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Dimensions of student participation: participatory action research in a teacher education context
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Chapter 2

Young People as Co-researchers

Enabling Student Participation

in Educational Practice

"It is not that we have become more 'in charge,'

but that she [the teacher] has become less so"

Student (primary school, age 7 years)

Abstract

This article explores how student participation can be incorporated in educational practice, particularly in the form of the student participation process 'students as co-researchers'. It is argued that enabling student participation, in the sense that students are involved in decisions that affect them in their school lives, is valuable and should be pursued for various motives. One of these motives is a rights-based motive following from the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the declaration *Education for All*. Moreover, student and teacher learning are identified as other important motives for intensive student participation practices.

An action research project in the Netherlands conducted by teams of teachers, students, and museum educators, serves to illustrate the student participation process and the strategy for teacher learning.

First, the concept student participation will be explored and related to teacher's professional development. Second, the characteristics and the intensity of the student participation in this case are described along six dimensions of participation. Next, the implications for the learning and professional development of teachers who participated in the Dutch project are explored. The four domains of the Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth serve as the structuring framework.

Chapter 2 – Young People as Co-researchers: Enabling Student Participation in Educational Practice

Introduction

In line with changing views on childhood, citizenship, and educational goals, the last decades have shown a growing interest in student participation. More and more, it became felt desirable and necessary for student voices to be heard and really listened to and for students to be consulted on educational matters that affect them. It was observed that students often were not seriously involved in matters that concern them, and had little influence on decisions that affect them. In research, students typically were just seen as a data source and not as partners.[2] A range of motives underlies the advocacy for student participation, one of which is a legal motive. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989) explicitly states that children not only have a right to good education but also 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.' (Art. 12.1). In addition, it stipulates that 'the child shall have the right to freedom of expression ... to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds …' (Art, 13.1). Consequently, only listening to students is not sufficient. Taking their opinions and ideas seriously, letting these opinions be actually part of decision-making, and creating an environment in which pupils are able to make their voices heard and taken into account have all become an obligation. This applies equally to everyone working in the educational system of a country that ratified this Convention in 1995 and that is therefore bound by it. Such a legal-political obligation, however, does not prescribe how to make this manifest in actual practice, thus turning the issue into an issue of pedagogy and educational development (Ponte & Smit, 2013). Since then, thinking and understanding about children have seen major changes. Consulting young people regarding their experiences of education in the classroom and beyond has been advocated and acceptance of children's right to be involved in decision-making in matters that affect them has broadened. In addition to the rights-based approach to education, as stated in the UN-CRC, the Education for All movement positions individuals' talents and potential as of central importance in education and links this to influence on their lives. Differences between children are set as the norm, and education has to accommodate the capacities and needs of all children.

The attention to these issues led to an increasing number of participatory initiatives and also has evolved into a plea for developing and applying more intensive and higher-level forms of student participation, for instance, a form in which students act as co-researchers. By implication, a more equal position of teachers and students in educational decision-making is advocated. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that both students and teachers can benefit and learn from such an approach. However, as participatory practices imply new ways of working, relating, and learning, they require teachers and schools to change, and often established educational practices appear to have a

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[2] As aptly put by Susan Groundwater-Smith (2005, p. 2): "They are observed, surveyed, measured, interviewed and commented upon in order to inform a research agenda to which they have made little contribution. […] The students are rarely recognised as active agents, who can be not only reliable informants, but also interpreters of their own lives. They are at worst, silenced; at best patronised.".

stubborn character. The practices are embedded in domains of education that relatively slowly change, such as school organization and culture; teachers' and students' beliefs, attitudes, and collective practices; educational goals, curriculum, and examination requirements.

This article describes an action research project in the Netherlands that was set up as a strategy to enable participatory practices through the process of embracing the concept of 'students as co-researchers'. The article has several components. First, the concept of student participation is explored and related to teachers' professional development. Second, the characteristics and the intensity of the student participation in this case are described along six dimensions of participation as distinguished by Kirby et al. (2003). Next, the implications for the learning and professional development of teachers who participated in the project are explored. The four domains of the teacher professional growth model as distinguished by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) serve as the structuring framework. Finally, some issues for further research are listed.

Student participation[3]

The concept of 'participation' (of young people) has been used in various domains, such as politics and community development, welfare and social work, and education, and in relation to a wide range of activities in which children are involved. It encompasses terms like youth consultation, listening to children, pupil or student voice, and student participation. Even within the educational domain, very different situations and processes have been labeled with the term 'participation', as Thomas et al. (2012a) illustrate:

> For example, 'participation' refers to any number of education situations from enrollment …, to sleeping in class …, to parental involvement …, to a strategy for increasing student attendance or teacher performance …. (p. 2-3)

They continue stating that:

> […] educational scholars and practitioners alike have freely identified participation as a statistic to be monitored, a right, an involvement in decision making, a physical presence, and as an educational intervention, leaving its meaning within the context they are using it undefined and assumed. (p. 3)

Therefore, the much-used term 'student participation' can be considered as multi-layered, bearing various meanings in different contexts.[4] It can refer to quantitative aspects such as the enrollment and (countable) participation of students in a particular type of education, or to qualitative aspects such as the extent and intensity to which students are engaged in educational activities. In the action research project that will be discussed in this paper, student participation is seen as the active involvement of students in decision-making about matters that affect and concern the students themselves. This involvement in decision-making is legally based on children's civil, political and social rights (Quennerstedt, 2010), but is also grounded in a democratic view on child development and on

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[3] While some distinguish the terms 'pupils' and 'students' to identify children of different age ranges, in this paper the term 'students' is used for all children from 4 to 18 years of age who are enrolled in formal education. Furthermore, here it is meant to be a neutral term, not referring to a specific kind of teacher-child relationship, a specific role or responsibility of the child, or an educational and social-political perspective (see Bragg, 2007).

[4] See e.g. Thomas, Whybrow and Scharber (2012a; 2012b, 2012c) for an in-depth exploration of the concept 'participation'.

education and in a social-constructivist perspective on knowledge. In our view, student participation extends to a wide range of aspects of the design and implementation of their curriculum and educational context and implies having an active role in researching those aspects as well, in order to contribute to improvements in the educational practice on a personal, school and community level, in the best interest of all stakeholders.

