



JSSE

[Journal of
Social Science
Education](#)

2021, Vol. 20(1) 118-134

Edited by:
Reinhold Hedtke

Research Report

Framing democracy as response to neoliberalism in Dutch education

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Keywords: democracy; frame analysis; neoliberalism; education policy; good education

- Examines the construction of meaning of democracy in the Dutch debate on good education;
- Uses a frame analysis to offer insight into the complex debate about this issue;
- Illustrates the argument by analyzing key documents that play a significant part in the discussion;
- Stresses the importance of understanding how the meaning of democracy is constructed through discourse;
- Identifies four dimensions of democracy as response to neoliberal tendencies that need to be addressed if democracy is to be part and parcel of (Dutch) education.

Purpose: This paper aims to understand the debate about what constitutes good education in the Netherlands. The meaning of the concept of democracy in these public debates is divergent and rather diffuse. If teachers, citizens, advisory councils, and the Dutch government agree that democracy ought to be anchored in future education, we first and foremost need to understand its meaning within these current debates.

Approach: In this study we conducted a frame analysis of eleven key documents from three relevant domains. The diagnostic frame shows that on the whole the authors of these documents view 'neoliberalism' and a 'culture of measurement' as undermining forces in education.

Findings: The prognostic frame shows that all authors frame democracy as a prognosis, but with four different meanings: 1) democracy as organizational structure, 2) democracy as governmental policy, 3) democracy as knowledge and skill, and 4) democracy as a practice. We argue that these can be interpreted as four dimensions of a democratic solution, constructed as a response to neoliberal tendencies in Dutch education


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Suggested citation:

Lozano Parra, S. Bakker, C. Van Lieren, L. M. (2021): *Framing democracy as response to neoliberalism in Dutch education*. Journal of Social Science Education 20 (1). <https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-4028>

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests: none

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the Dutch Government has called for a thorough revisioning of the Dutch curriculum. This debate revolved around the formulation of ‘good education’, influenced by the international debate on how to formulate the aims and ends of education so as to justify the role of education in democratic societies (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Meijer, 2014; Bakker & Montesano Montessori, 2016; Ruijters, 2016). The notion of ‘democracy’ as a key goal of education (Dewey, 1916; Reid 2002; De Winter; 2004; Straume, 2015; Neoh, 2017) plays a significant role within this discussion about good education in The Netherlands. To date, however, little attention has been devoted to *understanding* what democracy in the debate about good education in The Netherlands actually means, and how its meaning is constructed.

The main research question of this project is: what different meanings of democracy as preferred education are constructed in response to the neoliberal educational paradigm in the Netherlands? In this question, there seems to be a contradiction between the meaning of democracy and neoliberalism, as if neoliberalism is opposed to democracy. We will not formulate an alternative for the neoliberal paradigm. Instead, we hope to clarify how this seeming contradiction follows from our analysis of the Dutch debate. In order to answer our question, we will focus on the different meanings that are constructed in key documents we selected from this debate. In order to clarify these meanings, we use concepts from frame analysis as part of social movement theory. Frame analysis is a multi-disciplinary social science research method that sheds light on how to understand certain situations, activities, or messages that agents choose to use to say or act upon, and show why and how they are chosen. The concepts we will use from frame analysis are the diagnostic frame and the prognostic frame (Snow & Benford 1988; 2000, Snow 2007).

We will use the Dutch debate on good education as an example of how the meaning of democracy is constructed by different agents in the debate. In our analysis, we found four key concepts: neoliberalism, the culture of measurement, good education, and democracy. The diagnostic frame shapes how the neoliberal tendencies in the Dutch educational system, combined with a heavy focus on measuring and ranking data, sets the perimeters for the debate about good education. The prognostic frame presents how democracy is constructed as a solution to this diagnosis, leading to four different meanings of democracy as a desired prognosis that could be a solution to the neoliberal tendencies in Dutch education.

This analysis is both empirical and hermeneutical in its focus on collecting conceptualizations of democracy in the Dutch debate on good education and analyzing the construction of meaning through discourse that is used in these documents. It also contributes to an international debate about neoliberalism and its impact on education (see, for example: Giroux & Giroux, 2006; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hill & Kumar, 2009; Baltodano, 2012; Sturges, 2015; Brathwaite, 2017; Fitzsimons, 2017; Rudd & Goodson, 2017; Ali, 2019; Grimaldi & Ball, 2019; Hastings, 2019).

