



Research paper

Facilitating citizenship-related classroom discussion: Teaching strategies in pre-vocational education that allow for variation in familiarity with discussion

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ABSTRACT

Even though classroom discussion is considered an essential element of citizenship education, research indicates that pre-vocational students have fewer opportunities to practice with these discussions than their pre-academic peers. To provide more insight into pre-vocational teaching strategies to facilitate citizenship-related classroom discussions that allow for variation in familiarity with discussion, we analyzed observations of plenary discussion moments during 26 lessons at three Dutch secondary schools. Classrooms less familiar with discussion seem to benefit from a focus on structural aspects of discussion and avoiding strict content regulation, whereas classrooms more familiar with discussion profit from reflection on both process and content.

1. Introduction

Overall, the literature seems to agree that classroom discussions on citizenship topics are a key element of what schools can offer students in terms of citizenship education – contributing to individual citizenship outcomes, classroom climate, and in a wider societal context, the democratic fabric of society (Campbell, 2008; Geboers et al., 2013; Knowles et al., 2018; Maurissen et al., 2018; Schuitema et al., 2017; Torney-Purta, 2002). A classroom discussion can be defined as “a sustained exchange between and among teachers and their students with the purpose of developing students’ capabilities or skills and/or expanding students’ understanding – both shared and individual – of a specific concept or instructional goal” (Witherspoon et al., 2016, p. 6). In the context of citizenship education, classroom discussion is not only considered a method of instruction (teaching with discussion) but also an important curriculum outcome (teaching for discussion; Hess & Avery, 2008; Parker & Hess, 2001).

“Discussion is important to understand, both as a way of knowing and a way of being together. Participation in sustained discussions of powerful questions can be both a mind-expanding and community-building endeavor. This is the quest. Accordingly, discussion is relevant to the broad social aims of democracy and solidarity in a

diverse society and to the pedagogical aim of creating vigorous communities of inquiry.” (Parker & Hess, 2001, p. 273)

The issues at stake in the context of citizenship education are often controversial in nature, as they concern “questions of public policy that spark significant disagreement” (Hess, 2009, p. 37) and are therefore often also of personal relevance to teachers and students (Pollak et al., 2018; Schuitema et al., 2017). While there is more and more material available to train teachers in guiding classroom discussion for citizenship education (EuroClio, 2020; Kerr & Huddelstone, 2015), this remains a challenging task (Hess, 2002; Nganga et al., 2020; Oulton et al., 2004; Radstake & Leeman, 2010). Students in vocational tracks in particular, feel like they are less frequently stimulated to actively participate in society and politics and report having fewer discussions in class than students in academic tracks (Nieuwelink et al., 2019). This finding fits a broader pattern, in which education in vocational tracks seems less often aimed at encouraging critical discussions on political and societal issues (Leenders et al., 2008; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003). This seems a missed opportunity, as students from disadvantaged backgrounds appear to benefit even more from an open discussion climate, in terms of political engagement, than students from middle-class backgrounds (Campbell, 2008).

Following a review of (secondary) analyses into the role of classroom

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climate based on two large-scale cross-national citizenship education datasets, Knowles et al. (2018) called for more small-scale studies to investigate classroom climates in various school contexts and to identify obstacles teachers encounter when trying to facilitate discussion. Various studies answered this call, highlighting the importance of constructing a safe classroom environment (Saetra, 2021; Wansink et al., 2023). To our knowledge none so far, however, have focused on specific challenges that might be present in pre-vocational education, considering the less frequent use of citizenship-related classroom discussion. The skill of guiding discussions is coned by experience, or put differently: “becoming a capable discussion leader is a matter of taking up the quest and equipping oneself with understandings, experiences and techniques” (Parker & Hess, 2001, p. 283).

To yield more insights into how the obstacles and opportunities present in pre-vocational education are addressed, this study aims to shed light on strategies pre-vocational teachers, with varying degrees of familiarity with citizenship-related classroom discussions, use to facilitate plenary discussion moments. To accomplish this, an exploratory multiple case study was conducted to analyze the teaching strategies of four pre-vocational education teachers at three secondary schools in the Netherlands. All teachers implemented the same teaching method for citizenship-related discussion, *Terra Nova Mini Society*, but varied in their familiarity with discussion, allowing us to get an in-depth understanding of how pre-vocational teachers differ in their strategies to facilitate plenary discussion moments in the context of citizenship education.

2. Literature review

2.1. Classroom discussion as citizenship education

Classroom discussion can be used for numerous purposes. In the context of citizenship education, a distinction is often made between teaching *with* discussion and teaching *for* discussion (Parker & Hess, 2001). The fostering of civic knowledge, skills, and values using classroom discussions is what is often referred to as ‘teaching with discussion’. In this context, the discussion is used to explore topics that hold societal, and often moral, relevance. That means that many are inherently controversial, as different personal backgrounds of students as well as teachers will relate differently to their relevance, meaning and implications (Schuitema et al., 2017).

Moreover, being able to take part in discussions is also considered an important democratic skill in itself. Classroom discussions in the context of citizenship education are therefore also considered a valuable way of teaching *for* discussion (Hess & Avery, 2008; Parker & Hess, 2001). In this context, the question of ‘how to have a classroom discussion’ takes center stage and asks for a focus on the more structural aspects of a discussion, for example, the rules by which the discussion is managed, as well as the development of discussion skills (Hollander, 2002). To summarize: “Discussion is central to the teaching of citizenship: not only as a teaching method but also as a learning goal and as a form of active citizenship in its own right” (Huddleston & Rowe, 2015, p. 94).

2.2. The balance between student autonomy and teacher regulation

A key factor in creating a favorable environment for classroom discussions is the extent to which teachers attribute power to students to shape the discussion. There are different ways in which a transfer of responsibility or power from teacher to students can find its expression in relation to discussion. An example of a teaching style that places the student’s perspective and personal experiences front and center is ‘autonomy-supportive teaching’ (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). This style of teaching has been shown to positively influence a broad array of student and classroom climate outcomes (Teixeira et al., 2020; Vasconcellos et al., 2020). The use of personal experiences to make the learning content more meaningful is also considered a valuable

‘transfer-oriented’ teaching strategy, aimed to help students apply their newly learned skills in other contexts (Rombout et al., 2022).