An attempt to describe or define student participation reveals that it can have very different underlying goals and motives. The various motives can broadly be categorized into four groups (Smit et al., 2010):

- *Legal* motives, which emphasize children's right to participate. As described by Ponte and Smit in the introduction to this Special Issue, participation categorizes important underlying principles of the international *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (OHCHR, 1989), and has been laid down in several articles (see also Quennerstedt, 2010; Warnick, 2009);

- *Social* motives, which emphasize the community aspects of student participation, and position it as a first *real lifetime event* on the path toward citizenship and democracy (e.g. Cook-Sather, 2009; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007); we can see this reflected in a concern for democratic education and education for citizenship, as well as in the aim to establish an inclusive practice;

- *Innovative* motives, which emphasize that students have relevant insights that the school can make use of when reforming the curriculum in a broad sense. That also creates *commitment* and *ownership* (see Cook-Sather, 2009; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Thomson & Gunter, 2006); leading to a more informed basis for educational development and for changes and innovations in education and to a stronger connection with the needs, capacities, and perspectives of students;

- *Pedagogische*[5] motives, which emphasize that teachers – out of a genuine belief in their potential – should invite students to contribute their own opinions and ideas (see De Winter, 2009; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007); this position can be found in the desire for more open and positive teacher-student relationships and in student's personal growth, empowerment and increased motivation and self-confidence as intended outcomes.

Besides the legal obligation and mission, which follow from the human rights and children's rights as stated by the UN, there are several other reasons for involving students in education and for setting up education in a different, perhaps even a radically different, way (cf. De Winter, 2009; Fielding & Moss, 2011; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). On the one hand, student participation can be regarded as a goal in itself, in the sense that it creates an environment for experiencing democracy in practice and thus turns an educational practice of 'teaching citizenship' into one of 'learning democracy' (Biesta & Lawy, 2006). On the other hand, it is thought to contribute to student learning and learning processes in general. In a review study on student participation projects, Sol and Stokking (2008) pointed to the chain of mediating processes between forms of student participation and the actual learning of students, while further distinguishing effects on actually participating students and effects on all students. Nonetheless, Mager and Nowak's (2012) review of effects of student participation in school decision-making processes reports a range of effects, although empirical evidence is still moderate:

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[5] *Pedagogisch* is an adjective (in Dutch) that reflects the European tradition of child upbringing, education, and pedagogy. Here, it stands for an amalgam of didactic, pedagogical, teleological, and moral aspects of pupil-teacher interactions. The Dutch terms *pedagogiek* or *pedagogisch* and *didactiek* or *didactisch* cannot be literally translated as 'pedagogy' or 'pedagogic' and 'didactics' or 'didactic'. *Pedagogiek* or *pedagogisch* refers to the science of the child's upbringing in general (cognitive, social, emotional etcetera) and refers not only to education, but also to rearing processes in the family, social care, and many other institutions. (see Ax & Ponte, 2010).

personal effects for students such as developing democratic skills and citizenship and improvements in learning and academic achievement; effects on interactions as shown in improvements of peer and student-teacher relationships; effects on the school as an organization, such as influence on class content and teaching strategies, and on policies, rules, and procedures; and, as the strongest finding, an improved school ethos. The sense of belonging and agency as a result of being involved in genuine decision-making on issues that are worthwhile for students enhances motivation for school and learning in the school. For the students, not so much the curriculum itself might be the most interesting subject here, but "the *conditions of learning* in school; how regimes and relationships shape their sense of status as individual learners and as members of the community and, consequently, affect their sense of commitment to learning in school" (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p. 76). "The more that the regimes are changed to reflect the values that pupils call for (intellectual challenge, fairness, etc.), the stronger pupils' commitment to learning in school is likely to be" (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p. 85). In an interactionist or social-constructivist view of education, learning is dependent on interaction processes and learners' active construction of knowledge within social environments, constituted by "other students, teachers, parents, siblings and others who may make an impact on his or her learning" (Quicke, 2003, p. 52). As a further principle, stated by Quicke, individuals are seen as reflective agents who are capable of thinking about themselves as learners. While this process of reflection ('metacognition') is an aspect of the 'thinking skills' agenda (Quicke, 2003) – not only suitable for high-ability students though –, it also demonstrates what is potentially new about such a practice of student participation:

- students are more explicitly invited to comment not just on their own learning but on frameworks for learning, including teaching strategies and other conditions of learning;
- students have a more consciously analytic and responsible stance, knowing that they are contributing to school improvement and that their voices can make a difference;
- students' expertise as insightful commentators on teaching and learning is recognized;
- the status of students is enhanced through this recognition of their capacity to contribute to school improvement through informed commentary (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007).

In actual educational practice, the various reasons and motives for pursuing student participation are interrelated and appear jointly. They may vary, however, in their relative weights, and thus lead to different manifestations of student participation and to different perspectives on its value and outcomes and on the roles and responsibilities of the children and adults involved. We will elaborate on the variety in student participation below, but before that, two issues of specific importance in education have to be mentioned.

The first issue pertains to the compulsory character of education for children of a certain age range, the adult-child relationship that comes with it, and the morally informed, value- and goal-based implementation of the educational context and content.

In most educational systems, children are legally required to attend school and to follow lessons and activities according to a global program and a schedule that is regulated and monitored by the government. Adults – the teachers and other school staff – are appointed to design and implement the curriculum in order to organize and manage students' learning. For this purpose, teachers have

been given the authority to intervene in students' lives. The teacher's authority to do so finds its legitimacy in societal and political demands for a well-educated population, as well as in the – assumed or demonstrated – professional knowledge of the teacher. Authority and power are, then, not divided equally between teachers and students (cf. Arnot & Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007; Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001; Smith & Donnelly, 2004; Taylor & Robinson, 2009), which might be perceived as being at odds with a strive for self-determination and active participation of young people.

Obviously, compulsory education has characteristics that are positive to the extent that it guarantees children formal access to resources that help them in their development and in their chances to live an independent, valuable, and useful life as an adult. However, the unbalanced power differential frequently leads to one-sided and authoritarian relationships of teachers with their students. In reaction to this, a strictly anti-authoritarian approach has been advocated (e.g. Illich, 1971). In between the two positions a perspective on power is located that views power as an inherent characteristic of a teacher-student situation (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001; Gore, 1994, 1996). This view implies moral and practical issues that cannot be avoided, but also that power should not necessarily be looked at as negative. The involvement of the teacher is a prerequisite for most students' activities. Furthermore, because the teacher's actions are necessarily intentional, full reciprocity in the teacher-student relationship is not possible. Gore (1994), in her critique of the authoritarian model, argues that power should better be understood as a continuous process of participation and negotiation of all stakeholders. The critical analysis of Cook-Sather (2009) shows that such a view of power has not yet invaded education since then. She argues that children and young people might be perceived as a significant social group in education, but that they are seldom consulted when it comes to decisions about their education. This finding leads her (and us) to the desire not only to listen more carefully to what students have to say about their living and learning environments but also to allow them to actively participate in shaping them.

