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Mock Elections in Civic Education: A Space for Critical Democratic Citizenship Development

- This article shows that education related to mock elections varies widely within the Netherlands and internationally.
- It reveals that five elements of critical democratic citizenship development are commonly advanced in the Dutch schools under study.
- It presents teacher rationales for fostering limited elements of CDC-literacy, competences and identity in ME-related education.
- It shows how the limited emphasis on pursuing elements of CDC-development in ME-related education can be understood in the larger educational context.
- It calls for further research into students' political identity development processes during political simulations in different political and educational contexts.

Purpose: Preparing citizens for participation in pluralist democracies also requires a type of citizenship education that fosters critical democratic citizenship (CDC). This study inquires into an educational activity with a long history in many EU-countries: mock elections. It explores the extent to which elements of CDC-literacy, competences and identity are commonly fostered in education related to mock elections in the Netherlands, and teacher rationales in this regard.
Methodology: A qualitative study was conducted. Data from semi-structured interviews with teachers from eight schools were analysed using thematic analysis.
Findings and implications: Data analysis revealed an emphasis on offering a participatory experience. Five elements of critical democratic citizenship were commonly advanced in mock election related education in these schools. Teacher narratives also revealed how teachers had different understandings about political identity and their role in advancing identity development. Findings suggest that there is ample opportunity to intensify attention to CDC-development in education related to mock elections in Dutch schools. Further research into students' political identity development processes during political simulations in different political and educational contexts is required to further academic debate about desirable support by teachers and governments in high-quality political education projects.

Keywords:
Political education, mock elections, political identity, critical pedagogy

1 Introduction

Citizens do not naturally develop a democratic attitude. Fostering citizens' capacity to contribute to sustainable democratic communities in a globalized and pluralist environment requires a certain type of citizenship education. A type of education that moves beyond the cultivation of basic political knowledge, participatory skills, and that helps students to position themselves in the political spectrum (e.g. Beane & Apple, 2007; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Nussbaum, 2010; Parker, 2003). In secondary education, critical components of political literacy, skills and identity can be advanced with many types of educational activities (e.g. role-plays, political advocacy projects, political simulations). One such activity in civic education with a long history in many European countries is mock elections (MEs): the shadow elections that schools can organize in conjunction with the official elections. In Europe, ME-policies and practices vary widely amongst countries. In some countries (e.g. Norway), all schools hold MEs for their upper-secondary students (Ødegaard, 2016). In others (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands & the UK), participation of schools is optional.

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This study focusses on ME-related education in one of these countries: the Netherlands. Mock elections were introduced in the Netherlands in 1963 to familiarize future voters with the concept of elections (Van Detl, 1986). Since 1994, MEs are facilitated by the national institute for democracy (ProDemos), an NGO that receives governmental funding for organizing educational activities (e.g. school visits to the House of Parliament) and public events on democracy. To promote and facilitate the MEs in schools, ProDemos offers a digital platform where students from participating schools can cast their votes at local, national and European elections as well as national referenda and (even) the US-elections. ProDemos also develops lesson materials and election newsletters that teachers in primary, secondary and vocational education can use, and it organizes a national media event where ME-results are presented. All materials, including a manual for holding the MEs in school, are available on its website.

In the 2012 national elections, MEs were held in 436 schools. The majority of participating schools were high schools. Overall, 117,650 of the 929,100 Dutch high-school students participated (ProDemos, 2012). Studies of these -and prior- ME-results by researchers and ProDemos have shown that, apart from the fact that students more often vote for parties at the extremities of the political spectrum, student outcomes are a good

predictor for the general election results (Van Detl, 1986; Nuus, Habben Jansen & Dekker, 2002). In the Netherlands, no prior studies have been conducted into the educational activities that are offered in conjunction with the MEs, and the political literacy, skills and identity development that teachers intend to foster in this context. Also internationally, few scholars have examined MEs and election simulations so far. Previous studies (published in English) typically evaluated particular political simulation programmes (Davies, Gray & Stephens, 1998; Pappas & Peaden, 2004; Parker & Lo, 2016; Shellman, 2001), or examined the extent to which MEs, election simulations and related activities are held in schools (Haas & Laughlin, 2002; ICCS, 2009; Syvertsen, Flanagan, & Stout, 2007). In the US, Kahne and Middaugh (2008) additionally studied the opportunities of different student populations to engage in MEs and related civic education practices.

This qualitative study[1] set out to explore the extent to which critical democratic citizenship (CDC hereafter) literacy, skills and identity development is fostered in ME-related education in eight schools in the Netherlands, and teacher reasoning in this regard. By gaining an insight into the current attention given to CDC-development in ME-related education in the Netherlands, the study intends to stir academic debate about the CDC-developments that one can – and maybe should – foster in ME-related education. Findings will also be used to reflect, together with educational professionals in the Netherlands, on the ME education that they want to offer in conjunction with the upcoming national elections, which are scheduled for March 2017.

The main question addressed was: What elements of CDC-development did social studies teachers intend to foster with the ME-related education accompanying the 2012 national elections? ME-related education, in this study, is defined as a more or less distinctive educational project that consists of the ME itself and the learning activities organized prior to students casting their votes (e.g. lessons that provide an understanding of the political landscape) as well as afterwards (e.g. lessons in which students learn to analyze the ME-results).

2 Theoretical framework
To contextualize the study, this section first presents the underlying theoretical notions: learning objectives and political development. It then sketches the socio-political context of the study and the organization of civic education in the Netherlands.

