

**Democratizing Parental Involvement in Domaineducation:
A Qualitative Study Exploring Parental Involvement Through the Pure Deliberative
Procedural Perspective on Democratic Legitimacy**

Master thesis

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Master Youth, Education and Society



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Abstract

Schools find their citizenship-responsibility ambiguous and complicated. This paper argues that to clarify how schools should democratize, researchers and policymakers should be explicit about the perspective of democratic legitimacy that they take. This paper tests this claim by applying a pure deliberative-procedural perspective to the exploration of parental involvement at an educational pilot. Three conditions are formulated for legitimate democratic parental involvement: parents are well-informed about developments at the school, parents get opportunities to participate in deliberation and decision-making, all stakeholders are treated as equals throughout the process. The qualitative study employs semi-structured interviews with parents and school faculty to answer the question: to what extent does parental involvement at Domaineducation meet the conditions of pure deliberative procedural democratic legitimacy? The results indicate that the school has high communication standards which ensure that all parents are well-informed. Furthermore, opportunities exist to get involved. While there is a level of formal equality, it is suggested that Domaineducation can improve to equalize relationships between the school and the parents as well as between the parents themselves to reach substantive equality. The discussion suggests establishing standards of democratic professionalism amongst the faculty to bridge the knowledge gap between the parents and the faculty. The paper concludes by acknowledging limitations and suggesting implications for future research and policy.

Key words: parental involvement – democratic school culture – democratic legitimacy – pure deliberative-proceduralism

Samenvatting

Scholen vinden hun verantwoordelijkheid op het gebied van burgerschap gecompliceerd en onduidelijk. Dit artikel betoogt dat om duidelijk te maken hoe scholen moeten democratiseren, onderzoekers en beleidsmakers expliciet moeten zijn over het perspectief van democratische legitimiteit dat zij aannemen. Dit artikel test dit argument door een puur deliberatief procedureel perspectief toe te passen op de ouderbetrokkenheid bij een onderwijs-pilot. Drie voorwaarden voor democratische ouderbetrokkenheid worden geformuleerd: de ouders moeten goed geïnformeerd zijn over de ontwikkelingen op school, ouders moeten de gelegenheid hebben om deel te nemen aan beraadslaging en besluitvorming, en alle belanghebbenden gedurende het proces als gelijken worden behandeld. Het kwalitatieve onderzoek, waarbij gebruik wordt gemaakt van semi-gestructureerde interviews met ouders en de schoolfaculteit, beantwoordt de vraag: tot hoeverre voldoet de ouderbetrokkenheid bij het domeinonderwijs aan de voorwaarden van puur deliberatief procedureel democratische legitimiteit? De resultaten geven aan dat de school hoge communicatiestandaarden heeft die ervoor zorgen dat alle ouders goed geïnformeerd zijn. Verder zijn er mogelijkheden om mee te doen met de beraadslaging en besluitvorming. Al is er formele gelijkheid, het wordt gesuggereerd dat domeinonderwijs de relaties tussen de school en de ouders alsook tussen de ouders onderling moet egaliseren om substantieve gelijkheid te realiseren. De discussie suggereert het vaststellen van normen voor democratisch professionalisme binnen de faculteit om de kenniskloof tussen de faculteit en de ouders te dichten. Het artikel concludeert met het erkennen van beperkingen van het onderzoek en het suggereren van implicaties voor toekomstig onderzoek en beleid.

Trefwoorden: ouder betrokkenheid – democratische schoolcultuur – democratische legitimiteit - puur deliberatief proceduralisme

Democratizing Parental Involvement in Domain education:

A Qualitative Study Exploring Parental Involvement Through the Pure Deliberative Procedural Perspective on Democratic Legitimacy

The resilience of modern democratic society depends on the knowledge, capabilities, and values of its citizens (de Winter, 2012; Gutmann, 1993; Kymlicka & Norman, 1994; Levinson, 1997). Indicators of low levels of democratic citizenship among Dutch youth compared to their peers in other Western European countries and previous generations raise concern about the health of democracy in the Netherlands (Munniskma et al., 2017; Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2018). Amongst other reasons, the decline of support for democracy has been attributed to the fear of dictatorship fading out of our collective memory (de Winter, 2012). In response to the dwindling level of support for democracy, there have been calls for measures to strengthen democratic citizenship education (Staatscommissie Parlementair Stelsel, 2018). To maintain a democratic society, a democratic pedagogical offensive, which creates opportunities for children and adolescents to actively participate, is needed to allow the next generation to internalize the democratic way of life (Biesta & Lawy, 2006; De Winter, 2012; Edelstein, 2011).

One approach within the democratic pedagogical offensive have been the calls from academia and policymakers alike to democratize school cultures. According to scholars who support this approach, schools are responsible for citizenship education to prepare students to become members of a democratic society (Dewey, 1966; de Winter, 2012; Gutmann, 1993). They argue that democratic citizenship is best learned when students can experience what it means and how it can be practiced (Apple & Bean, 1997; Biesta, 2011; Dewey, 1966; Gutmann, 1993; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010; Solomon, Watson, & Battistich, 2001). Several pedagogical theories support the socializing effects of a democratic school

culture, such as ecological theories which illustrate that socialization depends on interactions with the subjects contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Super & Harkness, 1986), communicative theories which point to the socializing effects of observation and discourse (Bandura, 1986; Watts, 1999), and experiential theories which argue that the internalization of norms and values requires opportunities to practice them (Dewey, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). To improve Dutch citizenship education, the Dutch minister of primary and secondary education submitted a bill which called for schools to maintain a culture which mirrors the democratic values (Slob, 2019).

