THE CLASS AS A GROUP

Theoretical and pedagogical implications of groupwork in the classroom

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Date: 30 September 2019

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Your love will carry…….

ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to investigate 1) the perceived discrepancy between the social skills outcomes in the pupil-monitoring system and what is experienced by teachers, pupils or parents in the classroom, 2) to understand the role of the group on behaviours experienced by teachers as difficult or problematic, 3) to investigate what understandings teachers have of the concept of group in education, and 4) to assess the effectiveness of groupwork interventions in the classroom.

Over a period of 3 academic years, four groups in four different mainstream primary schools in the Netherlands were investigated. Each group experienced similar problems even though their size, location, ethnicity, socio-economic background of the parents or the composition of the group differed. All groups participated in this study for the duration of 5 till 12 weeks, to investigate whether using groupwork skills and knowledge would affect the problems related to the social behaviour they experienced in the classroom.

The approach included modelling groupwork skills and involving the group in the problem-solving process, using the experiential learning cycle for the pupils and the action-research cycle for their teachers. It also involved collaborative evaluation. Examples are pupils and teacher(s) reflecting together on their progress after each intervention, or between me and the teachers in reviewing data and emerging findings. The main data were derived from qualitative micro analysis of the videos that were made throughout this study, and are supported by direct observations of the activities, logbooks and statements made by pupils and teachers, and emails.

The study concludes that three factors, namely approaching a class as a group, involving the group in the problem-solving process, and using groupwork skills and techniques in group discussions, contribute to the aspirations of the teachers, the pupils and their parents, the school, and in the end to reaching the attainment targets for the social obligation of education. Being able to share thoughts, feelings and emotions about real, actual problems and conflicts in the 'here-and-now' enabled pupils to develop ways of thinking and talking, essential for gaining problem-solving skills and dealing with differences of opinion.

Teachers need to appreciate that children's thinking and reasoning differ from adults'. Therefore, teachers have to learn new skills in facilitating the development of their pupils' social skills as opposed to teaching what is socially expected of them. Gaining knowledge about group dynamics and group development would benefit teachers in the classroom not only in

reaching their attainment targets for social skills education, but also in dealing with behaviours in the classroom they experience as being difficult.

Furthermore, this study concludes that the currently deployed tools for measuring the outcomes of the social skills education do not sufficiently capture what needs to be assessed due for example to assumptions about language and interpretations, the discrepancy between internalized and integrated behaviours, or the impact of pupils' paralinguistic language on others.

Keywords: social obligation of (primary) education, groupwork, teacher training, action research, experiential learning, citizenship.

GLOSSARY

Since this study was conducted in the Netherlands, this glossary supplies a list of terms with accompanying definitions and/or translations used in Dutch education.

Cito (Centraal Instituut voor Toetsontwikkeling) – National Institute for Educational Measurement

Cotan (Commissie Testaangelegenheden Nederland) – Commission for Test matters of the Dutch Institute of Psychologists that promotes the quality of tests and the use of tests in the Netherlands

Effectieve Instructie – the goals, instruction and content of the lessons are adjusted to the different educational needs of the pupils (translated as: effective transfer of knowledge)

Handelingsgericht Werken (HGW) – a systematic approach in which the educational offer is adjusted to the educational and basic needs of the pupils. Based on the so called child characteristics, the educational needs of the child are established (translated as: Action Orientated Approach).

Handelingsgerichte Proces Diagnostiek (HGPD) – an approach in which diagnostics and approach go hand in hand

Inspectie van het Onderwijs – Education Inspectorate

Kwaliteitsborging – the school and the inspectorate control if the set targets are met and analyse what could be improved or what targets can be raised (translated as: quality surveillance).

Ministerie van Onderwijs, Culture en Wetenschap (Min. OCW) – Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Nederlands Jeugd Instituut (NJI) – Dutch Institute for youth

Onderwijsraad – Education Council

Opbrengst gericht werken – schools and teachers take a systematic approach in increasing the educational achievements of the pupils through setting high goals, evaluating their plans and analysing the effects of their teaching (translated as: revenue-focussed working).

Passend Onderwijs – Adequate Education

Primary Education – education of children in the age of 4 till 12 (group 1 – group 8)

Regionale Expertise Centra (REC) – consortiums of special schools and secondary special schools within a district (translated as: Regional Expertise Centres).

Rijksoverheid – central / national government

Samenwerkingsorgaan Beroepskwaliteit Leraren (SBL) – Cooperation body Professional quality Teachers

Stichting Leerplan Ontwikkeling (SLO) – National Institute for Curriculum Development

WEC raad – organisation that represents the interests of special education

Wet op het basisonderwijs – Primary Education Act

Weer Samen Naar School (WSNS) – Together to School Again. - Schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties (LOM), children with learning difficulties (MLK) and preschool children with developmental difficulties (IOBK) were merged into a school for special primary education (SBO). This process was named Weer Samen Naar School, and got its legal foundation in the Primary Education Act of 1998.

Zorgplicht – Schools have to present the best possible educational offer to all pupils that enrol. If a school is not able to provide the special needs an individual child requires, then the parents have to be helped in finding an educational place that suits the child more effectively. The parents and the school are required to work together in finding such a place. In order to assist the child as much as possible, teachers need sufficient knowledge of dealing with differences and have to be aware when they need the help of other professionals. Schools cooperate with other schools at a regional level and with youth care, social work, local police, district nurses, speech therapists and all other professionals possibly involved in the life of the child. (translated as: Duty of Care).

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Preface

> *All education is groupwork. Education of children and adults, education in families and schools never deals with the individual on the one hand and the subject to be taught on the other* (Lewin, 1943:115).

The notion of group, in relation to my own professional practice in primary education in the Netherlands, forms the context of this research. At present in the majority of Dutch primary schools, children are educated in groups and since the *Primary Education Act of 1985*, a class or form in primary education in the Netherlands is called 'a group'. Teachers strive to broadly educate all the children in their group but sometimes the group, or an individual in the group, does not cooperate. Teachers experience and interpret this as either having 'a difficult group' or as 'difficult behaviour' (ten Brink, 2002:13; van Overveld, 2016).

According to de Boer et al., (2002) and van Overveld (2016), teachers in the Netherlands increasingly report problems with teaching groups they experience as being difficult or they see the behaviours of individual pupils in the group as being problematic. Teachers tend to describe these behaviours as being, for example, annoying, secretive, impudent, attention seeking, verbally aggressive, interacting with each other negatively or being lazy (Miedema, 2002), and in the past decade, bullying, threatening, ignoring, excluding, and cyberbullying have been added to the list of complaints (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2014a).

According to Kuhlemeier et al. (2012), in everyday practice teachers and pupils have to deal with problematic behaviours to a greater or lesser extent, making teaching more complex or in some cases, even impossible. In my own professional situation I also see more and more teachers struggling with their groups and I notice how they often spend a considerable part of their time and energy in guiding 'difficult' or otherwise problematic pupils.

In response to this development many social skills programmes, anti-bullying campaigns and social skills course books have entered the educational field (Baar et al., 2007; Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, NJI, 2013; Rijksoverheid, 2013). Since 2007, almost one third of the primary schools in the Netherlands, including the schools in my professional context, have used the social skills programme *'Kanjer training'* (Tiger method) to teach children social and emotional skills (preventive) and to reduce bullying (curative) (www.kanjertraining.nl, 2013). Twice a year

the results of the training are measured through online questionnaires in which the pupils reflect on their own behaviour and how they perceive themselves as being accepted into the group. Recently this questionnaire has been positively reviewed by the Cotan[1] and as of August 2014, the Education Inspectorate deployed the questionnaire as a tool for measuring social development (www.Kanjertraining.nl, 2013).

The outcomes of these questionnaires highlighted some positive results of the training, including pupils feeling more socially accepted, and having less depressive or aggressive feelings (Vliek et al., 2011), and in the most recent report (2019:67), the Education Inspectorate writes that 97% of the pupils feels safe in school. Research commissioned by the Ministry of OCW (2012) required pupils to complete questionnaires in which they were asked how they perceived their own social skills, and teachers completed questionnaires about their judgment of the social competencies of the pupils. Findings seemed to confirm that the social functioning of the majority of pupils in the last year of primary education gave no particular reason for concern (Kuhlemeier et al., 2012:303). However, this result does not mean that problems do not exist and a small number of pupils exhibit behaviour which is experienced in that context as problematic and need additional attention, support and counselling (ibid).

In spite of this predominantly positive report, teachers increasingly describe having problems with teaching groups they experience as 'difficult' (ten Brink, 2002; van Engelen, 2014; van Overveld, 2016), reporting a discrepancy between the outcomes of these questionnaires and what they experience in everyday practice. They struggle with 'difficult groups' or 'disruptive behaviour of individual pupils in the group', and individual children still complain about bullying. This raises the question about whether social skills and citizenship are being taught in a meaningful, experiential way, useful in the here and now, or as preparation for a test. Ten Dam (2001) argues that improvement of social competence can be achieved only in a limited way, as long as social skills are taught in discrete lessons, rather than being enacted across the curriculum. For example, where pupils make statements about respecting different opinions or finding peaceful solutions for a problem, but then do exactly the opposite outside the classroom, as I frequently witness. There seems to be relatively limited transfer between what is learned in class and how this should be practised in real life.

This sets the context for this study, which seeks not only to find a possible explanation for the perceived discrepancy between test results and what teachers experience in practice, but also

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[1] See Glossary

to investigate teachers' understanding of the concept of the 'group' in education, in relation to pupils' social skills.

1.1 Professional situation and motivation related to the subject

As an educational professional with a fascination for groups, in this research I want to explore and more deeply understand, what exactly a group in education is. Also, I want to understand how education professionals engage with groups; and which behaviours in their groups they experience as being difficult, identifying how this differs from how professionals in social groupwork, for example social workers in schools, health care or prisons, engage with their groups.

At the time of writing I am a professional in (primary) education, having worked in the Netherlands for over 30 years. I have worked as a teacher in both mainstream and special education and during this time, I have experienced many changes in educational policy, which have affected the composition and the needs of the class; one consequence being the emergence of behaviours in the group that teachers experience as difficult. Meanwhile I have gained knowledge through study and experience in different systems, different roles and different tasks as will be subsequently explained.

After Teacher Training College I began to work in a mainstream elementary school (6 – 12 year olds). During this time, theories on experiential learning (Dewey, 1915, Piaget, 1932); on the role of talk in mediating learning (Vygotsky, 1978); on the importance of meaningful learning and the relatively unimportant role of the teacher in the learning process of young children (Rogers, 1979), greatly influenced Dutch education. This resulted in more attention being paid to the individual differences between children, more active involvement of pupils in the learning process (Berding & Pols, 2014) and expansion of elementary schools with a special orientation such as Montessori, Parkhurst or Petersen (Boekholt & de Booy, 1987). However, in 1986 the Dutch inspectorate noted that the approach taken by the majority of elementary schools was predominantly whole-class, from an organisational as well as an educational perspective (Braster, 2011). This was the pedagogical approach expected when I entered the professional field in 1982.

In 1985 the *'Wet op het Basisonderwijs'* (The Primary Education Act, 1985) came into force. Elementary and nursery schools merged into primary schools, where children from 4 to 12 years experienced 'a continuous development process' (Berding & Pols, 2014). The rationale

for this Act was equal opportunities for all, and a focus on individual development, but it was also intended to reduce the referral rate to special schools (ibid). Primary education became more focussed on the developmental stage of the child and worked in a more heterogeneous way. A side-effect of offering all children equal opportunities was the increased demands made of the new primary schools, such as expanding their special needs provision and greater accountability (Berding & Pols, 2014). However, contrary to expectation, pupil referral rates to special schools have continued to increase (Smeets, 2007).

Dissatisfied with seemingly being unable to teach children with special needs in a mainstream setting, in 1986, I transferred to special education. Here, I learned to understand and interpret different behaviours from a new perspective. I experienced how learning difficulties resulted in behaviour problems and most of all, I learned how the group can offer children protection and mutual aid. A drive towards inclusion (*Weer Samen Naar School, 1998*[2]) and cost-cutting closed many special schools so I later returned to mainstream primary education as a Dutch second language teacher for refugee children. Diversity afforded me a new personal perspective on 'groupness' in education and society. The children taught me about assumptions in interpreting behaviour from different cultural perspectives. Although house visits were no longer common practice, I experienced again the importance of close communication with parents. Eager to understand what happens in groups and dissatisfied with the educational solution of labelling pupils, in 2009 I joined the *IASWG (the International Association for Social Work with Groups),* where I learned the theory behind what I already had sensed in practice, but could not yet explain: how the behaviour of an individual relates to groups.

Currently, my job is to assist children in a mainstream school, identified as having special educational needs (SEN), and to advise teachers on achieving their set targets. In this role I receive many questions about how to deal with the behaviour of these children in the group or the effects of their behaviour on the dynamics of the group. These requests are typically substantiated by a list of each child with all their individual needs. Teachers, in my experience, are increasingly able to take the individual needs of their pupils into consideration when planning their education in their group plan. That, however, is not the same as *planning their group* as will be explained subsequently.

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[2] See also Glossary

1.2 Context

What children need to learn in primary education is written down in core objectives, describing the desired outcomes of a learning process, but schools can choose their own pedagogy (*Stichting Leerplan Ontwikkeling, SLO, 2006*). The Dutch government has also declared its ambition to become a leading, knowledge-based economy (Min. OCW., 2011a) and advocates: *'Revenue-focussed working'* (schools and teachers should take a systematic approach to increasing pupils' educational achievements through setting high goals and evaluating the impact of their teaching, SLO, 2010).Teachers must also achieve *'Effective transfer of knowledge'* (ibid: they must adjust their goals, instruction and content of the lessons to the different educational needs of their pupils, so no time is wasted); and accept *'Quality surveillance'* (the school and inspectorate control whether the set targets are met and analyse what could be improved, or change the targets for the next period, ibid).

Improvement of education, according to the Dutch government, equals increasing teachers' skills and knowledge in order to increase pupils' educational achievements, their cognitive results (Min. OCW., 2011a:20). That is, results which can be measured and compared (Biesta, 2009). In this vein, like Biesta (2009), I wonder if we are measuring what we value or end up valuing what we can measure since education also has the obligation to prepare children for participation in society (SLO, 2006), and this demands a more holistic view on education than just high test scores on a cognitive level. According to the core objectives set by the Government, primary education also has the obligation to teach pupils *'personal and world orientation'.* In this learning area, *"pupils orientate on themselves, on how people relate to each other, how they solve problems, and how they give meaning to their existence"* (SLO, 2006:47). The question is not only whether it is possible to measure and compare pupils' achievements in this domain, but also if better teaching will increase pupils' performance.

In order to become a knowledge-based economy, pupils' achievements must increase and therefore the purported 'quality' of the teachers. Consequently, many resources are invested in training teachers to become 'effective instructors' (Min. OCW., 2011a). Yet, in spite of the fact that more and more teachers are apparently now able to instruct effectively, the achievements of pupils do not always increase, as anticipated. Dijkstra & Janssens (2012) suggest three possible causes for this. First, there is a gap in knowledge about interpreting test results and the consequences for education. Second, there is a lack of ambition amongst school leaders and teachers for achievement-oriented education, and third, teachers and schools tend to blame the pupils or their parents for the disappointing results. Based on my

professional experience, I can agree with the first possible cause identified by Dijksta & Janssens (2012) and hence agree to a certain extent with the government's initiative to improve the quality of teachers' training. However, a child is not just a performance unit and therefore there is more than just comprehending instructions that might affect test results. Home situation and personal circumstances are also important influential factors on the educational performance of pupils. This relates to the third argument of Dijkstra & Janssens (2012) as well as to de Winters' (2010) perceptive argument: at present parents and teachers are no longer partners in raising children, and blame each other for failing results. Related to the second argument, both teachers and parents want their children to achieve well in school. The problem is that they both see different aspects of the same child and, instead of being partners, parents and teachers are on opposite sides of the 'wall' that has been erected between parents and school (de Winter, 2010).

Although in general, it may be a relatively small group of pupils that exhibit problematic behaviours (Kuhlemeier et al., 2012), dealing with oppositional behaviour or an unfriendly atmosphere can not only take time, at the expense of 'effective learning time', but also impact on the educational outcomes (ibid) so this is an important context in understanding why pupil achievements are not increasing.

When researching the quality of education, the focus is usually on the cognitive development of pupils (Kuhlemeier et al., 2012) as with the above Government focus (Min. OCW., 2011a). Education, however, also has the obligation to advance pupils' social development. What children must learn in this domain is written in the preliminary statement of the core objectives (SLO, 2006). Schools must contribute to the advancement of pupils' social competencies, social integration and active citizenship (Kuhlemeier et al., 2012). An increase in the number of children with learning and behaviour problems, the increasing individualisation of the society and the disappearance of traditional norms and values, were the reasons for the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science considering the social competences of children in primary education (Ten Dam & Volman, 1999). They commissioned the *Central Institute for Test Development (CITO)* to research children's social and emotional development during their final year of primary education. The aspects of social and emotional development were divided into three domains: social competence, citizenship and moral development. The research, carried out in 111 primary schools, involved testing different aspects of the educational outcomes of social competences through pupil questionnaires and self-reports, observation lists filled out by teachers and 'scenario interviews' ('How would you react if….') with pupils.

This research (Kuhlemeier et al., 2012) noted that the social functioning of the majority of the pupils was unproblematic. However, a relatively small group displayed problematic behaviours, including hyperactivity, excessive behaviour, blaming others, justifying excessive behaviour and lack of empathy (ibid). These findings were echoed in the Inspectorate Education Report (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2019:67) which reported that 18% of pupils in Dutch primary education had to deal with (verbal) abuse, and one in ten pupils indicated being bullied.

Additionally, in 2018-2019, the inspector responsible for handling complaints about (sexual) harassment and discrimination reported an increase of reports of nearly 40% compared to 2016-2017. Worthy of note is the remark in the report (ibid:68): *"Contacts with reporters indicate that protracted cases of bullying that have not been properly resolved by the school, can sometimes result in physical violence, such as fights".* These outcomes seem to confirm teachers' feelings and experiences that it is the behaviour of one pupil, a small group or the collective impact of these behaviours on the group that cause problems (van Overveld, 2016).

Groups are more than a collection of individuals who accidently enter the school in the same year, ending up in the same classroom, that is, more than the sum of their parts. Groups are a fundamental part of life and are dynamic wholes (Smith, 2018). A group is a collection of individuals who interact with one another and therefore become interdependent to some degree (Cartwright & Zander, 1968). In other words, teachers not only have to deal with individuals, and their own learning needs, but also with the dynamics within the group in their classroom. Teachers are trained to work with *groups of children*, but this does not necessarily involve *working with groups*. A group, however, can be very powerful, and for many teachers, a very challenging entity. Teachers having theoretical and pedagogical knowledge about groups, group dynamics and group processes, is an important condition for an effective education, but in the Netherlands, this is not regarded as an important subject in teacher training courses (Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans, 2017; Miedema, 2002).

1.3   Legislation in the Netherlands: group versus individual

WSNS ('Together to School Again') was the first step towards '*de Wet Passend Onderwijs'* (the *Adequate Education Act*) that came into force in 2014. '*Adequate Education'* is a system that aims to present all children with an adequate educational experience (Min. OCW., 2011b). This

requires schools to have a so-called *'Duty of Care'*, providing the best possible educational experience to all pupils. If a school is not able to manage an individual child's special needs, then the parents and school are required to work together to find appropriate alternative provision. In order to assist the child as much as possible, teachers need sufficient knowledge of dealing with differences and must be aware when they need the help of other professionals. Schools cooperate with other schools at a regional level and youth care, social work, local police, district nurses, speech therapists and other appropriate professionals can be included as required. The main goal is: one child, one family, one plan (Min. OCW., 2011b) and the Inspectorate monitors the means, budgets and educational outcomes (ibid). The central question in *Adequate Education* is: what approach, attitude or instruction does *this* child require?

Learning or behaviour problems are perceived as 'problems within the child' and translated into the child's 'educational needs'. For example, a given child may need peers who accept that they react differently or activities that are structured in small steps, in order to reach the set targets (Pameijer & Beukering, 2008). Every detail is recorded in group plans, individual learning or behaviour plans, the pupil-monitoring system, reports and evaluation sheets. Summarized, the average Dutch teacher has to work with groups that have become increasingly diverse in terms of the cultural, educational and behavioural needs of individual pupils, while also being required to increase every child's educational achievements. These new demands clearly require teachers to gain new knowledge and develop new skills to support pupil learning, holistically. Instead, teachers typically focus narrowly on performance - the knowledge and skills pupils must acquire to achieve well in national tests - believing this will enhance their instruction, while specialists, such as SEN coordinators (SENCOs), peripatetic teachers, speech therapists, behaviour specialists and social workers with 'specialized knowledge' take responsibility for addressing the range of complex pupil needs. Specialists, teachers and parents study data derived from the pupil-monitoring system and negotiate the 'threatening factors' and 'compensating factors', in order to answer the question: 'what does this child need'?

Being one of these specialists, I take part in these negotiations every week, but also being a practitioner, I experience what is happening in the classroom. I notice that sometimes the individual needs of one pupil conflict with the individual needs of another or the needs of the group, thus creating a complex situation for the teacher who, without sufficient knowledge about groups, has to respond to these situations.

Although *Adequate Education* focuses on the requirements of every individual child (Pameijer & Beukering, 2008), in the majority of Dutch primary schools, the education is organized in groups (by year, ability or instruction), suggesting a pragmatic, organisational rationale for the 'group'. In reality, however, a group in a classroom consists of individuals who all require their individual needs to be taken into consideration when planning the education of this group and this requires expertise that most mainstream teachers currently appear to lack.

1.4   Aims and context of the research

This research was carried out in four classrooms, ranging from Year 5 (eight year olds) to Year 7 (eleven year olds), within diverse schools, varying from a small village school to a large city school, in mainstream primary education. Mainstream, in the context of this research, includes children identified as needing special (primary) education (see Appendix A) and peripatetic supervision and, as a result of increasing migration, those from different nationalities and educational backgrounds. This makes complex demands on mainstream teachers, not only in dealing with the academic challenges or knowledge of different behaviour or learning disorders, but also in dealing with behaviour in the group, as a result of this cultural and linguistic diversity.

As in the majority of primary schools in the Netherlands, in the participating schools, children are brought together based on their date of birth and are called 'groups'. Four of these 'groups' were the focus of this study, from a range of year groups, with pupils from 8 – 9 years to 11 - 12 years. The educational concept of 'the group' might have consequences for how these 'groups' function and for the educational process of individual children. Since the main topic of this research is the role of the group on social behaviour in the primary classroom, my primary focus is whether theoretical knowledge of groups (Smith, 2018) can be applied in an educational context, supporting teachers to enhance children's social competencies and ability to learn and reducing the negative behaviours as described by Miedema (2002) on page 2. I am primarily interested in how a group in education could be defined from a 'group' perspective. For example, in writing their group plans, to what extent do teachers actually plan their 'group'? What is important when planning a group and why? Also in this research I want to better understand what motivates pupils to change their behaviour and how that relates to school policy and national policy.

1.4.1   Research design and research questions

This research uses a collaborative action-research framework, conducted in groups led by other teachers, in which I have offered myself in partnership as a facilitator for the groups' learning processes. One of the attractive features of Action Research is that it is a group activity: it involves planning and evaluating interventions, for the purpose of improving an aspect of education (Cohen et al., 2017). This study aimed to explore the role of the group on the social behaviour amongst children aged eight to twelve years old; to investigate the teachers' concept of 'group' and how this affected their practice; and to enhance the effectiveness of groupwork interventions in education, such as involving the group in finding solutions for the problems experienced in the classroom. The research employed an interpretive approach, focusing on micro-analysis of video recordings taken during the interventions.