2.1 Learning objectives and the aims of civic education
In educational research, setting clear and challenging learning objectives is considered pivotal for meaningful education (Hattie, 2009). The objectives that teachers develop depend, amongst others, on their pedagogical views and their views on the aims of education. This study builds on the work of critical pedagogues and education philosophers like Biesta (2011) who have argued that civic education should aim at preparing students for their role in the co-construction of future societies. These

scholars have stressed that citizenship needs to be envisioned as a process rather than an accomplishment, and that educators need to connect with the socio-political developments and democratic learning experiences from students' everyday lives that impact their ability and willingness to participate in the civic and political domain (Biesta, 2011; Osler & Starkey, 2005). A learning objective in civics that resonates with this pedagogical view concerns the development of students' capacities to discern current cultural narratives on good citizenship and the good society (Levinson, 2012). Another objective concerns developing students' capacity and willingness to contribute to the amelioration of current narratives on the good society and the viability of current democratic procedures and practices (De Groot, 2013; 2016).

2.2 Political development of citizens
As this study explores the extent to which participating teachers cultivate critical and elaborate elements of political citizenship development, this section presents key elements of critical and elaborate political citizenship as identified by scholars who specialize in democratic citizenship education (e.g. Beane & Apple, 2007; Beaumont 2010; Carretero, Haste & Bermudez, 2015; De Groot & Veugelers, 2015; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Nussbaum, 2010; Parker, 2003; Veugelers, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Before presenting the key elements, some underlying notions are explained: What is meant by political in this study, the distinction between critical, elaborate and basic political development, and the main components of political development that this study distinguishes.

The term *political* has multiple meanings in democratic citizenship education research. Sometimes, it refers primarily to the domain in which development occurs (e.g. knowledge about formal political bodies). At other times, the term points to a variety of contents, ranging from the negotiation of different interests (De Winter, 2012) to the negotiation of power structures and images of the good society in the civic and political domain (Biesta, 2011; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). In line with CDC-research, *politics* in this study is understood as the negotiation between power and images of the good society and good government in the civic and political domain as well as in people's everyday lives at home and in schools. As a consequence, the notion of critical political development in this study resembles the notion of critical democratic citizenship development as defined in CDC-education research (e.g. De Groot & Veugelers, 2015).

In education research on political or democratic citizenship, scholars also commonly distinguish between engagement in institutional politics and participatory politics: the political actions that people undertake in the civil domain to address practices and policies that do not align with democratic principles (e.g. Allen & Light, 2015). As this study examines an educational practice that is primarily designed to advance informed and conscious *electoral participation*, this study mainly builds on notions and distinctions as defined in research that aims to advance critical political development in election

processes. Future studies can complement the current (preliminary) framework for political electoral participation with insights from related fields (e.g. participatory politics, student voice and intercultural education).

To gain an insight into the political development that teachers want to advance in ME related education, this study discerns three main components of political development: political literacy, skills, and identity. Furthermore, key elements of critical and elaborate political development are distinguished from basic elements of political literacy, skills and identity. In line with an understanding of democracy as a political system, and of voting as the main political responsibility of citizens, basic political literacy in this study is understood as one's knowledge about political procedures and practices. One's capacity to vote and participate in campaigning activities are examples of basic skills, and one's party affiliations and party ideology are perceived as basic components of political identity. These basic political developments are typically examined in international survey research on citizenship development (ICCS, 2009). *Critical*, on the other hand, refers to higher-order thinking skills that enable engagement in complex, normative activities. *Elaborate* refers, for example, to skills that are prerequisite to engaging in additional political activities that do not necessarily require critical thinking skills (e.g. skills to develop campaign materials, or to organize a protest).

Critical political literacy
Critical and elaborate components of *political literacy* as stressed in citizenship education research typically include an understanding of the interrelatedness of democracy and diversity (Parker, 2003; Hess & McAvoy, 2015) and the interrelatedness of democracy and the addressing of social injustices (Carr, 2011; Osler & Starkey, 2005; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). They include an understanding of the philosophy behind, and history of, political procedures and political parties, and they include the deeper knowledge about (inter)national civic issues and democratic deficits that is needed to engage meaningfully in civic and political deliberation at the local and (inter)national level (Nussbaum, 2010; Parker, 2003). In this study, political literacy is understood as the conglomerate of the technical and ethical understandings mentioned above.

Critical political skills
With regard to fostering critical and additional *political skills*, citizenship education scholars typically stress the need to pursue students' higher-order thinking skills (Ruijs, 2012) and their ability to analyze political issues, social justice issues and democratic deficits (Jeliazkova, Bernaerts, & Kesteren, 2012; De Groot, 2013; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Veugelers, 2011). They also advocate fostering 'skills of influence and action' (Beaumont et al., 2006) like learning to engage in political deliberations (Parker, 2003; Morrell, 2005). Enhancing students' ability to question -and develop- personal and cultural narratives about good citizenship

and the good society is also emphasized (Haste & Abrahams, 2008; De Groot, 2016). As political issues are defined in relation to a certain normative context, critical skills typically involve ethical and political reasoning and positioning skills.

Critical political identity
Inspired by John Dewey's (1916) idea of democracy as a way of life, citizenship education scholars have also identified critical and additional elements of *political identity*. Elements that are more commonly examined in this regard are a sense of political and/or civic efficacy (see e.g. Carretero Haste, & Bermudez 2015; Beaumont, 2010), and a sense of politically engaged identity (Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, & Turny-Purta, 2006). In addition, scholars have argued that civic educators need to support identification with multiple political communities (Nussbaum, 2010; Osler, 2005) and a sense of political friendship (Allen, 2004; Hess & McAvoy, 2015): a preparedness (and ability) to engage with strangers in our own communities and built trusting relationships. Allen has specifically pointed to the required commitment of people and institutions to "slip loose of habits of domination and acquiescence" in this regard (Allen, 2004, p. 183).