What is important to consider in the context of student autonomy, is that classic classroom interaction is centered around recitation. The underlying goal of recitation is the accumulation of knowledge, through recall or testing (Khong et al., 2019). This teaching style, usually characterized by initiation-response-feedback patterns, can sometimes be misconstrued by teachers as discussion (Parker, 2001; Wilen, 2004). However, although classroom discussion *can* benefit from strong teacher regulation – especially in terms of content quality and student participation (Schuitema et al., 2017) – these often more ‘monologic episodes’ stand in sharp contrast to more dialogic, discussion-focused teaching approaches.

A strategy frequently applied when following a dialogic approach is the use of authentic teacher questions: questions without prespecified answers. Another example is ‘uptake’: following up on an answer given by a student, as such recognizing the importance of the student’s contribution (Nystrand et al., 2003; Schuitema et al., 2017). These examples illustrate the wide variety of teacher styles regarding the balance between student autonomy and teacher regulation. Citizenship-related classroom discussions can thus be expected to take different forms when facilitated by teachers with distinct teaching styles.

2.3. An open and safe climate: multi-perspectivity and reflection

In addition to the extent to which teachers regulate the content of what is being said during classroom discussions, an open, respectful environment where students feel safe to explore their opinions and those of their peers and where there is enough room for in-depth reflection is considered a crucial element for successful discussions (Maurissen et al., 2018; Reichert & Print, 2018; Schuitema et al., 2017). Saetra (2021) adds that such an environment should be jointly constructed by the teacher and students, focusing on good social relationships, appropriate norms for social interactions (most importantly, tolerance and respect) and skillful facilitation of the discussion (more specifically, framing and moderation).

One element of teacher facilitation that seems crucial for classroom discussion is the ability of teachers to be open to, invite and if necessary, introduce multiple perspectives (Schuitema et al., 2017; Wansink et al., 2018). Oulton et al. (2004) argue that during discussions involving controversial or sensitive topics, emphasizing and reflecting on openness and multi-perspectivity is particularly important. This can for instance be achieved by inviting students to keep an open mind and not take a stand too quickly, or by letting students practice with reflecting critically on their stance. In addition, metacognitive reflection – which focuses on students’ learning process and outcomes – has also been emphasized to be an important teaching strategy during value-loaded classroom dialogues (Rombout et al., 2022).

But even an environment that is open in terms of students being equally invited to participate and in which all contributions are equally considered, can result in students sharing ideas that others feel threatened or intimidated by. Simply allowing for more perspectives is therefore not always better. Guiding discussions where multiple perspectives are introduced asks for careful reflection on how to delineate between what is a relevant contribution and what crosses boundaries. In other words, how to ensure not only an open but also a *safe* environment, which is especially relevant when the goal is to invite multiple perspectives during a discussion on controversial topics (Wansink et al., 2023).

3. The Dutch educational context

The Dutch secondary school system is highly tracked: after primary education, students attend either pre-academic, senior general, or pre-vocational secondary education. A little over 50 percent of students attend pre-vocational secondary education, which consists of four

tracks, ranging from primarily practice-oriented to more theoretical. When attending the more theoretical pathway, students choose one of four sectors (e.g. ‘care and welfare’ or ‘business’). When attending one of the more practice-oriented pathways, they choose one of ten profiles (e.g. ‘building, housing and interiors’ or ‘transport and mobility’). After finishing pre-vocational secondary education, most students continue with senior secondary, or tertiary, vocational education (Ministry of Education, 2023).

All Dutch secondary schools must promote active citizenship and social integration (Dijkstra et al., 2014). This legislation was renewed in 2021, with a stronger emphasis on improving students’ knowledge of the basic values of democracy and socially responsible behavior in a pluriform society (Inspectorate of Dutch Education, 2021). At the same time, Dutch schools have plenty of freedom in deciding how they organize their citizenship education and what teaching strategies they use to fulfill this obligation (De Groot et al., 2022). As a result, there is a lot of variation in how citizenship education is taught. As such, the Dutch case is extremely suitable to examine between-school differences.

4. The Terra Nova Mini Society lessons

The goal of the discussion tool ‘Terra Nova Mini Society’ is to help young people explore how they relate to various citizenship topics, using a board game in the form of an uninhabited island. In groups of five, players are invited to create and discuss their ideal society. So-called ‘Island questions’ help players experience the consequences of their decisions. Various thematic lessons are available for educational purposes, each exploring several citizenship topics, for instance:

- (1) ‘In Power’ – different forms of living and governing together;
- (2) ‘Deserving and Distributing’ – what is ‘fair’, socioeconomic inequality, taxes;
- (3) ‘All for One’ – solidarity, social security, ethical dilemmas;
- (4) ‘Newcomers’ – refugees, (un)equal rights, integration;
- (5) ‘Two for One’: (un)fair trade, agriculture, development aid.

The thematic lessons are described in more detail in a teacher manual (Hu, 2017), which also includes suggestions for teachers on how to implement the tool. Teachers are advised to follow the following structure:

- (a) The teacher introduces the game and the first ‘Island question’;
- (b) Students discuss the question in small groups;
- (c) The teacher facilitates a plenary discussion moment.

This process repeats itself various times, depending upon the time available. The small-group discussions help students prepare for the plenary discussion moments that follow.

5. Methods

5.1. Participants

We analyzed and compared teaching strategies used by four pre-vocational teachers to facilitate plenary discussion moments during 26 Terra Nova Mini Society (TNMS) lessons that were given in the school year 2018/2019 at three secondary schools in the Netherlands. The three schools were chosen for their variation in familiarity with citizenship education more generally and citizenship-related classroom discussion specifically. In addition, the school contexts and student populations varied considerably. Whereas School A and School C were relatively small schools offering only pre-vocational education, for instance, School B was a larger school that offered both pre-vocational, senior general and pre-academic education. More information on the school context and familiarity with citizenship-related classroom discussions can be found in the Results section.

Before the TNMS lessons took place, the teachers participated in a workshop in which they were familiarized with the lesson method and received the TNMS manual. Afterward, they were instructed to design their own TNMS lesson series. The lesson series had to consist of at least three lessons, and had to start with the introductory lesson ‘In Power’. Besides these two conditions, the teachers were free to decide on the number and structure of the remaining lessons, and the integration of the lessons in their existing curriculum. Almost 500 first- and second-year students, approximately 13 years old, took part in the TNMS lessons. More information on the school context and format of the resulting TNMS lesson series can be found in Table 1.

5.2. Data collection

5.2.1. Classroom observations

In total, 26 TNMS lessons were observed: 10 at School A, 6 at School B, and 10 at School C. The observations were carried out by a team of 6 researchers, one of whom was the first author. The first author observed lessons at all 3 schools and 2 observers observed at 2 of the 3 schools. The other 3 observers – who conducted observations at 1 school only – always observed together with one of the 3 lead observers. Of the 26 observations, 14 observations had 2 observers present and 12 observations had 1 observer present.

