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Student Voice –  
the BRIDGE to learning

## **ERASMUS BRIDGE PROJECT EVALUATION**

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## **1. Introduction**

The research approach of the evaluation of the BRIDGE project, including theoretical framework, research questions, methodology, methods, instruments and data collection, is introduced and justified in this paper.

Student voice and student participation in education is a relative new approach. As a consequence the project is of an explorative nature and key concepts like student voice, student participation and democratic citizenship as well as how they are related need to be further explored throughout the project. Meanings might differ according to the contexts in which it is being applied. Contexts vary from country to country and from school to school. Therefore in the ERASMUS BRIDGE PROJECT we chose case studies as a viable method of inquiry to research pertinent questions and collect qualitative empirical data. Most of the terminology and order in this paper is based on John W. Creswell's work on Research Design (2009) and Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design (1997), Crotty's Introduction to Social Research (1998) and the work by Yin (2009) on Case Study Design.

### ***Relevance and purpose of project***

In the early 1990s we saw the emergence of two related issues in education across Europe and beyond: the notion that schools should contribute to the development of active, democratic citizens and as a result of the ratification of the 'Convention for the rights of the child', attempts to align the education system to the convention and in particular to article 12. Curriculum proposals for citizenship education typically include a focus on students' development of knowledge, skills and attitudes or dispositions and values. The proposals acknowledge that many of the aims and objectives call for a pedagogical approach where students are provided with opportunities to learn from experiences both within and outside of school. This calls for a new perspective on learning and on the curriculum, involving: learning within subjects, project based education, the school as a community and the role of the schools' surroundings.

For the Convention of the rights of the child Article 12 states that *"States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child"*. As a consequence of this, schools need to identify how and which students can participate in decision-making and on what issues. This project tries to present possibilities for student voice and how these practices contribute to the students' development of democratic abilities and engagement and the quality of education. This practice supports article 12 of the convention: students participate and have an influence on their situation.

## **2. Theoretical framework: concepts**

In this section relevant concepts are explored: student voice including student participation, democratic citizenship.

### **2.1 student voice**

The concept of voice is used to indicate a way of thinking that strives to reposition students in educational research, reform and practices. "This way of thinking is premised on the following convictions: young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching and schooling; that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education (Cook-Sather, 2006: 359-360)".

Thomson (2011) defines "voice" as the right for learners to express opinions, access people who influence decisions and exercise active participation in educational decision-making processes. Lundy relates voice to childrens' rights. She uses four aspects of voice in relation to article 12 of the Convention on the rights of the child:

- o space: children must be given the opportunity to express a view;
- o voice: children must be facilitated to express their views;
- o audience: the view must be listened to;
- o influence: the view must be acted upon, as appropriate (Lundy, 2007: 933).

These four aspects make it clear that voice is much more than simply speaking. It means that voice can and should have an effect. Cook-Sather (2006) also tried to summarize the central aspects of student voice as "sound, presence and power", indicating that students have a voice in the sense that they can speak up and share their thoughts, opinions and experiences; that they are given a platform to speak from and be listened to and that they actually can change their situation, possessing an active role in decision-making.

### ***Principles of student voice***

We regard five principles as crucial in student voice practices.

- I. We have a responsibility to ensure that education leads to further democratic qualities (as part of the aims for citizenship education).
- II. Democratic qualities are developed by interpersonal practices such as discussion, cooperation and decision making (educational benefit).
- III. All students are entitled to practise their democratic rights and have a voice in their education (the universal right to participate).

- IV. Students can offer unique perspectives and within a class these perspectives can be diverse (student voice).
- V. Learning is a social process involving peers and adults (social learning).

We consider these principles of crucial importance for education, because of their fundamental, intrinsic value. This means that we must critically reflect on our teaching and learning approaches and monitor how these principles are reflected in educational practices.