The question remains whether this new bill successfully addresses previous calls from teachers and school boards to clarify the citizenship responsibility of schools (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017). Dutch schools have had the responsibility to contribute to democratic citizenship since 2006 (stb-2005-678, 2005). However, the Council on Education [Onderwijsraad] reported that the responsibility set by the government had failed to result in a clear vision nor a result-oriented approach of citizenship education (2012). The slow development of citizenship education is the result of a combination of factors: a complex and unclear assignment, limited support in the implementation process, and a lack of knowledge about what works (Onderwijsraad, 2012; Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2012; 2015; 2016; 2017). The ambiguity of the assignment can be attributed a lack of a clear vision on how schools should democratize.

The school that commissioned this research project is another example of a school motivated to take active steps to foster a democratic school culture but having trouble in doing so. In 2018/2019, this school implemented an educational pilot called Domaineducation for the first two years of secondary education. Domaineducation aims to foster personal development and citizenship amongst its students by replacing the traditional curriculum with interdisciplinary learning domains and project-based learning (Boekema &

Promper, 2019). The learning domains and project-based learning opens opportunities for the students to take control over their own education. However, the first round of evaluation indicated that students are not aware of what it means to be a citizen or how their education prepares them in that sense (Kuijpers, 2020). Furthermore, since students reported that they learned about themselves through their parents, this first round of the evaluation called for research about the role of parents in the socialization of democratic citizenship (Kuijpers, 2020). Similarly, to the ambiguity experienced by other schools, the issues that are highlighted by the first evaluation can be attributed to a lack of vision with regards to parental involvement.

This research's contribution to the democratic pedagogical offensive can be divided into two parts. First, it is argued that the ambiguity of both the citizenship responsibility for all Dutch schools in general and parental involvement at Domaineducation in specific can be attributed to a lack of vision with regards to what perspective of democratic legitimacy should be pursued. This claim is put to the test by exploring parental involvement at Domaineducation through the pure deliberative procedural perspective on democratic legitimacy. Semi-structured interviews with parents and faculty were employed to answer the question: to what extent does parental involvement at Domaineducation meet the conditions of the Pure deliberative procedural democratic legitimacy? The goal is to provide suggestions about how this can be democratized. The discussion answers the research question and highlights the importance of democratic professionalism to bridge the knowledge gap between the faculty and the parents. This paper concludes with implications for future research and policy.

Theoretical Background

This section proceeds in three steps. First, democratic legitimacy is defined and explained, and it is argued that this concept has a guiding role in the process of school democratization. Then, a specific perspective on democratic legitimacy is described, namely pure deliberative proceduralism and the choice is explained. Then, at the end of this section, pure deliberative proceduralism is applied to parental involvement to formulate conditions of legitimate democratic parental involvement.

Democratic Legitimacy

The question remains whether this new bill successfully addresses previous calls from teachers and school boards to clarify the citizenship responsibility of schools (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017). That democratization of schools is a complex and unclear assignment is understandable since democracy itself is a contested concept whose meaning has continually evolved since its origins in Ancient Greece (Doughty, 2014; Downs, 1987; Kahan, 1999; Sultana, 2012). Furthermore, around the world, there exist different democratic institutional combinations which are all considered democracies. These range from presidential or parliamentary systems, elections through proportional representation or single member districts, and, unitary versus federal governmental structures (Gerring and Thacker, 2008; Lijphart, 2012; Sartori, 1997). Similarly, in the literature about school democratization, a range of institutions have been evaluated such as effects of dialogue in the classroom (Bickmore, 2014; Kaufmann, 2010), student representation in decision making (Klemenčič, 2012; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013; Nyundu, Naidoo, & Chagonda, 2015), and desired leadership styles (Jwan, Anderson, & Bennett, 2010; Ruffin & Brooks, 2010; Woods & Roberts, 2013). These varying institutional frameworks are based on different perspective on democratic legitimacy however these remain implicit in the literature on school democratization. To clarify the citizenship responsibility of school, this gap in the literature must be addressed by acknowledging the concept of democratic legitimacy (Peter, 2009).

Legitimacy is a fundamental normative concept in social evaluation and refers to the conditions for the appropriate right to rule and the conditions under which one has the obligation to accept the validity of these rules and act accordingly (Peter, 2009). In other words, when a collective decision meets the conditions of legitimacy, it ought to be accepted regardless of whether one deems it correct or just from their individual perspective.

Democratic legitimacy identifies an ideal for how members of a democratic constituency ought to make decisions about how to organize their life together and sets out the normative conditions that qualify democratic decision-making (Peter, 2009). In her book *Democratic Legitimacy*, Peter outlines four different perspectives: pure aggregative proceduralism, rational aggregative proceduralism, pure deliberative proceduralism, and Rational deliberative proceduralism. To create coherent democratic institutional frameworks within schools, the democratization process must be guided by a vision on democratic legitimacy. Therefore, to improve school democratization, research and policy must be explicit about the perspective of democratic legitimacy that is taken.

