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### Becoming a democratic citizen: A study among adolescents in different educational tracks

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# Becoming a Democratic Citizen



*A Study Among Adolescents in Different Educational Tracks*

**Hessel Nieuwelink**

# **Becoming a Democratic Citizen**

*A Study Among Adolescents in Different Educational Tracks*

Voor TtH, de liefste burger

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# **Becoming a Democratic Citizen**

*A Study Among Adolescents in Different Educational Tracks*

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam  
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus  
prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Adult Citizens' Views on Democracy**

Democracy is often seen as the most preferable way of ruling a country and dealing with conflicts of interest. For a democracy to flourish it is important that citizens are positively oriented towards its institutions and their underlying principles. This means that citizens should hold generally positive views towards the parliament and rule of law, and towards principles such as freedom of expression, equality between citizens, and minority rights. Moreover, the will to decide political issues collectively and to contribute to the common good is paramount for democratic citizenship (Dahl, 1998; Galston, 1991; Held, 2006; Kymlicka, 2001; Shils, 1991).

Research shows that differences exist in the way people interpret democracy and how they value democratic principles and the actual working of democracy. Studies conducted across various global regions show that although a vast majority of adult citizens can provide a relevant description of democracy (Dalton, Sin, & Jou, 2007), they have different interpretations of the meaning of democracy. In diverse global regions, the largest group of people define democracy in terms of freedom (such as freedom rights or freedom of speech), while others focus on procedural aspects (such as elections or the parliamentary system) or refer to equality or social justice (Dalton et al., 2007; Thomassen, 1995, 2007). A study involving Dutch citizens shows that this strong emphasis on freedom has been present for decades, but since the seventies an increasing number of people, and especially younger adults, have referred to procedural aspects when describing democracy (Den Ridder & Dekker, 2015). Such differences between citizens' interpretations of democracy are similar to those formulated in political theory, thereby further underlying the contested nature of the concept (Held, 2006; Pennock, 1979; Thomassen, 1995, 2007).

In general, people have positive views on democracy and a willingness to support democratic principles. Studies have found that a vast majority of people from all over the world argue that democracy is a good way of governing their country (Diamond & Plattner, 2008; Norris, 2011; Peffley & Rohrschneider, 2003; Thomassen, 1995, 2007). In west-European countries, including the Netherlands, the levels of support for democracy have increased since the sixties (Bovens & Wille, 2008; Norris, 2011). Moreover, most citizens also support democratic values, such as freedom of speech and tolerance, as people tend to feel that such values are of great importance for the functioning of an orderly society (Thomassen, 2007). However, the level of support for democracy and democratic values differs between agegroups. Some studies show that young citizens adhere to a larger extent to democratic values such as tolerance

and gender equality, and reject hierarchical institutions to a larger extent than their parents did when they were young (Inglehart, 2003; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Other studies find that older citizens have higher expectations of democracy than younger citizens (Norris, 2011).

While citizens' views on democracy are generally positive, a somewhat different picture emerges when the institutions that accompany democracy in the political domain are taken into account. Some groups of citizens are just not interested in politics. Many would rather avoid talking about politics altogether, preferring to leave politics to politicians, and only participate when things 'really go wrong' (Den Ridder & Dekker, 2015; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Moreover, research in recent decades shows that many adults have limited knowledge of political institutions. Adults nowadays have, for example, problems with naming politicians, knowing which political parties are in power, or explaining the content of constitutional rights (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001, 2008; Norris, 2011). For instance, a study of Dutch citizens shows that a substantial group of people find it difficult to decipher the difference between parliament and government (Dekker & Steenvoorden, 2008). People differentiate in how they evaluate the workings of democracy in everyday politics, with substantial variations between groups of citizens in the extent to which they trust the parliament, the government, and political parties. While some citizens are positive about the possibilities for making themselves heard, others feel they are not able to make a difference in politics or that politicians are not listening to them (Bernauer & Vatter, 2012; Newton, 2007; Norris, 2011; Van der Meer, 2010). There are also differences in the views of people of different ages on the functioning of political institutions. In many countries, young people display more cynicism, have lower levels of political partisanship, and are less willing to participate in politics than older people are (Dalton, 2004; Hooghe, 2004; Bovens & Wille, 2008).

### **The Importance of Educational Level**

It is a long-established fact that educational level is one of the most important factors in explaining differences in people's views on aspects of democratic citizenship. For example, in 1963, Almond and Verba showed that the political views of those with less education differed from those with higher educational attainment. The more highly educated citizens were more willing to participate in politics, more willing to follow politics, more likely to be active in political discussion, and placed greater value on his or her political skills. These outcomes were often replicated in the subsequent decades (Converse, 1972; Lijphart, 1997; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Kriesi, Grande, Lachat, Dolezal, Bornschie, & Frey, 2006; Norris, 2011; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1989; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995; Verba, 1996).

Educational level also relates to adults' perception of democracy itself. The less educated have a stronger preference for direct democracy than those with higher education, and associate democracy less frequently with decision-making. A substantial number of them have no association with democracy at all. The lower educated define democracy more in terms of freedom and equality, while more educated citizens define democracy more often in procedural terms, such as majority rule or elections (Bengtsson & Mattila, 2009; Den Ridder & Dekker, 2015; Webb, 2013). Moreover, education is negatively associated with adults' attitudes that are contradictory to democracy, such as intolerance, authoritarianism, and cynicism. More people with a lower education level believe in treating individuals with a migration background less favorably than those with the same nationality as themselves, believe children should be taught how to behave, and believe people in general cannot be trusted (Carvacho, Zick, Hays, González, Manzi, Kocik, & Bertl, 2013; Gesthuizen, 2006; Napier & Jost, 2008; Simpson, 1972).

Although ample studies have identified strong relations between educational level and political and democratic attitudes, there is only a basic understanding of why the level of education is such an important factor in explaining differences between citizens. In particular, it is unclear whether the differences found are a direct effect of schooling or a proxy for prior existing differences or underlying characteristics, such as social milieu. Therefore, more research is required on how adolescents from different educational levels develop views towards democracy, and what they learn about democracy inside and outside of school.

People are not born with democratic DNA; they have to develop the views, attitudes, and skills of democratic citizens. To achieve this they need space and stimuli to practice and experience democracy, and in acquiring democratic citizenship, adolescence is known to be a crucial period (Jennings, 2007; Sapiro, 2004; Sears & Levy, 2003). Despite this, the views of adolescents regarding democracy are unclear, and so is how they develop such views over time and the contexts that play an important role in this. These topics are the focus of this research.

### **The Focus of This Study**

This research focuses on the development of adolescents in terms of being a democratic citizen, and investigates the aspects of citizenship that are building blocks for holding democratic views. The primary focus is on democracy itself and decision-making. With this study, I investigate what kinds of views adolescents develop toward democracy. The research concentrates on how young people, at different age, evaluate democracy, democratic values, and the political institutions that accompany it. Because democratic citizenship involves more than decision-making, this research broadens the scope by investigating other central aspects of citizenship,

specifically, social and political engagement, degree of focus on collectivity, and reflexive support for the freedom of speech. Next to investigating the adolescents' views on democratic citizenship, I also examine what kind of experiences adolescents have with democracy inside and outside of school. Finally, this dissertation investigates if the adolescents' views toward and experiences with democracy relate to their educational level.

Most research on adolescents' democratic views and attitudes focuses on political democracy (political institutions associated with democracy). In these studies, adolescents are asked about their views on national parliaments, political parties, the rule of law, or even the European parliament (Hooghe & Dassonville, 2011; Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014). Yet, to most adolescents, these political actors and political institutions carry little meaning as only some of them follow politics, and for many politics is something abstract and far-fetched (Schulz et al., 2010; Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003). To develop a fuller image of how adolescents view democracy, I investigate democratic issues in situations of which they can make sense. Therefore, the focus of the research is primarily on the adolescents' views of democracy in everyday life.

Studies on adolescent democratic citizenship usually employ a quantitative and cross-sectional design. In this research, I adopt a longitudinal, qualitative approach. Because of this design, I hope to provide more in-depth insights into how adolescents view democracy and how they develop these views over time.

The Netherlands, the site of this study, is an interesting case for investigating potential differences between adolescents' views on, and experiences with, democracy related to education. At a relatively early age, Dutch students are selected for an educational track (a pre-vocational track, a higher general educational track, and a pre-academic track).<sup>1</sup> Because the education for students in different tracks is highly

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<sup>1</sup> In the Netherlands, students are formally selected for an educational track at the end of the second grade of secondary education. Because only a minority of schools offer education for all tracks during the first two years of secondary education, in everyday practice the selection is often made before the start of secondary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2013). About sixty percent of the students in Dutch secondary education go to a pre-vocational track. This track is subdivided into four sub-tracks, and about 25 percent of the students go to the lowest two sub-tracks. Some twenty percent of the students are in the general educational track, and twenty percent follow education in the pre-academic track (Statistics Netherlands, 2014). Moving up from the lowest pre-vocational tracks to higher tracks is rather rare. Some twenty percent move up from the highest pre-vocational tracks to the higher general education track, but this number has been decreasing in recent years (Inspectorate of Education, 2013). The students selected for this research were in pre-academic education (PA) or generally in the lowest two tracks of pre-vocational education (PV).

externally differentiated (organized often in various buildings at different locations), this study can shed light on varying educational practices related to track. In this research, I investigate the views and experiences of adolescents in the pre-vocational and pre-academic tracks.

### **Research Aim and Questions**

With this study, I aim to contribute to the understanding of adolescent political socialization, specifically with regard to democracy and democratic citizenship. The central research question reads as follows:

*What are the views and experiences of adolescents regarding democracy and decision-making, and how do these develop over time?*

This research question is divided into five sub-questions:

1. What possibilities do school, associational life, family life, and peers offer adolescents to develop positive attitudes concerning democratic decision-making? What are the differences between adolescents in terms of their educational track?
2. Which types of decision-making do adolescents from different educational tracks prefer in everyday situations in comparison with their views on decision-making in political democracy and their interpretation of the concept of democracy?
3. Do adolescents, with age, become more familiar with the political domain, and do they develop more complex views regarding democratic decision-making?
4. How do adolescents from different educational tracks view important aspects of citizenship, and how do these develop over time?
5. What are the experiences of adolescents from different educational tracks with democracy in everyday life, and do schools provide opportunities for those who have less experience of democracy in other settings?

### **Outline of the Dissertation**

Chapter 2 sets the stage by investigating adolescents' experiences with one central aspect of democracy, namely decision-making, in various settings of daily life (research question 1). In this chapter I concentrate on the kinds of experiences adolescents have regarding decision-making at home, with peers, in associational life, and in school, and search for adolescents' experiences of making their voices heard and making collective decisions. I differentiate between students from various educational tracks to see if educational background plays a role in having experiences with democracy and decision-making.

Thereafter, I shift the focus to how adolescents view democracy and decision-making. Chapter 3 investigates the kinds of preferences adolescents in different edu-

cational tracks have regarding decision-making in both everyday life and political democracy (research question 2). The focus is on the preferences of adolescents regarding collective decision-making procedures (majoritarian, consensual, and deliberative). Thereby, I investigate whether their preferences depend on the situation at hand, and whether differences exist in their views regarding decision-making in everyday life and within parliament.

In Chapter 4, I take this a step further by focusing on how views on decision-making develop over time (research question 3). By taking a longitudinal approach, I investigate the trajectories of adolescents regarding the development of their views on democracy. Thereby, this chapter concentrates on their familiarity with political democracy and the complexity evident in their views regarding democratic issues. Again, by comparing adolescents in pre-vocational and pre-academic educational tracks, I aim to see if different development trajectories exist for these adolescents.

In Chapter 5, the perspective is broadened by focusing on how young people, with age, develop views regarding three central aspects of citizenship (research question 4). Here, I investigate adolescents' views on social and political engagement, collectivity, and freedom of speech. Together with democratic decision-making, I consider these aspects as the building blocks of democratic views. These elements of citizenship are studied in different social contexts, such as the school and political democracy, in order to investigate whether adolescents' preferences vary depending on these contexts.

In the final empirical chapter of this dissertation (Chapter 6), I return to adolescents' experiences in everyday life (research question 5). Here, I focus on the possibilities adolescents have to develop democratic attitudes at home, with friends, and in associational life, and explore if school can compensate for differences that exist between students. In this chapter, the opportunities for those in pre-vocational education are compared with those in pre-academic education with regard to having discussions, making decisions collectively, and being encouraged to become socially and politically engaged.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I summarize the outcomes of these five chapters and interpret the main results in the light of previous studies. Moreover, I discuss how the central components of this dissertation can be of value for schools in providing students with opportunities to develop democratic attitudes, such as through having a curriculum better fitted to the preconceptions of adolescents regarding democratic citizenship. In dealing with these implications, I hope to provide some useful 'evidence-based' considerations for the development of citizenship education in schools.

## CHAPTER 2

### ADOLESCENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH DEMOCRACY AND COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING IN EVERYDAY LIFE<sup>2</sup>

#### **Abstract**

Formal schooling, family and associational life are expected to enable adolescents to develop democratic attitudes. However, much remains unknown about how young people perceive these settings for developing such attitudes, and whether this perception differs for students in different educational tracks. This qualitative study of Dutch adolescents aims to gain insight into adolescents' reported experiences of democratic decision-making. The results show that the opportunities for young people to be involved in collective decision-making and to gain democratic experiences are rather limited in schools and in associational life. This holds for students from both higher and lower educational tracks.

**Keywords:** civic education, civil society, political socialization, democratic experiences, the Netherlands, adolescents

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Developing adolescents' attitudes towards democracy is widely seen as an important goal of formal schooling. In the past twenty years, significant scholarly attention has focused on the specific goals that should be set for democratic and citizenship education on the one hand, and on the results obtained at student level on the other. In particular, the importance of fostering a democratic attitude and political and social engagement has been emphasized (e.g. Eurydice, 2012; Schulz, Ainley, Frailon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010; Veugelers, 2009; Citizenship Advisory Group, 1998). This research has provided us with insights into the importance of schools' roles concerning the socialization of adolescents; however, many questions remain unanswered. For example, what are the differences in adolescents' experiences with citizenship and democracy in formal education compared to other everyday life situations, such as in associational life and contact with peers and parents, and how do the experiences differ depending on the adolescents' backgrounds? With this study, we aim to gain insight into the possibilities that groups of adolescents encounter for making collective decisions and making their voices heard in educational and other social contexts. With our focus on the experiences of adolescents in relation to these crucial aspects of democratic citizenship, we want to shed light on the scope for adolescents to develop positive attitudes towards democracy.

### **Opportunities for Experiencing Democracy**

Since the early nineties, the degree of scholarly attention focused on the socialization function of formal schooling has increased rapidly, partly due to adolescents' perceived lack of societal involvement and perceived indifference towards democracy. This increase is most visible in the volume of research devoted to civic education programs and the formal civic education requirements that have been set in most Western countries in the past decade (Eurydice, 2012). During this period, many scholars have formulated goals for citizenship and democratic education. Schools are often portrayed as communities where students should be able to experience democracy and learn how to act democratically (Citizenship Advisory Group, 1998; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Veugelers, 2009). Therefore, students are expected to be able to develop civic skills (such as perspective-taking) and civic attitudes (such as the willingness to formulate their opinions and make collective decisions), and to support civic and democratic values (such as tolerance and equality) (Eurydice, 2012; Gutmann, 1999; Schulz et al., 2010). Schools' influence on the adolescents' democratic attitudes may vary from providing them with information and teaching social and political issues to organizing an open school climate with room for discussion (Amnå, 2012; Quintelier, 2013; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001).

Empirical research on the effect of citizenship education shows that formal education can indeed affect adolescents' attitudes towards democracy (Geboers, Geijsel,

Admiraal, & Ten Dam, 2013), and these attitudes can be developed both directly and indirectly. A large body of evidence attests to the role of a democratic classroom climate in which students feel encouraged to debate controversial issues (Campbell, 2008; Fjeldstad & Mikkelsen, 2003; Khoury-Kassabri, & Ben-Arieh, 2008; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Other studies have shown that a formal curriculum that includes specific citizenship courses can also influence adolescents' democratic attitudes (Feldman, Pasek, Romer, & Hall Jamieson, 2007; McDevitt & Kioussis, 2007; Yang & Chung, 2009.) Although these outcomes endorse the claim that schools can play a role in the political socialization of adolescents, the empirical knowledge base for this claim remains weak (Geboers et al., 2013; Isac, Maslowski, Creemers, & Van Der Werf, 2013).

More specifically, research has been conducted on students' experiences with decision-making in school, in which the student council is seen as a venue that enables students to develop democratic skills and attitudes. Studies reveal a small (positive) effect on students' attitudes (Eckstein & Noack, 2016; Elchardus & Siongers, 2016; Mager & Nowak, 2012). Other scholars claim that schools are generally hierarchical in character, and thus argue that students lack democratic experiences in this setting because they have little say in many aspects of the school (Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009).

Besides schools, other social settings can create opportunities for adolescents to develop democratic attitudes. Research shows that everyday life experiences and acquired attitudes have an impact on how people evaluate formal democracy (Flanagan, 2013; Greenstein, 1965; Hess & Torney, 1967; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003; Sears & Levy, 2003). More specifically, the roles played by parents, peers, and participation in associational life have been investigated. For example, the role of parents has been important in the research agenda of the political socialization of adolescents' right from the beginning, and has been found to have a crucial impact (Jennings, 2007). Studies following Putnam (1993, 2000) have claimed that civil society associations should also be seen as 'free schools for democracy', and have shown that those who participate in civil society tend to have more positive attitudes towards democratic values (Fung, 2003). Other scholars, however, have shown this to be more of a selection effect than a socialization effect, and that the effect does not hold for all types of organizations, such as sport organizations (Hooghe & Quintelier, 2013; Van der Meer & Van Ingen, 2009). As is the case with research regarding formal schooling, it remains unclear what specific mechanisms are responsible for these effects.

Socialization does not occur solely in organized settings. Teachers, parents, and other adults can create venues for adolescents to learn about the importance of democracy by enabling them to experience democratic ways of dealing with issues

in everyday situations. However, contact with peers in non-organized daily settings, which is another important factor in the socialization process of adolescents (Biesta et al., 2009), has received less research attention, despite it being known that adolescents can influence each other's attitudes by discussing social issues and media content (Erentaitė, Žukauskienė, Beyers, & Pilkauskaitė-Valickienė, 2012).

## Current Research

In this chapter, we shed light on the perceptions of adolescents in the Netherlands regarding the possibilities for developing democratic attitudes in school and in other social contexts. To do so, we focus on one aspect of democracy, namely decision-making in everyday settings (Nieuwelink, Dekker, Geijsel, & Ten Dam, 2016b). The aim of our study is to deepen our insight into the venues available for adolescents (aged 13–15) to learn about democracy. The following research questions are addressed in this chapter: *What possibilities do school, associational life, family life, and peers offer adolescents to develop positive attitudes concerning democratic decision-making? What are the differences between adolescents in terms of their educational track?*

To address this topic, we seek to bridge two gaps in the research literature. First, little is known about the ways in which students perceive the possibility of practicing aspects of democracy, such as decision-making in school, and about the ways in which students make decisions together, especially in comparison to their experiences in other social contexts. In our study, we compare these contexts with the aim of discovering whether there are differences in the decision-making method used depending on the context. We concentrate on three central modes of democratic decision-making: majoritarian decision-making, in which the majority rules through a voting procedure; consensual decision-making, in which participants attempt to negotiate between their fixed preferences to find as much agreement as possible; and deliberative decision-making, in which a discussion is used to find the best possible solution for a problem (Goodin, 2008; Lijphart, 1999).

Second, most studies about adolescents' political socialization focus on attitudes towards formal national politics (support for democracy and feelings of political efficacy measured using questions about attitudes towards parliament, elections, and authorities). These concepts are distant and carry relatively little meaning for many adolescents; therefore, we focus on democracy in everyday life. Adolescents' everyday decision-making experiences can enable them to develop their preparedness in several central aspects of democratic decision-making, such as making collective decisions, adjusting their own viewpoints, empathizing with others, and harnessing their (political) self-efficacy. The relevance of these experiences for adolescents' attitudes towards democratic values, political institutions, and political systems is supported by research demonstrating that adolescents base their attitudes towards these

functions on everyday life experiences. What they learn in these situations thus influences their attitudes towards democracy (Gimpel et al., 2003; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Sapiro, 2004; Sears & Levy, 2003). Other research shows that the attitudes towards democracy formed during (pre-) adolescence have a lasting impact on democratic orientations and behavior in later life (Jennings, 2007; Sears & Levy, 2003).

### *The Dutch Educational Context*

School autonomy is a central element of the Dutch educational system. The Ministry of Education sets attainment targets and final exams for secondary education, but within these broadly defined margins, schools are free to formulate their own pedagogical approach, set their own goals, and decide how to design an education program for their students. Because both denominational and public schools are state-funded in the Netherlands, a wide variety of religious and pedagogically founded schools exist. This means the experiences of students in terms of democracy and collective decision-making probably vary according to the school settings.

In addition, studies have shown that in the Netherlands and other countries, the differences in the goals and practices that are set for citizenship education across pre-vocational and pre-academic education can help explain differences in political attitudes between adolescents enrolled in these two tracks in high school (Ichilov, 2003; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003). Therefore, in this study, we compare the experiences of students in the pre-vocational track (PV) and pre-academic track (PA). Because adolescents from a higher socioeconomic background are overrepresented in higher educational tracks (OECD, 2014), and parental social milieu is shown to be related to democratic experiences and attitudes (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; McDewitt & Kiouis, 2015), this enables us to investigate differences with regard to experiences at home.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

In the spring of 2011, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 adolescents in their second year of secondary education in the Netherlands (aged 13-15). In selecting participants we have sought variety in both individual characteristic and school characteristics. Within each school a tutor helped us select the students based on the following criteria. We sought a well-balanced distribution with regard to gender, socio-economic milieu, ethnic background, and religious orientation. Twenty students from pre-vocational secondary education and twenty students from pre-academic education were selected, with an equal distribution between boys and girls. In order to be able to interview adolescents from various social and educational

backgrounds, we selected them from four schools in the Netherlands: a public school in Amsterdam with a mixed population of students that provides only pre-academic education; a public school in the middle of the country with a mixed urban/rural population of both migrant and non-migrant students that provides only pre-vocational education; a Catholic school in the northwest of the country with a predominantly non-migrant population that provides both pre-vocational and pre-academic education; and an orthodox Protestant school in the northeast of the Netherlands with predominantly orthodox Protestant and non-migrant student population that provides both pre-vocational and pre-academic education. This helped us to find perspectives on experiences with decision making from many different walks of life.

### *Interviews and Procedure*

The interviews were conducted by the first author and were structured as follows. First, the adolescents were asked to introduce themselves and describe the social activities in which they participated (e.g., activities with friends, voluntary organizations, sports clubs, or religious associations). Second, the interviewees were invited to respond to eleven statements, such as the following: “People should listen to each other, even though their opinions differ” and “If someone in the classroom does not agree with something, he or she should have the opportunity to explain his or her opinion”. The interviewees were given the opportunity to explain whether these situations occurred within their social settings. Third, the adolescents were queried about the extent to which they experienced collective decision making in their various social settings. The interviewees were also asked to compare social settings with regard to their experiences with this aspect of democracy. Because ‘decision making’ can be interpreted as being related only to formal procedures, the interviewees were also asked about these processes in more informal terms (such as ‘Which person chooses what is going to be done?’ or ‘Who decides on the program?’).

### *Coding and Analysis*

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. With the help of ATLAS.ti software, analyses were conducted for every interview, followed by cross-case analysis with a focus on finding similar and dissimilar patterns among the interviews (cf. Huberman & Miles, 1994). The coding scheme consisted of the following categories and subcategories:

- “Social contexts”: household, peers, associational life, and school and class; and
- “Experiences with decision making”: experience (e.g. collective decision-making; decision by authority), method used (deliberations, consensus, majority rule,

authority decides), and topic (e.g. fieldtrip, rescheduling of a class, what movie to watch).

To determine the reliability of the coding, an independent judge coded fragments of the transcribed interviews for comparison to the coding of the first author. Cohen's kappa reliability coefficient was then calculated. This resulted in a Kappa of 0.85, which falls into the category "almost perfect" (0.8-1.0) (Landis & Koch, 1977).

## Results

The interviewees participate in many social settings. At school, they interact daily with their classmates, teachers, and other school personnel; at home, most of the interviewees live with more than three people and must find a way to make their households pleasant for all residents. In their spare time, nearly all of the interviewees participate in sports or leisure organizations, such as soccer clubs, hockey clubs, music clubs, boy scouts, or gymnastics clubs. Some of them also attend confirmation classes in their church or Koran classes in their mosque. Finally, these adolescents spend a large amount of time with their friends.

In all of these social encounters, these adolescents participate in joint activities in which they must address the preferences of different people and deal with rules they must obey but with which they sometimes disagree. Thus, in different social settings, the interviewees encounter situations where decisions are made that affect all participants. According to the interviewees, in many situations, adult authorities (such as teachers, trainers, or parents) make the decisions. Relevant differences, however, exist between social settings in the extent to which these authorities are inclined to listen to adolescents' perspectives when making a decision. Nearly all of the interviewees stated that their parents are willing to listen to them, but their reported experiences with teachers at school and trainers in sport clubs vary greatly. Some interviewees said that their voice was being heard by school authorities, but others did not experience this.

From the perspective of adolescents, there are opportunities to make collective decisions in all social contexts, but sharp differences exist in their reported experiences. Interviewees claimed that although different perspectives exist among family members as well as among friends, they try to find consensus and tend to agree on activities in leisure organizations; however, at school, the majority rules. In this sense, they experience different modes of decision-making in daily life. These results are discussed in detail below.

## *Schools and Classrooms*

### *Different experiences with having a voice*

None of the interviewees felt that they as students had much of a say in what happens in school. One boy (PV) made the following statement: “In class, you do not really make decisions together. Most of rules and regulations are fixed”. Others agreed with him, although this does not mean that the interviewees generally felt that their opinions were being ignored. While some students reported that teachers and headmasters never really listen to them, others stated that on some occasions, school authorities did consider their perspectives when making decisions. Considerably more students in the PA track than the PV track stated that they experienced situations where their teachers were not willing to consider their opinions. This is probably because these PA students seemed more likely to be critical of school situations they believed to be unjust, and therefore confronted teachers and administrators more often. The denomination of the school appeared to play no role in this.

Those interviewees who said they were ignored all claimed that teachers and members of the school administration were not interested in students’ opinions. One boy (PA), for example, stated that: “Most teachers will want to pretend they are listening to you but then will brush you off by saying ‘I will take care of it’ and then do nothing about it”. A classmate of his, discussing their tutor, argued along the same lines. “You cannot discuss anything with him... Whenever you try to explain your point of view and give an argument, he does not listen and tells you to stop talking or you will be expelled from the classroom”. Similar arguments were voiced by interviewees who felt their administrators did not listen to them. One boy (PV) claimed that talking to the headmaster about school regulations was a wasted effort: “No, he would argue that those are the rules of the school... He is in charge of the school, why would he listen to me?” He and other interviewees argued that they were ignored because, being students, they are obliged to obey the rules set by the administration.

In the case of the interviewees who did not feel ignored by teachers and administrators, while the authorities did not always act upon their opinions, at least the students felt that their opinions had been heard. They gave examples of situations where their teachers or form tutors allowed them to participate in substantive classroom or school decisions, such as the appropriate punishment for misconduct and the scheduling of tutoring lessons. One boy (PV) discussed the former situation, in which he and his classmates were told by their teacher that they were responsible for coming up with a solution for misbehavior in the classroom: “We had to discuss with each other how we were going to address our misconduct and the rules of the school... We thought about how we were going to do it and what type of punishment we thought was fair... Thereafter the teacher discussed the penalties we sug-

gested with his colleagues”. Another interviewee (PA) explained that she and her classmates were able to influence the system of mandatory tutoring lessons for all students, to which they objected: “We explained our perspective to our form tutor and he said, ‘We will see what the whole class thinks about it. Which students agree with this and which don’t?’ Almost all students agreed with us. Our form tutor then went to the principal and explained our view. And now they have solved our problem”.

### *Voting in the classroom*

In many school context situations, the interviewees reported that school authorities make the decisions. However, these adolescents also explained that in some instances they are able to make decisions with their classmates about, for example, which movie to watch in class, the date of a test, or the rescheduling of a class. Students sometimes disagreed on the best decision in these situations, in which case the majority typically decided. This was the dominant experience in PV and PA schools alike, and did not differ according to denomination. One girl (PV) described her experiences: “Well, one of us wanted to see one movie [in class] and someone else wanted another movie. The teacher said that we had to decide as a class... Eventually, the majority will choose”. In many instances when students are allowed to decide by majority rule, they do so without debating the issue. One boy (PA) explained: “The teacher simply asks us to vote and does not give us time to debate it... We just vote”. Although students sometimes have different viewpoints, they do not always get the opportunity to explain their arguments; instead, the option that most students favor will be chosen, with little attention paid to the reasons for students’ other preferences.

When students are able to voice their opinions before they cast a vote, they are usually limited to a brief debate, and many interviewees from both tracks claimed that not all students were able to voice their arguments. One girl (PV) stated that: “If a girl who is very quiet says something, nobody will listen, but if a loudmouth says something, everyone will listen... Most of the time even the teachers do not hear the quiet girls... So these girls do not really have a say in things”. This means that simply allowing debate about a decision does not ensure equal participation for all of the students involved. Adolescents from both tracks and all schools involved stated that some or even many teachers are not creating a pedagogical environment where all students are able to participate on an equal basis in decision-making procedures. Because these teachers, from the perspective of the interviewees, are more inclined to listen to ‘loudmouths’ and create little space for the quieter students, the latter will have fewer opportunities to explain their preferences and experience this aspect of democracy.

Although voting is the dominant mechanism for making decisions in the classroom, three interviewees mentioned the use of finding consensus among the students as an alternative. One boy (PV) explained how they sometimes decided on the sequence of activities in the classroom: “Then, there will be a discussion, and we will find a solution together... One student voices his opinion, and another responds... I think that everyone takes part in the discussion... Finally, everyone agrees with what we come up with”. In this situation, the students were willing to listen to each other and attempt to take everyone’s interests into account when making decisions.

*Student council: Largely unknown*

Every school in the Netherlands is obligated to have a student council, and although it plays a role in school decision-making, most of the interviewed students were largely unaware of it. This held for students from both tracks and from all schools involved in the study. Those who were familiar with the council were usually not particularly interested in its workings or did not hold it in high esteem; for example, one girl (PA) stated: “Well, until recently, I didn’t know that we had a student council. So they are not very active... I know that they do not have much influence on school policy, so why would you want to join the council?”

Of the interviewees who were aware of the workings of the student council, two had participated in the council, three were willing to do so, while five others argued that it does in fact influence school policy. One boy (PA) who participated in his school’s student council explained that the administration was willing to listen to its ideas: “If you come with a realistic proposal they will listen to you. They will ask ‘Why do you want that?’ and you’ll have to explain your reasons, and other students can react. After that they discuss it with the administrators and tell us what the decision is and why”. This boy had experienced the administration’s willingness to take the student council’s ideas seriously, even to the extent of changing policies due to students’ requests. Some students who were not personally part of their school’s council felt that it did influence school policy, and argued that while an individual student cannot create change at school, the school council can because that is its role, and the administrators will listen to its members.

Although the student council can be a good tool for its student members to learn about decision-making practices, most adolescents interviewed did not view the council as effective in their schools, and raised questions about both its influence on school policy and its representativeness. These interviewees painted a picture of learning experiences not extending beyond those who participate in the council, even if they interacted with those council participants. Therefore, it is questionable whether those participants learn how to represent others’ interests.

## *Leisure Associations and Religious Associations*

### *Leisure activities*

Nearly all of the adolescents interviewed were engaged in activities such as soccer, tennis, music, or dancing. They generally participated in these activities in an associational setting, where many activities would be performed with ten to twenty other adolescents under the supervision of an adult. While there is potential for adolescents to experience collective decision-making in these organizations, in general the interviewees did not experience this. Usually, an adult (e.g. a coach or trainer) decides on the activity for the group and sets the rules. For example, one boy (PA) explained the decision-making process in his soccer team: “We don’t [decide together]... The coach decides about the line-up... Everyone has a fixed position. Nobody objects to that... the activities during training are also fixed”.