Thus, this research explored the extent to which engaging with the class as a group affects the problems related to the social behaviour teachers currently experience in the classroom, and what knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits teachers need to acquire, in order to engage with their class as a group. There are four research questions:

1)   To what extent can the perceived discrepancy between the findings of the pupil-monitoring system on the effectiveness of pupils' social skills and teachers' perceptions of their pupils' social skills be explained by the concept of 'group' in education?

2)   In what ways can engaging with the class as a group affect the problems related to pupils' social behaviour that teachers currently experience?

3)   What knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits do teachers need to acquire in order to engage with their class as a group?

4)   In what ways might a different conceptualisation of the 'group' contribute to the educational and social outcomes, specified in the core objectives (SLO, 2006)?

1.4.2   Profile of the participating groups[3]

The group investigated in School A was Year 7 (ten-eleven year olds). The school is set in a rural location and had 181 pupils divided into eight groups (Year 1 – 8). The school is predominantly 'white'[4] and the majority of the parents could be described as 'working class'. The group in School B was a Year 7 group situated in a large city school, located in a new residential area in a higher socio economic context than School A. 913 pupils are divided into 33 groups. The school has predominantly 'white' children and the majority of the parents are well educated.

School C is a small, city-centre school with 85 pupils divided into four groups. The population is multi-ethnic although a slight majority are white and of Dutch origin. The educational background of the parents is also mixed, varying from having finished primary school to having higher education qualifications. Although there are multiple religions represented, the school has a Catholic denomination[5]. The group included in the research was Year 5/6 (eight – ten year olds).

School D is a small city school with 121 pupils divided over six groups. The population is mixed, with different ethnicities and religions. The majority of pupils either have a Turkish or North-African background. Although more than half of the pupils are Muslim, the school has a Catholic denomination. The group involved in the research was a Year 6/7 (nine - eleven year olds).

Since the inspectorate reports only provide information about the quality of the education, for example, the educational results, effective use of learning time, pedagogical climate, adaptive instruction, or the pupil-monitoring system used (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2012), the above school data was supplied by the head teachers.

1.5   Summary

In this chapter I have pictured the Dutch educational system. I have also presented my professional position and motivation, initiating this study. I have also introduced the research questions that informed this study, and the profile of the groups participating in this study. The

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[3] School data was supplied by the head teachers
[4] For an explanation of the use of the terminology 'white or black schools', see Appendix A
[5] Also see Appendix A

thesis is divided into five further chapters. Chapter two presents a review of the literature on 1) different perspectives on the pedagogical obligation of education; 2) different views on 'groups'; 3) probable causes for difficult behaviour; 4) group development; and 5) possible cultural influences on student learning and behaviour. In chapter three, the research design and methodological approach are discussed, with my researcher positionality. Analysis of the data, and my decisions to present the data in themes are reported in chapter four. In chapter five, the research questions are discussed. Conclusions, limitations of the study, the contribution to knowledge, implications of the study and recommendations for new lines of inquiry, and reflection on methods and process are reported in chapter six.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> *Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life*
> *in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in*
> *bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his*
> *own powers for social ends.* (Dewey, 1897:78)

Since the focus of this study is on the role of the group on the learning process of individuals, the starting point for this literature review and theoretical framework of this thesis is social pedagogy that has developed from the theories of philosophers and educationalists, from Dewey (1915) and Freire (1970) to Vygotsky (1978). Dewey argued that children live in groups that can be used as important resources, not only for the growth and development of the individual, but also for the communities they live in, and ultimately for society: *"A society is a number of people held together because they are working along common lines, in a common spirit, and with reference to common aims"* (2001:10). Dewey believed all concepts, for example democratic understanding and values, could not be simply handed over from one generation to the next, but had to be learned anew in each generation. Dewey (ibid) rightly criticised the theory of behaviourism, prevalent at that time, since he argued that children are not passive recipients of knowledge, but take an active part in the process of their own learning. Indeed he believed that children learn best through engaging directly with their environment, through what is now known as 'experiential learning'.

Freire (1970), criticised what he called 'the banking concept' of education: the teacher as a subject of action, depositing knowledge in his objects of action, his students. After time, this knowledge should show result or 'interest' in the form of grades or certificates. Instead, Freire advocated the problem-posing concept of education, starting in the 'here-and-now'. Korczak (cited in Cameron & Moss, 2011) in his turn argued that children are human *beings* as opposed to human *becomings*, in other words, not the people of the future but people of today. Robinson (2011) also criticizes the fact that education still tells children that, if they do well in school, they will achieve better (paid) jobs in the future, instead of citing current benefits to them. Even at present, the Dutch Ministry of Education indicates that education is for the future by encouraging pupils to attain a 'basic qualification' since they write: *"With a basic qualification you have a better chance of finding a job"* (Rijksoverheid, 2018).

Crucially, Dewey argued for the centrality of language to the learning process:

> *Language is the device for communication; it is the tool through which one individual comes to share ideas and feeling of others. When treated simply as a way of getting individual information, or as a means of showing off what one has learned, it loses its social motive and end* (1897:79).

Vygotsky (1978) also emphasized the reciprocal relationship between language and thinking in the process of learning. Language makes dialogue possible (and vice versa): through dialogue, shared understandings, discussion of alternative possible solutions, and achieving agreement can be established. According to Vygotsky, such social interaction is essential for constructing knowledge and understanding because the child internalises cognitive tools, used first on the interpsychological plane, which subsequently form the basis for intrapsychological reflection and logical reasoning. The most important tool for these processes is language. Vygotsky argued that, when children were allowed to discuss and argue, interaction not only leads to a more active and independent ownership of knowledge, but also to *'interthinking'* when they combine their intellects, generating fresh ideas. However, recent Vygotskyan theorists, such as Mercer and Littleton (2007) have argued that, although in European classrooms children are set to work *in* groups, they are typically not enabled to work *as* groups or given instruction into how to achieve this.

Lewin (cited in Smith, 2001) deepened our understanding of the relationship between social interaction and learning, identifying how the tension between the perceptions of the self and of the environment influence the behaviour of individuals and groups. He argued that, in order to understand behaviour, the whole *'lifespace'* within which people act, had to be taken in consideration. According to Doel & Kelly (2014:56), Lewin coined the term 'group dynamics', resulting from the interactions that occur within a group, defined as:

> *The forces that move, change or influence individual behaviour in the group, the behaviour of the group as a whole, or have an impact on the development of the group.*

In summary, in social pedagogy, learning is seen as a social activity as opposed to an individual activity, contrasting with *Adequate Education* in the Netherlands, where the central question is: 'what does *this* child need to reach the set targets?' and in which the learning outcomes of the individual pupils only are carefully monitored. The broad view on learning of social pedagogy will be used as a theoretical framework in the current study, given the importance of group interaction, group dynamics and language as a tool for (social) learning, since one of the

goals of this study is to explore to what extent teachers engaging with the class as a group might impact on pupils' negative social behaviour.

2.1   Learning versus teaching

To deepen understanding of social pedagogy, it is helpful to go back to the original definitions of education, school and pedagogy. The word 'education' derives from the Latin words *educere* (stretching and leading away from ignorance) and *educare* (growing and raising), (van Dale etymological dictionary, 1997:248). These definitions suggest that the process of educating is aimed at the needs of the learner. For many centuries, formal education has taken place in schools. The word 'school' derives from the Greek word *scholè* (free time). The original meaning is 'time in between'; time not spent in the family and/or in public life; a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood in which children are made acquainted with what adults think is important and necessary to know to be able to participate in society (Berding & Pols, 2014). Meirieu (2004) states that a school is an institute with a pedagogical mission: handing over knowledge and tools to the next generation to enable them to safeguard their own future, as well as the future of the world.

There are different ways to interpret what this '*pedagogical mission'* should look like, depending on the definition of pedagogy. The Anglo-Saxon definition is: the science of teaching (Oxford English Dictionary: 1975:628). Thus, Alexander (2004:11) defines pedagogy as: *"What one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the different kinds of decisions of which teaching is constituted".* Teaching is defined as: to give instruction; to cause; to give knowledge to somebody (Oxford English Dictionary, 1975:903), suggesting an activity from the teacher that causes the learning of the learner. On the other hand, the Dutch definition of pedagogy is: *"the science of raising children"* (van Dale Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal, 1992:2256). This definition suggests that pedagogy includes all those involved with raising children, parents and teachers. However, there are tensions between Dutch Teacher Training Colleges being called 'Pedagogical Academies' and the original meaning of the word pedagogy, which emphasises a broader community of pedagogues: pedagogy is 'to lead the child' (van Dale etymological dictionary, 1997:652) and derives from the Greek word Paidagōgeō: Pais (child) and Agōgos (leader, guide). Although being a slave, the pedagogue was a member of the household, thus being in close contact with parents (Smith, 2009).

Thus, the original definitions of education, school and pedagogy suggest a holistic understanding of education, incorporating a concern for individual growth and development, and for the community and society in which the individual is growing up, and the interrelationship between individual and society. In this vein, Pestalozzi (cited in Smith, 2012) emphasised that the aim is to educate the whole child, addressing head, heart and hands and taking place in a social context, while enabling children to be free to pursue their own interests and to draw their own conclusions. Dewey (1897:77) also believed that learning is a social activity that *"comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself"* and Vygotsky (1978) viewed all learning as socially mediated. In other words, learning takes place through experiencing and interacting with others. These others can be adults as well as their peers in the group.

2.2   School, society and social skills

According to Turkenburg (2005), school and society are communicating vessels: when there are problems in society, politicians as well as the community, view education as the way to solve these problems. In recent years, education in the Netherlands has increasingly become more responsible for dealing with potential social problems, such as children's safety, inclusion, obesity, alcohol abuse and integrating different cultures as a result of rapid migration patterns (Onderwijsraad, Education Counsil, 2008). Hämäläinen (cited in Cameron & Moss, 2011:14) has argued that the pioneers of social pedagogy too attempted to find educational solutions for social problems, such as poverty or inequality, although not by making these merely educational problems, but by confronting them.

Significantly, in 2006, citizenship was added to the attainment targets for Dutch primary education, not as a separate subject, but as a general objective of the curriculum with the aim of teachers and children practising democratic principles in the classroom (SLO, 2014). This aim appears to align with the philosophy of social pedagogy since this is also based on promoting and enhancing children's rights:

> *The right to meaningful participation in decisions affecting people's lives is a cornerstone that enables people to empower themselves by gaining more ownership and feeling respected. Meaningful participation in a social pedagogic relationship is always a social and inclusive process, about engaging in dialogue*

as equal human beings exploring different perspectives (Cameron & Moss, 2011:47).

However, the government has set attainment targets for citizenship and the general idea is that schools have the obligation to *teach* pupils how democracy works, *teach* children what the rules are and what norms and values are important (Platform Onderwijs 2032, 2016). From an ethical perspective, Topolski (2008) questions whether the classroom is an appropriate place to create citizens since there is no consensus on what exactly a good citizen is, and therefore it is impossible to teach. Moreover, Topolski also critiques the ideological basis of such a policy, challenging the assumption that the solution for problems in society can be solved in school, since in fact these 'problems' (for example, poverty or inequality) are often symptoms of political crisis that need structural solutions. In this vein, Vandenbroeck et al. (2011) also argue that pedagogues are given excessive social responsibilities when there is a crisis in, for example, social cohesion in society, with policymakers transforming political problems into pedagogical questions and issues, attempting to make education responsible for solving societal problems.

As argued by Lagerweij & Lagerweij-Voogt (2004), the most successful way for governments to make education responsible for solving problems in society is by implementing new laws, steering reforms through a cost-recovery system or providing schools with extra means and facilities for school experiments or development of projects. According to Foucault (1991), modern governments refuse to acknowledge that poverty, inequality and associated problems are caused by structural issues that need radical, structural solutions, for example, a rejection of the neo-liberal support of the market and global capitalism. Instead, governments transfer responsibility for problems in society like bullying, obesity, or the pluriform society to education.

Growing attention in the media about the increasing number of complaints about bullying, sometimes resulting in pupils' suicides, forced the Dutch government to take action, resulting in the 2015 Social Safety Act (PO raad, 2014). This Act delegates responsibility for preventing all forms of bullying to schools, which can now be held legally responsible if there is insufficient proof of preventive actions taken, such as: offering social skills lessons, having an anti-bullying protocol, having a school confidante, and monitoring pupils' feelings of safety and wellbeing twice a year. The inspectorate monitors whether, and how schools live up to these rules (ibid). However, the corresponding decision-making power is not actually delegated. Schools and governing bodies are forced to govern themselves according to the arrangements set down by

the government. Through benchmarking, the government creates conditions in which schools and/or governing bodies are forced to act in certain ways in order to achieve a given benchmark (Lagerweij & Lagerweij-Voogt, 2004).

Similarly, schools should not imitate governments' transfer of responsibility for social problems to *individuals*. Bullying is a group process (van Engelen, 2014) and simplistic solutions, such as an anti-bullying protocol or an anti-bullying contract for the group, will have little effect (ibid). Only teacher knowledge about how groups form and develop and thus, a radical reconceptualization of classroom relationships, can help to prevent bullying (van Engelen, 2014; Malekoff, 2014). However, this is not an important subject in teacher training courses (Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans, 2017; Miedema, 2002). Instead, a range of social skills methods and/or anti-bullying programmes have entered the educational field and in many schools, citizenship and social skills education are discrete lessons, taught separately from other subjects, rather than as a component of the total education, with regular tests to establish if the educational goals have been achieved. These lessons are crudely regarded as the cure for what is wrong in society, and the tests are designed to measure the progress of these cures (de Regt, 2010). Vandenbroeck et al. (2011:65), however, argue that dismissing social problems by making them merely educational problems is: *"inevitably also dismissing the most vulnerable: those who cannot participate in the definition of the problems they are supposed to have"*. They advocate confronting social problems and defining a social pedagogical perspective as a way of *"continually re-examining in participatory ways what the problem might be and whether our pedagogical practices question or confirm prevailing understandings of the problem"* (2011:54).

Although in social pedagogy, the pedagogue is viewed as acting as an 'upbringer' on behalf of society, Diestersweg (cited in Smith, 2009) one of its 'founders', advocated that schooling must be separated from church and politics and turned into a force for social change. This however, is a very complex issue in the Netherlands because of the freedom of education in Act 23 of the Constitution, whereby parents have the right to a school that agrees with their religious and other philosophies (Onderwijsraad, 2016; see Appendix A). In 2017, 70% of Dutch primary schools based their education on religious or philosophical convictions (CBS, 2017). Thus in such schools, pupils learn about other religions or philosophies through taught lessons, as opposed to working, playing, learning and living in a multi-ethnic community. Clearly, Act 23 causes tension with Act 1 of the Constitution that forbids all forms of discrimination.

2.3   The social obligation of education

Schools have the responsibility for equipping children with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in society, which are defined in the core objectives for the domain *'Oriëntatie op jezelf en de wereld'* ('personal and world orientation', SLO, 2006). One set of key objectives states that pupils should learn how people relate to each other, how they solve problems and how they give meaning to their existence. Within this domain, primary education must also prepare children for their role as citizens in a democratic, constitutional state; therefore knowledge about, and insight into important values and standards, such as respect and tolerance, and knowing how to act accordingly, are preconditions for coexistence (SLO, 2006:48). The core objectives also clearly state that schools are free to choose by what methods they intend to attain these set targets.

In Dutch primary education the social obligation is translated into social skills lessons. Commissioned by the government, the *Central Institute for Test Development (CITO)* evaluated the results of the social education of children in the last year of primary school (Kuhlemeier et al., 2012). Although 90% of the teachers that took part in this evaluation study (n=137), agreed that schools should pay attention to the development of pupils' social and emotional skills, 76% of teachers stated that they preferred the use of a course-book or programme for teaching these skills because they offer clear goals and lessons for the entire school year. Teachers also stated that taking a systematic approach while working at the social competencies of pupils allows them to monitor the pupils' social development more closely since most programmes also offer a pupil-monitoring system (ibid). It seems obvious that monitoring systematically has become more important since the implementation of the *Social Safety Act* (PO raad, 2014).

Schools are free to choose what teaching methods they use for reaching the attainment targets. Almost one third of Dutch primary schools use the *Kanjer (Tiger) training* (Kanjertraining, 2014) to prevent or reduce unwanted behaviours and to develop social skills. This programme is based on Bandura's (1986) theory of social learning, which involves children practising responses in role-play to five social skills that have to be learned. Also children are encouraged to give (positive) feedback to peers (tips and tops) and moral dilemmas are discussed in class (NJI, 2014). The *Kanjer training* is offered in planned lessons on the curriculum and also contains behaviourist influences, such as motivating children to behave in a desired way through positive reinforcement, ignoring unwanted behaviour, and teaching children how to handle difficult situations, by offering them strategies in small steps (ibid).

There are, however, certain limitations to teaching social skills this way. Firstly, when for example practising behaviours in role-play as suggested in the *Kanjer training*, it is questionable if pupils exhibit behaviours they use in real-life situations. Pupils often do not feel at ease in role-play and believe that people's behaviour in this context is not representative of their real social behaviour (Kuhlemeier et at., 2012). Additional problems include facilitating role-play, which is a skill teachers need to learn, and that preparing and using role-play is time consuming (ibid).

Additionally, when acting out a situation that happened days ago, there is no longer any connection between the concrete experience itself and the emotions and feelings that came with it. Therefore, Pink (2016) argues that instead of 'what if' situations, meaningful situations in the present should be used because they contain motivation and passion and give pupils autonomy. Pink (2016) also warns that programmes designed to stimulate good behaviour can be counterproductive and might even lead to negative behaviour, such as deceit and short-sighted thinking because the motivation for behaving as desired by authorities, in this instance teachers, derives from extrinsic instead of intrinsic motivation. Therefore Dewey (1915) and Rogers (1979) argue that schools should not be places where children are taught artificial lessons that they might or might not be able to use in life, but places that are of importance for the children right now. Children *do* experience problems such as exclusion, bullying, conflict and so on. When problems like this occur, children need guidance in dealing with these problems immediately, not by teaching or telling them what they might do in hypothetical situations. In this vein, Doel and Kelly (2014:84) rightly argue that one of the drawbacks of curriculum-driven activities, such as social skills lessons planned on the time-table, is *"that it is driven by the curriculum, rather than by the needs of the group"*. Needs of a group or individuals in the group cannot be planned according to a schedule, they appear when something happens.

According to Arendt (2004), teaching can deny the fact that children are developing human beings. Adults must help children develop democratic values at their level, instead of teaching them how problems in the adult world must be dealt with, abstractly. Doel and Kelly (2014) additionally state that children themselves can create totally different solutions as their reasoning differs from adults', and Schmuck & Schmuck (2001) note the importance of peer-group life in developing democratic knowledge, skills and attitudes. Instead of viewing their role as dispensing knowledge, delivering the curriculum, and arranging instruction so that

pupils will learn, teachers should be more sensitive towards pupils' personal needs and the peer group's interaction (ibid).

This suggests that social skills should be learned in concrete situations rather than in discrete lessons, planned on the curriculum, even if evaluating the impact of these might be more complex. In other words, if "*the school should be used as a training ground for practising democratic principles"* (Bron et al., 2009:11; Visser, 2018:15), real 'here and now' problems in children's lives should be used, for example, starting with a child saying "I feel excluded" or "I feel bullied", as opposed to taught lessons about anonymous, fictive scenarios. Prinsloo (2012:136) also advocates confronting and discussing differences because it *"it forces introspection and change"*. Problems should be discussed in the group, firstly because they are, almost always, group, not individual problems; and secondly because through dialogue and discussion, ideas and feelings can be shared, possible solutions can be found and agreements can be established. Or as Prinsloo (ibid) states, discussion enhances awareness of own beliefs, prejudices, and values.

2.4   What motivates children to change their behaviour

As elaborated by Ryan & Deci (2000), people can be self-motivated or externally regulated. This means that people may be willing to change their behaviour because they feel the need for doing so themselves or because they will be rewarded or punished for their behaviour, by others. Ryan & Deci found social and environmental factors that can enhance or diminish feelings of competence and autonomy, such as: relatedness and security, rewards and punishments, positive or negative feedback, communication, challenges, and freedom for demeaning evaluations. They (ibid) argued that, by nature, young children are eager to learn, explore, master or assimilate because of their own desire to be able to do or know something, without being externally rewarded. This eagerness is referred to as 'intrinsic motivation' by Pink (2016) and Ryan & Deci (2000). With behaviour, children learn through experience, observation or because they are being taught by parents, siblings, peers, teachers or others. Therefore, Ryan & Deci (2000) argue that children are intrinsically motivated to learn how to act when their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness will be satisfied.

In school, however, it is assumed that children need to be encouraged and cannot learn without guidance (Pink, 2016). As in other social settings, schools have certain behaviours and values which are prescribed and most of these (for example: no running in the hallways, or: no

two pupils allowed at the same time in the toilet) make little sense to children so they are not spontaneously adopted. Desired behaviours can be 'internalized' (where children know what is expected of them and are able to show this expected behaviour on demand for reward or to avoid punishment), or 'integrated' (where children have learned behaviours that have become congruent with their own values and needs) (Ryan & Deci, 2000:73). Here, a possible explanation for the discrepancy between the outcomes of the pupil-monitoring system and what teachers experience in the classroom might be found: the tests highlight that the desired behaviours have been internalized, whereas the actual behaviour shows that these have not been integrated.

Ryan & Deci (2000) stress the importance of the need to feel a sense of belonging, and connectedness with others for motivation to change behaviours. Related to the topic of this present study, is the notion of becoming a group (as opposed to being a class). Now the key question is: what exactly is a group?

2.5   Would a primary school class in the Netherlands count as a group?

Based on the definition of group in the Dictionary of the Dutch Language: *"A group is a class or a year in primary education"* one could argue the primary class counts as a group. However, a group is more than just a number of pupils in a classroom when looking at other definitions of group. Schmuck & Schmuck (2001:29), for example, acknowledge the fact that in groups there is interaction and group members influence each other, to some degree: *"A group may be defined as a collection of interacting people with some reciprocal influence over one another"*. Van Engelen (2014:14) adds common interest and the need for cooperation in groups: *"We speak of a group when there is a common interest or a common assignment that requires cooperation"*.

In schools, on the other hand, children are divided into year groups, ability groups or instruction groups for reasons of efficiency (Braster, 2011). This educational view on groups suggests a pragmatic, organisational use of groups. However, according to Forsyth (2017:10):

> *Groups are the setting for an infinite variety of interpersonal actions. If we were to watch a group for even a few minutes, we would see people doing all sorts of things: talking over issues, getting into arguments, and making decisions. They would upset each other, give each other help and support, and take advantage of each other's weaknesses.*

Although this definition of a 'group' is not used in education, this is exactly what teachers experience in everyday practice.

Instead of a pragmatic educational view, the group children are in could also be viewed as an important resource for developing social skills that not only benefit the individual, but the entire group. A group-orientated class *"provides opportunities for students to use their intellectual capacities to their fullest"* (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001:41) and *"enhances their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving in order to achieve important life tasks"* (Malekoff, 2014:142).