In line with this argument, the difficulty Domaineducation experiences in conceptualizing parental involvement can be attributed to a lack of a guiding vision on what kind of democratic culture they wish to establish. To create a coherent democratic school culture a vision on democratic legitimacy must be chosen and translated to aspects of school functioning. While there are a range of perspectives which could be chosen to this end, providing an overview of the perspectives on democratic legitimacy that have been proposed falls outside the scope of this paper. Instead, the focus remains on describing the perspective that was taken during this research project, Pure-Deliberative-Proceduralism, and how it relates to parental involvement.

Pure Deliberative Proceduralism

The first characteristic of this perspective is that it takes a procedural stance as opposed to an instrumental stance. Proceduralists claim that decisions are legitimate when the decision-making process itself, rather than the resulting decisions, meets demands of fairness (Peter, 2009). Unlike instrumentalists, proceduralists do not believe that it is possible to determine outcome-oriented criteria of legitimacy outside of a legitimate process. Pure-proceduralism, as opposed to rational-proceduralism, refers to the fact that this perspective has a sole focus on procedure rather than including instrumental conditions on legitimacy. The reasoning behind applying a procedural perspective to parental involvement at Domaineducation was guided by the desire to guarantee consistent participation in the democratic process. Unlike proceduralists, instrumentalist outcome-oriented criteria for legitimate decisions are determined without consulting the stakeholders. On the other hand, proceduralism prioritizes democratic participation by the parents over determining a certain kind of decision. This focus is consistent with Domaineducation's prioritization of developing democratic citizenship with its students. Treating the parents in an authoritarian manner would send mixed messages about the values that are important.

The second characteristic is that it supports a deliberative procedure rather than an aggregative procedure. Where aggregative procedures are solely focused on the aggregating individual perspective into a collective decision through voting mechanisms, deliberative procedures emphasize that collective decision-making should follow public deliberation among all those affected by the decisions (Peter, 2009). Deliberation is a public process of reasoning and argument among equal citizens (Cohen, 1997). According to deliberative perspectives on democracy, the exchange of reasons is what lies at the heart of the democratic decision-making process. While there are different perspectives within the deliberation perspective, they generally share three procedural conditions. Firstly, stakeholders must be well informed about decisions that affect them to determine their perspective. Secondly,

stakeholders must have the opportunity to be involved in the deliberation and decision-making process. Thirdly, all participants in the deliberation and decision-making process should be treated as equals. For the deliberation to be considered legitimate, stakeholders should be both formally and substantively equal. This means that everyone can put issues on the agenda, propose solutions, and offer reasons in support of or in criticism of proposals. Furthermore, participants are substantively equal in that the existing distribution of power and resources does not shape their chances to contribute to deliberation (Cohen, 1997). The reasoning behind applying a deliberative approach to parental involvement at Domaineducation was guided by fact that this approach accommodates the needs of parents involved with an education pilot. Since Domaineducation is a totally new concept, both to the faculty and to the parents, it is essential that the parents are kept up informed about the decisions that are made. Furthermore, by involving the parents in the deliberation process, the faculty can use their perspectives and support through the implementation process.

Democratic Parental Involvement

Having clarified the distinction between democratic legitimacy and democratic institutions and described the conditions of the Pure deliberative procedural perspective, the remainder of this paper applies this perspective to parental involvement. Parental involvement includes any activity where a child's primary caretakers interact with school activities. This can include home-based activities such as listening to children talk about school or homework supervision as well as school-based activities such as attending parent-teacher meetings (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Despite both democratization of school cultures and parental involvement being popular topics, the overlap between these subjects remains a gap in the literature. Since parents are affected by the decisions made at school, democratic governance implies that they should be considered in the process of democratizing school culture. Furthermore, the literature has identified a range of benefits of collaboration between

the parents and the school, such as a reduction in the stress of childrearing (de Winter, 2012), an increase in social capital (Coleman, 1988), and improvement in educational attainment (Al-Alwan 2014; Oswald, Zaidi, Cheatham, & Brody, 2018; Shute, Hansen, Underwood, & Razzouk, 2011).

Applying the conditions of Pure-Deliberative-Proceduralism to parental involvement results in three conditions that need to be met for legitimate democratic parental involvement. Firstly, parents must be well-informed about decisions that affect them and their children. Secondly, there are opportunities for parents to be involved in deliberation and decision-making. Thirdly, the stakeholders are treated equally in their involvement in deliberation and decision-making. While most schools meet the first two conditions of the pure deliberative procedural perspective, these opportunities are often characterized by a democratic deficit. This deficit refers to the unequal distribution of power both between the school and the parents as well as within the parent body. To democratize school cultures, these democratic deficits in parental involvement must be addressed.

With regards to the relationship between parents and the school, while parents are often given a say in schools, their influence is usually limited to trivial matters. In research and practice alike, the purpose of parental involvement is usually instrumental to improving educational results (Al-Alwan 2014; Epstein 1987; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Oswald et al. 2018). While parents may support a focus on educational attainment, it is undemocratic since parents were not involved in its construction (Fullan & Quinn, 1996; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Stelmach, 2016; Tronto, 2013). In this relationship, parents are stripped of their agency and instrumentalized (Stitt and Brooks, 2014), parents are seen as public volunteers (Lawson, 2003) and teachers as their managers (Miretzky, 2004; Pushor, 2017; Lareau, 1989). This has also been described as thinking for parents instead of with parents (Hughes and Mac Naughton 2000). As a result, the school may fail to recognize what

really matters for parents (Van Laere, Van Houtte, Vandenbroeck, 2018). To meet the conditions of Pure-Deliberative-Proceduralism, the relationship between schools and parents should be equalized providing genuine opportunities for deliberation and decision-making as well as shared agenda-setting power.