The hierarchical structure of these leisure organizations seems broadly similar to the adolescents’ experiences of the school context. While people are free to enter and leave these associations, the interviewees did not feel they had any particular influence within these contexts. The interviewees’ experiences in leisure organizations vary in terms of the extent to which they feel the leaders take their perspective into account. Some interviewees were able to voice their preferences to their coaches or trainers, while others claimed that the coach or trainer rarely listened to them. We did not find any differences based on the type of organization or educational background of the students. One boy’s (PA) story about scouting was typical of the experiences of other interviewees: “You can say what you’d like to do, but the officers ultimately decide”. The voicing of preferences by the adolescents seems a rather one-sided activity given that the adults make the final decisions. There appears to be little discussion between the adolescents about their preferences and the possibility of meeting their interests as far as possible.

Some interviewees explicitly stated that they felt ignored; the experience of one girl (PA) who participated in a circus theatre is exemplary. She explained: “One of the reasons I left that place was that my supervisor always told me what I had to do. We were going to have a show for the public, and then she said that I had to be a little animal, but I wanted to be something elegant... When you are an animal it seems like you’re not good at it, not elegant. So I decided to leave that theatre”. According to this girl, she had greater opportunities to voice her opinion in the classroom than in the theatre program, which, despite being voluntary and recreational, does not guarantee adolescents more influence over their activities. This girl’s experience and her reaction to it, however, also shows that situations in which a person cannot make her voice heard can be important for the development of democratic attitudes. She felt it was unfair that she was forced to perform a part that she

clearly did not want; that experience showed her the importance of having an influence in decision-making processes.

Within the various associations, the interviewees were sometimes able to make collective decisions. In contrast to the classroom, however, the interviewees rarely recalled doing so by majority rule. On almost every occasion when allowed to choose their activity, the interviewees reported that everyone on their team or in their club agreed on what they wanted to do. In this setting, they never really experienced disagreement when provided with the chance to make a decision. One boy (PA) provided an example: “Sometimes we can decide what we are going to do during soccer practice. [...] Then, we are going to shoot on goal because that is what everybody loves the most”. The interviewees stated that disagreements about which activities to do did not really exist because all of the members joined the organization due to their love of that particular activity.

#### *Confirmation class or Koran class*

All twelve students from the orthodox Protestant school participate in confirmation classes in their church, while three students from other schools participate in Koran classes in their mosque. The experiences reported by the adolescents in these settings are quite similar to those reported in other organizations, with the exception of one aspect that is unique to this type of association. The activities in religious associations are relatively predetermined; some interviewees stated that the adult in charge of the meetings makes the decisions about which texts to read and discuss. Other interviewees, however, reported being able to provide input into the selection of topics and being encouraged to bring up issues that are relevant to them. One girl (PA) explained: “We also discuss topics that we are interested in... We may suggest topics that we want to talk about, and they listen to that, but they decide how the meeting takes place”. Although there are clear similarities with leisure organizations and school contexts, the fundamental difference in religious study organizations is that while there is some room for initiative in selecting the topics for discussion, the content of the discussions has a clear direction. One boy (PV) stated: “Our clergyman makes clear which opinions are allowed and which opinions are not allowed within our faith”. In contrast to their experiences with leisure activities and in the classroom, adolescents are confronted with strict regulations about the opinions they should express. Thus, their initiatives are much more directed along the lines of their faith.

#### *Friends in Non-Organized Settings*

The interviewees believe they have the greatest opportunities to make collective decisions and the greatest chance of making their voices count when they are among

friends. In most instances, they and their friends agree on what they will be doing. If they have varying preferences, most interviewees explained that they try to find a consensus on what they will do. For the interviewees, this is a logical process; as friends, you care for one another, you are inclined to have similar preferences, and you wish for everyone to be satisfied. This holds for all students, regardless of educational track and/or school. One girl (PV) explained what happens when her friends are unable to agree on what they are going to do: "Sometimes one girl wants to go cycling, someone wants to play hockey, and a third wants to play soccer. I make sure that everyone gets what she wants... We start by going cycling, then we play hockey, and afterwards we play soccer". As this girl explained, all of the members of the group can voice their preferences, and they then look for a solution that will satisfy everyone.

However, some interviewees also experience a different process of collective decision-making among friends, as in some cases the group simply opts for what the majority wants to do. One boy (PA) explained: "If you plan to go somewhere and only one person is not able to come on that date, then it is bad luck for him. You can try to find agreement with everyone, but if that is not possible, you just decide what most people prefer, and he can go another time". From the perspective of these interviewees, not all groups of friends are focused on finding consensus and keeping everybody satisfied. In some cases, the decision-making process among friends is similar to what they experience in the classroom.

### *At Home*

All interviewees still live at home with one or both of their parents and most have one or more siblings. All report that their families make collective decisions on joint activities. Family types did not seem to influence experiences with democracy at home. Their parents decide on the rules of the household, but most interviewees do not feel these rules are overly restrictive. In these and other situations where parents make the decisions, nearly all of the interviewees feel their parents consider their preferences. In addition, in this social setting there are no systematic differences found in terms of the students' educational track or the denomination of the school. One boy (PV) explained how his family made decisions: "My parents are in charge, but I can say what I want to do, but ultimately they decide. If I want to go to a party and they don't agree, then I can start whining as much as I like, but it doesn't make a difference... Only when I have really good arguments will they change their opinions". This boy and most of the other interviewees feel their parents take them seriously and are prepared to listen to them.

When deciding about daytrips or holidays, the interviewees explained that everyone in the family has a say. One girl (PV) said: "If we go on holiday, for example,

we decide together about what we are going to do. Then, we always reach an agreement together”. It seems that in these households, each family member focuses on making a decision that everyone can agree with, thus meeting everyone’s preferences. The interviewees feel that, compared to other social contexts, there is much more room for discussion when making decisions at home. One girl (PA) stated: “When we make decisions together, we listen to each other, and most of the time, we find an agreement. In the end, everyone should be happy about what we are going to do”. In more formal, organized social settings, the interviewees explained there was limited discussion about the rules or activities employed. Conversely, in their households, most of these adolescents felt they could have a prolonged conversation about the preferences of all the individuals involved in a proposed activity, after which they are able to make a decision to which everyone agrees.

This horizontal power relationship does not hold for all households, however. Two of the forty interviewees described a more hierarchical relationship between themselves and their parents, where the parents make all decisions. One girl (PV) explained the habits in her household: “My parents make the decisions... Like where we go to when we go on holiday... I don’t have much to say about the rules at our home. My parents set certain rules, and I just stick to them”. In the experiences reported by these two interviewees, we find more traditional power relationships where the parents are the heads of the household; therefore, there is little discussion about household rules and the activities in which family members participate. However, most interviewees experience the household as a social setting in which horizontal social relationships exist, providing them with opportunities to voice their opinions and preferences.

## **Conclusions and Discussion**

In this chapter, we have presented the results of our study on Dutch adolescents’ perspectives on and experiences with collective decision-making in everyday situations. We have sought to provide insight into the everyday opportunities available for adolescents, aged 13–15, to develop democratic attitudes and how these differ for students from different educational tracks and schools (denominations).

Many scholars have argued that associational life and formal education offer adolescents opportunities for experiencing democracy (Fung, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Veugelers, 2009). The results presented here offer, at best, a rather mixed view of this hypothesis. According to the perceptions of many of the interviewed adolescents, the opportunities to experience democracy by making their voices heard individually and making decisions collectively are limited in these everyday settings. This result is in line with an international study on citizenship education that shows students in the Netherlands have relatively limited opportunities for decision-making in

schools (Schulz et al., 2010). Most of the forty adolescents in our study explained that their school administrations and club leaders are relatively uninterested in their opinions. This holds regardless of the students' educational track or denomination of the school. According to the interviewees, authorities in formal organized institutions often make decisions without considering their perspective. In this respect, the power relationships in formal education and associational life are far more hierarchical in nature than those found in more informal social settings. In contrast, nearly all interviewees indicated that their parents are willing to take their viewpoints and opinions seriously. However, the finding that voluntary associations provide adolescents with more possibilities to take the initiative and to gain democratic experiences than formal schooling (e.g. Biesta et al., 2009) was not supported by the adolescents we interviewed. Below, we will reflect on these results, particularly the question of inequality between students from different social milieus and educational tracks.

Previous research revealed differences in adolescent democratic attitudes and in the opportunity structure available for adolescents to develop these attitudes. Families from lower social backgrounds and pedagogical regimes in lower educational tracks are considered to be more often hierarchically organized, which means young people in these settings experience aspects of democracy less often (e.g. collective decision-making, deliberation) (Jennings et al., 2009; McDevitt & Kiouisis, 2015; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003). The results of the present study contradict this expectation to a certain extent. First, interviewees' experiences of relations at home are rather egalitarian. Although parents make the decisions, they are largely willing to listen to and include the preferences of young people. This holds for students in both educational tracks and from different social backgrounds, and indicates, therefore, that young people in the Netherlands nowadays grow up in families where decision-making is a rather egalitarian endeavor. The experience of having a voice and being heard by parents is therefore not a satisfactory explanation for inequality in the democratic attitudes of young people. It can perhaps better be explained by considering the way in which politics is discussed in families in more detail (Jennings et al., 2009).

Second, the reported experiences of the adolescents in schools generally do not differ in terms of educational track. Students in both tracks have limited experiences with decision-making, and when they are allowed to make a decision together, they just cast a vote. In the eyes of adolescents from both tracks, there are limited opportunities to experience this aspect of democracy in schools. The few differences we found between educational tracks point in an unexpected direction. Rather than students from the PV education, it was actually those from the PA track that reported not having a voice when teachers or administrators make a decision. Perhaps these students, somewhat more often than peers in PV education, are susceptible to school

authorities' lack of inclination to listen to students, and they say this loud and clear. It can also be the case that teachers in PV schools are more engaged with listening to what their students have to say in order to enhance opportunities. In general, taken from the perspectives of the interviewees, schools do not seem to create many venues for developing democratic attitudes. Our study does not support the idea that schools enhance inequality between students, but they do not seem to mend the inequality gap either. There are only limited opportunities for adolescents to develop democratic attitudes.

In some cases, the adolescents in our study had opportunities to make decisions collectively. With regard to this, relevant differences exist between schools on the one hand and family, friends, and associational life on the other. At school, when students are allowed to make decisions together, different perspectives often exist, and a majority decision is ultimately made. By doing so, students can learn about fair ways to address differences of opinion when making the best decision. However, it is remarkable that majority decisions seem to dominate in classroom settings. Students feel that teachers rarely urge students to reach agreements among themselves, and participating in a deliberative decision-making process is very uncommon. If the perceptions of the interviewees hold true for larger groups of students, then it can be said that adolescents are not consciously learning about consensual decision-making or the deliberative decision-making process in school. Observational studies may reveal whether aspects of these types of decision-making occur in everyday school life.

According to the forty adolescents, agreement is often sought and for the most part is easily found, when a joint decision is made at home, with friends, and in organizations of associational life. The reported predominance of finding agreement can be explained by the characteristics of these contexts. Within associations, adolescents often have similar interests, whereas at home and with friends, people tend to wish to keep everyone satisfied. When adolescents are able to make collective decisions in associations, it is generally limited to a short exchange of preferences, and often, all agree on the proposed activity. The interviewees report that discussing their preferences for, or disagreement with, the planned activity is rare. While there are opportunities to learn cooperation in these social settings, it seems adolescents are not confronted frequently with situations in which they are forced to resolve differences in perspectives and opinions as a group.

In general, based on our research we are unable to indicate which of the social contexts discussed here (formal schooling, associational life, household, and friends) is 'most important'. However, it seems that experiencing democracy in everyday social contexts is more of a potential than a reality. In our view, schools are the obvious setting for students to experience and learn about democracy. At school, students

are confronted with adolescents who have other preferences and values, and unlike with friends and voluntary associations, there are limited exit options. Schools should use this potential to create venues for students to identify their preferences about collective decision-making and to learn about social and political issues. Moreover, the pedagogical space of the school can be used to stimulate students to reflect on experiences with democratic decision-making outside the school. Students can be encouraged to reflect on everyday situations where they encounter hierarchical power relations, undemocratic decision-making processes, and the lack of a voice. By helping students to reflect on undemocratic experiences, teachers can assist students in developing democratic attitudes. This can be especially important for PV students because studies (e.g. Ichilov, 2003; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003) often show that students in this educational track have fewer opportunities to learn to reflect on social issues and (un)democratic experiences. These types of schools in particular should work to create venues for their students to experience democracy and develop democratic attitudes.



## CHAPTER 3

### "DEMOCRACY ALWAYS COMES FIRST"

#### ADOLESCENTS' VIEWS ON DECISION-MAKING IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND POLITICAL DEMOCRACY<sup>3</sup>

##### **Abstract**

Research shows adolescents to be positively oriented towards democracy, but little is known about what it actually means to them and what their views are on decision-making in both everyday situations and political democracy. To gain insight into these aspects of adolescents' democratic views we have interviewed 40 Dutch adolescents from second grade of different types of high school. Potential conflict between various democratic principles prevalent in everyday life situations was discussed and compared to how they view decision-making in political democracy. The results of our qualitative study showed that adolescents' views on issues concerning collective decision-making in everyday situations are quite rich and reflect different models of democracy (majoritarian, consensual, and deliberative). Moreover, how adolescents deal with tensions between democratic principles in everyday life situations varies. While some adolescents combine several principles (for instance majority rule as a last resort after trying to find broader consensus), other adolescents tend to strictly focus on only one of these principles. Adolescents' views on political democracy, however, are rather limited and one-dimensional. Those adolescents who seemed to have a more explicit picture of political democracy often preferred a strict focus on majority rule, neglecting minority interests.

**Keywords:** political socialization, adolescents, decision-making, democratic views, civic engagement

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For the stability of a democratic society, it is of great importance that new generations develop democratic orientations. Yet, during the past fifteen years, studies have raised questions about the orientations of new generations towards democracy and specific aspects thereof, such as political interests, willingness to vote, freedom of speech, and collective decision-making. Scholars claim that new generations are largely preoccupied with their own lives and interests, and are therefore less focused on participation in public spheres and the common good (Galston, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Ribeiro, Malafaia, Neves, Ferreira, & Menezes, 2015).

Notwithstanding the concerns raised, some research conducted in recent years shows that many adolescents still appreciate democracy and support underlying values such as tolerance and freedom of speech (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). In general, they prefer democratic regimes above undemocratic ones and democratic ways of decision-making with friends, in school, and in leisure organizations (Helwig, 1998). Although adolescents seem positively oriented towards democracy, a more detailed picture of their views about democratic ways of decision-making is still lacking. For instance, adolescents are often asked in studies whether or not they agree with democracy and/or freedom rights, but these studies do not shed light on adolescents' views in situations in which they are confronted with competing democratic principles (e.g. Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Schulz et al., 2010; Torney-Purta, 2001). Notably, the studies carried out focused primarily on political democracy (i.e. parliament, presidency, and political parties), while previous research has shown that adolescents have limited knowledge of and experiences in such arenas (Galston, 2001; Helwig, 1998). Some studies have focused on decision-making in situations familiar to adolescents, but participants in these studies are drawn predominantly from the higher socio-economic milieu, which leaves differences related to education levels or the socio-economic milieu out of the picture (e.g. Helwig & Kim, 1999; Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2003). Other studies have revealed the significant impact of education on adolescents' democratic views, and have claimed this as a stronger explanation for differences between young people than background characteristics such as gender, age, religiosity, and ethnicity (e.g. Flanagan et al., 2005; Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Schulz et al., 2010).

This chapter reports on a qualitative study of the democratic views of adolescents from different educational tracks. We aimed at offering a situated understanding of adolescents' democratic views by focusing on the different meanings of democratic decision-making in the context of both everyday life situations and political democracy. Our interviews with adolescents have provided in-depth insights into adolescent preferences regarding the collective decision-making processes they encounter in different situations where aspects of democracy are at stake. We focused on familiar situations in their daily lives in which they interact with others, such as at home,

with friends, and at school (hereafter “everyday situations”), and on adolescents’ views about decision-making in a political democracy, meaning the institutions that constitute the democratic characteristics of the state, such as parliament, the presidency, the constitution, and political parties. This approach enabled us to compare adolescents’ subjective views on democratic decision-making in different situations. Moreover, interviewing adolescents from divergent socio-economic and sociocultural backgrounds allowed us to explore the differences between various groups.

The relevance of our study lies particularly in the fact that adolescence is a formative period in a person’s political socialization (Jennings, 2007; Sears & Levy, 2003). The views and orientations developed during this period affect a person’s beliefs throughout the rest of his or her life. Furthermore, a large amount of research has pointed out that young people to an extent base their attitudes towards politics and democracy on experiences with democracy in everyday life, such as discussions and decision-making in class and whether adults are willing to listen to their perspectives (Flanagan, 2013; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Sapiro, 2004). Everyday experiences can influence how they view democracy, and this influence can have a lasting effect.

### **Models of Democracy**

Democracy is not a univocal concept and also democratic decision-making can take various forms. At least three models of democracy can be distinguished: majoritarian democracy, consensual democracy, and deliberative democracy (Dahl, 1956; Goodin, 2008; Held, 2006; Hendriks, 2010; Keane, 2009; Lijphart, 1999). Within all three models of democracy discussing viewpoints is considered a central aspect, but the role of this discussion differs to a large extent. Selecting one from several competing options stands central in the majoritarian model of democracy. Discussion is supposed to inform people about the available options. Therefore, discussion is considered an instrument that enables people to voice their viewpoints and to persuade others after which “the winner takes all” via a voting procedure. In the consensual model of democracy, the focus is on finding agreement via negotiation involving as many participants as possible and thereby taking as many minority interests into account as possible. Discussion is basically negotiation to find a compromise. In the deliberative model of democracy, preferences of actors become fluid and participants are focused upon developing new perspectives and finding win-win options by deliberation. Discussion is here the method that is used to come to a decision. By discussing all given viewpoints objectively, people must come to an understanding about what for all people involved the most reasonable option is.

Coming to a decision through voting, negotiating, or deliberating confronts people with contradictory principles, and particularly between freedom and equality, majority rule and minority interests, and the power of numbers or the power of

arguments. Within these three models of democracy, no fixed balance between democratic principles can be found. The balance can shift depending on the time, place, and preferences of the individuals involved (Thomassen, 2007). However, because of a focus on one decision-making procedure, each of the respective models implies tensions between certain competing principles in particular. In the majoritarian model, potential conflicts primarily exist between majority vote, the power of arguments, and interests of minorities. In the consensual model, potential conflicts mainly exist between negotiating agreements, the necessity of collective decision-making, and the power of arguments. In the deliberative model, potential conflicts between deliberation, power of numbers, and the necessity to come to a collective decision are accentuated. A more comprehensive understanding of democracy would therefore suggest that several of these principles are taken into account when arguing about aspects of democracy. To observe a deeper and more complex understanding of Dutch adolescents' democratic orientations, these models of democracy and their encompassing potentially conflicting principles were used as a theoretical frame for this research.

### **Orientations Towards Democracy and Decision-Making**

Some research has been conducted about the question what adolescents know about democracy and how they feel about it. The few available studies of adolescents' views on democracy indicate that they on average have only limited insight into the meaning of this concept. Many adolescents are not able to define democracy or provide a coherent description of it. Those who are able to define democracy, moreover, typically do so in terms of such characteristics as individual rights and freedoms, democratic representation, majority rule, and/or civic equality (Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003; Flanagan, Gallay, Gill, Gallay, & Nti, 2005; Flanagan, 2013). Only a small group of adolescents have been shown to be able to provide a more comprehensive account of the concept of democracy by mentioning several key characteristics, relating these to each other and explaining why they constitute a democracy (Sigel & Hoskin, 1981; De Groot, 2013). In other international research, adolescents were shown to be able to judge what is good and bad for democracy when confronted with statements about political institutions (Torney-Purta, 2001). Comprehension of democracy seems to be related to the ability to understand what a democratic way of dealing with a situation entails. An older study among adolescents in the USA has shown that those who were able to provide a more comprehensive account of democracy also provided more often a democratic solution for a problem as opposed to a more self-centered approach (Sigel & Hoskin, 1981).

All in all, adolescents appear to have trouble defining democracy despite having some basic knowledge of what it entails. The inability of many adolescents to give a

definition of democracy that encompasses several characteristics does not mean, however, that they are indifferent to the existence of democracy. An international study comprising 38 countries showed that the overwhelming majority of adolescents from all participating countries (strongly) concur with statements expressing such democratic principles as freedom of speech, equal rights for all, and free elections (Schulz et al., 2010). To date, hardly any research has been conducted about the question whether adolescents vary in their preferences for a certain model of democracy. One study among Canadian children documented a preference for a representative democracy, consensual democracy, or direct democracy as opposed to a meritocracy or oligarchy (Helwig, 1998).

Studies indicate that democratic views among adolescents are not equally distributed. With regard to educational track, students in college-bound tracks are often more positively oriented towards democracy, possess more comprehension of democracy, and have a better understanding of democratic institutions (such as parliament, constitution, and presidency) than those in vocational tracks (Flanagan et al. 2005; Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Schulz et al., 2010). It is therefore relevant to take educational track and the related differences in social-economic and social cultural background (OECD, 2014) into account when studying adolescents' views on democratic decision-making.

To be able to gain insight into the adolescents' preferences regarding decision-making in situations that are familiar to them, some research has focused on everyday situations, such as the classroom and with friends. These studies showed that even children at the age of six approve of majoritarian decisions in classroom and with friends. However, studies in different cultural contexts have shown that, with age, children become more hesitant to approve majority decisions when these concern personal matters, individual rights, or repeated decisions with a fixed majority and minority (Moessinger, 1981; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984; Kinoshita, 1989, 2006). These studies further showed early adolescents (age 10-12 years) to have started to develop a sensitivity to tensions and dilemma's that are central to democratic decision-making. Yet, the participants in these studies were not presented with several decision-making procedures, for example majority rule, negotiating agreement, or deliberation. More generally, scholars have concentrated on the elements of one type of democracy, namely, a majoritarian democracy. In a study of 6- to 11-year-old Canadian children (Helwig & Kim, 1999) and a study of 13- to 16-year-old Chinese adolescents (Helwig et al., 2003), however, the participants were explicitly asked about which type of decision-making process they would prefer: consensual, majoritarian, or authority based. Most Canadian children stated that majority decision-making with peers and family and at school for field trips is a legitimate way but most of them preferred consensual decision-making. The major-

ity of the Chinese adolescents preferred majority decision-making. The participants in these studies had predominantly a higher social class background and none of these studies have thus been able to explore differences between different social groups.

In the present study, we follow this line of research by focusing on decision-making in adolescents' daily lives. A focus on issues that are familiar to adolescents is important for two reasons. First, research shows that adolescents can learn about democratic processes at school, with friends, and via leisure activities. In these situations adolescents can experience discussions and collective decision-making (Geijsel et al., 2012; Miklikowska & Hurme, 2011; Sapiro, 2004; Nieuwelink, Dekker, Ten Dam, & Geijsel, 2016a). It has also been found that when young people are asked to make judgments about political democracy, they indeed draw upon their knowledge of aspects of democracy, such as decision-making, in day-to-day activities and their experiences with the outcomes of these (Flanagan, 2013; Greenstein, 1965; Hess & Torney, 1967; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003). Adolescents compare between what they experience and judge as fair in their direct environment to situations, institutions, and actors within political democracy, which we call the "analogy claim".

A second reason for studying issues of daily significance comes from the finding that although people may refine their democratic views during their lives, the attitudes of adolescents towards salient features of their lives tend to have a lasting impact on these views and political behavior (Sears & Levy, 2003; Jennings, 2007; Jennings, Stoker, & Bower, 2009). Recent studies have shown that adolescents' attitudes with regard to democracy remain relatively stable between the age of fourteen and early adulthood. A strong correlation has been shown to exist between adolescents' attitudes towards political engagement and political trust (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; Prior, 2010). For this reason, it can be assumed that just how young people perceive daily power-related issues and processes as fair or unfair will influence their attitudes and views on political democracy later in life, which we call the "permanence claim".

On the basis of both the analogy claim and the permanence claim it can be argued that insight into democratic processes in everyday life can deepen our understanding of what democracy means for adolescents and shed more light on the democratic experiences during adolescence as constitutive elements for democratic attitudes in adulthood.

In the present study, we build upon the general picture that emerges from prior research showing that young people have a preference for democratic decision-making in different social contexts. However, it remains unclear what specific views adolescents have regarding issues where collective decision-making is at stake,

including the tensions between the various democratic principles involved. Studying adolescents' views in a qualitative way, we aim to gain a situated understanding of adolescents' democratic views by focusing on the different meanings of democratic decision-making in both everyday situations and in the context of political democracy. In sum, we sought to answer the following research question:

*Which types of decision-making do adolescents from different educational tracks prefer in everyday situations in comparison with their views on decision-making in political democracy and their interpretation of the concept of democracy?*

## Methodology

### *Participants*

Adolescents in their second year of secondary education in the Netherlands, aged 13-15 years, participated in our study (N =40). With the selection of the participants a well-balanced dispersion was strived for with regard to gender, socio-economic milieu, ethnic background, and religious orientation. The 20 boys and 20 girls were also equally distributed between pre-vocational (PV) and pre-academic (PA) education tracks with 13 adolescents from an ethnic minority. The students attended one of the four following schools in the Netherlands: an orthodox Protestant school that provides both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a homogenous population of non-minority students in the northeast of the Netherlands; a public school that provides only pre-vocational education for a mixed urban/rural population of both migrant and non-migrant students in the middle of the country; a public school that provides only pre-academic education for a mixed population of students in Amsterdam; and a Catholic school that provides both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a predominantly non-migrant population in the northwest of the country.<sup>4</sup> The adolescents' teacher asked them whether they wanted to participate on a voluntary basis. Their parents were informed about the interview and were told that they could object to their child's participation (no parents objected).

### *Interview and Procedure*

We developed a framework of themes and topics from our theoretical perspective to guide the semi-structured interviews (see Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The interviews were conducted by the first author in the spring of 2011. They lasted approximately 90 minutes and involved the answering of a few introductory questions followed by the presentation of two cases about issues of democratic decision-making. The first case dealt with a hypothetical, but familiar, situation in the class-

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<sup>4</sup> In the Netherlands, both private (primarily denominational) and public schools are state funded.

room (Nieuwelink et al., 2016b) in which the interviewees were asked how they would deal with disagreement among students on the rescheduling of a class. During the case discussion that followed the interviewees were asked to explain their views in more detail and whether they would change their preferences whenever the situation in the case would be different (e.g. ‘Does it matter how many students object to rescheduling the class?’, ‘Does it matter what kind of argument is being used?’) Near the end of the case discussion, the interviewees were asked to sum up their views and whether there were aspects of decision-making that they found most important. We chose to present a classroom-based situation that adolescents often encounter in daily school life in order to make comparisons between the respondents’ views. This case builds upon the research of Helwig and colleagues showing that substantial groups of respondents follow significantly different decision-making strategies within a classroom context (e.g. Helwig & Kim, 1999). The case discussion was intended to provide an understanding of how interviewees deal with decision-making and investigate whether changing circumstances have impact on their preferences. Before and during this case discussion, the interviewer deliberately did not refer to concepts such as “politics” or “democracy”, so not to influence the interviewees.

In the second case, the students were asked to select a group they objected to from a list including ‘atheists’, ‘religious fundamentalists’, ‘nationalists’, and animal rights activists and then give their views on whether or not that group should — if it were to constitute a majority group — be allowed to abolish the freedom rights of other groups. This case draws upon research showing that people make different judgments when it comes to abstract versus concrete situations (Finkel, Sigelman, & Humphries, 1999; Helwig & Turiel, 2002). This case discussion was meant to provide insight into the adolescents’ views with regard to the boundaries of collective decision-making.

The interviewer next asked the adolescents explicitly about the meaning of “democracy” and their evaluation of it. The concept was purposefully not mentioned by the interviewer earlier in the interview in order to allow the students to give their own interpretation of democracy and decision-making.

Finally, the interviewees were asked to respond to fourteen statements. Two statements gave them an opportunity to sum up their views with regard to decision-making and explicitly formulate these (“When taking a decision it is important to find agreement even though it takes more time”, “When taking a decision it is important that the majority decides”). With other statements we tried to gain insight into the adolescents’ perspectives with regard to political democracy (e.g., “Politicians do not care about my opinion or that of my relatives”, “Politicians are mostly

concerned with their own interests”). This enabled us to compare their views on everyday situations to their perspective on political democracy, which has not been done before. Together, the four phases of the interview shed light on how adolescents’ views differ between everyday situations and political democracy.

Before the interviews took place, a pilot study was conducted with six adolescents from four schools. After three pilot interviews, the interview questions and responses were discussed in the research group and a number of adjustments were made to the set of questions. The adjusted interview questions were then used in the other three pilot interviews.

### *Coding and Analysis of the Data*

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. With the help of ATLAS.ti, the interviews were coded and analyzed on the basis of the concepts that were derived from the theoretical framework and research question (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994). The transcribed interviews were coded using the following categories and subcategories:

- decision-making: majoritarian decision-making, consensual decision-making, deliberative decision-making, changing viewpoint according to size of minority, changing viewpoint because of minority’s argument;
- meaning of democracy: decision-making procedure, liberty, equality, and other subcategories;
- evaluation of democracy: positive towards democracy, neutral towards democracy, negative towards democracy, no opinion
- situation: everyday situations, political democracy.

To determine the reliability of the coding, an independent judge coded the fragments of the transcribed interviews for comparison with the original coding. Cohen’s kappa reliability coefficient was then calculated. The category “decision-making,” resulted in a Kappa of 0.92, “meaning of democracy” in a Kappa of 0.85, and “evaluation of democracy” in a Kappa of 0.83. These reliability values fall into the category “almost perfect” (0.8-1.0) (Landis & Koch, 1977).

The individual respondents were the units of analysis. Many interviewees emphasized several principles when arguing about decision-making. As described above, this is in line with theoretical conceptualizations of decision-making because the models take into account several competing principles, such as majority rule, minority interests, and finding consensus. We categorized the views of the individual respondents by looking at the principles on which they primarily focused. They were classified as referring to “majoritarian decision-making” when the interviewee argued that it was most important that the majority decides, as referring to “consensual decision-making” when negotiations to find an agreement was argued by the

interviewee to be most important, and as referring to “deliberative decision-making” whenever the dominant preference of the interviewee was that a rational dialogue between all participants should lead to an agreement about what is publicly seen as the most preferable outcome. Some interviewees mentioned several methods for coming to a decision. Their views were categorized by one preferential model based on their explicit choice between the different ways of coming to a decision near the end of the first case discussion and in the final part of the interview (see above).

## Results

In general, the 40 adolescents preferred decision-making procedures where the interests of the whole group were the starting point. Most of the time, they explained what would for the whole group be a fair mechanism to come to a decision. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees (5) had trouble going beyond their own personal interests.<sup>5</sup> When asked about their preferred decision-making strategy, for example, one girl (PV) responded as follows: “It depends [on what I want]...I am more focused on my own best interests”. When it proved not possible to have things as she wanted them, she then argued that a majority decision was most preferable. When probed for further information, the interviewees formulated views that were all in line with a democratic manner of decision-making and none of them thus argued for deciding based on expertise, or strong leadership. We therefore consider the views of the interviewees regarding decision-making in everyday situations to all be democratic. In Table I, an overview can be found of the classification of the adolescents’ decision-making views, in the setting of everyday life, with respect to specific models of democracy.

### *Majoritarian Decision-Making*

Those adolescents whose decision-making views matched the majoritarian model of democracy (26) considered the voicing of all perspectives during the decision-making process important. That was the case among adolescents in both pre-academic and pre-vocational education. As one girl explained (PV): “I would want to know whether they have good arguments, and I would give my point of view.... After that, the majority decides. Tough luck for those who don’t get what they want”. This interviewee thus considered it important that everyone be permitted to voice their opinion before the casting of votes.