In the theory section, we will first elaborate on the Dutch debate about good education. Then, we will clarify four key concepts: good education, the culture of measurement, neoliberalism, and democracy in the Dutch educational context. In the method section, we will

present our frame analysis. Then, we will describe our selection criteria and present the documents selected for analysis in this study. In the findings section, we will present how the diagnostic frame sets the stage for the prognostic frame in which four different meanings of democracy emerged from our analysis. Finally, we will suggest further research, arguing that the frames constructed around democracy should be seen as four different dimensions of democracy in Dutch education. These dimensions deserve further research, in particular the meaning of democracy as a practice. This study contributes to the understanding of what democracy means with respect to education by unraveling its complexity as it becomes part of societal debates.

2 THE DUTCH CONTEXT

Because of a multitude of educational policy innovations from the nineties onwards, the Dutch government established a governmental committee to investigate the practical implementations of these innovations. Its conclusions were clear: the responsible politicians suffered from a tunnel vision resulting in educational policies without broad public support (Commission Education Innovations, 2008). As a result, teachers felt uninvolved in policy matters, while politicians granted too much importance to international rankings (Commission Education Innovations, 2008). Moreover, since 9/11, but more specifically since the 2004 terrorist attack in Madrid, concerns about Islam, integration, and social tensions have increased in many parts of Europe. Since then, terrorist attacks caused “shockwaves and triggered anxiety for immediate security risk” (James & Janmaat, 2019, p. 2).

These historical and social developments kickstarted a great number of published documents and debates revolving around the content of good education. Dutch Professor of Pedagogy Micha De Winter wrote a report for the Dutch Scientific Council which advocated that socialization of pupils should be anchored more firmly in Dutch education. In 2006, the Dutch government obliged schools to promote active citizenship. All in all, the emphasis on democracy education as part of good education increased due to a concept of education as an institute that is responsible for preparing individuals for effective participation in democracies and society (De Winter, 2004).

3 THEORY

3.1 Key concepts

In order to answer our research question, we will confine ourselves to the conceptualizations of good education that are constructed in the analyzed documents. The concept of ‘the culture of measurement’ refers to the rise of interest in educational ‘outcomes’ over the past two decades, resulting in national and international league tables. These have been used by government to raise educational standards and by scholars to develop ‘evidence-based-learning’ (Biesta, 2010). For our definition of neoliberalism, we follow Jolle Demmers (2017), who understands neoliberalism as “a logic of practice and form of normative reasoning through which the principles of the market are extended to every dimension of human life:

political, cultural, social, vocational, educational, public and private.” Additionally, neoliberalism views the state in relation to the socio-economic political realm as a preserver of the free-market economy “at all cost” (Harvey, 2005).

Democracy, our fourth and final key concept, has been revitalized over the past decades as an important part of education, engaging educators, scholars, policymakers as well as politicians (Osler & Starkey, 2006; Arthur, Davis & Hahn, 2008; James & Cremin, 2012; Banks, 2017). This is partly because of international concerns about social cohesion and the political participation of young people (McLaughlin, 1992; White, Bruce & Ritchie, 2000; Kahne & Westheimer, 2004; Ruitenberg, 2008; Lawy & Biesta, 2010; Straume, 2015). While these researchers emphasize the importance of democratic education, they are also quite skeptical about governments formulating aims of curricula, to which we will come back in the result section, specifically in the prognosis of democracy as knowledge and skill.

Many researchers have argued that democratic citizenship does not develop naturally and that education has a role to play in the development of democracy and citizenship education (Dewey, 1916; Gutmann, 2004; Parker, 2004; De Winter, 2004; Ruitenberg, 2008; Nussbaum, 2010; Straume, 2015). The classical conception of democracy originates in a moral ideal which sees social life as constructed by the core values of positive freedom and political equality (Reid, 2002). This is one of the reasons why the democratic theories of deliberation developed by John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas are often used by scholars and educators (Ruitenberg, 2008). However, democratic theorists such as Chantal Mouffe (2005) question this idea of equality of deliberation and have developed an agonistic model which emphasizes the importance of conflict, which we focused on in earlier work (Authors et al, 2020). Other scholars point to the continuously developing nature of democracy (Giroux, 2004; Crick, 2008) and the difference meaning of democracy within each country (Cook & Westheimer, 2006; Zyngier, Traverso & Murriello, 2015). With respect to education, democracy is seen by some as a form of political liberation, and by others as a form of integrating newcomers into existing orders (Crick, 2008; Biesta, 2013). In any case, democracy is viewed as something that needs to be part of the educational realm.