## **2.2 Democratic Citizenship**

The BRIDGE project emphasizes the relationship between student voice and the development of democratic citizenship skills and attitudes. A democratic society should be made up of democratic citizens. Many societies are emphasizing the importance of education in counteracting threats to our open, democratic societies. Therefore citizenship education has become an international movement (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2010; Eurydice, 2012). According to a recent study on citizenship education (Eurydice, 2012) that included 31 countries in Europe, citizenship is featured in all national schools' curricula, either as a subject, cross-curricular issue or by having the school function as a place where students learn citizenship from experience. The concept of citizenship is used in general education in particular, although in universities the development of citizenship skills and other 'graduate attributes' has risen up the agenda in recent years (Barrie, 2007; Haigh & Clifford, 2010, Veugelers, De Groot & Nollet, 2014; Leask, 2015). In a curriculum proposal for citizenship education in primary and secondary schools, developed by the Dutch National Curriculum Institute (SLO), citizenship education is based on three domains: identity development, participation and democratic principles (Bron, Veugelers & Van Vliet, 2009). Student participation and voice is a way for students to experience and develop democratic attitudes in education. At the same time, it follows article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [OHCHR], 1989) which states that "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the

child” (UNHCR, 2015). We consider curriculum negotiation a means to provide students with opportunities to practise ‘citizenship-as-practice’ as opposed to ‘citizenship-as-status’ (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). Of course citizenship education includes a body of knowledge and cognitive skills, but citizenship must also be learned by enacting behaviors in daily situations within and outside the institution.

Less formal educational activities benefit students, and practices that are a kind of situated learning can lead to the development of democratic attitudes (Hoskins et al., 2012). We regard student voice and negotiation as examples of what Boomer calls collaborative democracy (principle A) and students as actors (principle C). Beane adds to the curriculum negotiation work of Boomer by emphasising the importance of developing a range of skills, stating that “the participation in collaborative planning is a critical citizenship skill in a democratic society” (Beane, 1997, p. 96). Zipin (2013) sees curriculum negotiation from the perspective of ‘funds of knowledge’, where students’ backgrounds and life experiences are seen as culturally valuable and rich and are integrated into the curriculum. The education system can enhance a democratic society by the way it is organised, but it can also be argued that students acquire certain skills and attitudes to contribute to democratic societies through active participation in their school and in the learning process. In a report on student leadership for example, Black et al. (2014) state that international policy expresses the intent for students to have an active role in decision-making and democratic processes in schools. The authors articulate that this “follows a longstanding policy tradition that frames schools as institutions that serve a set of agreed public purposes, including the development of young people’s ability to participate as citizens and as leaders in their schools and communities” (Black et al., 2014, p. 7).

### **2.3 Voice, citizenship and participation**

Considering the interpretations of voice just described, it is clear that voice is about making a difference, about influencing decision-making and having some sort of power over ones position and situation. This overlaps other concepts involved with giving opinion and sharing power, such as participation and consultation. Considering the definition of participation by

government institutions in England and Scotland the overlap with voice becomes apparent: The English Department for Children, Schools and Families defines children's and young people's participation as: "adults working with children and young people to ensure that their views are heard and valued in the taking of decisions which affect them, and that they are supported in making a positive contribution to their school and local community". (DCSF, 2008: 5). The Scottish national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families, Children in Scotland, gives us a broad definition of youth participation stating that participation occurs when people are given opportunity to express views effectively and for those views to be listened to and taken into account. It is about being involved in and influencing decision-making on matters that affect you ([http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/par\\_leg.htm](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/par_leg.htm)). These two definitions could just as well be defining voice: they are about expressing views, being listened to and having an influence. This correlates with the "sound, presence and power" as described by Cook-Sather. Whitty & Wisby (2007) see student voice along a continuum and illustrate this by referring to Roger Hart's participation ladder (Hart, 1992), indicating also an overlap between voice and participation. Cross, et al, define student participation shortly and directly: "participation quite simply means taking part", in which listening and being listened to is a crucial component (Cross, 2009: 13). Clearly voice and participation are often used interchangeably. The difference between both phrases is that student voice can include aspects of communicating with and understanding of students as well as giving students a say and involving them in decision-making. Communication is usually not distinguished as explicitly in participation. Nonetheless, there is an overlap, and because of this, the theory of student participation is included in this paper as well.

### ***Levels of participation***

The distinction between levels of participation is an interesting element in the theory of participation. Hart's well known "ladder of participation" (1992) is an often used model to indicate different levels of participation by children. Hart's ladder of eight levels was inspired by Arnstein's ladder of 9 rungs, while Hart identifies eight, ranging from non-participation, such as manipulation, to 'youth initiated, shared decisions with adults'. Another example is the model by Dürr, distinguishing seven levels from 'basic information and passive reception of decisions' to 'participation in decision-making, initiation of action, implementation of solutions and evaluation of outcomes'. (Dürr, 2005: 34). Shuttle took a different perspective when categorizing institutions in terms of their degree of learner engagement. He developed a model consisting of five levels:

- o inform: learners are informed about decisions;
- o consult: learners are consulted to support decision making;

- o involve: input from learners into decision making is sought;
- o collaborate: decisions are shaped in partnership with learners;
- o empower: there is ownership of decisions by learners. (Shuttle, 2007: 36).