All observers received an extensive instruction guideline, informing them about the goals of the research project, the format of the TNMS lessons, the instructions given to teachers and the protocol for the classroom observations. Since we were not able to audio or videotape the discussions for privacy reasons, an observation instrument was constructed. Each observer received instructions on how to type out the discussions as accurately as possible, so they could be used as field notes, and how to safely store the data afterward to ensure the respondents’ anonymity. The observer was present during the entire lesson and stayed with one randomly chosen group of students to make written notations of both the small-group discussions and the plenary discussion moments.

Table 1
Background information per participating secondary school.

	School A	School B	School C
<i>School context</i>			
Type of school	Regular (public)	Special (Christian)	Special (humanistic)
Type of education	Pre-vocational (all tracks)	Pre-vocational Senior general Pre-academic	Pre-vocational: theoretical track
School size	500	1750	250
Degree of urbanization ^a	Moderate	Strong	Extreme
<i>Format TNMS lessons</i>			
No. teachers	1	1	2
Years of teaching	27	15	6 3
No. classes	10	16	3
No. students	180	254	63
Education type students	Pre-vocational (all tracks)	Pre-vocational: basic + middle management	Pre-vocational: theoretical
Grade students	Grade 1 + 2	Grade 1 + 2	Grade 2
During course(s)	Happiness	Religion	Social Sciences Economics
No. TNMS lessons	2–3	3	3
Topic of lessons	‘In Power’ ‘Deserve & Distribute’ ‘All for One’	‘In Power’ ‘Deserve & Distribute’ ‘All for One’	‘In Power’ ‘Newcomers’ ‘Two for One’

^a For more information on the degree of urbanization, we refer to the Central Agency for Statistics (Statistics Netherlands, 2023).

5.2.2. Teacher questionnaires

Before the start of the TNMS lessons, all teachers filled out a short online questionnaire. One of the questions we asked teachers was what *citizenship education goals* they focused on most in their teaching. From a list of nine goals – based on a selection of items from the Understanding the Effects of Schools on Students' Citizenship study (Coopmans et al., 2019), teachers could choose a maximum of three.

We also collected information about the teachers' familiarity with citizenship-related classroom discussion, by asking *how often they discussed citizenship-related topics with their students*. Answer categories ranged from (1) 'never' to (4) 'often'. Additionally, we presented teachers with a list of *eleven examples of current citizenship topics*. This list was based on a selection of citizenship topics addressed in the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Schulz et al., 2018) and the TNMS teacher manual (Hu, 2017), supplemented by several topics prominent in Dutch media at that time (Sijbers et al., 2015). We evaluated the list with a group of experts on citizenship education consisting of researchers and teachers.

In the questionnaire, we asked teachers whether they had previously discussed these topics with their students, and *how easy or difficult* it had been to discuss each topic. If a topic had not been discussed, teachers were asked to indicate how difficult they expected such a discussion to be. Answer categories ranged from (1) 'very difficult' to (4) 'very easy'.

5.3. Analysis

Using our review of the literature, we developed an initial coding scheme in which we distinguished between the main teaching strategies for classroom discussion, which we then supplemented with central topics that emerged during the coding process. We focused on didactical focus (e.g. knowledge transmission; critical reflection) and strategies regarding (i) student versus teacher regulation (e.g. type of questions; controlling content) and (ii) an open and safe discussion climate (e.g. emphasizing multi-perspectivity; process reflection). Analyzing the field notes from all 26 classroom observations, we labeled and compared the teachers' strategies and the (student) reactions or interactions that followed. We selected four main themes to focus on for further analyses: (1) communication style; (2) giving meaning; (3) reflection; (4) reacting to extreme statements. Examples of the main themes and subthemes are visible in Table 2.

The analysis of classroom observations was supplemented with quantitative information regarding the context of the TNMS lessons and the teachers' familiarity with discussion before the TNMS lessons. Case reports were made per school to validate the credibility of our observations and analyses, based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. These case reports were fed back to the participating teachers for a member check to see whether the reports resonated with their experiences.

6. Results

What follows are three school portraits. Each portrait includes a description of the school context and format of the TNMS lesson series (Table 1), the teacher's vision on and familiarity with citizenship-related classroom discussions (Table 3) and the teacher's strategies to stimulate such discussions (Table 4).

6.1. School A

6.1.1. Familiarity with citizenship-related classroom discussion

School A is a small pre-vocational public secondary school offering both practical- and theoretical-oriented tracks, with a specific focus on technical education. The school is located in a rural, moderately urban area. At the time of the study, the school had no specific citizenship education curriculum. Citizenship topics were addressed by Teacher A during the weekly 'Happiness' lessons that all first and second-year

Table 2

Coding scheme with an overview of main themes, sub-themes and examples.

Main theme	Sub-theme	Example
Giving meaning 1: Relating to different contexts	Connecting it to current issues in the real world by giving examples	"I am allowed to vote today, which is a big thing; you will be doing this in a smaller context"
	Connecting it to current issues in the real world by asking students	"Which situation is most similar to how we respond to refugees in the Netherlands?"
	Connecting it to students' personal experiences by asking students	"Who can give an example of how your mother or father takes care of you?"
	Connecting it to the teacher's personal experiences by giving examples	"My daughter (...) studying treatments for this illness cost a lot of money; I sometimes help by going door to door to ask for donations"
Giving meaning 2: Multi-perspectivity	Connecting it to the school context by giving examples	"You are of course already allowed to vote in the student council"
	Connecting it to different social environments by asking students	"Is someone in power at home? (...) and is someone in power at school? (...) and who is in power in the Netherlands?"
	Emphasizing the differences between the students' ideas by summarizing students' responses	"I hear variations running from (...) to (...) and (...)"
	Emphasizing the differences between the students' ideas by asking students	"Are there people who thought of a different solution?"
Communication style 1: Inviting interaction	Emphasizing the disadvantages of proposed solutions by asking students	"Are there also disadvantages?"
	Emphasizing disagreements by asking students	"Based on the way you talk about this topic, I get the feeling you do not agree with the decisions taken (...) can you tell us a bit more about it?"
	Introducing a hypothetical situation in which roles are reversed	"If you would be the newcomer, how would you feel?"
	Asking students content- related questions	"When do you call someone a powerful leader?"
Communication style 2: transmitting knowledge	Summarizing students' answers and asking follow-up questions	"Ok, I heard various answers: (...). So how do you then decide who will do which task?"
	Asking for further explanation	"Why?"
	Asking for clarification	"Can you be a bit more specific?"
	Giving explanations	"Please all look at the board, that is where the instructions are provided"
Reflecting	Combining explanations with asking students	"Can you explain what "discussion" means? (...) Right, discussion means (...)"
	Asking students to read instructions out loud	"Can you please read what is on the next slide?"
	Checking if everything is clear	"Do you all understand what this means?"
	Asking students about the decision-making process	"Let's talk for a moment about how the discussions went, what went well? (...) what went less well? (...)"