The second issue pertains to the way policy measures are reflected in educational practice. Declaring children's rights to participation establishes a strong basis under political decisions and legal measures aimed at enabling children's involvement, and not exclusively in the domain of education. However, in education, governments can set the necessary preconditions for teachers and students to work in, but it remains an educational problem how to make student participation manifest in educational practice. This practice is situation-specific and requires constant normative and moral choices geared to individual students. In other words, legal and political guidelines can provide the 'havings', but they cannot guarantee the 'doings' (terms by Young, 1990). Student participation, then, is not only a manifestation of legal rights that can be distributed (Young, 1990), but it is also an educational challenge that teachers and students have to give expression to in their daily interactions. Teachers have to get to know their students and their views, they have to create space for them to use, show, and develop their capacities. In short, they are challenged to create a context in which student participation is enabled and can flourish. However, this is a challenge that turns out to be difficult to take up, because traditional views, expectations, roles, and patterns of interaction need to change, within an organizational context defined by traditional codes (Cook-Sather, 2002). This is certainly true of the most intensive forms of participation such as 'student as researcher' initiatives.

Dimensions and levels of student participation

Despite constraining factors, many participation activities and projects have been identified (see e.g. the overview of Fielding & McGregor, 2005), although most of them are of low intensive levels of participation (see below) or confined to involvement in formal procedures (Quicke, 2003). We draw on a study by Kirby et al. (2003) on participation activities in the UK for a descriptive framework for various forms of participation. Kirby et al. distinguished six dimensions for children's participation in decision-making (p. 21): (1) level of participation; (2) focus of decision-making; (3) content of decision-making; (4) nature of participation activity; (5) frequency and duration of participation; (6) the children and young people involved.

These dimensions will be briefly elaborated on below, based on the report by Kirby et al. (2003, pp. 21-28), and they will be used for the case description thereafter. The first dimension (level of participation), however, will be dealt with more extensively, because it is the most commonly used way to characterize youth participation, and because it informed the design of our project to a large extent.

(1) level of participation

The level of participation pertains to the degree of active engagement of young people, often in terms of the relative amount of power shared between adults and children. Hart (1992) made a clear distinction between non-participation (in three levels) and genuine participation (in five levels) that he depicted in his well-known 'ladder of participation'. In his model, participation starts at level 4 'assigned, but informed' and goes up to level 8 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults'. While Hart's model justly pointed out that not all forms of child involvement are participatory (but some can be labeled as manipulation, decoration, or tokenism), the ladder metaphor was criticized as well because it could suggest that higher steps are always preferable. Shier (2001) reworked the five participation levels of Hart's ladder to a model - 'Pathways to Participation' - that indicates which level of participation is appropriate for a specific task and to a series of questions and steps for developing and implementing participation in practice. Furthermore, he defined at what point in the 'pathway' the minimum obligations of the UN-CRC are met. Egg (2009) developed Hart's participation ladder into a double-legged ladder model, one for teacher initiatives and another for student initiatives.

A different approach was taken by Fielding (2001), who focused on the variation in roles and responsibilities that students have in the activities. His model is made up of four types of student participation: students as sources of data, students as active respondents, students as co-researchers, and students as researchers. More recently, Fielding (2011) has elaborated his model into 'patterns of partnership', six patterns that reflect different kinds of relations (listening to and learning with) between adults and children in educational practices. Fielding speaks of patterns in order to stress that participation cannot be understood as a once-only activity or project, but that it is - or should be - a coordinating principle of working and relating to each other. The term pattern emphasizes the continuing and recurring character of the activities over longer periods of time. Furthermore, the patterns are discernible in the behaviors and interactions of students, teachers, and school managers. This explains them as a way of working and relating and connects the patterns to school culture.

In all of these classifications, the 'student as (co-)researcher' approach is conceived as the most intensive form of participation. In addition, it is acknowledged that on all levels of involvement and decision-making "implementation of these decisions will require input from adults and is ultimately dependent on adult structures, responsibility and power" (Kirby et al., 2003, p. 23).

(2) focus of decision-making
The focus of decision-making distinguishes between "personal or individual decisions, and public decisions relating to matters which affect children as a group" (Kirby et al., 2003, p. 23). Kirby et al. mention that decision-making in private contexts has gained less attention than in the public domain: "The literature covers decision-making that relates to service delivery and development, those that are about public policy making, those that are about influencing policy (centrally or locally) and those that involve research or service evaluation where children may be involved either as users, as subjects or as co- or peer- researchers" (p. 25).

(3) content of decision-making
Participation can appear in different sectors (community development, urban renewal, juvenile justice system, school/curriculum development, etcetera), that have different cultures and styles of professional practice. Furthermore, the actual subjects of the decision-making can vary, including along the dimension of everyday decisions (e.g. – in education – what peers to collaborate with; what satchel to use) to more serious decisions (e.g. what school to attend; what school regulations to be applied; whom to appoint as a teacher).

(4) nature of participation activity
The way participation is translated into practice defines the nature of the participation activity. A distinction is made between formal and informal approaches and mechanisms. Formal mechanisms are set up to provide designated opportunities for children and young people to influence decisions (e.g. one-off consultations; regular group meetings; suggestion boxes). Informal approaches enable children and young people to voice their views, and be listened to, as and when they feel it is appropriate (on-going dialogue; observation; listening to spontaneous communication; engaging in joint activities).

(5) frequency and duration of participation
The variation in frequency and duration of different activities runs from regular to irregular events, time-limited to indefinitely continuing activities, and seldom to frequently occurring events. It is about the level of opportunity that young people are provided with to influence decisions about their own lives.

(6) the children and young people involved
The sixth dimension pertains to the characteristics and the number of young people involved, such as children of particular groups (e.g. gender, home, or social situation) or age ranges or within a certain area. The number may vary from small numbers (e.g. councils, social action groups), to higher numbers (e.g. larger consultations), to everyone (e.g. informal ongoing dialogue).