The 2009 ICCS study also examined civic identity, defined as a combination of civic self-image and civic connectedness (IEA, 2007, p. 18). Building on this notion of civic identity, Biesta's (2011) notion of learning democracy and De Groot's (2013) empirical research on Dutch adolescents' democratic engagement, De Groot (2016) also came to distinguish two additional elements of democratic citizenship identity: one's narratives about one's democratic citizenship philosophy and one's narratives about one's democratic citizenship experiences. Cultivating these narratives, De Groot (2016) argued, can generate mental and emotional resilience amongst students against essentialist narratives on civic or political identity and the exploitation of identity towards violence which, for example, is a pressing and global issue described eloquently by Amrita Sen (2006). As an overarching framework on political identity does not seem to exist, this study, for now, defines political identity as the conglomerate of the elements mentioned above. Furthermore, in line with dialogical and cultural identity theories (Hermans & Hermans-Konopk, 2010; Carretero, Haste & Bermudez, 2015), political identity is understood as culturally embedded, multi-vocal and contingent: as continuously evolving through intra- and interpersonal dialogues, and embedded in available narratives on cultural and political identity.

Together, these CDC-elements provide the framework that was used to analyze discrepancies between teacher objectives and the CDC-elements that education scholars consider indispensable to preparing young citizens for participation in pluralist democratic communities.

2.3. Democracy and civic education in the Netherlands
The Netherlands can be defined as a constitutional democracy, a democratic political system that is

supported by a constitution that aims to protect the sovereignty of the people and several liberal rights that are deemed key to democracy (Thomassen, 1991). Dutch democracy can also be defined as a consensus democracy, because of its multiparty system and a political culture that aims to develop policies that also serve and protect the interests of minorities (Spruyt & Lijphart, 1991). Furthermore, it is known as a stable democracy. Academic discussions on democratic deficits in many Western democracies have revealed that the adjective stable does not automatically coincide with the quality of the political system in a country, the strengths of its civil society, the level of polarization in political and public debate, and the democratic ethos of its citizens. Instead, it points to the time span for which a certain democratic political system has been in place and the subsequent participatory dynamics (Haste, 2004). While the Dutch democracy is relatively stable, political and cultural polarization in the Netherlands has increased in in the last two decades (RMO, 2009; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken & Koninkrijksrelaties, 2008). This implies that many adolescents develop their identities in a polarized context, and encounter essentialist narratives on political and cultural identity on a day-to-day basis in school and on social media.

In Dutch high schools, civic and political engagement is mainly fostered in social studies classes and in school projects. *Study of Society* (Maatschappijleer), a one year subject in upper secondary education, was introduced in 1962 in order to complement the existing social studies curriculum (history and geography) with a focus on participation in social and political life. In 2006 the Dutch government introduced a law that obliges schools in primary, secondary and vocational education to foster the *active participation and social integration* of young citizens. In line with the Dutch freedom of education legislation, schools are free to decide how and within which subjects they stimulate the civic and democratic literacy, skills and identity of students. In practice, the 2006 legislation on civic education has led to an increase in explicit attention to (world) citizenship in mission statements (Peschar, Hooghof, Dijkstra, & Ten Dam, 2010). Although (advanced) subjects in social studies currently prioritize (assessable) academic content and approaches, and are wary of prescriptive approaches (Wilschut, Hoek & Landelijk Expertisecentrum Mens- en Maatschappijvakken, 2012), the legislation on citizenship education did lead to increased attention to participatory experiences, civil service trajectories, political deliberation, debating and dialogical learning activities in educational practice and policy. In some schools, the 2006 legislation also led to expansion of the civics curriculum (i.e. additional projects or subjects). Findings from recent studies on citizenship development and education in the Netherlands, however, indicate that students in lower levels of secondary education still have limited opportunities to engage in participatory activities in school when compared to other countries in Europe (Kerr, Sturman, Schulz, Burge & ICCS, 2010), and that attention to civic identity in schools is limited (De Groot,

2013; Nieuwelink, Dekker, Geijsel, & Ten Dam, 2015; Veugelers, 2011).

3 Research design

To gain an understanding of the extent to which CDC-development is commonly fostered in ME-related education in the Netherlands, and teacher rationales in this regard, a qualitative study was conducted. This type of research is particularly useful to gain insight into people's experiences and reasoning. To answer the main question 'What elements of CDC-literacy, skills and identity did social studies teachers intend to foster with the ME-related education accompanying the 2012 national elections?', three sub-questions were developed:

1) Which CDC-elements did the teachers commonly mention (in relation to ME-related education or in relation to the general curriculum)?
2) To which extent were CDC-elements specifically pursued in ME-related education?
3) Are there discrepancies between the CDC-elements as discerned by CDC-scholars and the elements mentioned by the teachers?

The insights gained in this qualitative are used for the development of a survey study in March 2017. This follow-up study, which aims to gain insight into the intentions and rationales of all teachers in Secondary education in the Netherlands who organize ME in their schools in conjunction with the national elections of 2017, also examines how intentions and rationales relate to different school, student and teacher characteristics.