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Main theme	Sub-theme	Example
Reacting to extreme statements	Naming process elements that went well	"You worked well. I heard interesting reflections"
	Naming process elements that did not go well	"One of the groups was not able to come up with a solution, mainly because the person responsible for ensuring that everyone was listening"
	Asking students about process elements that did not go well	"I want to discuss something that happened in one of the groups just now; people were not listening to each other. How did that go in other groups?"
	Sharing one's sentiments as a teacher	"I think I would enjoy living on your island"
	Emphasizing neutrality as a teacher	"Remember, that is just my opinion, you do not have to agree with that at all"
	Reminding students of the real world	"Keep in mind that it is not just a game, but that you are discussing problems that also happen in real life"
	Questioning students about real-life consequences	"And what if you play for [football team] and you are of color, what then?"
	Short replies about real-life consequences	"That might not be so cool when you are Moroccan yourself"
	Telling students to focus	"I just want to hear what you decided about (...)"
	Sarcastic humor	"Well, I hope you will one day have a lovely Surinamese girlfriend"
	Explicitly shutting down interaction	"I am putting an end to this discussion"

students were enrolled in. According to Teacher A, the Happiness course not only focused on students' personal development and group dynamics but also paid attention to societal themes such as politics and democracy, cultural diversity and healthy lifestyles. Teacher A indicated to mainly focus on teaching his students critical thinking skills, how to deal with different viewpoints and how to prepare for participation in a democratic society (Table 3).

Teacher A furthermore mentioned that he was already quite familiar with citizenship-related classroom discussions, which happened fairly often in his class. When asked about eleven example topics (see Table 3), Teacher A indicated that he had previously discussed all eleven topics with his students, although not every topic was comparably easy to discuss. Two of the more difficult topics to discuss with his students were terrorism and Islamophobia. This was, according to him, related to the negative associations many of the students' parents seemed to have with Islam.

6.1.2. Teaching strategies for discussion

Structuring The didactical strategy of Teacher A primarily focused on ensuring that students understood the general rules of the game and their role in it. He did so by adding more structure to the TNMS lessons (e.g. by adding a roadmap on the board to clarify the different phases of the game) and eliminating elements of the game that he thought were too difficult or hindering discussions (e.g. discussion cards and opinion coins). Moreover, since the students were very noisy, he introduced a loud digital timer that counted from 5 to 1 at the end of every group discussion to regain order.

Transmitting He also spent a lot of time on explaining rules, reading instructions and summarizing the information on the various citizenship topics. Throughout this process, Teacher A seemed less focused on inviting interactions with or between students: little input was asked of his students and he rarely engaged in back-and-forths with his students.

Table 3

The vision on and familiarity with citizenship-related discussion per teacher.

	Teacher A	Teacher B ^a	Teacher C1/C2
<i>Top-3 citizenship education goals</i>			
Social skills	0.00	1.00	0.00
Critical thinking	1.00	0.00	0.00
Forming your own opinion	0.00	0.67	1.00
Defending one's own opinion	0.00	0.00	0.00
Deal with different ideas and opinions	1.00	0.33	1.00
Resolving disagreements	0.00	0.11	0.00
Participating in a democratic society	1.00	0.00	1.00
Collaborating with others	0.00	0.89	0.00
Self-confidence	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>Familiarity with citizenship discussions</i>			
Frequency of discussion	4.00	2.33 (0.71)	4.00
Example topics discussed	11	1.33 (1.22)	11
- Refugees	1.00	0.11 (0.33)	1.00
- Equal gender opportunities	1.00	0.11 (0.33)	1.00
- Black Pete	1.00	0.00	1.00
- #Metoo	1.00	0.00	1.00
- Freedom of speech	1.00	0.44 (0.53)	1.00
- Terrorist attacks	1.00	0.00	1.00
- Homosexuality	1.00	0.22 (0.44)	1.00
- Gender identity	1.00	0.11 (0.33)	1.00
- Antisemitism	1.00	0.00	1.00
- Islamophobia	1.00	0.00	1.00
- Discrimination	1.00	0.33 (0.50)	1.00
Easiness of discussion example topics	2.91	2.85 (0.65)	3.55
- Refugees	3.00	3.11 (0.61)	4.00
- Equal gender opportunities	3.00	3.11 (0.78)	4.00
- Black Pete	2.00	2.78 (0.67)	3.00
- #Metoo	4.00	2.67 (0.71)	4.00
- Freedom of speech	3.00	3.22 (0.67)	3.00
- Terrorist attacks	2.00	2.78 (0.67)	3.00
- Homosexuality	4.00	2.56 (1.01)	4.00
- Gender identity	3.00	2.44 (0.88)	4.00
- Antisemitism	3.00	2.33 (0.87)	3.00
- Islamophobia	2.00	3.00 (0.71)	3.00
- Discrimination	3.00	3.33 (0.71)	4.00

^a Teacher B indicated that her classrooms differed concerning their familiarity with discussion, and therefore filled out a separate questionnaire for each class ($N = 9$). For Teacher B, both mean scores and standard deviations are therefore reported. The teachers at Schools A and C indicated that the answers did not differ between classrooms, and therefore filled out the questionnaire only once.

Table 4

Main teaching strategies used to facilitate classroom discussion per teacher.

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C1/C2
Didactical focus	Knowledge transmission	Knowledge transmission	Interaction
	Understanding	Understanding	Critical reflection
		Multi-perspectivity	Multi-perspectivity
Didactical strategies	Structuring + Transmitting	Initiation-response-feedback	Inviting interaction
	Neutrality	Controlling content	Moral rules of conduct
	Making it real	Making it personal	Making it real
	Reflective remarks	Reflective remarks	Inviting reflection

When explaining what 'discussions' were during the introduction of the first TNMS lesson, for example, he either read the instructions out loud himself (e.g. "Please all look at the board, that is where the instructions are provided") or asked one of his students to do so. During the general classroom discussions that followed, he again often summarized different answers, stated how much he enjoyed hearing them and moved on to the next topic. This unidirectional communication style was present throughout the lesson series.