Student participation and the teacher
As applies to all reforms in educational processes and practices, enabling student participation requires the effort and commitment of all stakeholders and may take a long time before it consolidates into a

standing practice. New practices and ways of working have to be introduced and accepted, adults and young people have to be encouraged to support these participation activities and ensure they have influence, and new roles and responsibilities have to be negotiated and adopted. As explained before, student participation, especially in the more intensive forms, is not simply an extension of a good teacher's practice, and it is not an extra-curricular project. Adapting to students' needs and capacities and consulting them about various classroom issues characterizes a good teacher, but involving students in decision-making and reflecting on learning and teaching processes goes much further and is not commonplace. While several forms of participation can be found nowadays, examples of teachers and students co-researching their school and their teaching and learning processes are rare (Sol & Stokking, 2008). Student participation is not a product of a one-shot event; it can be seen as a process that mirrors itself in school culture and organization, and in teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and actions. This ongoing, developmental aspect is what Fielding and Moss (2011) capture in the use of the term 'pattern'. However, teachers operate within 'pre-figured' environments of circumstances, expectations, and standing practices that structure and largely determine and shape an individual's thinking and acting; and that to a certain extent 'resist' change. Numerous examples of unsuccessful educational reform projects have shown this over and over again. Often, among other factors, resistance to change as a characteristic of teachers and school organizations was identified as an important explanation for the lack of success, thus labeling this as a negative component in the process of change. However, Luttenberg et al. (2011) take a different position by arguing that the term *resistance* does not capture the reason for unsuccessful reforms in education. They plead for adopting "teacher's search for meaning and cohesion" (p. 2) within their own frames of reference as a better concept for understanding the complexity of reforms. They draw attention to the interaction of external situational demands and teachers' personal frames of reference in adapting and redefining their work and workplace. With this concept, teachers are positioned not as resisting professionals or reluctant participants, but as positive and active agents in educational change, who are only cautious of giving up their professional autonomy. This resonates well with the shift in focus on professional development programs, described by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002, p. 948): "The key shift is one of agency: from programs that change teachers to teachers as active learners shaping their professional growth through reflective participation in professional development programs and in practice." In terms of the framework for understanding praxis (Ax & Ponte, 2008), presented in the introduction to this Special Issue (Ponte & Smit, 2013), the teacher's scope for autonomous action shifts from 'system' to 'lifeworld', meaning that they are less driven by anonymous mechanisms, but can organize their own reality, set their own aims and follow their own preferences, and can enter into dialogue with others about their practice.

The terms 'search for meaning and cohesion', 'teacher autonomy', and 'agency' might suggest that mainly the teachers are responsible for educational change or the lack of it. Such a view, however, would wrongly focus only on the teachers' side and the personal and psychological aspects, while ignoring that they are framed by national and political measures and situational demands. In consonance with this personalized view of the teaching profession, Luttenberg et al. (2011) point to the contextualized nature of educational change and the essential importance of adjusting and adapting new practices to personal needs and perspectives.

Literature on the effectiveness of teacher learning and professional development programs clearly has shown that most top-down, planned, isolated, training-based approaches to teacher development are not successful (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006). And even irrespective of the planned or unplanned (formal or informal) nature of teacher development, has it been found important not to limit teacher development to knowledge transfer, reflecting on experiences, and discussing problems and approaches. In action research, precisely the cycles of defining the problem, planning, implementing, and monitoring actions for improvement, are meant to overcome this issue and to establish mechanisms for change in which acting in practice is paramount. We find this line of thinking also in the 'interconnected model of professional growth' (see Figure 3Figure 3. The Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002).) for analyzing teacher change, a model proposed by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) that distinguishes four domains that encompass the teacher's world and that identifies two crucial processes:

> the personal domain (teacher knowledge, beliefs and attitudes), the domain of practice (professional experimentation), the domain of consequence (salient outcomes), and the external domain (sources of information, stimulus or support).

> [....] This model also identifies the mediating processes of reflection and enactment as the mechanisms by which change in one domain leads to change in another. (p. 950)

The three first-mentioned domains together constitute the individual teacher's professional world of practice. The model locates 'change' in any of the four domains.
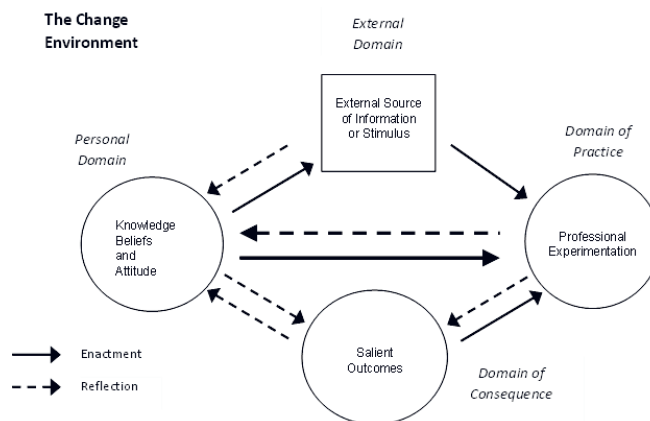

Figure 3. The Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002)

This model has particular characteristics that renders it attractive for describing our action research project as a teacher development strategy, as well as for thinking about how to design and research teacher development in follow-up projects. First, the model has a non-linear structure that, as Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002, p. 965) state, "provides recognition of the situated and personal nature, not just of teacher practice, but of teacher growth: an individual amalgam of practice, meanings, and context". Next, in the model, the domain of practice is not restricted to classroom experimentation but encompasses all forms of professional experimentation. Furthermore, besides reflection,

enactment is incorporated as an essential mechanism in the process of teacher change professional growth, which aligns with the crucial action component in the action research approach. Moreover, the consequences of changes (perceived as salient outcomes) are positioned as equally important as, and connected to, changes in the personal domain and the domain of practice. Through this, not only changes in teachers come to the front, but changes in students as well, who are the stakeholders *par excellence* in a student participation project. And finally, the model fits well into a perspective of teachers' professional development in realistic contexts and of teachers as learners.