Selection and recruitment of teacher participants
The teachers were recruited using the ProDemos database, which contains all 433 persons coordinating the 2012 ME in their schools. In order to generate rich data, several criteria were set: teachers had to have over four years of teaching experience in civics and an interest in the topic at stake, teachers also needed to be working in different areas of the Netherlands. 47 teachers who matched these criteria were approached. Eight teachers from four different provinces agreed to participate. Nine teachers actively declined the invitation, and thirty did not respond. Reasons for declining ranged from 'no time' to the idea that they did not have much to say since their school had not organized complimentary educational activities in conjunction with the 2012 ME.

The study thus examined the CDC-developments that teachers in eight different schools pursued with ME-related education. Of the participating teachers, one was a primary school teacher, teaching grades two to seven. The other seven were high school teachers, all teaching Study of Society, a subject often offered two hours a week in the pre-exam year. These teachers particularly spoke about the learning objectives formulated for their students in the five-year Higher General Secondary Education track (havo) and/or the six-year Pre-university Education track (vwo). Most of the participating schools only offered the regular one year of classes in the subject Study of Society in upper secondary education. Because

elections do not take place annually, ME-related education is not embedded in the general Study of Society curriculum in Dutch schools. Also, the magnitude of the ME-project that teachers organized varied. Among the participating teachers, two organized MEs for the whole school, two organized MEs only for students attending the one year obligatory Study of Society classes, and the others participated with students from multiple levels. Some teachers hardly organized any ME-related educational activities, apart from classroom conversations about the (upcoming) elections; others organized activities for all students and/or for specific student groups.

Research instruments and data collection
To collect teacher narratives on the CDC-developments that they pursue, a semi-structured interview design was chosen. Information about teacher objectives was elicited with the following interview questions: What did you (and your colleagues) hope that students would take home from the ME-related educational activities? Did you intend to foster political literacy, skills, and identity with these activities, and if so, could you elaborate on this? Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours, and were conducted between December 2015 and March 2016. Teachers thus had to rely on their recollection of the educational activities offered during the national elections in 2012 (and the local and EU-elections in 2014), and archived documentation. To stimulate the recollection process, the interview guidelines were sent in advance, and teachers were invited to email relevant lesson materials and documents. As not all teachers organize education activities in conjunction with the elections, and because of the small sample size, I decided not to conduct a separate analysis of the teaching materials. When available, the materials were used to examine the reliability of the data provided in the interviews.

Analysis
To gain an understanding of the educational contexts in which the teachers advance certain components of CDC-development, I first developed vignettes that envision per school: a) how ME's are organized and b) what type of education activities are organized in conjunction with the elections. To illustrate the different education contexts included in the sample, I here present two of the vignettes (School A and School B). These vignettes were selected because they envision how the organisation of ME and related education activities vary among schools in the research sample with a similar student population, in terms of size (approximately 2100 students) and cultural background (mostly non-migrant students).

In school A the decision to organize the ME is made in, and supported by, a teacher section with 19 teachers who teach various related subjects, e.g. History and the Study of Society (2 hour subject during 1 year). Several teachers coordinate the ME (in conjunction with the national and regional elections). The participating teacher organized

the ME for the first time in 2012. To prepare students, teachers (in history/social studies) at all levels spent one lesson on this issue: in this lesson, students were informed about the elections, the voting process and the political parties. Through assignments, students received help selecting a party that matches their personal interests. During one school day, students from 2 classes per hour were directed to the 'polling station' in the school to cast their vote (administrators developed a schedule and arranged the ICT-facilities). This process was guided by several students (who handed out codes they could use to cast 1 vote) and a former intern. Afterwards, the results were discussed in the Social Studies classes. A brief report about the results and how they relate to the results of the national elections was published in the school's newsletter (in 2012, the electronic learning environment did not yet serve as the main communication channel).

In school B there are two teachers who teach Study of Society in general and pre-university education (3 hour subject during 1 year). Both organize the ME (in conjunction with each election) for students from their own classes. To prepare students, the participating teacher walked students through the voter application and discussed different interpretations of some of the questions asked. Students casted their vote throughout the lesson, one at a time, on a computer in front of the class. During the event, the teacher pointed students to the rules of the game (e.g. discussion is not allowed at that very moment and place; you have the right to ask a person whom he/she votes for, but one does not have to respond truthfully). In the next lesson, the teacher asked students to comment on the election results. He also briefly discussed the results in terms of (un)likely outcomes of the formation process. In 2012, a brief report about the school results and how they relate to the results of the national elections was published in the school newsletter.

After the preliminary categorization of the transcribed interviews in relation to each research question with the help of software for qualitative analysis (Atlas-ti), a thematic analysis was conducted per question (Joffe, 2012). To answer the first research question, segments that contained information about teacher objectives were first attributed to one of the three main categories: CDC-literacy/skills/identity. Each interview segment was then re-examined in order to discern subcategories per category, and the segments were reread to list which subcategory of objectives each teacher fostered. In the tables presented in the results section, an x indicates that teachers mentioned this objective explicitly as an objective, X indicates that teachers explicitly defined an objective as most prominent in their own teaching, / signifies that there was some attention to this type of development, but it was not explicitly defined as an objective, and finally, C signifies that the objective was explicitly mentioned, but (primarily) advanced elsewhere in the civics curriculum. An empty spot indicates that a particular element was not pursued by a certain teacher.

CDC-objectives were qualified as common when they were clearly defined as an objective by four teachers or more. The second question was answered by examining the extent to which elements were advanced predominantly in ME-related education. Question three was answered by identifying the objectives that were not commonly mentioned by teachers as well as objectives that added to the elements as defined in the literature.