In addition to the instrumentalization of parental involvement, schools often fail to acknowledge the uneven distribution of the capacity to participate. The literature on parental participation has identified a range of factors which influence the degree of participation including: social and cultural capital (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, and Hernandez 2013; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Allensworth, Bryk, & Sebring, 2010), a lack of access to information (Gyrko & Henig, 2010; Levin, Daschbach, & Perry, 2010), limited time (Heymann & Earle, 2000; Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007), language differences (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Marsh, 2007), self-efficacy (Lareau & Munoz, 2012; Lyken-Segosebe & Hinz, 2015), and the ambiguity of expectations (Flynn & Nolan, 2008). When the uneven distribution of the capacity to participate is ignored, the distribution of involvement within the parent body is unequal as well. “Neutral” approaches to parental participation aimed at increasing educational attainment risk perpetuating social inequalities rather than mitigating them (Feuerstein, 2000; Gillanders, McKinney, & Ritchie 2012; Lareau, 1987). To meet the conditions of Pure-Deliberative-Proceduralism, parental involvement should be equitable by acknowledging the differences in the ability to participate and providing support to mitigate these differences.

This paper tests the validity of the claim that school democratization can proceed more coherently when a vision on democratic legitimacy is chosen by exploring parental involvement at Domaineducation through the pure deliberative procedural perspective. In doing so, the goal is to understand how democratic parental involvement currently is and to provide suggestions for how it could be democratized further to meet the conditions set out

by pure deliberative proceduralism. In that light, the paper addresses the question: *to what extent does parental involvement at Domaineducation meet the conditions of the Pure deliberative procedural perspective on democratic legitimacy?* This question is divided into three sub questions which each reflect one of the conditions of democratic parental involvement:

1. How well-informed are parents about decisions that affect them or their children?
2. What opportunities for involvement in deliberation and decision-making are there for parents?
3. To what extent are the stakeholders treated as equals in their involvement in deliberation and decision-making?

Methodology

Research Design

To answer the research questions, a practice-oriented qualitative design was employed. Practice-oriented research's primary aim is to solve a practical problem while addressing literature gaps in the process (Bleijenbergh, Korzilius, & Verschuren, 2010). The primary aim was to clarify how parental involvement could be democratized within Domaineducation. since the research had a practice-oriented nature, the main purpose of the research was to benefit the study's participants. To achieve an open-ended, detailed exploration of the participants experience, the data was collected through nine semi-structured interviews with parents and faculty involved with Domaineducation and analyzed in two rounds of coding (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). At the beginning of the research process, the Netherlands was struck by the Corona pandemic. In addition to the minimization of personal contact, on the 12th of March people were asked to work from home if possible and on the 15th of March schools were closed (NOS.nl, 2020). As a result, education had to

quickly shift from traditional education to online education. These developments placed an unexpected burden on teachers and parents alike which affected this research in both the recruitment and data collection process.

Participants

The commissioning school was a secondary school in Noord Brabant, and home to a total of 1700 MAVO, HAVO, and VWO students. Since 2018, this school offers Domaineducation for the first two years of student's secondary education. In the first year there was one class of students which took part in this education pilot. In the second year, two new classes were added to the program.

To gain a full picture of parental involvement at Domaineducation, interviews were conducted with parents and different faculty members of the school. Collecting data from different perspectives allowed for data source triangulation of the experiences to gain multiple perspectives and validation of data (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Initially, the goal was to interview eight parents with different levels of involvement and diverse cultural backgrounds and three teachers. The parental participants were selected using a stratified sampling method combined with snowball sampling. The goal of the stratified sampling procedure was to include the perspectives of both involved and noninvolved parents. Furthermore, a more general invitation for participation in the research would likely have resulted in an overrepresentation of involved parents. This had to be avoided to gain a full picture of parental involvement. Two of the teachers that participated were selected through a purposive sampling method and the third teacher through snowball sampling. In the end, three parents responded to the invitation to participate and two more were contacted through snowball sampling. Nonetheless, the sample of parents was reflective

of the different levels of involvement and repetition in the information coming from the last two interviews implied a degree of data saturation (Francis et al., 2010).

Data Collection

With informed consent in mind, the interviews were preceded by an information letter and a short survey in which the participants were asked for their consent to participate and given the opportunity to make amendments to the topic guide. Furthermore, since the Dutch government limited face-to-face contact to slow down the spread of the coronavirus, the interviews were conducted digitally. The participants could choose their preferred medium: MS Teams (5/9), or phone call (4/9). Both the researcher and the participants were at their respective homes during the interview. On average, the interviews lasted 24 minutes and ranged from 22 to 29 minutes. The interviews were transcribed word for word, anonymized, and the audio-files were deleted. In this paper, all quotations were translated from Dutch to English.