Our analysis presents a Dutch case study in which several meanings appear when agents from different fields join a societal discussion on the relation between democracy and education. For this paper, we will not elaborate on democratic theory such as the deliberative model or agonistic model, but will confine ourselves to the meaning of democracy found in the analyzed documents about good education. In our frame analysis we will present how the concept of democracy, as part of good education and as an alternative to neoliberal tendencies, has four different meanings that all play a specific part in the prognostic frame of democracy as a solution to neoliberal tendencies in Dutch education: 1) democracy as organizational structure, 2) democracy as governmental policy, 2) democracy as knowledge and skill, and 4) democracy as a practice.

4 METHOD

The reason for choosing a frame analysis is twofold. First, a frame analysis acknowledges the important constructionist relation between language and reality. Framing is rooted in the symbolic interactionist and constructionist principle that meaning is not something that is naturally attached to certain objects, experiences or events, but rather appears through interactive and interpretative processes (Snow, 2004). Meaning is always embedded in, and bounded by, the broader cultural and political context in which it appears (Williams, 2004). A frame, therefore, is “an interpretative schema that signifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one’s present or past environment” (Benford & Snow, 2000 p. 614). By interpreting and assigning meaning to certain events and conditions, agents try to gather support and demobilize opposition (Snow & Benford, 1988; 2000). Snow and Benford (1988) identified three core framing tasks (1988), of which two are relevant for this research: (1) diagnostic framing for the identification of a certain event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of modification; (2) prognostic framing to propose a solution to the problem and to specify what needs to be done.

Secondly, a frame analysis elaborates on the *discursive* process of meaning making, emphasizing the construction of meaning as a never-ending process, rearticulated and renewed through temporal, geographical, political, and cultural contexts. It provides insight into this ongoing process of meaning making and enables us to focus on the *discursive* constructions of democracy in the debates about the future of education in the Netherlands. Benford and Snow term frames as “relatively stable referential modes of representation” (Steinberg 1999, p. 739). According to sociologist Marc Steinberg, however, this view neglects the dynamic character of language. Both Steinberg and cultural theorist Stuart Hall emphasize the role of discourse in the shaping of meaning. Discourses are “ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practice, which provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (Hall, 1995, p. 6). The term *discursive* has become a general term used to refer to approaches in which meaning, representation, and culture are seen as co-constitutive (Hall, 1995). These discursive processes take place in what McCombs (2004, p. 89) calls a discursive field. Because different meanings of democracy appear in a discursive, interactive process, this analysis gives us tools to understand how meaning is constructed. We view the debate on good education in The Netherlands as a discursive field in which different agents construct different meanings.

4.1 Selection of documents

This analysis has an explorative character. For our frame analysis, we selected documents according to the following criteria: 1) the documents were published between 2004 and 2018, 2) the documents were written by Dutch agents, 3) the documents were written by teachers or school leaders (educational practice), educational scholars or policy-makers, 4) the document aim at contributing to “good education”, 5) the documents focus on primary and/or secondary education, 6) the documents focus on the aspect of democracy as an important part of good

education. Therefore, the voice of the student activist asking for democratization in higher education, leading to the occupation of the administration building of the University of Amsterdam in 2015, is excluded. The voice of parents is excluded from our analysis. In our view, gaining insight into parents' and pupils' views on democracy education is a research subject on its own (see, for example: De Groot, 2013).