Another five level model is that of Shier (Shier, 2001), also used by the DCSF (2008: 6). The basic level 'children are listened to' begins the sequence, and possesses the hierarchic features of models developed by Hart, Dürr and Shuttle:

- o children are listened to;
- o children are supported in expressing their views;
- o children's views are taken into account;
- o children are involved in the decision-making process;
- o children share power and responsibility for decision-making.

Level 2 in this model: 'children are supported in expressing their views' suggests that students are likely to need support. Yet, it also suggests that voice is something that can be supported, developed and learned, making voice an aspect that needs a place in the curriculum.

All the models exhibit an increase in complexity, empowerment and responsibility. Some (Treseder, 1997; Allan & Cross, 2008; Baron et al, 2008) argue that these hierarchical models are 'too linear and judgemental' (Baron et al, 2008: 4, 13), or that they 'put adults and children in oppositional positions' (Allan & Cross, 2008: 11) and should be replaced by a circular model wherein participative components are given equal weight. By presenting different forms of participation in a circular way, attention can be given to the contexts in which each form of participation can be valued in its own context. In other words: the top stairs of the ladder are not necessarily the most appropriate goal for each situation.

The model developed by Treseder demonstrating this circular approach:

- o Assigned but informed: adults decide on the project and children volunteer for it. The children understand the project, they know who decided to involve them, and why. Adults respect young people's views.
- o Consulted and informed: the project is designed and run by adults, but children are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously
- o Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children: adults have the initial idea, but young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but children are also involved in taking the decisions.

- o Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults: children have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct, but offer their expertise for young people to consider.
- o Child-initiated and directed: young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge (Tresender, 1997).

Even though the hierarchical aspect of many models is criticized by some, we consider it a helpful method to employ when choosing realistic forms of participation attuned to particular situations. To be aware of these levels in a hierarchic way helps to determine divisions of power and the impact participation can have.

We propose to use the model by Shuttle, (2007: 36).

- o inform: learners are informed about decisions;
- o consult: learners are consulted to support decision making;
- o involve: input from learners into decision making is sought;
- o collaborate: decisions are shaped in partnership with learners;
- o empower: there is ownership of decisions by learners.

## 2.4 Practices of voice

Besides levels of participation it is relevant to be clear about the object and practices of voice. What are students allowed to talk about and influence? Are they invited or can they take the initiative to participate in decisions regarding different aspects of schooling. Examples of the *object* of voice are:

- physical aspects of the school (playground equipment, color of walls, decoration),
- offering of foods in the cafeteria,
- School climate (safety in school, school or class rules)
- Social events: field trips, budget for class materials and activities,
- pedagogy: homework, types of assignments, schedule and planning of tasks, evaluation methods, peer assessment,
- content: learning goals and topics.

### **Box 1. Close up: Student voice in the curriculum**

A widely used model within SLO that helps organising the school curriculum and the different aspects related to this, is the 'curricular spider web' (Akker, 2003). This model is a reshuffling of Klein's (1991) list of nine essential elements of the curriculum, that



distinguishes different components of what can be seen as 'the broader curriculum'. These are: rational, objectives, contents, teachers' role, materials, arrangements, time, place, evaluation. When presented as a spider web, the rational forms the centre of and the different components make up the threads. Together, these threads determine whether the rational will be fully realised. An uneven balance between the threads will increase the chance of an uneven curriculum or will have a negative influence on the realisation of the rational. If for example, there are objectives and there is content described, but teacher have no time to teach these, then the implementation will stall. Or if there are materials and tests, but the teachers don not know how to use them, then failure is obvious.