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<sup>5</sup> For reasons of transparency, we will note the numbers of adolescents who formulated a certain perspective between brackets in the presentation of our research results.

**Table 1: Classification of adolescents’ views on decision making and core arguments provided by them**

	Majoritarian: <i>little or no room for minority viewpoints</i>	Majoritarian: <i>room for minority viewpoints</i>	Consensual	Deliberative
<i>Number of respondents (N=40)</i>	13	13	9	5
<i>Role of majority</i>	Majority is always right. That is democratic.	First discuss to see what all viewpoints are. Then vote.	Voting is unfair because then we have to compete with each other. Everybody should be able to take part.	We should be able to find the best solution together. We have to look at all the arguments. It is not about majorities.
<i>Role of minority</i>	Majority decides; tough luck for the others.	If they are fair-sized, you should listen to them to a greater extent.	If it is very important for them, they should be able to have it their way.	It is about the persuasiveness of arguments. Minority or majority status does not matter.

Among those adolescents whose decision-making views were compatible with a majoritarian model of democracy (26), two types of arguing could be distinguished: one (13) where regarding decision-making in the classroom emphasis was solely on majority interest; the other (13) took in such situations also minority interests into account.

The adolescents in whose views there was a strict focus on majority rule not only argued that majority deciding is fairer, but also argued that the majority is always right. As one boy (PA) stated: “You have to see it this way: If the majority votes for something, it must be right because that is what most people want”. Some of these adolescents further claimed that this principle should apply to *all* situations. When confronted with the second case involving religious fundamentalists or atheists wanting to abolish rights of minorities, 3 out of the 40 interviewees stated that a majority has the right to do this. As one girl (PA) said: “It is very unjust...but, yes, they can. It is a majority....You can’t say that in this instance democracy doesn’t hold. Democracy always comes first”. This girl further claimed that for decision-making and democracy - a connection that she made herself, it is always best that the majority decide, even when it is a bare majority. For her and some of the other adolescents, minority rights are secondary to majority decision-making.

In contrast, the other adolescents with views that are related to majoritarian model stated that minority viewpoints should also be taken into consideration within the classroom context, especially when it was a substantial group or when they had important objections. In these cases, these adolescents thought that the majority cannot make a decision without considering the consequences for others. As stated by one girl (PV): “Then they would probably listen to them to a larger extent...There would be more discussion. Perhaps someone switches sides”. After such discussion, the vote decides how things will go.

Some of the adolescents who also focused on minorities further observed that the arguments people put forward should have implications for the decision-making process. When a minority puts forth weighty arguments, these need to be taken seriously. As one of them (PA) pointed out, the majority may then concur with the minority at times: “If their reasons are good, then it is fair not to do it...[and] I think the majority will go along with them”. A vote is then not necessary, because – in the opinion of this student – the majority would not object to the clearly legitimate arguments of the minority.

### *Consensual Decision-Making*

For other interviewees (nine) trying to find a compromise should be the dominant guiding principle to reach a decision. Somewhat more boys and adolescents in the pre-vocational track had views related to this model. They argued that all participants must to be allowed to present their viewpoints before trying to reach an agreement. In the subsequent decision-making process, the interests of all participants must then be taken into account to the greatest extent possible. As one girl (PA) expressed it: “Everyone gives his opinion and then they have to agree with one another. It cannot be the case that, after the discussion, a decision is suddenly made by one group”. For these adolescents, a majority decision is not necessarily a fair decision.

The students whose views matched the consensual model indicated that although it can be time-consuming and hard to find agreement, it is necessary to do so when important arguments are at stake. One girl (PV) goes a step further and claimed that voting in such a situation is not a good method and may even be counterproductive: “Then they are going to start a dispute while they should be consulting with one another so that they can come to an agreement”. According to a boy (PV), if they cannot find agreement and the minority interests are seen as relevant, the minority should have their way “because the viewpoint [of the majority] would be at the expense of the others”. Under these conditions, thus, participants’ interests are more important than the number of people agreeing or disagreeing. These adolescents nevertheless found it difficult to indicate when interests of participants are of such importance that it should not be overlooked.

### *Deliberative Decision-Making*

The interviewees (five) who had the strongest preference for deliberative decision-making, noted that the process should focus solely on the arguments being made and not the number of people favoring a particular option. This was the case among most adolescents in pre-academic track and only among the girls. The participants in the discussion must first examine the options and arguments put forward during a discussion and then decide on the best option collectively. As one interviewee explained (PA): “If you are with more people, you are not necessarily right. It is about the best arguments....You have to convince one another”. The participants in a decision-making process must convince each other. “Someone may think that he is right. But I can think that he is not right. I cannot decide what is good or bad...it is my opinion. [You reach a decision] by convincing one another” (PA). Everyone has to be open to the ideas of others: “I think it is important that you are willing to be convinced by others. You have to listen [and ask]: ‘Why do you think that? Do I agree? Does this outweigh other arguments? Maybe it is much better, maybe not.’ You can change your own ideas” (PA). Via such discussions, these interviewees think that it is possible to find the best decision.

For these interviewees, it was difficult to determine what should be done when agreement cannot be found. Two of them thought that eventually a majority decision should be taken in such a situation. If the minority has tried to convince the others of an option but failed to do so, then “...tough luck. Then the majority decides” (PA). The other three interviewees with views related to deliberation disagreed and thought it unfair to let the majority decide — particularly when major interests were at stake. “Then you know at the start that the others will win, because their group is bigger... If it is really important for the three students, it would really be shitty for them” (PA). Even a small minority should be able to veto an option in the decision-making process. These interviewees further argued that rational considerations must be pivotal in the decision-making procedure. They mentioned two ways to come to a decision. One interviewee (PV) stated that the arguments should be anonymized so that people do not know who came up with them. “You can write down the arguments anonymously and then decide together”. Another interviewee (PA) asserted that, when prior agreement has not been possible, a person who has not been involved in the decision-making process should examine relevant arguments to reach a decision. Everyone has to be open minded: “That will be tough... But they just have to be objective. That is important”. The interviewees who emphasized deliberation clearly have high hopes for the rational capabilities of people and think that people are capable of putting their own interests and preferences aside.

### *Decision-Making in Classroom and Political Democracy*

The views of the adolescents summarized above refer primarily to the classroom situation and therefore do not automatically apply to the political democracy. Switching the focus to this domain appeared to be difficult for many of the interviewees because they did not have much knowledge of institutions of political democracy. A large subset of the 40 interviewees (18) was unable to explain how they thought the decision-making in parliament should take place or comment on the similarities or dissimilarities with decision-making processes in the classroom. This was predominantly the case among students in pre-vocational education, since 14 out of these 18 interviewees are in this educational track.

Most of the interviewees who were able to discuss decision-making in political democracy (18 out of the 22) asserted that the same considerations should hold for the classroom and for parliament. One interviewee (PA), for example, explained: “Those three children should not have it their way.... Yeah, because that is also what takes place in politics, right? Whenever most people vote for one party, it gets more seats in parliament”. Only 4 of these 22 adolescents argued that the decision-making processes might vary across the two situations, although they did not agree on the ways in which the decision process might diverge. Three of these four students thought that minority interests should to be taken more into account in the classroom situation than in the political democracy. As one boy (PA) explained: “In the class, decisions aren’t that important, so you can make a quick decision. But when it is really important, as with politics, you have to take time to make the decision and find agreement”. One interviewee suggested just the opposite when she (PA) explained: “[In the classroom] I would let those three students have it their way... But, I want to put forward that if this would be the case within the government with big issues, the minority would not have its way. I would definitely look at what the majority wants”.

In sum, for some of the interviewees, their decision-making views in the context of everyday situation and political democracy corresponded; for others, they did not. While all of the interviewees’ views greatly resembled one or the other model of democracy, moreover, they nevertheless differed for some of the interviewees depending on the context being considered.

### *Democrats with Limited Comprehension of Democracy*

The aforementioned results show all of the adolescents in our study to be advocates of democratic decision-making. But what about their views on the concept of democracy? What does “democracy” mean to them? Of the 40 interviewees, 11 did not have a relevant image of democracy. Some of them simply stated that they do not know what “democracy” means. Others provided an incorrect description:

“That not everyone is equal... I think it sounds angry, somehow. Just like discrimination” (PV). For this aspect we did find differences among pre-academic and pre-vocational students because 8 out of the 11 who could not formulate a relevant description of democracy were from the pre-vocational educational track.

The interviewees who were able to state what democracy meant most often did that by referring to freedom of speech and/or the right to decide collectively on public policy. One boy (PV) stated for example: “[Democracy] is about the fact that everyone can choose who is in power and that you can decide together what is going to happen to the country”. Most of the interviewees were not able to give a more comprehensive description of the meaning of democracy. When talking about democracy they did not refer to such things as complex decision-making procedures, a system of representation, or the role of minorities. There was also little awareness of the inevitability of tensions between democratic principles such as majority will versus minority interest or the power of numbers versus the power of arguments.

From a theoretical perspective, decision-making preferences of the adolescents can be expected to relate to their comprehension of democracy. Several interviewees spontaneously commented on this relationship while it was possible to discern a relationship in the responses of some of the other interviewees. The most straightforward relationship between the participants’ views on decision-making and definition of democracy was found for the adolescents with a preference for majority decision-making. To them, democracy equaled majority decision-making. As formulated by one boy (PA): “I think that the majority will have its way. That is the way a democracy functions”. However, many of the adolescents with a preference for either consensual or deliberative decision-making also defined democracy in terms of voting and majoritarian decision-making — even those who strongly rejected to such a decision-making procedure in the classroom.

As has been described above, research (Sigel & Hoskin, 1981) showed that adolescents with a more comprehensive understanding of democracy more often make choices that are democratic as opposed to self-centered ones. One indication of such an understanding of democracy in our own research was when the interviewees spontaneously referred to the concept of democracy without being prompted. These adolescents clearly recognized that aspects of democracy were being addressed upon in the current discussion. These same adolescents might also, therefore, be expected to be more sensitive to the tensions between various democratic principles. Sixteen interviewees referred to democracy before the concept was mentioned by the interviewer. Of these sixteen interviewees, eight emphasized majority decision-making with little or no attention to minority interests despite such adolescents constituting only a small part of the group of interviewees (13 out of the 40, see Table I). This is an indication that having more understanding of the abstract concept of democracy

does not necessarily mean that someone is more sensitive to tensions between democratic principles in a decision-making process.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

In the present study, we aimed to offer a more situated insight into adolescents' views on democratic decision-making than emerges from prior research. We did so by looking at the ways in which adolescents formulate their own preferences regarding decision-making in everyday life, how these can be compared to their views on democracy and decision-making in parliament, and whether or not these differences vary between students from different educational tracks. The different meanings of decision-making in both everyday life situations and political democracy were made visible by using different models of democracy (majoritarian, consensual, and deliberative) and their encompassing potentially conflicting principles. The results showed that adolescents' views on democratic decision-making in everyday situations were often rich, multidimensional, and extended throughout the various models. Most interviewees gave priority to the majoritarian model, while a smaller number of interviewees had primary preferences for consensual or deliberative democracy. Regarding everyday situations, some interviewees took several democratic principles into account, while others focused strictly on one of these principles. Regarding decision-making in parliament and the interpretation of the concept of democracy, we found different results than those in everyday situations. A substantial group appeared to be unable to articulate their perspective on either of these and therefore did not show these rich and multidimensional results. Most of the adolescents who could do so stated that the same considerations should hold for decision-making in everyday situations and parliament. Some interviewees formulated a description of democracy that was more or less in line with their views on decision-making in everyday situations, while others formulated a definition that was, at least partly, in contrast to these views. With regard to educational track, only small differences existed in adolescents' views on decision-making in everyday situations; but pre-vocational students had greater difficulty formulating their views regarding decision-making in parliament and a description of democracy compared to students in the higher educational track.

Before discussing these results in the light of previous studies, we point to several limitations of this study. The research was conducted among a small sample of adolescents in the Netherlands. Our qualitative approach enabled us to explore adolescents' views in-depth, but required caution when drawing conclusions. Large scale research is needed to investigate whether the results are present among other groups of youth as well. Furthermore, this study is based on young adolescents being interviewed once, so remains unclear how they will develop their views during the later

years of their adolescence and early adulthood. Longitudinal studies are needed to investigate individual trajectories regarding the development of democratic views. A final aspect relates to the interview structure, which might have influenced the interviewees' responses. The discussion of the cases may have been a consequence of how the respondents described democracy. We tried to prevent this form of influence by not mentioning concepts like "politics" and "democracy" during the first part of the interview. An indication that the interview structure did not strongly influence the respondents' views is that the perceptions of many adolescents on decision-making in everyday life did not relate to either their views on decision-making concerning freedom rights or their concept of democracy.

The present study showed largely democratic, yet different, views present in adolescence regarding decision-making in everyday situations. This result is in line with previous studies (e.g. Helwig & Kim, 1999; Helwig et al., 2003), but also yields new insights into adolescents' democratic views. To conclude this chapter, we would like to discuss five results that do not correspond with earlier findings or instigate further research. First, in previous studies, adolescents were asked to choose between several options (e.g. Helwig et al., 2003). Our study showed that when young people were asked to formulate their own views on decision-making, they did so in accordance with various models of democracy. This further strengthened the claim that adolescents prefer democratic decision-making versus non-democratic.

Second, contrary to earlier presentations of general preferences for decision-making (Moessinger, 1981; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984), the present research shows that adolescents' views differ between various situations and circumstances. Many adolescents adapt their views when the circumstances in the situations discussed are changed. A substantial group of interviewees at some point endorsed majority decisions in the classroom, but altered their views when the number of people objecting to the majority increased or when the objections became more compelling. This shows that many interviewees consider the circumstances when thinking about an issue, as well as show sensitivity to tensions that arise in a particular situation, due to differing democratic principles.

Third, other studies only showed that adolescents preferred democratic methods for decision-making; we were able to explore adolescents' views in greater detail. Not every interviewee appeared to be sensitive to tensions that come with democratic decision-making, such as majority will versus minority interest, or the power of numbers versus the power of arguments. In the interviews with these adolescents, there was little discussion about the risks of tyranny of the majority (cf. Maletz, 2002), deadlocks due to lack of consensus (cf. Andeweg, 2000), or the dominance of the more articulated in a deliberative setting (cf. Sanders, 1997).

Fourth, we also investigated the relationship between adolescents' views on deci-

sion-making in everyday situations and in political democracy, which has not, to our knowledge, been done previously. While many interviewees differentiated between arguments and interests in everyday situations that they regarded as more or less important, most adolescents only stated that a certain type of decision-making should be used in the political domain. Many adolescents, especially those with consensual or deliberative views on decision-making, formulated a description of democracy that did not correspond to or was even in conflict with their views on decision-making in everyday life. This indicates that, in the perspective of many interviewees, decision-making in the classroom and the concept of democracy are unrelated. These rather limited and one-dimensional views can perhaps be explained by their limited knowledge of and experiences with political democracy. It can be expected that adolescent views will become more complex when they get more in contact with political democracy and develop a more sophisticated understanding of democracy, as Sigel and Hoskin (1981) showed in their study. However, contrary to this expectation, many adolescents in our study who showed more understanding of politics and the concept of democracy did not take more democratic principles into account when arguing about decision-making in everyday situations. A substantial group of those adolescents even formulated views associated with the tyranny of the majority. A better understanding of political democracy thus did not automatically lead to views that took more principles into account.

Finally, previous studies have shown that educational level is related to adolescents' democratic views (Flanagan et al., 2005; Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Schulz et al., 2010). The findings of our study partly contradict this finding. While we have found differences with regard to their ability to formulate views about decision-making in parliament and to give a description of democracy, we have only found minor differences regarding their preferences for democratic decision-making. That these young people in the pre-vocational tracks are less exposed to information and discussions about political democracy does not seem to influence their willingness to make decisions in a democratic manner. Future research should investigate how students from different educational tracks develop their democratic views over time and how differences in views on everyday situations and political democracy develop.

## CHAPTER 4

### GROWING INTO POLITICS?

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS' VIEWS ON DEMOCRACY OVER TIME<sup>6</sup>

##### **Abstract**

Adolescence is often seen as the stage of life in which young people become better acquainted with and more interested in politics, and in which they develop more complex views on democratic decision-making. However, because of a lack of longitudinal studies we do not really know how views on politics and democracy develop during adolescence. In the present study forty Dutch adolescents were interviewed in their second year of secondary education and two years later. The results show that although, with age, the interviewees become more familiar with politics, their initial more complex views regarding democratic decision-making in everyday situations become attuned to their more one-dimensional perception of the workings of formal democracy. Instead of growing into politics, their perception of the functioning of parliamentary democracy seems to be colonizing their preferences towards collective decision-making. The implications of these findings for understanding the political socialization of young people are discussed.

**Keywords:** perceptions of politics, political socialization, adolescents, decision-making preferences, models of democracy

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<sup>6</sup> Based on: Nieuwelink, H., Ten Dam, G., Geijsel, F., & Dekker, P. (submitted). Growing into Politics? The development of adolescents' views on democracy over time.

For a democracy it is important that people possess democratic orientations, such as a reasonable level of political trust, a feeling of efficacy, a willingness to deliberate, and a preference for democratic ways of decision-making. It is often acknowledged that adolescence is a formative period for acquiring democratic orientations. Young people become better acquainted with and more interested in the political world. During adolescence and young adulthood people are expected to develop an interest in social and political issues, to be ready to discuss politics, and to become more strongly aware of the complexity of social interactions. Even though people may keep developing their attitudes towards politics and democracy throughout their lifetime, the foundation for these attitudes is laid during adolescence and young adulthood (Abendschön, 2013; Flanagan, 2013; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Sapiro, 2004; Sears & Levy, 2003). However, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the individual development of democratic orientations (Amnå, 2012). Most studies have compared age groups instead of comparing individuals at different points in time. Consequently, it is unclear how individual adolescents develop attitudes towards aspects of democracy and whether trajectories in the development of democratic orientations can be identified.

To gain more insight into how adolescents' views regarding democracy develop over time, this chapter reports about the results of a longitudinal study with repeated interviews. The study aimed to gain more insight into the development of adolescents' views on democracy. We investigated these views in situations where democratic issues are at stake. These issues involve multiple perspectives on the best solution for a problem, and aspects of democracy (e.g. collective decision-making, discussions, societal engagement) may be regarded as venues to deal with these issues by confronting people with conflicting democratic principles such as freedom, equality, majority will and minority rights. We focus on decision-making as an important aspect of democracy that young people experience in their daily lives. Concentrating on democratic views is particularly important as previous studies indicate that young generations are less positively orientated towards democracy and more focused on their private interests instead of the collective good (Manning, 2013; Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison, & Anstead, 2014). Moreover, adolescents appear to have only limited knowledge of and experience with politics (Galston, 2001; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito 2010). In particular their views on the workings of political actors such as the presidency, parliament and political parties and related attitudes (political efficacy, political trust and willingness to participate in politics) are not well developed (Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003; Sapiro, 2004). By investigating democratic decision-making in the context of adolescents' daily life, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of the development of their democratic views and how this is linked to their perception of democracy in the political domain.

## Developing Democratic Views During Adolescence

Many studies across different parts of the world have shown that adolescents generally take a positive view of democracy and democratic values such as tolerance, equality and free speech (see for example Schulz and colleagues (2010) for Europe, Asia and Latin America, Khoury-Kassabri and Ben-Arieh (2006) for Israel and Palestine, and Helwig et al. (2007) for Canada and China). In this chapter we define politics as those actors and processes in the sphere of government that are explicitly labeled as political: politicians, parties, and parliament. Political socialization research shows two related developments in gaining a fuller perspective on the political world: increasing familiarity with politics and increasing complexity in reasoning about democratic issues. As to the first development, adolescents become more *familiar* with politics by starting to develop orientations towards abstract institutions and principles such as government, parliament and the concept of democracy (Hooghe & Dassonville, 2011; Greenstein, 1965; Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003; Sapiro, 2004). While children develop views and attitudes towards aspects of everyday situations such as choice of friends, bullying, and boundaries of parental control over the preferences of their children (Helwig & Turiel, 2002), adolescents usually also develop democratic orientations (Adelson, 1971; Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003). The outcomes of their learning experiences appear to be transferred from everyday situations to more distant social and political domains, such as civil society, political institutions and political actors, with which adolescents gradually familiarize themselves (Abendschön, 2013). Studies show that at age sixteen adolescents possess more knowledge of politics and democracy than at an earlier age (Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003; Greenstein, 1965), and that they are more strongly oriented towards and interested in political issues (Adelson & O'Neill, 1966; Neundorf, Smets, & Garcia-Albacete, 2013). With age, adolescents also tend to use more abstract notions in their moral and democratic reasoning. While children and younger adolescents formulate objections to infringements of freedom rights in psychological terms, older adolescents tend to use democratic principles to formulate their objections (Gallatin and Adelson, 1971; Galston, 2001; Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Sigel & Hoskins, 1981).

A second development in their political socialization is that adolescents tend to become more aware of the complexity of the social and political world. A first aspect of complex reasoning is multidimensionality in the sense that people take a plurality of democratic principles (such as freedom and equality) into account when arguing about a democratic issue (Pennock, 1979). A second aspect concerns being able to draw a distinction between different situations and contexts when reasoning about an issue. In this respect, complex reasoning implies that people base their assessment of the topic at issue or on the context in which the issue is situated (Helwig & Turiel,

2002). Empirical research shows that while younger children tend to take a relatively naïve perspective on the organization of social and political life, adolescents develop a more complex understanding of what the concept of democracy entails. They develop more multi-layered perspectives on moral and democratic issues that encompass different moral or democratic principles as well as considerations about the feasibility of solutions (Adelson, 1971; Flanagan, Gallay, Gill, Gallay, & Nti 2005; Greenstein, 1965; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2007). Older adolescents more often take several, contradictory principles into account (Adelson, 1971; Kinoshita, 2006; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984; Moessinger, 1981; Sigel Eckstein & Noack, 2016; Elchardus & Siongers, 2016 Hoskins, 1981). They also tend to argue that a decision about what is fair depends both on the issue at stake and on the social context in which the decision is made (Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Flanagan, 2013; Flanagan & Stout, 2010). Therefore, studies find that with age adolescents are more inclined to use more complex reasoning with regard to democratic issues. Thus far, relatively little is known about the relationship between becoming more familiar with politics and the complexity of views on democracy.

Studying adolescent reasoning on democracy is especially relevant because attitudes acquired during adolescence can have a lasting impact (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Sears & Levy, 2003). Recent studies have shown that certain adolescent political attitudes (e.g. political interest and willingness to participate in politics), acquired from the age of fourteen, are more or less persistent, whereas other attitudes (e.g. voting intention, political confidence) fluctuate during adolescence and early adulthood (Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; Hooghe, Dassonneville, & Marien, 2014; Prior, 2010; Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014).

That the period in life from fourteen years onwards is a formative phase in the political socialization of young people, can be explained by both their cognitive development and the role of socializing agents. When adolescents grow older, their cognitive abilities increase and this enables them to take different principles into account when arguing about a moral or democratic issue. It also enables them to understand the meaning of formal structures of democracy (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 2000). At the same time, adolescents are introduced to social and political issues by parents, teachers, peers, voluntary organizations and media, which raises their awareness of these issues (Amnå, 2012; Quintelier, 2015). Adolescents learn about political issues by discussing them with others, but also by everyday experiences with, for example, decision-making processes. Since many adolescents seldom discuss political events (e.g. elections, impactful debates in parliament, formation of a new cabinet, political crises) with others (Gimpel et al., 2003; Manning & Edwards, 2014), they are supposed to develop views and attitudes toward political institutions,

actors and principles primarily through everyday experiences (Flanagan, 2013; Greenstein, 1965; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Hess & Torney, 1967; Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; Sapiro, 2004). For example, encounters with school management have been shown to impact adolescents' external political efficacy (Gimpel et al., 2003). In sum, with increasing age, adolescents develop more abilities to reason democratically and have more experiences with democratic institutions and processes.

### **Adolescents' Views on Decision-Making**

In the current study we focus on one aspect of democracy, namely decision-making. Democratic decision-making can take different forms and reasoning about it is generally multidimensional and complex. Political theory distinguishes at least three different models: A majoritarian democracy, which is typified by competition among citizens' preferences and voting as a decision-making mechanism; a consensual democracy, in which citizens try to achieve agreement through negotiation about their fixed preferences; and a deliberative democracy, in which rational dialogue is intended to lead to agreement among citizens about the best solutions to social and political issues. Discussion is a central element in all three models of democracy but its function varies. In majoritarian decision-making discussion is needed to develop and present alternatives to choose between. In consensual decision-making discussion is basically negotiation to find a compromise. In deliberative decision-making discussion is needed to learn about different perspectives and to find the most reasonable option (Dahl, 1956; Pennock, 1979; Held, 2006; Keane, 2009; Lijphart, 1999; Hendriks, 2010). In the three models of democracy, no fixed balance can be found between potentially conflicting democratic principles, such as freedom and equality (Pennock, 1979; Thomassen, 2007). In all these models contradictory principles of democracy are taken into account (such as majority vote, minority interests, power of arguments, finding agreement), which tends to make these models multidimensional and complex in nature (e.g. majoritarian democracy also takes freedom rights of minorities into account). In line with this, democratic reasoning about decision-making is generally complex in the sense that several contradictory or competing principles are taken into account when arguing about collective choices and decisions.

Only a few studies, primarily from a developmental psychological perspective, have studied the development of adolescents' attitudes and views regarding democratic decision-making, all using a cross-sectional quantitative approach. In some of these studies adolescents were asked to compare majoritarian and consensual models of decision-making (e.g. Helwig, 1998) whereas other studies have focused solely on majoritarian decision-making (e.g. Kinoshita, 2006; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984). To our knowledge no study has taken deliberative modes of dem-

ocratic decision-making into account. Participants in the studies of Helwig *c.s.* (Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Helwig et al., 2007) preferred democratic decisions (e.g. majoritarian, consensual) to authoritarian or oligarchical based decisions and this preference increased with age. These studies also show an age effect for the preferred decision-making model: younger adolescents tended to prefer consensual democracy or direct democracy, whereas older adolescents more often preferred representative democracy (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2003). With regard to majority decisions, older adolescents tended to see more problematic aspects than younger adolescents (e.g. Kinoshita, 2006; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984). However, because these studies were cross-sectional their contribution to an understanding of the development of views at an individual level is rather limited.

As considered from the above studies about adolescents' views on democratic decision-making, adolescents across different global regions are positively oriented towards democracy and older adolescents have acquired more multidimensional perspectives on decision-making. Therefore, these results indicate that with regard to democratic decision-making adolescents grow into politics: older adolescents seem to a larger extent aware of the contradictory character of democratic principles and more inclined to take the multidimensionality of democracy into account when reasoning about democratic issues. But because of the dearth of longitudinal studies on adolescents' democratic views we do not have much knowledge about the development of these views over time. In the present study we therefore aim at gaining an insight into the ways in which adolescents grow into politics with regard to their views on various ways of democratic decision-making. To this end, we seek to answer the following research question: *Do adolescents, with age, become more familiar with the political domain, and do they develop more complex views regarding democratic decision-making?*

In exploring the development of adolescents' views on decision-making, we utilized a qualitative approach applying repeated interviews. This enabled us to deepen our understanding of adolescents' views on this aspect of democracy from their own point of reference. In contrast to previous research, the participants in our study were able to formulate their own preferences regarding democratic decision-making, including majoritarian, deliberative or undemocratic ones. Given that adolescents tend to entertain limited perspectives on the political domain (e.g. parliament, political parties, and government), and to relate their attitudes toward democracy, political institutions and political actors to their everyday experiences (Abdelzadeh, Zetterberg & Ekman, 2014; Flanagan, 2013; Gimpel et al., 2003; Sapiro, 2004), the starting point of our research lies precisely with these everyday situations, which will be related to situations of parliamentary democracy. In our analysis we will differentiate for gender and educational track as these are considered to be important factors

in adolescent political socialization. While previous studies show that adolescents in higher (e.g. pre-academic) educational tracks develop greater familiarity with politics and complexity in their reasoning than those in lower (e.g. vocational) educational tracks (Gaiser, Gille, Krüger, & De Rijke, 2003; Schulz et al., 2010), their findings with regard to gender are unstable: some studies indicate that adolescent boys grow to larger extent into politics than adolescent girls, while other studies show no difference or even (in some countries) a reversed development (e.g. Wolak & McDewitt, 2011; Schulz et al., 2010).

## **Method**

For this study we interviewed forty Dutch adolescents twice: when they were in their second year of secondary education (aged 13 to 15; 2011) and two years later (2013). We chose to interview students in eighth and tenth grade for three reasons. Firstly, previous studies indicate that this period is pivotal for the political socialization of adolescents (see above). And secondly, after grade ten about half of Dutch students, those in the pre-vocational educational track, leave secondary education and change over to tertiary vocational education. This hampers a comparison with students in the pre-academic track of secondary education (continuing until the twelfth grade).

As to the selection of participants a well-balanced dispersion was aimed at with regard to gender, socio-economic status, ethnic background, and religious orientation. The twenty boys and twenty girls were equally distributed between pre-vocational (PV) and pre-academic (PA) education tracks, with thirteen adolescents from an ethnic minority. These students attended one of the four following schools in the Netherlands: an orthodox Protestant school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a homogeneous population of non-minority students in the northeast of the Netherlands; a public school that only provides pre-vocational education for a mixed urban/rural population of both migrant and non-migrant students in the middle of the country; a public school that only provides pre-academic education for a mixed population of students in Amsterdam; and a Roman Catholic school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a predominantly non-migrant population in the northwest of the country. By selecting participants with different backgrounds and varying characteristics we established a diversity in our sample which helped us to find perspectives on democracy from many walks of life.

### ***Interview and Procedure***

The semi-structured interviews were organized in the same way in both rounds of interviews and lasted approximately 90 minutes (see Table 2). They were con-

ducted by the first author. The interview structure was piloted in 6 interviews. During the interview several cases and statements were discussed.

The structure of the interview involved answering a few introductory questions followed by the presentation of two cases about issues of democratic decision-making. In the first case, participants were asked how they would deal with disagreement among students about the rescheduling of a class. During the discussion of this case interviewees were asked to explain their views in more detail and whether they would change their preferences whenever the situation in the case would be different (e.g. ‘Does it matter how many students object to rescheduling the class?’, ‘Does it matter what kind of argument is being used?’). In order to prevent that the use of certain terms (e.g. decision-making, democracy) would influence the ways these adolescents interpret the case, we used politically neutral terms (e.g. choosing, solving the problem). This case builds forward on the research of Helwig and colleagues showing that substantial groups of respondents follow significantly different decision-making strategies in a classroom context (e.g. Helwig & Kim, 1999). The presentation of this case was intended to gain an understanding of how interviewees deal with decision-making. As we used open-ended questions, unlike Helwig and colleagues, adolescents were able to formulate their own perspectives on fair decision-making.

In the second case, students were asked to select a group they objected to (e.g. atheists, religious fundamentalists, nationalists) from a list and then give their views on whether or not that group — if it were to constitute a majority group — should be allowed to abolish the freedom rights of other groups. This case draws upon research showing that people make different judgments when it comes to abstract versus concrete situations (e.g. Helwig & Turiel, 2002). This case was meant to provide an insight into the reasoning of adolescents with regard to the boundaries of collective decision-making.

The interviewer next asked the adolescents explicitly about the meaning of ‘democracy’ and their evaluation of it. The concept was deliberately not mentioned by the interviewer earlier in the interview in order to allow students to give their own interpretation of democracy and decision-making.

Finally, interviewees were asked to respond to fourteen statements. Two statements gave them an opportunity to sum up their views with regard to decision-making and explicitly formulate these (‘When making a decision it is important to find agreement even though it takes more time,’ ‘When making a decision it is important that the majority decides’). With other statements we tried to gain an insight into the adolescents’ perspectives with regard to the political domain (e.g. ‘Politicians do not care about my opinion or that of my relatives’, ‘Politicians are mostly concerned with their own interests’). This enabled us to relate their views on

everyday situations to their perspective on formal politics, which has not been done before.