The topic guide used for the parents and the school faculty were largely the same (see appendix 1). Before starting the recording of the interview, the researcher introduced himself and explained the purpose and process of the interview. Participants were told that they were free not to answer a question and encouraged to ask for clarification if something was unclear. The encouragement to ask for clarification aimed to prevent participants answering questions without understanding what they were about the school faculty were asked if they gave consent to including their job titles in the research. At the beginning of the interview several demographic questions were asked to gain insight into the participants followed by open questions about their thoughts on Domaineducation. The key topics to be discussed were the communication standards, deliberation opportunities, and decision-making opportunities. At the end of the interview, the participants were asked for final remarks that

had not yet been discussed and were encouraged to send any remaining thoughts to the researcher by mail so they could be added to the transcript. The opportunity to amend the topic guide or provide additional thoughts after the interview were meant to make sure that the interview stayed as close to the participant's experience as possible. With ethical data use in mind, the data that was collected was anonymized and the original files were deleted afterwards.

Data Analysis

A provisional coding procedure was used to answer the sub-questions while limiting the research bias on the analysis. The analysis procedure included six steps; familiarizing oneself with the data, dividing the responses into meaning units, applying the provisional codebook, specifying the codebook based on the first round of coding, applying the improved codebook, and finally relating these codes to the sub-questions. Analyzing the data in two rounds allowed for a balance between categories that address the research questions on the one hand while being guided by the participants' responses on the other hand. No other coders took part in the coding procedure and the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo (version 12.2) was used throughout the coding process. The preliminary codebook categorized the data based on the three sub-questions: communication standards, opportunities for involvement, equal treatment of stakeholders. Between the first and the second round of coding, the codebook was adjusted to fit the data more precisely. New codes were included to reflect descriptions of the communication standards, the types of involvement, the descriptions and explanations of the parent-school relationship, and the descriptions and explanations of the parent-parent relationship (see appendix 2). This improved codebook was applied to the data in the second round of coding. The data was analyzed on two levels of aggregation: group perspectives and individual perspectives. On the level of the group, the attitudes of the parents were aggregated to create an approximation

of the perspectives of the parent-body. Analyzing on an individual level allowed for the identification of specific in-group differences.

Results

The five parents that were interviewed were involved in the school to different extends. One parent was very involved, participating both in the soundboard and the parent-council. Two others were relatively involved and had attended at least one soundboard meeting. The last two parents were not involved and did not participate in either the soundboard or the parent-council. There was no cultural diversity in the parents that were involved since all were Dutch and none felt attached to a religious belief. Furthermore, all parents that were interviewed were mothers born between the year 1970 and 1977. In terms of educational background, one of the mothers finished MBO, three finished HBO, and the fifth finished her bachelors.

The four faculty that were involved included school leadership, two teachers who were also mentors of a domain class and project coordinators of the Domaineducation pilot, and one teacher who was also a mentor of a domain class. The faculty were also involved with the parents to different extends. One of the faculty had attended soundboard meetings and participated in the parent-council. The two project coordinators organized the soundboard meetings as well as maintaining contact with the parents through primary communication channels, information evenings, and 10-minute conversations. The other teacher did not participate in the soundboard meetings nor the parent-council but did maintain contact with the parents in the same ways as the other teachers. Similarly, to the parents, the faculty were all Dutch and none were religious. Except for one of the project coordinators, all the faculty that were involved were female. The faculty were all born between the year 1967 and 1991.

Aside from one mentor who had completed a master's degree all the faculty had completed an HBO study.

Sub-question 1: How well-informed are parents about decisions that affect them or their children?

Several channels of communication were discussed, ranging from magister, e-mail, and telephone calls to information evenings and 10-minute conversations. Within the theme of communication standards, three categories were used: modes of communication, descriptions of the communication between the parents and the school, and motivations to communicate.

Three codes were used to describe the statements within the first category regarding the methods of communication. The first code combined magister, e-mail, and telephone under primary communication channels. The second and third code included descriptions of the information evenings and the 10-minute conversations, respectively. While both the parents and the faculty claimed that the primary channels of communication contributed to the fact that the parents felt like they knew who to reach out to. Only the teachers claimed that this was facilitated by the fact that the value of communication was emphasized at the information evening at the beginning of the school year. For example, one of the mentors said that "*at the beginning of the year, we stress the importance of open communication at a general parent evening.*" No notable differences were found between the descriptions by parents that were involved compared to those that were not.

In the second category, the most common description was that the parents feel well informed. This description was followed closely by the idea that parents felt that they knew who to reach out to when they have a question or face a challenge. This sentiment was raised by both the parents and the faculty. For example, one of the parents said that "*in theory,*

whenever something is up, you can always reach out to the mentor. They usually respond immediately and discuss the issue with you.” There was a difference within the parents that were interviewed. The parents that were the least involved both indicated that there were aspects about Domain education which remained unclear to them while the parents that participated in the soundboard did not appear to raise that issue. For example, one of the parents that was less involved said that *“[she does] not know much about Domain education because [her] son does not discuss what happens at school.”* Moreover, the teachers admitted that while the school maintains high standards of communication, there will always be some parents that fall through the cracks. The faculty discussed the challenge of language differences and different expectations associated with minority cultural backgrounds. The sample of parents was not diverse enough to study these obstacles from the parents’ perspective.