In the classroom 'group', there are multiple situations providing good material, such as conflicts, arguments or disagreements, which are meaningful for individual pupils and/or the entire group at that moment. However, as stated by de Boer et al. (2002), instead of using these situations, many teachers complain about having to solve these conflicts at the expense of valuable learning time. One possible reason could be that teachers lack sufficient understanding of social pedagogy or focus too much on the individual as a result of *Adequate Education* (ibid). According to van Overveld (2016), the Dutch government has developed a policy that is characterized by an imbalance between social-emotional learning and academic learning. This imbalance is causing pressure, not only on the schools and teachers since they have to account for the academic outcomes of their education, but also on the pupils and their parents:

> *In this competitive situation, achievements of pupils are compared to each other and the pupil who scores best gets the most appreciation […] At present a lot of pupils experience their education as a competition. Pupils try to achieve and relate their results to the results of others. Parents, as well as the assessment structure of our educational system, increase this feeling of competition* (Förrer et al., 2004:12).

This pressure can result in behaviour that demands attention from the teacher in the classroom, such as withdrawing, oppositional behaviour, indifference, or cheating (Brons et al., 2003). Also, in a competitive situation, those who achieve well can become victims of jealousy but also those who do not achieve well can become victims of negative attention (van Engelen, 2014). It can even result in developing behaviour disorders or psychosocial problems (NJI, 2009).

Cohn and Terfurth (2007) state that one reason for experiencing difficult behaviour in the classroom is that in educational groups there is an imbalance in the triangle: I (individual), we (the group) and it (educational goals). In general, in educational groups there is a strong emphasis on the 'it'. At present, as a result of *Adequate Education,* there is also a strong emphasis on the 'I'. Since the assessment focuses on the educational outcomes of individual pupils, which are compared to those of peers on school, national and international levels (Biesta, 2009), the emphasis is on the line between the 'I' and the 'it'. In groups where this triangle is in balance, all conditions for optimal development of all pupils are present, therefore teachers should always strive for balance between the 'I', the 'it' and the 'we' in their classrooms (Cohn & Terfurth, 2007). At present, social skills programmes (or anti-bullying programmes) are used to restore the imbalance.

2.6   Possible causes of difficult behaviour

'Difficult behaviour' will no doubt challenge different teachers in different ways. Furthermore, behaviour is always contextual and determined by situation, relationship, judgement and time (van Overveld, 2016). Nevertheless, a growing number of Dutch teachers are reporting problems with behaviour (de Boer et al., 2002; van Overveld, 2016), and identify behavioural problems as one of their greatest challenges (van der Worp et al., 2014). Teachers, parents, management and society all have different explanations for this increase. Possible explanations teachers give for experiencing more problems with behaviour in the classroom are that pupils are less motivated towards school; children want to negotiate everything; children have unclear goals in life; and parents do not set boundaries (de Boer et al., 2002). Robinson (2011) blames schools for delivering a boring curriculum and creating passive consumers; while, according to Ten Dam & Volman (1999), it could be the variety of special needs in one group that teachers are confronted with, as a result of *Adequate Education*. However, Berding (2009) suggests that a possible explanation for the increase in teachers experiencing difficult behaviour is that in society, familiar traditions, such as: respecting adults or viewing the teacher as an authority figure, have declined and new traditions have not yet developed. According to the public, the main reason for schools experiencing problems with behaviour is that teachers and schools no longer enforce discipline (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001).

However, there seems to be little research-based evidence for these assumptions about schools. Doel (2005), by contrast, rightly argues that most behaviour can be an important piece of communication of where the group or the individual is, and attempting to control or remove the behaviour alone is a missed opportunity for the teacher to learn about the group. Doel argues that the key to understanding and working with difficult behaviours in groups is to unlock the *meaning* of the behaviour, instead of simply containing it. Having an understanding of how to work *with* difficult behaviour rather than being *against* it is likely to be more effective. Thus Doel (ibid) argues for teachers being aware of the wider context, anticipating difficulties; developing knowledge of the individual outside the group (its subcultures); sampling behaviour to understand it and recognise future cues; and establishing group ground-rules.

Doel (ibid) also emphasizes that it is important not to pathologize difficult behaviour since establishing the meaning of the behaviour for and with the group, is essential for the group's success. Furthermore, he stresses the importance for teachers of exploring their own feelings when dealing with difficult behaviour because when experiencing strong emotions, we tend to focus on our own needs, instead of others', thus blocking new ways of thought and action instead of opening them.

Nonetheless, since the introduction of *Adequate Education*, children's behaviours *are* pathologized, labelled and translated into threatening and compensating factors, in line with the policy: 'what does this child need?' Thus a new behaviour specialist has entered the educational field. This specialist is trained to diagnose, write and carry out *individual* behaviour plans for problems such as: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anger management, Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-nos) or fear of failure (ECNO, 2016). It appears that the focus is on at least controlling or perhaps even removing behaviours that are experienced as difficult.

2.6.1 Roles

In every group, different roles can be distinguished. Sometimes these roles are formally prescribed, for example, when people are paid to carry out a specific function within an organisation. In other situations, these roles are designated, or assumed by a group member. Structures begin to develop early in all groups, whether or not they are visible. Role differentiation is something that occurs in every group for several reasons, including the need

for a 'division of labour' to achieve the group's goals; 'to bring order, to outline expectations about behaviour'; and for individuals 'to achieve self-definition' within the group (Brown, 2000). As individuals, we all tend to perform different roles in different settings. Our sense of identity and self-worth are often intimately bound up in our group membership. Becoming a member of a new group often requires us to redefine who we are, which in return might have implications for our self-esteem, due to our role in this new group (ibid).

School social skills programmes, such as Kanjer (2014) or Grip op de groep (van Engelen, 2014), attend to how different roles in positive and negative groups in the classroom develop, the effects of these on the group and how peers and teachers should act on these roles (for example, the scapegoat, intriguer, dictator or the clown). Kanjer (2014) uses coloured caps to practise different reactions, and van Engelen (2014) suggests reward and punishment. Doel & Kelly (2014), on the other hand, warn that it is more important to understand the meaning of this behaviour for the group as a whole, rather than giving the behaviour a label. Roles in the group are reciprocal and interactive. It is more important to identify the behaviour of the person in the role of, for example, the scapegoat that elicits the actions of the other members of the group than to refer to the rules ('no one ridicules'; 'no one acts bossily') or through ignoring or punishing unwanted behaviour and rewarding wanted behaviour, as is advocated in the social skills programmes (Northen & Kurland, 2001).

2.6.2   Group development

Group development is currently attracting an increased level of interest in the educational literature. Both van Engelen (2014) and van Overveld (2016) adopt the group development theory, and universal group-forming stages, as set down by Tuckman (1965), in order to explain what teachers can expect of groups, and how they can steer or influence the processes occurring within a group. Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans (2017) also base their theory on the model of Tuckman (1965), but use the Dutch terminology of Brehm et al. (2000) and the description of the stages of Gielis et al. (2003), as listed below:

1) Forming: includes getting to know each other, showing our best side, searching for kindred spirits.
2) Storming: finding a place in the group. The central question in this phase is: who is the strongest and has the most power? Roles are divided.

3) Norming: establishing the group norms: how to deal with each other and others outside the group; hair, clothes, points of view.

4) Performing: achieving in a positive group or a negative group.

5) Termination: winding up the group process.

Doel & Kelly (2014:34) warn that, although such models have been helpful in understanding that conflict in groups is to be expected, they *"occasionally have been unhelpfully interpreted as a blue print or road map for the development of all groups"*. Given the many factors that can influence group development, such as: group structure, age, vulnerability or gender, not all groups develop in the way that the Tuckman model suggests (ibid). Perhaps that is why Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans (2017), for example, argue that Tuckman's model applies only to groups without supervision (for example, groups of children playing in the streets or groups of children that meet at campsites). If, on the other hand, as Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans (ibid) state, an adult is in charge of the group, this adult will have to bring *the 'norming'* stage forward and integrate the '*norming*' more or less in the *'forming'* stage. Van Engelen (2014) in this vein suggests that the 'norming' phase has to be spread out over the first three phases: 'forming', 'storming' and 'norming' and van Overveld (2016:57) advises teachers to *"pull the strings firmly and present the rules of the group already during the forming phase",* by turning the order of the storming and the norming phase around to make sure that the teacher can keep discipline and avoid one or more pupils identifying themselves as informal leaders with negative intentions.

The fact that, in the above educational literature about groups, the order of stages can be altered might suggest that these models are not the most suitable for understanding group behaviour in (primary) education. However, within group-work literature, changing the order of phases is never mentioned. Instead, different models have been developed for different groups, such as the Boston Model, which emerged from direct observations and analyses of numerous children's groups, conducted in social services agencies, or the Relational Model, developed for groups of women (Gitterman & Salmon, 2009). These models can help practitioners better understand that groups are social systems that change over time and that every group needs interventions that are attuned to the group's stage of development.

A possible explanation for wanting to change the order of stages, as suggested in the educational literature (for example van Overveld, 2016 or van Engelen, 2014), is that teachers learn that keeping discipline in a group is an important skill. Also the fact that, as van der Worp

et al. (2014:30) state: many teachers report having a limited repertoire of approaches, interventions and management strategies in dealing with behavioural problems. That might imply that teachers do not always know that power and control problems are often the result of not understanding the behaviour in the group. It is, for example, not uncommon for 11 – 13 year olds to be noisy, cheerful, active and uncensored in their expression (Malekoff, 2014). Therefore Malekoff (ibid) states that it is more helpful to find a balance between what is non-negotiable from the start by, for example, setting a few ground-rules and making a distinction between 'reasonable controlled wildness' and 'total destruction'.

Knowledge about how groups develop can increase teachers' understandings of how to enable children to learn in the context of a group. As Northen & Kurland (2001) or Doel & Kelly (2014) point out, all phases of group development demand different roles of the worker or teacher. In the beginning phase, for example, the group needs direction, structure, and limits that are aimed at fostering norms of respect. Once the group has started to form, problems or negative roles in the group should be addressed directly by involving the group in a problem-solving process. In the middle phase, problems or negative roles need a more direct confrontation (Northen & Kurland, 2001). All this might suggest that theoretical knowledge about groups, including roles and interventions that a group might need at the start or half-way through the year, might be more helpful for teacher than knowing how to write a special behaviour plan, as suggested by, for example, van Overveld (2016) or Pameijer & Beukering (2008).

However, having knowledge about groups and planning groups are highly neglected components in educational practice and teacher training (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001; Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans, 2017). Malekoff (2014:142) rightly argues that educating teachers about how children's groups develop and what they can achieve is *"not perceived as 'serious business', aimed at academic achievement".* The price teachers and their pupils have to pay for this neglect can be high (ibid) as becomes evident from what teachers state they experience in the group (de Boer at al., 2002; van Engelen, 2014; van Overveld, 2016); the increase in social-skills programmes; and the attention to bullying given by the government (Baar et al., 2007; NJI, 2013; van Overveld, 2016; Rijksoverheid, 2013). Malekoff (2014) states that failing groups might be blamed for their lack of motivation, resistance, sabotaging parents or uncooperative behaviour, but all too often, the cause is poor teacher planning. Teachers do plan their groups, but what they plan relates to how to achieve their academic goals. They write group plans for mathematics, spelling, reading comprehension and so on and they write individual plans for

pupils with special needs (Min. OCW., 2014). What most teachers do not plan is the group itself.

2.7   Planning a group

In the planning model, developed by Kurland (1978), seven interrelated components provide a practical framework for preparing a group (see Appendix 2 for detail):

- Context: the communities children live in.
- Pre-group contact: where do the children come from and what can be expected, in terms of support from the parents?
- Structure: what specific arrangements does this group need?
- Needs: what are the problems, issues and areas of concern that might prevent optimal development?
- Purpose: what is the nature of the interrelationship between individual and collective objectives and goals?
- Content: what means will be used to achieve the goals of the group and individuals in the group?
- Composition: what will be the size of the group? Will each child benefit from this group?

Although these components were developed for a social agency context, they might also have value in educational settings. The philosophy, culture, policies and attitude towards the pedagogical mission of the school can play a major role in the success or failure of groups. Mission and vision of a school are written down in the school plan (Min. OCW., 2014) adjusted to the location and situation of the school. The mission and vision statements of three primary schools in West Brabant, for example, are:

> *"As a school, we want to be relevant to our community. Our motto is: Together we make the world".*

> *"Our school is the beating heart of a small community, where children can develop into confident, happy people within a safe environment".*

> *"We want our population to be a reflection of the community. Our motto: A school for and with each other".*

Significantly, the school 'community' is never defined. When planning a group however, being aware of the characteristics of the community is one of the most important of the seven components of planning because children's context is highly important. Children are not just school-children. First of all, they are family children (Arendt, 2004; de Boer, 1980; van Manen, 2006) and bring the norms and values of their social context with them into the classroom (de

Boer, 1980, van Manen, 2006). This social context includes both the family situation and their neighbourhood, including for example, potential stress factors: divorce, single parenting, inadequate resources, family violence, poverty, alcohol or drug abuse (van Manen, 2006). The group or individual members are inevitably influenced by the location of their community and its characteristics, based on race, ethnicity, religion or shared values, norms and worldviews (Malekoff, 2014; Northen & Kurland, 2001).

Therefore, all the above influences should be taken into consideration in the teachers' planning. Certain attitudes will be influenced by, for example, cultural norms, and worldviews. Commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Kuhlemeier et al. (2012) studied the social and emotional development of pupils in the last year of primary education in 111 schools. They noted differences between pre-adolescent boys with a Turkish, North-African or Islamic background and others, in terms of their self-image, self-criticism, moral reasoning, social errors of reasoning, and problem-solving. Data suggested that these boys interpreted others' behaviours more often as intentional or negative, and therefore justified their excessive reactions to this, felt more angry, and overestimated their own social competencies. Azghari (2013) argued that the rationale for the different ways of raising children in indigenous Dutch families and those with an Islamic background can be found in the different cultures. For example, typically, in the former, parents try to raise their children based on content, meaning that taking responsibility, independence and speaking up for yourself are seen as important values, whereas the latter typically raise their children based on form: respecting adults equals obedience. Also in form-focussed cultures, the views of, and loyalty to, the group are important whereas content-focussed cultures view independence and individual opinions as more important (ibid). Therefore it is important for teachers to be aware of these differences and explore these in the group.

For example, in her autobiography, Bläser (2001) described the complicated balancing required between adapting to new cultural norms and values in school, and living in a different culture at home. Bläser's teachers were unaware of the tensions that living in two cultures brought to her. They discussed language problems and school results with her parents, but not cultural differences and potential problems such as the different gender roles and how this may affect feelings of 'honour' if boys are encouraged to work together with girls on an assignment. Ignoring these differences is not only depriving these children of learning different perspectives, but also of how to deal with these differences.

Dutch schools do take the social context into consideration when planning their education, but this is usually from a different perspective: equal opportunities for all (Min. OCW, 2016). Since the 1970's, the government's' policy of educational equality offers better educational opportunities for pupils who are disadvantaged as a result of their socio-economic, cultural context, or language abilities (Jepma & Beekhoven, 2013). For example, the parental level of education and language competence in Dutch counts for the 'weighting' of pupils, resulting in differential financial resources being allocated to schools. The cause of these disadvantages primarily is found in the home situation of the children (ibid). Significantly, disadvantage in this context means children are at risk of falling behind in the core subjects of primary education: the Dutch language and mathematics. Other possible consequences of the social situation of pupils, such as cultural beliefs and values, or ways of raising children, are not included. Considering the fact that one of the social obligations of education is 'dealing with different cultures' (Onderwijsraad, 2008), this is a significant omission.

2.8   Needs

The central question in *Adequate Education* is: what does this child require? In terms of pupils' normative needs, the educational programme takes their developmental level into consideration during planning. Specific (educational) needs have become of more interest in recent years. Schools have *special needs* coordinators, plans, teams and external advisors (de Winter, 2010). However, when looking at the needs from the perspective of the social obligation of education, things look rather different. The consequences of ignoring the contextual needs of a child's life have been elaborated above, but there are other issues.

Some children have had limited opportunities for developing social skills or trying out new experiences prior to their first day in school. These skills are not limited to specific behaviours, but include the need to master different ways of communication, relationships or problem-solving skills (Northen & Kurland, 2001). For example, a young child might never have been separated from its parents or has only socialised with adults, and has to learn now how to relate to a teacher or peers. For constructing knowledge and understanding, social interaction with peers as well as adults is essential, but this has to be learned somewhere. As Schmuck and Schmuck (2001:25) rightly argue, *"students cannot learn simply to avoid social problems; they must learn to handle them constructively and creatively if we are to live and work well together, safely and effectively".* Therefore, for teachers, it is important to gain knowledge of pupils' contextual needs. In reality, however, the *pupils'* contextual needs are ignored, in

considering the social obligation of education, whereas the needs of society, the government and the school are prioritised, as elaborated in paragraph 2.2. and defined in the core objectives (SLO, 2006).

The Dutch educational field is starting to acknowledge that knowledge about groups and group dynamics might help teachers in dealing with behavioural challenges. Van Overveld (2016) developed a model for a group plan for behaviour in line with *Adequate Education* centred around: what does this child or this group need to reach the set targets? The goals that should be achieved, however appear to be goals the teachers, not pupils', particularly desire. As examples of goals which teachers can write in the group plan, van Overveld (2016:253)[6] suggests: *"I want to achieve that I will be able to alert Jos on his aggressive behaviour in an emotionally-neutral way".* Also the goals for the group are set from the teachers' perspective: group (level 1), pupils at risk (level 2) and high-risk pupils (level 3). Again, examples given are: *"At the end of this period the pupils will be able to name the rules and expectations for behaviour in class and in the hallways"* (ibid, 121), or *"At the end of the self-control-training the number of conflicts between this pupil and the teacher will have decreased by 50%"* (ibid: 253).

However, van Overveld's behaviourist model (2016) is simplistic: expectations are made clear to the pupil(s) and the expected behaviour is taught, trained, practised and evaluated, through rewards and sanctions. This fails to recognise that, to achieve deep learning of social skills, pupils need to be more actively engaged in generating and reflecting on appropriate social behaviour in school. The possible consequences of neglecting the planning components for the social obligation of education are elaborated on in Appendix B.

2.9   Summary

In recent years, Dutch teachers increasingly report problems with behaviour in the classroom. Several possible explanations for difficult behaviour in the classroom have been discussed as well as several possible actions. Although social pedagogy originated in education (Smith, 2009), it is the field of groupwork that seems to have refined the understanding of what goes on in groups and how people learn most when interacting with others. 'Difficult' behaviour, as explained by Doel (2005) and Malekoff (2014) is to be expected in every group as part of the group forming process, and should be used to advance learning. This, however, requires knowledge about groups and group dynamics, but as established by Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans

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[6] The translation from Dutch into English is mine and therefore is not a direct quote in the usual sense.

(2017) and Schmuck & Schmuck (2001), in educational practice and teacher training, this knowledge is underestimated. Instead, social skills methods and programmes have entered the educational field to help teachers deal with these problems and a new 'behaviour' specialist has entered the educational scene. These actions assume a behaviouristic view on learning and teaching, ignoring or under-estimating theories about the role of the group on behaviour, motivation for changing behaviour and social pedagogy. This certainly leads to a level of abstract knowledge about social behaviour, since Dutch pupils in general achieve well in the pupil-monitoring systems and research commissioned by the government (2012). However, pupils cannot apply this 'knowledge' to their own behaviour in groups, on an integrated level, as evident in inspectorate reports (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2014) and what teachers experience in the classroom (Miedema, 2002; van Overveld, 2016; van der Worp et al., 2014).

Although knowledge of group social interaction is available in the educational field, governmental need for measurement and control (Biesta, 2009) makes teachers believe that appropriate behaviour can be learned and unlearned through academic teaching alone. This leaves a gap for research exploring the knowledge developed in social groupwork about social learning, the importance of planning a group, experiential learning, the role of the group on behaviour and its practical use in the classroom. This research also aims to provide a possible explanation for the perceived discrepancy between the positive outcomes of the pupil-monitoring system and the contradictory, negative pupil behaviours experienced in the classroom.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

The focus of this study was to investigate whether an Action Research (AR) collaborative project, involving myself in the role of a groupwork counsellor, could support teachers and their students in enhancing students' social skills in the classroom and thereby address any problematic behaviour with their groups. The AR began by introducing teachers to the idea of approaching the class as a group, using a groupwork framework. This chapter details and discusses my methodological decisions, the rationale for, and implementation of the AR model and, the data-collection methods used. Researcher positionality, ethical issues and methods of data-analysis will also be discussed.

3.1   Methodological Approach

In the scientific world, researchers have diverse conceptual worldviews in order to explain the nature of problems and the way in which these problems should be researched. Kuhn (1962) provided us with the term 'paradigm', defined by Guba and Lincoln as:

> *the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method, but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways* (1994:105).

In educational research, there are several paradigms, for example, positivist and interpretive, that govern inquiries about policies and practices and all phenomena can be studied and interpreted in different ways, based on different ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The ontological assumption – the nature of reality or the way things are seen as real that exist outside the researcher (ibid) - of interpretive research is that 'truth' is how people experience and relate to it (Kara, 2018). That is, interpretivists believe that there are multiple interpretations of a given phenomenon under investigation, depending of the person viewing it. Alternatively, the positivist believes that reality can be studied objectively, generating a single truth, expressed in laws or law-like generalizations (Cohen et al., 2017). Interpretivists argue that social life is a product of everyday understandings and that social sciences should aim at interpretation rather than scientific explanation (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) use the metaphor of 'miner' versus 'traveller' to distinguish between the positivist and interpretive researcher: the

positivist 'miner' is digging for the single, universal truth, whereas the interpretive 'traveller' and its participants are on a journey, constructing knowledge in interaction.

According to Taylor & Medina (2013), applied to education, interpretive inquiry can engage teachers as reflective practitioners in developing enhanced understanding of the life-worlds of their pupils by constantly asking questions such as: Who are these children sitting in front of me? Who is the self that teaches? In this research, I was drawn to an interpretive position as I wanted to explore the complexity of situated practice, deepening my understanding of issues in particular contexts in cooperation with the participants.

However, since, like Biesta (2009) I wonder if the pupil-monitoring system measures what we need to know about the behaviours teachers experience as difficult, or if these measurements serve other interests (e.g. to make national and international comparisons), a critical theory paradigm also seemed appropriate. The ontological assumption of critical theory is that values and beliefs are shaped by politics and social, cultural, ethnic or economic interests. These values and beliefs are socially constructed, valuing hegemonic views of reality over others (Cohen et al., 2017), in order to preserve the existing political and educational system.

In critical theory, the values of the researcher influence the inquiry as s/he is keen to transform 'reality', rather than simply investigating it, as in interpretivist research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Cohen et al., 2017). In qualitative research, especially that carried out by practitioners (typically 'insiders'), Dunne et al. (2005) argue that the researcher needs to be aware of their position in the study and to constantly and reflexively analyse this. This is because interpretive researchers accept that there are multiple interpretations of a given phenomenon being investigated, so they must be transparent about their own role to themselves and to the readers of their research, strengthening its 'trustworthiness', rather than assuming, as in more traditional, positivist research, that they will not impact on the outcomes.

> *Reflexivity works to allow us to make informal interpretations of what we experience and observe and feel* (Dunn et al., 2005:22).