This model can very well be related to pupils participation. For example by asking questions like: Why do we find it important to give pupils a voice (rational); towards which goals are pupils learning to participate (aims and objectives); in what way is the teacher facilitating participation? etcetera. In the table below the different components are listed in column one. In the second column we described how we think the different components apply to pupil voice. In the third column of the table, we have given examples of what we think are questions that could be proposed to students in relation to the different components. By doing so, we use the model to determine what components of the curricular spiderweb are that can be applied to student voice. In the case study on the UK it became clear that pupil participation is often about learning activities and the role of the teacher and hardly ever about the crucial curriculum questions on aims and objectives or content. This study however emphasizes just that: towards which goals are students learning (objectives)? and what are they learning (the content)?

The following table provides an overview of the curriculum components and its relation to pupil voice.

Curriculum component (Akker, 2003)	Curriculum component applied to student voice	examples of questions that could be discussed with students
Rationale	Why is it important to give pupils a voice (moral, educational, practical reasons)	Why is it important to attend school? What can be the advantage of this subject now or later?

Aims and objectives	Towards which goals are our students learning through pupil voice (self-knowledge, social skills, participation skills, responsibilities)	What is it you want to be better at, when you finish school / this subject?
Content	What do pupils regard relevant to learn?	What do you want to learn? What is relevant to you, what questions have you come across?
Learning activities	How can we organise pupil voice: in class or school, with peers or experts, with materials or not?	How do you want to learn? What activities do you want to be involved in, how certain learning activities improve learning?
Teacher role	How is the teacher facilitating pupil voice? How can an open climate be created? How can power be shared with students?	What qualities do you value in a teacher? What should teacher do more or less off? Does the teacher provide opportunities for pupil voice?
Materials and resources	Are materials used to facilitate the process of pupil voice? What kind of materials? How prescriptive are the materials?	What materials do you prefer to use? What is it you do or don't like in the current materials? How about ICT? What about practical work, field work and experiments?
Grouping	With whom are they learning? Are pupils randomly grouped or based	What do you consider a good balance between

	on interest? Do pupils volunteer or should all participate?	individual, group and class work?
Location	Is pupil voice taking place within the classroom, is it formalised and taking place on school level? Are locations used that are unlike the traditional school setting?	How do you like your school / classroom. What can be improved? How do you regard the safety in the halls and area's around the school.
Time	When is pupil voice used, during class or school time, after school? Do we facilitate staff? Or pupils rewarded with credits or exemptions?	What activities or subjects do you want to spend more or less time on? Are you interested in after school hours activities?
Assessment	Do we want to assess the learning and how? Quantitative, qualitative? By peers or staff?	How can learning be assessed? Are there alternatives for written tests. How can 'copy-paste' work be prevented in assignments?

When we look at *practices*, based on their nature, we can distinguish:

- o Dialogue and discussion: this includes interaction within the classroom, collaborative learning, forms of negotiation, providing time for students to express themselves, exchange ideas and reflect on the content or process of learning.
- o Choice in learning: providing students opportunities to choose between tasks, assignments, content, evaluation and assessment. Personal learning plans according to needs, interests and ambitions.
- o Peer to peer: involving students in tasks that are traditionally seen as the teacher's work, such as: peer assessment, peer support, peer teaching, buddying, peer mentoring and conflict resolutions.
- o Consultations: asking students about their opinion of numerous school-related issues. These can be organized with questionnaires, focus groups, panels or working groups.

- o Students as researchers: instead of asking students about their opinions and using them as a data source, students can also play an active role in research being conducted at their school. The four-fold typology of student engagement by Michael Fielding (2001) helpfully distinguishes four variants of student involvement in research that form a continuum: students as data source; students as active respondents; students as co-researchers; and students as researchers.
- o Informal participation: students can also take - or be involved in - initiatives that involve decision-making at different levels, or contribute to processes of decision-making by expressing their opinion and be while remaining open to the opinions of others. Examples are ad hoc or structural advisory groups, forums, discussion platforms, debate groups, school papers etc.
- o Formal participation: involving students in class and/or school councils and/or in different formal decision-making bodies in school. This can involve school evaluation, class evaluation, appointing teachers, improving teaching and learning, physical surroundings, communication, redrafting of school missions, etc.

All these different manifestations of student voice can be related to the levels distinguished in the models of participation we presented previously. Yet each type of appearance can be related to more than one level, depending on how the activity is organised and how power is distributed. It also makes clear, however, that the models focus primarily on the distribution of power while practices allowing students more autonomy, initiative, responsibility, involvement and engagement, are just as important for developing voice. These more basic pedagogical practices are a prerequisite for decision-making.