4 Results

This section first presents the study's findings with regard to an overarching value that was repeatedly emphasized by the teachers, the value of introducing students to political practice. It then describes which CDC-elements were commonly mentioned by the teachers, the extent to which these elements were specifically fostered in ME-related education, and teacher rationales for (not) emphasizing certain elements. To conclude, it lists the main discrepancies between those CDC-elements mentioned by the teachers and those discerned in CDC-literature.

4.1 Focus on engagement in political practice

Data analysis revealed how, apart from fostering (critical) literacy, skills and identity development in ME-related educational activities, teachers particularly highlighted the value of introducing students to political practice. They commonly explained, for example, that participation in the MEs enables students to become aware of their (future) political rights, to get a taste of what it feels like to decide with which party they identify most, to cast their vote, and to learn about the results: "It does not really matter if twelve year olds have an understanding of politics or not […] I just think it is important that they are confronted with the fact that it will only take a couple of years before they will start casting their votes". Teachers also commonly appreciated the opportunity that the ME, and its related learning activities, offers to arouse students' interest in what happens outside their personal lives and to recapitulate basic (and advanced) knowledge about political institutions and procedures.

Some of the teachers did not pursue any specific political developments with the ME-related education that they offered. As one teacher said: "There is no masterplan behind it". Teachers also regularly referred to the objectives of the general Study of Society and/or Social Sciences curriculum: "When thinking about our learning objectives in ME-related education, I think about the overall objectives for this subject: developing the students' opinions [about political and civic issues], argumentation skills and listening skills". The following sections reveal the extent to which CDC-developments were particularly advanced in ME-related education.

4.2 Critical political literacy

With regard to the development of critical political literacy, two objectives that transcend basic literacy objectives (i.e. knowledge about the political system and knowledge about the agendas of the main political parties) were commonly pursued by the teachers in ME-

related education. The first concerns fostering students' knowledge about the politics behind party programmes. This objective also included promoting student knowledge about how party agendas – and voting behaviour – can vary pre and post elections. As one of the teachers explained:

"In my classes with pre-university students I explain more about things that one needs to understand to develop a balanced opinion about party agendas and actions. I, for instance, point to discrepancies between the official party agendas on a certain issue and the way (coalition) parties have voted on this issue and possible explanations. That coalition parties, for example, have other interests to take into account when voting than parties in the opposition.

The second objective concerns fostering students' understanding the interrelatedness politics and quality of own life. With regard to this objective, one of the teachers explained:

"I want them to be able to look beyond appearance and me-dia skills of politicians. I want them to understand the bigger picture behind the things that politicians say, and how this picture relates to them. This is still rather abstract of course. To make it concrete, I ask students to imagine themselves as a shop owner, a Muslim, or a person who has recently been through a divorce, and think about the implications of a certain policy for their lives.

Next to fostering students' awareness of the impact of certain policies on the everyday lives of different social and cultural groups, teachers also talked about advancing their students' imagination with regard to how the quality of the roads and the presence of community facilities in their neighbourhoods are impacted by decisions made in local and (inter)national politics: "I want them to realize that politics is also about your neighbourhood, about where you live […]. That the government has a say in many of the things you encounter during the day".

Three other objectives were also commonly mentioned, but were predominantly advanced in the general civics curriculum. The first of these objectives concerns furthering students' understanding of the philosophy behind, and history of, political procedures and parties, in line with Parker's (2003) work on democratic enlightenment and democratic education. As one of the teachers explained:

"Civic and political events just happen, but political theory doesn't change overnight. So, for my pre-university students, my aim is to achieve a robust understanding of political theory. This way they are capable of interpreting what they observe, what is happening, and why it is happening.

The second objective resembles Carr's (2011) work on critical media literacy and social justice education and concerns advancing students' understanding of the use

and impact of spinning and framing by political parties and stakeholders in the media.

Table 1: Elements of critical political literacy

Critical political literacy	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Knowledge about politics behind party programmes	x*		xC	xC	x		x	x
Understanding the interrelatedness of politics and quality of personal life	x	x	xC	/C	x	x	X	x
Understanding philosophy behind, and history of, political procedures and parties	/C	/	/C	xC	XC	/	/C	X
Understanding of the use and impact of spinning and framing by political parties and stakeholders in the media	x		xC	/C	xC		x	x
Understanding background & complexity of civic/political issues and knowledge about multiple perspectives	x			/C	xC	/C	xC	x

*x = explicitly mentioned as an objective; X = defined as key objective; / = some attention, but not explicitly defined as objective; C = fostered primarily elsewhere in the civics curriculum

Fostering students' understanding of the background and complexity of civic and political issues, and their insight into multiple perspectives is the third common objective that was predominantly pursued in the general civics curriculum, an objective that resembles the idea that students should be introduced to multiple perspectives on a civic issue (Parker, 2003; Lange, 2008).

Teachers' main explanation for primarily attending to certain critical literacy objectives elsewhere in the civics curriculum related to the isolated character of the ME-project. Teachers, for instance, explained how they cover the philosophy behind, and history of, political procedures and parties in another semester, and how they use the ME to animate this knowledge. This might also explain why only two critical literacy objectives were, by several teachers, referred to as key objectives. Other teachers explained that they put limited emphasis on advancing critical literacy altogether, because of the student levels that they taught and students' low level of political interest and literacy in primary/general secondary education.