According to Cresswell (2014:186), the qualitative researcher should:

> *try to develop a complex picture of the issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching a larger picture that emerges.*

Therefore, I used a research diary to engage in reflexivity throughout the research. Significant events or critical incidents can offer a deeper insight into the nature of that what is being

studied, based on the knowledge and personal experience of the researcher and I used these to further reflect on my research position and the data collected.

Critical theorists argue that interpretivists attempt to understand existing situations, rather than questioning or trying to reform them (Cohen et al., 2017). Wanting to understand what is going on, while questioning at the same time if current educational practices serve the *best* interests of children, teachers and indeed, society, made me question why interpretive research cannot also be critical. Where do my values and what I believe feature? These questions were echoed in Burgess et al. (2009), who stated that developing a theoretical framework is not only about the methods to be used or the subject matter of the project, but also about the researcher as an individual. Dunne et al. (2005) argue that what we think, as individuals, is influenced by cognitive, educational, sociological and other perspectives, and in turn, this also influences how we operate as researchers and consequently our accounts of social reality, especially in professional settings. Since this study was conducted in my own professional context, and I have spent thirty years reflecting on education system as a practitioner, and deepening my understanding through a range of 'groupwork' courses and professional development, my thinking has been influenced by all the above perspectives. Therefore, I was inspired by Taylor & Medina's argument (2013) that a critical dimension can be added to the interpretive paradigm, empowering colleagues and pupils to become imaginative and critical thinkers, capable of addressing the question: 'Whose interests are not being (and should be) served by particular social policies and practices?' Applied to educational AR, a key focus for researchers drawing on critical theory, is to raise teachers' awareness of established values and beliefs that underpin their seemingly 'natural' teacher-centred classroom roles, leading to richer understanding of educational practice and how to change it (Kemmis et al., 2013).

One way of involving and empowering teachers and pupils in educational research is Action Research, which is why I chose this design, enabling me to take a critical stand in this interpretive inquiry, thereby combing both perspectives. Before I elaborate on my collaborative AR design and methods, I will explore my position in this research.

3.2   Positionality

My role in the research was complex. Participating schools invited me, as a groupwork counsellor, to help with explanations and solutions for the problems they were experiencing at the time. I was not initially invited therefore, as a researcher, but as an 'expert on the topic'. In

this respect, I was a '*practitioner-researcher'*, conducting research on groups I facilitated, relevant to my professional employment (Robson & McCartan, 2016). However, my role could also be viewed as being external to the setting in which this study was conducted. Therefore, I was both an insider with pre-existing knowledge and experience of the demands made on teachers and schools, and the problems identified (ibid), while at the same time I could be viewed as an outsider, since this study was carried out in schools other than my own. In reality, I offered myself as a partner in a collaborative relationship with the teachers that invited me in to help find solutions to a number of issues (Banegas, 2012).

Banegas (2012), argues that collaborative approaches in classroom research may cause tensions between the teacher and the 'external' researcher as their institutional relationship and their dynamic identities might be challenged. In this study, I worked in partnership with teachers, but I was also regarded as a specialist in group dynamics, and as a researcher pursuing a doctorate so teachers sometimes deferred to my knowledge, undermining the designed 'equality' of our relationship. Equally, I was intensely aware that I stood to gain from gathering data for my doctorate and did not want teachers to feel pressurised in any way to collaborate on this AR project, but wanted this to be a joint venture. As Dunne et al. (2005) point out, I experienced that researcher identity is more than just a methodological choice.

The differing interests and potential power relationship between myself and the other participants occasionally resulted in tensions and ethical dilemmas (Drake, 2010), for example, when teachers did not keep a log, as agreed at our first meetings in the methodology design stage in School A. This was data I wanted, to ensure that our research was robust and that teachers fully engaged with the crucial, critically reflective stage of the research. However, it was perceived by some teachers as an additional administrative task that could be avoided by reflecting orally. Being a teacher myself, aware of all the non-teaching responsibilities, I did not want to exert pressure on the teachers to complete their logs, once they had made it clear that they did not want to do these. Because I wanted this to be a collaborative AR, this inevitably raised such ethical issues. By teachers making me responsible for adding their reflections to the written reports, I had the added challenge of giving an 'accurate' account of their words, which is complex in an interpretive study. This could have impacted the outcomes of this research in the data-collection or analysis stages, since I was perceived by the teachers as 'an expert on groups'. I tried to solve this problem by sending teachers my written reports and giving them the opportunity to change my interpretation of their words if needed, as recommend by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). Also I invested in being viewed as a colleague and

equal, by sharing my own experiences as a teacher and my comments on the administrative workload.

Being viewed as an equal and colleague, rather than a wholly outside researcher meant that teachers openly discussed thoughts and feelings in the staff room. I sought to reduce any inherent tensions, as recommended by Dunne et al. (2005), by developing rapport and creating trust. For example, I deliberately placed myself in the more vulnerable position of taking over the group and publicly modelling groupwork skills, while the teachers filmed, observed and, reflected on events, including my role, about which they could be critical, and gave feedback, instead of adopting a transmissive role of 'lecturing' the teachers, as an expert.

3.3   Action Research

AR has two essential aims: firstly to improve practice, the understanding of practice, and the situation in which the practice takes place; and secondly to involve all participants (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Another important feature of AR is that it can be carried out by researchers as well as practitioners, individual teachers, a group of teachers or teachers and researchers working cooperatively (Cohen et al., 2017). Dewey (1910) and Lewin (1946) are seen as two of the most influential founding fathers of AR. In his critique on the existing educational system in the early 1900's, Dewey encouraged teachers to reflect on their practices and advocated that the problems and motives of pupils, as experienced by themselves, should be the starting-point for all educational inquiry (Dewey, 1915). Based on Dewey's ideas about reflective thinking, Lewin in the 1940's, introduced the term 'Action Research' since he believed that every group, involved in a situation that needed to be changed, should also be involved in the planning, execution and evaluation of the research. Thereby he gave AR a strong democratic character, positioning practitioners as capable of generating fresh knowledge and understanding, as well as improving practice (Ponte, 2002; Smith, 2007).

Stenhouse (1975) significantly developed AR. Unlike Lewin, who perceived AR as a scientific method for solving problems, Stenhouse perceived AR as a concept for the professional development of teachers, laying the foundation for the 'teacher as researcher' approach. In this study, I have drawn heavily on Stenhouse's ideas as well as on Ponte's (2002). Both believe that a teacher as a professional should not simply be an implementer of a centrally determined curriculum, but a designer of learning environments and an improver of education and therefore should research their own practice. In Stenhouse's (1975) conception of AR, the practice of the teacher is still monitored by an external observer or researcher, whereas in

Ponte's (2002) view, teachers themselves determine the research agenda and use the research as a professionalization strategy; they shape their practice based on self-deployed insights and apply these insights in their AR.

AR involves practitioners in the research process, theorizing their own practice and reflecting critically on the consequences of this. AR is a social action, which requires understanding the perspectives of others affected by the action and therefore it is almost exclusively collaborative (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). My chosen methodology drew on the insights from 'practical action research' (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), which develops the practical reasoning of the practitioners. The situation that needs changing is open to development through self-reflection, rather than teachers being 'told' the solution to their problem by an external researcher.

Although being an outside facilitator, I formed cooperative relationships with the teachers of the classes involved, to help them plan and implement a strategic action for change; monitor and evaluate the change and its effects by collecting data; and help them reflect on any value of the achieved changes. My reasons for taking this approach derived from the fact that I was invited to work in the schools with groups that were not my own, either by the teacher or the head teacher because of my 'expertise with groups', but I needed to work with teacher colleagues to adapt our intervention to their particular context and needs. Secondly, being a teacher myself, I was familiar with the frustration of having external 'experts' talking about good practice without demonstrating how to achieve this so I positioned myself on the boundary, as an insider/outsider. One advantage of being an 'outsider' was that I could be true to the philosophy of the entire research, focusing on group behaviour and interpretation throughout, since the groups were not my own, therefore I did not have all the information about pupils' *individual* needs.

Since Lewin (cited in Smith, 2007) introduced the term 'Action Research' and described the process as a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action, his initial model has been further developed into many different forms. What all these models have in common is that they share a cyclic approach to action, reflection, collecting and evaluating data and the formulation and re-formulation of a plan of action (see Figure 1 below).
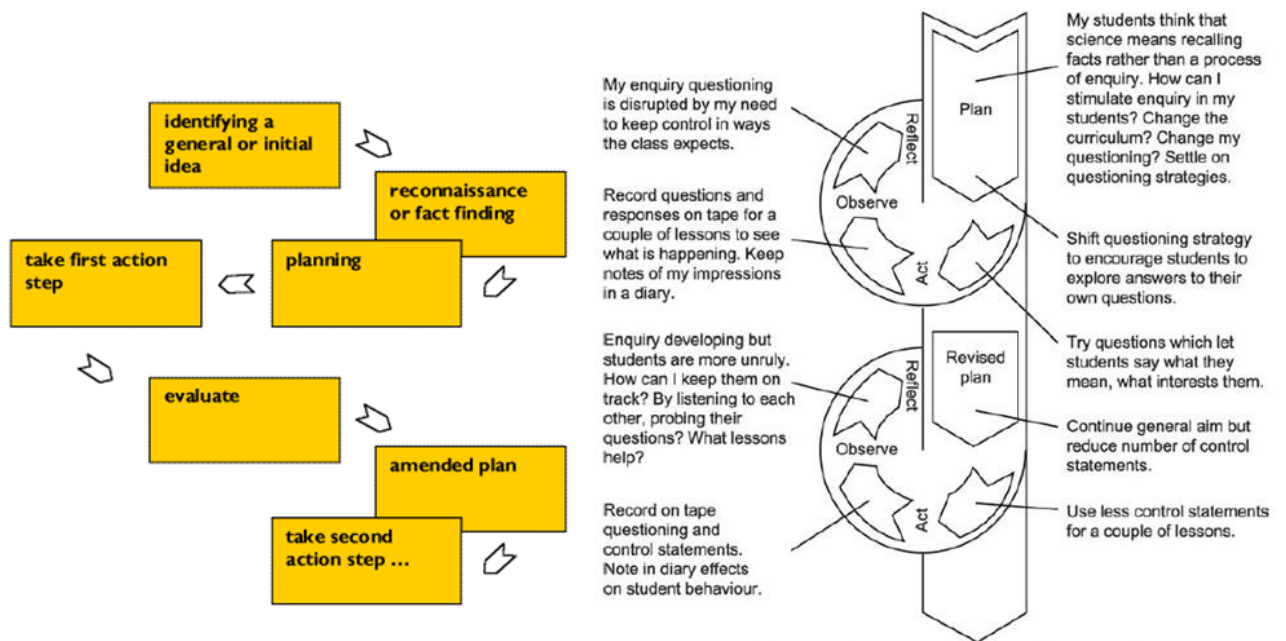
The Action Research Cycle Lewin (in Smith, 2007:3)

The 'Action Research Spiral' (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988:14)
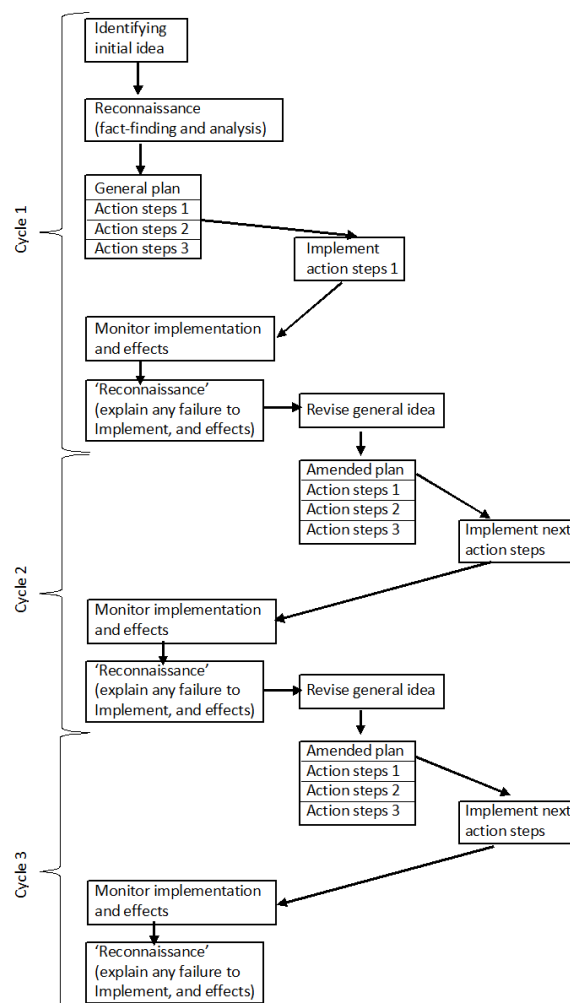
Elliott's Action Research Model (Elliott, 1991:71)

Figure 1: Action Research Models

Carr & Kemmis (1986:162) explain Lewin's initial model, visualized in Smith (2007). The researcher starts with 'an initial or general idea', showing that the researcher does not enter the research totally blank, but with some sensitizing concepts about the situation that needs understanding or improving that guide the direction of the first phase of the research. However, frequently more fact-finding or 'reconnaissance' about the situation is required before an overall plan and decisions about the first step of action can be made. Yet, the Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) more flexible model visualizes how knowledge retrieved in the first cycle, feeds into the second and so on. It shows how every cycle adds to exploring the issue under investigation in greater depth, showing the potential of the AR spirals to change significantly in focus or emphasis as the research progresses. This model seemed most appropriate for this study since it allowed us to conceptualise not only how what was learned in every cycle was fed into the next cycle in a given school, but also how knowledge gained in School A was used in School B and so on. Elliott's model (1991), on the other hand, better represents how every action leads to new facts being found, demanding a new reconnaissance stage, in order to amend plans or to make new ones. As Dunne et al. (2005) state, research is a social activity, demanding 'reflexivity' by the researcher: process of making informed interpretations of what we observe, experience and feel, while 'referring' to our prior understandings of what we are observing, and being constantly aware of our position within the research. Therefore aspects of Elliott's model (Figure 1 above), were also attractive to represent the process of AR in this study.

Although these models appealed to me for the above reasons, they seemed to be missing what I believed should be the first question in every AR since this is what inspired me to start this research: What is the 'habit' or aspect of practice that doesn't work? According to Dewey (1910), like all individuals, teachers are creatures of habit and routines. When in a certain situation such a habit or routine no longer 'works', a problem or uncertainty arises. Dewey believed that all reflective thinking begins with a problem. Additionally, in the above AR models, the concept of 'learning by doing' or 'experiential learning', fundamental to Dewey's (1915) theories of learning, as opposed to the cognitive process of evaluating and reflection in the AR models, seemed to be missing. Although at first sight the AR cycle and Dewey's Experiential Learning (EL) cycle show many similarities, since in both cycles the learners/practitioners go through a sequence of actions, they are not the same. AR by definition is deliberate and planned and thus involves strategic action (McMahon, 2006),

whereas EL is learning through reflecting on a concrete experience. Such concrete experience can be deliberate and planned, as in an alternative teaching strategy, but it can also be spontaneous, for example, when a problem or conflict arises (Garvin et al., 2017). In this present study, concrete experiences were deliberately planned in the form of teacher and student activities, but they were also spontaneous, when something occurred that was more meaningful at that moment than what was planned. For these reasons, I developed a new model of AR for this project, drawing on the models described above, which conceptualises the different elements of the AR process used. This model (Figure 2 below) includes: the AR steps/cycles; the gaining of depth; the importance of reconnaissance after every action; and the EL within each AR cycle.
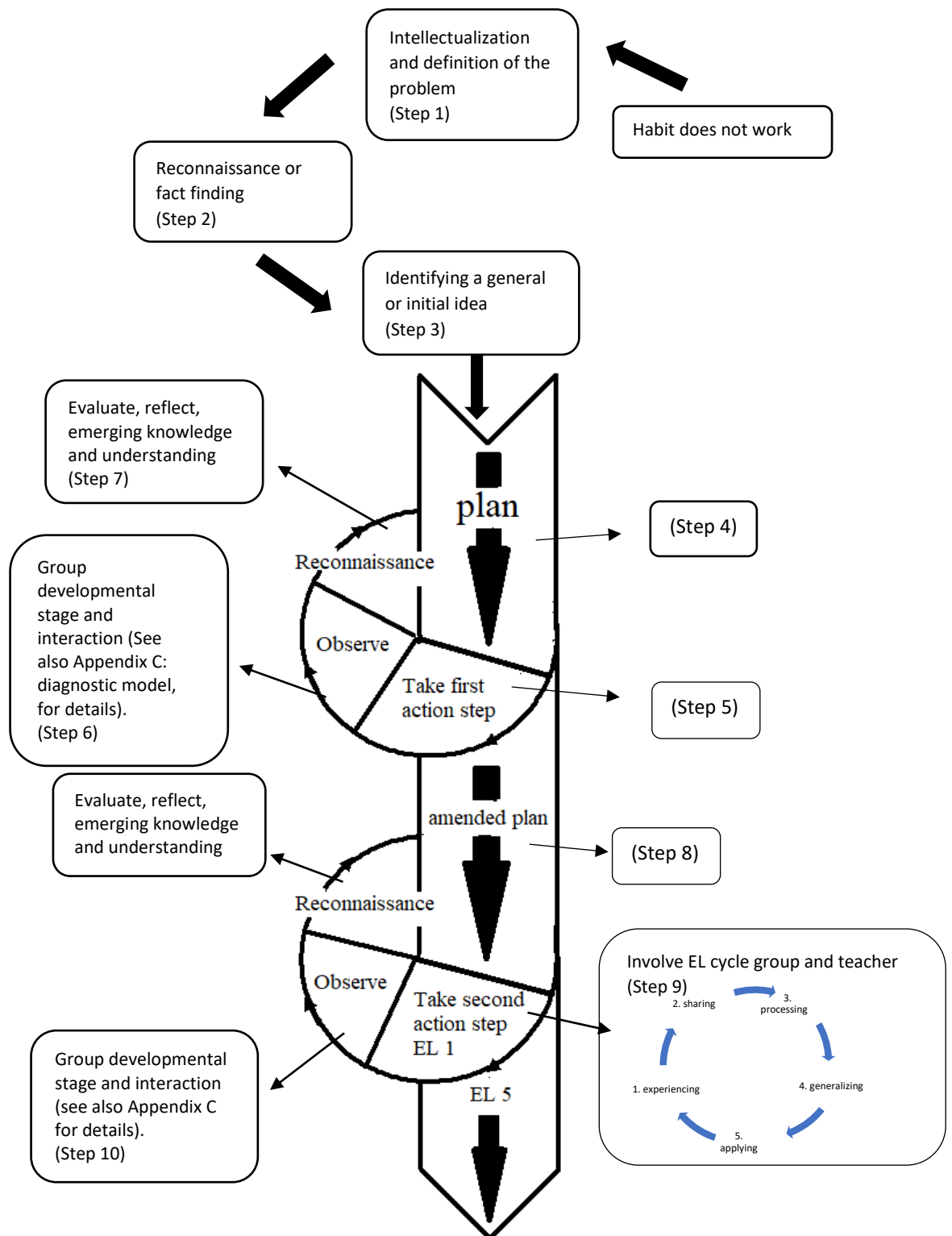
Combined AR model deriving from Dewey, Lewin, Kemmis & Mc Taggart and Elliott

Figure 2: Implementation of the different AR models

In the 'observe' stage of the AR, I introduced the 'diagnostic model' (Appendix C) to the teachers, raising teachers' awareness of how certain behaviours are 'normal' in a group developmental process as opposed to viewing these behaviours as 'factors within the child' or 'behaviours that made teaching more complicated or almost impossible', from a teacher perspective, as was customary for the teachers prior to the interventions. Next I modelled Experiential Learning as an alternative for 'teaching', by leading activities and group discussions.

As mentioned above, Dewey (1910) believed that reflection originates in the problem. Such a problem might occur when a routine or habit no longer seems to work. This study began because of exactly that reason: the habit or routine of teachers trying to 'keep children in line', involved and motivated in their learning did not seem to work in any of the four schools participating in the research. Therefore, during the reconnaissance period, when I was interviewing head teachers and teachers to understand their perspectives on the 'problem' they wanted support with addressing, I also read intensively. For example, I studied inspectorate reports of the four schools and more widely, to see if the problem head teachers were articulating, was more general. I also read a range of groupwork literature about 'difficult' groups in the classroom. In the Dutch literature and inspectorate reports, I not only found that indeed there was an increase in teachers reporting problems with pupils' negative behaviour, but also possible explanations for this development, as elaborated in chapters one and two. At this point my initial idea developed, which I shared with teacher collaborators: a class is also a group. The process of how this AR study developed for my first School (A), is shown in the table below:

Step	AR cycle	Actions
Step 1	**Understanding of the issue:** What is the problem? The normal routine no longer seems to work: the head teacher approaches me.	Initial informal interview (field notes made) with the head teacher to establish the problem.
Step 2	**Intellectualization** and clarification of the problem, based on interview and other school data collected in this stage.	All measures taken by the school have been taken *for* the pupils, not *with.* Questions, based on above interview: What is: the group developmental level? Group interaction level? Role of teacher? Two further informal interviews with one teacher and head teacher conducted to address these issues, addressing these aspects:

	Reconnaissance: gathering data to identify the problem more precisely; fact-finding and reflecting.	What has the school / teacher done so far? Why? (rationale) What results? Why did this approach not work? Reaction of parents? What goals are desired? Why?
Step 3	**Initial idea** for interventions: What if we assume that the class is a group and approach teaching from this perspective, not seeing pupils as a class of individual learners?	A class is also a group. Based on groupwork literature: - What group could it be? - What interventions are needed?
Step 4	**Plan:** How to intervene with the pupils by redefining them as a group? How to support teachers' understanding and development? How will I try to involve teachers or model to them what they could do to support these kinds of processes when I leave?	Develop a plan in steps: This is where we are now; this is what you want to achieve; this is how it could be done.
Step 5	**First Action**	Series of whole-class, group interactive activities to take all (teacher and group) out of their comfort zone, in order to collect data (video recordings of the intervention and field-notes) about group developmental stage and interaction (See Figure 3 below and Figure 6 in chapter 4 for details).
Step 6	**Observe:** group developmental stage: interaction between individual pupils; interaction teacher – group.	Direct observations (making field-notes); video recordings for later observations in 'micro-analysis' (process is explained below).
Step 7	**Reflect, evaluate, find new facts, add to data collection:** Reflect and re-plan, amending the intervention to take on this new understanding.	Evaluation with the group and the teacher immediately after the activities (sharing and processing EL cycle); reflect with the help of video recordings; find new facts (including literature). Collect the following data to support this process: Direct observations * Pupil statements Interaction First thoughts and feelings of teachers (post-observation field-notes) Micro-analysis of video recordings of interventions and group discussion

		Feedback discussion with teacher (field-notes) Email exchange (additional data)
	Reconnaissance: New facts found Plan cycle 2	Relationship space and behaviour (literature) Assumptions about the role of the teacher Pressure to deliver the curriculum (based on above teacher interview) Need for autonomy (pupils articulate this in videoed groupwork activities)
Step 8	**Amended plan:**	What does the group want? What does the group need? (more autonomy) What does the teacher need? (more knowledge about groups)
Step 9	**Second Action / cycle** New EL cycle of the teacher and the group **	Activities planned and conducted for the group (all pupils) to learn about their assumptions, about facts and feelings and definitions; Activities for the teacher to learn about their assumptions, e.g. about teaching versus learning. (See Appendix H for details of interventions).
Step 10	**Observe:**	

Table 1: first AR cycle School A

*My first impression was that the classroom was very small for so many pre-adolescent pupils. I assumed that this might influence the behaviour of the pupils, but had no hard evidence for this assumption. I had to find literature about the impact of space on human behaviour.