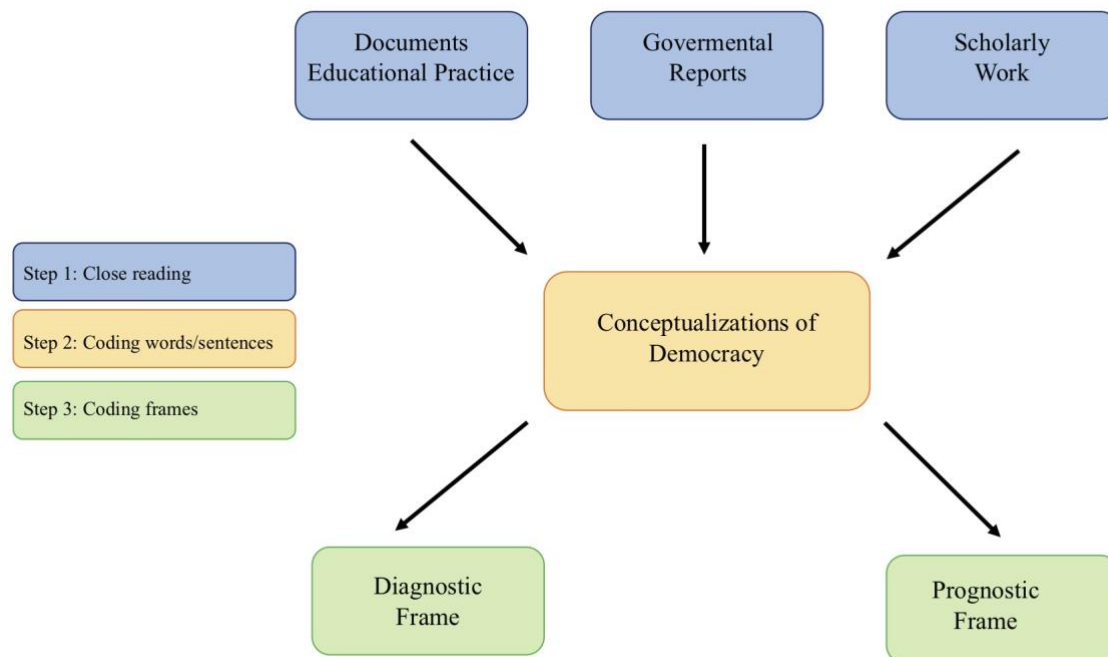
In total, eleven documents were analyzed in this study, authored by agents in three particular domains (see Table 1). The first domain is Educational Practice, represented by the work of teachers Jelmer Evers and René Kneyber, and Kees Boele (former teacher and educational director). We selected three reports from the second domain Government Work. Two of these were published by the Dutch Education Council. The third one, titled "OnsOnderwijs 2032" ("Our education 2032"), was published by the Education Platform and describes a discussion between citizens and educational practitioners about education for the future instigated by former State Secretary of Education Sander Dekker. Our third domain consists of academic work by Professor of Education Wiel Veugelers (a leading figure on the topic of democratic education and citizenship in the Netherlands), Professor of Pedagogy Micha de Winter (author of the report on democracy education already mentioned), and Professor of Education Gert Biesta. The latter's ideas about qualification, socialization, and subjectification as the purpose of education became accessible to a broader Dutch audience with the translation of his work between 2012 and 2016. He views his work as a trilogy that is highly interconnected (Biesta, 2013) and, therefore, we included all three works in our frame analysis.

We are aware of the differences in interests and language used within the specific discourses of these three domains. However, despite their differences, these three domains all interact within the Dutch discursive field of education, and agents within these domains all repeatedly use divergent meanings of the term 'democracy' to diagnose the current state of Dutch education and predict its future. Because meaning making is a discursive process and develops through the interaction of individuals exchanging thoughts and opinions, we do not separate the scholarly discourse from the public discourse. For example, the three dimensions developed by scholar Gert Biesta are mentioned and used by policymakers, teachers, and school leaders alike. Reversely, the selected documents written by teachers are often called upon by policymakers and teachers as an example of (democratic) action. Since we want to investigate the meaning of democracy with respect to the future of good education in the Netherlands, we deem a frame analysis of these divergent meanings essential to our research.

Table 1. Selection of Documents

Educational practice	Governmental reports	Scholarly work
Het Alternatief I: weg met de afrekencultuur. [The Alternative I: Away with the culture of measurement] <i>Jelmer Evers & René Kneyber (red.)</i>	Onderwijs2032. [Education2032] <i>Platform Ons Onderwijs (PO)</i>	Beyond Learning. Good Education in an Age of Measurement. The Beautiful Risk of Education. <i>Prof. Gert Biesta</i>
Het Alternatief II: [The Alternative II] <i>Jelmer Evers & René Kneyber (red.)</i>	De volle breedte van onderwijskwaliteit. [A broad definition of the quality of education] <i>De Onderwijsraad (OR)</i>	Opvoeding, Onderwijs en Jeugdbeleid in het algemeen belang. De noodzaak van een democratisch-pedagogisch offensief [Education for the common good. The need for a democratic-pedagogical push] <i>Prof. Micha de Winter</i>
Onderwijsheid. Terug naar waar het echt om gaat. [Educational wisdom. Back to where it is truly about.] <i>Kees Boele</i>	Een ander perspectief op professionele ruimte in het onderwijs. [A different perspective on the professional space in education] <i>De Onderwijsraad (OR)</i>	Creating Critical Democratic Citizenship Education <i>Prof. Wiel Veugelers</i>

To structure the different meanings of democracy that appear in the various documents under analysis, we first conducted a close reading of every document (see Figure 1). During this process, we categorized words and sentences used to describe aspects of democracy with respect to education. As a subsequent step, we coded the language used within the core framing tasks, structuring the language used for motivation, diagnosis, or prognosis. The final step was to code the language within the core framing tasks to find generalizations that encompassed the three core framing tasks for documents from three domains. Finally, the findings resulted in the formulation of four different dimensions of democracy proposed as solution to the diagnosed problems. The analysis showed an overlap between the motivational and diagnostic frame. All authors used the diagnostic frame as a motivation for participation in the debate. Therefore, the focus in this article will be on the diagnostic and prognostic frames found in the selected documents, and the ways in which these frames both constitute the meaning of democracy in this debate.