4.3 Critical political skills

With regard to critical – and elaborate – political competences, two objectives were more commonly pursued in ME-related education. The first concerns cultivating students' ability to analyze political and civic events, with the help of their knowledge about the (rationale behind) checks and balances that are built into the democratic system, and their knowledge about democratic procedures like the formation process and the interests of various stakeholders. One teacher, for example, explained how, with her pre-university students in the higher grades, she used the elections to explain about the formation process, the issues at stake, and the interests involved: "I want them to realize that people's actions are always linked to certain interests. Students do not like this idea, but I want them to be conscious about it". Another teacher explained how she wanted her pre-university students to understand the value of political immunity for ambassadors, like how this means that ambassadors can even get away with not paying their parking tickets.

The teachers also commonly fostered two elements that are related to the ability to analyze political and civic events. These concern fostering students' abilities to critically read and evaluate the questions and outcomes of Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) and to critically examine the viability of political stances as presented by politicians. The following segment illustrates how one of the teachers fostered both skills simultaneously:

"I cannot assist students individually in developing an informed understanding of their position in the party spectrum. So what I do is I walk through the Voting Advice Application in class. During this process, I discuss their understanding of the different items. Afterwards, I point to certain elements that explain some typical outcomes, and limitations. How students have a tendency to opt for expensive rather than realistic solutions, for example.

'Co-organizing the MEs was the second objective that was more commonly pursued in ME-related education. The level of student participation in the organization of MEs varied though. Several teachers invited students or the student council to become co- or main organizers. Others gave students a facilitating role, e.g. monitoring the voting process in the school. In the schools that organized MEs at the classroom level, students had no role in their organization and facilitation.

Two other objectives were also commonly mentioned, but predominantly pursued in the general curriculum. The first of these objectives concerns learning to voice one's opinion in a respectful manner in class, and to provide arguments for one's opinion, an objective that has been emphasized by Parker's (2003) work on classroom deliberation. For example, when asked what skills teachers intended to foster, they explained: "I hope that students will learn how to engage in critical thinking, how to voice their opinion, and present their opinion before an audience", and, "Students know this from the first grade: that they are never allowed to just say 'I like

this', or I think this is stupid'. If they do so I always probe them to continue by saying 'because???'". Several teachers also explicitly talked about addressing students' abilities to deal with anger and frustration in conversations and public deliberations in a responsible manner.

Table 2: Elements of critical and elaborate political skills

Political/democratic skills	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
(Critical) analysis of events	x		XC	xC	X	x	X	X
- Critical evaluation of VAA-questions and outcomes			x	xC		/		x
- Ability to question 'facts' and stances of politicians	x		x	xC	x		x	x
Co-organize ME	/	x		x	x		/	X
Develop & voice one's opinion in respectful manner in class and public deliberations, and provide arguments	x	x	xC	xC	x	/C	XC	XC
- Listen to each other		X	XC				XC	xC
- Critical reflection about judgments/ preferences prejudices	XC	X	xC	/C	/C	/C	XC	xC
Design and analyze campaign materials			xC	/C	/C		xC	

Teachers commonly mentioned two elements that are related to the objective of learning to voice one's opinion. The first also relates to Parker's work on classroom deliberation and concerns fostering an ability to listen to each other. From the teachers who explicitly mentioned this objective, several also presented it as a key objective, and considered this skill quintessential for creating a space where everyone can share their fears about civic and political events. The second element resides with De Groot's (2013) work on key dimensions of democratic citizenship and concerns fostering critical reflection about personal judgments, preferences, and prejudices. With regard to fostering critical reflection, some of the teachers specifically mentioned thematizing scepticism with regard to the use of casting one's vote, a theme that Beaumont (2010) has written about more extensively in her work on fostering political efficacy in US schools. This objective was not commonly mentioned though.

The second objective that was more commonly mentioned but primarily pursued in the general civics curriculum concerns designing and analyzing campaign materials. This elaborate participatory skill was typically fostered in the context of a political school debate or in the context of a simulation project in which students make up their own political parties.

Analysis also revealed how attention to CDC-skills varied widely among the teachers. Four objectives were mentioned as key to their teaching by several teachers. The empty spots in table 2 on the other hand also show that some of the teachers gave very little attention to advancing CDC-skills in ME-related education. Only one teacher, for example, explicitly aimed to advance listening and debating skills in her lessons prior to the ME (see table 2). A common teacher explanation for putting limited emphasis on cultivating critical and elaborate political skills was that political simulations, debates and the like are organized elsewhere in the curriculum. Other explanations concerned the limited scope of the project, lack of facilities to organize the project, and a focus on the participatory experience.

4.4. Critical political identity
Analysis revealed one critical political identity objective commonly mentioned in ME-related education: advancing an embodied value of political rights. Here, teachers repeatedly stated how, using video and role play, they introduced students to political rights and political identities of people in countries with other regimes:

"I always stress the value of having the option to cast our votes, to have that right. And how important that is. We watch movies about countries with other regimes and discuss the impact of these regimes on people's lives. We also do one of ProDemos' simulation games, in which several countries deliberate about homo-emancipation and the like. This way, students gain an understanding about the decisions that these governments would make, and what it means to not have the opportunity to speak up.