** In the first meeting, the group made different statements about bullying or (feeling) being bullied that needed working on: Fact or feeling? Who is responsible? The group needed an activity to learn about roles and patterns in a group; about assumptions; about expressing thoughts and feelings.

From the video analyses, the teacher became aware of how her actions and the group's reactions interacted. Her interpretation of being a good teacher was that she always had to be in control. She needed an activity to experience that involving the pupils does not mean you are no longer in charge.

Figure 3 (below) shows how data gathered in School A fed into School B; from B to C; and from C to D. (Theme: relationship parents – school).

3. Reconnaissance: Raising and educating derive from the same source.

2. Intellectualization: the relationship between parents and school has turned into a 'customer – deliverer' relationship. 'Customer satisfactory' is a high goal head teachers strive for.

4. General idea: Parents and teachers need to talk about what concerns them.

1. Problem: Relationship parents – school: parents 'report' a problem, school is expected to solve it.

7. When parents and school work together, it benefits the children.

5. Involve parents. Ask for their concerns. Partner.

School A

Reconnaissance

Observe

First Action Step

6. Parents and teachers have similar aspirations for their children.

Knowledge fed into School B: When parents and school communicate as partners, it benefits the children.

10. A class is more than a collection of individuals. Education has the obligation to prepare all children for society.

School B

Reconnaissance

Observe

Next Action Step

8. Involve parents: ask for their aspirations.

9. The focus is on the individual. Parents 'demand' actions that benefit their child. Little trust in the professional judgement of teachers.

Knowledge fed into School C: The school also has a social obligation: a class is a small society.

13. All parents, despite their cultural differences, appear to have similar desires for their children. They differ in defining 'what is best' for their child.

School C

Reconnaissance

Observe

Next Action Step

11. Involve parents: discuss what 'all parents want for their child' and how to achieve this goal together.

12. Parents 'know' what other parents or the school do 'wrong' in raising their children.

School D

Reconnaissance

Observe

Next Action Step

Knowledge fed into School D: When parents are given the opportunity to talk with other parents and school about their aspirations, concerns and worries, there is more mutual trust and cooperation.

16. Parents can have different reasons for not coming to the school. Some of these reasons are related to cultural differences.

14. Involve parents: discuss problems of living 'between cultures'.

15. Teachers complain that parents do not come to the school, but feel reluctant to go to the parents.

Knowledge gained in School D: Different cultures have different concepts about raising children, the role of schools and teachers, and the relationship between school and parents. When parents do not come to school, school should go to the parents.

Figure 3: combined AR-cycle School A-D

3.3.1 Validity and trustworthiness

In this qualitative study, validity was addressed primarily through triangulation of methods and of participants. Cohen et al. (2017) define triangulation as *"the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour".* As explained by Robson & McCartan (2016), triangulation *"involves the use of multiple sources to enhance the rigour of the research".* In this study I used a range of methods, for example, video-analysis, observation, interviews, research diary, field-notes and emails. This enabled me to investigate the issue using different instruments, thereby giving me a more layered picture of the entire context. I also used triangulation of perspectives, as I sought the views of all participants in the study, through interviews and group discussions, for example teacher, students, head teachers and parents. As suggested by Robson & McCartan (2016), I also used 'member checking' of data, in order to achieve more trustworthy findings, given the interpretive nature of transcriptions and of analysis. In the current study, transcripts, accounts and interpretations were presented to the participants on a weekly basis, allowing participants to give feedback, enhance accuracy and offer alternative interpretations. By doing so, I also demonstrated to the participants that I valued their perceptions and contributions (ibid).

Validity establishes the quality of the direct link between the AR interventions and any improvement of, in this case, the social behaviour of the pupils (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The aim of this study was to explore how engaging with a class as a group, can affect the challenges that teachers in their classrooms experience. The study also asked what skills, knowledge, habits and attitudes teachers need to acquire in order to be able to address their class as a group. In all four schools the interventions were aimed at addressing the class as a group and involving the pupils in the problem-solving process. In terms of internal validity, the outcomes of this study suggest that a direct link exists between the interventions and the achieved goals, since all participants agreed that the interventions would stop as soon as the goals set by the teacher and the group had been achieved. External validity was demonstrated by the fact that the results of the interventions were similar (not the same since the initial problems, the groups, or the circumstances were not the same) in all four schools.

A necessary condition for validity in qualitative research is trustworthiness (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Therefore, I took care in the design and piloting of all research methods (See Section 3.5 below), using the same instruments in all cycles of the AR across the four schools. I also ensured that the voices of all stakeholders were represented in the research (Drake, 2011). Therefore, in addition to asking teachers to reflect on practice after videoed observations, I

also elicited the views of children in weekly evaluations and explored ideas with head teachers in interviews.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

In educational research, the researcher is confronted with ethical concerns at every stage (Cohen et al., 2017). Ethical behaviour is important because a researcher has responsibilities towards participants and the research community. A major ethical dilemma is to find the balance between the demands of being a researcher, searching for truth(s) and the rights and values of their subjects that might be threatened by the research (ibid). Since it is not possible to ensure that all possible issues will be covered, Cohen et al. (2017) argue that a prime ingredient of ethical thinking is reason. In this research I was dealing with different parties with diverse interests: pupils, teachers, head teachers and parents. Therefore, the way in which I account for my ethical behaviour could be described as utilitarian (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009).

All participating schools volunteered because one or more parties involved experienced a problem related to the topic that they had been unable to solve themselves and therefore sought to increase their understanding of this. That, however, did not discharge me from obtaining informed consent of all participants. As Boddy (2014) points out, there is a lack of clarity and consistency in different ethical guidelines about who can or should give consent when under-aged children participate in research. For me, it was essential also to obtain consent of the children participating in this study. In the next sections I will elaborate how I informed all involved and how I handled anticipated ethical issues.

3.4.1 Participants

University:
I gained ethical approval from Sussex University and this research was carried out, according to the ethical guidelines developed both by Sussex University and for research on practice, by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and, my professional guidelines as a licensed Video Interaction Counsellor.

Head teachers / teachers / schools:
In order to behave ethically, I had one or more meetings with the teacher experiencing the initial problems that triggered this research and the head teacher. In these, I explored their

wishes and expectations and not only explained the planned interventions, but my research methods and how I wished to use the data, to ensure that participants could give 'informed consent' (Cohen et al., 2017). I explained that I would anonymise the schools, names of pupils and teachers in the research report, and that participants had the right to withdraw at any time. I also promised to send participants my written observations, reflections and video-analyses after each session for their reflections, and would share the outcomes of my research. All head teachers gave their verbal consent which was noted. The only time I asked for additional consent for using the data for my research from the head teacher, was when School D had withdrawn from the interventions.

As Drake (2011) points out, research undertaken by practitioners achieving a doctorate requires reflexive consideration towards the practitioner-researcher's position. Most practitioner-researchers investigate their own workplace, meaning that they have access to information about the situation, the participants, or the politics within the organisation that outsider researchers do not have. Although this might be an advantage, it might on the other hand compromise the researcher's ability to engage critically with the data. Drake (ibid) suggests keeping diaries and external perspectives to stimulate reflexivity. I kept a research diary throughout, but due to other professional demands, teachers could not achieve this. Instead we agreed to 'exchange first thoughts and feelings' on the video data, which were added to my field-notes and reflections.

In this study I also tried to minimize the risks of conducting 'insider' research, by investigating schools other than my own. Being a teacher myself within the same organisation, I was familiar with all the constraints of my colleagues, but not familiar with the particular situation within these schools, allowing me a more distanced perspective. Also all participants were given the opportunity to give feedback on my written accounts of my first interpretations of the video-analysis, and when our interpretations differed, we discussed them. This was a way of empowering my participants so that they were active in interpreting events and exploring them with me so that we were, genuinely, co-constructing knowledge (Cohen et al., 2017; Kemmis et al., 2013). Findings would be shared with all involved, including pupils.

A main ethical dilemma regarding the teachers was the power relationships inherent in my insider-researcher position (Dunne et al., 2005). It was essential that the teachers experienced that, from day one, we were working in partnership and my observations and interventions would not lead to judging their pedagogical 'qualities', but would be used to solve problems, each had identified. This involved feedback and reflection. Therefore it was very important to

establish a relationship based on trust, which would elicit more 'truthful', authentic responses (Dunn et al., 2005). This demands researcher sensitivity and empathy. For me, this meant that I would never impose possible interventions. Based on my expert knowledge, I would make suggestions for possible actions, but it was always the teachers who made the decision about which interventions they thought most suitable for their contexts.

Parents:

In all participating schools, the problems in the group had reached a critical level: parents had lost faith in schools in finding a solution for their child. Therefore, it was essential to involve parents, who were consulted about their views from a practical, as well as an ethical perspective, as recommended by Boddy (2014), and so their informed consent was sought. In Schools C and D, with their cultural diversity, it was particularly important to take account of ethnicity and culture (ibid). Therefore, I gave parents my personal contact details and the reassurance that they could always contact me in case they had questions or doubts. Only three parents made use of this option.

In the parents' meetings, the use of video was a difficult issue in at least one of the schools, in terms of parental consent. One parent wanted to insist on viewing the images before giving permission for this to be used in the data. This request however had to be refused because it was against the ethical guidelines I have as a video-counsellor and against ethical principles since there are also other children on the images and sharing these images with parents no longer fits within the description 'for educational purposes' (Brons, 2008:5). Another consideration was that parents may not always understand the context in which some comments might have been made or where certain behaviours originated from. Instead, the parent in this situation was offered the possibility to hand in a no-consent form, but did not make use of it.

3.4.2   The use of video

In using visual images of children for research, the issue of informed consent is essential (Brons, 2008; Boddy, 2014; Cohen et al., 2017). Being a licensed video interaction counsellor within the governing body I work for, I did not need additional consent for filming in the classroom as part of my 'teaching' role, since this governing body insists that parents who do not agree with a video-interaction counsellor filming their child for educational purposes have to declare this when enrolling their child. However, I did need consent for the data to be used

for research purposes and endorsed Boddy's (2014) arguments, referring to guidelines regarding children's human rights and the importance of gaining the child's consent.

Since it is important to make sure that participants understand precisely what they are consenting to (Cohen et al., 2017), prior to the first group discussion with the pupils, the reason for filming the interventions and how the subsequent images would be used, was explained. Participants were also informed that requests not to be filmed or make statements in front of the camera would be honoured.

In all participating schools, the pupils' main concern related to finding their data had been placed on social media; reassurance that this would not happen was given. Pupils subsequently requested to view the images and also received further explanations of how the images would be used. All requests were respected after the group agreed on ground-rules for behaviour e.g., no laughing at individuals or individual statements. A distinction was agreed between situations which could be considered funny and those directly involving laughing at individuals. Pupils who did not wish to be filmed for research were given the opportunity to observe; to hold the camera; or to walk out of camera reach. No participant was allowed to exclude themselves from the interventions or to miss any aspect of school.

A point of concern expressed by teachers and head teachers related to the possible effect the camera could have on the natural behaviour of the pupils. Based on experience and as stated by Brons (2008), staff were assured that this effect was likely to be temporary.

As a licensed video interaction counsellor I was bound by the ethical guidelines of the professional code of conduct (Brons, 2008). Participants were also informed that all raw data would be destroyed after montaging critical incidents for reflection. Prosser et al. (2008) note the problem of anonymity and confidentiality in using visual images since the whole purpose of using visual images lies in the persons, situations or the place. Therefore their suggestion to anonymize images by blurring of identifying features with pseudonyms, was followed.

3.5   Overview of AR model and timeline with Methods of Data Collection

As the AR was complex and involved four schools, I have summarised my entire model, mapped against research methods below (table 2). The data were collected from four different classes: two Year 7s (10-11 years old), one Year 6-7 (9-11 years old), and one Year 5-6 (8-10 years old). Classes were situated in four different schools and data were collected over three

academic years. Successive interventions took place during one afternoon for, on average, nine weeks (that is, first School A, then B, then C, then D). The tables below provide an overview of the timeline of data-collection and methods used. Every intervention includes a full AR-cycle of: Fact-finding, Planning (amending plan), Intervention, Observation and Evaluation, Reflection and new Fact-finding. In every cycle, the methods of data-collection were: unstructured observations of the group developmental stage and dynamics during the activities; and group discussions with pupils to establish problems and goals of the group. These were sometimes recorded on video, or were simply summarised by the pupils on paper, depending on the level of confidentiality around the theme that I sensed within the group. Other methods were: field-notes; reflections (teachers' first thoughts and feelings in informal interviews); and video analysis of the 'group' interventions. These methods are not constantly repeated in the timeline. Only new or different methods not used in every cycle are specifically mentioned. From School's B, C, and D, only the timeline is given as the above pattern was repeated.

The number of interventions differed in all schools due to the fact that, firstly a process is not predictable because it *is* a process and not a fixed programme. Secondly, in School A and D, I could work for the whole afternoon with the group, meaning two hours and 15 minutes each week, whereas in Schools B and C, I had only one and a half hours per week.

The instruments used in this study to assess the social achievements of the children were the diagnostic model adapted from Kersting & Krapohl (1987), (Appendix C) and the observation and evaluation plan written after deliberation with the children and their teacher, based on their goals (Appendix D). Every week the children, as a group, were asked to evaluate their

progress with the help of a selection of the observation and evaluation plan that corresponded with their statements made the week before: where do you stand now and how do we know it, and what needs working on? This was an important process in ensuring that the research included the voices of children and their perspectives since the entire group had to agree and in the subsequent week, a new activity was done to test their statements and to ensure trustworthiness, as advised by Robson & McCartan (2016).

School	Method of Data Collection	Date
School A	Initial open interview (1 hour) with head teacher to establish problem and intended goals of the school and writing an initial plan.	19-04-2013
	First intervention: Observation group developmental stage / dynamics during group activities; Group discussion to establish problem and goals of the group; Field notes; Video analysis; Literature about the impact of space on group dynamics.	25-04-2013
School A	Video Interaction Meeting with teacher and head teacher and amending plan.	15-05-2013
	Second intervention: **Start of EL cycle teacher and pupils:** processing and generalizing with the group after activities; processing and generalizing with teacher after the interventions; Semi-structured interview with teacher about her feelings / teacher role; Parents meeting: group discussion to establish parents' concerns.	16-05-2013
	Third intervention and second EL cycle: Literature about motivation.	23-05-2013
	Fourth intervention and third EL cycle: 'Confrontation' with video images: reflecting on interaction teacher-group and pupil-pupil; contradictions between 'words and actions'.	30-05-2013
	Fifth intervention and fourth EL cycle: 'Critical incident': group discussion.	13-06-2013
School A	**Sixth intervention and fifth EL cycle:** Second 'critical incident': Email exchange with head teacher, parents and coordinator Year 6-8.	20-06-2013
	Seventh intervention and sixth EL cycle: 'Confrontation" with video images: reflecting on problem-solving skills.	15-08-2013
	Eighths intervention and seventh EL cycle: Reflection and evaluation (group discussion) with group; Reflection and evaluation teacher and head teacher.	22-08-2013

Table 2: Timeline and Methods of Data Collection

School	Intervention	Date
School B	Initial open interview head teacher	28-10-2013
	Parents meeting	07-11-2013
	First intervention	07-01-2014
	Second intervention: Start of EL cycle teacher and pupils	14-01-2014
	Meeting with school's behaviour specialist	21-01-2014
	Third intervention and second EL cycle	28-01-2014
	Fourth intervention and third EL cycle	31-01-2014
	Fifth intervention and fourth EL cycle	05-02-2014
	Sixth intervention and fifth EL cycle	10-02-2014
	Seventh intervention and sixth EL cycle	14-04-2014
	Eights intervention and seventh EL cycle	22-04-2014
	Ninth intervention and eights EL cycle	12-05-2014
	Tenth intervention and ninth EL cycle	19-05-2014
	Eleventh intervention and tenth EL cycle	16-06-2014

School	Intervention	Date
School C	Initial open interview teacher	06-01-2014
	First intervention	16-01-2014
	Second intervention: Start of EL cycle teacher and pupils	23-01-2014
	Third intervention and second EL cycle	30-01-2014
	Fourth intervention and third EL cycle	06-02-2014
	Fifth intervention and fourth EL cycle	13-02-2014
	Sixth intervention and fifth EL cycle	20-02-2014
	Parents meeting	25-02-2014
	Seventh intervention and sixth EL cycle	13-03-2014
	Eights intervention and seventh EL cycle	20-03-2014
	Ninth intervention and eights EL cycle	03-04-2014
	Tenth intervention and ninth EL cycle	24-04-2014
	Eleventh intervention and tenth EL cycle	23-05-2014
	Twelfth intervention and eleventh EL cycle	26-06-2014

School	Intervention	Date
School D	Initial open interview deputy head teacher and teacher	18-03-2015
	First intervention	09-04-2015
	Second intervention: Start of EL cycle teacher and pupils	16-04-2015
	Third intervention and second EL cycle	23-04-2015
	Writing revised plan	19-05-2015

Table 3:Timeline and interventions School B – D

3.6   Data Sources

This section discusses each of the different qualitative methods used.

3.6.1   Video

As argued by Flewitt (2011), education in western societies has prioritized writing and speech for teaching children. This is the case, not just for academic lessons, but also for teaching social skills, as a study of the available course-books and assessment tools that were used in the participating schools showed, during reconnaissance. New technologies enable researchers to investigate communication and learning on a different, more semiotic level (ibid). A helpful tool is video as it enables the researcher to revisit the moment and to re-awake memories and experiences of both researcher and participants (Jewitt, 2012). In this study, video images were used for reflecting on situations in the classroom with the teachers and the groups.

Flewitt et al. (2013) also noted that linguistic data only provides partial evidence since they do not capture paralinguistic information (intonation, facial expression, gestures, vocalisation or body-language). According to Tomasello (2009), speech is the latest development in human communication. Body language is the foundation on which words are placed: it is possible to say one thing with words, while the body is communicating the opposite. Therefore, the images were helpful in enabling analysis of the verbal and non-verbal interactions during the group activities, strengthening the observation data, since video captures things that the researcher might not have noticed at the time of the interventions (Jewitt, 2012).

Thirdly, asking teachers to film, offered opportunity for a different perspective, both a literal and metaphorical lens. When filming, choices have to be made. From a validity perspective, choices and camera position could be viewed as a disadvantage of using video as a main data source because selecting what is to be included, also selects what is excluded (ibid). Conversely, the actual choices made, generated discussion about what influenced the teachers' choices. Teachers tended, for example, to focus on behaviours that showed lack of involvement and focussed on the behaviour they saw, rather than reflecting on what had caused this behaviour (Brons, 2008).

Other reasons for choosing video as the main data source were that video can easily be shared (Jewitt, 2012). It offers the possibility of reflecting and discussing the images with all those involved, offering possible new perspectives and understandings of an event.

3.6.2   Direct unstructured observations during interventions

Observations require the researcher to be an empathic, sympathetic member of the group, to gain access to insiders' behaviours and activities, while a degree of detachment is also needed (Cohen et al., 2017). Observations were used, firstly to establish where the group was in its developmental stage and to determine the group's' needs. Secondly, observations provided information about the dynamics in the groups. An advantage of observation as a research tool is its directness (Robson & McCartan 2016): I watched and listened to what children did and said during the interventions, in order to assess the effectiveness of the interventions and find contradictions and similarities between the outcomes of the pupil-monitoring system and what teachers and pupils had stated at the beginning. Being also involved in leading the interventions and facilitating the group discussions, I was not able to observe all that was going on at the time. Knowing that the sessions were recorded on video allowed me to focus on the interventions and discussions and continue my observations, retrospectively, when I watched the video.

A disadvantage of this approach is that observation, both in real time and using the video-data afterwards, is very time-consuming (Flewitt, 2013; Robson & McCartan, 2016) and as I was leading the interventions, this took up most of my time during the lessons. Secondly, writing field-notes at the time would interfere too much and would draw attention to me as a researcher, whereas I wanted to conduct my research in as naturalistic conditions as possible. This is why notes were written, immediately after the events in the evenings. In the video-observations, I searched for critical incidents: events that are of more interest than others because they offer important insights and are very revealing, either typical or untypical (Cohen et al., 2017).

3.6.3   Open interviews

In qualitative research, interviews offer a simple way of obtaining information. The type of interview used in this study was based on the principle 'fitness for purpose' (Cohen et al., 2017). Prior to the interventions I interviewed two head teachers and two teachers. These interviews could be described as informal conversational or open interviews. Dunne et al. (2005) suggest that conversation style interviews possibly put the interviewees more at ease. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) use the metaphor of the interviewer as 'traveller', allowing the interview to be less controlled and rule bound. Because I wanted to find out what was going on in the schools selected as samples, without imposing any preconceptions, the interview questions emerged naturally, rather than being guided by a schedule, as in a semi-structured

interview (see Appendix E). To develop rapport, as suggested by Kvale and Brinkman (2009), I showed a caring, sensitive attitude, by allowing the interviewees to talk about their particular concerns. As suggested by Kunz et al. (2014), I also made use of physical rapport, 'mirroring' the body language of the interviewees to establish a feeling of 'being heard and acknowledged'. My questions only served to elicit, clarify or summarize what participants had stated, through follow-up questions, to deepen understanding of the interviewees' perspectives, in relation to the research focus (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009), or to reach the level beyond the cognitive explanations (Kunz et al., 2014).

3.6.4   Statements and group discussions

Another research method used was teacher/whole-class ('group') discussion. Group discussions could come up spontaneously, initiated by a remark or behaviour of an individual pupil or planned related to an activity. These group discussions followed the pattern of group interviews (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009) thus, they encouraged pupils' interaction in a less intimidating way than in individual adult-child interviews, and challenged pupils to react to statements made by peers in a more natural way. Some statements made by pupils or teachers came 'spontaneously', others were triggered by me asking: *"I interpret from your body language that you do not agree. What is it that you would like to say?"* These group discussions were recorded on video and analysed, not only on their textual level, but also on their non-verbal level, as suggested by Flewitt et al. (2013).

An advantage of using statements made by a range of participants during group discussions was that here, the interaction is between the group as opposed to an individual response to an adult's question (Cohen et al., 2017), deepening the complexity of the discussion. This approach also enables children to challenge each other and use their own language. Having peers present avoids, to some extent, that children giving answers they think the researcher might want to hear, instead of revealing what they really think. On the other hand, the researcher has to be aware of the need to mediate the power relations in the group to prevent some children dominating the discussion or using inappropriate, emotive language; and to prevent other children feeling exposed or embarrassed in front of the group.

3.6.5   Emails

According to Burns (2010), in social research, emails can be viewed as a kind of interview, although there is still discussion about whether emails count as 'proper' interviews, such media technologies enrich the array of investigatory tools available. Since I worked with the

group for one afternoon each week, and after school the teachers frequently had other obligations that needed their attention, a lot of the discussion and feedback was exchanged through email, a helpful means of participant involvement (ibid). Here, the teachers not only reported critical incidents that occurred during the week, but also their questions and concerns, and in some cases, the reactions of parents, with whom I had no direct access, except in one case. However, a limitation, pointed out by Burns (2010) was that not all respondents were equally good writers, resulting in more emails asking for more detail or more explanation, thus consistently face-to-face teacher reflections might have elicited richer data.