In the next paragraph, we will turn to the description of a specific student participation project in the Netherlands as an example of an advanced level of student participation, that is 'students as co-researchers', and of the combination of teacher development, student participation, and action research. A participatory action research approach that actively involved the students and teachers in collaboratively investigating their own practice and in learning within that practice was considered pre-eminently appropriate and powerful for our project, this being a search for intertwining student participation and teacher development. Such an approach would allow for a combination of systematically investigating an issue in the actual practice from a 'first-person' or 'insiders' perspective, with the participation of all stakeholders, deliberate designing and implementing changes through experimenting with new practices and roles (enactment), and careful reflection on and evaluation of the outcomes (not only in terms of achievements of students but also in terms of improvements on a personal, relational, and social level within classrooms, schools, communities). Furthermore, it would offer opportunities to enlarge participants' autonomy by enabling them to decide on the research questions, methods, and conclusions and, as a result, by incorporating new practices geared to local circumstances and fitting in their personal 'frames of reference'.

The case shows how the views of students can be honored, from a first-person perspective, and how students of different capacities are included in researching educational issues. Moreover, it demonstrates changes in educational practice on a personal (student and teacher) and organizational level as a consequence of involving students in authentic issues concerning their school lives. For characterizing and evaluating the case, we will make use of the above-mentioned six dimensions of student participation (Kirby et al., 2003). The model by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) will serve as a structuring framework for interpreting several aspects of teacher professional development in this specific case.

A student participation project in the Netherlands
Context
From the nineties onwards, participation of young people in designing their life-world got much more attention, but in the Netherlands not so much in educational policy; not nationally, besides the formal obligation for secondary schools to involve students as school council representatives, and not on school level, as Sol and Stokking (2008) report. They argue that student participation is potentially influential but insufficiently used. Realization is, due to the lack of school policy on this issue, largely dependent on the views and attitudes of individual teachers. Moreover, in general, much participation did not go further than the first level: 'being listened to' (Bragg, 2010; Fielding, 2011), and did not extend to taking part in actual decision-making. The Netherlands ratified the resolution of the

Convention for the Rights of the Child in 1995 and are therefore bound by it since then. Many of the basic human rights stated in the resolution and the obligations that follow from it were already met in the Netherlands, like in other Western-European countries. Access to education for all children, for instance, is legally founded and has become common practice long before 1995. However, in the field of education and teacher professional development, Dutch policy on children's civil, social and political rights has been poor with regard to children's participation and measures to implement student participation in educational practice have been lacking.

Based on these findings and in order to contribute to a higher level of ambition towards student participation, the research project 'Students and teachers as co-researchers' (2009-2011) was started. The project was aimed at an intensive form of student participation, namely research with and by students themselves.[6] Thomson and Gunter (2006) describe this form of student participation as an initiative in which "children and young people conduct a specifically designed inquiry to provide data to inform recommendations for change" (p. 413). The question was how such a participation strategy could be designed. In addition, the project was meant to be inclusive for all students, including very young students and 'vulnerable' students, such as children with special educational needs and not so verbally gifted children.

General description

Within the framework of the project 'Students and teachers as co-researchers', action research[7] was conducted on two levels. On the first level, research teams of primary or secondary school students aged 6 to 16 years, their teacher at school and an external educator conducted action research on student learning in an external educational setting, such as a museum or a library. The teams worked collaboratively at designing and conducting the investigation, and at formulating proposals for improvements to the learning in that setting. The proposals could refer to the design and organization of the setting, but also to the teaching methods, the educational goals and subjects, and the educational relationship between pupils, teachers, and educators. Consequently, they concerned the role of the educator, the role of the teacher, as well as the role of the pupil.

On the second level, facilitators and researchers of the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (UUAS), and the participating teachers explored the question of how to design the participation strategy and how best to facilitate this. This was done in collaborative working meetings at the university. In addition, every step in the research project with the students was carefully prepared, recorded, and evaluated. Special attention was paid to the way the students were enabled to work on equal standing with their adult research fellows, for instance by educating and supporting them – and at the same time their teachers as well - in conducting research through a series of workshops adjusted to their age and level.

In periodical working meetings of teachers, facilitators, and project leaders, which were held in between each phase of the research project, and were led by an academic researcher and an external

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[6] A documentary of the project is available online (El Ayachi & Willems, 2012).

[7] *Action research* in education can be conceived as a form of research into educational practice, conducted by teachers and other stakeholders themselves, aimed at bringing about improvements in the practice that are based on informed action (cf. Carr, 2007; Kemmis, 2009; Noffke, 1994; Somekh & Zeichner, 2009; Zeichner, 2003).

advisor, the teachers and facilitators were educated in designing and conducting action research. In addition, by discussing participants' perspectives on teaching and learning and by reflecting on their own and their students' roles, they were made sensitive to ways of actively involving students in matters that concern their own education. In each meeting, experiences, solutions, and suggestions of the earlier phase were evaluated, and questions, plans, and activities for the next phase were listed and discussed. In this way, the intended strategy could be designed in close collaboration with all stakeholders. Subsequently, at their respective schools, and with the guidance and advice of the facilitator, the students and the teacher adapted the overall steps to the local context. At the same time, the periodical working meetings served as a specific form for creating a supporting group, as a collaborative context that is found to be conducive to teacher's learning (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006).

Additional support came from a parallel PhD research project,[8] in which data were collected through group and individual interviews, logs of participants, audio recordings of meetings, and written and oral evaluations of the working meetings.

To sum up, the aim of each research team was: (1) to improve learning in the external educational setting; (2) to actively engage students in developing the education they receive; and (3) to enhance positive student-teacher behavior. The principal goal of the project was the development of a strategy for realizing a form of student participation in which the various stakeholders would be involved as researchers and co-researchers. Since this implies changes in the teacher's professional practice, it was also designed as a strategy for teacher professional development and school development towards genuine student participation.

Participants and roles

In total, ten research teams participated in the project, coming from five primary schools (one school for children with special educational needs) and one secondary school. Each team consisted of four to six students – as representatives of their class –, one teacher, and one educator of the institution that formed the research site (four museums and one library). All student members of the research teams voluntarily participated (and most of the students of the classes involved wanted to become a member) and they could opt out at any time (but none did). In the selection process, however, it was secured that not only the most extravert and verbally competent children were chosen and that perspectives of a diversity of students in terms of, for instance, learning motivation or style, cultural and social-economic background, and quality of the student-teacher relationship were represented. The other students of the respective classes took part in the preparatory workshops and were actively involved in the process of defining the research questions, interpreting the results, and providing ideas and input for the presentation at the end of the project. Peers of the teachers acted as critical friends. This way the action research project was positioned as an activity that was not 'owned' by the research teams but as a collaborative enterprise that served every stakeholder's interest.