In order to find out if the interviewees might be trying to remain consistent in their views in both rounds of interviews, they were asked in 2013 whether they remembered the contents of the prior interview. Most interviewees (25 of the 40) remembered that they had been interviewed, but did not recall what the interview was about. Only fifteen interviewees (twelve PA-students and three PV-students) roughly remembered the topic of the interview. That is, they could broadly refer to the concept of the interview but did not recall the answers given two years earlier.

### *Coding and Analysis of the Data*

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. With the help of ATLAS.ti the interviews were analyzed with a focus on similarities and dissimilarities in response patterns (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994). The transcribed interviews were coded using the following categories and subcategories:

- Decision-making: majoritarian decision-making, consensual decision-making, deliberative decision-making, changing viewpoint according to size of minority, changing viewpoint because of minority argument;
- Decision-making in parliament: no perspective, some perspective, elaborated perspective.
- Meaning of democracy: decision-making procedure, liberty, equality, other subcategories.

To determine the reliability of the coding, an independent judge coded the fragments of the transcribed interviews for comparison with the original coding. Next, Cohen's kappa reliability coefficient was calculated. For 'decision-making', the resulting kappa was 0.82, for 'decision-making in parliament' 0.83, and for 'meaning of democracy' 0.86. These reliability values fit into the category of 'almost perfect' (0.8-1.0).

In order to interpret the views of participants with respect to the three models of democracy (majoritarian, consensual, or deliberative), these views were classified in the following manner. They were classified as referring to 'majoritarian decision-making' whenever it was primarily argued that the majority should decide; as referring to 'consensual decision-making' whenever negotiation was chosen to find agreement, on the presumption that people have fixed preferences; and as referring to 'deliberative decision-making' whenever a preference was expressed for coming to an agreement through rational dialogue in which all participants can put forward their viewpoints and collectively search for the most preferable outcome in the public sphere. When an interviewee was found to consistently argue in favor of a specific model of democracy, the interview was labeled as such. When an interviewee was

found to provide responses that were compatible with more than one model, the expressed views were labeled in accordance with the model of democracy chosen as the most important one in his/her response to the statements about decision-making.

## Results

This study focuses on the question whether adolescents, with age, become more familiar with the political domain of democracy and possess more complex views on democratic decision-making. The results for the two aspects of this question will be dealt with in turn.

### *Becoming More Familiar with Politics*

Previous cross-sectional studies showed that older adolescents have more elaborated views on democracy than younger ones. We therefore expected that by growing older adolescents would become more familiar with politics, with the way decisions should be made in parliament, and with the concept of democracy. Among the interviewed adolescents, this was indeed the case. Although discussing politics and giving their interpretation of democracy was a difficult task for them, this difficulty decreased with age. In the first round of interviews, for a substantial group of participants formulating their perspective on the workings of Dutch politics was too difficult a task, especially for girls and students in the lower track (PV). They were, for example, not able to explain whether politicians are willing to listen to people like themselves or unable to argue whether politicians are only focused on their personal interests. At this age, the political domain was unfamiliar and abstract to these adolescents. Two years later all interviewees were able to formulate at least some basic ideas about the workings of Dutch politics and to give their perspective on topics such as the responsiveness of politicians.

As the adolescents became more familiar with politics, their ability to formulate their preferences regarding decision-making in parliament increased. In the first round of interviews about half of the interviewees were unable to describe their preferred way of coming to a decision in parliament. The other interviewees (predominantly boys and PA- students) were able to formulate some basic preferences. Two years later all interviewees formulated at least some basic ideas about decision-making in parliament. They expressed views that are related to the three models of democracy. The largest group of interviewees (predominantly boys and PA-students) preferred majority rule while some of them (predominantly PV-students) preferred consensus to be negotiated and others (only girls) preferred rational deliberation leading up to an agreement about the best option.

Becoming more familiar with politics would suggest that adolescents also become more familiar with the concept of democracy. However, this seemed not to be the

case. In both rounds of interviews, a substantial number of adolescents (predominantly PV-students) were unable to provide a description of democracy and, thus, did not show increased familiarity with the concept of democracy with age. Those interviewees who were able to provide a description of democracy mentioned majority rule as a central component. At both points in time, most adolescents regarded majority rule as playing some part in democracy. With increasing age, other interviewees stuck to their strictly majoritarian interpretation of democracy while other adolescents developed such views. Only some young people stuck to a definition in other terms (e.g. freedom of speech, rule by representation).

### *Increasing Complexity in Reasoning?*

Previous cross-sectional studies also showed that older adolescents have deepened their views on democracy and have more complex views of decision-making. This suggests that with age adolescents take more principles into account when coming to a decision and base their preferred decision-making procedure both on the topic that is being discussed and on the context in which the decision-making process takes place. The results of our study are not in line with these outcomes. When growing older our adolescents tended to base their democratic decision-making in everyday situations more strongly and sometimes even exclusively on the preferences of the majority. With age, a significant group of these adolescents more often applied this principle rather straightforwardly to decisions about freedom rights and decision-making in parliament. This was especially the case among boys and students in higher educational track (PA). A deepening of their views was not observable, suggesting that they developed less complex views on democratic decision-making. The results for the aspects of complex reasoning mentioned above (e.g. taking more principles into account, differentiating between topics and differentiating between contexts) will be discussed in turn using the interview themes, see Table 2.

### *Stronger focus on majority rule*

Because adolescents' experiences with politics and formal democracy are limited, we started discussing decision-making with the interviewees with regard to day-to-day situations, predominantly classroom situations (see Table 2). In these situations their views regarding decision-making were related to one of the three models of democratic decision-making. In both rounds of the interviews, most adolescents expressed views that were consistent with the same model. The largest group (increasingly boys) clung to preferences related to majoritarian decision-making or developed views towards that model. They explained that all participants should be able to voice their opinions in order to make clear what preferences exist. After discussing these preferences, they stated, a vote can be taken. Other adolescents

**Table 2. Themes in interviews**

Case about rescheduling a class	Interviewees were asked to discuss their preferred way to deal with a situation in which some students objected to rescheduling the class.
Case about the abolishing freedom rights	Interviewees had to pick a group they objected to (e.g. atheists, religious fundamentalists, nationalists) from the list. Then it was discussed whether this group – if it were to constitute a majority group – could abolish the freedom rights of other groups.
Statements about national political system	Interviewees were asked to respond to statements such as the following: ‘When making a decision it is important to find agreement even though it takes more time’, and ‘Politicians do not care about my opinion or that of my relatives’, leading up to a discussion about their views on decision-making in the national political system.

(predominantly girls) stuck to their views relating to deliberative decision-making or developed views in that direction and argued that the central aspect of decision-making is that agreement should be found on the best possible solutions. Lastly, some adolescents (boy, girl, both tracks) formulated preferences for a consensus democracy at both moments in time and one girl (PV) developed such views. These students believed that all participants should negotiate to find solutions in which all or most of them feel that some of their preferences are being met.

Adolescents’ views also varied with regard to the number of principles they took into account. In the response of interviewees two types of reasoning can be distinguished. Some interviewees only emphasized the central aspect of their preferred model (e.g. voting, negotiation or deliberation), while other interviewees not only emphasized one of these principles but also took other democratic principles into account when arguing about a democratic issue (e.g. the majority will, the importance of collective decision-making, interests of minorities, arguments used by participants in the decision-making process, and the desirability of finding agreement).

Whereas it might be expected that the number of adolescents who would take multiple principles into account when reasoning about a democratic issue would increase, the opposite seemed to be the case: in the second round of interviews more adolescents focused on one single principle. Some interviewees showed stable views regarding the number of principles they took into account, either focusing on one principle or taking more than one principle into account in both rounds of interviews. Among other interviewees, however, we saw a decrease in the number of principles. This decrease was brought about by a stronger focus on majority decisions and led the views of these adolescents in two different directions.

The first developmental path was observable among some interviewees, mainly girls, with consensual or deliberative views on decision-making. In the first round of interviews they rejected majority rule but two years later they argued that voting is sometimes necessary, thereby taking multiple principles into account. The reasoning of two adolescents, one with consensual views and one with deliberative views, is illustrative for this development. One of them, who argued from a consensual perspective, stated in the first round of interviews that, if an agreement cannot be negotiated, the minority should be able to veto a decision: '[The majority] is not necessarily right. You should take the interests of others into account and find the best solution (boy, PA).' However, two years later, he took a different stance with regard to voting by arguing that it is sometimes a necessary decision-making procedure: 'I think that it is better to find an agreement than to cast a vote. You really should try to find consensus, but if that does not work out, you should cast a vote. [Have a] plan B, so to speak.'

The other adolescent, who had deliberative views on decision-making, stated in the first interview that all participants should strive for agreement on the best solutions on rational grounds: 'I do not agree with [voting]. I do not think that it is important... The best arguments should be decisive (girl, PV).' However, two years later, she had a different perspective: 'If they both have good reasons, you cannot allow for all opinions. Then you cannot solve this problem... Then I would say that the majority should decide.'

The second development regarding the number of principles adolescents took into account was present among interviewees with a majoritarian perspective, mainly, and increasingly, boys. These young people argued in the first round of interviews that argumentation, finding agreement, and interests of minorities are also relevant, but two years later they stated that in decision-making only the preferences of the majority count. Thus, they developed views that are strictly focused on one democratic principle. In this respect the reasoning of one interviewee is exemplary. In the first round of interviews this adolescent stated: 'First of all, what matters is the arguments that are put forward. But if the arguments from both sides are of equal weight, the majority will decide (boy, PA).' Two years later, this interviewee weighed the interests of participants in decision-making processes differently: 'Those three students will have no say, because the others are with more people.... I would want to know why they object, but even if they have a good reason, we will still reschedule the class, because otherwise it will be disadvantageous for the others.'

While adolescents' views on democratic decision-making in everyday situations diverge, in the second round of interviews a perspective on decision-making with a strict focus on majority rule is even more dominant than two years earlier, which applies in particular to boys. No substantial differences were found for educational

track. Whereas previous studies indicated that with age adolescents take more principles into account and that, accordingly, their views become more multidimensional and complex, the opposite trend shows up among the interviewees in the present study.

### *Voting about freedom rights*

The views discussed above were formulated regarding a case of decision-making in everyday life where no high stakes were involved. In order to identify whether the adolescents applied principles of democratic decision-making to situations in which the freedom rights of minorities are at stake, interviewees were also presented with a second case (see Method). In both rounds of interviews, the majority of interviewees argued at both points in time that a collective decision could not be made in such a situation. For them, the fundamental rights of people outweigh collective decision-making.

However, the number of those arguing that simple majority decisions can be made in such situations increased with age (predominantly boys and PA-students). All of these adolescents strictly focused on majority rule in a classroom context, and with regard to the case concerning freedom rights, although certain members gave counterarguments, they also considered majority decisions to be democratic and fair. For these interviewees, democracy amounts to majority decisions and the fundamental rights of minority groups do not represent an essential part of it. The reasoning of one interviewee, in the second round of interviews, is exemplary. When reasoning about the abolishment of freedom of religion he stated: ‘What they want is very extreme, but you would have to do it the same way as with other topics: the majority has to decide.... But this would conflict with other legislation, such as freedom of religion. So that would make it very difficult.... It is a very sensitive topic.... But if they change all the conflicting legislation, and follow correct procedures, as a majority they should have the permission to [abolish these rights] (boy, PA).’

These findings show an increase in the number of interviewees who equated democracy with majority rule, as well as applying this principle to nearly all aspects of their views on collective decision-making. This conflicts with the expectation that older adolescents make more distinctions between topics when arguing about which decision-making procedure is the most equitable. Such a deepening of adolescents’ views, in the sense that they distinguish more often between different topics with age, was not observed among these interviewees.

### *Similar reasoning across contexts*

Differentiating between contexts regarding the preferred model of decision-making can also be regarded as an aspect of complex reasoning. Interviewees were ques-

tioned about their perspective on decision-making in everyday situations and in the political domain. Many adolescents stuck to their views regardless of the specific context. Others, who did not have opinions on decision-making in parliament in the first round of interview, developed similar views where the same decision-making procedure is applicable with regard to everyday situations and politics two years later. Thus, for both groups, contexts do not significantly differ when it comes to decision-making. The statements of one interviewee are exemplary. He argued in both interviews that the majority should decide both in the classroom and in parliament, attaching little weight to minority interests. In 2013, he stated the following with regard to decision-making in parliament: ‘The majority has to decide. Otherwise it will be a chaos... Because otherwise there are so many different opinions, and if you have to convince everyone it may take years... I think that a small majority is sufficient (boy, PA).’ As these interviewees became more familiar with politics, their preferences for decision-making in parliament did not become more complex with regard to the differences between contexts and to the role of such aspects as the will of the majority, minority interests, or the power of argumentation.

In both rounds of interviews only a few adolescents argued that parliament is different from the classroom while a couple of other students developed such views. In different contexts the decision-making process should be different as well. However, these interviewees disagreed about the implications of this reasoning. Some of them who argued for a majority perspective in the classroom setting stated that in parliament it is better to look for consensus (predominantly PV-students). The reasoning of one interviewee is exemplary. He stated that decisions in politics are made about very important topics: ‘You should look for as much agreement as possible... It may take more time than in other situations, but that’s fine.... Both parties have a bit of their way and you reach common ground’ (boy, PV).

Other interviewees argued that majority decisions are most important when it comes to politics (predominantly PA-students). Several interviewees, who reasoned from a deliberative perspective in the classroom setting, argued that it is not feasible to take all perspectives into account or to reach agreement in politics. One of them, for example, explained this perspective as follows: ‘I prefer everyone to agree, but I think that voting is the best procedure, because otherwise it would take a year to come to a decision... That is because people have different opinions (girl, PA).’ In their reflections on decision-making in parliament the adolescents took feasibility into account and made their initial preferences secondary. These interviewees differentiated between contexts, which is an indication of complex views of decision-making. However, it is notable that about half of the adolescents who did not emphasize majority rule in everyday situations, changed their preferences when it came to decision-making in parliament. Also with regard to this aspect of democracy

a trend towards a stronger focus on majoritarian decision-making was manifest.

### *‘This Is How It Works in Politics’*

According to many interviewees, voting is the best decision-making procedure in a parliamentary democracy. A substantial and increasing group of adolescents (predominantly PA-students) stuck to or gave only in the second interview an explanation for their stronger emphasis on this majority rule. From their point of view, the majority simply makes the decisions in parliament. When discussing the case about rescheduling a class (see Table 2), these interviewees more often referred to decision-making in parliament to underpin their views. The reasoning of one adolescent is exemplary. In the 2013 interview he formulated his views on decision-making in school: ‘Majorities will always come first. It is the same as with elections. [Last time] the liberal party won more votes than the labor party. It is the same in this situation [in school]... You simply have to vote: in favor or not’ (boy, PV).

Some other adolescents who argued in the classroom context from a consensual or deliberative perspective, claimed that it is fairer when decisions are made in a different manner than with a majority vote. In line with this view, they formulated a rather critical perspective on the working of Dutch democracy. They first argued that the majority should decide outcomes both in the classroom and in politics, as this is the case in the Dutch parliament, but they later reformulated their views. However, this critical perspective of parliamentary democracy was quite rare among the interviewees. A substantial group adjusted their perspective from focusing on fair decision-making to how they perceived the current practice in Dutch democracy.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

The present study aims to gain more insight into the development of adolescents’ views on democracy. Previous cross-sectional studies have shown that older adolescents are more familiar with politics and possess more complex views and that this holds particularly for those in the higher educational tracks (e.g. Adelson & Beall, 1970; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Sapiro, 2004; Schulz et al., 2010). Our study shows that the interviewed adolescents do become more familiar with politics but do not simultaneously develop more complex views on decision-making. Many interviewees claimed that decisions in parliament are simply made by a majority, and the largest group of the adolescents endorsed this notion of coming to a decision in some form. As a consequence, especially boys and students in the pre-academic track, adjusted their preferences regarding decision-making in everyday situations to how they perceived the workings of Dutch politics. The initial complexity in their views made room for a one-dimensional majority perspective on democratic decision-making. With regard to track differences, we observed that students in the pre-

vocational track were less often familiar with politics and took more principles into account when coming to a decision. In their expressed views more complex reasoning did not appear to be related to experiences with political and democratic processes. It rather seemed that adolescents who took more principles into account by stating that ‘all democratic principles are important’ had *not* thought about situations where democratic issues are at stake. It is interesting to explore in future research whether this relationship between democratic views and educational track also holds for other aspects of democratic reasoning. Our study also diverges from previous studies which have shown that adolescents base their attitudes towards democracy and political institutions on everyday experiences (e.g. Flanagan, 2013; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Gimpel et al., 2003; Manning, 2013; Sapiro, 2004). Our findings suggest more or less the opposite: adolescents do not gradually grow into politics but (their image of) politics is colonizing their social life preferences towards decision-making. Contrary to other, political, studies focusing on democratic views in the context of formal democracy or – to a lesser extent – psychological or educational studies concentrating on everyday situations, we adopted a design in which we asked participants about both contexts and explicitly asked them to relate these to each other. This enabled us to show that adolescents’ perspectives on the workings of formal democracy influence their initial preferences regarding democratic issues in everyday life instead of the other way around.

Before elaborating on the findings of our study, we mention some limitations of our approach. One limitation concerns the small, and thus not representative sample of the study. Large scale research is needed to investigate whether the development we observed is present among different groups of adolescents in various cultural and political contexts. Another limitation concerns the interviewees’ young age (thirteen to seventeen years) and the limited time span between the interviews (two years). It is possible that during young adulthood the interviewees further develop or even change their views. However, although research shows that the development of adolescents’ attitudes toward citizenship is a non-linear process (Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, Jorgensen, & Ten Dam, 2015; Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010), at least for some attitudes there is stability between the ages of fourteen and thirty (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Prior, 2010). This is an indication that the development found in our study towards more and stricter focus on majority rule can have a lasting impact for adolescents.

Several explanations might be considered for the strong and increasing focus on strict majority rule. First, the role of media in the political socialization of adolescents has changed, as many scholars have indicated (Abendschon, 2013; Sapiro, 2004; Manning & Edwards, 2014). Current generations of adolescents generally use interactive social media for as sources of political news (e.g. Stoker & Bass, 2011). The

image of politics and democracy they receive through these media is different from the image in traditional media, for example in connection with the frequent use of polls as a means to come to a decision. Secondly, while traditionally the Dutch political culture is consensual (Hendriks, 2010; Lijphart, 1999), there are indications that the political culture in the Netherlands and in other European countries has become harsher and less concerned about minority rights (Hendriks & Michels, 2011). We interpret the finding that many of the interviewees who were most familiar with politics claimed that in politics a small majority decides, also about fundamental freedom rights, as an indication of how formal democracy is actually portrayed to young people and how this influences their views on democratic decision-making. Although these trends are possible explanations for the strict focus on majority rule future studies should address this question more thoroughly.

A third explanation for the results in the light of previous studies can be found in differences in research design. In contrast to most previous studies, we have adopted a longitudinal orientation in our design with repeated interviews and were thus able to focus on individual trajectories regarding the development of democratic views. Consequently we could observe the developments described above which perhaps remained invisible when focusing on one point in time. Furthermore, we took a qualitative research route which allowed us to discuss the interview topics thoroughly with the participants. Consequently, the interviewees were perhaps more aware of the consequences of their initial arguments and alternative views than they would have been in situations where they would have filled in a questionnaire. This can have resulted in different choices and perhaps more principled views.

How should we appreciate a trend towards one-dimensional views on democratic decision-making? On the one hand, it may be regarded as positive that adolescents at different ages possess a by and large democratic way of reasoning. It can also be said that the emphasis on majority rule is a sign of realism, as this is the decision-making procedure that is most feasible in many situations. But we regard the stronger focus on majoritarian rule at the same time as problematic. Firstly, an increasing number of adolescents applied majority rule to situations in which fundamental freedom rights were at stake and neglected other democratic principles, such as respecting minority interests. These views can therefore be understood as reflecting a tyranny of the majority (Held, 2006; Keane, 2009; Maletz, 2002). Therefore, especially the view that freedom rights can be abolished by a single majority can hardly be seen as an indication of a *realistic democratic* perspective. Secondly, the fact that decision-making processes in Dutch democracy are complex holding elements of negotiation to come to consensus and deliberation about given arguments, appears to be overlooked by these adolescents. They do not seem to develop a sophisticated account of the functioning of (Dutch) democracy, which limits their ability to judge the functioning of its actors and institutions on its actual merits.

All in all, the present study shows that these adolescents do not seem to grow into politics with age but that their views of just ways of dealing with democratic issues seem to be adjusted to their perception of how formal democracy works. If this result generally holds, it implies that the present-day experiences of young people with politics are perhaps rather one-sided and have a restricting influence on their views on democracy. This holds an important challenge for socializing agents to show adolescents both the problematic aspects of a strict implementation of majority rule and the strengths and limitations of the workings of formal democracy. Thereby, they can help adolescents to reflect on these aspects which can be an impetus for the development of richer perspectives on politics and democracy.



## CHAPTER 5

### ADOLESCENT CITIZENSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL TRACK

#### A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIEWS ON THE COMMON GOOD<sup>7</sup>

##### **Abstract**

Many studies show adults' attitudes towards citizenship to be related to their educational level. It has been claimed that higher educated people more often possess 'good' citizenship values. However, because of the dearth of longitudinal studies on this topic, only limited insight exists into how differences in citizenship attitudes between adolescents from various educational tracks develop over time. In this qualitative longitudinal study, we investigate the perspectives of adolescents from different educational tracks on aspects of citizenship (political engagement, collectivity, and freedom of speech). The results show that adolescents in higher educational tracks develop stronger political orientations with age and learn to focus more strictly on competition between perspectives and on formal procedures of parliamentary decision-making. Their views on citizenship become more one-dimensional. Those in the lower track remained rather uninterested in politics but stick to their emphasis on cooperation, consensus, and inclusiveness when dealing with issues that affect the whole community. Furthermore, gender differences play an important role in adolescents' views on the common good. Overall, our study shows that 'good' vs. 'bad' citizenship values do not simply coincide with educational level and provides a more nuanced insight into the developmental trajectories of young people towards citizenship.

**Keywords:** citizenship, education, political socialization, educational track, inequalities

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<sup>7</sup> Based on: Nieuwelink, H., Ten Dam, G., & Dekker, P. (submitted). Adolescent citizenship and educational track: A qualitative study on the development of views on the common good.

Educational level is an important factor for explaining differences in orientations towards democratic citizenship. From the earliest empirical studies onwards, education has been shown to have a significant impact on adults' political and democratic attitudes and has been seen as a stronger explanation for these attitudes than other background characteristics such as gender, age, religiosity, and ethnicity (e.g. Almond & Verba, 1963; Converse, 1972). Converse even stated that 'education is the universal solvent... The higher the education, the greater the 'good' values of the variable. The educated citizen is attentive, knowledgeable, and participatory, and the uneducated citizen is not' (Converse, 1972: 324). Many studies from the years thereafter have shown that the higher educated people have more political efficacy, that they evaluate democracy more positively, they are more interested in politics, that they want to participate more in politics, and that they are less authoritarian (e.g. Lijphart, 1997; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1989; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Verba, 1996). In the contemporary academic and public debate about citizenship, educational differences are still an important issue (e.g. Eidhof, Ten Dam, Dijkstra, & Van der Werfhorst, in press; Gesthuizen, 2006; Kriesi, Grande, Lachat, Dolezal, Bornschie, & Frey, 2006; Norris, 2011). For example, Dutch political scientists Bovens and Wille (2009) have launched the provocative concept 'diplomacy-democracy' to call attention to the extreme overrepresentation of higher educated people among politicians and the risk that they are increasingly ignoring the interests and concerns of lower educated citizens.

Adolescence is an important period in life in which political attitudes are formed. A large amount of research shows that an association between educational level and citizenship already exists during adolescence. Additionally, among adolescents, the relationship between education and political attitudes is often observed. Many scholars have investigated this issue by comparing lower and higher educational tracks (e.g. Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002; Torney-Purta, 2002; Gaiser, Gille, Krüger, & De Rijke, 2003; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito 2010; Hout, 2012). However, because of the dearth of longitudinal studies, only limited insight exists into how differences in citizenship attitudes between adolescents from various educational tracks develop. What happens during this crucial phase in the political socialization of young people and do students in different educational tracks show different developmental patterns? In the present study, we focus on changes in the outlook on youth citizenship in lower and higher school types in the Netherlands. By following a longitudinal approach, we aim to gain insight into how their views on citizenship develop over time and to determine whether and in what ways patterns related to educational track already exist and how these evolve when they age. The qualitative character of our research enables us to explore the meanings adolescents attach to important aspects of citizenship in depth.

## Citizenship and Civility

What ‘good citizenship’ entails in democratic societies is part of a highly normative debate. In some perspectives, the critical role of citizens towards authorities is emphasized (e.g. Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Westheimer, 2015), while in others, the importance of growing into customs and conventions of a community is primarily accentuated (Miller, 2000). Another contrast lies in the question of what the main locus of citizenship is. Some authors claim that political participation is the highest form of participation (some call this *republicanism*; Van Gunsteren, 1998), while others argue that the political community is one among many domains that people are part of and that participating in social domains is at least as important (*communitarianism*; Barber, 1984; Kymlicka, 2001; Van Gunsteren, 1998).

Notwithstanding the different discourses on democratic citizenship, there are also some central, shared aspects. One of these is what Shils (1991) called ‘substantive civility’. This concerns the virtue that people should be willing to moderate their personal preferences and search for the common good for society as a whole. To operationalize citizenship, we focus on three central aspects of civility according to Shils: engagement, collectivity, and freedom of speech. The first aspect is the willingness to be engaged in society cannot function without their active participation. The level of involvement is debated but the premise that citizens should participate in communities is (largely) undisputed (Fung, 2006; Held, 2006; Ekman & Amnå, 2012). Secondly, citizens should consider others as fellow citizens with equal rights and obligations, even when their interpretations of the common good differ. Trying to find shared interests, i.e. value the collectivity, is part of the democratic process. Thereby, citizens should be willing to be focused on the common good and when doing so try to include conflicting interests and the interests of minorities (e.g. Goodin, 2009; Thomassen, 2007). Finally, citizens have the right to be able to voice their views in trying to find the common good, even when others find these obnoxious or objectionable. At the same time, those who are voicing their opinions should consider the sensibilities of other citizens and prevent exclusion. With the right of freedom of speech, citizens should thus find a balance between the democratic need to voice and exchange opinions and recognition of the sensitivities of other citizens (Dekker, 2009; Shils, 1991; Walzer, 1974). We will call this reflexive support for the freedom of speech.

In this research, we investigate the views of adolescents from different educational tracks regarding these central aspects of citizenship in a developmental perspective. Consequently, we explore whether adolescents’ views are associated with certain interpretations of citizenship and how these develop over time.

## Previous Research about Citizenship and Educational Track

Research, most often cross-sectional research, shows that between adolescents, differences exist with regard to citizenship orientations that relate to the level of education. Adolescents in higher educational tracks appear to have more political knowledge than those in lower tracks. They are to a larger extent familiar with the concept of democracy and with political institutions, actors, and events than other students (e.g. Torney-Purta, 2002; Schulz et al., 2010). Differences for educational level are also found for attitudes towards democratic citizenship. A study shows that students in higher educational tracks show higher levels of support for democracy while those in lower tracks are more often disinterested in democracy and more often reject the idea altogether (Gaiser et al., 2003). Furthermore, students in higher tracks also have a greater intention of participating in politics (Torney-Purta, 2002; Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Gaiser & De Rijke, 2008) and are more interested in political and social issues than their peers in lower tracks (Gaiser et al., 2003). Students in higher educational tracks also tend to show higher levels of tolerance and lower levels of ethnocentrism (Hooghe, Marien, & Quintelier, 2012; Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 2001; Elchardus, Herbots, & Spruyt, 2013).

However, while these studies find that among adolescents, differences already exist regarding their attitudes towards politics and democracy, they do not touch upon individual trajectories during adolescence. To our knowledge, only a few studies have yet investigated development during adolescence with taking into account differentiation for educational tracks (Eckstein et al., 2012; Elchardus et al., 2013; Janmaat, Mostafa, & Hoskins, 2014; Persson, 2012, 2014; Keating & Janmaat, 2015; Lancee & Sarrasin, 2015; Geboers, Geijssels, Admiraal, Jorgensen, & Ten Dam, 2015). With the exception of Geboers et al.'s study that only shows evolving track differences regarding citizenship knowledge, adolescents in higher tracks are generally found to develop more interest in politics, greater willingness to participate, more political trust, and greater levels of tolerance than their peers in lower tracks. These differences seem rather stable or even increase over time.

That educational level is strongly associated with differences in adolescents' citizenship attitudes can be explained by several factors. Schools themselves could play a role in it. Studies indicate that the goals set for citizenship education differ for lower tracks and higher tracks. Goals set for the prior type more often focus on pro-social behaviour and discipline while the latter type is more often directed towards emancipation and critical thinking (Ichilov, 2003; Leenders, Veugelers, & De Kat, 2008; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003). Other studies put forward the notion that the higher cognitive skills and abilities of students in higher educational tracks probably account for higher levels of political knowledge and greater willingness to participate in politics (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Hillygus, 2005). Additionally, socio-economic milieu

appears to be an explanatory factor. In many countries, adolescents from higher social milieus are overrepresented in higher educational tracks (OECD, 2014; Bol, Witschge, Van de Werfhorst, & Dronkers, 2014). Some longitudinal studies show that differences already exist before educational tracking, implying that socio-economic milieu are causing variations among adolescents (Persson, 2012, 2014; Lancee & Sarrasin, 2015). At home, children in families with higher socio-economic status more often encounter situations that enable them to develop democratic attitudes than children from lower status families (i.e. discussions about politics or negotiations about house rules) (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Neundorf, Smets, & Garcia-Albacete, 2013; Gniewosz, Noack, & Buhl, 2009). Besides SES, there are of course also other student characteristics that relate to the development of citizenship attitudes—gender in particular, but also ethnicity, and religiosity (e.g. Godwin, Godwin, & Martinez-Ebers, 2004; Eckstein et al., 2012; Geijsel, Ledoux, Reumerman, & Ten Dam, 2012). These characteristics, however, are not, or less, strongly linked to educational level.

### **Present Study**

*How do adolescents from different educational tracks view important aspects of citizenship, and how do these develop over time?* In this chapter, this research question will be answered with help of an interview study among Dutch adolescents. By taking a longitudinal and qualitative research approach, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of what happens with young people's perspectives during this important life phase. We provide a more in-depth description of the development of adolescents' views on citizenship from those from different educational tracks in order to explore whether different development trajectories are related to tracks differences. Moreover, given that gender is an important factor in citizenship, we also explore the possible differences between female and male adolescents.

In our study, we focus on three aspects of citizenship, namely social and political engagement, orientation on the common good (collectivity), and reflexive support for the freedom of speech, as being important aspects of civility (Shils, 1991, see above). Converse's unambiguous claim (1972) that education is strongly associated with having 'good values' and the results of the empirical studies published in the last forty years on this issue, suggest that adolescents from higher tracks become with age more socially and politically engaged and more oriented towards the common good and thereby emphasize on consensus and inclusivity, and increasingly argue that both freedom of speech and sensitivities of other citizens are of great importance. Those from lower educational tracks are not supposed to develop such positive orientations towards these aspects. Focusing on developmental trends among young people, we investigate from an in-depth perspective whether this relationship between 'the good values' and educational level holds for the participating adolescents as well.

## Methodology

### *Participants*

For this study, we interviewed forty Dutch adolescents twice: when they were in their second year of secondary education (aged 13 to 15; 2011) and two years later (2013). We chose to interview students in eighth and tenth grades primarily because previous studies indicate that this period is pivotal for the political socialization of adolescents (see above).

The respondents were equally distributed between pre-vocational (PV, lower status) and pre-academic (PA, higher status) educational tracks. These students attended one of the four following schools in the Netherlands: an orthodox Protestant school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a homogeneous population of non-minority students in the northeast of the Netherlands; a public school providing pre-vocational education for a mixed urban/rural population of both migrant and non-migrant students in the middle of the country; a public school providing pre-academic education for a mixed population of students in Amsterdam; and a Roman Catholic school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a predominantly non-migrant population in the northwest of the country. Regarding the selection of participants, a well-balanced dispersion was aimed at with regard to gender, socio-economic status, ethnic background, and religious orientation. By selecting participants with different backgrounds and varying characteristics, we opted for a diverse sample which helped us to find perspectives on democracy from many walks of life.