3.6.6   Field-notes

Field-notes, written during or just after events in research, are intended to be read by the researcher as evidence to produce meaning and an understanding of the culture, social situation, or phenomenon being studied (Cohen et al., 2017). An advantage of field-notes is that they provide information produced first-hand, can help relate incidents, explore emerging trends and enrich important contextual data, e.g classroom climate (Morrow, 2005). However, field-notes can be highly subjective since they are observational data produced by me, as researcher (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001), based on memory since it is hard to write while observing. Therefore, since Morrow (ibid:259) argues that field-notes *"should include all the stuff of the senses (sight, sound, etc"),* to strengthen the trustworthiness of the design, I triangulated my own observations with the video-recordings when writing my reports of the sessions.

3.7   Methods of Data Analysis

As my primary source of data was the video-observations, made by teachers, and my field-notes, I will first describe how this data was prepared and analysed. I will then go on to describe my overall method of data-analysis for the whole data-set, using a deductive and inductive process (Baarda et al., 2005). Transcribing video recordings is not only extremely time-consuming, but also involves *"a process of 'transduction' from one mode to another"*: sometimes complex and multiple actions including spoken language have to be written up or shown in a still photograph of a moment of action and describing the action (Flewitt et al, 2013). This process of 'translation' might influence the interpretation of the videos. Therefore, to start the analytical process, I noted Denzin's (2004) suggestion that films and images should initially be considered at their 'textual realism' level, meaning the story the material is telling and how it is telling that story. Therefore, analysis of the audio-visual texts and still images

within these started with an initial look at the overall picture, in order to gain some global impressions in this first stage. For example, the size and the furnishings within the classroom in relation to the number of pupils, the outside temperature, or the location of the school near a busy road, can all influence how people feel and react (v. Dijk, 2016) and thus influence the way we interpret the images. When viewing the raw material, all these aspects had to be taken into consideration. Since the first focus in each group was about establishing the group's developmental stage, Phase 1 of the analysis involved a broad perspective, identifying elements in the classroom that could possibly affect the dynamics of the group such as: space, decoration or noise. A simple observation form was used to record this, as I reviewed the videos:

	Positive	Negative
Classroom		A lot of furniture; hardly room to move
Interaction	Pupils make room for each other and wait for their turn	

Table 4: Example of Observation Form

These initial interpretations were triangulated with my observations and field-notes of the first meeting in Phase 2 of my data-analysis, for example:

The room seems too small for so many pre-adolescent children; strong smell of 'hormones'; the open window does not provide enough fresh air; kindergarten children are playing outside and their noise enters through the window. (Field-notes 25-04-2013).

Although such environmental aspects can influence the dynamics in the group, they do not have to. By comparing the observation form, and my field-notes, first possible causes for the perceived problems could be put aside or used for further analysis:

The lack of space does not seem to have a negative impact on the group. The pupils make room for each other without negative reactions or conflicts. (Field-notes 25-04-2013).

According to Figueroa (2008), moving from the global to the detailed analytical levels does greater justice to the nature of audio-visual data and the structure of the meaning within them. So the second phase of the analysis consisted of selecting critical incidents, using the

diagnostic model adapted from Kersting and Krapohl (1986). These incidents were subsequently analysed further in Phase 3. Video-transcripts were made of approximately two critical incidents identified in each of the weekly sessions that the teacher and I worked on together to develop the group's cohesion and social skills (34 in total across the four different schools). These were between two and five minutes in length. In addition, after viewing the entire video-recordings, verbal transcripts or field-notes, were made of specific comments and interactions made by the teacher and pupils that appeared to relate to these critical incidents, in other parts of the sessions. These written data were then compared with my other data: Observational data, field-notes, statements and emails, using the process described below.

Before viewing the selected incidents with the teacher, I prepared a framework of what was visible, using descriptive language, without making judgements or interpretations (Brons, 2008). In School A, for example, these fragments were labelled: pupil interaction, teacher-pupil interaction, teacher-group interaction, pupil initiative:

School A: 25-04-2013

Time in seconds	What happens	Label
17.19	F falls on his knees and starts picking up items from the floor	Pupil initiative
17.23	S sees what F is doing and joins him	Pupil initiative
17.24	Teacher instructs F and S to pick up the rubbers from the floor	Teacher-pupil interaction
17.25	F and S continue without looking up	Teacher-pupil interaction
17.26	F and S realize the instruction is meant for them	Pupil-teacher interaction
17.26	Exchange looks	Pupil interaction
17.27	F and S continue their job	Pupil initiative

Table 5: Example of Framework

After each AR cycle, the teacher and I viewed the selected critical incidents in order to start the process of analysing and interpreting what was going on, in terms of our focus on social interactions among teachers and pupils. Either the teacher or I would stop the video at pre-selected points. The teacher would query some decisions I made as group facilitator, for example, when modelling facilitating group discussion, or I would ask the teacher what might have caused certain behaviour and we discussed our interpretations:

Researcher: *F and S are on the floor picking up small items. What were you thinking at this point?*

Next I would share my observations about the selected fragments, which, inevitably, involved my interpretation of an event, for example:

> *Let's go back a few seconds. F is ready with putting his table aside. Do you notice what is happening? What does that tell you about the teacher-pupil relationship? What is the group asking for?*

The way we reflected on what had happened in class in Phase 3 was adapted from what, in Video Interaction Counselling, is called 'Micro-Analysis': the images are analysed per second (Brons, 2008). First a frame is established, identifying: What am I looking for? Images can be viewed, for example, to identify interesting features or messages, to look for contradictions (e.g. between paralinguistic and verbal communication), or for cause and effect. This kind of analysis demands a high level of detail in the focus and the analysis (Cohen et al., 2017). In this study, the frame depended on the questions emerging from the teacher or the group. When there was a problem with the behaviour of the group, the focus of the micro-analysis might be on the interaction between the teacher and the group, the classroom management or the interaction between the pupils (Brons, 2008). This means that both focus and frame can differ or change during the course of the study. Although video-analysis and presenting the outcomes of such analysis can be time-consuming activities, they produce very rich sources of data since they combine spoken and paralinguistic elements to ensure that the researcher gains a more holistic understanding of each event being studied (Flewitt, 2013).

3.8   Method of analysing entire data-set

Action Research data-analysis generally involves an iterative, spiralling, or cyclic process that proceeds from more general to more specific observations (Baarda et al. 2005; Cohen et al., 2017). In the reconnaissance (Phase 1), open informal interviews were held with either the teacher or the head teacher from each of the four schools. Because I wanted the participants to feel at ease, I chose not to record these initial interviews. Instead, I made notes of the statements the interviewees made and wrote a report of the interviews afterwards (see Appendix E). These reports were shared with the interviewees, for ethical reasons, to support their agency, allowing them to make comments or clarifications to my interpretation of their words (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

For my whole data-analysis, I used, what Baarda et al. (2005) and Brooks et al. (2015) describe as a 'template approach'. Template Analysis is not bound to one epistemology (ibid) and can

also be used in attempting to discover the underlying causes of particular human phenomena (Brooks et al., 2015). Template Analysis is a form of data analysis that involves the development of a coding template, summarising themes identified by the researcher. From the statements the interviewees made during the initial interviews, I identified key codes or themes. These codes or themes served as an initial template for analysing the data and included: group dynamics, role of teacher, role of parents, problems and group development (see Appendix F). I used the same template for my field-notes, the teacher or student statements, observations and video-observations and compared the answers to what was already known from the literature or other methods.

In the next stage of 'open' or axial coding, I looked at the data afresh, without viewing it from these deductive codes and identified further inductive codes to represent the unanticipated concepts, for example language and definition, that had derived from the other data sources. Following Baarda et al. (2005), I also searched for relationships: similarities, contrasts or consequences between the categories by comparing the data from the different schools and methods. The aim here was to add depth and structure to the categories found. It is an important step in building theory (ibid). In School A for example, data deriving from the initial interview showed contradictions, as shown in Figure 6. The description of the group outside school and on fieldtrips, compared to the problems described, did not agree. I also used Baarda et al's (2005) suggestions to keep a log of what I was thinking at each stage of the data-analysis.

Label A: description of the group (teacher)
It is a large group, 28 pupils Nice kids Lively and noisy sometimes but not in a negative way Spontaneous, helpful, friendly Close, watching out for each other and standing up for each other Hard workers but difficult to motivate

Label B: problems as experience by the teacher
Difficult to motivate Not involved 'Eating energy' Wanting to discuss everything Reacting to each other in a negative way A challenge A lot of dynamics

| A closed front |
| Complaints about bullying and excluding but no evidence |

Table 6: Axial Coding

19-04-2013

What triggers me is the contradiction between how the group is being described on field trips and outside school, compared to the problems mentioned. It is as if the teacher is talking about two different groups: one group being in the transition or storming stage and the other already in the cooperation and differentiation or performing stage.

Figure 4: Reflective Log entry 19-04-2013

As Brooks et al. (2015) point out, in Template Analysis, selected themes can always be refined and modified, and new themes might emerge. As the study progressed, more themes appeared including: groups' needs; impact of space on behaviour; facts/feelings/assumptions; language; assumptions about language; definitions; non-verbal language; cultural differences in raising children; impact of honour; motivation; autonomy; views on learning; teacher skills and knowledge; justice for all and equal opportunities. Having identified many codes, these were then reduced into 8 broader categories or themes which were: Groups, (difficult) behaviour, social skills, teacher skills and knowledge, language and definitions, feelings and emotions, cultural issues and relationship parents – school (see Appendix G).

This involved a process of reducing, integrating and refining the themes (ibid). For me, this was an enlightening moment in the research process because it enabled me to explore the data as a whole and make sense of it. It also was a very helpful tool in the experiential learning cycles of the groups and teachers. The template was also used to interpret and write up my findings, as discussed in chapter four. As suggested by Strauss & Corbin (2015) I wrote story lines after every intervention to move from description to conceptualization. This enabled me to develop a theory of what was going on and to make decisions about steps that had to follow.

The chosen AR model introduced in paragraph 3.3 not only showed how data gained in cycle one were fed into cycle two, but also how data gained in School A were fed into School B and so on. Most themes or issues that came up in School A developed deeper dimensions as the study progressed; others appeared to be almost the same in all four schools; and sometimes new themes appeared in the next school. In chapter four these themes will be discussed.

3.9   Limitations of the design

One of the limitations of the research design was the tension between aspirations and time. In reality, due to all the 'non-teaching responsibilities' of the participants (staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings, chairing committees or attending seminars and professional-development training), teachers were not always able to keep their logs, as agreed, or to work with me on the micro-analysis of the videos. That is why we agreed on 'first thought and feelings' at the end of each of the interventions when the teacher and I would reflect on what had happened, and on exchanging emails. Therefore, it became my responsibility to make notes of the teachers' reflections and to add them into my reports, and on many occasions it also became my responsibility to select the critical incidents for feedback moments with the group. This might have affected the outcomes of this study as the teachers themselves might have chosen other critical incidents, illustrating their needs or questions in a more explicit way, thus adding aspects to the table of knowledge and skills needed in chapter four. This issue will be further discussed in chapter six.

Another limitation was the relatively brief period of the interventions. Although the groups stayed together, their teachers changed in the next school year. I shared knowledge and skills about groups with the teachers that took part in the study, but it would have been interesting to see what the groups themselves had learned and taken with them to the next year and how the teachers used what they had learned in their new groups.

What unexpectedly turned out to be a major limitation was the fact that, as a researcher, one can collect too much data. Although being familiar with video as a Video Interaction Counsellor, I never anticipated the amount of relevant detail from such fine-grained analysis. (Cohen et al., 2017; Schieble at al., 2015). In my role as Video Interaction Counsellor, the focus usually lies on teacher – group interaction or class management. In this study, the videos helped to not only to identify contradictions between spoken words and other para linguistic language, it also offered opportunities for the pupils to take more ownership over their own social learning. The data also provided information about, for example, teacher assumptions and cultural differences, or how children learn social skills that deserve further investigation. However, the focus of this study was on solving the problems as described or experienced by the teachers so that determined the choices I made about which data to use.

3.10   Summary

In this chapter I have explained the methods I used for collecting and analysing the data as well as my position in this study. I have also explained the chosen AR model and my reason for implementing the groups' EL cycle. The analysis will be presented thematically in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, OUTCOMES AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the data collected in the reconnaissance (Phase 1) and intervention stages (Phase 2) in the four participating schools, and the analyses of the Experiential Learning (EL) and AR cycles. Every intervention was planned and executed as a full EL cycle (34 in total), as shown in Figure 2 and 3 (Chapter three). The reconnaissance stages of the four AR cycles consisted of two periods of data-collection (Phase 1). In all schools, the first data derived from the initial interviews with teachers or head teachers. The second data-set was the reconnaissance activities with the groups (i.e. classes), focussing on the groups' developmental stages and the pupils' perspectives on the problems described by their teachers or head teachers. By comparing the data derived from the different sources, new knowledge and understanding emerged.

In phase 2, this new emerging knowledge and understanding not only informed the next EL cycle in one school, but also the next AR cycles in the following school(s). Themes and activities were planned according to these. The data analysis and findings of Phase 2 will be presented and discussed according to the themes of the final template, as well as the themes that emerged during the course of this study in all four participating schools. An overview of the intervention activities used in the EL cycles is shown in Appendix H.

4.1   Phase 1: Data Analysis Reconnaissance Stage

4.1.1   Initial interviews with teacher or head teacher

As suggested by Baarda et al. (2005), an initial template was developed, based on the first interviews with teachers and head teachers in School A, and further developed following the interviews with staff in the other schools: see Table 7 below.

School	Statement	Label / Theme
A	*Problems with motivation, involvement, or unwanted negative interaction during lessons, making it very difficult for the teacher to teach.*	Assumptions about: Role of teacher.

B	*At the beginning of the year it seemed to be a nice, unproblematic group, but that feeling changed after a few weeks. Outside the classroom a lot of things are going on. Now there is an atmosphere of distrust and not feeling safe. The group views itself as a negative group with lots of arguments and bullying.*	Group dynamics; Group development.
C	*In the classroom my pupils are cooperative but easily distracted.*	Assumptions about: Learning.
C	*Some boys make their presence very much felt, while others are hardly noticeable.*	Group dynamics; Group development.
C	*Children who fulfil a sort of leadership role, influence their peers in a secretive, sneaky way through for example signalling behind my back. Outside the classroom they manipulate others or force them to do things.*	Group dynamics; Group development.
C	*Children start showing untypical behaviours and over-react in situations.*	Group dynamics; Group development.
C	*Children do not feel safe and bring their problems with them into the classroom.*	Group dynamics; Group development.
D	*There is a lot of agitation in the group. The pupils react to each other in a negative way.*	Group dynamics; Group development.
D	*Most pupils have concentration problems. They are not able to finish their work and the results of their work are lower than expected.*	Group dynamics; Group development; Assumptions about learning.
D	*A few boys continue to speak Arabic in class.*	Assumptions about cultural aspects.
A	*Interventions of the teachers in Year 5 and 6 such as Video Interaction Counselling sessions or the implementation of new rules, have not resulted in the desired outcomes.*	Assumptions about: Role of teacher; Learning.
A	*An increase in measures only resulted in an increase of the unwanted behaviours.*	Assumptions about: Learning.
B	*We have invested a lot in extra social skills training with the help of the behaviour specialist and by doing activities in which we focussed on a positive view. It seemed to be effective for a while, but the problems keep coming back.*	Assumptions about: Learning; Behaviour.
C	*I have to puzzle over and map what has happened. This is taking a lot of time and energy at the expense of learning time and of the children who are not involved in the problems.*	Assumptions about: Role of teacher; Learning.
D	*The teachers do not feel comfortable in this situation and are not able to do their work as required.*	Assumptions about: Role of teacher.
B	*Solving problems takes time at the expense of valuable learning time.*	Assumptions about: Learning.
C	*There is a lot of agitation in the group. The pupils react to each other in a negative way.*	Group development; Group dynamics.
D	*A special group plan appeared to have been successful (80% of the pupils is living up to the new*	Assumptions about: Role of teacher;

	rules), but 20% of the pupils is still showing problems and is taking the others with them in the unwanted behaviour. The teachers struggle to prevent this and have to fall back on punishing individual pupils.	Learning; Behaviour; Assessment.
A	*Parents of one boy complain that their son is the victim of bullying.*	Relationship parents–school; Group development.
A	*We cannot put a finger on what it is that is going on in the group because on fieldtrips this group is very close, self-supporting, helpful, looks out for each other, acts responsible and is pleasant and cheerful.*	Group development; Group dynamics.
B	*In one of our Year 7 groups there is a serious bullying problem. In spite of extracurricular social skills training, individual counselling of 'the victim' and those whom the school thinks could be responsible, the situation remains the same.*	Group dynamics; Group development; Assumptions about: Learning: Focus on individual.
D	*Most of the pupils are not able to reach the targets on cognitive as well as social-emotional level.*	Assumptions about the obligation of school.
A	*Parents expect that the head teacher solves their problems or addresses other parents.*	Relationship parents-school.
A	*Parents go into defence mode when the teacher wants to talk about the behaviour of their child.*	Relationship parents-school.
A	*Parents complain to other parents instead of talking to the teacher.*	Relationship parents-school.
B	*The parents of the victim now demand that their child is transferred to one of the other groups and that the perpetrator(s) are expelled. The latter will be a problem because we have no evidence and the school believes that transferring the child is not a desired solution.*	Relationship parents-school.
C	*Parents insist that the problems that have originated out of school, should be discussed and solved in school.*	Relationship parents-school.
A	*Conflicts between children sometimes result in conflicts between parents.*	Role of parents.
C	*Parents address each other and this too sometimes results in friction.*	Role of parents.
C	*It is very typical that the parents of Year 5 still bring their children into the classroom, as if they see it as their job to keep an eye on things so they can alert me when something is about to happen.*	Relationship parents-school.
D	*Parents we desperately need to talk to never attend any of the parent-teacher meetings.*	Relationship parents-school; Politics.

Table 7: initial template based on initial interviews: School A: 19-04-2013; School B: 28-10-2013; School C: 06-01-2014; School D: 18-03-2015.

The template enabled relationships between themes to emerge. In all four schools, the first plan of action was to involve the group (i.e. class) in the problem-solving process. The next paragraph shows the reconnaissance interventions, what they revealed about the groups' developmental stage, and how they informed the next steps in the EL cycles.

4.1.2   First interaction with the group

The first activity in all schools served to bring the group and the teacher out of their comfort zone, to gain an impression of the group's developmental stage. After a short introduction, each group was asked to put the tables aside and form a circle with their chairs and no additional instructions. The way in which a group performs this seemingly easy task reveals much about the interaction in the group. The teacher was asked to film, while I facilitated the session.

For the first analysis of the video recording, the simple observation form was used (see Chapter three, page 60). By comparing these observations with my field notes, first possible explanations for the perceived problems were derived.

25-04-2013

My first impression is that the group shows initiative, responsibility and involvement, but the teacher reacts as if her authority is being tested. The qualities the group shows on fieldtrips are suppressed in the classroom by imposing rules and sanctions. The real problem might be the interaction between the teacher and the group rather than the group itself since the head teacher stated that all the actions taken had only resulted in an increase of the problems. The pupils stated that the teacher is strict and does not allow any enjoyment in the lessons. Another influential factor might be the size and location of the room. My first impression was: the teacher is trying to keep 28 frogs in a bucket by sitting on the lid.

Figure 5: Reflective Log entry School A, 25-04-2013

In the next stage I analysed the video recordings in more detail and selected frozen images to reflect on with the teacher. My questions served to trigger the teacher's reflection. I simply stopped the video at certain points, without giving any comment and asked:

- What do you see?
- What did you think at that moment?
- Why did you think that?

time in seconds	name	spoken language	visual behaviour
15.03	group	chattering	Working goal orientated: tables to the side, chairs in a circle. Helping each other. Waiting and making room for each other.
17.19	Fred		Is picking up items from the floor.
17.24	teacher	Yes! Pick up those rubbers! *(ordering tone of voice)*	Fred looks up. Surprised.
18.09	teacher	Move over! More....more.. Yes Theo, move...move... more!	The group is trying to form a circle. There is hardly any room in the corner. The room is very full and the pupils can only move a few centimetres.
18.21	teacher	Plenty of room there!	The legs of the tables behind them, prevent pupils from moving their chairs other than to the front.

Figure 6: Video analysis School A (25-04-2013)

25-04-2013

One of the complaints made by the teacher is that she feels that she is 'fighting' the class. However, the class appears to be cooperative and responsible. The video shows that F starts to clean the floor on his own initiative after he has finished putting his table aside. S joins him when he is ready too. Suddenly the teacher instructs the boys to pick up the rubbers. F and S have no idea at first that the teacher is talking to them and do not react. Once they realize, they exchange surprised looks, raise their shoulders and continue cleaning the floor. Did the teacher miss the initiative or does she feel that she has to be in control and has to give instructions first?

Figure 7: Reflective Log entry 25-04-2013

In the video, the group shows the positive characteristics the head teacher mentioned: although there is very little room to move with the furniture, the group is helping each other, waiting for each other, chattering in a friendly way, not 'abusing' the situation, showing responsibility and initiative. The fact that there is so little room, does not seem to influence the interaction between the pupils in a negative way, only between the teacher and the group.

Next the teacher and I viewed the images again, using micro-analysis to search for possible cause and effect, and to plan new actions based on the needs of the group as well as the teacher. We discussed the question: What other interpretations could be possible for the behaviours you reacted to?

What happens/ Cause?	Effect	Other possible interpretations
F is on his knees, picking up items from the floor.	Teacher assumes that F is withdrawing himself from the task or perhaps even is throwing rubbers on the floor and starts 'instructing' him to *pick up those rubbers!*	Now the floor is open, F notices rubbers on the floor. He takes the initiative to pick them up.
Teacher is instructing F.	F looks up: Who? Me? Teacher assumes F is challenging her.	F looks surprised. He had no idea I (teacher) was talking to him since he already was cleaning the floor.
The group is trying to form a circle but there is not enough room so T can't move his chair forward.	Teacher assumes that T is holding the group up by refusing to move his chair and to enter the circle. She starts ordering the group to *move, more!*	There is not enough room to make a circle with chairs so T accepts that he has to sit a little backwards.
Pupils do as they are told and try to move their chairs a few centimetres, but the legs of the tables are in the way.	The teacher assumes that the group is slow on purpose.	The group is making an effort to perform the task as requested.

Figure 8: Video analysis School A (25-04-2013)

The micro-analysis offered the possibility to 'freeze' the images or to review certain moments, allowing us to see details that might have been missed during the event itself. It also enabled us to discuss the teacher's assumptions about her role and of the pupils about their task. Viewing the selected video fragments was very revealing for the teacher: she had 'missed' Fred's initiative, the reason why Theo could not enter the circle, and why Theo had wanted to close a window. She acted 'based on her assumptions of how a teacher should act', interpreting the groups' reactions as 'undermining her authority' (reflective log, 15-05-2913). The micro-analysis of the video offered the opportunity to look for cause and effect. The video highlighted for example, that Theo wanted to close the windows because the noise coming from the playground made it hard to understand what was being said. Thus, he showed involvement in the group discussion and responsibility, by taking the initiative. Teacher–group interaction, environmental factors such as room size, and pupils' initiative became visible. These data strengthened my hypothesis about this group's more advanced developmental stage. What the teacher had interpreted as testing her leadership or perhaps even oppositional behaviour, typical of the 'transition' stage of group development, were, in fact, characteristics of the 'performing' stage.