Figure 1. Frame analysis

5 FINDINGS

5.1 Diagnosis

The first frame that is used for the core task of diagnosis is what the teachers Evers and Kneyber call the “neoliberal perspective” (Evers & Kneyber, 2013, p. 8). In their ‘Alternatief I’ (‘First Alternative’), they argue that neoliberalism sees education as a free market with a competitive character and top-down control, with teachers as instruments rather than professionals (Evers & Kneyber, 2013, p. 8). In their sequel ‘Alternatief II’ (‘Second Alternative’), they argue that neo-liberalism in Dutch education is a ‘disaster’ partly because it ‘leads to a culture of performativity’ (Evers & Kneyber, 2015a, p. 136). In addition, their diagnosis stresses that teachers lack agency and are incapable of using the liberty Dutch educational law gives them. They argue that this lack of agency is a direct result of a structural problem in the Dutch educational system, caused by neoliberal educational policy. According to Evers & Kneyber, a “democratization” of Dutch education might be a solution to these structural problems (Evers & Kneyber, 2015a, p. 138).

Boele also argues that neoliberalism is a source of the problem and calls it ‘the latest mutation of feasibility’ (Boele, 2016, p. 15). In his opinion, economic growth as a criterion for relevance and a strong focus on training for the professional job market have foregrounded measurable results and have caused a lack of direction in education (Boele, 2016). A comparable line of thinking is present in Biesta’s work. He claims that ‘the neoliberal ideology’ is responsible for a ‘technical-managerial approach of accountability in education, wherein people only do what they are held accountable for by their superior’ (Biesta, 2010). This development has led to a redefining of educational relations into economic terms, assuming

that with accountability comes responsibility and the belief that a consumer role will give parents and students more power (Biesta, 2006).

Rather than diagnosing neoliberalism as a problem in education, governmental reports verbalize their diagnoses in terms of vertical versus horizontal control. The Dutch Education Council sees vertical control as a useful tool to guarantee the quality of education but also writes that the Netherlands has an overly strong focus on this type of control. It dominates the organizational structure of Dutch education and is generally based on managerial logic. The Council states that this logic foregrounds the competency of individual teachers, even though structure (the organizational environment) and culture (the ambiance of the environment) are equally important in their view (OR, 2016b). According to the Council, all of this could lead to an alienation of teachers, to a reduction of their drive and motivations, and to an exaggeration of accountability (OR, 2016b, p. 21). The Council also points to the fragmented, narrow focus on professional space and its top-down character which does make this diagnosis partly similar to the criticism of neoliberalism mentioned above (OR, 2016b, p. 17).

Moreover, all domains make 'a culture of measurement' part of their diagnoses (Biesta, 2010, p. 10; Boele, 2016, pp. 105-107; Evers & Kneyber 2013, p. 8). This is interesting because this 'culture of measurements' contradicts the understanding of democratization as related to a certain freedom of the teacher. This becomes clear when they indicate three problems linked to this 'culture': growing bureaucratization, a growing importance of rankings, marks, and figures, and tightening frameworks of protocols and procedures (Evers & Kneyber, 2013, p. 9). They state that it has caused "the growth of bureaucratic accountability and a decrease of bottom-up responsibility in the educational practice" (Evers & Kneyber, 2013, p. 9). They argue that teachers are expected to follow protocols to the letter, which is precisely why they lack the autonomy to change priorities. As a consequence, many teachers only feel responsible for the things they are supposed to do according to their superiors (Evers & Kneyber, 2013 p. 273). Boele takes the perspective of the director, stating that managing education is insufficient when it merely builds upon indicators, rankings, and protocols, and emphasizes measurable results (Boele, 2016).

Biesta also blames the culture of measurement for the disappearance of the subject of purpose in education. Discourses about effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability in education have replaced "the question what education is *for*" (Biesta, 2010, p. 3, emphasis as in original). As a consequence, the limited discourse about effectiveness and efficiency gave rise to an interest in the improvement and analysis of education by measuring educational data, such as exam results and other success rates. This in its turn has resulted in international tables and rankings used by national governments for policymaking (Biesta, 2010). The large quantity of data gave the impression that decisions about the direction of "the policy and form of educational practice can be based *solely* on factual information" (Biesta, 2006, p. 12 emphasis as in original). This has led to a performative culture in which means become ends and targets and indicators of quality are mistaken for quality itself, Biesta claims.