Reflective remarks A similar communication style was present when

Teacher A remarked on students' learning process, which he did frequently, such as when he said: "One of the groups was not able to come up with a solution, mainly because the person responsible for ensuring that everyone was listening to each other did not do his or her job". He often connected such reflective remarks with current affairs, for instance when he emphasized that "[it is] important to voice your opinion, just like with the Dutch elections, where it is important you vote". He did however not use these examples as a starting point for a conversation with his students.

Neutrality At the start of every lesson, Teacher A emphasized the TNMS key feature of 'no right or wrong answers', by mentioning that "choices will never be judged as weird – this is your society, so try to make it as ideal as possible". One of the things that stood out during the classroom discussions, is the frequency with which subgroups came up with 'funny' plans for their island, such as establishing a McDonald's, organizing parties, or making sure there was no school present. In most of these situations, Teacher A took on a neutral stance and stuck to his strategy of summarizing students' answers (e.g. "I heard various answers: (...)"), before continuing with the next topic. At other times, the teacher did not respond at all, for instance when students came up with solutions that seemed not serious or even provocative, such as "if you do something illegal, you are imprisoned and killed" or "they [girls] are not allowed anything, except for breathing, so they can make sandwiches".

Making it real A second observation that stood out, is the frequency with which extreme opinions or discriminatory stances were expressed, often related to ethnic background, to which Teacher A reacted with sarcastic humor or a short reply. When students mentioned that they only allowed 'their own [white] kind of people' on their island, for instance, the teacher replied with: "Well, I hope you will one day have a lovely Surinamese girlfriend". When Teacher A did reply on a more serious note, he tried to keep it light and did not elaborate on the subject. When a student declared that people with a Moroccan background were not welcome on his island, for example, he replied with "ok, that might not be so cool when you are Moroccan yourself". When the student replied with "I don't care", the teacher added: "That is racist, but ok", and moved on to another discussion topic.

To a similar statement made by another student, he reacted with: "And what if you play for [football team] and you are of color, what then?". When the student answered that in that case, that person was also not welcome in the team, the teacher replied with: "Well ok, if that is what you decide for your island". When confronted with provocative or extreme statements, he thus seemed to switch between neutrality and reminders of the real-life consequences of students' statements.

6.2. School B

6.2.1. Familiarity with citizenship-related classroom discussion

School B is a large Christian school community located in a strongly urbanized area, serving students from all types of secondary education (pre-university, senior general and pre-vocational). At the time of the study, the school had no specific citizenship education curriculum. Since School B had no courses on citizenship or social sciences, the TNMS lessons were implemented during the lessons on Religion that all first- and second-year students attended. Teacher B indicated that her main educational goals during these lessons were to teach her students social skills, how to collaborate with others and, to a lesser extent, how to form one's own opinion (Table 3).

Citizenship-related classroom discussions were not very common in the lessons on Religion. When asked about eleven example topics, Teacher B indicated that she had discussed on average only one of them with her students. Most of the topics had only been covered in one or two of the nine classes that participated. The topic that she discussed most was that of freedom of opinion, whereas issues such as terrorist attacks and Islamophobia had never been discussed. When asked why these topics had never been discussed, or what made certain topics more difficult to discuss, Teacher B mentioned that her students often felt

these topics did not concern them.

6.2.2. Teaching strategies for discussion

Initiation-response-feedback Throughout the implementation of the TNMS lesson series, Teacher B seemed to be primarily concerned with keeping her students engaged. She employed various strategies for this. Like Teacher A, she also focused on transferring knowledge, but used a more interactive approach, for example by asking for their definitions of the concepts used in the introduction (a strategy that was also listed in the TNMS manual), and then providing feedback – also referred to as an initiation-response-feedback pattern:

Teacher: "[student name], can you explain what 'discussion' means?"

Student: "To consult with each other, and decide together"

Teacher: "Discussion means talking with each other, listening to each other, and then trying to find a solution that everyone can agree with. And what if you do not agree?"

Student: "You can also vote"

Teacher: "Indeed. And this is exactly what the game is about: Talking to each other and explaining why you have a certain opinion"

She kept up this initiation-response-feedback approach during the general classroom discussions, purposefully asking students questions about the content (e.g. "When is someone in charge?"), the process ("How did you come up with this idea?"), the reason behind certain decisions ("Why?"; "Why not?"), or advantages and disadvantages regarding their decisions.

Making it personal Another strategy used by Teacher B to engage students was to make the themes discussed more 'real' by connecting them to current affairs, as well as students' own lives. She often switched from examples of current affairs to students' personal lives and back, in particular when she noticed students struggling to understand, for instance during the introduction of the first TNMS lesson:

Teacher: "The next few lessons (...) you will be organizing the island in front of you. Today we're going to talk about being in power. Today is also the day that the elections take place [...] if we all vote for a particular political party, that party will be in power. Who can explain the word 'power'?"

Student: "The leadership"

Student: "That you can decide upon something"

Student: "When you can do whatever you want"

Teacher: "And is it a good thing if someone is in power?"

Student: "Yes, because then you know what to do"

Teacher: "Ok, so that gives you direction?"

Student: "I don't know"

Teacher: "Is someone in power at home?"

Student: "My mom"

Student: "My foster mom"

Student: "Me"

Teacher: "And is someone in power at school?"

Student: "No"

Student: "No one"

Student: "We are"

Student: "The school principal, but we have never seen him or her"

Teacher: "And who is in power in the Netherlands?"

Student: “Rutte [the Dutch prime minister]”

Student: “The king”

Teacher: “I am glad to hear that you already know quite a lot about being in power, and what you can do when you are in power, deciding upon matters, etc. That means that you already understand part of the theme that we will be discussing today”

When students proposed extreme ideas – such as introducing the death penalty for minor offenses – she used a similar approach, asking them if they wanted to live in a world where those rules applied, such as: “So if a pupil does not do a lot in class, he or she should receive the death penalty as well?”

In addition to using examples from students’ personal lives, she also used examples from her own life to illustrate the topics discussed, for instance during the introduction of the TNMS lesson ‘Deserving and Distributing’, during which she told the class about her daughter, who is ill: “Researching how to treat ill people costs money, and since there is not enough, I sometimes help by going door to door to ask people if they want to share their money. And that is exactly what we’re going to talk about today: whether if you’ve earned something, you have to share it, and how.”