4.1.3   Statements and group discussions

The first meeting with each group allowed me to see how the group perceived the problems expressed by their head teacher and teachers. The pupil statements were recorded on video and later transcribed for comparison, identifying, interestingly, that teachers and pupils' perspectives on student behaviour appeared quite similar (Table 8).

Date	School	Problems according to the group
25-04-2013	A	Lot of talking; lot of discussions, also with the teacher; (to) much fun; talking before your turn; interrupting the teacher; taking a long time before starting to work.
07-01-2014	B	Lots of arguments; feeling unsafe; bullying and name calling; cheating; short tempers; challenging others; abusing each other's weak spots.
16-01-2014	C	Arguing a lot; excluding pupils; not being honest; blaming others; laughing at others.
09-04-2015	D	Fighting; pupils not listening to the teacher (on 12 of the 22 papers the names of 3 to 5 boys are written as being the main problem); reacting to each other in a negative way; noisy group; concentration problems; work is never finished.

Table 8: Problems according to the group

However, no evidence was available as to how the pupils experienced the classroom in reality. Hence, their statements could have been repetitions of what their teachers had told them about their behaviour, or what they believed I wanted to hear. So I also reversed the question by asking pupils what kind of group they would like to be. Prior to my first encounter with the group, I had asked the teachers the same question. The statements made by the group and their teachers, are shown in Table 9.

Date	School	Aspirations of the group	Aspirations of the teacher(s)
25-04-2013	A	A fun group; a little bit less talkative; respecting each other for who we are.	We want to turn the negative image the group has of itself into a positive image. We want to put a stop to the bullying problem.
07-01-2014	B	Becoming a 'real' group; reacting to each other in a friendly way; doing things together; having fun; being able to be who we are.	We want to achieve that all pupils are feeling that they can be who they are, feel safe, and are able to react to each other in a positive manner.
16-01-2014	C	Being nice to each other; being honest; being able to trust each other; being friends.	We want to achieve that all our pupils enjoy going to school; trust each other; feel safe; are able to cooperate in a positive way.
09-04-2015	D	A nice group; a quiet group; being able to talk to each other in a normal tone of voice; no name calling or abusive language; no disrespectful children.	We want all our pupils to come to school feeling good about themselves and enjoy being here. We want a pedagogical climate in the classroom in which all children are allowed to be who they are, and feel safe enough to express their thoughts and feelings.

Table 9: Aspirations of group and teacher

Although different words were used, the aspirations of the groups and their teachers showed many similarities. Next, I was interested in what the pupils believed had caused the current situation, and how this related to teachers' and head teachers' beliefs. The latter had mentioned the role of parents as a major influential factor in the problems experienced in the classroom (table 7). The pupils, however, ascribed the problems to different reasons, as shown in Table 10:

Date	School	Probable causes for the problems according to the group
25-04-2013	A	Stupid rules like: special toilet times; no talking in the corridors; no talking between the lessons; no time for fun; we always have to work.
07-01-2014	B	We always have to work and there is no time for talking, not even between lessons; sometimes you want to have some 'space', but there is never enough room or time.
16-01-2014	C	Do not know. Perhaps we do not trust each other? We also have lots of conflicts outside school.
09-04-2015	D	The teachers and the head teacher because they merged our groups. We do not want to be in one group; Hamid, because he never listens to the teachers or the group.

Table 10: Probable causes of problems, according to the group

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

The statements made by the pupils all relate to group dynamics between pupils, and between group/teacher. In Schools A and B, the pupils expressed their desire to be able to interact, at least during the changes between lessons. The statements made in School C suggest that the pupils do not know each other and in School D, the behaviour of one pupil, particularly, is mentioned by most of the group. These findings seemed to confirm that the classes had not been viewed as 'groups', but rather as a collection of individual students, pursuing academic achievement only.

Discussion:

Although staff and pupils identified similar, unwanted behaviours in the classroom, these were attributed to different causes. In the literature, explanations for teachers experiencing difficult behaviour in the classroom vary from: changes in society in general (Berding, 2009); schools no longer enforcing discipline (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001); the variety of special needs in one group (Ten Dam & Volman, 1999); and schools offering a boring curriculum (Robinson, 2011). The explanations the teachers gave however, mainly referred to the role of parents. They also listed administrative load; increased numbers of pupils with special needs; and lack of support from management in dealing with difficult parents as serious problems. Management tended to blame society in general, parents, and teachers' behaviour.

According to Malekoff (2014), it is not unusual that failing groups are blamed for their lack of motivation, resistance, uncooperative behaviour of parents, so these findings were not surprising. The pupils however, stated 'stupid rules'; not being allowed to talk; not really

knowing each other; not being 'heard'; or the behaviours of an individual pupil in class, as important factors.

When asked about the discrepancy between what teachers state they experience in class and the more positive outcomes of the pupil-monitoring system, the teachers noted that, in general, 'the pupils are nice kids', or 'do not 'difficult' on purpose' (teacher Interviews). Management (head teachers and school counsellor) stated that the *majority* of children showed no problematic behaviour at all, but described the difficulties involved in understanding the interaction between pupils. The emphasis here is on the word 'majority'. The problems are ascribed to a few or to individual pupils and are viewed and dealt with as these pupils' 'individual needs'. The data showed management's belief that there was nothing wrong with the educational system itself, but that behaviour problems are due to external factors, such as: a protective attitude of some parents; changes in society; or the influence of social media on certain pupils.

The use of the word *majority* is also interesting from another perspective. Teachers recognised that in almost every group, the majority of children were no problem. For example, in School D the statement from the deputy head teacher that their interventions before our research had been successful because "*now 80% of the pupils were able to behave according to the rules*", was misleading because the 5 children (20% of the class) who showed 'difficult behaviours' from the start, continued to show the same unwanted behaviours (see Appendix I), resulting in the school's participation in this study. In Schools A, B and D, however, the pupils mentioned the behaviour of one pupil as the main source (School D) or a contributing factor (School A and B) in the perceived problems. Translated as a percentage, this means 3 – 5% of the pupils.

As Doel (2005) rightly argues, most behaviours in a group are important pieces of communication. Therefore it is important to understand the meaning of the behaviour, instead of simply containing it. When looking at the actions the schools had taken in reaction to the behaviours they were struggling with, they mainly attempted to 'contain' the unwanted behaviours by imposing rules and sanctions: new school rules (School A); involving a behaviour specialist (School B); individual behaviour plans (School B, C and D); group behaviour plan (School D); extra social skills lessons (all schools). Only in School A, was the interaction between the group and the teacher viewed as a possible cause, resulting in the teacher receiving Video Interaction Counselling (head teacher interviews, School A).

Pressure on results and achievements (Biesta, 2009), or the way we organise our education, for example, were not mentioned by the interviewees. The pupils, however, did refer to

'pressure' with comments such as: 'always having to work' (School A and B); 'the teacher not liking having to wait to start her instruction' (School A); 'pupils wanting to share something' (School A and B); and 'not able to concentrate and never finish our work' (School D). These statements also relate to how the pupils perceived the organisation of education in their schools. In all schools, teachers and pupils described the same problem and showed high motivation to address it, but they identified different causes. These findings supported the idea that a class in education is also a group, not simply a collection of individuals and that the answer to the perceived problems could be found in addressing each class as a group, rather than in extra social skills lessons.

Therefore, the reconnaissance findings informed the EL and AR cycles, which focused on me collaborating with teachers to treat the class as a group and all of us reflecting on the video-data gathered each session. The data-analysis in this Phase 2 followed a similar pattern: micro-analysis of the video-recordings, which were compared and triangulated with data from other observations, field notes, pupil statements and teacher emails. In the next sections, the themes from the analysis will be explored..

4.2 Phase 2: Data-Analysis of EL and AR cycles

In Phase 1, several themes emerged (Figure 7), that served as an initial template for analysing data collected during the Phase 2 interventions. In the EL and AR cycles of the groups, these themes were further explored and evaluated, and emerging knowledge and understanding was fed into the next school(s). Therefore, below, I have explored the overarching themes of this AR, selecting the best illustrations of each from across the four schools, not exploring the individual AR cycles in each school. Additional themes that apply to one school only will be explored afterwards.

4.2.1 Theme one: Group Dynamics and Group Development

The opening intervention at the start of the AR cycle in all four schools was to ask the group to put the tables aside and to form a circle of chairs. This was followed by the greeting game to get an impression of the group's developmental stage and interaction (pupil-pupil; teacher-group). The groupwork literature identifies different models for group development,

depending on the composition of the group: beginning (orientation, power and control, transition), middle (intimacy and relationship, cooperation and differentiation) and ending (adjourning). In this study, I used the diagnostic model developed by Kersting & Krapohl (1987) to identify the developmental stage of the groups under investigation (amended for use in the classroom during this study, see Appendix C). In School A, the data from this first session showed contradictions in teacher and pupil perceptions, represented in the labels (see Table 6). Thus the head teacher's description of the group outside school and on fieldtrips contrasted significantly with the behavioural and learning problems described by the teacher.

However, by the fifth EL cycle in School A (see Appendix J) the group showed that they felt safe enough to express their personal concerns; share feelings and emotions; and be willing to listen with respect to what others had to say (characteristics of the middle group-developmental stage). Indeed, pupils showed in the session all the qualities the head teacher had described them as exhibiting outside school, including offering mutual aid, in solving the bullying problem described by the head teacher in the initial interview (see Northen and Kurland, 2001).

Emerging knowledge and understanding

By comparing the data-sets, a hypothesis developed in School A that, as a result of the teacher imposing rules and sanctions in class, the group was held back in the beginning stage of group development, whereas outside school, they were already in the 'middle stage'. Therefore, a series of activities was planned to support the pupils in collaborative problem-solving in class, during the next EL cycle. Significantly, from the moment the group was given more room for initiative and became involved in solving problems, they developed as a group, and showed the same characteristics of the middle developmental stage in class as outside school. For example, when Leanne's parents reported a second bullying problem that had been unnoticed by the teacher, the group displayed all their qualities as a cohesive group, offering help to both Leanne and the girl accused of bullying, Bianca (see Appendix K).

This hypothesis of how a teacher or a school can hold a group back in its group-developmental stage, was fed into the AR cycle in the next schools. In Schools B, C and D, in the first meetings, I searched for statements and behaviours that could be compared to the diagnostic model I was starting to develop, based on the model of Kersting & Krapohl (1987). Statements made

by either teacher or head teacher in the initial interviews already revealed much information about the group's developmental stage, as shown in Table 11 below.

School	Statement	Developmental Stage
B	At the beginning of the year it seemed to be a nice, unproblematic group, but that feeling changed after a few weeks.	The group has reached the transition stage.
B	Now there is an atmosphere of distrust and not feeling safe.	Transition
B	In Year 7 we have a serious bullying problem. In spite of extracurricular social skills training, individual counselling of the 'victim' and those whom we think could be responsible, the situation remains the same.	Transition
C	Some boys make their presence very much felt while others are hardly noticeable.	Transition
C	Children who fulfil a sort of leadership role, influence their peers in a secretive, sneaky way through signalling behind my back.	Transition
C	Outside the classroom they manipulate others or force them to do things.	Transition
C	Children start showing untypical behaviours and overreact in situations.	Transition
D	Children do not feel safe and bring their problems with them into the classroom.	Transition
D	There is a lot of agitation in the group. Pupils react to each other in a negative way.	Transition

Table 11: Group Developmental Stages based on interviews

In School B much attention was given to pupils' individual needs. For example, the school behaviour specialist had many individual sessions with pupils and also spent time explaining the needs of individual pupils to the whole group. From a group perspective, the 'group' was addressed as a collection of individuals and pupils perceived situations from a wholly individual perspective, as the following pupil statements illustrate:

> *I have given him [Bas] many opportunities but he does not want to change* (Ron).
> *We cannot cooperate because they [the other pupils] never do what I tell them* (Simone)*.*

The teacher's first impression of the group agrees with what can be expected in the first stage of group development: pupils making use of familiar norms and rules; investigating the situation; observing their peers; and testing their teacher. Once pupils have figured out peers' identities, they established a 'pecking order', described by the teacher as: pupils competing for friendships; forming sub-groups; and increasingly complaining about bullying and

scapegoating. These are symptoms of the transition stage, indicating that the group is becoming a group, asking for a different role of the teacher, as shown in the diagnostic model (Appendix C).

The theme of group dynamics and group development also resulted in interesting data in School C. In the initial interview, the teacher stated: *"At first sight, there seems to be nothing wrong, but under the surface, a lot is going on"*. An activity was chosen to make the dynamics and the divisions of the roles in the group visible. In this activity, the group had to find its way through an invisible labyrinth (see Appendix L), by collectively building knowledge of where, and where not, to go. After the activity, in his 'first thoughts and feelings', the teacher stated:

> *I have seen how the most dominant boys in the group are in fact feeling very insecure. They want to perform and achieve and they find it very hard to accept directions or to deal with failures.* (Field notes, 23-01-2014).

The video data highlighted how some of the boys wanted to follow directions from other children, or knew themselves where to go, but instead followed their friends' directions. Both the teacher and I, assumed that this 'insecurity issue' could have a cultural aspect since, as explained by Azghari (2013), it is not uncommon for children with, in this case, a Moroccan background, to perceive a mistake as a personal failure. Where most children perceived a 'wrong step' as a step closer to finding the right way through the labyrinth, for these boys a 'wrong step' felt like failing. By following their friends' directions, the 'blame' for 'making a mistake' could be shared. Further, the video showed how pupils were still figuring out their own position in the group, and were searching for alliances with influential children, whereas others still needed the teacher's protection, all characteristics of the transition stage, between 'storming' and 'norming'.

In School C, the teacher also mentioned secretive behaviour, competing for leadership, manipulation and feelings of being unsafe, indicating that the group was somewhere between the orientation and transition stage. My own observations were that the pupils were able to make impressive statements, suggesting understanding of 'social skills' criteria, but their behaviours did not agree with these (see 4.2.2. below).

Teachers in School B and C mentioned that all the problems *"demanded a lot of time at the expense of valuable learning time"* and the teacher in School C added: *"at the expense of pupils that are not involved in the problems"*. However, the problems experienced *in* the group were not perceived as problems *of* the group.

When in School D, in the reconnaissance phase, the group was asked how they perceived the problems in class and what they thought needed changing, a new theme emerged: feelings of lack of safety. Whereas in the other schools, during this phase, the pupils expressed their thoughts in the group discussions, this was not the case in School D. Initially two pupils raised their hand, but once Erdem started by stating "*nothing*", the hands dropped and pupils 'forgot' what it was they wanted to say. It seemed that none of the pupils felt sufficiently safe to express their thoughts in class. In fact, they gladly accepted my proposal for them to write their thoughts and feelings anonymously on paper.

These 'feelings of lack of safety' are illustrated by the video-extract below (Figure 13), taken from my second intervention with the group (Week 2). The group has been asked how they perceived their problems and what they wanted to change. The extract starts almost 3 minutes into the intervention that I am leading, following the question: What would you like for your group?

Time in seconds	Name	Spoken language	Visible behaviour	Interpretation
2.27	Erdem	Nothing *(bored tone of voice)*	Two pupils raise their hands. Erdem is not moving, appears to look at me and to pay attention. He is not raising his hand (starts to talk anyway, without being invited to do so).	Does not want to discuss this.
2.32	Me	What do you mean? Nothing needs to be changed or you want nothing for your group? What are your thoughts about this group?		
2.37	Erdem	Normal *(bored tone of voice)*	Nothing visible in his behaviour. He is not moving at all.	

2.46	Me	Okay, so are you saying that there are no problems in this group?	Is 'blowing her face' while looking at the teacher.	Looking for help?
	Fatime			
2.46	Malik		Sits with his hand under his head.	Appears to show no interest.
2.56	Fatime and Karen		Both looking at the teacher.	Looking for help?
3.17	Fatime		Goes into hiding.	Experiences no help? Feels intimidated?
3.18	Fatime		Is hiding under her table.	Withdrawing? Afraid?

| 3.18 | Kevin | | Is covering his ears. | Shutting himself off? |

Figure 9: Video Analysis School D (16-04-2015)

As in all schools, in School D the initial intervention was to ask the group to put the tables aside to establish the group's developmental stage. The following video-extract (Figure 10) and my reflective notes (Figure 11), clearly illustrate how this group, almost at the end of the school year (April), was still in the beginning (forming) stage of group development. The extract starts almost 20 minutes into the session, after reflecting on the video images of how the group performed the task the previous week. During the group discussion, the group mentioned that they had *"to work like a team"*. This time we needed a large circle to have room for the labyrinth game, so all tables had to go to the side.

Time in seconds	Name	Spoken language	Visual behaviour	Interpretation
19.08	Group	Screaming and shouting, no deliberation.	All children start to move their own furniture without any system or logic.	No group, just individuals.
19.17	Malik and Masoud		Stay put. They sit in their seats and do not move, or react to what others are saying.	The boys are testing me.

19.21	Hamid		Starts dancing and shaking his bottom.	Wants to show he is in control; wants to see how far he can go.
19.34	Frank	Shouts at Hamid that he has to go out of the way.	Lifts a table on his own. All content falls out of the drawers.	
20.04	Samira	No words.	Has to climb over the fallen chair and content of the drawers.	Accepts the situation as it is, does what she has to do and ignores what is going on.
20.12	John and Denzim		Start wearing headphones to shut off the noise.	Accept the situation, take care of themselves.

20.39	Erdem and Frank		Try to build a third level.	Are they simply trying to make as much room as possible or am I being challenged here? I do not know what to do at this point.
21.41	Group	Shouting. Noisy.	No cooperation. Al children only take care of their own tables and chairs.	"I have done what was asked to do". No responsibility for the end result, school materials or personal belongings.
22.09	Hamid	Sort of singing.	Dances on a chair.	Daring.
23.53	Group	Talking.	Sort of circle.	

Figure 10: Video Analysis School D (09-04-2015)

> **08-04-2015**
>
> The classroom is full of posters with 'behaviour statements'. From the start of the activity, it was everyone for themselves with no deliberation about where to put the tables or how to approach the task. Merely shouting, screaming and trying to go in their own individual direction. There were many disputes and conflicts, personal items fell on the floor, including a pair of glasses, but no one felt responsible. At some point a table almost fell through the windows and onto other children with no one taking responsibility. Both teachers were present but that did not influence the behaviour. One group of boys was testing the boundaries whilst the rest of the group ignored what was going on (put on headphones, turned the other way). No self-regulation or regulation from the group and it took 5 minutes to get something that looked like a circle. This group is a collection of individuals.

Figure 11: Reflective Log entry School D: 09-04-2015

The data deriving from the videos in School D indicated that the group was still in the orientation or forming stage: pupils were still testing the teachers and their peers; others were looking for the teacher's protection or simply 'turned off', by putting on headphones. The teacher stated that there was:

> *a strong competition for leadership in the group; little contribution in class; personal feelings that I (teacher) cannot put into words* (initial interview).

Other data, such as the group plan (see Appendix I), and teacher statements revealed that, again, the focus had been on the individual needs of pupils, by trying to control the behaviours through detailed class rules, a behaviourist punish-reward system, and individual behaviour plans. Hence the group developmental process was being supressed.

Discussion

Knowledge about groups is not considered to be an important subject in teacher training (e.g. Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans, 2017). Although all teachers stated that they knew about stages of group development, they had never looked at pupil behaviours they found challenging from a group perspective. Their focus, and hence their actions, were aimed at the behaviour of individuals. The influence of the group on individual behaviour was something they had noticed and, in line with the Kanjer (Tiger) training (Vliek, 2014), referred to as 'giving fuel to the unwanted behaviours', but teachers did not regard it as reciprocal and interactive.

The actions taken in all four schools appeared to align with the basic question underlying the philosophy of Adequate Education: 'What does this child need'? (Pameijer & Beukering, 2008), focussing on the individual child, thus ignoring the fact that a class is also a group. As stated by Forsyth (2017), in groups, people react to and with each other. Children are members of different groups: family, school, sport or music. In these groups they have different roles and behave in a different way as a result of the group dynamics. As Doel & Kelly (2014) rightly point out that, although these roles are important in the context of the group, they are sometimes wrongly interpreted as individual characteristics. Therefore, when searching for 'What does this child need?', it is important to understand the behaviour of the child from the perspective of the group as a whole rather than labelling the (unwanted) behaviour of an individual. Doel & Kelly (2014) explain how individuals or groups can get stuck in their role(s) and the importance of 'unfreezing' the situation. In School A, initially the answer to the question of a seemingly disruptive pupil, André, 'What does André need?' was sought in anger-management training. Once the problem was identified in the group after André had asked his 'key question', the group as well as André, gained insight. Together they were able to 'unfreeze' the situation and to find new ways of interacting.

A consequence of not viewing a class as a group is the interpretations teacher, behaviour specialists or SENCOs make of the behaviours they experience as difficult. The fact that, for example, conflict is to be expected in every group (Doel & Kelly, 2014; Malekoff, 2014; Northen & Kurland, 2001) and that conflicts in the group, are not a sign of being a bad teacher (not being in charge), but instead a sign that 'the group is on the way', was a great relief for the teachers that took part in this research (data from teacher interviews).

From a group perspective, it is very difficult to define a group in education. Although it is a planned group (Cartwright & Zander, 1968), planned for educational purposes, because of the fact that in many cases children stay together for 8 years, it also has features of a primary group (Toseland & Rivas, 2012) and because education is compulsory, it has features of a 'mandated group' as well (Malekoff, 2014; Nebel et al., 1997). That is why existing developmental and diagnostic models developed for groups other than those in educational settings cannot be simply replicated. However, changing the order of the stages, as suggested by van Engelen (2014); Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans (2017) or van Overveld (2016), is denying the fact that groups in educational settings *do* also develop according to similar stages as any other group and that there is interaction, interdependence and structure in these groups too. Since the situation and circumstances of children in a small village school differ from those of

children in a large, multi-cultural city school, their needs will differ too. But the characteristics of the behaviours show similar patterns.

Many social-skills approaches mention 'the golden weeks' (Bijleveld, 2011, van Engelen, 2014), referring to the first six weeks of a school year as the time-frame for the initial stage. However, in primary education, children typically stay together for the duration of eight years. In School A, the initial stage progressed into the subsequent stage within a single week or perhaps even within a day, since the staff mentioned that *"this group really is a group"* (interview head teacher). The literature (e.g. van Engelen, 2014) indicates that groups can also regress to earlier stages when a new pupil is added to the group or another pupil leaves. In other words, even if a group stays together for eight years, that does not mean that the development of the group shows a progressive line. In School B, for example, the dynamics in the group changed once pupil Oscar went to another school. From that moment, the problem between Bas and Ron became more evident. In School D, in the previous school year, the teachers did not report any problems, unlike the teachers taking part in this study. The deputy head teacher and teacher of the former Year 6 had not anticipated that the new composed group would regress to the beginning stage of group development. As separate classes, Year 5 and Year 6, both groups showed no significant problems, but once they were merged, from a group perspective, the new group had to start forming from the beginning. The data show that the group was not given the opportunity to do so since in April, almost at the end of the school year, they were still in the beginning stage. The data, thus, indicate the importance of teachers' knowledge about groups and of how to facilitate group development.

The cross-school data indicated that, prior to the interventions, none of the groups had progressed beyond the transition stage because teachers' and schools' systems and rules had prevented a 'natural' group development. The data also indicated that the focus on individual pupils, and perceiving behaviour problems as 'factors within the child', was not helpful, in terms of the dynamics and atmosphere in the group. In addition, the data indicate that deeper knowledge of how groups develop and what the needs of a group are at certain stages may help teachers in understanding their pupils' behaviour in the different stages of group development.