Thus, the terms 'neoliberalism' and 'the culture of measurement' relate to an economized perspective on education that is problematic when it comes to good education according to the documents we have analyzed so far. These forces undermine current Dutch education and lead

to problems that need modification. For example, teachers Kneyber and Evers call for action and change, stressing “the need for an alternative for the culture of measurement” (Evers & Kneyber, 2013, p. 269). They do not want to wait for government intervention, as they find it important that teachers reclaim their autonomy and take the first steps in the “resistance against the culture of measurement” (Evers & Kneyber, 2013, p. 9). In our view, the diagnostic frames of neoliberalism and the culture of measurement which all documents refer to, function as a counter-terminology, empowering the prognostic frame in which democracy is presented as a solution to the problems sketched above. At this point we will take the next step in our frame analysis, from the diagnostic framing task discussed above to the prognostic core framing tasks.

5.1.1 Prognosis I: Democracy as an Organizational Structure

The first meaning of ‘democracy’ in an educational context refers to the organizational structure of schools and the role of different actors, such as teachers, school leaders, and management. Evers and Kneyber aspire to radical change by “flipping the system”, changing top-down accountability into bottom-up responsibility, encouraging a system in which teachers are the leading pawns in the educational structure (Evers & Kneyber, 2013, p. 270). This bottom-up system would lead to what they call “collective autonomy”, i.e. teachers taking control (Evers & Kneyber, 2013, p. 270). Therefore, Evers and Kneyber’s prognosis presents democracy as an organizational structure. According to them, this would enable good education, and is therefore an alternative to the culture of measurement and the neoliberalist organization of education (Evers & Kneyber, 2013, p. 270). Teachers would be fully responsible for education; other organizational layers would serve them and be accountable to them. The authors encourage teachers to step up and demand ownership to search for ways to utilize the space schools already offer. Evers and Kneyber conclude their first book by paraphrasing Biesta, stating that “it is time to embrace the beautiful risk of education” (Biesta, 2013, p. 140; Evers & Kneyber, 2013, 275).

In their second book, they conclude that despite their best efforts, there is still a lack of action among teachers. This is the reason why they shift their prognosis from collective autonomy to professionalization. They even state that they no longer believe that improving Dutch education is dependent upon a further increase of an already available teacher autonomy (Evers & Kneyber, 2015, p. 14). Alternatively, the question whether teachers are capable of *using* this autonomy and freedom seems far more relevant to them.

In his prognosis, Boele also frames democracy as an organizational structure. To enable good education, “a culture of quality” is necessary, meaning a “systematic orientation on content, professional autonomy, responsibility and ambience” (Boele, 2016, p. 116). The content of education should be developed collectively, with contributions from all stakeholders, stimulated by school leaders. In addition, Boele is skeptical about a flat organization. He states that “hierarchies have existed for thousands of years and have proven their value throughout this time” (Boele, 2016, p. 130).

The Education Council also stresses democracy as an organizational structure in its report about the quality of education. The report emphasizes working in teams, as this cooperation offers social support, social control, and responsibility (OR, 2016b, p. 18). This would lead to a reduction of vertical control and to the government taking up a stimulating and facilitating role – discussed in more detail below. To enable educational work in teams, school leaders should create a culture and structure that is supportive, and teachers should have an active attitude to achieving agency. This restructuring of relations between teachers and school leaders asks for a “democratic attitude” from teachers, meaning a professional position-taking to enable working together in teams, and making shared decisions (OR, 2016b). To create such agency, a certain amount of freedom without interference from government or school leaders is necessary, the Council claims (OR, 2016b).

5.1.2 Prognosis II: Democracy as Governmental Policy

Apart from emphasizing a “democratic attitude” to restructuring relations, the Education Council also formulates another meaning of democracy that functions as part of a prognosis frame. Democracy as governmental policy entails the relationship between the educational field and the government, and the way in which this relationship is structured. It focuses on the power relations between different agents in the educational field, verbalized as the balance between vertical and horizontal control (OR, 2016b). When it comes to the quality of education, the Council deems vertical control executed by school leaders necessary. In fact, the Council advises the government to take more initiative, set out the principle guidelines, and ask for a larger professional input from schools (OR, 2016a).