### *Interview and Procedure*

Semi-structured interviews were organized in the same way in both rounds of interviews and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The interviews involved answering a few introductory questions followed by the presentation of two cases about ways of dealing with the common good. In the first case, participants were asked how they would deal with disagreement among students about the rescheduling of a class. During the discussion of this case, interviewees were asked to explain their views in more detail and whether they would change their preferences whenever the situation in the case would be different (e.g. ‘Does it matter how many students object to rescheduling the class?’ ‘Does it matter what kind of argument is being used?’). This case confronted the interviewees with several principles of citizenship, such as collective decision-making, and inclusion of varying arguments and interests, that are at play when dealing with issues regarding the common good.

In the second case, students were asked to select a group they objected to (e.g. atheists, religious fundamentalists, nationalists) from a list. Then, the interviewees

were asked to give their views on the possibilities these groups should have to voice their opinions publicly. Thereafter, the participant was asked to discuss the situation where these groups would formulate views that offended the sensibilities of other citizens and what kind of solution the interviewee would prefer in such situations. The last aspect of the discussion of the second case was that the interviewees were asked to give their views on whether or not that group—if it were to constitute a majority group—should be allowed to abolish the freedom rights of other groups. This case was meant to provide insight into the reasoning of adolescents with regard to potential boundaries to collectively define the common good and the potential conflicting principle of fundamental freedom rights.

Thereafter, several statements were discussed that focused on social and political engagement and their perceptions of the workings of Dutch politics (e.g. ‘I like to talk with people about what is going on in the world’, ‘I find it important that people are engaged with creating a just world’, ‘It is important that people vote in elections’, ‘Politicians do not care about my opinion or that of my relatives’). The adolescents were also asked to formulate their views about statements that dealt with issues related to the common good in the political domain. They were asked about collective ways to deal with issues regarding the common good (e.g. ‘Politicians should be listening to all citizens when coming to a decision; ‘When coming to a decision, it is important to find agreement even though it takes more time’) and about autocracy and theocracy (e.g. ‘A strong leader should tell us what we should do’, ‘It would be best if our country was ruled by God’s will’).

### *Coding and Analysis of Data*

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. With the help of ATLAS.ti, the interviews were coded and analysed on the basis of the concepts that were derived from the theoretical framework and research question with a focus on discerning similarities and dissimilarities in the patterns of responding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The transcribed interviews were coded using the following categories and subcategories:

- Social and political engagement: Discussing current events, discussing political issues, engaged with creating a just world, voting, and evaluation of Dutch politics.
- Focus on the common good (collectivity): Preference for collective ways, preference for non-collective ways of dealing with such issues, importance of collective decision-making, focus on inclusivity, and focus on consensus and compromise (all for social and political domain).
- Freedom of speech: Importance of voicing one’s, importance of sensibilities of other citizens.

To determine the reliability of the coding, the fragments of the transcribed interviews were coded independently, resulting in a satisfactory Cohen's kappa of 0.84.

Respondents are the units of analysis and analysed according to the categories stated above. As regards the three central aspects of citizenship, we looked for the following information in the transcripts of the interviews. First was signs of engagement in statements about social and political activities and the wish to be involved in, or provide explanations for, the importance of being active in creating a better world. Second, indications for a focus on the common good were that interviewees took into account the preferences and interests of others—preferences for procedures that gave room to deliberation or negotiation and stimulated the search for common interests as well as an awareness of a tension between these aspects (as is in line with theoretical approaches on this, see above). Third was the acknowledgement of the tension between the principle of freedom of speech and values of politeness, non-offensive behaviour, and respect for the sensitivities of others.

## Results

How do our adolescents develop views as regards to engagement, the common good, and freedom of speech? What differences can be seen along the lines of educational tracks or gender?

### *Elitist vs. Egalitarian Political Engagement*

Democratic societies require socially and politically engaged citizens. The interviewed young people in the higher educational track (PA) and the lower track (PV) talked in different ways about engagement. The dominant views among adolescents in PA-track were that they are willing to be engaged in society and that political engagement is important. With age, being engaged to create a more just world became an even more dominant aspiration among these adolescents. From their perspectives, contributing to justice is related to doing something about global poverty and being engaged with national politics. The statement of one girl was exemplary in this regard: 'I think it is interesting to see how things are organized in other parts of the world... Because you can think about how our society is organized and why we act in a certain manner... If people in the third world are not able to solve their poverty problem it is our responsibility to help them... Youth especially should be engaged, because we are the future of our country'.

The PA-students were also interested in politics and this increased with age. These boys and girls increasingly argued that it is important to be informed about social and political issues and to discuss them with others, and their ability to provide examples of the political events (such as elections) developed over time. One boy stated, 'I think it is important that you are able to form an opinion about politics and the

news, that you are aware what is going on in the world, and that you learn to take different perspectives into account'. In the views of these adolescents, politicians are focused on public interests and responsive towards citizens' preferences, and the interviewees therefore argued that their own opinions count. Another boy formulated this as follows: 'They think about rules for the country and thereafter you can vote for the party of your preference. So they are trying to make the Netherlands a better place'. This positive outlook on the workings of politics and the importance of political participation, however, does not imply that these adolescents felt that all citizens should have a similar role in politics and democracy. An increasingly larger group argued that it is not preferable for people with a low educational background to be able to become politicians because of the complex nature of politics that not all people can understand. A girl argued for example that 'Perhaps it is a prejudice but I think that those in the pre vocational-track have less well-developed views than those in pre-academic education. Those in pre-academic education can have a better insight into situations and formulate better arguments. Pre-vocational students have only a simple perspective... So I think that only smart people should become politicians'.

Among the boys and girls in the lower educational PV-track a different perspective on social and, especially, political engagement emerged. Although a substantial group argued that social engagement is important, this was to a lesser extent than their peers in PA-track and did not increase with age. In the perspective of these adolescents, people can help create a better world, but it is certainly not a priority. The statement of one girl is exemplary of this way of thinking: 'I am not involved and don't think it is that important... I just wanna have fun and with my exams coming up and I don't have the time'. Moreover, when these adolescents stated that engagement with creating a just world is important they referred to global poverty but also increasingly to being social responsible for their own community. One boy (PV) explained his perspective as follows: 'Respecting each other, not making fun of each other and not bullying one another... Just being polite'.

Over time, the political engagement of these boys and girls remained low and even tended to decline. The dominant view among these interviewees from pre-vocational education was that it is rather unimportant to follow political news and discuss it with others. One girl explained this viewpoint clearly: 'I do not really follow politics... I think it is dull. They talk about topics that I do not care for. [...] They also talk about complicated things that I do not understand. So, it is not of my interest'. With age, these adolescents become more critical about the functioning of Dutch politics. In their view, politicians are not engaged in doing something for the country. One boy explained this position: 'I do not really notice anything they are doing. [...] On television, I see them sitting in parliament while they are half asleep

and only some of them are having a discussion. And then Wilders [radical right-wing populist politician] is making a silly statement. It is crazy!’ The PV-students also had different outlooks than their peers in PA-track about the desirability of equal participation regarding educational level. Almost all claimed that all people should be able to actively participate in politics. One girl expressed this position as follows: ‘It is all about your perspective on society. You do not have to be very smart for that... It is not necessary that you’re very good with math and speak several languages... It is all about having a good opinion’.

While we have observed differences between students from different educational tracks that are in line with the expectations, we have not found any substantial differences for gender. The boys and girls in the PA-track showed virtually the same development in socially and politically engagements and the boys and girls in the PV-track remained both rather politically unengaged.

### *Searching for the Common Good*

An important aspect of citizenship is that people focus on the common good when dealing with issues that have an impact on the whole community and thereby try to find as much agreement among the participants as possible. An important community that young people are part of is their class at school. Therefore, the interviewees were asked how they would deal with a case where competing perspectives existed in situations involving the classroom. Boys and girls from both tracks and in both rounds of interviews showed preferences that took into account the common good instead of focusing solely on their personal interests. The interviewees claimed that they were willing to listen to perspectives of others and explain what their personal preferences are. However, the extent to which the adolescents stated that they were willing to find a solution that all participants to agree to, differed sharply and this difference increased with age. Among the interviewees, from both educational tracks and primarily girls, there was a substantial group that emphasized in both rounds of interviews the importance of coming to a decision collectively but also the necessity of taking the interests of all into account. These interviewees took several principles into account when dealing with the common good, such as competing views, inclusiveness of stakeholders, and that at some point a decision has to be made. However, an increasing group of adolescents, again from both educational tracks and this time primarily boys, argued from a different perspective that developed over time. They emphasized with age on finding a quick and simple solution for disagreements. To these interviewees, a discussion was relevant to provide insight into the preferences of all participants, but the majority should decide what the solution for the existing problem is, without considering the objections of others. A boy (PA) explained this in the following manner: ‘Those three

students do not really have a say. No matter what they come up with, the others students will want to reschedule the class. [...] Even if they all are limited majority [...] As long as they are with more people, they can have it their way'. Thus, although differences regarding the focus of adolescents on the common good in the context of the classroom along the lines of educational track were largely absent, gender differences were clearly visible. Girls from both tracks focused in both rounds of interviews on both successful decision-making as well as inclusivity and finding agreement. Only among boys was an increase observable in focusing solely on successful decision-making. To them, other aspects of civility (e.g. finding consensus, inclusivity) became less relevant as they aged.

Another aspect of adolescent citizenship we distinguished is dealing with issues regarding the common good in the political community. To the young people from both educational tracks and in both rounds of interviews, a strong leader or theocracy were not appealing options because this would violate individual liberties or would not take into account the perspectives of others. For example, some of the adolescents with an orthodox Protestant background argued that in their perspective, it would be best if the country would be ruled by Gods will, but also these adolescents were of the opinion this would not be a just way of dealing with collective issues in a democratic society considering the various interests.

The boys and girls from both tracks argued that in the political domain, a representative body should be dealing with issues that affect many. However, as was the case with the classroom issue, differences did exist regarding the question where the emphasis should lie but they were now also alongside the lines of educational track. Compared to the classroom situation, PA-boys put more emphasis on majority rule and thus on the importance of making decisions when they age. Minority interests, arguments, and consensus became less important in the political sphere. Coming to an agreement when many people are involved was increasingly viewed as too difficult. One boy explained this position as follows: 'Whenever there is a majority in favour of something they should come to a decision... I think that you should not make democracy and bureaucracy too slow and laborious'.

Yet, with age, many of those in PV-track and PA-girls developed views with stronger emphasis on the necessity of inclusiveness. Just because of the weight of the decisions that are made in this domain, all parties should be involved in the decision-making process. One girl stated, 'I think that in politics it is important that they can find agreement and that can take longer [than in other situations], and everyone should be taken into account'.

The differences found for educational track and gender were also apparent regarding issues where freedom rights and equality between citizens are at stake. The interviewees were asked how they would deal with perspectives on the common

good that advocate the abolition of freedom rights. Among PV-students and girls in both rounds of interviews, the dominant opinion was that freedom rights for all forms the foundation of the political community of the Netherlands and should thus not be abolished. However, boys in the PA-track increasingly stated that whenever a majority of people argue that rights of religious groups, atheists, or migrant groups are conflicting with their perspective of the common good it is legitimate to abolish these rights. A central element of the outlook on citizenship of these PA-boys is the ability of a political community to define their own laws, even if there is only a simple majority that wants to abolish freedom rights.

In sum, those in the PA-track and boys increasingly stressed their views on citizenship procedures for just decision-making and thereby more or less neglect minority rights, arguments, and inclusiveness. Students in PV-track and girls, on the other hand, stuck with age to their emphasis on the importance of finding collective ways of dealing with the common good and also the necessity of consensus and inclusivity.

### *Reflexive Support for Freedom of Speech*

It is often argued that in a democratic society, both the voicing of obnoxious viewpoints and the taking into account of the sensitivities of others is important. This issue was explicitly discussed with the interviewees. They were asked to pick a group from a list they strongly object to (such as nationalists, religious fundamentalist, fundamentalist atheists) and were asked about whether these people should be able to voice their opinions even though they are humiliating for other citizens, sexist, or racist.

A substantial group of adolescents from both educational tracks and predominantly girls at both points in time argued that voicing opinions and taking care of the feelings of others are important democratic values. Additionally, those with obnoxious views should be able to express them but they do have the duty to take the sensitivities of others into account. When discussing a situation where a Dutch politician was deliberately insulting Muslim women with headscarves, a boy (PA) stated, 'Freedom of speech is important but you cannot say a lot of [humiliating] things and then only say 'well, that is freedom of speech!' That is not something that people should be allowed to do'.

At the same time, we have found that some adolescents in both tracks increasingly focused on one principle only. Among those in PA-track and boys predominantly, a trend towards an exclusive focus on freedom of speech was observable. These boys increasingly argued that freedom of speech is more important than the feeling of others of being humiliated. A boy (PA) explained that it is problematic if the government starts to ban certain opinions: 'Everyone can give their opinions... If they want they can go and protest, it doesn't bother me... I don't think that you should stop

them if someone feels insulted because a lot of things can be insulting. You cannot forbid everything'. In the perspective of these adolescents, the prohibition of opinions is very problematic and would do more harm than good.

A development towards focusing on one aspect was also present among those in PV-track, and again primarily among boys. With age, these interviewees increasingly stated that there should be unconditional free speech, as did their peers in PA-track. At the same time, however, an increasing number of them stated that freedom of speech is important but when opinions are offending others, they should be banned from public debate. One of them (PV) explained his views on nationalists: 'I understand that they are afraid that in the future the immigrants will be in the majority in the Netherlands. [...] But they should not be allowed to say everything because it can offend others. [...] I think it is more important not to offend others than that they can say what they want'.

In sum, among boys from both educational tracks, we have seen a development towards a more one-dimensional interpretation of citizenship while girls predominantly stuck to their initial views that both freedom of speech and the sensitivities of others are important.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

An abundant number of studies show that adults and young people alike differ in their citizenship orientations along the lines of educational level (e.g. Kriesi et al., 2005; Bovens & Wille, 2009; Torney-Purta, 2002; Schulz et al., 2010; Elchardus, et al., 2013). Many of these studies show that those with a higher educational level or in higher educational tracks more often agree with 'good values' (e.g. democracy, tolerance, political interest) whereas those with a lower educational level or in lower tracks to a larger extent seem to endorse 'wrong' values (e.g. political cynicism, political disinterest, authoritarianism). Even though some studies have focused on the development of adolescent citizenship over time, the developmental trajectories in relation to citizenship values and adolescents' interpretations of 'good citizenship' remains largely unknown. In the present study, we have investigated this topic. In general, the results show that adolescents in higher educational track develop with age stronger political orientations but also gradually focus more strictly on competition between perspectives and on formal procedures when dealing with social issues. Their views on citizenship become more one-dimensional. Those in the lower track, at both ages, remained rather uninterested in politics but stick to their emphasis on cooperation, consensus, and inclusiveness when dealing with issues that affect the whole community. Above that, gender differences play a role in adolescents' views on citizenship. Boys increasingly focused on competition and formal democratic procedures while girls more often emphasized cooperation and inclusion.

Overall, our study shows that ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ citizenship values do not simply coincide with educational level. Using a dichotomy between higher and lower educational tracks is a too narrow lens to come to a clear understanding of developments in adolescent citizenship. Because of the design of our study, we do not know how these results are translated to larger groups of adolescents in the Netherlands and elsewhere. Even though we have a diverse sample, it is of course not possible to generalize from these findings. Only large scale and comparative studies can show whether the conclusions also hold elsewhere.

Notwithstanding this limitation, the results of our study on the development towards citizenship and civility nuance the (implicit) assumption that students in higher educational tracks have more often a ‘better’ perspective on citizenship than those in lower tracks (Amadeo et al., 2001; Gaiseret al., 2003; Persson, 2012; Keating & Janmaat, 2015; Lancee & Sarrasin, 2015). From a theoretical perspective, civility has been described as the preparedness of citizens to be willing to participate in society, to moderate views, to look for consensus and to be as inclusive as possible (Walzer, 1974; Shils, 1991; Dekker, 2009). Regarding social and political engagement, it is noticeable that those in the higher educational track learned to focus more on critical participation in the political domain while those in lower track stuck to their rather disinterested perspective on politics and focused more on taking care of one another in the social domain. The views of the higher educated adolescents can be interpreted as being more in line with a republican perspective on citizenship. From a communitarian perspective, however, one could argue that looking after one another is just as important. Regarding dealing with issues related to the common good as well as the tensions between freedom of speech and sensibilities of others, a different and unexpected trend was observable in our study. Among students in the higher educational track, procedural orientations regarding dealing with sensitive issues became more dominant with age. From their perspectives, it is a fundamental right of people to express opinions and of majorities to come to decisions, as long as they follow the right procedures. On the other hand, students in the lower track remained to a larger extent focused on inclusivity. These latter adolescents stuck to the idea that arguments, interests, and different groups should be taken into account as much as possible, especially with regard to situations in the political domain, and that the freedom of speech is important but that also holds for sensibilities of others.

What is seen as ‘the good end of the variable’ (Converse, 1972) is part of a fundamental debate between republican, liberal, and communitarian perspectives on citizenship (e.g. Van Gunsteren, 1998; Miller, 2000; Kymlicka, 2001). Taken from the outcomes of our study, two types of citizenship in particular can be discerned among students in different educational tracks. With their emphasis on the political domain and procedural aspects when dealing with sensitive issues, among students in the

higher educational track, a procedural republican type of citizenship is emphasized more with age. Students in the lower educational track, on the other hand, stressed the importance of decency in the social domain as well as cooperation and inclusivity at both points in time. Thereby an inclusive communitarian type of citizenship seemed to dominate their views.

That our results are not in line with the expectations about the relationship between educational track and the development of attitudes associated with civility can be explained by several factors. First, images that adolescents have about citizenship, politics, and democracy are influenced by how politics is portrayed in the media (e.g. Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003). In the media and political cultures in Europe and the Netherlands, the focus is now stronger on the importance of freedom of speech and not so much on sensitivities of others and the political culture has become harsher with less focus on minority rights and inclusivity (Sapiro, 2004; Manning & Edwards, 2014). That those adolescents with a clearer image of Dutch politics are also those with more one-dimensional views on freedom of speech and the common good can partly be explained by this change in media and political culture (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011; Hendriks & Michels, 2011). Second, our deviating results can also be explained by the design of our research. Most studies on youth citizenship tend to focus on the political domain and find that education is linked to aspects like political interest, political efficacy, and willingness to participate in politics (Amadeo et al., 2001; Torney-Purta, 2002; Gaiser et al., 2003; Schulz et al., 2010; Eckstein et al., 2012; Persson, 2012, 2014; Elchardus et al., 2013; Keating & Janmaat, 2015.) However, we have also taken into account social domains where the issue of civicness also arises. Whereas young people, and especially those in lower tracks, have limited experiences with the political domain, they do encounter situations in everyday life where they are confronted with issues related to citizenship (Authors, 2016). Therefore, more scholarly attention to situations that are meaningful to young people can provide us with a broader and more nuanced perspective on the development of adolescent citizenship. Furthermore, differences in adolescents' attitudes related to educational track are not necessarily caused by formal schooling. Different educational tracks generally host student populations with different characteristics (cognitive ability, family life, socio-economic milieu) and can explain the disparities. Because of the small scale of our study, it was not possible to unravel the various mechanisms that drive citizenship development. Future research can shed more light on what is causing different developmental trajectories between groups of adolescents.

Finally, in quests for explanations for the low levels of political interest of students in the lower educational track, we plea for not only focusing on (individual) characteristics of these young people (such as knowledge, social milieu, intelligence), but

also on the structural and cultural aspects of contemporary democracies that apparently give these adolescents the idea that politics is not of their business. Their feeling that politics is not something for people like them can be an adequate representation of realities in contemporary western democracies (e.g. Bovens & Wille, 2009). That their higher educated peers increasingly claimed that participating in parliament is not something for the low educated can be an indication thereof. In our view, the fact that young people with a lower educational background have the image that their role in the political domain is supposed to be limited is a fundamental problem for equal participation in democracy. Structural and cultural causes thereof deserve more scholarly attention.

## CHAPTER 6

### COMPENSATING OR REPRODUCING?

#### STUDENTS FROM DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL TRACKS ABOUT THE ROLE OF SCHOOL IN EXPERIENCING DEMOCRACY<sup>8</sup>

##### **Abstract**

Studies show that adolescents that are at a higher educational level have more positive experiences than those of lower levels with aspects of democracy, such as decision-making or discussions. In our qualitative longitudinal study, we focus on how adolescents from different educational tracks evaluate the various possibilities to experience democracy in daily life, and whether school is compensating for any difference therein. Data were gathered by interviewing 40 adolescents at two points in time (eighth and tenth grade). The results suggest that, especially in the later phase of secondary education, school exacerbates instead of decreases social differences in society. Those in the higher educational track experience more often than those in the lower track having discussions and being encouraged to be socially and politically engaged. We discuss the implications of these findings with respect to equal opportunities for all citizens and the role of school in political socialization of adolescents.

**Keywords:** educational tracks, political socialization, equality, education, adolescents

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<sup>8</sup> Based on: Nieuwelink, H., Dekker, P., & Ten Dam, G. (submitted). Compensating or Reproducing? Students in different educational tracks about the role of school in experiencing democracy.

Young peoples' orientation towards society, politics, and democracy is shown to be strongly related to their educational level (Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, & Ten Dam, 2015; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito 2010; Torney-Purta, 2002). Those at higher levels are often more positive about democracy and are more willing to participate, and to show more political efficacy. Those at the lower levels, on the other hand, are shown to be less interested in news and politics and to show more cynicism about politics. They are also shown to be more critical of their own abilities to make a difference. An important explanation for these differences lies in the experiences young people encounter when discussing news and politics in daily life. The opportunity structure for adolescents from various educational levels appears to be different: young people at higher level discuss politics more often, and have parents that show more interest in politics and participate more often in civil society and politics (e.g. Authors, 2016a; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009). This is problematic because it can hamper equal opportunities for participation in society and democracy, as has been often argued (Lijphart, 1996; Dahl, 2006; Stolle & Hooghe, 2011). In the perception of many policy makers and scholars, it is the task of schools to contribute to the citizenship competences of all students (Davies, 2008; Eurydice, 2012; Schulz et al., 2010). Some scholars argue that schools should also compensate for inequalities in citizenship knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In particular, for those who have less positive experiences with politics and democracy, the school can broaden their horizon (Biesta, 2009; Janmaat, 2008; Veugelers, 2009; Van de Werfhorst, 2014). Some studies have shown that schools can indeed have an effect to this end, but other studies indicate that schools are actually reproducing or strengthening existing differences (Campbell, 2008; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2011; Metz & Younnis, 2005; Ichilov, 2003; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003). Nonetheless, most of these studies have a quantitative perspective, usually questioning the students once during their school career and often focusing on one single context (e.g., school, family, or peers). More in-depth understanding of the possibilities of adolescents to experience democracy in school in addition to their experiences in other social contexts during their whole school career is still lacking.

This chapter reports about a qualitative longitudinal study on the perceptions of Dutch adolescents from different educational tracks of the possibilities to develop democratic attitudes in everyday social settings. The aim of our study is to deepen our insight as to how adolescents experience situations in everyday life that can potentially enable them to develop democratic attitudes, and whether young people from different educational tracks perceive school as a place where democratic attitudes are fostered. By interviewing them twice, we can provide a more comprehensive view of the experiences that adolescents have with democracy in everyday life and whether differences exist during various phases in their school life. With our

qualitative approach, we can add to the literature by providing more insights into the meanings adolescents attach to these experiences.

Since most adolescents have limited experiences with *political* democracy (e.g., the parliament, government, political parties) (Authors, 2016a; Schulz et al., 2010; Galston, 2001), in this study, we concentrate on everyday experiences with aspects of democracy. By doing so, we build on previous research that shows adolescents base their attitudes toward democracy and politics partly on what they experience in daily life (Flanagan, 2013; Sapiro, 2004). Our focus is on three central aspects of democracy (discussions, decision-making, and social and political engagement) that adolescents often encounter in these day-to-day situations.

### **Developing Attitudes Toward Democracy**

Democracy is a multidimensional concept that encompasses various ways of dealing in a collective and inclusive way with different perspectives and interests, and encompasses many aspects. Discussions are one of the features of democracy, as exchanging arguments, disagreeing with and convincing others facilitate that social groups with different interests and opinions can live together in a peaceful way. In the literature, political issues are highlighted in particular (Goodin, 2009; Held, 2006). Nonetheless, discussions can also involve situations where citizens form or share opinions about everyday issues, such as collective activities or rules of an organization. There are different ways of coming to a decision in a democratic way. Democratic decisions can be made through voting, negotiation, or deliberation (Goodin, 2009; Lijphart, 1999). To clarify viewpoints or find common ground, it is important that all people concerned participate and voice their perspectives on collective problems. Therefore, social and political engagement is an important aspect of democracy, as it is a central means for people to make their voices heard and be involved in collective decision-making (Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

Many studies have shown that young people's political participation is rather limited, and that participation during adolescent and young adulthood is also strongly related to socio-economic milieu and education (Elchardus, Herbots, & Spruyt, 2013; Schulz et al., 2010). Similarly, they show that those adolescents who do not participate in politics develop attitudes toward democracy by following and discussing the news and by encountering aspects of democracy in everyday life. These experiences lay the basis for their attitudes toward democracy and politics and have been shown to have a lasting effect (Flanagan, 2013; Greenstein, 1965; Hess & Torney, 1967; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003; Prior, 2012; Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014; Sapiro, 2004; Sears & Levy, 2003). For example, the views of young people about the responsiveness of politicians is partly based on their experiences with authorities in their daily lives (Gimpel et al., 2003) and interest in

politics during adolescence is an important explanation for adults' political interest (Prior, 2012). However, other studies indicate that it works the other way around—when becoming more familiar with politics, adolescents adjust their views about fair decision-making to how they view politics' works (Nieuwelink, Ten Dam, & Dekker, 2015; Abdelzahed, Zetterberg, & Ekman, 2014).

Adolescents can experience aspects of democracy inside and outside of school, at home, with peers, and in associational life on a daily basis. All of these contexts have been shown to be of relevance to the development of the adolescents' democratic attitudes. Encounters with aspects of democracy in daily life differs for social-cultural background and level of education (Amnå, 2012; Quintelier, 2015). Firstly, the role of parents has been shown as important for the acquirement of democratic attitudes (Jennings, 2007). Substantial differences exist in the opportunities of adolescents to experience aspects of democracy at home. Studies show that an authoritative parental style, where the reasoning behind parental policies are open to discussion, is more common among the higher educated, and is positively related to positive views on social relations and politics (Chan & Koo, 2011; Gniewozs, Noack, Buhl, & 2009; Leman, 2005; Spera, 2005). Young people who grow up in social milieus with higher educated parents also experience talking about the news or politics more often (Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray, & Born, 2012; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Neundorf, Smets, & Garcia-Albacete, 2013; Hooghe & Boonen, 2015).

Secondly, interactions with peers are important for adolescents to develop democratic attitudes (e.g. Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Research shows that adolescents influence each other's attitudes by discussing social issues and media content (Amnå, 2012; Erentaite, Zukauskiene, Beyers, & Pilkauskaitė-Valickienė, 2012; Gordon & Taft, 2010; Settle, Bond, & Levitt, 2011). Even though these studies have not looked into the differences between social groups, it is plausible that those adolescents with highly educated parents will also discuss the news and political issues more often with their peers. This puts adolescents with “lower” social-cultural background at a disadvantage.

Thirdly, civil society is widely seen as important for the fostering of civic orientations (Cohen & Rogers, 1995; Fung, 2003; Putnam 1993, 2000; Warren, 2001). Participating in some types of organizations (i.e., cultural organizations or youth unions) appears to have a positive effect on democratic attitudes, while participating in other associations (i.e., sport organizations) does not seem to affect democratic attitudes (Dekker, 2014; Fung, 2003; Hooghe & Quintelier, 2013; Van der Meer & Van Ingen, 2014). The highly educated often take part in activities in civil society (e.g. Dekker, 2014; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996), and have, therefore, possibilities to develop democratic attitudes.

## Can School Compensate for Society?

In a democracy, all citizens should have opportunities to develop democratic attitudes regardless of social-cultural background or educational level. This raises the question whether school, as a public institution, should be able to compensate for social inequalities (e.g., Eurydice, 2012; Janmaat, 2008; Schulz et al., 2010; Van de Werfhorst, 2014). Empirical research on the effect of citizenship education shows that formal education can indeed affect adolescents' knowledge of and attitudes toward democracy (Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, & Ten Dam, 2013; Isac, Maslowski, Creemers, & Van Der Werf, 2013; Manning & Edwards, 2014). Citizenship attitudes can, in particular, be fostered by a democratic classroom climate where students are encouraged to discuss political issues (Campbell, 2008; Fjeldstad & Mikkelson 2003; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001), a formal curriculum that includes specific citizenship courses (Feldman, Pasek, Romer, & Hall Jamieson, 2007; Galston, 2001; McDevitt & Kioussis, 2007; Yang & Chung, 2009) and extra-curricular activities in combination with systematic reflection (e.g. service learning) (Metz & Younis, 2005; Van Goethem, Van Hoof, Orobio de Castro, Van Aken, & Hart, 2014).

Some studies have found that the effects schools have on citizenship competences especially hold for adolescents who have less positive experiences with democracy. They also found that school can contribute to social equality (Campbell, 2008; Castillo, Miranda, Macarena, Cox, & Bascopé, 2014; Gainous & Martens, 2012; Metz & Younnis, 2005; Langton & Jennings, 1968). However, not all studies show that school actually compensates for society. Some research found that school exacerbates existing differences in political knowledge, which is an important resource for the development of attitudes towards politics and democracy (Campbell, 2008; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2012; Persson, 2015). Furthermore, it has been shown that goals and practices for citizenship education can differ across educational tracks. In (pre-) vocational education, the focus is more often on discipline and social adjustment, while in pre-academic education, emancipation and critical citizenship are more often strived for (Ichilov, 2003; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003). By pursuing different goal orientations, schools reproduce existing differences between (social groups of) adolescents. Finally, the characteristics of the educational system also influences the citizenship competences of adolescents. Van de Werfhorst and Mijs (2010) show that inequalities are magnified by external differentiation in separate school types. National level tracking leads to differences between students regarding their political knowledge and democratic attitudes, and are in favour of those in higher tracks.

We conclude from previous studies that the picture that emerges regarding the role of schools with respect to enhancing the citizenship of adolescents is mixed. Schools can compensate for the differences in opportunities that adolescents encoun-

ter outside the school to positively experience democracy, but they do not always bring this into practice. What is missing so far is insight into how adolescents from different educational tracks experience the various possibilities to learn democracy both inside and outside of school.

### **Current Study and Dutch Educational Setting**

The central question of this chapter reads as follows: *What are the experiences of adolescents from different educational tracks with democracy in everyday life, and do schools provide opportunities for those who have less experience of democracy in other settings?* By taking a longitudinal and qualitative research approach, we intend to deepen our insight into the issue whether schools compensate for prevailing inequalities in society.

The study has been carried out in the Netherlands. The Dutch educational system is characterized by a large degree of school autonomy. Schools can formulate their own goals within the broad margins set by the Ministry of Education. Citizenship education is compulsory for all schools. Due to the constitutional freedom of education, however, schools are free to design citizenship education in their own manner under the condition that this is done in a systematic manner, with respect to the basic democratic values, and with an underlying vision of citizenship and social integration. Goals for citizenship are usually part of the subjects Civics and History, which are mandatory for all students and focus primarily on the cognitive aspects of citizenship. The Netherlands has an externally differentiated school system where education for the different tracks is generally provided at different locations. In the lowest track, there is pre-vocational education (PV). The highest track provides pre-academic education (PA).

### **Method**

For this study, we interviewed forty Dutch adolescents twice: when they were in their second year of secondary education (aged 13 to 15; 2011) and two years later (2013). We chose to interview students in the eighth and tenth grades because during these grades, schools provide the subjects wherein they explicitly pay attention to citizenship issues.