### **3. Methodology**

The BRIDGE evaluation is based on research methodology. The methodology consists of research perspectives, research questions, a description of evaluation methods and context analyses.

#### **3.1 Research perspectives**

The project explores and tries to broaden understanding of the possibilities of student voice in education in different international settings. The rationale behind this approach is threefold:

- 1) student involvement increases the quality of education by involving students as stakeholders, providing unique perspectives,
- 2) Student involvement results in better student engagement; and
- 3) the process of student participation in decision-making about their school and schooling contributes to the development of democratic citizenship qualities.

This rationale reflects two worldviews: a “social constructivist worldview” (Creswell, 2009: 8) education is developed as an interactive process amongst participants including teachers and students; and an “advocacy worldview” (Creswell, 2009:9): students are allowed a voice in discussions on their schooling. Discussions they usually have no access to. They are empowered by developing and developing negotiation skills that will make their voice effective in decision-making processes.

These worldviews can be elaborated by describing the theoretical perspectives used in this project. Student voice in education is underpinned by three aspirations and theoretical perspectives:

1. Empowerment perspective: Increasing student voice by providing opportunities for student participation in decision-making in their own education, empowers students.
2. Democratic citizenship perspective: Developing democratic citizenship qualities within school by learning from experiencing democratic processes through student voice approaches. The educational setting provides opportunities for planned, organised and structured participation using a well-defined method that includes instruments for students to employ, as well as possibilities to reflect on outcomes and process.
3. Educational quality perspective: Student participation in school and schooling increases the quality of education by improving student engagement in education. When applied to curriculum matters, the relevance of the curriculum is increased by bringing diverse perspectives and by relating curriculum to students' backgrounds, identity and interests.

### 3.2 Evaluation questions

The BRIDGE project has two general objectives:

- *To develop different models of working in partnership with students, giving them voice and develop their skills and attitudes to become responsible and democratic citizens.*
- *To create and implement ideas for pedagogical practices that support the active role of all students in their learning by building bridges between students and teachers.*

To further specify this central question, we have formulated six sub questions.

1. What are the relationships between the concepts: student voice, participation and democratic citizenship?
2. What models and pedagogical practices supporting the active role of all students in their learning are usable and effective to support student voice?
3. What are teachers' commitment and capacities to work in partnership with students?
4. What new or different perspectives on education do students bring?
5. To what degree do students develop democratic qualities through student voice practices and if so, what qualities are these?
6. What is the influence of the context (system, school, class, teacher, implementation) on the student voices practices?

Researching the first question broadens the understanding of the central concepts of the project and how they are related.

Question two is the description and formative evaluation of the methods and approaches to student voice applied in the project. Includes age group, settings, levels (class, school, system), instruments.

The third question is related to question two, but emphasizes the role of the teacher: attitudes and capabilities. To what degree are teachers committed, how do they feel about giving students a voice and a certain amount of power, how capable are teachers to organize and coach processes of teacher-student partnerships.

The fourth question inquires into the nature of contribution students can make to their education. What perspectives, interests and content can students bring to the discussion? Do students bring perspectives that are different from policy makers or teachers?

The fifth question seeks to ascertain the educational benefit of student voice and student participation in education. Four is about the qualities related to democratic principles that students utilize and develop as a result of the process.

Question six focuses on the context in which the study takes place and asks if the results of question 1 and 4/5 are affected by differences in context between the cases. Possible factors that have an influence: system characteristics, openness to student voice, teacher characteristics, pedagogical school climate, student characteristics.

The research sub-questions are explored through two types of research methodology: case studies and educational design research. Both will be described in the next paragraphs.

### **3.3. Case study methodology**

In the BRIDGE project, evaluation is organised through a case study methodology. Data collection methods are a consequence of this approach. The rationale for case-study design are two-fold:

first, student voice needs to be explored, especially from the perspective of developing democratic qualities. Explorative case studies that emphasise the importance of thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the study context can contribute to our understanding of student voice practices in classes and schools. We can reflect on the data to identify specific characteristics of particular cases as well as cross-case themes to provide conclusions that can add to our understanding of the main research question and sub-questions.

Second, case studies are particularly advantageous in that they offer the possibility to study phenomena and processes within context and in situations that researchers cannot control or have little control over (Yin, 2009). Case studies do not rely on controlled variables; they "follow the research philosophy of analysing an existing, real life situation in all its complexity" (Kyburz-Graber, 2004: 54). This approach also follows the curriculum theory introduced by Eisner (1979) who claims that educational and curricular problems need to be considered in context: being able to "appreciate what is occurring" as well as how teachers use their "educational connoisseurship" to make decisions on when and how student voice can best be employed.