At the same time, however, the Council argues that this vertical structure should be primarily aimed at strengthening horizontal control by using more instruments that emphasize informal rules and personal motivation to achieve a more equal form of communication regarding the quality of education (OR, 2016b, p. 33). According to the Council, this horizontal control will lead to an increase in agency and trust between teachers and school leaders, which will in turn lead to a decrease in the need for vertical control, because control takes place, not through formally stated power positions, but through an informal relation of stimulation and limitation (OR, 2016b, p. 33).

5.1.3 Prognosis III: Democracy as Knowledge and Skill

The third meaning of democracy encompasses the teaching of knowledge about democracy and democratic skills to children and students so that they can become well-informed democratic citizens. In this type of prognosis frame, democracy functions as a curriculum-based solution that needs to be part of the content of future education. According to the Education Platform (PO), schools, teachers, and school leaders are responsible for constructing educational practice and giving meaning to it, rethinking curricula and goals on a national scale every year (PO, 2016, p. 16). One important facet of the Dutch educational curriculum should be a subject called “burgerschapsvorming”, best translated as citizenship education. According to the Education Platform, it is the task and responsibility of every school to teach children how

to function in a democratic state. In a globalizing world and an increasingly multicultural society, the report argues, the teaching of democratic skills and knowledge is of utter importance. Keeping the core values of democracy alive is an educational task, together with the promotion of knowledge about the rule of law (PO, 2016, p. 36). Veugelers (2007, p. 107) analyzed postwar Dutch legislation on citizenship education and distinguished three types of citizenship:

- *adapting citizenship*: emphasizes discipline, social awareness, and gives relatively little attention to autonomy;
- *individualistic citizenship*: attaches great importance to discipline and autonomy, and relatively little to social awareness;
- *critical-democratic citizenship*: revolves around autonomy and social awareness more than around discipline.

By favoring the latter and building on work from for example Dewey, Giroux and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, Veugelers argues for “critical-democratic citizenship” in a modern society that “needs citizens that are both socially aware and autonomous (...) to stimulate humanitarian, social and democratic values” (Veugelers, 2007 p. 116).

In contrast, Biesta states that the current understanding of democracy as knowledge and skill within the educational field is problematic. He claims that in established democratic states, education has the task to preserve democratic life but is currently called upon “to counter political apathy, particularly among the young” (Biesta, 2006, p. 118). Asking education to prepare children for democracy is problematic for the following reasons: 1) it builds on an instrumentalist concept of education, making schools fully responsible for the success and future of democracy, 2) it foregrounds individualism and citizenship as competencies by equipping students with the “proper set of democratic knowledge”, 3) and it is built on the premise that the success of a democracy depends on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of individuals and their willingness to act democratically (Biesta, 2006). These points would suggest that democracy is only possible when all citizens are properly educated and will act in a proper way. Biesta rejects what he sees as a relationship between democracy and education in which education is understood as a trajectory for children to become democratic citizens (Biesta, 2013, p. 102). Although the teaching of democratic knowledge and moral qualifications is an important aspect of education, Biesta challenges its existing developmental character, which we discuss in detail further below (Biesta, 2013).

5.1.4 Prognosis IV: Democracy as a Practice

When Veugelers speaks about democracy, he refers to the work of Dewey and the concept of “democracy as a way of life” (Veugelers, 2007 p. 110). Veugelers emphasizes that democracy should not be seen as a fixed state, but as a process that needs to be won repeatedly and needs to be maintained. According to him, democracy as a process “can stimulate, organize and link value development and norm development” (Veugelers, 2007 p. 110). De Winter also emphasizes that “democracy is not only a political system, but also refers to a way of life” (De

Winter, 2004, p. 7, emphasis as in original). He claims that the public interest as an educational aim got lost due to the increase of individual and (religious) groups interests (De Winter, 2004 p. 3). Furthermore, he calls for the need for socialization in terms of teaching “[the] democratic constitution and democratic manners in a time of increasing pluralism, decreasing social cohesion and advancing fundamentalism” (De Winter, 2004, p. 3). According to De Winter, democratic education is “not about individual pedagogical choices, but an urgent pedagogical and societal responsibility for the sake of society as a whole” (De Winter, 2004 p. 3). Hence, De Winter characterizes the need for citizenship education mainly as a educational process towards socialization.

According to the Education Platform, “good education” in the 21st century contains 1) a qualifying function, teaching children the proper skills and knowledge, 2) a socializing function, equipping them for society, and 3) a contribution to self-understanding.¹ These categories are very similar to the domains of qualification, socialization, and subjectification Biesta introduced to discuss the purpose of education and to explain what constitutes good education.² Democracy as knowledge and skill would fall under the domain of socialization, i.e. the educational domain in which pupils become part of a particular social, cultural, and political order.