As to the selection of participants, a well-balanced dispersion was aimed with regard to gender, socio-economic status, ethnic background, and religious orientation. The twenty boys and twenty girls were equally distributed between pre-vocational (PV) and pre-academic (PA) education tracks, with thirteen adolescents from an ethnic minority. These students attended one of the following four schools in the Netherlands: an orthodox Protestant school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a homogeneous population of non-minority students in the

northeast of the Netherlands, a public school that only provides pre-vocational education for a mixed urban/rural population of both migrant and non-migrant students in the middle of the country, a public school that only provides pre-academic education for a mixed population of students in Amsterdam, and a Roman Catholic school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a predominantly non-migrant population in the northwest of the country. By selecting participants with diverse backgrounds and varying characteristics, we opted for a diverse sample that helped us to find perspectives on democracy from many walks of life.

### *Interview and Procedure*

The semi-structured interviews were organized in the same way in both rounds of interviews and lasted approximately 90 minutes. First, the adolescents were asked to introduce themselves and to describe the social activities they are engaged in within their private life (e.g., activities with friends, sports clubs, or religious associations) and the activities they participate in at school (e.g. student council, debating clubs). Second, the interviewees were invited to respond to statements, such as the following: “People should listen to each other even though their opinions differ” and “If someone in the classroom does not agree with something, he or she should have the opportunity to explain his or her opinion”. They were given the opportunity to explain whether these situations occurred within their social contexts.

The third part of the interview was focused on comparing the adolescents’ experiences with having discussions, collective decision-making, and being encouraged to be socially and politically engaged in their various social settings. The interviewees were asked not only about their experiences in the classroom, but also in the broader school context and with extra-curricular activities, such as community service. The interviewer started this part of the interview by asking the interviewees to compare the extent to which they discuss everyday activities in these settings. Because the concept “discussions” can be difficult to understand for young adolescents, they were asked whether situations exist where people can give their opinion and others respond on that opinion. Thereafter, their experiences with decision-making in their social settings were compared and discussed. Because decision-making can have a formal connotation to it, the adolescents were asked about how choices are made and who does it (e.g., “when you are going to do something together how do you choose between activities?”, “who decides about the rules and regulations?”). Subsequently, the interviewees were asked to compare whether they talk and discuss about the news and politics as indications of being socially or politically engaged. Because it can be hard to comment on such broad topics, the interviewer provided some examples of current events (such as a shooting in a shopping centre, the abdication of the queen, the Arab Spring, and elections). The interviewees were asked

whether and in which setting the adolescents talked about these and how these discussions evolve.

The final part of the interview zoomed in on the extent to which and in what way social and political issues and democracy are being taught and discussed in their classes. The interviewees were asked whether they talk about current events in educational settings and if it was related to school subject matter. Thereafter, they were asked whether and in what way they have discussed recent elections in class and through what kind of activities (such as watching of film clips of debates or discussing the outcomes).

### *Coding and Analysis*

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. With the help of ATLAS.ti, the interviews were coded and analyzed on the basis of the concepts that were derived from the theoretical framework and research question (cf. Miles & Huberman 1994). The coding scheme consisted of the following categories and subcategories:

- “Social contexts”: household, peers, associational life, school and class;
- “Experiences with discussions”: experience (frequency), differences in opinion, equal opportunities to participate, and topic;
- “Experiences with decision-making”: experience (frequency), method used (voting, negotiation, deliberation, authority decides), and topic.
- “Being encouraged to discuss social issues and politics”: experience (frequency), differences in opinion, and equal opportunities to participate.

To determine the reliability of the coding, the fragments of the transcribed interviews were coded independently, resulting in a satisfactory Cohen’s kappa of 0.84.

The interviews were analyzed according to the categories stated above. With regard to the three central aspects of democracy, we looked for the following information in the transcripts of the interviews. First, indications for adolescent experiences with discussions, different opinions, and the possibilities to voice their opinions in different settings, such as about joint activities or rules of the organization. Second, indications for the possibilities to influence or participate in decision-making procedures and how they come to decisions (e.g. voting or negotiating). Third, situations were searched where the adolescents were encouraged to be socially or politically engaged, for example, through talking about the news or elections.

### **Results**

All interviewees participate in a variety of social settings and interact with friends and other peers, family, teachers and school authorities, coaches and trainers, and religious authorities. Below, we discuss adolescents’ experiences in these various social contexts. First, we go into the experiences with democracy at home, with

friends, and in associational life. Thereafter, we present our results regarding the school.

### *At Home*

Daily activities at home create opportunities for many interviewees to have discussions in their households and to make collective decisions. Differences exist in adolescent experiences with discussions according to educational track. Many adolescents from the higher track (PA) stated at both points in time that they often discuss everyday activities or hobbies, and that there are often competing views. One boy (PA) stated for example: “It is not a hot debate, but we all have our opinions so we share them... These discussions are about small things like who is going to do what [in the housekeeping]”. On the other hand, a substantial group of students from the lower track (PV) argued that they did not have many discussions in their household, and that strong disagreement was rare. This was especially the case when the students were in tenth grade. The explanation of one boy (PV) about the conversations he had with his father regarding soccer was exemplary: “Sometimes we talk about it. Was it a good game or a bad game? But that’s it. We don’t talk that much”.

Whether or not the adolescents have discussions, there are situations when a decision needs to be made regarding household issues, such as holidays and outings. Most interviewees stated that in such situations, they try to find consensus, but that their parents have the final say. This holds true for adolescents from both educational tracks and at both points in time. As one girl (PA) stated: “When we make decisions together, we listen to each other, and most of the time, we find an agreement. In the end, everyone should be happy about what we are going to do”. The students from both tracks seem to live in a household where the “pedagogical regime” is focused on consultation and negotiation, and this did not change over time.

Important differences exist in the adolescents’ experiences with talking about the news and politics. A substantial number of those enrolled in the PV-track, and this did not change over time, did not discuss the news or political events at all. These adolescents stated that the news is not a topic about which they talk, and many of them seemed to avoid politics in their discussions. Few of these young people talk about elections with their parents, and whether and for what party they will vote. Among those from the PA-track, on the other hand, the news and political events are being discussed as a matter of course and this increased with age. In the second round of interviews, nearly all of them explained that they talked with their parents more or less extensively about political events or elections, and many knew which kind of party their parents voted for and had discussed it with them. For adolescents in the higher educational track, politics is not distant from their lives, and their par-

ents seem to give them the impression that politics matters and talking about it is a normal activity.

### *Among Peers*

With regard to friends and other peers in daily life, the democratic experiences of young people also differed in terms of educational track. Those in the PA-track (semi-)regular discussed hobbies, such as musical preferences, and sporting events, such as Champions League matches, and how they will spend free time. This did not change over time. In general, differences in views were debated, the opinions of friends and peers were listened to and consensus was strived for. One boy (PA) explained how they talk about such topics: “Recently we have discussed where we will go to in the summer. Someone said what he wants and others respond and say that they want something else. Then we will find agreement together”. However, the experiences of those in the PV-track with discussions were different. At an older age especially, many of them barely discussed everyday topics with their friends. They explained that they have conversations with their friends, but seldom have discussions. One girl stated: “We don’t really discuss. It is just that someone says ‘let’s go to the mall’ and then we all agree. We just do that”. Similarly, those in the PV-track engage in activities that all of them like, but they do not have much of a discussions about it; people give their opinion, but little more.

Another picture emerges when looking at societal issues. According to the interviewees from both educational tracks and at both ages, it is uncommon to discuss news, social issues, or politics among friends. They viewed talking about the news or politics as a dull activity, and those who do talk about the news do so only briefly. The dominant view was that they preferred to talk about what matters to a teenager according to them: music, sports, role models, and boy/girlfriends.

### *In Associational Life*

Nearly all of the interviewed adolescents play music, sport, or dance in an organized associational setting. They often perform several activities with ten to twenty others under the supervision of an adult. From the perspective of many adolescents from both educational tracks and at both points in time, there is limited room for discussion and collective decision-making in these organizations, and they do not discuss the news or political issues. The dominant experience of these young people, which did not change over time, was that they are able to voice their opinions, but that there is little to discuss and decide because everyone is there for the same reason and the rules are fixed. For example, one girl (PV) explained about the group she dances with: “The instructor decides about choreography, but we can say whether we want something to be changed... Sometimes we have a discussion, for example

about who should do a certain trick”. However, some interviewees from both educational tracks and in both eighth and tenth grade were able to make a decision together. These adolescents stated that they have discussions with their team and that their coach encouraged them to voice their opinions about the strategy of the game and lets them decide together. One girl (PA) explained for example: “Soccer is a team sport and you talk a lot with them. We discuss the tactics. I think ‘this is a good strategy,’ ‘that is a good strategy,’ ‘we have to do this and that’”.

All twelve students from the orthodox Protestant school participate in confirmation classes in their church, and three other students participate in Koran classes in their mosque. In the perspective of the interviewees, there is much room for discussion at the age of fourteen, as well as sixteen. They are asked to give their perspectives on events in their daily lives that are related to their faith even if these conflict with central aspects of their faith. Although all of the participants belong to the same religious group, there are often substantial differences in opinion. News or political events are seldom discussed, and only when related to their faith.

In sum, those in the academic educational track discuss more often about everyday activities and social and political issues than those in pre-vocational; therefore, they encounter situations where they can develop democratic attitudes more often. This difference seemed to be even more apparent at a later age when the adolescents are in tenth grade. These results are in line with the expectations taken from the literature.

### *At School*

School can compensate for the differences in experiences in society, but do they actually put this into practice? What are the adolescents’ experiences when it comes to aspects of democracy in the classroom and by means of extra-curricular activities?

### *In the classroom*

Differences exist in the experiences of the adolescents from the different educational tracks regarding the opportunities to discuss (for example, rules and regulations of the school and joint activities). Those in the PA-track, stated that when they were in eighth or tenth grade, they had (semi-)regular discussions about these kinds of topics. During these discussions, many claimed that competing views were formulated, and that there was room for all classmates to explain their views. One girl in a combined class with students who also follow a class in Latin and Greek and regular PA-students explained that the rescheduling of a class can be difficult: “Then [those students with Latin and Greek] don’t want to reschedule and we ask ‘why not?’... The teacher listens and says that we have to take others into account”. These students seem to be encouraged by their teacher to deliberate with others about everyday issues in the classroom.

The PV-students had different experiences, especially when they were in the tenth grade. Many explained that there was rarely a debate in the classroom, and if there were, these did not last long. One girl stated: “In class it is usually ‘open your book and get to work’”. Whenever these students had discussions, these did not seem to be very well ordered. One boy explained the course of discussions in his classroom: “If someone disagrees then they will yell it through the classroom... In our class you either agree or don’t agree, for the rest we really don’t care”. During discussions in these PV-classrooms, it seemed that not all students have a say, as highlighted by one boy: “If someone has a good reason others will perhaps agree, but most of the time the same persons will have it their way because they are the loud-mouths... If you’re less popular you will have less of a say”.

Some situations in the classroom require a decision that will affect all students. Those from both educational tracks explained that when it comes to regulations, timetables, and the content of the lessons, the teachers or other school authorities decide. This did not change as they age. However, most students in both tracks felt that their school authorities were listening to them, both in the eighth and tenth grade. One boy (PV) explained the routine in his class: “The teachers decide the content of the class. But sometimes we as students come up with a plan and then they listen to that... For example, we asked if the teacher wants to make handouts... Most of the time they are willing to do that”. The interviewees, however, also explained that in some situations, they were able to make a decision with their classmates. These usually involved the rescheduling of a class, the screening of a movie, or a field trip. In some situations, such as when they leave school at an earlier hour, they all agree and decision is made by consensus. In other situations, they disagree about the best solution, and then typically, the majority decides with little debate. For example, one boy (PV) explained the situation regarding the movie they would watch at the end of a day: “That is with the majority rule... The teacher asked us what we wanted, then we voted and then we watched that movie. That’s it”.

In all schools in the Netherlands, regardless of educational track, students have to learn about society, social issues, politics, and democracy. The extent to which social and political issues are debated in the classroom, however, differs greatly between the interviewed students from the PA-track and PV-track. In the eighth grade of both tracks, the news, politics, or elections were not discussed often in the interviewees’ classrooms. Every now and then, the teachers referred to these topics, but there was little debate about them. However, in tenth grade the experiences of the two groups of adolescents diverge. The PV-students stated that they still did not discuss current affairs in class. One boy stated: “Yeah, we have once talked about the news but I don’t know what it was about... During the Economics class, we discussed the economic crisis. They said that there is an economic crisis now. They just tell us that,

that's all". Political or democratic events are, from the perspective of the PV-student, not discussed either. About three months before the second interview took place, there were national elections for the Dutch parliament, but PV-interviewees said these elections were not discussed extensively in the classroom. One boy explained that they had discussed politics infrequently during the previous year, but not in tenth grade: "Now we don't talk about politics. That was last year with Civics... We didn't talk about the elections. Not at all... Now we are learning for our finals so we're busy with that". It seems that only in situations where the lesson content is related directly to politics will teachers talk about current affairs or politics.

The reported experiences of interviewees in the PA-track when in tenth grade differ substantially. These adolescents stated that they now discussed the news and politics on a regular basis within their History, Civics or Religion classes. One girl from the orthodox Protestant school explained how they talked about the news and moral dilemmas: "With Civics, we talk about the news, like 'what do you think about euthanasia?' Everyone can give his or her opinion and then we talk about dilemmas like 'what would you do as a doctor when it comes to euthanasia?'... And what if there is a new medicine that can save five lives but would be at the expense of one healthy person. 'What would you do?'" The PA-students were encouraged to develop views on such complicated moral issues. These students also stated that they discussed politics at school when in the tenth grade, and most discussed the national elections of 2012. One boy (PA) explained: "The teacher asked us if we had seen the debates and what the strategy of the politicians was... We watched clips of [right wing politician] Geert Wilders because my teacher thinks he is a brilliant debater... We also discussed the outcome of the elections and that it is remarkable that many people voted for either [leftist] labor or the [rightist] liberals, and that now they are in a coalition together". Generally, these young people in the PA-track were at school regularly and were encouraged to think about and debate politics and elections, creating avenues to develop positive attitudes towards democracy.

### *Activities outside the classroom*

During our study, all students were able to participate in extra-curricular activities that can be seen as potential venues for developing positive attitudes toward democracy. In grade eight or nine, they had to do community service and they volunteered in hospitals, elementary schools, or sports organizations. They only had to perform thirty hours of community service; therefore, they received only simple assignments to help elderly people, patients, or children. Consequently, students had to perform activities where there was little room to experience democracy through having discussions or showing initiative.

Second, the student council is also a venue for experiencing democracy. How-

ever, only a small number of interviewees from both educational tracks at both points in time actually participated in the council at their school, and most of the others are largely unaware of its workings. Those who are active in the council are positive about the possibilities they have to articulate their views on school rules and regulations, and they believe that they have a real influence on school policies. Despite this, it does not seem that the student members have structural contact with other students about what they discuss in the council; therefore, it does not seem like they learn much about the processes of actively representing the interests of others. Although the student council can have some positive effects, the scope thereof seems rather limited.

In both interviews, some adolescents mentioned a third type of activity outside of the classroom as their school encouraged them to participate in debating clubs outside the school. One girl (PV) was active in a national debating league, where they discussed various social and political issues, while one boy (PA) was engaged in the Model European Parliament, where they simulated a decision-making process in the European Parliament. Both adolescents were positive about the discussion skills they had learned in these situations. They even gave examples of political issues that they had to think about and discuss with others. Being involved in such activities can be very fruitful for the development of democratic attitudes, but very few young people have this opportunity.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

In this research, we investigated the experiences of adolescents from different educational tracks on democracy and whether schools provide opportunities for those who less experience democracy in daily life. In the Netherlands, after the final year of primary school, at the age of 12, students are already selected for pre-vocational education or for one of the levels of general secondary education in preparation for higher education. These tracks are often organized at different locations, which enables us to make a clear comparison between students of different educational tracks. The results show that in activities outside of school, adolescents in the pre-academic track experience more opportunities to develop democratic attitudes as compared to those in the pre-vocational track. Within the school, we found similar results. Especially at an older age, students in the PA-track often discuss everyday situations and political events in school, while those in the PV-track lack such experiences. Taken from the reported experiences of these young people, we conclude that school tend to reproduce or even exacerbate differences among students from different educational tracks.

Before discussing these findings in the light of previous studies, we pay attention to the limitations of our study. First, we conducted in-depth interviews with a small

number of adolescents in the Netherlands, which only allows for a cautious interpretation of the results. Second, we have not observed adolescent behavior in their everyday life, which means it is possible that differences exist between their reported experiences and what actually occurs in social settings. Third, we asked adolescents to reflect on their democratic experiences in the past months, and they may have difficulties remembering what has happened during those periods. With the design of our research, we tried to counter these limitations. We selected a diverse sample of adolescents from many walks of life and from schools with diverse characteristics (in student population and denomination) and from various geographical locations. That these findings were observable in various locations indicates these are present in many schools in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the results are in line with studies in other countries where relationships are also found for social milieu and political discussions at home (e.g., Jennings et al., 2009, Schulz et al., 2010) and for different types of citizenship education for different groups of students (e.g., Ichilov, 2003). Therefore, there are good reasons to expect that the results of this study do not only hold for these forty adolescents.

Our study underlines the importance of civic education in schools. Because differences between adolescents exist in the possibilities to develop democratic attitudes, the public institution of education should create opportunities for all young people to experience aspects of democracy on a regular basis. From previous studies, we can conclude that schools are able to contribute to the students' democratic attitudes by creating a democratic classroom climate, by helping students learn about society through a formalized curriculum, and by providing them with opportunities to reflect on extra-curricular activities (e.g., Geboers et al., 2013; Isac et al., 2013). This promise, however, is not fulfilled by the schools in our study. The students in the PA-track stated, especially when in tenth grade, that they often discussed social and political issues and events, such as elections, particularly in courses with related topics (civics, history or religious education). Those in the PV-track reported that they hardly talked about these topics in eighth or tenth grade. As a consequence, there has not been an objective public authority that has provided these students with a framework to think about events, such as national elections that are pivotal in a democratic process during these years, which are crucial for their political socialization (e.g., Prior, 2012; Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014; Sears & Levy, 2003).

Many scholars have emphasized that adolescents develop attitudes towards democracy and civic engagement in everyday mediating institutions (Flanagan, 2013; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Gimpel et al., 2003; Sapiro, 2004). In this regard, our research paints a pessimistic picture about what adolescents from the lower educational track learn about democracy. Their relatively limited possibilities to experience and learn about democracy can result in different views on the importance of democracy and

citizenship (Elchardus et al., 2013; Janmaat, Mostafa, & Hoskins, 2014; Torney-Purta, 2002). It is worth investigating what kind of image young people from different educational tracks develop of democracy, decision-making, and the necessity of civic engagement during adolescence.

That adolescents' experiences with democracy in the school settings varies strongly and even exacerbate existing inequalities hamper equal opportunities to participate in politics. While our study indicates that there are several opportunities for teachers in both pre-vocational and pre-academic education to pay attention to aspects of democracy, only teachers in the higher educational track seem to discuss political or controversial issues with their students. At least in the perspective of the students, topics related to democracy and citizenship are hardly discussed. Only when directly connected to the content of a (History, Civics or Religious Education) class and/or the final exam do teachers pay attention to these topics. The lack of compensation of differences between students is, in our view, in part due to the rather marginal position of citizenship education in the curriculum. Equality in opportunities for all adolescents would require more thorough attention to citizenship issues, especially in the later years of secondary education.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

#### BECOMING A DEMOCRATIC CITIZEN

How young people perceive democracy and citizenship has long been the subject of academic and public debate, partly because there are doubts about the extent to which adolescents today are positively orientated towards democratic citizenship (Galston, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Ribeiro, Malafaia, Neves, Ferreira, & Menezes, 2015). It is considered important that the new generation also endorses democratic values. Young people should be prepared to be actively involved in society, to take the interests of others into account, and accept that there are views in the public domain with which they (fundamentally) disagree (Dahl, 1998; Galston, 1991; Held, 2006; Kymlicka, 2001; Shils, 1991). In arguing about democratic issues, adolescents have to deal with competing principles, such as freedom and equality, majority decisions, and minority rights, and the power of arguments and the power of numbers. Theoretical approaches indicate that democratic reasoning is usually complex in the sense that competing principles should be taken into consideration (e.g. Pennock, 1979; Thomassen, 2007). This places high demands on adolescents' views and attitudes.

This dissertation reported on research that considers adolescents' views on democracy. Particular attention was paid to decision-making, discussions, and social and political engagement as central aspects of democracy. The central research question was:

*What are the views and experiences of adolescents regarding democracy and decision-making, and how do these develop over time?*

In this chapter, the most important results and implications of the study will be discussed.

#### **Summary of the Findings**

Twenty adolescents from pre-vocational education and twenty adolescents from pre-academic education participated in this study. They were interviewed twice; once when in the second grade of secondary education (thirteen to fifteen years of age; 2011) and again two years later (2013). This stage in life is of great importance for the development of attitudes regarding democratic citizenship (Neundorf, Smets, & Garcia-Albacete, 2013; Prior, 2010; Sapiro, 2004; Sears & Levy, 2003). Furthermore, during the first years of secondary education, mandatory aims are set that focus on citizenship education. In the third or fourth grade, all students take the subject 'Civics' ('Maatschappijleer'), which has a strong focus on the political dimen-

sion of democratic citizenship (Education Council of the Netherlands, 2012; Maslowski, Van der Werf, Oonk, Naayer, & Isac, 2012). The adolescents were asked to discuss their views regarding democracy in everyday life, their perspectives on political democracy, and their interpretation of the concept of democracy. Furthermore, I talked with the adolescents about their experiences with democracy in their daily lives, and in school especially.

The results regarding different aspects of becoming a democratic citizen were presented over five chapters, with the central findings summarized below. Chapter 2 examined what the daily lives of young people in the second year of secondary education looks like in terms of democracy and collective decision-making. This chapter answered the following questions: *What possibilities do school, associational life, family life, and peers offer adolescents to develop positive attitudes concerning democratic decision-making? What are the differences between adolescents in terms of their educational track?* The results show that young people have limited opportunities to gain positive experiences of democratic decision-making and having a voice in their daily lives. At school, school leaders or teachers usually make the decisions, with students' views sometimes taken into account. Whenever young people can reach a decision together, in the experience of the adolescents they will do so by casting a vote; extensive deliberation or trying to find consensus is the exception rather than the rule. In associational life, adults make the decisions with little room for collective decision-making by the adolescents. From the perspective of the adolescents, they are being listened to at home, and consensus is often sought. Among friends, the young people have similar experiences. I found little variation between adolescents in different educational tracks. Based on these results, I conclude that these young people, especially at school and in associational life, have few opportunities to participate in democratic decision-making, and therefore have limited experience of the complexity of democracy.

In the third chapter, I investigated the adolescents' preferences regarding collective decision-making: *Which types of decision-making do adolescents from different educational tracks prefer in everyday situations in comparison with their views on decision-making in political democracy and their interpretation of the concept of democracy?* This chapter also focused on the adolescents during second year of secondary education. The results reveal that the young people have democratic views concerning situations that can arise in the classroom. When thinking about decision-making, these adolescents do not focus on their private interests, but instead concentrate on public interests. Most young people, from both educational tracks, have preferences related to majority decision-making, smaller groups of youths have preferences related to consensual decision-making or deliberative decision-making. Some of the adolescents then emphasize multiple and conflicting democratic principles, such as majority prefer-

ences and minority interests, or power of arguments and power of numbers. When making a decision, others focus on one principle only. For example, they solely stress a preference for the majority to make a decision, and do not pay attention to the arguments put forward or the interests of minorities.

The views of young people on collective decision-making in everyday situations are usually rich and multidimensional. However, this is much less the case when it comes to decision-making in parliament and the concept of democracy. This particularly holds among adolescents in pre-vocational education. A substantial number of interviewees are unable to formulate their preferences regarding parliamentary decision-making, and/or do not have an explicit image of the concept of democracy. The others mostly formulate the same considerations for decision-making in parliament and within the classroom; the majority decides, for example. Those who are able to provide a description of their interpretation of democracy often do so by naming one single aspect, such as majority voting or freedom of expression. In sum, the results show that the adolescents' views on democracy in everyday life are richer and more multidimensional than their perspectives on decision-making in parliament and the (formal) concept of democracy. This is primarily the case for young people in pre-vocational education who have limited comprehension of political democracy.

Chapter 4 further elaborated on these findings by examining the development of the views of young people between fourteen and sixteen years old regarding democratic decision-making. The following research question was formulated: *Do adolescents, with age, become more familiar with the political domain, and do they develop more complex views regarding democratic decision-making?* The results reveal that the adolescents, as expected, become more familiar with politics and democracy as they grow older. This is especially the case for young people in pre-academic education. However, their views do not simultaneously become more multidimensional. Becoming more familiar with politics does not, for these pre-academic students, go hand in hand with an increase in the complexity of their views. Strikingly, those in the pre-vocational track, more often stick to their initial multidimensional views on decision-making; they still take several principles into account, such as finding agreement, the interests of minorities, and the preferences of the majority. Among those adolescents in the pre-academic track who become more familiar with politics, however, a trend of focusing solely on the principle of majority voting is observable, both in daily life and in political democracy. From their perspective, the sole focus of politics is on the preferences of the majority, and this is exactly what democracy involves. They translate this one-dimensional conception of democratic decision-making to how they view everyday situations. Their initial, more multidimensional, views on decision-making in everyday life are colonized by a 'flat' perception of the

workings of political democracy. Therefore, the results of this study demonstrate that young people do not naturally ‘grow into politics.’ With the advancing of the years, they do not naturally translate their more complex ideas about decision-making in everyday life to (the principles of) political democracy. Rather, there is a reversed development, as the adolescents’ perception of the functioning of political democracy permeates their thinking on democratic issues in everyday situations.

In Chapter 5, I investigated whether similar developments occur for other central aspects of democratic citizenship, namely a willingness to be socially and politically engaged, being focused on public interests, and a reflexive interpretation of freedom of expression. *How do adolescents from different educational tracks view important aspects of citizenship, and how do these develop over time?* The results provided in this chapter show that adolescents in pre-academic education develop a stronger social and political engagement as they grow older. They consider active participation in politics especially suitable for people with a higher educational level. In addition, as they age they focus more strongly on procedural aspects when dealing with social or political issues. When arguing about situations that concern public interests, pre-academic students focus, with age, predominantly on procedural aspects. In their view, the majority should simply decide. In terms of issues related to the freedom of expression, they almost exclusively emphasize the opportunities that people have to give their opinions, while paying little attention to the sensitivities of others. In the views of adolescents in the pre-academic educational track, we can identify a *procedural republican* type of citizenship.

Adolescents in the pre-vocational track do not become more socially and/or politically engaged. They feel it is important that people help each other, but do not attach much importance to political participation or social participation beyond their own community. Instead, their engagement translates into taking care of one another by paying attention to everyone’s well-being. To the extent that they consider political participation important, their view is that this holds for all citizens equally. When arguing about social and political issues, it can be recognized that these adolescents place a stronger emphasis on inclusivity; from their perspective, the public interest is best served by taking into account everyone’s interests and trying to find consensus. Thereby, an *inclusive communitarian* type of citizenship seems to dominate the views of those in the pre-vocational track.

Together with differences in perspectives regarding citizenship among those from pre-academic education and pre-vocational education, this study also identified clear gender differences. When growing older, the boys develop views with a strong emphasis on competition and formal democratic procedures to a greater extent. The proper solution for a social or political issue can, in their view, be found when the correct procedures are followed. Girls to a greater extent remain their focus on

inclusivity and consensus. When dealing with social and political issues, they consider it of particular importance that the interests and sensitivities of all those involved are taken into account.

To gain insights into the role of the school regarding the opportunities adolescents have to develop democratic views, in the sixth and final empirical chapter of this dissertation I returned to the experiences of young people. The research question was: *What are the experiences of adolescents from different educational tracks with democracy in everyday life, and do schools provide opportunities for those who have less experience of democracy in other settings?* For finding an answer to this question I investigated young people's experiences of decision-making, having discussions, and being encouraged to be social and political engaged when in the second and fourth grades. The results show that adolescents in pre-academic education experience democracy outside of school with more regularity than their pre-vocational education peers. The pre-academic students indicate that they regularly discuss daily activities and social and political issues with friends and family; however, this holds to a much lesser extent for those in pre-vocational education.

Just as at home and with friends, those in the higher track report having more regular positive experiences of democracy at school than their peers in the lower track. Students in the pre-academic track feel that teachers of subjects such as History and Civics regularly encourage them to discuss everyday activities in the school. Those in the pre-vocational track note that there is far less scope in their classes to discuss such topics. When it comes to talking about politics, I found similar results. In the fourth grade especially, those adolescents in the pre-academic track are often encouraged to talk about social and political issues. For example, they discussed the 2012 parliamentary elections in the Netherlands extensively in the classroom. Pre-vocational students state that they hardly talk about politics, and the 2012 parliamentary elections were barely discussed in class. In sum, the results shows that in the second grade, differences exist in the opportunities for young people to have positive experiences with democracy. In the fourth grade, these differences manifest themselves to an even greater extent. Schools within the pre-vocational educational track seem less able to offer opportunities for their students to gain positive experiences with democracy.

## Overall Conclusions

The central research question of this dissertation was: *What are the views and experiences of adolescents regarding democracy and decision-making, and how do these develop over time?* The five empirical chapters collectively answered this question. This research has shown that adolescents in both pre-vocational and pre-academic educational tracks have democratic views about decision-making in everyday life and the politi-

cal domain. The adolescents' views on democracy in everyday life are rich and mostly multidimensional, which means they are well able to formulate their preferences, provide answers to questions, explain their views, and take several democratic principles into account. However, this is much less the case with regard to decision-making issues related to political democracy. Although these adolescents, and especially the pre-academic students at a later age, are better able to explain their preferences, they have difficulties in explaining their views about democracy, politics, and parliament. Politics continues to be, especially for pre-vocational students, an abstract domain. Contrary to expectations, the adolescents do not develop more complex views as they grow older. The pre-academic students that become more familiar with politics predominantly start to focus more strongly on only one democratic principle. Their initial rich views about everyday situations are colonized by the way they perceive political democracy.

Young peoples' experiences of democracy in everyday life provide greater insight into the background of the observed trend of them having one-dimensional views. This study shows that adolescents from both educational tracks have only limited experiences with democracy at school and in other social contexts (such as at home and in associational life). In their experience, they seldom encounter the complex character of democracy. Combined with the one-sided image that pre-academic students in particular develop of the workings of political democracy, this explains the diminishing of complexity in the views of adolescents in the higher educational tracks.

Finally, in this dissertation I have found no evidence that schools compensate for inequalities in students' experiences of democracy outside of school. Between the second and fourth grade, the differences in experiences between students from different tracks are increasing, and schools seem to be reinforcing these differences. The possibilities that exist for schools to provide their students with positive experiences of democracy (such as letting students participate in decision-making and discussions about society) are not fully utilized. Schools offering pre-vocational education especially do not seem to be relevant arenas for young people to learn to reflect on democratic issues and to develop positive attitudes towards democracy.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The strengths and limitations of this study relate primarily to its qualitative and longitudinal character. The qualitative design made it possible to obtain in-depth insights into how young people think about issues regarding democratic citizenship, meaning the study provides a view of the underlying motives of the young people's views and experiences. The longitudinal character of the study allowed for establishing how these views and experiences developed over time. Therefore, the develop-

ment trajectories of individual adolescents concerning democracy, citizenship, and politics become clear. The longitudinal perspective enabled me to determine whether experiences with democracy change at various stages of adolescence.

Another contribution of this study to the research domain of political socialization is the manner through which the reasoning of young people has been investigated in terms of democracy. Most often, adolescents' views are investigated in the context of political democracy. Issues of democracy in that domain are, however, for most adolescents, abstract; they find it uninteresting and it carries little meaning to them. In this study, the interviewees were questioned primarily about aspects of democracy (decision-making and discussion) in everyday life. Consequently, I was able to discuss democratic issues in a way that made sense to the adolescents.