Two other policy identity objectives were also commonly mentioned, but predominantly attended to in the general curriculum instead of specifically in ME-related education. The first objective concerns fostering a sense of identification with local and (inter)national political communities, a component of citizenship development that many scholars have addressed (e.g. Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Osler & Starkey, 2005). As one of the teachers explained:

"Political identity is about being part of a political system and about locating themselves on the political spectrum. The first is complicated already. The idea that we are a household of 16 million people… it is all rather abstract to them. But I do try to help them understand: 1) you are part of a community. Whether they position themselves on the left or right of the political spectrum I leave to them. That said, I do want students to understand that it is important to cast one's vote.

Teachers commonly mentioned two other related elements in the context of this particular objective: the first resides with Hess and McAvoy (2015)'s work on the political classroom: positioning oneself in relation to mental frames about the good society. The second concerns development of a sense of commitment to broader range of civic issues. In order to connect her

students to a range of civic issues, the primary school teacher that was interviewed, for example, not only discussed party stances on issues that were popular among students (like animal rights), but also on issues that her students often have not yet thought about (like the quality and accessibility of education for different student groups).

Table 3: Elements of critical/elaborate political identity

Political/democratic identity	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Embodied value of political rights (vs political rights/identity in systems that do not function/lack checks and balances)	X	x	/	/	xC	/	X	X
Identification with local and (inter)national political communities	/	/	/	/C	xC	x	xC	x
- Positioning in relation to mental frames about the good society			/	/C	X		x	x
- Sense of commitment to broader range of civic issues	x	x	xC	/C	x	/	xC	/C
Sense of political efficacy		x	XC	/C	xC		XC	
- Inclination to engage in political discussions and deliberations	/	/C	xC	xC	xC		xC	X
Political friendship and/or valuing fairness and tolerance	/C	/C	/C	/C	/C	/C	/C	/C

The second objective that was commonly attended to in the general civics curriculum instead of specifically in ME-related education concerns fostering a sense of political efficacy, a sense that one can participate in the political realm and have an impact, as defined in the work of scholars like Beaumont (2010) and De Groot, Goodson & Veugelers (2014). As one teacher explained: "The main thing that I want students to take home from the MEs and the other participatory experiences that I organize is that they feel they can have an impact. That once you have faith, and you put an effort into it, you can change things that you dislike". In this regard, the teachers who organized activities where students could meet (youth) politicians also commonly stated that they aimed to foster students' inclination to engage in political discussions and deliberations.

Analysis of the pursued critical and elaborate political identity development objectives also revealed how elements of identity were more often mentioned indirectly, when compared to elements of political literacy and skills. Simultaneously, it showed that all three common objectives were defined as key by several teachers.

A possible explanation for attending to a limited number of elements of CDC-identity in the ME-context can be found in the different conceptualizations of political identity that underlie the teachers' views. Some teachers, for example, defined political identity as one's understanding of one's position in the political landscape

and/or one's political ideology. Others also talked about additional components like one's identification with the (inter)national political community, and the extent to which one feels politically engaged.

A second explanation relates to the teachers' pedagogical views. The teachers often defined their task as supporting students' political orientation process with relevant knowledge, i.e. knowledge about political processes and bodies, party programmes, and inconsistencies between certain combinations of stances of a certain party, or the financial implications. This task resembles more basic political identity development objectives like fostering students' orientation in the party landscape. A type of objective that requires a "neutral" stance of teachers. In line with this neutral or coaching role, teachers seemed to be inclined not to directly thematize identity development in their lessons.

A third explanation relates to teachers' views about the impact that they can have on their students' identity development. As one teacher explained: "Fostering students' identity development is important I think, but it is not something I explicitly cultivate. The lessons that I give can impact students' political identity, but I do not have the illusion that my teachings will foster the development of personal political identities in students".

4.5. Implicit and additional CDC-objectives
Analysis revealed that several elements mentioned in CDC-literature were not (or not explicitly) fostered by the teachers in ME-related education. In addition the teachers also mentioned elements that receive little attention in the literature. These elements primarily concerned political identity. In the ME context for example, the teachers did not explicitly aim to enhance political friendship or fairness and tolerance amongst students (Allen, 2004; Hess and McAvoy's, 2015) in this context. Teacher narratives, however, also suggest that an active appreciation of the multiplicity of voices in the political landscape was promoted elsewhere in the programme (e.g. when preparing for political debate) and indirectly, by advancing students' political literacy and deliberative skills. Teachers also did not talk about cultivating students' narratives about their democratic citizenship experiences (De Groot, 2015). This suggests, for example, that the teachers provided limited space for students to develop and question their personal narratives about the impact that participation in these elections might have (had) on their political skills, and their sense of efficacy towards negotiating the multiplicity of voices in the Dutch multiparty system.

On the other hand, teachers also mentioned three CDC-identity elements that -to my knowledge- have received limited attention in civic education research so far. The first element was pursued by some of the teachers who organized political events in the general curriculum, and concerns fostering "a sense that politicians are just like us": a sense that politicians are approachable and that not all politicians have excellent communication and debating skills. The second was mentioned once, and concerns localising oneself politically within multiple

communities, i.e. the school population, or various religious and political communities:

"I think for instance that, for those adolescents who do not want to vote because of their faith, it is quite a thing. Negotiating the demands from the different communities that they belong to is also part of their identity development I think.

This objective can be tailored to notions such as "civic self-image" (IEA, 2007), "a sense of (political) belonging" (Putnam, 2000) and the notion of "political friendship" (Allen, 2004). The third was visible in one teacher's hope to provide students with "a sense of pride about their own political literacy/maturity". Although not defined in the literature as such, this notion can also be tailored to notions of political agency, efficacy and self-esteem (Beaumont, 2010). Future cross-disciplinary theoretical research will have to provide further insight into the interrelatedness of these notions and their value for political development theory.