Controlling content Although Teacher B frequently checked in with students to see if they agreed with her summary or if she missed something during her interactions with the students, she seemed to have a clear sense of what the ‘right’ answer was that she wanted to hear. Using a series of questions and explanations, she tried to guide students to this answer. Although this approach provided students with a sense of structure, it also introduced relatively strict boundaries, in particular concerning the content of the discussions. For instance, when a student answered quite elaborately: “[student name] wanted a tree house. There is a mother and a child because the father passed away”, the teacher replied: “I just want to hear what you decided about the living situation. I can see the houses are quite far apart. Why?”. She frequently emphasized the importance of focusing: “Look, I applaud that you are using your imagination, but please stick to the essence of the question”.

Moreover, as the lesson series evolved, Teacher B decided to skip some of the plenary discussion moments and instead have only a general discussion moment towards the end of the lesson. To further ensure students took the TNMS lessons seriously, she also introduced an assessment element. Students had to write a student report on the TNMS lesson series, which was then graded as sufficient or insufficient by the teacher.

Reflective remarks Teacher B frequently asked students to bring forward different ideas or new perspectives, using questions provided in the TNMS manual (e.g. “Who has organized his or her island completely differently?” or “Are there people who thought of a different solution?”). In addition, when she noticed that students within a subgroup did not agree, she explicitly shared this with the rest – a strategy that was also mentioned in the TNMS manual: “And now we will be looking at an island where they did not agree. [group number], you had quite a discussion. What was it about?”. Finally, she also used the TNMS discussion cards provided to help students ask questions about the decisions taken by the other groups during the general classroom discussions.

Moreover, there were various moments during the discussions where the teacher asked students process-related questions, such as “Did you agree fast?” or “How did you reach this decision?”. There were very few examples where the teacher asked students to reflect on the lesson as a whole. She did, however, mention multiple times that she did not appreciate the way students behaved during the TNMS lessons, such as when she said “You are a second grade, but are behaving like you are still in elementary school, playing around and building tree houses, whilst the game is about having a dialogue with each other”. She also paused the lesson multiple times because students did not take the game seriously or because she felt there was too much noise in the classroom.

6.3. School C

6.3.1. Familiarity with citizenship-related classroom discussion

School C is a small pre-vocational secondary school located in an extremely urbanized environment, offering only one type of pre-vocational education: the theoretical track. The school has an explicit focus on citizenship education, both throughout the curriculum and concerning the wider community outside of school. Instead of being linked to a specific course, the TNMS lessons were matched with corresponding themes in the curriculum. As a result, two TNMS lessons took place during Social Sciences with Teacher C1 and one TNMS lesson took place during Economics, with Teacher C2. Both Teacher C1 and Teacher C1 indicated to focus predominantly on teaching students how to form their own opinion, deal with people with different opinions and participate in a democratic society (Table 3).

Citizenship-related classroom discussions were common according to Teacher C1 and Teacher C2. When asked about eleven example topics, they had previously discussed all of them with their students and indicated that it was relatively easy to guide citizenship-related discussions in their classrooms.

6.3.2. Teaching strategies for discussion

Inviting interaction Throughout the game, Teacher C1 constantly engaged in supporting and inviting interaction with her students, asking students’ opinions and ideas and challenging them to respond to each other. For instance, she started the first TNMS lesson by asking students: “Who can tell me what the goal of the game is?”. In general, she asked a lot of open-ended questions to her students, for example during a plenary discussion moment in the TNMS lesson ‘Newcomers’:

Teacher: “Which situation is most similar to how we respond to refugees in the Netherlands?”

Student 1: “Refugees first enter a procedure”

Teacher: “And how is this reflected in the game?”

Student 1: “On our island, everyone adapts, so that is fine”

Student 2: “I don’t believe everyone will be treated the same”

Teacher: “And how could you deal with that?”

Student 2: “Yeah I think this is the case everywhere, I do not have a lot of experience with the subject, but it is a difficult problem. Difficult to make it succeed. There are always people that disagree”.

Teacher: “It is very interesting what you are saying. [another student name], how would you deal with this problem?”

Student 3: “You could discuss it together, whilst trying to stay nice to each other, or you can ignore them, but then you get nowhere at all”

Teacher C2 had a similarly inviting communication style, with a lot of open-ended questions.

Making it real Teacher C1 primarily connected the game to current affairs. Contrary to Teacher B, she did not use personal examples or examples from students’ daily lives. For example, when reflecting on the goal of the TNMS lesson series:

Teacher: “Does anyone have an idea why we are playing this game at the moment?”

Student: “So that you can argue your opinion in the EU parliament”

Teacher: “Which organization is also involved in this?”

Student: “UN”

Teacher: “And how are they involved in this?”

Students: “Human rights”; “Millennium goals”; “Migration pact”; “Refugee pact”

Teacher: “Yes, exactly. That’s reflected in the game, but also visible in society. How do you deal with refugees? Problems that you have to think about at the EU or a higher level. Sometimes countries don’t agree with each other: how do you deal with this? With all these different opinions, arguments are very important”

Teacher C2 applied a similar strategy, even introducing several self-designed cases on current issues to further clarify the connection between the game and the real world.

Although very few extreme ideas arose during their classes, both Teacher C1 and Teacher C2 used this link with the real world to remind their students that: “(...) you are the one that decides what happens, just don’t forget that it is not just a board game” (Teacher C1); or “keep in mind that it is not just a game, but that you are discussing problems that also happen in real life” (Teacher C2). Teacher C2 vocalized his own opinion on the matter a bit more explicitly than Teacher C1, for instance when a student mentioned they were planning on slaughtering people on the island:

Teacher: “So if you walk out the door here, you would be able to do that?”

Student: “No, because I am not a killer”

Teacher: “But according to you, that is the ideal society”

Student: “No, only on the island”

Teacher: “But away from the island?”

Student: “In that case, no ...”

Teacher: “Try to keep that in mind, ok. I think slaughtering people is going too far”

Moral rules of conduct Both Teacher C1 and Teacher C2 used relatively strict boundaries, not regarding the content of what was discussed, but related to the process and how students voiced their opinion and communicated with each other – something that was also emphasized in the TNMS manual. In addition to discussing several ‘TNMS discussion rules’ at the start of each TNMS lesson – including the absence of right and wrong answers, the importance of elucidating one’s opinion, that it is a good idea to challenge yourself to “really reflect on it”, and that “funny behavior just to be funny” is not appreciated – the teachers reminded students of these rules throughout the discussion. For instance: “Remember, everyone can have their say. Listen to each other’s viewpoints and in the end, decide on the newcomers together”. Or when a student asked “Was this a good idea or not, what do you think?”, Teacher C1 answered, “That is not the point!”. Interestingly, the student responded with “you always say that!”, suggesting that these rules are also used by Teacher C1 outside of the TNMS lessons.