This study also has limitations. Due to its small scale, the results regarding differences for educational track, age, and gender cannot be one-to-one generalized to the broader adolescent population in the Netherlands. However, choosing for a selective and diverse sample (Creswell, 2013) (regarding educational track, gender, religiosity, social milieu, location, and school characteristics) helped me to identify the perspectives on, and experiences with, democracy of adolescents from many walks of life in the Netherlands. That I found quite a number of similar results in the views and experiences of young people with considerable diverging background characteristics is an indication that the observed patterns also exist among other groups. A quantitative study should examine whether this is indeed the case.

Another limitation concerns the study's time frame. I examined the views and experiences of young people when they were in the second and fourth grades of secondary school. This study has not rendered insights into how the views and experiences will develop when they grow into adulthood. During the first years of adulthood, people experience drastic changes, such as leaving home, beginning tertiary education, entering the labor market, and having the right to vote. These changes may affect the political socialization of adolescents (García-Albacete, Lorente, & Martín, 2016), and I cannot indicate how the adolescents' views may change when they encounter such experiences.

Finally, it might be seen as a limitation that this study used self-reporting to determine the experiences of young people. I have not observed the adolescents or talked to their teachers, friends, or parents, and therefore only have information from the adolescents themselves about what is taking place in their daily lives. As is always the case with research based on self-reporting, there may be a difference between what adolescents have reported and what actually happens. The perception of youth is, by definition, subjective. However, that young people in the same class formulate to a large extent similar experiences of the school context is indicative of a truthful reflection of their experiences. The results of this dissertation are also in line with previous

research that focused on the goals that schools set for citizenship education (Ten Dam & Volman, 2003), and the goals teachers claim to set for citizenship (Leenders, Veugelers, & De Kat, 2008). These are also indications that I have gathered a realistic reflection of what is taking place in schools in the Netherlands.

## Discussion

The results and conclusions of this dissertation have several implications for the political socialization research field and the practice of citizenship education in schools. These implications are discussed below.

### *Implications for the Study of Political Socialization*

This study contributes to the research domain by broadening its perspective and questioning some assumptions.

#### *Broadening the perspective*

In several ways, this dissertation has broadened the research-based approach concerning adolescents' views on democratic citizenship. First, when investigating adolescents' democratic attitudes, most studies focus solely on political democracy. Young adolescents are asked about their interpretation of the concept of democracy, whether they will vote when they turn eighteen, whether politicians will listen to people like them, and even if they trust the European parliament (e.g. Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2011; Keating et al., 2010; Schulz et al., 2010; Torney-Purta, 2001). For young people, these are rather abstract elements of the institutional structure of political democracy, and many studies show that young people have little knowledge of such institutions (Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2011; Schulz et al., 2010). *The International Citizenship and Civic Education Study* reported that in the Netherlands, as in some other countries, a substantial proportion of young people score below the basic proficiency level that is necessary to participate actively in politics. This is particularly true for students in the pre-vocational educational track (Maslowski et al., 2012; Schulz et al., 2010).

That everyday life is the focus of this dissertation is a broadening of the dominant research perspective on democratic citizenship, and because of this orientation I was able to discuss complex issues of collective decision-making with young people who are relatively uninterested in, and ignorant about, politics and democracy. The results show that young people are positively oriented towards democratic ways of decision-making. Adolescents are able to provide arguments for both their preferences and the consequences of these inclinations. This approach has proven valuable for studying democratic citizenship. The dissertation builds upon the few studies that have also shown that the utilization of issues from everyday life can be a meaningful

route along which adolescent views on abstract themes can be investigated, such as power relations, having a voice, and social engagement (Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009; Lawy & Biesta, 2006).

Because of the open questions in the interview, young people were able to formulate their perspectives on democracy and decision-making. Consequently, they were able to formulate views that are not in line with how these are usually measured. Previous studies have often adopted a majoritarian perspective on democracy by emphasizing voting and majority decisions, and neglected elements of other models of democracy, such as negotiating, striving for consensus, or deliberation (e.g. Kinoshita, 2006; Schulz et al., 2010). This study has shown that young adolescents from both pre-vocational and pre-academic educational tracks also hold views related to consensus democracy or deliberative democracy. This means that a one-sided research emphasis on aspects of a majority democracy disregards some of the adolescents' views on democracy. For the few studies that examined the preferences of young people with regard to various models of democracy adolescents from higher social milieus were almost exclusively selected (Helwig & Kim, 1999; Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2003). This brings me to a third contribution to the research domain. Adolescents from both pre-vocational and pre-academic educational tracks participated in this study. Young people from higher social backgrounds are overrepresented in pre-academic education, while young people from lower social milieus dominate pre-vocational education (OECD, 2014; Bol, Witschge, Van de Werfhorst, & Dronkers, 2014). Therefore, this study contributes to the broadening of the research domain on political socialization by revealing that rich views about democratic decision-making are not reserved for the more highly educated or those from higher social milieus.

### *Questioning 'growing into politics'*

Previous studies indicated that the views of adolescents become more complex as they grow older because they come to consider several democratic principles and account for the social context in which an issue exists (Adelson, 1971; Flanagan, 2013; Greenstein, 1966; Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Kinoshita, 1989, 2006; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984; Moessinger, 1981; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981). Over time young people become more aware of the complexity of society and of the political domain, which can be seen as a process of 'growing into politics' (Abendschön, 2013; Adelson, 1971; Adelson & O'Neil, 1966; Greenstein, 1966; Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003; Gallatin & Adelson, 1971; Greenstein, 1966; Neundorf et al., 2013; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981). These developments particularly apply to adolescents in higher educational tracks, as these young people endorse the 'good citizenship val-

ues,' such as tolerance, political interest, political self-efficacy, and the importance of pluralism (Converse, 1971; Lijphart, 1997; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1989; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Verba, 1996).

The results of this dissertation paint a different picture. With age, many adolescents develop a rather one-dimensional perspective of the workings of political democracy (democracy equals majority decisions). This perspective then 'colonized' their initial multidimensional views on decision-making in everyday situations, which is especially the case for the students in pre-academic education. The adolescents in pre-vocational education continue to emphasize several principles, such as majority voting and minority rights, the quest for consensus, and the importance of collective decision-making. The democratic views of those in the lower educational tracks are, to a large extent, consistent with theoretical perspectives, which indicates that democratic reasoning should always take into account several principles (e.g. Pennock, 1979; Thomassen, 2007).

Young people in higher and lower education tracks have different preferences regarding their engagement in creating a just society. Many adolescents find it important to be involved, but have different views about the social context in which people should be active. Students in the pre-academic track believe that a better society can be created by participating in politics; those in pre-vocational education state that this can primarily be achieved by being active in everyday social contexts, such as the neighborhood or voluntary organizations. Therefore, this research also finds that the views of those in pre-academic education differ from those of their peers in pre-vocational education, but that these cannot, from a theoretical or moral perspective, be seen as 'better' views.

The observed trend of a greater (exclusive) emphasis on the right of the majority to make decisions is remarkable in relation to the Dutch political culture, which is characterized traditionally by a strong emphasis on consensus, compromises, and coalitions (e.g. Lijphart, 1999, 2008). The discrepancy between the traditional political culture in the Netherlands and the direction in which the democratic views of these adolescents develop can be interpreted in light of their experiences in everyday life, as discussed above. However, the greater emphasis on majority rule may itself be an indication of changes in the Dutch political culture and news coverage thereof. Research shows that characteristics of a majoritarian democracy have also become more prominent in the Dutch parliamentary democracy during the past twenty years. Besides the still-existing coalition-based government, there is more emphasis on competition between political parties, on winning elections, and small majorities in parliament that do not search for wider support when deciding on new policies (Hendriks & Michels, 2012; Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011). The adolescents' perceived emphasis on majority rule may be an indication that the media provides them

with an image of democracy that focuses on the idea that it is primarily concerned with majority preferences. However, several studies show that in recent years in newspapers and on television news there has been no trend for a stronger focus on aspects connected to majority democracy, such as drawing attention to conflicts between political parties (Takens, Van Atteveldt, Van Hooff, & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013; Vliegthart, Orchards, & Bouman, 2011). Yet, this may not be the case with other (social) media, which is used mainly by young people (Shehata, Ekstrom, & Olsson, 2015; Stoker & Bass, 2011). Therefore, it is important to investigate what kind of information young people receive about democracy through channels other than newspapers and television news, and what impact this has on their views.

### **Citizenship Education: Implications for Research and Practice**

The results of this dissertation also have implications for both research into, and the practice of, citizenship education. These are discussed in this section.

#### *Suggestions for Further Research*

I have discussed subjects for further research throughout this dissertation. These concerned international comparative, quantitative studies with the aim of determining whether the results of this study also apply to other groups of adolescents, observational studies to establish what the daily lives of young people look like, and longitudinal studies that follow young people over a longer period. Here, I focus on the theme of citizenship education.

First, more research should be conducted to consider the ways in which citizenship education can be more effective. The results of this dissertation reveal that young people – in pre-academic education but especially in pre-vocational education – have only limited opportunities in school to gain experience of, and learn about, democratic citizenship. This indicates that the possibilities therefore are not, or only to a limited extent, being utilized. Both in the curriculum and in how teachers interact with students, this study demonstrates that there are nevertheless opportunities for young people to have positive experiences with democratic citizenship. Individual studies and systematic literature reviews show that education may affect students' citizenship through the curriculum (citizenship as a subject matter) and by having a democratic classroom climate with room for discussion and hearing students' voices (Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, & Ten Dam, 2012; Campbell, 2008; Feldman, Pasek, Romer, & Hall Jamieson, 2007; Fjeldstad & Mikkelsen, 2003; Isac, Maslowski, Creemer, & Van der Werf, 2013; McDevitt & Kioussis, 2007; Yang & Chung, 2009). Research can provide more insights into the ways in which an effective curriculum can be designed and how abstract concepts of democratic citizenship can be presented to students in a meaningful way. In addition, studies can contribute

to the further development of a democratic educational climate. This usually involves the exchange of views and the ability of students to have a say (e.g. Isac et al., 2012; Torney-Purta, 2001). This dissertation has shown that young people, and those in pre-vocational education in particular, have limited experiences with such a pedagogical climate. Specifically, research can consider the development of an (effective) democratic classroom climate and the way in which young people can gain positive experiences of dealing with conflicting democratic principles (such as consensus or majority decision). Attention should also be paid to how such an environment is designed, and focus on how young people who are not used to democratic methods can be encouraged to participate in a dialogue.

Second, more attention should be paid to the role schools play regarding differences between young people of various educational tracks. Previous studies, and this dissertation, show that citizenship education differs greatly between higher and lower educational tracks (Ichilov, 2003; Leenders et al., 2008; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003), and that relationships exist between educational level and citizenship attitudes (Elchardus et al., 2013; Hooghe, Marien, & Quintelier, 2012; Janmaat et al., 2014; Persson, 2012, 2014; Torney-Purta, 2002; Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 2001). Although this topic has received much scholarly attention in previous decades (e.g. Almond & Verba, 1963; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Lijphart, 1997; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996), much remains unclear about the specific role of schools in developing students' citizenship in higher and lower education tracks, and the underlying reasons for this. Therefore, it is important to investigate what students from different tracks both intentionally and unintentionally learn about their potential role as citizens in a democratic society.

There are differences in adolescents' political interest and engagement in higher and lower education levels, as has been described in detail in this dissertation. For example, those in the pre-academic track are more engaged and interested, but also assume that political participation should predominantly be reserved for the more highly educated. Where does this elitist view of political engagement come from, and what can schools do to teach students more about egalitarian perspectives on political engagement? On the other hand, the students in pre-vocational education are less interested in and engaged with politics. What has spurred the students in lower tracks who are politically engaged to become involved? How can young people learn from positive role models? Should schools provide more experiences of democracy for their students, or should they create opportunities for students to reflect on what they are already experiencing in everyday life? Such research can contribute to learning more about the barriers that impede the less well educated from becoming politically engaged.

### *Implications for the Practice of Citizenship Education*

Finally, this dissertation has implications for citizenship education in schools. A first suggestion for educational practice focuses on what is taught regarding citizenship in schools. A long tradition of educational research shows that an important prerequisite for deep learning is that the class contents are recognizable and meaningful for students. Subsequently, a link can be made with subjects that students find more abstract (e.g. Pintrich, 2003; Randler & Bogner, 2007; Volman, 2011). The question is, does citizenship education in the Netherlands meet this condition? The findings of this dissertation show that daily experiences with democratic citizenship at school are limited. A previous study (Nieuwelink, 2008) pointed out that Civics textbooks on politics and democracy that are often used in Dutch secondary education pay scant attention to issues and topics that students can make sense of. These textbooks almost exclusively focus on abstract concepts, institutions, and actors (such as the rule of law and the relationship between cabinet and parliament). While adolescents attach virtually no meaning to such issues (e.g. Schulz et al., 2010; Gimpel et al., 2003), the results of this dissertation do show that young people are perfectly capable of arguing about democratic issues in their daily lives. In Dutch education, this ability of adolescents and their preconceptions about democracy seem to be underused. After dealing with meaningful issues in class, topics that students find more abstract can be introduced in relation to these issues, such as elections or the rule of law.

In many European countries, including the Netherlands, political themes are considered one of the core elements of the content of citizenship education. These involve political parties, the rule of law, and civil rights (Eurydice, 2012; Maslowski et al., 2012). However, this research has shown that it is not self-evident that these kinds of themes are integral to what is being taught in schools. The adolescents indicated that as far as social and political issues are dealt with in class, this happens only in subjects that are related in terms of content (such as Civics, History, and Religious Education). That these topics are only taught in these classes is understandable, but it is also problematic because of their relatively marginal position in the curriculum. The parliamentary election of 2012, for example, was virtually ignored in the pre-vocational track classes, partly because the students often did not take any of the aforementioned subjects in the fourth grade. While this period in life is crucial for their political socialization (e.g. Prior, 2012; Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014; Sears & Levy, 2003), schools apparently did not seize the opportunity to discuss this important democratic event.

The view of the importance of students learning about elections is widely shared by teachers and schools (Maslowski et al., 2012); that this does not happen indicates a lack of a coherent approach to, and perspective of, citizenship education in schools.

This corresponds with the image that the Education Council of the Netherlands (2012) and the Dutch Inspectorate for Education (e.g. 2010, 2014) outline of the current situation concerning this education component. The introduction of obligatory educational goals for citizenship in education (2006) did not lead to an acceleration of the development of citizenship education in the Netherlands; rather, it seems to be stagnating. Many schools and teachers are struggling to grasp the meaning of citizenship, and have trouble creating a coherent program that enables students to develop their democratic citizenship further. Dutch students have in comparative perspective little knowledge of aspects of political democracy (Schulz et al., 2010), which points at the desirability for the content of citizenship to have an important place in the curriculum.

A vibrant democracy requires citizens who are socially and politically active, are focused on the public interest, are willing to participate in discussions, and recognize the complexity of democracy. This is especially the case in a society where divisions between groups seem to be increasing (e.g. Bovens, Dekker, & Tiemeijer, 2014; Kleijwegt, 2016). When tensions between groups are mounting, democratic attitudes and methods protect against social erosion. This underlines once more the importance of citizenship education during adolescence. However, this does not exist naturally. This study showed that young people in associational life, at home, and with friends have only limited experiences that can enable them to develop democratic skills and attitudes. Parents, associations, and the media should be more active in creating possibilities for adolescents to develop positive attitudes towards democracy.

Meanwhile, inside schools, attempts to further the development of democratic citizenship are often not succeeding. There are important differences between adolescents' views and experiences, and this is precisely why school leaders, teachers, and education policy-makers have the important task of strengthening citizenship education in schools by means of an improved curriculum and forming a democratic class climate. The school can be a place where all students experience the importance of democracy, and where they learn to reflect on the ways in which conflicts of interests and values can be dealt with in a political democracy. By understanding and experiencing the ways in which a democracy can work, both in everyday life and in politics, young people can further develop their own perspectives, which ideally will also reinforce their positive attitude towards democratic citizenship.

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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

### *Articles in peer-reviewed journals*

Nieuwelink, H., Dekker, P., Geijsel, F., & Ten Dam, G. (2016). 'Democracy always comes first': Adolescents' views on decision-making in everyday life and political democracy. *Journal of Youth Studies*. DOI:10.1080/13676261.2015.1136053.

Nieuwelink, H., Dekker, P., Ten Dam, G., & Geijsel, F. (2013). 'Democratie gaat altijd voor': Denkbeelden van Nederlandse jongeren over democratie en besluitvorming. [Adolescents' views on democracy and decision-making]. *Res Publica. Politiek-wetenschappelijk tijdschrift van de Lage Landen*, 55, 157-176.

### *Chapter in peer-reviewed book*

Nieuwelink, H., Dekker, P., Geijsel, F., & Ten Dam, G. (2016). Adolescents' Experiences with Democracy and Collective Decision-making in Everyday Life. In P. Thijssen, J. Siongers, J. Van Laer, J. Haers, & S. Mels (Eds.), *Political Engagement of the Young in Europe. Youth in the Crucible* (pp. 174-198). London / New York: Routledge.

### *Papers in progress*

Nieuwelink, H., Ten Dam, G., Geijsel, F., & Dekker, P. (submitted). Growing into Politics? The development of adolescents' views on democracy over time.

Nieuwelink, H., Ten Dam, G., & Dekker, P. (submitted). Adolescent citizenship and educational track: A qualitative study on the development of views on the common good.

Nieuwelink, H., Dekker, P., & Ten Dam, G. (submitted). Compensating or Reproducing? Students in different educational tracks about the role of school in experiencing democracy.

### *Conference contributions*

Nieuwelink, H., Ten Dam, G., & Dekker, P. (2015, June). *Gemiste mogelijkheden voor bevorderen democratisch burgerschap*. [Missed opportunities for fostering adolescent citizenship]. Paper presented at Onderwijs Research Dagen 2015, Leiden, the Netherlands.

Nieuwelink, H., Ten Dam, G., & Dekker, P. (2015, June). *Adolescent citizenship and educational track. A qualitative study on the development of views on the common good*. Paper presented at Politicologenetmaal 2015, Maastricht, the Netherlands.

Nieuwelink, H., Ten Dam, G., Dekker, P. (2015, May). *Missed opportunities for fostering adolescent citizenship*. Paper presented at AMCIS-LLAKES conference:

- Inequality of active citizenship: Can education mend the gap?, London, England.
- Nieuwelink, H., Ten Dam, G., Dekker, P., & Geijsel, F. (2014, September). *Development of adolescents' views on democracy over time*. Paper presented at Youth, Politics & Society conference, Leuven, Belgium.
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## CHAPTERS IN THIS DISSERTATION AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF CO-AUTHORS

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### *Contributions:*

Hessel Nieuwelink reviewed the literature, collected and analyzed the data and drafted the various versions of the manuscript. The research team for this article further consisted of Paul Dekker, Femke Geijssel and Geert ten Dam, who together supervised Hessel Nieuwelink. As in an audit procedure, the research team discussed the various steps of the research. The team collaboratively conceptualized and designed the study, deliberated about the data analysis and its outcomes. The supervisors contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the data and reviewed and revised the manuscript.

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Hessel Nieuwelink reviewed the literature, collected and analyzed the data and drafted the various versions of the manuscript. The research team for this article further consisted of Geert ten Dam and Paul Dekker, who together supervised Hessel Nieuwelink. As in an audit procedure, the research team discussed the various steps of the research. The team collaboratively conceptualized and designed the study, deliberated about the data analysis and its outcomes. The supervisors contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the data and reviewed and revised the manuscript. Femke Geijssel made a contribution in co-designing the study.

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## SAMENVATTING

### BECOMING A DEMOCRATIC CITIZEN

Hoe jongeren naar democratie en burgerschap kijken is al lange tijd onderwerp van academisch en publiek debat, mede omdat er twijfels bestaan bij de mate waarin adolescenten vandaag de dag positief staan tegenover democratisch burgerschap (Galston, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Ribeiro, Malafaia, Neves, Ferreira, & Menezes, 2015). Het wordt van belang gevonden dat de nieuwe generatie ook democratische waarden onderschrijft. Jonge mensen zouden bereid moeten zijn om als actieve burgers deel te nemen aan de samenleving, om belangen van anderen serieus te nemen en te accepteren dat in het publieke domein denkbeelden bestaan waar zij het (fundamenteel) mee oneens zijn (Dahl, 1998; Galston, 1991; Held, 2006; Kymlicka, 2001; Shils, 1991). Bij het nadenken over democratische vraagstukken moeten jongeren kunnen omgaan met principes die op gespannen voet met elkaar staan, zoals vrijheid en gelijkheid, meerderheidsbesluiten en minderheidsrechten, en macht van argumenten en macht van aantallen. In theoretische benaderingen wordt doorgaans aangegeven dat democratisch denken doorgaans complex is in de zin dat strijdige principes meegenomen moeten worden in een overweging (bijv. Pennock, 1979; Thomassen, 2007). Dit stelt dus hoge eisen aan de houdingen en denkbeelden van jongeren.

In deze dissertatie wordt verslag gedaan van een onderzoek naar de denkbeelden van jongeren over democratie. In het bijzonder is aandacht besteed aan besluitvorming, discussie en maatschappelijke en politieke betrokkenheid als belangrijke aspecten van democratie. De centrale onderzoeksvraag luidt:

*Wat zijn de denkbeelden en ervaringen van jongeren met betrekking tot democratie en hoe ontwikkelen deze zich in de tijd?*

In dit hoofdstuk worden de belangrijkste uitkomsten en de implicaties van de studie besproken.

### **Samenvatting van de bevindingen**

In deze studie participeerden twintig jongeren uit het vmbo en twintig jongeren uit het vwo. Zij zijn allemaal tweemaal geïnterviewd: toen zij in de tweede klas van de middelbare school zaten (13 tot 15 jaar; 2011) en twee jaar later (2013). Voor de ontwikkeling van houdingen en denkbeelden tegenover democratisch burgerschap is deze leeftijdsfase zeer belangrijk (Neundorf, Smets, & Garcia-Albacete, 2013; Prior, 2010; Sapiro, 2004; Sears & Levy, 2003). Bovendien besteden scholen gedurende deze jaren ook verplicht aandacht aan democratisch burgerschap. Voor de onderbouw van het voortgezet onderwijs bestaan kerndoelen gericht op deze the-

matiek en in de derde of vierde klas krijgen leerlingen het vak maatschappijleer waarin vooral de politieke dimensie van democratisch burgerschap centraal staat (Onderwijsraad, 2012). De adolescenten zijn bevraagd over hun denkbeelden ten opzichte van democratie in het dagelijks leven, hun perspectieven op politieke democratie en de betekenis die zij geven aan het concept democratie. Daarnaast heb ik met jongeren gesproken over hun ervaringen met aspecten van democratie in hun dagelijks leven en met name in de school.

In vijf hoofdstukken zijn de bevindingen gepresenteerd over verschillende aspecten van het toegroeien naar democratisch burgerschap. De belangrijkste bevindingen worden hieronder samengevat. In hoofdstuk twee is nagegaan hoe het dagelijks leven van jongeren in de tweede klas van het voortgezet onderwijs eruit ziet wat betreft democratie en besluitvorming. Dit hoofdstuk gaf antwoord op de volgende vraag: *Welke mogelijkheden bieden school, verenigingsleven, familie en vrienden om positieve houdingen over democratische besluitvorming te ontwikkelen? Welke verschillen bestaan er tussen jongeren van verschillende onderwijstypen?* De resultaten laten zien dat de jongeren beperkte mogelijkheden geboden wordt om in hun dagelijks leven positieve ervaringen op te doen met democratische besluitvorming en te kunnen opkomen voor eigen standpunten en belangen. Op school worden de besluiten meestal door schoolleiders of docenten genomen. Daarbij worden soms de standpunten van leerlingen meegenomen. Als leerlingen al samen een besluit konden nemen dan gebeurde dat in de ervaring van de leerlingen veelal door te stemmen; uitgebreid daarover delibereren of pogingen doen om overeenstemming te bereiken is eerder uitzondering dan regel. Ook in het verenigingsleven namen volwassenen vrijwel altijd de besluiten en was er eveneens weinig ruimte voor collectieve besluitvorming. Thuis wordt er in de beleving van jongeren wel goed naar hen geluisterd en wordt veelal consensus gezocht. Met vrienden gaat dat op een vergelijkbare manier. Ik heb vrijwel geen verschillen gevonden tussen jongeren van verschillende onderwijstype. Hun ervaringen komen grotendeels overeen. Op basis van deze resultaten concludeer ik dat deze jongeren, met name op school en in het verenigingsleven, beperkte ervaringen met democratische besluitvorming hebben en daardoor weinig meekrijgen van de complexiteit van democratie.

In het derde hoofdstuk ging ik verder in op de voorkeuren van jongeren met betrekking tot het proces van collectieve besluitvorming: *Wat zijn de voorkeuren van jongeren van verschillende onderwijstypen over besluitvorming in situaties in het dagelijks leven in vergelijking met hun denkbeelden over besluitvorming in politieke democratie en hun interpretatie van het begrip democratie?* Ook deze deelstudie richtte zich op jongeren in de tweede klas van het voortgezet onderwijs. De resultaten laten zien dat de jongeren democratische denkbeelden hebben over situaties die zich in de klas (kunnen) voordoen. Bij het nadenken over besluitvorming stellen de jongeren niet hun eigen

belangen centraal maar kijken naar manieren waarop het algemeen belang gediend kan worden. De meeste jongeren, en dit geldt voor beide onderwijstypen, prefereren meerderheidsbesluitvorming. Een kleinere groep jongeren heeft voorkeuren voor consensus besluitvorming of deliberatieve besluitvorming. Een deel van de jongeren legt vervolgens nadruk op meerdere en strijdige democratische principes, zoals meerderheidswens en minderheidsbelang, macht van de argumenten en macht van de aantallen. Andere jongeren richten zich bij het nemen van een besluit uitsluitend op één principe. Zij benadrukken bijvoorbeeld enkel de wens van de meerderheid om een besluit te nemen en letten daarbij niet op de argumenten die aangedragen worden of de belangen die minderheden hebben.

De denkbeelden van de jongeren over besluitvorming in dagelijkse situaties zijn doorgaans rijk en multidimensionaal. Dit is echter veel minder het geval als het gaat over besluitvorming in het parlement en het concept democratie. Dit geldt met name voor de jongeren in het vmbo. Een substantiële groep geïnterviewden kan geen voorkeuren verwoorden ten aanzien van parlementaire besluitvorming en/of heeft geen expliciete beelden bij het concept democratie. De anderen formuleren doorgaans dezelfde overwegingen voor besluitvorming in het parlement als binnen de klas: de meerderheid beslist, bijvoorbeeld. Wie in staat is het begrip democratie nader in te vullen, doet dat veelal door één enkel aspect ervan te benoemen, zoals meerderheidsbesluitvorming of vrijheid van meningsuiting. Samenvattend laten de resultaten zien dat denkbeelden van jongeren over democratie in het alledaagse leven rijker zijn dan hun perspectieven op besluitvorming in het parlement en op het (formele) concept van democratie. Dit is vooral het geval bij jongeren in het voorbereidend beroepsonderwijs.

Deze bevindingen zijn verder uitgewerkt in hoofdstuk vier waar de ontwikkeling van de denkbeelden van jongeren tussen veertien en zestien jaar over democratische besluitvorming zijn onderzocht. In dit hoofdstuk stond de volgende vraag centraal: *Worden jongeren wanneer zij ouder worden meer bekend met het politieke domein en ontwikkelen zij meer complexe denkbeelden over democratische besluitvorming?* De resultaten laten zien dat de jongeren, zoals verwacht, bekender worden met politiek en democratie naarmate zij ouder worden. Dit geldt vooral voor de jongeren in het vwo. De eerder geconstateerde multidimensionaliteit in het denken van de jongeren neemt echter niet gelijktijdig toe. Meer bekendheid met de politiek gaat niet hand in hand met toenemende complexiteit in hun denkbeelden. Opvallenderwijs houden juist jongeren in het vmbo vaker vast aan denkbeelden waarin zij niet kiezen voor één principe van democratie maar meerdere principes meenemen, zoals het vinden van overeenstemming of het meenemen van zowel de belangen van minderheden als de wensen van de meerderheid. Bij de vwo-jongeren die blijk geven van een grotere bekendheid met de politiek, is daarentegen een trend te vinden richting het uitslui-

tend nadruk leggen op meerderheidsbesluitvorming, zowel in het dagelijks leven als in het domein van de politieke democratie. In hun ogen wordt in de politiek alleen gelet op de meerderheidswens en dat is dan ook waar het volgens hen bij democratie om gaat. Deze eendimensionale opvatting van democratische besluitvorming vertalen zij vervolgens naar alledaagse situaties. Hun aanvankelijke, meer multidimensionale denkbeelden over besluitvorming in het dagelijks leven worden gekoloniseerd door een ‘platte’ voorstelling van de werking van de politieke democratie. De uitkomsten van dit onderzoek laten daarmee zien dat jongeren niet vanzelfsprekend ‘de politiek ingroeien’. Hun meer complexe denkbeelden over collectieve besluitvorming in het dagelijks leven vertalen zij met het vorderen der jaren niet naar de (principes van) politieke democratie. Er is eerder sprake van een omgekeerde beweging. De manier waarop jongeren kijken naar de werking van de politieke democratie dringt door in het denken van jongeren over democratische vraagstukken in alledaagse situaties.

In hoofdstuk vijf is onderzocht of vergelijkbare ontwikkelingen plaatsvinden voor andere centrale aspecten van democratisch burgerschap: bereidheid tot maatschappelijke en politieke betrokkenheid, gerichtheid op algemeen belang en een reflexieve interpretatie van vrijheid van meningsuiting. *Hoe denken jongeren van verschillende onderwijstypen over centrale aspecten van burgerschap en hoe ontwikkelen deze zich in de tijd?* De resultaten van het hoofdstuk laten zien dat jongeren in het vwo een sterkere maatschappelijke en politieke betrokkenheid ontwikkelen naarmate zij ouder worden. Actieve participatie in de politiek achten zij bovendien vooral geschikt voor mensen met een hogere opleiding. Daarnaast leggen zij op latere leeftijd sterker de nadruk op procedurele aspecten in de omgang met sociale of politieke vraagstukken. Vwo’ers leggen vooral de nadruk op procedures wanneer zij redeneren over omgaan met vraagstukken betreffende het algemeen belang. De meerderheid moet simpelweg beslissen. Bij vraagstukken over de vrijheid van meningsuiting benadrukken zij vervolgens vrijwel uitsluitend de mogelijkheden die mensen hebben om hun mening te geven, terwijl zij zo goed als geen aandacht besteden aan de gevoeligheden van anderen. In de denkbeelden van jongeren in het vwo is daarmee een *procedureel republikeins* type van burgerschap te herkennen.

De jongeren in het vmbo laten een minder sterke ontwikkeling zien richting maatschappelijke en politieke betrokkenheid. Zij vinden het belangrijk dat mensen elkaar helpen, maar blijven weinig waarde hechten aan politieke participatie. Hun betrokkenheid schuilt meer in het zorgen voor hun naasten door op ieders welbevinden te letten. Voor zover zij politieke participatie belangrijk vinden, geldt dit in hun visie voor alle burgers in gelijke mate. Bij het nadenken over sociale en politieke vraagstukken is er bij deze jongeren een grotere nadruk op inclusiviteit te herkennen: het algemeen belang kan in hun ogen het beste gediend worden door ieders

belangen mee te nemen en naar consensus te zoeken. In de denkbeelden van jongeren in het vmbo is daarmee een *inclusief communitaristisch* type van burgerschap te herkennen.

Naast verschillen tussen vwo-jongeren en vmbo-jongeren in hoe zij naar burgerschap kijken, zijn er in dit onderzoek ook duidelijke sekseverschillen gevonden. Naarmate de jongens ouder worden, ontwikkelen zij vaker denkbeelden waarin de nadruk ligt op competitie en formele democratische procedures. Wanneer de correcte procedures worden gevolgd, dan kan de juiste oplossing voor een sociaal of politiek vraagstuk gevonden worden. Bij de meisjes is deze trend niet waargenomen. Meisjes houden in sterke mate vast aan hun ideeën over inclusiviteit en consensus. Bij de omgang met sociale en politieke vraagstukken achten zij het vooral belangrijk dat rekening gehouden wordt met de belangen en gevoeligheden van alle betrokkenen.