The category pertaining to statements describing the motivation to communicate included three main codes: students interests, personal interests, education pilot. In general, the parents and the faculty agreed that communication was important since it is in the student’s best interest when the different socializing contexts communicate to get a full picture of the student’s development. All four of the faculty made some sort of reference to the pedagogical triangle between the student, the home context, and the school context. The faculty said that:

the goal is to work together, to establish effective collaboration. The goal is to learn from each other about the best way to approach things. Whenever there are misunderstandings, more communication is required. To make the four to six years the student spends with us as pleasant as possible, both caretakers aim to monitor the child’s development well. To do this you need both parties, the home context and the school context.

Parents shared this belief:

For me [the 10-minute conversations] are often a way to check how things are going. Is there something that is going on that I do not notice at home? At home you can think that everything is going well but it could be that your child is a brat at school. You never know.

Furthermore, the parents seemed to emphasize the value of information more regarding the fact that Domaineducation was a new educational format that they had zero prior experience with. For example, the parent who was involved in the parent-council explained her reasoning to do so by saying that:

it is important for me because Domaineducation is new. Since our child is part of the first class, we do not exactly know how the education will go. Some things may go well, others may not. I figured, if I get involved, I will be well-informed about the decisions that are made and have some influence on them as well.

Between the parents themselves, a clear distinction could be made between the parents that were involved and those that were not. Where the parents that were involved all discussed their interest in being informed about their child's progress and the developments at school, the parents that were not expressed neither of these.

Sub-question 2: What opportunities for involvement in deliberation and decision-making are there for parents?

Domaineducation offers opportunities to get involved in deliberation as well as decision-making. With regards to deliberation, three out of the five parents discussed their involvement in the soundboard meetings. With regards to decision-making, one out of the five parents discussed her involvement in the parent council. For both modes of involvement, three categories of codes were made: descriptions of involvement, reasons to participate, and

reasons not to participate. However, since only one parent and the faculty member could share their perspective on the workings of the parent-council there is too little data to draw conclusions about the influence of parents in the decision-making process.

The first category, descriptions of experience at the soundboard were generally positive and included three main codes: pleasant, responsive, and open communication. For example, one parent said when asked about how she would describe her experience on the soundboard: *“Pleasant, we just discuss some things which the teachers struggled with. We offered some new ideas that they had not considered yet. That was fun and felt valuable.”* These sentiments were shared by all three parents that had participated in a soundboard meeting but were not discussed by the faculty.

The second category, motivating factors, included both reasons to participate as well as reasons not to. Parents that were involved shared a desire for information, interest in matters of school functioning, and a desire to influence decisions. Similarly, to the importance of communication, parents related their motivation to get involved to the fact that Domaineducation was new to them. For example, one of the parents said that *“it was important to get involved in order to know what is going on and adjust course whenever that is necessary, because it is new.”* Parents that were not involved attributed this to a lack of interest, a lack of time, and a lack of competency as well as trust in the faculty professionalism. For example, when asked whether the parent wished to have more influence on the decision-making process, she said:

no, I think it is important that you know what you're doing. I do not know anything about decision-making at schools, pedagogically speaking. Another parent shared a similar view when she expressed that “the school makes decisions and I trust that they

put in the time to figure out the best course of action. I do not need to know all the details.

The motivations that were given by the parents can also be used to provide insight into question 3 and 4.

Sub-question 3: To what extent are the stakeholders treated as equals in their involvement in deliberation and decision-making?

This theme included two categories: parent-school relationship and parent-parent relationships. With regards to the parent-school relationship, two main codes were used: agenda-setting responsibility and justifications. The first code, agenda-setting responsibility, was divided into two sub-codes: parental influence and faculty influence. The parents and the school are almost treated as equals in the agenda-setting process. While the school does set the agenda for the information evenings, the soundboard meetings, and the parent-council meetings, parents are invited to raise their own concerns. For example, one parent said that for the soundboard meetings, *“the mentors determine what we discuss. I think that is fine since there is always room to raise our own concerns.”* The parents and the faculty that were involved confirmed these descriptions of the agenda setting responsibility distribution. The parents that were involved in the soundboard and parent-council had no objections to this distribution of responsibility over the agenda-setting process. The justifications that were given by the parents mirrored those that were raised with regards to question 2: trust, responsibility, and faculty professionalism. The faculty shared these reasons, focusing particularly on the value of maintaining room for faculty professionalism. One of the mentors was particularly hesitant towards a group of parents who tried to raise their list concerns:

At the beginning of the year, we had a soundboard meeting where a group of parents had prepared a wish list of things they wanted for their children. This group was

going to tell us what they thought. Not out of negativity, more because they were used to being more involved in the previous year. They had to get used to the fact that this year was going to be different. I think we succeeded in calming them down a little.

Similarly, the faculty member claimed that as a professional “*you need to have a piece of freedom to act in order to run the school in an effective and uniform manner.*”

Finally, regarding the parent-parent relationship, while parents all are given an equal opportunity to get involved, the actual involvement is unequally distributed. Two codes were used in this theme: descriptions of equal opportunity and descriptions of unequal involvement. In general, the communication channels of the school are available for use by all the parents. Furthermore, while the 10-minute conversations are only mandatory for parents whose child is performing poorly in school, all parents are invited. With regards to the soundboard and the parent-council, everyone is given an equal opportunity to get involved at the beginning of the year. Despite this equal treatment, the levels of involvement are unevenly distributed amongst the parents. Within the parents that participated in the research, some parents were very involved while others were not. The reasons given for this unequal involvement have been raised in previous sections and include differences in interest, time, and competency.