Nevertheless we must not deny the limitations of case study research. Certain theoretical concerns must be considered when presenting the research results of such studies. Studying 'real' issues as they occur and when they occur makes it difficult to capture 'truth' in the way that controlled experiments using controlled variables and using statistical analysis aim to do (Cousin, 2009). Case study results are interpretations of what has occurred. Both the way information is 'read' or captured as it occurs and the way this information is interpreted and then presented by the researcher is always somehow subjective. The process of 'meaning making' (Stake, 1995: 100) instead of 'proofing' is a crucial characteristic of case study research. The focus on meaning making better matches the explorative nature of our work. However, this does have implications for the way results are presented and conclusions

drawn. Care must be taken that strong generalizations are not made. A rich and skilful write-up of detail and analysis “such that the reader can make a judgement about the case” (Cousin, 2009: 135) is required to transform this uniqueness into some form of generalization.

### **3.4 Educational design research**

To answer in particular subquestion 2 (what methods are useable) the educational design research-approach (EDR) can be employed in the evaluation research of methods and instruments used in the project. EDR is used for a range of research studies that emphasise the practical use of research outcomes and that acknowledge the complexity of educational settings. Evaluation is intertwined with design and development activities. Data collection and analysis focus on a formative aim: how does the intervention work out in a context and how can it be optimized? “Design research is cyclic, process-oriented and has a focus on practicality.

The development of approaches to support student voice in education fits within this definition of design research. Our experience, resonates with the work of Nieveen (2009: 97) who wrote that “in case of a formative evaluation during early stages of the project, the main purpose is to locate shortcomings in the intervention and to generate suggestions for improvement, the number of respondents is less critical”. This prototyping approach implies that two or more versions have been developed in an evolutionary sequence, and that empirical data is collected during the process. Each prototype is adapted to the data collected in the previous version, eventually leading to a better intervention. Therefore formative evaluation is crucial to improve the intervention.

It is essential to determine the data sought through formative evaluation. Nieveen (2009: 94) has described four quality criteria that help determine the kind of data needed to improve the prototypes. These are:

- relevance: the intervention and its design must be based on state-of-the-art (scientific) knowledge,
- consistency; the intervention is logically designed,
- practicality; the intervention is (expected to be) usable in the setting for which it has been designed;
- effectiveness; use of the intervention (is expected to) result(s) in produces desired outcomes.

Relevance is a crucial criteria and is partly subjective when related to student voice: the involvement of student in the improvement of education is related to ones vision on



education and on the development of children and young people. These pre-assumptions must be articulated in the evaluation.

Consistency must be evaluated during the prototyping phase. It is important to determine if the intervention is consistent with the aims of the intervention. Is it doing what is required? The same goes for practicality: learners must understand the intervention. Teachers must be able to work with the materials and obtain results from it.

Finally effectiveness is also important. It is crucial to know what the intervention has actually produced. In designing this research, it is essential to discover if student voice can improve curricula and how the participants are affected.

### **3.5 Context information**

Both for case studies as for educational design research, information about the context of an intervention is crucially important to understand and explain what is occurring and what works or not. In an international project like ERASMUS BRIDGE, contexts vary to a large extent. We propose to gather data on different levels:

The educational system level: policy, laws, traditions, school autonomy.

School level: location, pedagogy, cognitive levels of student, denomination, SES of students.

Class level: class size, teacher and student characteristics.

#### **3.5.1 System level.**

#### **3.5.2 school level: school characteristics**

**Location:** is the school situated in a rural, middle size city or large city environment? With rural we mean that student enrollment is from rural areas and small villages and communities. In general the social structures in these communities are relatively strong and the environment is relatively stable and not complex. For the purposes of this research, middle size cities have over 100 000 and up to 300 000 inhabitants. These cities are more heterogeneous and dynamic than the rural areas. The larger cities are 300 000 and over. These cities are the most heterogeneous and dynamic while social cohesion is the loosest. Students might travel from different parts of the city to school. Location is a relevant characteristic because it gives a context to help understand the input of the students. This will likely reflect their background and the situation in which they are growing up.