Teacher C2 did provide his opinion when asked by students, but always seemed to add: “Remember, that is just my opinion, you do not have to agree with that at all”. There were also several examples of situations in which Teacher C2 actively ended a discussion when students mentioned extreme solutions. For example:

Student 1: “We use them as slaves”

Teacher: “I don’t understand, why, how?”

Student 1: “Well, we hit them when they don’t listen”

Teacher: “You are not playing a computer game or something. Why don’t you stay after class for a bit, because you are not taking this seriously”

Student 2: “You are making jokes, even though you say you are not. I find that so disrespectful, especially since this happened quite recently”.

Teacher: “I am putting an end to this discussion”

Inviting reflection Throughout the TNMS lessons, Teacher C1 invited

students to reflect on the content as well as the process numerous times. She used various strategies for this. If the students did not bring up different ideas, Teacher C1 challenged them to consider other perspectives and asked critical questions about the solutions they proposed (e.g. “What was a counterargument?”). Some of these questions were based on the TNMS discussion cards (e.g. “Are there any disadvantages?”). She also actively invited students to share their ideas if she felt their voice was left out:

Teacher: “Based on the way you talk about this topic, I get the feeling you do not agree with the decisions taken”

Student 1: “No, that’s right”

Teacher: “Can you tell us a bit more about it?”

Student 1: (explains)

Teacher: “Maybe someone else, for instance [name student 2] can react to that”

Student 2: “Well, the idea was (explains)”

Teacher: “And who decides in the end?”

Student 2: “We did not agree yet, and were still discussing the subject matter”

Additionally, she checked in with students to reflect on how the process of discussions in subgroups went, by asking students for instance: “How is the collaboration going?”; “Let’s talk for a moment about how the discussions went. What went well? (...) What went less well? (...) Who used a discussion card? (...) Did you agree with each other swiftly?”. She also reflected on students’ learning outcomes, for instance by complimenting students for disagreeing, e.g.: “Interesting that you did not reach a decision, because this shows that you were all defending your interests. What do I mean by this? That you stand up for yourself”.

Finally, she also reflected on what did not work well, such as when she said: “I want to take a moment to discuss what happened with one of the subgroups. People were not listening to each other, and things did not work out well. How did this go in the other groups?”. Or when she said: “A lot of pupils were doing other things. Do you recognize that?”. She thus actively and frequently engaged students in the process of reflection, inviting students to share their thoughts both on what was going well and what was not going well.

7. Discussion

7.1. Approaches to familiarize students with citizenship-related classroom discussion

The main aim of this study was to shed more light on the strategies teachers use to facilitate citizenship-related classroom discussions in pre-vocational education. To do so, we analyzed 26 classroom discussions led by four pre-vocational secondary school teachers with varying levels of familiarity with discussion, all using the same educational tool to stimulate citizenship-related classroom discussion, Terra Nova Mini Society (TNMS). To reflect on the various teaching strategies, we discuss the teachers’ approaches in the order of their level of familiarity with classroom discussion, starting with teacher B, followed by teacher A and finally, teachers C1 and C2. Following, we briefly discuss the role of citizenship education as a possible contextual precursor for this familiarity with discussion, the extent to which extreme statements occurred during classroom discussions, as well as possible avenues for future research.

7.1.1. School B: unfamiliar with citizenship-related classroom discussions

At School B, the teacher and students were relatively new to the use of classroom discussion, both as a teaching method and a (citizenship-

related) learning goal (Hess & Avery, 2008; Parker & Hess, 2001). Teacher B's teaching profile can be best described as 'knowledge focused' (Reichert et al., 2021): the content of the discussions during the TNMS lessons was strictly regulated by the teacher and assessments were introduced – an element characteristic of this type of teaching profile. Whereas Djigic and Stojiljkovic (2011) found this form of classroom management style to be less beneficial for the general atmosphere and students' involvement in class than other teaching styles, Schuitema et al. (2017) found that for classroom discussion, strong teacher regulation benefited both content quality and student participation.

At School B, where both the teacher and students were unfamiliar with this type of discussion, strict content regulation did not seem to work particularly well. The lack of student participation even led Teacher B to further limit the opportunities for plenary discussions during the TNMS lessons. What did seem to enthrall students into participating was when the teacher used or asked for examples from students' personal lives, as such letting go of the otherwise strictly regulated content. The use of personal examples – a known teaching strategy to make learning content more meaningful (Rombout et al., 2022) – can thus be considered a good first step to help students in pre-vocational education discuss unfamiliar citizenship topics.

7.1.2. School A: somewhat familiar with citizenship-related classroom discussions

At School A, citizenship-related classroom discussions (before the TNMS lessons) were more frequent, in line with a 'critical thinking' teaching profile (Reichert et al., 2021) – which was also one of the top-3 educational goals emphasized by Teacher A. He did however mention that some topics – such as Islamophobia – were rather difficult to discuss with his students, something that seemed less of an issue at the other two schools. This was also evident during the TNMS lessons, in which considerably more extreme statements were observed than at the other two schools.

Teacher A's explanation – namely that this was partly due to the ideological background of the students' parents – is also highlighted in a recent study by Lozano Parra et al. (2022). In this study, extreme statements are considered potential moments of learning: "Allowing friction to be part of the classroom, without aiming toward a certain solution, is an important aspect of democratic learning if we accept that conflict and difference are important parts of democracy" (p. 23). Teacher A tried to accomplish this by employing a more distanced, non-interventionist approach (Djigic & Stojiljkovic, 2011), focusing mainly on summarizing students' viewpoints – a teaching strategy often used to promote arguing about values (Rombout et al., 2022) – but otherwise trying to remain neutral both regarding the content of the discussions and how this content was communicated.

This teaching style has been argued to be particularly beneficial in discussions involving sensitive topics, since it creates an open atmosphere – however, only when simultaneously helping students to reflect on their stand and practice with multi-perspectivity (Oulton et al., 2004). Although Teacher A did make explicit connections to real-life situations – which is another useful teaching strategy to make learning content more meaningful (Rombout et al., 2022) – more familiarity with structural aspects of citizenship-related discussions, such as the rules by which a discussion is managed (Hollander, 2002), might be needed to be able to profit from the sensitive nature of certain topics present in the classroom (Lozano Parra et al., 2022) or the use of realistic examples (Rombout et al., 2022).