Six of the ten teachers had five to twenty years of teaching experience; two of them were enrolled in a postgraduate Master's course SEN at UUAS. Two other teachers had just started their careers in

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[8] The project of Leon Plomp, PhD candidate at the University of Gothenburg.

primary education. The last two teachers were regular student-teachers at UUAS, doing their practicum at a school for secondary education, with full responsibility for their respective classes.

Teacher educators at UUAS guided and facilitated the research process. Facilitators play a crucial role in the professional learning process (Krell & Dana, 2012; Ponte et al., 2004; Van Swet et al., 2009), for instance in structuring and managing the research process, providing resources, mediating conflicts, motivating the teachers, and acting as 'critical friends'. In addition, in this project, their role was to create and sustain a context in which teachers would not automatically take the lead, but would be enabled to work as co-researchers, side-by-side with their students.

An external advisor and an academic researcher were involved as project managers, facilitators of the working meetings, and informants on action research.

Set-up

The activities with and by the students started with a preparation phase of three to four months, a phase that included all students of a class, not only the members of the research team. In this period the general research question 'How can I learn and how do I want to learn in this extracurricular environment' was discussed and refined to researchable questions geared to the actual external setting that was chosen as the educational site under investigation.

At school, in five consecutive workshops, the students were prepared for their researcher's role. In these workshops, jointly given by the facilitators and teachers, the student-researchers and their peers explored concepts such as 'research', 'research questions', and 'collaborative learning'. In addition, they were instructed in 'researching with photographs and drawings' and they conducted a small-scale trial study within the school. Finally, the whole class visited the external institution that was going to be researched, in order to get acquainted with the site and to get input for discussing and finalizing the research questions and data collection methods. For instance, in the library setting, four specific questions were formulated by the students: "Whether we feel comfortable, and if so, where and why. Questions about the interior and the computers. And whether we can find everything properly."

After this preparation phase, the research teams collected data in the museum or library by means of photographs, video clips, drawings, notes, observations, and interviews with staff. At the end of this half-day site visit, the facilitator led a short discussion on the data and preliminary findings. In this discussion, particular effort was put into giving both students and teachers ample space for expressing their views. As an icebreaker and a starting point, each team member commented on one of his or her photographs taken at the site. Subsequently, back at school or in the office, they consulted their respective peers: students reported to and discussed with other students from their class; teachers with their colleagues at school; educators with their colleagues at the museum or library. Results of the site visit and of the peer consultation round were then taken together and jointly analyzed, which led to formulating of final results and recommendations. For example, some students reported that they learned most by doing and manipulating, and suggested therefore to reduce the number and length of textual explications in favor of computer animations and objects that they were allowed to touch. The team that researched the library concluded, among other things, that the library should be more recognizable as a library, but also praised the physical environment, in particular, the cosy

corners and comfortable seats and other places for children to seat or read, thus making it attractive as a learning place.

In festive meetings at the UUAS or at school, first in a plenary session and later on, in subgroups at a 'research fair', each research team of students and teachers presented the specific research questions, the data collection methods, the results, and the recommendations for improvement of student learning at the external site. The students were the leading presenters at these events, with side roles for the teachers and educators only to illuminate specific adult perspectives or to report on measures that were under consideration or that were already implemented on the basis of the recommendations. Several educators, for instance, explained that due to the requirements of different visitor groups (children of various ages, and adults with various interests) not always the best solution for supporting student learning could be implemented. However, several concrete recommendations had been realized promptly, such as lowering explanation signs and enlarging their font sizes in order to make them more easily readable for small persons. Furthermore, one museum educator had experienced great worth in co-researching with the children and had decided to involve children in the upcoming development of a new exhibition. She explained: "As an educator and exhibition developer you are mainly led by your own experience, literature, and educational goals. Sometimes, you lose sight of what it is really all about: the children." Besides the research teams themselves, the meetings were attended by museum and library educators, facilitators of UUAS, peer students of the student-researchers, parents, school managers, and teachers, and other interested persons.

Characteristics and outcomes

In this section, we return to the six dimensions of participation (Kirby et al., 2003) for characterizing the project mainly from the student's side, and to the four domains of teacher change (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002) for identifying relevant aspects of change in relation to the student participation in this project on the teachers' side.

Dimensions of participation

In this project, students actively participated in researching their own educational practice. In close collaboration with adults – their teacher and an educator –, they were involved from the start in deciding on the research questions, designing the research activities, and drawing up and presenting the conclusions. In an interview, one of the teachers reported

> Yes, they [the students] feel responsible for the research. They want to do it all well, preparing the whole study, discussing the data afterward, and attending to informing their fellow students about their research activities. Answers [to their questions] have to be found. They don't do it because the teacher tells them to. Now they are much more self-motivated. (teacher, female, primary school, Year 4/5)

Therefore, the *level of participation* can be categorized as Fielding's participation level 'students as co-researchers' (2001): "students co-research aspects of pedagogy/learning with teacher"; or as the participation pattern 'students as joint authors" (2011): "a genuinely shared, fully collaborative partnership between students and staff". Students were involved in the research process as equals to the adults and shared responsibility for decision-making and implementation with them (Shier, 2001; level 5). While, in Shier's terms, the project did offer an 'opportunity' for the students and teachers to

operate at this level, it did not yet become an 'obligation' for the school, that is, it was not yet built-in into the system as an agreed policy for all staff. The project was intended as the start of a continuous process of teacher and school development, by bringing the experiences of student participation in an external setting into the classroom and school practice and – in the long run – by developing a participatory school culture. In the project, the impetus for this process would come from the 'external domain', that is, from the arrangement of students, teachers, and educators as co-researchers as set up by the project management and from the support in developing student participation as an educational strategy. Most deplorable, however, due to an untimely termination of the project funding, further development of the participation strategy could not be realized. Nevertheless, a number of teachers informed us that they continued implementing and expanding student participation practices in their classrooms and kept on promoting them among their peers.