Discussion

The goal of this research was to test the validity of the claim that employing a vision on democratic legitimacy would contribute to the clarification of the school democratization process by exploring parental involvement at Domaineducation through the pure deliberative procedural perspective. The interviews that were conducted provided insight into the extent to which parental involvement at Domaineducation meets the conditions of the Pure deliberative procedural perspective on democratic legitimacy and raised areas for

improvement. Three sub-questions were formulated, each relating to a specific condition for democratic parental involvement: 1) How well-informed are parents about decisions that affect them or their children? 2) What opportunities for involvement in deliberation and decision-making are there for parents? And 3) To what extent are the stakeholders treated as equals in their involvement in deliberation and decision-making?

First, the communication standards at Domaineducation ensure that the parents are well informed about developments at the school. Everyone who was interviewed affirmed that the communication standards were high and that if an issue were to arise, they knew who to reach out to. Making sure that the parents are sufficiently informed about what is going on at the school is the first condition to democratic parental involvement. With regards to the second sub-question, at the beginning of the year, everyone was invited to participate in the soundboard group and be part of the parent-council. Therefore, parents at Domaineducation do enjoy the opportunity to get involved in the deliberation and decision-making process. Furthermore, the parents that did take advantage of these opportunities described them as enjoyable since the atmosphere was open and productive. Finally, most room for improvement for the democratization of parental involvement lies with the equal treatment of the stakeholders throughout the process. While all stakeholders are equal on a formal level since everyone gets the same opportunities to participate, there are differences in the influence on the process between the school and the parents and differences in the ability to participate between parents amongst each other. Therefore, parental involvement at Domaineducation does not meet the condition of substantive equality.

To further democratize parental involvement at Domaineducation, both the relationship between the parents and the school and the between the parents amongst each other must be equalized. Offering practical suggestions as to how this can be achieved must start with an understanding of what causes the substantive inequality. The main reason that

was offered as to why the faculty had more influence on the agenda than the parents was the faculty's professionalism. In other words, both the faculty and the parents believed that the faculty were more competent in making decisions about school functioning due to their educational and professional background. Out of respect for the value of expertise, parents were willing to take an informative role in the deliberation process. Furthermore, when parents did try to exert control over the agenda, the faculty listened but also aimed to reduce the enthusiasm of the parents to maintain space for professional judgements. The ability to contribute meaningfully to the deliberation process was also raised a reason not to participate by some parents. As such, the perceived self-efficacy contributes to different levels of participation amongst the parents. These reasons fit in seamlessly with the literature that was discussed in the initial description of the democratic deficit and highlight a point of tension between pure deliberative proceduralism and the knowledge gap between school faculty and parents.

One way this tension can be resolved is by incorporating a focus on democratic professionalism by the school's faculty. Democratic professionals are specialists in their field who seek to open their domain of authority to lay participants, share tasks, and collaborate in the construction of what the profession entails (Sachs, 2001). The idea is that it overcomes the knowledge gap between professionals and lay people by calling on the professionals to share their expertise with the lay people (Olson & Dzur, 2004). Contemporary social and political theorists have raised three benefits associated with democratic professionalism. First, democratic professionalism foregoes commercial gain for public service and thereby increases the sense of purpose the professional gets from their work (Sullivan, 1995). Second, by bridging the gap between the professional and the lay people, the democratic professional tends to benefit from a higher level of public appreciation as the lay people become more aware of the value of their service (Sullivan, 1995). Finally, by opening their profession to

lay people, democratic professionals contribute to the preservation of democratic way of life (Fischer, 2000). Democratic professionalism contributes to the democratization of parental involvement by facilitating a greater level of substantive equality between the faculty and the parents by reducing the knowledge gap. Furthermore, by providing an opportunity to learn about school functioning from the perspective of the professional, it also shrinks the inequality between parents themselves. Democratic professionalism provides an opportunity to balance out the substantive inequalities with regards to the ability to contribute meaningfully to the deliberation process.

To implement democratic professionalism, the school's faculty could be encouraged to reflect on what they believe parents most often misunderstand about their profession and take the time to share their perspective with the parents at the beginning of the school year. While this may cost the faculty more time at the beginning of the year to do this reflection and prepare a presentation, it can end up saving time later in the year as it prevents parents who push ideas which clash with the faculty's professionalism. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that democratic professionalism is not easily achieved. In addition to the skills required to be a good teacher, a democratic teacher is also required to be a facilitator of community participation (Dzur, 2002). Nonetheless, the extra effort needed to implement democratic professionalism may be worth it when it contributes to the democratization of parental involvement.

Before making the final recommendations for future practice, research, and policy, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, while the parents that participated in the interview provided a range of perspectives on parental involvement, ranging from minimally involved to completely involved, all participants were Dutch women. Multiple efforts were made to reach out to people with a recent migration background, but these did not elicit response. This can be attributed to the fact that the correspondence was limited to email and

the research could not introduce himself to the parents in person due to the measures against the spread of the corona virus. Interviewing more culturally and gender diverse parents would improve the representativeness of the perspectives in relation to the parent population at Domaineducation. Furthermore, increasing the diversity in the participants would have provided more depth into both the relationship between the school and the parents and the relationship between the parents. Secondly, since the interviews were carried out in an unusual time for parenting and education, the parents, mentors, and faculty members' minds could have been preoccupied by the uncertainty caused by the corona pandemic. As a result, their responses in the interviews may not be representative of their true perspective. Finally, while the interviews provided a good opportunity to explore a wide range of perspectives with minimal resources, this data research would have benefit from triangulation of research methods. Observing the 10-minute discussions, soundboard meetings, or parent council meetings would have provided more insight into the relationship between the school and the parents and the relationship between the parents.