**Denomination:** has the school a religious identity? Schools are public schools or Catholic, Protestant, Dutch reformed, Islamic or one of the smaller denominations. These schools show a large variance in denominational identity ranging from strict to almost non-existing moderate. All case study schools, however, are of a moderate nature when religion is concerned.

**Education sector or stream:** the cognitive abilities of participating students. There are roughly three options: pre-vocational education, general education and pre-university education. Selection is based in a large part on cognitive abilities; lower achieving students enroll in pre-vocational streams and higher achievers in pre-university education. Education sector or stream gives an indication of the cognitive abilities of students, unfortunately is also gives an indication of the social economic backgrounds of the students. Pre-vocational students are often from lower socio-economical families.

**Pedagogical identity and culture.** Schools either choose a pedagogical identity or it develops out of practice with values, school culture, teaching and learning style communicated in various ways. Pedagogical identity and pedagogical culture are two separate considerations. With pedagogical identity we mean the identity that a school formally and explicitly has. Pedagogical culture is the interpretation and experiences of the school culture by those involved, in our cases this would be the students and teacher.

Pedagogical culture can vary. Schools can be more traditional in their teaching style: one teacher with a group of around 30 students, a strong teacher with textbook dominance in content, pedagogy, class management and assessment. Other schools are less traditional and try to break away from traditional patterns by, for example, applying team teaching or project based education, different types of student input and variation in assessment.

Because a school can be more or less open to student input and students feel more or less safe to share their point of view, pedagogical identity and culture is a relevant factor in the case studies.

### **Place of intervention**

It is in the interest of the student's development that a variety of opportunities to participate in democratic practices are created. Once these opportunities are institutionalised in school culture, chances that certain skills, attitudes and knowledge are developed increase in comparison with a situation where opportunities are only coincidentally offered by a few teachers or in some projects. Furthermore it is important to ensure the participation of all students in these processes. Too often student participation is restricted to a selection of students. If our aim is for all students to develop democratic qualities, then all students must be included. Table X shows the levels where student voice can be organised. The lower the level, the more students can be involved.

Table 1: Curriculum levels

Level	Setting	Example
Macro	System, district, country	External curriculum requirements, national curricula

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Meso	School	School based curricula
Micro	Class	Class curricula, Content of projects, teaching and learning materials
Nano	Student	Individual learning goals and trajectories.

#### **4. Data collection methods.**

Traditional data sources for case studies are documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations and physical artefacts (Yin, 2009: 98). But they can also include life histories, sociograms and questionnaires (Cousin, 2009). In the BRIDGE project evaluation is important but limited and in balance with the scope and size of the project.

##### **4.1 Questionnaire for students.**

A student questionnaire can provide data about the context of the case study; the perception of students on participation in school; on the usability of the intervention (formative evaluation); and on their activities, such as the use of certain skills. This data, related to research questions 2, 4, 5 and 6 establishes the effectiveness of the intervention, do students develop certain democratic qualities and what is the influence of the case study context?

##### **4.2 Interviews with teachers**

Data can also be gathered via interviews with the case study teacher(s). The interviews helps gather data about intended and operational interventions, the teacher's perception of the intervention, and the impressions of the teacher concerning the development of skills amongst students.

An interview can be conducted before the teacher started the intervention, the so-called "pre-intervention interview" (see box 2), and a retrospective interview was conducted after the intervention and lesson series were concluded, the "post-intervention interview".

#### ***Box 2. Close up: teacher interviews about curriculum negotiation***

A two part pre-intervention interview was conducted before the teacher started the intervention. The objective of the first part of the interview was to get a deeper understanding of the curriculum the teacher intended to offer. At this time, basic information was obtained, asking about the theme, subject, and class. The rest of the questions were based on the interrelated curriculum components (Akker, 2003) adapted from Goodlad et al (1979: 68) and used by SLO in various projects. The components are: rationale, aims and objectives, content, learning activities, teacher role, materials and resources, grouping, location, time, and assessment. In the interview however, the rationale behind the subject or theme was not questioned because this rather abstract component might take up too much time of the interview and besides, a teacher would

probably mention similar aspects under "objectives" and "teacher's expectations of students". In addition, the teacher role was split into "own role of teacher" and "teacher's expectation of student behavior". This distinction was made to emphasize the connectedness between teacher and student's roles. An element was also added to "teaching and learning materials" (i.e. materials and resources), namely the functioning of the textbook. This aspect was added for two reasons: the textbook often is dominant within the often existing variety of materials and resources, ; and it is essential to know how the textbook will function if students' input changes the objectives and content of the lesson series.