Secondly, the *focus of the decision-making* in the project was mainly 'public', since the decisions were about the learning of students as a group. The teams researched an authentic issue that was relevant to all participants, and the outcomes of the research were planned to be granted and implemented. In fact, even while the project still proceeded, the findings and recommendations actually led to improvements in the museums and the library, in exhibitions as well as in the interior design and the arrangements for educational guidance of students. For instance, many children mentioned the abundance of – bright – colors in the exhibition rooms as distracting for their learning, which was quite unexpected by the museum educators, as it was meant to appeal to young people. They followed up on this finding in the preparations for the next exhibition that were ongoing at the time of the research teams' work. Furthermore, while observing the students during the site visit, the educators noticed that the students were very able to recognize the learning goals in several sections of the exhibition, possibly even better than the adults. Therefore an educator commented: "Here at the museum, the idea goes round to develop a booklet for adults that explains what and how children learn in 'Het Rijk van Heen en Weer' [Dutch title of the exhibition about communication processes]."

In principle, student participation activities can pertain to topics, domains, and sectors outside education. In this case, the *content of the decision-making* was educational, although not restricted to school, focused on the what and how of student learning in an external educational context. The actual theme covered by the setting – the specific museum or exhibition and the library – was not particularly relevant from the perspective of student participation. It was, however, a motivating aspect for the students and – as an additional asset – it led to concurrent learning on the actual subject. . Thus, in this project, students learned about communication processes (significance of various non-verbal signs; communication over distances); manifestations of festivities in different cultures and times, their meaning in the context, and correspondences with other cultures; value and function of a library, and ways to find sources of information.

The project was initiated and set up as a framework for working in research teams. As such, it provided designated opportunities for the students to influence decisions, which categorizes the *nature of the participation activity* as a formal approach. On the other hand, due to the equal status of students and teachers in the teams and the collaborative character of the work over a longer period of time, much and intense student-teacher interaction took place, in which they were engaged in joint

activities and ongoing dialogue. Already in the first phase, the teacher and students talked about what role each student – and the teacher - would take up, and who would represent the class in the research team, which also led to class discussions of individual capacities and inclusive practice. Later on, in the workshops about learning and researching, teachers and students exchanged their own learning experiences and preferences. In the words of a teacher: "I notice that in this way teaching becomes more and more two-way traffic." In this respect, the project can be labeled as an informal approach.

The fifth dimension covers the *frequency and duration of participation*. The activities of the students in this project took place within a well-defined time frame. The research teams went through a series of phases that stretched over half a school year, including the final presentation. Still, the workshops were scheduled in a relatively short period of time – in most cases within a month – and also the site visits, the peer consultation, and the interpretation of the findings were held together. Within these periods the activities were frequent, but in between, they were irregularly scheduled.

To conclude this subsection, the *children and young people involved* were students of various age groups, capacities and backgrounds and from various school types. Furthermore, participation of all students was sought, not only of those students that became the class representatives in the research teams. Moreover, the differentiation in roles contributed to adjusting the activities to the needs, preferences and capacities of individual students. This way, the project formed an inclusive practice, in which "… differences between children are the norm and not the exception. It is 'Education-for-All-by-All' …" (Ponte & Smit, 2013, p. 456).

Domains of teacher change
Overlooking the project as a whole, and the activities of students and teachers in particular, we will now illuminate a number of specific aspects of the teacher's change environment (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002) and identify change sequences between domains and processes of enactment and reflection that mediate them.

In this project, the changes clearly started in the *external domain*. Teachers were invited to enter into an already set-up context of an action research project with their students, a practice that was new for them, they were informed about student participation and about the aims and global steps and activities in the project, and were stimulated to experiment with a new teacher-student interaction pattern. Changes in the external domain continued during the project, by means of the working meetings and the support of the facilitators and peers. The extent to which the school management approved the intended level of student participation and enabled the teachers to take part in the project was another element in the external domain.

Right from the start, through *reflection* on prior knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of the teachers, changes in the personal domain came about, which were *enacted* again in (changes in) the specific planning of the project (the external domain). Explication and discussion of perspectives on education, learning, and classroom practices, and on children filled the first working meetings and subsequently shaped them.

The core changes, which were intended to influence all other domains, arose in the *domain of practice*, where planned action research activities were actually conducted. The teachers took on a

new role and experienced working with their students on a collaborative task in their own professional practice (enactment). An essential outcome of this was, of course, the mere fact that a specific level of student participation was realized: a salient outcome in the *domain of consequence*. Through the experimental way of working together, changes in the teacher-student relationship developed, which became apparent in, for instance, the enthusiasm and respect the teachers showed for the unexpectedly high levels of skill and motivation of their students, the increased trust they developed in involving them in the design of their lessons plans, and in the more friend-like way of working with and for their students. Students also changed with regard to attitudes (gained self-confidence and motivation) and knowledge and skills (research, writing, and presentation). Reflection on these outcomes informed the domain of practice again, visible for instance in more frequently and naturally involving students in lesson design, ways of conduct, and other classroom issues, and influenced teacher's beliefs and attitudes towards their students and the value of student participation (the personal domain).

The teachers participated on both levels of the action research process: as members of the research team and as developers of the participation strategy. They learned (change) about the value and methodology of action research (personal domain) and developed (enactment) ideas, activities, and arrangements to make students' voices heard and responded to in their daily practices and to involve students in decision-making processes (domain of practice). For instance, the teachers developed and exchanged educational materials for discussing aspects of learning with their students, adapted to their age and capacities; or, they introduced regular plenary class meetings about issues of learning and working in class and school The domain of consequence, in this project, is defined broadly, encompassing changes in teachers, in students, as well as in educational practices.

The analysis so far represents the picture that applies to the teachers in general. Most of them voluntarily participated in the project out of a strong belief in student participation on the basis of a positive attitude to changing their practice accordingly. However, some teachers felt 'sent' by their manager and were, therefore, more skeptical and reluctant at the start, or better formulated: they 'searched for meaning and cohesion within their frames of reference' (Luttenberg et al., 2011). The model can make clear what different paths they took. For them, the initial exchange of ideas in the working meetings did not change much in the personal domain. All the same, a stimulus (manager's pressure) in the external domain led them to take part in the workshops and to plan and conduct the research with their students (professional experimentation via enactment of the project set-up). At first, they held on to the established hierarchical positions and did not give their students enough space to act as co-researchers., which can be seen as an enactment mechanism between the personal domain and the domain of practice. For instance, at first, some teachers viewed it necessary for them to *lead* and *structure* their students learning and doubted if the (young) students would be capable of the research activities. It made them feel unsure about their own role as *co*-researcher. In their practice, they were reluctant to involve the students in deciding upon the research questions, and the activities needed to answer them. However, with further stimuli, information, and support (the external domain), for instance by the facilitator, the domain of practice did change as was intended, and students and teachers actually started working together in teams. Reflection on this adapted practice changed the attitudes of the teachers (personal domain). Now the outcomes (domain of

consequence) had changed as well because the effects of the changed practice became visible in the positive behavior and the skills of the students. Reflection on this again triggered the teachers to change their beliefs and attitudes towards student participation (personal domain).