5 Conclusions and discussion

This article reported a qualitative study into mock election (ME) related education in eight schools in the Netherlands. The main aim was to gain an insight into the extent to which critical democratic citizenship (CDC) development is advanced in ME-related education in the Netherlands, and teacher rationales in this regard. After distinguishing multiple elements of CDC-development as defined in CDC-literature, the study examined: 1) which elements of CDC-literacy, skills and identity teachers in the eight schools commonly mentioned; 2) the extent to which these elements were specifically pursued in ME-related education; and 3) discrepancies between the CDC-elements as discerned by CDC-scholars and those mentioned by the teachers.

Thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with the teachers about the educational activities that they organized in conjunction with the 2012 national elections revealed how the teachers repeatedly highlighted the value of introducing students to this political practice. Altogether, five elements of critical literacy, skills and identity development were commonly (i.e. by four teachers or more) advanced in ME-related education. Out of these two were elements of critical literacy (viz. knowledge about the politics behind party programmes, and an understanding of the interrelatedness of politics and the quality of one's own life), two were elements of CDC-skills (viz. the ability to analyse political and civic events, and to co-organize MEs), and one was a sub-component of CDC-identity (viz. an embodied value of political rights). Several other CDC-elements were also commonly mentioned, but predominantly fostered in the general civics curriculum (e.g. understanding the complexity of civic/political issues, voicing one's opinion in respectful manner and a sense of political and/or civic efficacy).

The largest discrepancy between the CDC-developments cultivated by the teachers and the CDC-

elements as discerned in citizenship education research was found in relation to CDC-identity development. In ME-related education only one element of political identity was commonly advanced. Some other CDC-identity elements were fostered implicitly, e.g. a sense of political friendship (Allen, 2004; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Others were mentioned occasionally, or not at all, e.g. thematizing scepticism with regard to the use of casting one's vote (Beaumont, 2010) and narratives about one's democratic citizenship experiences (De Groot & Veugelers, 2015). This suggests, amongst other things, that the teachers hardly guided the co-construction of students' narratives about how, for example, the 2012 ME experience influenced their sense of efficacy towards negotiating party programmes in the Dutch multiparty system.

Together these findings reveal that ME-related education in the participating schools puts limited emphasis on advancing elements of critical democratic citizenship. It also suggests that elements of CDC-identity, in particular, receive limited attention in the general civics curriculum, when compared to elements of CDC-literacy and skills. Typical teacher explanations for paying limited attention to CDC-development in ME-related education concerned the limited scope of the ME-project, limited teacher facilities, a focus on ME as a participatory experience, and attention to CDC-knowledge and skills elsewhere in the general civics curriculum. Furthermore, limited attention to elements of CDC-identity can be explained by the variety in teachers' understandings of what political identity entails, teachers' preferences for a "neutral" role, and teachers' views about their (limited) impact on students' development.

The limited emphasis on pursuing elements of CDC-development in ME-related education can also be understood in the larger educational context. It resides with the autonomy of schools and the limited space in the curriculum for organizing events. It aligns with the scarce teacher facilities for organizing participatory projects in many schools (ICCS, 2009), and it aligns with the fact that political simulations are not primarily organized to stimulate meaningful learning on key objectives, but typically function as a "side dish" in the Dutch civics curriculum (Parker & Lo, 2016).

Further empirical studies can shed light on the generalizability of these findings for the larger Dutch and European context, and inspiring practices in this area. In March 2017, a follow-up quantitative study examines the extent to which elements of CDC-development are pursued by all teachers in secondary education in the Netherlands who organize ME in their schools in conjunction with the national elections in 2017. This study also examines the interrelatedness of teacher intentions and school and student characteristics and teacher facilities in this context. The interrelatedness between the formal and operationalized curriculum and students actual learning experiences will be examined by conducting additional case studies.

Another limitation concerns the study's focus on political development at the individual level. As a democratic way of life cannot be accomplished through the development of individuals, CDC-education scholars have also stressed the need to formulate objectives on the level of the class, school or community. They have pointed, for example, to the need to create a positive learning climate and a space for dialogue and development of civic (counter) narratives (Diazgranados & Selman, 2014; Levinson, 2012). Future studies can further our understanding of possible and desirable CDC-objectives of ME-related education and other political simulation projects. It is important in this regard to also theorize about how teacher support in such projects might need to vary under different conditions, e.g. the quality of the teachers, the school climate, its civic profile, the student population, the national culture of political participation and the political climate (see also Hess & McAvoy, 2015).

Overall, findings suggest that there is ample opportunity to intensify attention to CDC-development in ME-related education in these schools. With additional educational activities, for example, teachers might cultivate additional elements of CDC-identity, e.g. the development of an active appreciation of the multiplicity of voices in the political landscape, students' narratives about the impact of participation in the ME-project on their appreciation of their right to vote, or their identification with multiple political communities. To further ME-related education practices, however, we also need to know more about the actual teaching practices, the learning experiences of students, the interrelatedness of teacher intentions and the actual learning experiences of students and related questions: How do specific contexts (i.e. limited facilitation, political polarized societies or school environments) impact teacher decisions on what activities to organize? How can teachers take account of the interplay between students' political identity development processes during MEs and a specific political context (e.g. political polarization processes in schools)? What support from school leaders and the government do teachers and scholars recommend in specific educational and political contexts? Further theoretical and empirical study is needed to answer these questions and advance high-quality political education projects in pluralist democracies.

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