The teacher's expectations of the innovation were questioned the second part of the interview : how the teacher thinks students will react to this way of working and what problems the teacher expects. An overview of the interview items are included in the appendixes.

**Post intervention interview**

The intervention is reflected on by the teacher and researcher in the second interview, or post intervention interview, after the lesson series was concluded. . This post-intervention interview consisted of two parts. Like the pre-intervention interview, the teacher's view of the curriculum is considered. However this time the focus is not on the teacher's intentions, but on the curriculum as it had developed during the process: the operational curriculum. In this part of the interview the teacher's answers from the pre-case interviews form the basis for the post-case interview.

The intervention was reflected on In the second part of the post-intervention interview: the instrument, the process, possible barriers, unexpected outcomes and changing roles.

Interview scheme [based on intervention: negotiated curriculum]

Research question	Pre-intervention question	Post-intervention question
Is the student prompt sheet an effective tool to support curriculum negotiation?	What are your expectations towards the intervention in regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Existing knowledge of students</li> <li>- Questions of students</li> <li>- Unique perspectives of students</li> <li>- The group negotiation</li> </ul>	Reflect on intervention in general and answers to pre-intervention questions. This question can tell is whether the instrument worked. Students

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The class negotiation and your role?</li> </ul> <p>Can you name a few benefits for the intervention?</p> <p>Do you expect certain problems and what are they?</p> <p>What influence will the students' question have on forthcoming lessons?</p>	<p>might or might not have been underestimated.</p>
<p>What perspectives do students bring to the curriculum?</p>	<p>What content is being addressed in the lesson series about the given topic?</p> <p>Where will learning take place?</p> <p>What do you hope to achieve with the lessons?</p> <p>What pedagogical resources do you use and what is the role of the teaching method (textbook): leading, guidance; background.</p> <p>How much time (%) do students work individually, together in small groups, together as a class?</p> <p>How do you evaluate learning outcomes?</p>	<p>Comparing the answers to the pre-intervention interview with what actually happened tells us what the teacher did differently than anticipated and how this was influenced by students' input.</p>
<p>Do students develop democratic qualities through curriculum negotiation and if so what qualities are these?</p>	<p>What role do you see for yourself and what behaviour goes with that?</p> <p>What are your expectations towards the intervention in regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique perspectives of students</li> <li>- The group negotiation</li> <li>- The class negotiation and your role?</li> </ul>	<p>Comparing the pre-interview with the actual lessons as they developed reveals the influence of the students. Influencing decision making is seen as a part of democracy.</p> <p>Democracy also supports diversity and unique perspectives of students are a part of that.</p>

	<p>What influence will the students' question have on your forthcoming lessons?</p>	<p>Students negotiating in small groups and in class is a way of practicing democratic principles.</p>
<p>What is the influence of the context (school, class, teacher; implementation) on the results?</p>	<p>Class and level?                  Where will learning take place?                  What pedagogical resources do you use and what is the role of the teaching method (textbook): leading, guidance, background?                  How much time (%) do students work individually, together in small groups, together as a class?                  How do you evaluate learning outcomes                  Are you experienced in student initiated education?                  What are your expectations of the intervention?                  Can you name a few benefits obtained from the intervention?                  Do you expect certain problems and what are they?</p>	<p>The school climate and teaching style is reflected in the place of teaching with what resources, the setting (social) and the teacher's expectations of curriculum negotiation and abilities of the students.</p>

#### 4.4 Class observation.

Class observations are used to verify and validate the findings obtained from the other instruments and place them within their context.

Wright (1960) distinguishes different types of observations and the role of the observer. We eventually settled on three approaches:

Outsider present: researcher sits in the class as an outsider observing, without intervention in the lesson, not addressing the students except for a brief introduction to mention that he was

there to look at the way the class uses the method for curriculum negotiation including the prompt sheet.

Outsider non present. researcher was not physically present but watched a film of the process in class. The teacher had placed a camera in one fixed place in the class. This allows for the researchers to see the process, hear the teacher's instructions and see the students' reactions and behaviour.

Participant. The researcher participates to (co-)teach a lesson where the intervention was used.