Discussion and implications

The 'Students and teacher as co-researchers' project started from the conviction that children are not different from adults in the sense that they are all independent individuals, with individual personalities, capacities, and potential, who are in a life-long process of development. Seen from a rights-based approach to education, this means that all people – children, young people, and adults alike – share the right to an education "geared to tapping each individual's talents and potential, and developing learner's personalities...", as stated in the Education for All declaration in 2000. Combined with the UN-CRC principle that children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and for their views to be given due weight, enabling all students to be involved in decision-making in educational matters has become an imperative task and responsibility for all professionals in the domain of education. It also leads to the conclusion that student participation on an intensive level – such as students as co-researchers - should be common practice in all educational contexts.

A second argument that stood at the basis for advocating for students to co-researching with their teachers in this project, lies in an educational research issue, which can be summarized as follows. Educational research – and other social research - can be categorized into various strands, founded on diverging views on what counts as valid knowledge and what designs and methods are considered appropriate and trustworthy. On one end of the spectrum, the empirical-rationalistic type of research became criticized for its inability to capture meaningful social processes and phenomena, because of the disconnection with actual practice and the ignoring of the normative character of education, the stakeholders' perspectives and interpretations, and specific local context characteristics. Forms of teacher research and participatory action research are meant to overcome this kind of problems. However, involving the teachers themselves in the research process as the active agents, but not students, leads – in our opinion – to a similar problem again, and would not bring about changes that are worthwhile and relevant for *all* stakeholders. Teacher research in which students are treated as objects still uses a third-person perspective and fails to capture the meaning of education for them. Therefore, in the students as co-researchers project, action research by students and teachers together has been adopted as the inevitable approach to student participation. At the same time, by the active involvement of the students, the approach favors a process of active learning, which aligns with an interactionist and social-constructivist view on teaching and learning.

The question then was how to bring about the pursued student participation in actual educational practice, as it was not yet common practice and, consequently, it required changes in teachers' and students' attitudes and behavior. Action research as a tool for teachers' professional development has been documented many times (see Ponte, 2010) as a sound way for teachers to learn about their own practice. Not all types of research with or by teachers, however, include a clear idea of the way by which change will come about; it is assumed to happen automatically on the basis of gained insights, for example, in this project, the insight that even quite young children are able to reflect on and express their way of learning and what helps or hinders them in their learning. Experimenting with the insights

– that is acting them out in the teacher's practice – is an essential component of teacher learning. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) have recognized this aspect as well and have identified *enactment* as one of the two change mechanisms in their model. In addition, they add the notion that not only new insights can be enacted in the *domain of practice*, but also the changed practices and outcomes can be *reflected* on and can change the insights (*personal domain*). For this reason, creating a context for actual 'enacting' student participation through teacher-student partnerships in action research, was the key idea in the 'Students and teacher as co-researchers' project: create space for teachers and students to experience new ways of working (an *opportunity*, in Shier's (2001) model), so that knowledge, beliefs and attitudes could change accordingly, which would then drive further experimentation and change towards student participation. Through a process of collaboration, exchange, and discussion with others in school, the individual activities would help 'Building a culture of participation' (Kirby et al., 2003). Furthermore, in order to make it easier for teachers – and students - to experiment with behaviors and roles that differed from the established classroom practice, an external educational context was chosen as the starting point for the research. We realized that transfer from there to in-school contexts and embedding in school culture would require special attention and a longstanding effort and support. As said, however successful and generally applauded the project was, the follow-up stages could not take off due to an untimely end to the project.

The value of the approach in the 'Students and teacher as co-researchers' project lies first and foremost in the realization of the participation form 'students and teachers as co-researchers'. Teachers and students of various capacities and with various attitudes actually entered into the development of a new way of working that enabled them to participate in decision-making. Furthermore, teachers and students learned and changed in the process of co-researching. We saw changes occurring in practice – in the museum and the library -, in teachers' and students' knowledge and beliefs, and in their attitudes. Students showed great enthusiasm and dedication and increased motivation. They learned about research and gained insight into their personal preferences for learning and experienced having an impact on the system's processes. These types of changes and learning apply to teachers as well. They reported changes in the way they interacted with their students and improvements in the educational practice, first in the external setting and later on in the classroom setting as well. Still to be answered, however, is the question of how sustainable the changes are. As Rudduck and Fielding (2006, p. 76) observe, "an important concern for the longer term survival of student voice is building a coherent and secure school-wide foundation for the work. While there are often patches of exciting work on student voice, it can be difficult to move from these islands of risky commitment to the mainland of the school (…)". We had envisioned a path of development from single teachers and research teams, to multiple teams within a school and in a network with other schools, to the anchoring of the participatory practice in the school culture. Such sustainable changes could be based on long-standing collaborative partnerships between schools and university as "a meeting or confrontation between different fields of knowledge." (Rönnerman et al., 2008) and on teachers taking up roles as local facilitators for their colleagues (Rönnerman, 2008).

The project was not set up to research in detail what effects the student participation strategy might have on teacher and student learning, how this might be different for participants of various backgrounds, and how best to facilitate this. In addition, further research is still needed on the question

of the effectiveness of students as researchers in generating useful insider knowledge (Bland & Atweh, 2003) and how this differs from other types of research. The role of teacher education in the professional development of inclusive and participatory teachers and how to design it has been touched upon in this project but needs further elaboration and research as well. Teachers were involved in developing the strategy for this project and teacher educators participated as facilitators for the action research teams, which is a model that could be introduced and researched further, including the assessment of effects on teacher learning.

Questions remain and new ones are generated by the project. Important to note, however, is – in our opinion – that the approach in the 'Students and teacher as co-researchers' project opens an opportunity to steer away from schooling driven by 'system', and to bring education back into the lifeworld and realm of substantial rationality of teachers and students, and teacher educators, thus putting them back in charge of decisions that shape their shared practice on the basis of shared responsibility: an education not only *for* all but *by* all.