To provide more suggestions about how parental involvement can be democratized further, more research is required. One area of focus could be the exploration of reasons why uninvolved parents choose to not get involved. While this research showed that sometimes parents choose not to participate due to a lack of interest in the procedures. This is fine and can also be considered a democratic expression of their interests. However, if possible, steps should be taken to make sure that anyone who wants to get involved can get involved. The first step to achieve this is becoming aware of the obstacles that parents face. The second step is to include them in figuring out a way how to address those obstacles. Another area of focus could be to study the actual influence the parents in the parent-council have on the final decision. Since only one parent and one faculty member could share their perspective on the workings of this council, this research failed to provide insight into that. While interviews

may be useful to this end, they would benefit from being combined with observational studies. Such research would contribute to establishing to what extent parents and the school are formally and substantively equal in the decision-making process.

In addition to the practical contribution to the commissioning school, this research made a theoretical contribution to the literature on school democratization by highlighting the value of establishing a perspective on democratic legitimacy. Starting with a perspective on democratic legitimacy allowed for a coherent set of conditions of legitimate parental involvement which brought clarity to the democratization process. The important lesson to take-away from this is that establishing a solid philosophical foundation for democracy facilitates the search for areas of improvement. To clarify the citizenship responsibility of schools, future research and policy must be explicit about the perspective of democratic legitimacy they focus on when discussing school democratization so as to avoid ambiguity and confusion on the side of school practitioners.

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Acknowledgements

I would have never been able to complete this assignment by myself. That is why I would like to take a moment to express my gratitude to several people who played a pivotal role throughout my thesis and my life in general.

Allereerst bedankt aan de ouders en faculteit die tijdens deze onzekere en drukke tijden toch de tijd hebben genomen om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek. Ik heb dat de resultaten van mijn onderzoek zullen bijdragen aan de verbetering van het onderwijs.

Verder ben ik enorm dankbaar voor de ondersteuning die ik op wekelijkse basis heb gekregen van mijn begeleiders; Jeroen, Charlotte, en Anita. Zonder jullie advies had ik dit niet kunnen afronden.

Last but definitely not least, I want to thank my friends, family, my fellow Pullekes, and my parents for the support and energy that I get from you. I love you all very much.

Appendix 1 – Interview Topic Guide

1. Introduction
 - a. Introduce self & research
 - b. Explain interview procedure
 - c. Ask for questions
2. Start Recording
3. Demographic Questions
 - a. In what year were you born?
 - b. In what city do you live?
 - c. What is your nationality?
 - d. Do you feel attached to a religion or worldview?
 - e. What is your highest completed level of education?
4. General Opener
 - a. What do you think about Domaineducation?
 - b. Do you consider yourself to be involved?
5. Communication
 - a. In what ways do you communicate with the school?
 - b. How do you experience this communication?
 - c. What facilitates/prevents effective communication?
6. Deliberation
 - a. Are you involved with the soundboard?
 - b. How do you experience your involvement in the soundboard?
 - c. Why did you (not) get involved in the soundboard?
7. Decision-making
 - a. Are you involved with the parent-council?
 - b. How do you experience your involvement in the parent-council?
 - c. Why did you (not) get involved in the parent-council?
8. General Closer
 - a. How do you see your role in the school community?
 - b. What would you change about Domaineducation?
 - c. Is there anything left you would like to add?
9. Stop Recording
10. Conclusion
 - a. Thank you for participating
 - b. Feel free to send additional thoughts that you might have later this week
 - c. Snowball sampling request

Appendix 2 - Codebook

Theme	Category	Code	Subcode
Well informed	Modes	Primary channels of communication	Magister
			Mail
			Phone
		Information evening	
		10-minute conversations	
	Descriptions	Well informed	
		Responsive	
		Short channels	
		Unclear	
	Motivations	Students interest	
Personal interest			
Education pilot			
Opportunities for involvement	Soundboard	Descriptions	Responsive
			Pleasant
			Open communication
		Reasons to participate	Desire for information
			Educational pilot
			Influence decisions
		Reasons not to participate	Faculty professionalism
			Time
			Lack of competency
	Parent-Council	Descriptions	Responsive
			Pleasant
			Open communication
		Reasons to participate	Desire for information
			Educational pilot
			Influence decisions
		Reasons not to participate	Faculty professionalism
			Time
			Lack of competency
Equal Treatment	Parent-School Relationship	Descriptions	Parental agenda setting
			Faculty agenda setting
			Input
			Influence decisions
		Justifications	Trust
			Responsivity
			Faculty professionalism
			Well-informed

Theme	Category	Code	Subcode
	Parent-Parent Relationship	Descriptions	Equal opportunity
			Unequal involvement
		Reasons	Educational pilot
			Faculty professionalism
			Time
			Lack of competency
			Lack of interest