Om zicht te krijgen op de rol van de school met betrekking tot de mogelijkheden die jongeren hebben om democratische denkbeelden te ontwikkelen, keerde ik in het zesde en laatste empirische hoofdstuk van deze dissertatie terug naar de ervaringen van jongeren. De onderzoeksvraag was: *Wat zijn de ervaringen van jongeren van verschillende onderwijstypen met democratie in het dagelijks leven en bieden scholen mogelijkheden voor degenen die buiten school weinig ervaring opdoen met democratie?* Om een antwoord op deze vraag te vinden heb ik gekeken naar de ervaringen van jongeren met besluitvorming, het voeren van discussies en het aangemoedigd worden tot maatschappelijke en politieke betrokkenheid in zowel de tweede als vierde klas. De resultaten laten zien dat jongeren in het vwo buiten de school met meer regelmaat ervaring opdoen met democratie dan hun leeftijdsgenoten die het vmbo volgen. De vwo'ers geven aan dat zij regelmatig met vrienden en familie over dagelijkse activiteiten en sociale en politieke onderwerpen discussiëren. Voor vmbo'ers geldt dat in veel mindere mate.

Net als thuis en met vrienden, zijn het op school wederom vooral de vwo-jongeren die positieve ervaringen met democratie op kunnen doen. Deze jongeren vinden dat docenten van vakken als geschiedenis en maatschappijleer hen regelmatig aanmoedigen om te discussiëren over alledaagse activiteiten in de school. De vmbo'ers vertellen dat er in hun klassen veel minder ruimte is om over dergelijke onderwerpen te spreken. Vergelijkbare resultaten worden gevonden als het gaat om praten over de politiek. Met name in de vierde klas worden de leerlingen in het vwo aangemoedigd om over sociale vraagstukken en de politiek te praten. Zo hebben zij uitgebreid gesproken over de parlementaire verkiezingen in Nederland van 2012. Vmbo'ers geven echter aan dat zij nauwelijks over de politiek spreken: over de parlementaire verkiezingen van 2012 is bij hen in de les vrijwel niet gesproken. Dit onderzoek laat zien dat er in de tweede klas verschillen bestaan in de mogelijkheden

die jongeren hebben om positieve ervaringen met democratie op te doen. In de vierde klas zijn deze verschillen nog pregnanter. Scholen binnen het vmbo lijken in mindere mate in staat hun leerlingen mogelijkheden te bieden om positieve ervaringen met democratie op te doen.

### **Overkoepelende conclusies**

De centrale onderzoeksvraag van deze dissertatie was: *wat zijn de denkbeelden en ervaringen van jongeren met betrekking tot democratie en hoe ontwikkelen deze zich in de tijd?* De vijf empirische hoofdstukken geven gezamenlijk antwoord op deze vraag. Deze dissertatie heeft laten zien dat de jongeren in zowel het vmbo als het vwo democratische denkbeelden hebben over besluitvorming in het alledaagse leven en het politieke domein. De denkbeelden van de geïnterviewden over democratie in het dagelijks leven zijn rijk en veelal multidimensionaal. Zij zijn goed in staat om hun voorkeuren te formuleren, antwoorden te geven op vragen en hun denkbeelden toe te lichten. Dit is echter veel minder het geval met betrekking tot vraagstukken die raken aan besluitvorming in het domein van de politieke democratie. Hoewel deze jongeren en vooral de vwo'ers op latere leeftijd beter in staat zijn om hun preferenties uit te leggen, blijven ze het moeilijk vinden om hun denkbeelden over democratie, politiek en parlement uit te leggen. Politiek blijft, vooral voor de vmbo'ers, een abstract domein. Anders dan verwacht, worden de denkbeelden van jongeren naarmate zij ouder worden niet complexer. Juist de vwo'ers die bekender worden met het politieke domein, gaan meer nadruk leggen op één principe van democratie. Hun aanvankelijk rijke denkbeelden over democratie in alledaagse situaties worden gekoloniseerd door de wijze waarop zij de politieke democratie waarnemen.

De ervaringen van jongeren met democratie in het alledaags leven bieden meer inzicht in de achtergrond van de gevonden ontwikkeling richting meer eendimensionale denkbeelden. Deze studie laat zien dat de jongeren van beide onderwijstypen niet alleen weinig ervaring hebben met democratie op school en in andere sociale verbanden (zoals thuis en in verenigingsverband). In de ervaringen die zij opdoen komt ook het complexe karakter van democratie nauwelijks naar voren. Gecombineerd met het eenzijdige beeld dat vooral vwo'ers over de Nederlandse parlementaire democratie ontwikkelen, biedt dit er een verklaring voor dat juist de denkbeelden van de jongeren in het hogere opleidingstype aan complexiteit inboeten.

Een laatste conclusie van deze dissertatie is dat ik geen aanwijzingen gevonden heb dat scholen compenseren voor de ongelijkheden in ervaringen met democratie buiten de school. Gedurende de schooltijd worden de verschillen tussen de leerlingen van het vmbo en het vwo groter en het onderwijs lijkt daarin een rol te spelen. De mogelijkheden die de school heeft om leerlingen positieve ervaringen met democratie op te laten doen (leerlingen laten participeren in besluitvorming, discussie)

sies over de samenleving, enz.) worden onvoldoende benut. Vooral scholen in het vmbo lijken voor jongeren op dit moment niet een relevante plek om te leren reflecteren op democratische vraagstukken en positieve houdingen ten opzichte van democratie te ontwikkelen.

### **Sterktes en beperkingen van de studie**

Sterktes en beperkingen van deze studie hebben vooral te maken met het kwalitatieve en longitudinale karakter van deze studie. Het kwalitatieve design maakte het allereerst mogelijk om diepgaand inzicht te verkrijgen in hoe jongeren nadenken over vraagstukken rondom democratisch burgerschap. Deze studie geeft zicht op de achterliggende motieven van de denkbeelden van jongeren en op hun ervaringen. Het longitudinale karakter van de studie maakte het tevens mogelijk om te bekijken hoe deze denkbeelden en ervaringen zich door de tijd heen ontwikkelden. De ontwikkelingstrajecten van individuele adolescenten met betrekking tot democratie, burgerschap en politiek werden daardoor zichtbaar. Het longitudinale perspectief stelde mij in staat om na te gaan of ervaringen met democratie variëren in diverse fasen van de adolescentie.

Een andere bijdrage van deze studie aan het onderzoeksdomein van de politieke socialisatie betreft de manier waarop het denken van jongeren over democratie is onderzocht. Meestal worden denkbeelden van jongeren bevraagd in de context van het politieke domein. Vraagstukken over democratie zijn in dat domein voor jongeren veelal abstract; zij vinden deze oninteressant en van weinig betekenis. Binnen deze studie zijn de geïnterviewden primair bevraagd over aspecten van democratie (besluitvorming, discussie) in het dagelijks leven. Hierdoor was ik in staat om democratische vraagstukken op een voor jongeren betekenisvolle wijze te bespreken.

Deze studie kent ook beperkingen. Vanwege de kleinschalige opzet van de studie zijn de resultaten niet één op één te generaliseren naar verschillen voor opleidings-type, leeftijden en sekse in Nederland. Echter, de keuze voor een selectieve en diverse samenstelling van de respondenten (Cresswell, 2013) (rondom onderwijstype, gender, etniciteit, religiositeit, sociaal-economisch milieu, locatie en schoolkarakteristieken) hielp bij het vinden van perspectieven op en ervaringen met democratie van jongeren uit verschillende lagen van de Nederlandse samenleving. Dat er vergelijkbare verschillen gevonden zijn in de denkbeelden en ervaringen van jongeren met zeer uiteenlopende achtergrondkenmerken is een aanwijzing dat de gevonden patronen onder bredere groepen bestaan. Via een kwantitatieve studie zou onderzocht moeten worden in hoeverre dit inderdaad het geval is.

Een andere beperking betreft de beperkte tijdsperiode waarover deze studie rapporteert. Ik heb de denkbeelden en ervaringen van jongeren onderzocht toen zij in de tweede en vierde klas van de middelbare school zaten. Daarom is er geen zicht op

de wijzen waarop de denkbeelden en ervaringen van jongeren zich ontwikkelen als zij richting volwassenheid gaan. Zij maken dan ingrijpende veranderingen mee, zoals uit huis gaan, naar tertiair onderwijs gaan, arbeidsmarkt op gaan en kiesrecht krijgen. Deze kunnen van invloed zijn op de politieke socialisatie van adolescenten (García-Albacete, Lorente, & Martín, 2016). Deze studie geeft geen zicht op wat er met de denkbeelden van jongeren gebeurt wanneer zij dit soort ervaringen hebben.

Ten slotte is een beperking dat in deze studie gebruik gemaakt is van zelfrapportage voor het achterhalen van de ervaringen van jongeren. Ik heb jongeren niet geobserveerd of gesproken met hun docenten, vrienden of ouders en heb alleen informatie van de jongeren zelf over wat er in hun dagelijks leven gebeurt. Zoals altijd het geval is bij onderzoek dat gebaseerd is op zelfrapportage, kan er verschil bestaan tussen wat jongeren hebben gerapporteerd en wat er daadwerkelijk is gebeurd. De beleving van jongeren is per definitie subjectief. Echter, dat jongeren die in dezelfde klas zitten op hoofdlijnen vergelijkbare ervaringen met hun school hebben geformuleerd is een indicatie voor een waarheidsgetrouwe weergave van hun ervaringen. De resultaten van deze dissertatie stemmen tevens overeen met eerder onderzoek dat zich richtte op de doelen die scholen stellen voor burgerschapsonderwijs (Ten Dam & Volman, 2003) en de doelen die Nederlandse docenten zeggen te stellen voor burgerschap (Leenders, Veugelers, & De Kat, 2008). Ook dit zijn aanwijzingen voor een reële weergave van wat er plaatsvindt binnen scholen in Nederland.

## **Discussie**

De resultaten en conclusies van deze dissertatie hebben implicaties voor het onderzoeksdomein van de politieke socialisatie en voor de praktijk van het burgerschapsonderwijs op school. Deze implicaties worden hier besproken.

### *Implicaties voor de studie van politieke socialisatie*

Deze studie levert een bijdrage aan het onderzoeksdomein door het perspectief te verbreden en een aantal uitgangspunten ter discussie te stellen.

### *Verbreiding van het perspectief*

Op een aantal wijzen heeft deze dissertatie de onderzoeksmatige benadering van denkbeelden van jongeren over democratisch burgerschap verbreed. Ten eerste, de meeste studies richten zich bij het onderzoeken van democratische houdingen en denkbeelden van jongeren uitsluitend op de politieke democratie. Jonge adolescenten wordt gevraagd naar de betekenis van het concept democratie, of zij zullen stemmen als zij achttien zijn, of politici naar mensen zoals zij zullen luisteren en of jongeren vertrouwen hebben in het Europees Parlement (bijv. Hooghe & Dasson-

neville, 2011; Keating et al., 2010; Schulz et al., 2010; Torney-Purta, 2001). Dit zijn voor jongeren tamelijk abstracte elementen van de institutionele structuur van de politieke democratie. De resultaten van veel studies wijzen erop dat jongeren weinig kennis hebben van dergelijke instituties (Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2011; Schulz et al., 2010). De International Citizenship and Civic Education Study rapporteerde dat in Nederland, evenals in sommige andere landen, een substantieel deel van de jongeren onder het elementaire beheersingsniveau scoort dat nodig wordt geacht om actief te kunnen participeren in de politiek. Dit geldt met name voor leerlingen binnen het vmbo (Maslowski, Van der Werf, Oonk, Naayer, & Isac, 2012; Schulz et al., 2010).

Dat er in mijn dissertatie ruime aandacht was voor het alledaagse leven, is een verbreding van het onderzoeksperspectief op democratisch burgerschap van jongeren. Hierdoor was ik in staat om gecompliceerde collectieve besluitvormingskwesities te bediscussiëren met jongeren die relatief ongeïnteresseerd in en onwetend zijn over politiek en democratie. De resultaten laten zien dat jongeren positief staan ten opzichte van democratische vormen van besluitvorming. De adolescenten kunnen argumenten geven voor hun voorkeuren en de consequenties daarvan. Deze benadering is waardevol gebleken voor het bestuderen van het democratisch burgerschap van jongeren. Ook eerder onderzoek heeft laten zien dat het gebruik van vraagstukken uit het dagelijks leven een zinvolle route is waarlangs denkbeelden van jongeren kunnen worden bestudeerd over abstracte thema's, zoals machtsverhoudingen, inspraakmogelijkheden en maatschappelijke betrokkenheid (bijv. Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009; Lawy & Biesta, 2006).

Juist door de open vragen bij het interview, waren jongeren in staat om te formuleren hoe zij aankijken tegen democratie en besluitvorming. Hierdoor zijn ook ideeën van jongeren achterhaald die niet passen binnen de opvatting die doorgaans gemeten wordt. Zo gebruiken veel voorgaande studies een meerderheidsperspectief op democratie door de nadruk te leggen op stemmen en meerderheidsbesluiten. Elementen van andere democratiemodellen, zoals onderhandelen, streven naar consensus, of deliberatie, worden veelal niet meegenomen (bijv. Kinoshita, 2006; Schulz et al., 2010). Deze studie heeft laten zien dat jonge adolescenten uit zowel het vwo als het vmbo ook denkbeelden hebben die verbonden zijn met consensusdemocratie of deliberatieve democratie. Dit betekent dat een eenzijdige nadruk in onderzoek op aspecten van een meerderheidsdemocratie een deel van de denkbeelden van jongeren over democratie buiten beschouwing laat. Voor de enkele studies waarin wel de voorkeuren van jongeren zelf met betrekking tot verschillende democratiemodellen zijn nagegaan, zijn vrijwel uitsluitend jongeren uit hogere sociale milieus geselecteerd (Helwig & Kim, 1999; Helwig et al., 2003). Dit brengt mij bij een derde bijdrage aan het onderzoeksdomein. In dit onderzoek participeerden jongeren die in

vwo of vmbo zaten. Jongeren uit hogere sociale milieus zijn oververtegenwoordigd in het vwo, terwijl jongeren uit lagere sociale milieus vooral te vinden zijn in het vmbo (OECD, 2014; Bol, Witschge, Van de Werfhorst, & Dronkers, 2014). Deze studie draagt daarmee bij aan de verbreding van het onderzoek over politieke socialisatie. Het laat zien dat rijke denkbeelden over democratie niet voorbehouden zijn aan de hoger opgeleiden.

### *‘De politiek ingroeien’ ter discussie*

Eerdere studies wijzen erop dat de denkbeelden van adolescenten naarmate zij ouder worden steeds complexer worden doordat zij verschillende democratische principes meenemen in hun overwegingen en rekenschap geven van de sociale context waarop een vraagstuk betrekking heeft (Adelson, 1971; Flanagan, 2013; Greenstein, 1966; Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Kinoshita, 1989, 2006; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984; Moessinger, 1981; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981). Jongeren worden bekender met de complexiteit van de samenleving en met het politieke domein en deze ontwikkeling kan gezien worden als een proces van ‘de politiek ingroeien’ (Abendschön, 2013; Adelson, 1971; Adelson & O’Neil, 1966; Greenstein, 1966; Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003; Gallatin & Adelson, 1971; Greenstein, 1966; Neundorf et al., 2013; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981). Dit geldt vooral voor jongeren in hogere onderwijstypen. Met name deze jongeren onderschrijven de ‘goede’ burgerschapswaarden, zoals tolerantie, politieke interesse, politiek zelfvertrouwen en het belang van pluriformiteit (Converse, 1971; Lijphart, 1997; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1989; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Verba, 1996).

De resultaten van deze dissertatie laten een ander beeld zien. Naarmate de adolescenten ouder worden ontwikkelen velen een relatief eendimensionale voorstelling van de werking van de politieke democratie (democratie staat gelijk aan meerderheidsbesluiten). Dit perspectief “koloniseerde” vervolgens hun aanvankelijke multidimensionale denkbeelden over besluitvorming in alledaagse situaties. Dit is vooral het geval bij vwo’ers. Opvallenderwijs continueren vooral jongeren uit het vmbo het benadrukken van meerdere principes, zoals meerderheidsbesluitvorming en minderheidsrechten, het zoeken naar consensus en het accentueren van collectieve besluitvorming. De democratische denkbeelden van degenen die in het lagere opleidingstype zitten, komen dus in grotere mate overeen met theoretische perspectieven waarbij aangegeven wordt dat in democratische redeneringen altijd meerdere principes meegenomen moeten worden (bijv. Pennock, 1979; Thomassen, 2007).

Jongeren in hogere en lagere opleidingstypen hebben verschillende preferenties wat betreft het zich inzetten voor een rechtvaardige samenleving. Veel jongeren

vinden het belangrijk maar zij verschillen over de plek waar dat zou moeten gebeuren. Adolescenten op het vwo menen dat een betere samenleving gecreëerd kan worden door in de politiek te participeren; jongeren in het vmbo geven aan dat dit vooral bereikt kan worden door actief te zijn in de naaste omgeving, zoals de buurt of het verenigingsleven. Deze studie laat daarom zien dat de denkbeelden van jongeren verschillen maar dat dit niet betekent dat degenen in hogere opleidingstypen vanuit theoretisch of moreel perspectief ‘betere’ denkbeelden hebben dan die in lagere opleidingstypen.

De gevonden trend in de richting van grotere (exclusieve) nadruk op het recht van de meerderheid om besluiten te nemen, is opvallend in het kader van de Nederlandse politieke cultuur. Deze wordt traditioneel gekarakteriseerd door een sterke nadruk op consensus, compromissen en coalities (bijv. Lijphart, 1999, 2008). De discrepantie tussen de traditionele politieke cultuur in Nederland en de richting waarin de democratische denkbeelden van jongeren zich ontwikkelen, kan geïnterpreteerd worden tegen de achtergrond van de ervaringen die ze in het dagelijks leven opdoen, zoals boven besproken is. Maar de grotere nadruk op meerderheidsbesluitvorming kan zelf ook een indicatie zijn voor veranderingen in de Nederlandse politieke cultuur en berichtgeving daarover. Onderzoek laat zien dat kenmerken van een meerderheidsdemocratie de afgelopen twintig jaar ook meer herkenbaar zijn geworden in de Nederlandse parlementaire democratie. Naast het nog altijd bestaande coalitielandschap, ligt er meer nadruk op competitie tussen politieke partijen, op het winnen van de verkiezingen en beleid dat gemaakt wordt door kleine meerderheden zonder dat gezocht wordt naar breder draagvlak (Hendriks & Michels, 2012; Thomassen & Andeweg, 2011). De door de jongeren veronderstelde nadruk op meerderheidsbesluitvorming, kan er dus op duiden dat adolescenten via de media het beeld krijgen dat het bij democratie vooral draait om de wens van de meerderheid. Verschillende auteurs wijzen er echter op dat er de afgelopen jaren in kranten en journaals geen grotere nadruk is komen te liggen op aspecten die verbonden zijn met een meerderheidsdemocratie, zoals aandacht voor conflicten tussen politieke partijen (Takens, Van Atteveldt, Van Hooff, & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011). Dit is mogelijk wel het geval bij (sociale) media waar vooral jongeren gebruik van maken (Shehata, Ekström, & Olsson, 2015; Stoker & Bass, 2011). Het is daarom een belangrijke vraag wat voor informatie jongeren via andere kanalen dan kranten en journaals over democratie krijgen en wat dit voor hun denkbeelden betekent.

### **Burgerschapseducatie: implicaties voor onderzoek en praktijk**

De uitkomsten van deze dissertatie hebben tevens implicaties voor zowel onderzoek naar als de praktijk van burgerschapseducatie. In deze paragraaf worden deze besproken.

### *Suggesties voor vervolgonderzoek*

In de verschillende hoofdstukken van deze dissertatie zijn onderwerpen voor verder onderzoek de revue gepasseerd. De voorstellen betreffen internationaal vergelijkende, kwantitatieve studies om te bezien of de resultaten van deze dissertatie ook gelden voor andere groepen jongeren, observatiestudies om te bekijken hoe het dagelijks leven van jongeren eruit ziet en longitudinale studies die jongeren over een langere periode volgen. Hier richt ik mij op het thema burgerschapsonderwijs.

Ten eerste zou er meer onderzoek gedaan moeten worden naar de manieren waarop burgerschapsonderwijs op een effectieve manier vormgegeven kan worden. De resultaten van deze dissertatie laten zien dat jongeren - in het vwo maar vooral in het vmbo - slechts in beperkte mate ervaringen opdoen met en leren over democratisch burgerschap op hun school. De mogelijkheden daartoe worden niet of nauwelijks benut. Zowel ten aanzien van het lesaanbod als de omgangsvormen tussen docenten en leerlingen kwamen in het onderzoek voorbeelden naar voren waarbij jongeren positieve ervaringen op kunnen doen met democratisch burgerschap. Er valt hier nog een wereld te winnen temeer omdat individuele studies en literatuurreviews laten zien dat onderwijs effect kan hebben op het burgerschap van leerlingen via het curriculum (burgerschap als vakinhoud) en een democratisch pedagogisch klimaat met ruimte voor discussie en inspraak van leerlingen (Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, & Ten Dam, 2012; Campbell, 2008; Feldman, Pasek, Romer, & Hall Jamieson, 2007; Fjeldstad & Mikkelsen, 2003; Isac, Maslowski, Creemer, & Van der Werf, 2013; McDevitt & Kioussis, 2007; Yang & Chung, 2009). Onderzoek kan meer inzicht geven in de manieren waarop een effectief curriculum vormgegeven kan worden en hoe abstracte begrippen over democratisch burgerschap op een betekenisvolle manier aan leerlingen aangeboden kunnen worden. Daarnaast kunnen studies bijdragen aan het verder uitwerken van de betekenis van een democratisch pedagogisch klimaat. Veelal wordt aangegeven dat het vooral gaat om het uitwisselen van meningen en het hebben van inspraak (bijv. Isac et al., 2012; Torney-Purta, 2001). Deze dissertatie heeft laten zien dat jongeren, en met name de vmbo'ers, beperkte ervaringen met een dergelijk klimaat hebben. Onderzoek kan in het bijzonder gericht worden op het verder uitwerken van een (effectief) democratisch klimaat en hoe jongeren ervaring kunnen opdoen met het omgaan met tegenstrijdige democratische principes (zoals consensusvorming, beslissing bij meerderheid). Daarbij zou ook de vraag hoe een dergelijk klimaat vormgegeven kan worden betrokken moeten worden. Hoe kunnen jongeren die van huis uit niet gewend zijn aan democratische omgangsvormen gestimuleerd worden om te participeren in een democratische dialoog?

Er dient ten tweede meer nagedacht te worden over de rol die de school speelt bij de verschillen tussen jongeren van diverse opleidingstypen. Zowel voorgaande stu-

dies als deze dissertatie laten zien dat burgerschapseducatie in grote mate verschilt tussen hogere onderwijstypen en lagere onderwijstypen (Ichilov, 2003; Leenders et al., 2008; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003) en dat er relaties bestaan tussen opleidingsniveau en burgerschapshoudingen (Elchardus et al., 2013; Hooghe, Marien, & Quintelier, 2012; Janmaat et al., 2014; Persson, 2012, 2014; Torney-Purta, 2002; Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 2001). Ook al staat het thema reeds geruime tijd in de academische aandacht (Almond & Verba, 1963; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Lijphart, 1997; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996), er is nog veel onduidelijk over de specifieke rol van de school bij de ontwikkeling van burgerschap van leerlingen in hogere en lagere opleidingstypen en wat daar de achterliggende redenen voor zijn. Het is daarom van belang om te bekijken wat verschillende typen scholen hun leerlingen bedoeld en onbedoeld leren over hun potentiële rol als burger in een democratische samenleving.

Zoals in deze dissertatie uitgebreid is beschreven, bestaan er verschillen in politieke interesse en betrokkenheid tussen jongeren in hogere en lagere opleidingstypen. Aan de ene kant zijn degenen in het vwo vaker meer betrokken en geïnteresseerd, maar hebben zij ook vaker de veronderstelling dat politieke participatie vooral iets is voor hoger opgeleiden. Waar komt deze elitaire blik op politieke betrokkenheid vandaan en wat kunnen scholen doen om leerlingen ook over meer egalitaire perspectieven op politieke betrokkenheid te leren? Aan de andere kant zijn jongeren in het vmbo veel minder betrokken bij en geïnteresseerd in de politiek. Wat heeft er bij adolescenten in lagere opleidingstypen die wel politiek actief zijn voor gezorgd dat zij deze interesse hebben ontwikkeld? Wat voor ervaringen zijn dat geweest en welke rol is daarbij weggelegd voor de school? Hoe kunnen jongeren leren van positieve rolmodellen? Moeten scholen leerlingen vooral meer ervaringen met democratisch burgerschap op laten doen of meer reflecteren op datgene wat zij in het dagelijks leven al meemaken? Dergelijk onderzoek kan vervolgens bijdragen aan het verkrijgen van inzicht in de drempels die belemmeren dat ook lager opgeleiden politiek betrokken worden.

### *Implicaties voor de praktijk van burgerschapsonderwijs*

Deze dissertatie heeft ten slotte implicaties voor het burgerschapsonderwijs op scholen. Een eerste betekenis van dit onderzoek voor de praktijk richt zich op de vormgeving van burgerschapsinhouden. Een lange traditie van onderwijskundig onderzoek laat zien dat een belangrijke voorwaarde voor zinvol onderwijs is, dat het aansluit bij situaties die voor leerlingen herkenbaar en betekenisvol zijn. Van daaruit kan een koppeling gemaakt worden met onderwerpen die voor leerlingen meer abstract zijn (bijv. Pintrich, 2003; Randler & Bogner, 2007; Volman, 2011). Het is de vraag of het burgerschapsonderwijs in Nederland aan deze voorwaarde voldoet.

De bevindingen van dit onderzoek laten zien dat dagelijkse ervaringen op school met democratisch burgerschap beperkt zijn. Een eerdere studie (Nieuwelink, 2008) wees erop dat veel gehanteerde lesmethoden voor het Nederlandse secundaire onderwijs over politiek en democratie amper aandacht besteden aan vraagstukken en onderwerpen die voor leerlingen betekenisvol zijn. De lesmethoden zijn vrijwel uitsluitend gericht op abstracte begrippen, instituties en actoren (zoals rechtsstaat, en verhouding tussen regering en parlement). Waar deze zaken voor jongeren veelal vrijwel geen betekenis hebben (bijv. Schulz et al., 2010; Gimpel et al., 2003), laten de resultaten van deze dissertatie echter zien dat jongeren goed in staat zijn om te argumenteren over democratische vraagstukken in hun dagelijks leven. Van dit vermogen van jongeren en hun preconcepties over democratie lijkt in het Nederlandse onderwijs onvoldoende gebruik gemaakt te worden. Het behandelen van betekenisvolle onderwerpen kan een goede opstap zijn naar de behandeling van onderwerpen die voor leerlingen meer abstract zijn, zoals verkiezingen en de inrichting van de rechtsstaat.

In veel Europese landen, waaronder Nederland, worden politieke thema's als een van de kernen van de inhoud van burgerschapsonderwijs beschouwd. Het gaat dan om politieke partijen, de democratische rechtsstaat en grondrechten (Eurydice, 2012; Maslowski et al., 2012). Dit onderzoek heeft echter laten zien dat het niet vanzelfsprekend is dat dit soort thema's integraal op scholen worden behandeld. De jongeren geven aan dat voor zover er gesproken wordt over maatschappelijke en politieke kwesties, dit uitsluitend gebeurt bij vakken die daar ook overduidelijk een inhoudelijke verwantschap mee vertonen (zoals maatschappijleer, geschiedenis en levensbeschouwing). Dat de genoemde inhoudelijke thema's alleen bij deze vakken behandeld worden, is begrijpelijk maar tegelijkertijd ook problematisch vanwege de relatief marginale positie die deze vakken in het curriculum hebben. Zo is er met de vmbo-jongeren vrijwel niet over de parlementsverkiezingen van 2012 gesproken, mede doordat zij in de vierde klas veelal geen van deze vakken hadden. Juist in een periode die cruciaal is voor hun politieke socialisatie (bijv. Prior, 2012; Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014; Sears & Levy, 2003) hebben scholen de gelegenheid niet aangegrepen om over deze belangrijke democratische gebeurtenis te spreken.

Het belang van leren over verkiezingen wordt door leraren en scholen breed gedeeld. Dat daar toch weinig aan wordt gedaan, wijst op een gebrek aan een samenhangende aanpak en visie van scholen op burgerschapsonderwijs. Dit komt overeen met het beeld dat de Nederlandse Onderwijsraad (2012) en Inspectie voor het Onderwijs (bijv. 2010; 2014) schetsen over de stand van zaken met betrekking tot dit onderwijsonderdeel. De komst van wettelijke verplichtingen voor burgerschap in het onderwijs (2006) heeft niet tot een versnelling van de ontwikkeling van burgerschapsonderwijs in Nederland geleid; eerder is er sprake van een stagnatie. Veel

scholen en docenten hebben moeite om zicht te krijgen op wat burgerschap precies betekent en om een samenhangend aanbod te ontwikkelen waarbij leerlingen gericht hun democratisch burgerschap verder kunnen ontwikkelen. Dat Nederlandse leerlingen vergelijkenderwijs weinig kennis hebben over onderdelen van de democratische rechtsstaat (Schulz et al., 2010), wijst op de wenselijkheid dat burgerschapsinhouden een belangrijker plek in het curriculum krijgen.

Een levendige democratie heeft burgers nodig die maatschappelijk en politiek actief zijn, gericht zijn op het algemeen belang, willen participeren in discussies en de complexiteit van democratie onderkennen. Dit is zeker het geval in een samenleving waar scheidingen tussen groepen lijken toe te nemen (bijv. Bovens, Dekker, & Tiemeijer, 2014; Kleijwegt, 2016). Juist als spanningen tussen groepen oplopen, vormen democratische houdingen en methoden een bescherming tegen sociale erosie. Dit onderstreept eens te meer het belang van burgerschapsvorming gedurende de adolescentie. Vanzelf gaat dit niet. Deze studie heeft laten zien dat jongeren in het verenigingsleven, thuis en met vrienden, slechts in beperkte mate ervaringen opdoen die hen in staat stellen democratische vaardigheden en houdingen te ontwikkelen. Ouders, vrijetijdsverenigingen, en ook media zouden zich er meer aan gelegen moeten laten liggen om jongeren in staat te stellen positieve houdingen ten opzichte van democratie te ontwikkelen.

Ook binnen de school lukt het vaak niet om democratisch burgerschap verder te ontwikkelen. Juist omdat er grote verschillen tussen jongeren onderling zijn, ligt hier een belangrijke opdracht voor schoolleiders, docenten en onderwijsbeleidsmakers om het burgerschapsonderwijs op scholen te versterken, via het lesaanbod en een democratisch pedagogisch klimaat. De school kan een plaats zijn waar alle leerlingen het belang van democratie kunnen ervaren en waar zij leren te reflecteren op de manieren waarop in een politieke democratie kan worden omgegaan met situaties van tegenstrijdige belangen en waarden. Door te begrijpen en te ervaren op welke manieren democratie kan werken, zowel in het eigen leven als in de politiek, kunnen jongeren eigen perspectieven ontwikkelen. Dit versterkt hopelijk vervolgens ook hun positieve houding tegenover democratisch burgerschap.



## DANKWOORD

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hessel Nieuwelink was born on May 26, 1980 in Alkmaar, the Netherlands. After high school in Schagen, he completed a bachelor's degree in civics teaching (Maatschappijleer) at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. In the following years, he worked as a civics teacher at different schools in Amsterdam. Meanwhile, he studied both Political Science and Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). He graduated cum laude in both master's degrees and wrote a thesis on the impact of the International Tribunal for Rwanda on the lives of ordinary Rwandans. Thereafter, he became a teacher educator in civics at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (HvA). His PhD research focused on adolescents' views on and experiences with democracy. In cooperation with scholars from HvA and UvA, he is now engaged in research projects regarding the integration of citizenship education in the curriculum and concerning ways in which schools deal with controversial issues in the classroom.