7.1.3. School C: familiar with citizenship-related classroom discussions

In line with an 'independent thinking' teacher profile (Reichert et al., 2021), the teachers at School C underlined that one of the main goals of education was students' ability to form their own opinion. To achieve this, classroom discussions and debates were organized fairly frequently. Both teachers and students were thus already quite familiar with

citizenship-related classroom discussions before the TNMS lessons. Moreover, contrary to School A, none of the citizenship topics seemed to cause difficulties when discussed in class.

The teaching strategies applied by Teacher C1 and C2 during the TNMS lessons can be best described as interactionist (Djigic and Stojiljkovic, 2011): using open-ended questions, students were invited by the teacher to share their thoughts and classroom discussions were frequently regulated by students themselves. Compared to the classroom discussions at the other two schools, students at School C seemed to participate more actively and more seriously, thereby supporting earlier studies on the positive impact of student-regulated discussion (Schuitema et al., 2017) – at least in classrooms with students who are more familiar with citizenship-related discussions.

Two other teaching strategies that might explain the quality of the discussion climate at School C relate to the process. First of all, the teachers introduced and monitored strict moral rules of conduct regarding students' behaviors and ways of communication, explicitly condemning discriminatory statements by students based on moral grounds – in line with what Saetra (2021) referred to as one of three core elements of good practice when discussing controversial issues in the classroom. Secondly, students were actively invited to critically reflect on their contributions – which has been argued to be particularly important when discussing sensitive issues (Oulton et al., 2004) – as well as the (ir) more general learning process (a transfer-oriented teaching strategy, see Rombout et al., 2022).

Interestingly, extreme or provocative statements seemed to occur less frequently at School C than at the other schools, whilst students more actively voiced their opinion. Moreover, examples of real-life situations introduced by the teachers seemed to initiate more student responses than at School A. These findings not only support earlier research on the importance of creating and maintaining a safe classroom climate for discussion (Wansink et al., 2023) but also suggest that a certain familiarity with citizenship-related classroom discussion is necessary for students to profit from invitations to critically reflect on the process and content, including real-life consequences.

7.2. Suggestions for future research

The present study provides not only valuable information for teachers wanting to facilitate citizenship-related classroom discussions in pre-vocational education but also serves as an important starting point for further research. We highlight two potentially interesting pathways. Firstly, the three schools did not only differ in their teaching strategies for citizenship-related classroom discussions but also their approach to citizenship education more generally. Since a school's citizenship education approach impacts how citizenship-related discussions are experienced by students (Maurissen et al., 2018), future research should shed more light on how schools incorporate such discussions in the enactment of their general citizenship education approach. The current analysis provided some interesting first insights on this matter.

At School C, a 'citizenship-rich' approach to citizenship education was found (Kerr et al., 2004, 2007). Here, citizenship education was visible in the curriculum as well as in the numerous opportunities for active citizenship in both the school and the wider community. School C was also the school where students were most familiar with discussions and participated most actively in the TNMS lessons, suggesting that citizenship-related discussions in pre-vocational education profit from a similar 'whole school' approach. Considering the exploratory nature of the present (small scale) study, a larger, more representative sample is needed to be able to compare the association of different student outcomes regarding discussion with teaching strategies and broader school approaches to citizenship education. This would also allow for more in-depth comparisons of the potential role certain characteristics of the school context might play in this regard, such as the type of vocational track or the degree of urbanization.

Furthermore, what stood out during our analyses was the amount and severity of provocative, extreme, or discriminatory statements that were made by students. This was especially the case in the two schools, A and B, where teachers reported either less familiarity or more difficulty with citizenship-related discussion. More familiarity with guiding classroom discussions might support an attitude of ‘contained risk-taking’ (Pace, 2019), where such statements from students can be used as moments of learning, also in classes where students may be more prone to sabotage the educational process with non-serious or provocative responses or where students may voice more extreme opinions about certain societal topics (Lozano Parra et al., 2022). An analysis of teacher training curricula in the Netherlands concluded that information on pedagogical skills – such as creating an open and safe discussion climate in class – is often lacking in the knowledge bases used in these curricula (Nieuwelink & Oostdam, 2021). A more systematic analysis of how more experienced teachers practice these skills, including teaching both with and for discussion (Parker & Hess, 2001) could help improve these knowledge bases.

7.3. Limitations

Regarding the potential limitations of our approach, we are aware of the implications of having to work with field notes instead of actual recordings. Since we had two researchers present during more than half of the observations, we were able to compare notes, thereby increasing the reliability of our data and analyses. The upside of only being able to make notations is that this method is generally understood to be less invasive than videotaping (Schmidt, 2019), and as such, likely had minimal impact on the conversations that were observed during the TNMS lessons.

Additionally, the educational tool used during our observations may have influenced the teachers’ strategies. For one, TNMS has a very open approach to inviting discussion, for instance by emphasizing that there are ‘no right or wrong answers’. Furthermore, in the TNMS manual, various examples of dialogic approaches are listed. From our analyses, it is visible that each teacher has a very distinct teaching style to invite discussion during the plenary TNMS moments, despite what might be seen as ‘nudges’ towards a certain TNMS-specific approach.

Relatedly, research indicates that teachers in different subject domains have different understandings of citizenship education goals (Leenders et al., 2008). This was also visible in the top-3 goals of the teachers in the current study, whose subject domains differed substantially. In terms of the ‘content familiarity’ of citizenship-related classroom discussion, one can imagine that some of the discussed themes might be closer to home for an Economics teacher than for a Religion teacher. Given the fact that teachers were allowed to choose their preferred TNMS lessons – and thus topics – we however do not believe that this has had a big impact on our results.

7.4. General conclusions

All in all, our findings reveal distinct approaches across three secondary schools for pre-vocational education with varying levels of familiarity with citizenship-related classroom discussions. At schools where students and teachers are less familiar with discussions, strict content regulation seems less effective. Incorporating personal life experiences, on the other hand, appears to help students practice discussing the topics on hand. Reflecting on the process and content of the discussions, as well as incorporating real-life consequences or current affairs, seems to work best at schools where students and teachers are more familiar with discussions.

In addition, our findings highlight the teacher’s important yet complex role in establishing and maintaining a classroom climate that is safe enough to practice citizenship-related discussions. To do so, a combination of more student-regulated content and sufficient teacher regulation in terms of *how* students communicate and interact could be a

fruitful approach. Practicing this type of guidance can also help teachers in dealing with – and even profit from – provocative responses or extreme statements from students. Differently put, teaching *with* discussion profits from teaching *for* discussion.

Author statement

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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