Even though Biesta acknowledges the need for socialization, he thinks that democracy should not be and is not equal to the kind of knowledge that can be taught (Biesta, 2010 p. 110, 2013, p. 103). Following the work of Hannah Arendt, he tries to overcome the “instrumentalism and individualism in the theory and practice of democratic education” in order to articulate “a political conception of democratic subjectivity” (Biesta, 2006, p, 121). According to Biesta, Arendt’s philosophy revolves around the idea of humans as active beings, in which humanity is based on what someone does (Biesta, 2013, p. 104, emphasis as in original). Arendt distinguishes three modes of active life or *vita activa* in which, apart from labor and work, action is an end in itself with freedom its defining quality (Biesta, 2013). Biesta points out that to act means to take initiative and create something new, to make a new beginning. To be a subject is to act, but to be subject, we need others to respond to these new beginnings, because if no one responds, the new beginning would not come into the world and being a subject would be impossible (Biesta, 2006, p. 133, emphasis as in original). Action is never possible in isolation, and thus never possible without plurality (Biesta, 2006). We can find subjectivity in public life where we live and have to live with others who are not like us. Without plurality, there would be no freedom (Biesta, 2006, 2013).

So philosophically, democracy is understood as the situation in which everyone has the opportunity to be a subject, to act, and to bring their beginnings into the world of plurality and difference, into which others also bring their unique beginnings (Biesta, 2006). In the context of education, Biesta strongly emphasizes that education is not solely at the disposal of the existing order, inserting newcomers along pre-existing rules and borders. Hence, education is not mere socialization, but should also entail an orientation toward freedom in which students can question and oppose existing orders (Biesta, 2006, p. 129). For Biesta, democracy is not only an organizational structure, policy, or knowledge and skill, but also the commitment to a world of plurality and difference where freedom appears. More importantly, democracy as a frame is

such a practice, a way of being and interacting with others. Therefore, we claim that this meaning of democracy constitutes an important fourth dimension in the debate about the future of good education in the Netherlands.

6 CONCLUSION

By using a frame analysis, we clarified that the documents under analysis make neoliberalism and the culture of measurement part of their diagnostic frame, i.e. they present them as forces that are undermining current education. This particular diagnosis then gives rise to the prognostic framing task, in which the meaning of democracy is discursively constructed as a counter-terminology to the concepts of neoliberalism and the culture of measurement.

In all documents, democracy is framed as a prognosis, but with four different meanings: 1) democracy as organizational structure, 2) democracy as governmental policy, 3) democracy as knowledge and skill and 4) democracy as a practice. We argue that these different frames can be seen as the four dimensions of democracy with respect to Dutch education. If democracy is to be part and parcel of the future of Dutch education, they should all be part of the conversation. However, an increased awareness about these four dimensions is not sufficient in itself. The next step would be to further specify specific themes at the heart of these four dimensions, in order to understand what we can expect when it comes to democracy with respect to education. Firstly, we need empirical data about the ways in which policymakers formulate the aims of democratic education and define its meaning. Secondly, we need to explore how these aims fit into the current ideas about democratic theory. For example, if policymakers push for the aim to learn pupils how to disagree, how does this fit into the idea of conflict in democratic society? This is especially important for the current Dutch context; at this very moment, development teams are revising the Dutch curriculum. The first results tend to favor grounding democracy in education based on the deliberative model of democracy. This choice has strong implications for the meaning of democracy and its anchoring in the educational system. We want to stress the importance of exploring the meaning of the deliberative model when applied to educational aims, and the consideration of other democratic theories, such as the agonistic model. Lastly, we need to know how teachers and school leaders turn democracy into practice, and how they interpret potential connections between democracy and education. This study wants to function as a starting point for an understanding of these phenomena.

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ENDNOTES

1 In Dutch: kennisontwikkeling, maatschappelijke toerusting en persoonsvorming.

2 By qualification, Biesta (2010) means 'the part of education where knowledge, skills and understandings is provided and often also concerns the dispositions and forms that allow the students to 'do something'. Subjectification is the domain where 'the process of becoming a subject occurs. It is precisely not about the insertion of newcomers into existing orders, but about ways of being independent from such orders, ways of being in which the individual is not simply a specimen of a more encompassing order'. With socialization the three domains overlap, but we have to be aware that in discussing good education, separation will contribute to the conversation.