Summarised, the data suggested six key points. First, in line with the statements of Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans (2017) and Miedema (2002, teacher training does not regard knowledge about groups as an important subject in the Netherlands. Second, progress does not always mean a linear progress from one group-stage to the next, as became evident in School D. Third,

teachers need to feel secure in their teaching and understand that roles in groups are always contextual, reciprocal and interactive. Fourth, existing models of group development cannot simply be replicated in schools because a class as a group is very difficult to define since it has features of different kinds of groups. Fifth, when looking at 'What does this child need?', the group in which this child is, should also be taken into consideration. And sixth, the data also indicate what can go wrong in groups – and what the groups get blamed for – when teachers lack knowledge about groups (Malekoff, 2014).

4.2.2   Theme two: Social Skills education

In the initial interviews, teachers and head teachers reported that they had invested in extra social skills lessons. All schools used the Tiger training (Kanjer training) to teach children social skills and to assess the outcomes. In school B, the behaviour specialist invested in extra social skills lessons, and in all schools, several individual children received extra help. As also became evident in the initial interviews, the outcomes of the pupil-monitoring system did not agree with what the teachers experienced in the classroom.

In all schools, during the intervention, the statements pupils made appeared to show evidence of how the social skills lessons had been effective. In School C for example, pupils referred to one of the Tiger statements, 'we treat each other with respect', on several occasions. As examples of this, they gave: not interrupting others when they are talking; waiting for your turn; not laughing when someone makes a mistake. However, the behaviours the same pupils showed in class did not align with their statements, as shown in the next video extract. This starts several minutes into the group discussion, evaluating the greeting activity in which the theme 'respect' emerged.

Time in seconds	Name	Spoken language	Visual behaviour	Interpretation
3.16	Me Rafiq	How can you show respect to your peers in this activity?	 Is raising his hand	Rafiq is involved and eager to give an answer.
3.21	Rafiq	Non-verbal	 Clapping his hands	Is alerting his peers to pay attention.
3.23	Rafiq	Non-verbal	 Waving his hand	Is alerting some peers.
3.42	Rafiq	Respect is listening to each other and waiting until someone has finished talking.		Rafiq shows that he knows the answer that he believes I would like to hear.

Figure 12: Video Analysis School C (16-01-2014)

In my reflective log I wrote:

> 16-01-2014
>
> During the entire intervention, Rafiq showed his involvement in the activities as well as in the group discussion. Rafiq stated: 'Respect is listening to each other and waiting until someone has finished talking', showing that he knows the theory. However, there seems to be no transfer between his words and his actions. He has no idea that he is acting 'disrespectful' when he starts talking to Aman in Arabic, just seconds after receiving a compliment for his contribution.

Figure 13: Reflective Log School C 16-01-2014

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

In all four schools, social skills were 'taught' as discrete lessons, planned according to the time-table. Statements made by pupils during the interventions gave the impression that these lessons had been successful. However, the problems as experienced by the teachers, as well as the pupils, indicate that there was a gap between knowing what behaviour is expected and acting accordingly. Rafiq, in the above example, knew what was expected of him or what he thought was the 'right answer' to my question, but his immediate 'action' indicated that he did not 'own' this knowledge.

Ryan and Deci (2000:71) distinguish between 'internalized behaviour' and 'integrated behaviour'. Internalized behaviour can be shown on demand or can be achieved through reward or punishment (ibid). When values are 'owned', meaning that pupils behave as desired, even when no one is looking because these values are congruent with their own values, it is defined as 'integrated behaviour' (ibid). Since the outcomes of the pupil-monitoring system were not congruent with what was experienced in the classrooms, resulting in the schools' requests for my intervention, a possible explanation might be the way that the pupils' social skills are assessed. This is the subject of the next section.

4.2.3   Theme three: Assessment of pupils' social skills

The Inspectorate gives priority to data from the pupils' self-reports to measure the outcomes of the pupils' social competencies (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2014b:39). The Tiger (Kanjer) training, used in the participating schools, offers questionnaires for pupils (and teachers) to complete twice each year. In the questionnaire, pupils are required to respond to statements such as: *'I am being bullied'*, by ticking one of the boxes labelled as: *'absolutely not true'* – *'not*

really true' – *'sort of true'* – *'absolutely true'* (Appendix M). These statements are related to four coloured caps, representing social, disturbing, unhappy or negative behaviours or intentions (Kanjertraining, 2016).

In School B, pupils mentioned the behaviour of Brian as a contributing factor to the problems in the group. In the initial interview, the head teacher also mentioned that parents had complained about this pupil and demanded he be expelled (initial interview, 28-10-2013). In his self-report however, Brian viewed himself as: trustworthy, nice, honest and absolutely no bully, whereas the teacher ticked the box 'frequently' in response to the statement about bullying.

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

The above findings support how this form of assessment can be characterized by unrealistic judgements about situations or self (Guyt,2003). Even when children respond to the questionnaires honestly, wrong or misleading conclusions can be drawn. There could also be a problem of language and definitions. For the pupil-monitoring system, all pupils are asked to react to the same statements, based on the assumption in the questionnaire, that all pupils have the same interpretations, thoughts and feelings about these statements. Despite these flaws, the weight placed on the questionnaire findings by the government is huge.

A similar problem occurs when teachers have to complete observation sheets in this monitoring-system (Appendix N). Teachers must select boxes, from *'never' to 'often'*, in responding to statements including: 'Shows dependent behaviour', 'disturbing behaviour', 'lack of concentration', 'lack of motivation', or 'aggressive behaviour'. How, for example, the frequency of disturbing behaviour should be measured, not only depends on what a teacher experiences as 'disturbing', but also on their definitions of 'frequently' or 'often'.

4.2.4   Theme four: Language and definitions

In the initial interviews and group discussions, teachers and pupils mentioned problems with bullying. This problem was handed back to the groups to explore during the interventions. In School A, B and C, all children could use words like 'bullying' or 'respect' in a sentence. However, when asked for a definition, these differed. For Mahmoud, for example, bullying was 'hitting or kicking someone', whereas for Brigit, bullying was 'being excluded' (Pupils'

statements 16-05-2013). Thus, there was clearly a need to include a focus on exploring language and other concepts, relating to behaviour, for example assumptions and interpretations of language, in the AR cycles. This work was planned for and implemented in all four schools.

In School A it took two interventions, in the form of activities to experience how people tend to act, based on our own assumptions, to establish a common definition for the word 'bullying', by comparing individual interpretations and looking for commonalities. The pupils came up with this definition of bullying:

> *Doing something to someone else that is hurtful for that person on the outside or the inside of that person, and not wanting to stop doing that when specifically asked.*

From the moment we established a common definition, complaints about bullying could be evaluated against this definition. Based on what was learned in School A, in School B we also started with defining the word bullying before we explored the issue. Once the group here agreed on the importance of the word 'repeatedly' in their definition, they realised that, for example, not being picked in a team, or not being allowed to join a game, is not bullying unless it happens repeatedly.

In School C, from the first encounter with the group, the word 'respect' was mentioned frequently by pupils and teachers. All pupils were able to make carefully crafted sentences with the word 'respect', such as: "*You show respect when you congratulate the winner when you have lost; Respect is being careful with others' belongings"*. 'Doing' respect, on the other hand, was a totally different thing as, shown in Figure 12. The next intervention in School C started with viewing the fragments (as shown in Figure 12) with the group. First pupils' statements defining respect, made in the previous meeting, were recalled and then, the pupils were asked to search for examples of 'doing respect' or enacting this quality in the video. As with School A above, it took two meetings to come to the understanding that 'respect' is something one has 'to do', rather than 'to say'. In School C the group defined respect as:

> *Respect is a gift you can give to others.*

The group used the word 'gift' because: "*it makes you feel happy when others listen to you, greet you, or not get angry when you do not want or dare to do something"*. The group decided

to '*practise doing respect*' by not laughing or making fun of others when someone made a mistake or did not dare to do something. Although this was a big challenge for some pupils, in the next meeting the teacher stated that the group was making an effort and helping each other by reminding individual pupils of what the group had agreed.

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

Social-skills course books and teachers assume that all readers have the same definition of words. The data show that, although all pupils were able to make a good sentence with words like *bullying* or *respect*, these words were interpreted in different ways. It is difficult for a teacher to find evidence for complaints about bullying when the 'victim' perceives a look or not being invited for a birthday party as bullying. The data highlight the importance of involving the group in establishing common definitions for use. This theme is closely linked to the theme of emotions and feelings.

4.2.5   Theme five: Emotions and feelings

In Schools A and B, there had been incidents with pupils in earlier years that had seemingly been dealt with, but which pupils raised during this study, indicating that these incidents still played a role in the problems currently experienced in class. The emotional way in which some pupils reacted to certain activities showed the importance of exploring the influence of emotions and feelings in conflicts. The first incident in School A was the bullying problem, which the school could not find evidence for (initial interviews); the second dated back at least two years, and had been forgotten by the teachers. In School B, the incident that still influenced interaction in class also dated back at least two years, but parents and the school assumed that this 'file' was closed.

First incident School A: André and his parents complained about bullying. The teacher, head teacher and Year 6-8 coordinator (henceforth 'coordinator') had talked with André, his parents, and the pupil allegedly bullying, who denied this. The school could not find proof of the bullying and suggested that André might benefit from anger-management control. But what was the school looking for?

When André asked his key question in class: *"What do I do that makes you not accept me?"* it became evident how important it is, not only to have common definitions, but also to talk about assumptions, emotions and feelings. When first Thomas and next Stefan started to cry, the teacher was unable to film any longer and wanted to end the session. Guiding (not

forbidding) the emotions, helped André to understand his role. Opening the wound in class, in front of the whole group, was not only very brave of André, but it solved a problem adults had not been able to do in two years (see Appendix J).

After André's 'coming out', Leanne's parents went to the head teacher and told him about the existence of the 'I hate Leanne club'. Initially, the school acted as accustomed: the teacher and the coordinator talked with Leanne (the alleged victim) and Bianca (the alleged initiator of the club), and informed the parents afterwards by phone. Bianca's parents were not happy with the procedure, and copied me in the email to the head teacher. My interventions had already finished since the problem I was asked for had been solved, but because the parents had sought my help, I contacted the head teacher and reminded him of how the group had been able to solve the bullying problem that the school could not. I also explained that what was happening now was the result of the interventions. I suggested involving the group in this bullying problem too.

Figure 14 and 15 below are translated summaries of emails from the parents and the school's response, illustrating the failure of school's application of their 'bullying protocol' (see for more detail Appendix K).

> *Dear sir(s)*
>
> *Last Friday, at 3 p.m., my wife was taken by surprise by a phone call from D about the fact that B supposedly bullied her classmate L. L's parents had made their complaints to the school. In this conversation, D also stated that L's parents had come again to school because they were of the impression that the school was not taking any action. Now B should be questioned, without the presence of her parents, and hard measures eventually will be taken. We find this line of action very strange and careless for several reasons.*

Figure 14: Parent's email to head teacher

> *This morning I have spoken with B.[...] She is very indignant that she is perceived as a bully because that is not how she views herself. She admits that sometimes she participates in the bullying, but she has no idea why SHE is sitting here now.[...]*
> *After recess I had a conversation with both B and L.[...] According to B there absolutely is no I hate L club. At this point in leading the conversation, I could not get any further because it resulted in a 'yes-and-no conflict' [...] It was very difficult for L to react, which I understand. [...] I have only asked her whether it was possible that other children sometimes initiate things, but that she only sees what B is doing. "Could be", was all she said. But perhaps this was a desired response to my question.*

Figure 15: Coordinator's reaction to parents

Having acted as accustomed, the school initially concluded that Bianca's reactions were sincere and that Leanne needed help. However, the AR interventions had made some of the group members uneasy about their roles, and things had started to 'brew'. Some club members wanted to get out of the club, and others wanted to come clean, putting pressure on Bianca. This resulted in Bianca confessing to her parents that, indeed, she was the founder of the club. At that point, the head teacher asked me to come back to work with the group again, and shared the school's bullying protocol with me (see Appendix K).

The data show how in both bullying cases in School A, following protocols and procedures does not necessarily lead to the truth. These are rational adult solutions for solving problems, and at first sight, appear to be fair. However, they do not capture underlying emotions and feelings. This particular bullying problem had started with a play-date that went wrong in Year 5 and that had been 'solved' by the teacher with a rational solution (see Appendix K).

The extracts below (Figure 16 and 17), taken from individual interviews with Leanne and Bianca, illustrate how the teacher had offered a rational explanation, being unaware of the feelings of hurt and betrayal of both girls at the time.

Leanne: *"In Year 5, when in happened, the teacher sat down with us and asked us what had happened. Then she said that it had all been a misunderstanding and that we both had acted silly. Bianca should not have shouted through the letterbox and banged on the windows, I should not have hidden behind the couch. Since we were friends, we both had to say sorry and make up. At that moment it felt okay, but as soon as something new happened, all the old feelings would come back and we had a new fight"* (Interview 22-08-2013).

Figure 16: statement Leanne

Bianca: *"I think that it is better to tell how you feel right away. It is difficult and I did not like it much what Leanne said about me today, but I feel so much better now! I think adults find it difficult too"* (Interview 22-08-2013).

Figure 17: Statement Bianca

These findings about the importance of pupils being able to express feelings at the time of key events were fed into School B, where a conflict between two boys (Bas and Ron) appeared to be under control. I was invited to work with the group because of the complaints about bullying of another pupil (Oscar). However, when I wanted to start an activity, both Bas and

Ron approached me and told me that there was a rule that they could not be in the same group so I had to assign one of them to a different group. In this case, a conflict in Year 5 resulted in the advice to the boys to avoid each other and the school accommodated this decision. However, being in the same classroom meant that every look or remark was addressed with the old feelings, confirming the assumptions of all involved. The boys, the parents and the school were unaware of how this seemingly rational, adult solution affected the rest of the class and the boys themselves, as the conflict remained unsolved. Again, by raising the problem explicitly with the group, the group was able to help, by offering different perspectives and motives for solving their issues (see Appendix O).

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

By triangulating emails, interviews, pupil statements and video data, a new hypothesis started to emerge: complaints about bullying are not only a matter of language and interpretation, but also of how adults may not take the emotions and feelings of children seriously and instead give adult advice.

Discussion:

In all cases, adults had talked with the pupils in question about the facts: 'what has happened?'; 'who said what?'; 'who did what?', and gave advice. Emotions and feelings (largely based on assumptions) had not been addressed. Teachers clearly believed that problems could only be solved on a rational level. André had problems and he had already received individual counselling for one year, in line with the *Adequate Education* question: 'What does this child need?' to deal with his anger issues. The teacher and the coordinator had talks with André and the alleged initiator of the bullying about what had been done or had been said, and had advised them how to behave and avoid conflicts. However, since the emotions had not been addressed, every new situation was interpreted with the old emotions and feelings. In the second bulling problem, it resulted in creating the 'I hate Leanne club'. The teacher in School A had also been Bianca and Leanne's teacher in Year 5. She remembered the playdate that went wrong and how they talked about it in school. She was present during the confrontation of Leanne and Bianca about the 'I hate Leanne club' and stated afterwards:

> *You know, at that point, I always start to fill in or to make suggestion. […]*
> *It is difficult not to say anything and allow them to work it out themselves*.

The coordinator also incorrectly interpreted the emotions and feelings of Leanne and Bianca and acted on his own interpretations, rather than giving time to help them by asking clarifying questions (Appendix K).

With their anti-bullying protocols and school confidants, schools believe that they can control bullying. However, children's reasoning differs from adults', as do their solutions (Doel and Kelly, 2014). Facilitating dialogue without imposing solutions or avoiding emotions might look time-consuming at the time, but in the end, proved to be more effective.

The coordinator in School A showed what he had learned from this groupwork intervention about children's emotions in relation to bullying in a meeting with all involved:

> *I have realized from this process that a bullying problem is not so*
> *straightforward as it looks. In both bullying cases I offered myself as a*
> *confidant but I was not aware of the role of the group. What I take away*
> *from this process is involving the group* (Field notes, 22-08-2013).

The head teacher in School A also stated here how a groupwork approach changed his perspective on the perceived problems:

> *What I have learned most from this approach is the importance of talking*
> *with the group, making the group responsible for what is happening with*
> *an individual pupil. This is a learning process for the teachers* (Field notes
> 22-08-2013).

In the initial interviews, teachers and head teachers indicated that dealing with conflicts and problems was absorbing 'valuable learning time', indicating that they did not perceive 'learning to deal with problems and conflicts' as valuable learning. Carr & Kemmis (1986:183) counter this:

> *If someone argues that there is no time for a certain important topic to be*
> *covered in the school timetable, the action researcher will argue that the*
> *('objective') constraint of time is only apparent; in fact, the issue about*
> *how people choose to use their time, and that either the timetable should*
> *be changed, or the important topic should be included in a subject already*
> *in the timetable.*

The attainment targets for primary education clearly state that schools also have a social obligation, listing as one of the three important obligations of education '*equipping children for*

participation in society' (SLO, 2006:1). As in the majority of Dutch primary schools, the participating schools responded to the social obligation by 'teaching' social skills according to the class time-table, and with the help of course-books or programmes. However, school social-skills programmes address problems and conflicts on a cognitive, rational level and result, as described by Ryan & Deci (2000), in internalized behaviours. The children in this research were very capable of dealing theoretically with hypothetical situations and knew what boxes to tick in the questionnaires, because no emotions and feelings were involved. However, emotions and feelings colour our thoughts about events, are powerful and can cause illogical or foolish behaviours (Baumeister et al., 2007). On the other hand, emotions and feelings can also help children to learn and profit from experiences (ibid). Talking about their emotions and feelings helped Bianca and Leanne, André (School A), and Bas and Ron (School B) to solve their problems and provided learning situations for their peers because a bullying situation is never just something between bully and victim, but involves the entire group. Offering their perspectives and being actively involved leads to integrated knowledge (Ryan and Deci, 2000), as the data highlight.

The data indicate that 'learning social skills' is not something that can be put on the time-table as a discrete subject. During the day, all sorts of interactions take place, doing something 'with' or 'to' others, causing emotions and feelings that prevent children from taking active part in the so called 'valuable learning' of spelling or mathematics. The data highlighted how social learning can be embedded in the entire curriculum by involving the group in the experienced problems.

4.2.6   Theme six: Non-verbal language

In School D, in the initial interview, one teacher mentioned inappropriate behaviours of some pupils that she *was not able to put into words or give examples of.* In my first meeting with the group, I gained some idea of these behaviours.

> 08-04-2015
>
> The atmosphere in the group did not feel genuine. When entering the classroom, a few boys approached me and asked me who I am. Although the boys introduced themselves with a handshake, I felt what it is the teacher could not put into words: their energy did not agree with their words and actions. There was no 'hard evidence' of unacceptable behaviour. In fact, these boys showed perfect manners by shaking my hand and introducing themselves. The behaviours of these boys appeared to be very 'desired behaviours', but I felt intimidated in a way that I could not logically explain.

Figure 18 Reflective Log, School D 08-04-2015

Bauer (2006) explains that what I felt, and what is generally described as: 'gut feeling', assumption, prejudice or intuition, is in fact a physical reaction of the body to the body language of the other; a communicative sonar that scans the other and shows us in a subtle and subjective way if we are dealing with a friend or a fiend. When assessing their pupils' achievements in social skills, teachers have to 'tick boxes' in response to 'measurable behaviours'. But how, for example, should I assess the behaviour of the boys above when it was 'just a gut feeling' that their behaviours were 'inappropriate', without being able to 'show evidence'?

One of the problems with the current assessment tools is that they are based solely on written language. As Tomasello (2009) argues, language (spoken and written) is the most recent form of human communication, but before speech, people communicated on a physical (or energetic) level which is still the first way children learn to communicate. Education (including tests), however focuses on language, prioritizing speech and writing (Flewitt, 2011). The meaning of spoken language is bound to the context of a situation and to the bodily activity (Brons, 2013; Malinowski, 2007; Tomasello, 2009). To visualize this communicative contradiction, I compared two situations in which a boy apologized for his behaviour.

time in seconds	name	spoken language	visible behaviour	interpretation
19.23	Ahmed	(lauging and cheering) noooooo	Pushing David back in the circle	Having fun; engaged in the activity
19.25	Me	Now it is getting difficult. Earlier you stated that we have to show respect for other countries' customs. But what about David's feelings? Can we force him to do this or should we respect his feelings now? What do you think?	(Ahmed: going back to his seat, making himself smaller)	Feels embarrassed.
19.30	Ahmed	Sorry, sorry!	Plays with the cords of his sweatshirt, looks at the floor	Is sorry and feels ashamed

Figure 19: Video analysis School C 16-01-2014

time in seconds	name	spoken language	visible behaviour	interpretation
15.27	Hamid	Cheering loud	Walks from his seat, wiggles his bottom as a soccer player after a goal, raises his arms	Testing how far he can go
15.29	Group	Hamid! Act nomal!	Irritation, frustration in the group. Four boys react by showing similar behaviour as Hamid	It is a battle for power
15.31	Me	Hamid, do you hear what the group is asking you?	Hamid ignores me and does not look up	Testing his limits
15.32	Hamid		Slowly walking back to his seat, in the meantime clapping high five to a friend	His body language expresses: so what?
15.35	Hamid	Sorry, my mistake (board tone of voice)	Lying in his chair	I have done what was asked so you cannot tell me off. I won.

Figure 20: Video analysis School D 09-04-2015

These two video fragments show the importance of paralinguistic language in interpreting spoken language. Ahmed's body language, his volume and tone of voice were all congruent with his words, whereas Hamid's body language, tone of voice and manner of speech conveyed a meaning that contradicted the purported meaning of his words.

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

Initially, the way that Ahmed apologized in school C, was not perceived as a 'critical incident'. When however, I started working with School D, as above, I went back to the data gained in the other schools and to the literature to find explanations and other examples.

The participating schools all experienced problems related to the social behaviour of one or more pupils in their groups that contradicted the outcomes of the pupil-monitoring system. The data indicated that the latter cannot capture nuances, such as: contradictions between pupils' apparent linguistic or outward conformity to social norms of behaviour, including showing theoretical understanding of this on a questionnaire and their inner, embodied resistance. The instruments currently used to measure the level of 'social skills', can in fact 'mask' the reality. The above findings indicate that the currently deployed instruments to measure pupils' social skills are inadequate because they do no capture the complexity of social interaction.

4.2.7   Theme seven: Relationships: school and parents

In the initial interviews, all teachers and head teachers spontaneously identified parents as a possible cause of the problems experienced in class. Their statements were analysed and labelled in the table below:

School	Statement	Label
A	*When there is something with their child, the first reaction of the parents is to go in 'defence mode', blaming the school, the teacher, other children or other parents.* *Parents do not teach their children to take responsibility for their own actions.* *Parents do not talk to the teacher when there is an issue, but start talking with other parents at the gate.* *Conflicts between children sometimes result in conflicts between parents.*	Relationship school – parents.
B	*Parents have lost faith in school.* *Parents demand that a child will be expelled or their child will be transferred into another class.* *Parents go directly to the head teacher and demand that he solves the problem or sets pupils or other parents straight.*	Trust
C	*Parents insist that problems originated outside school will be discussed and solved in class.* *Parents address each other and cause friction this way.* *Parents come into the classroom as if they have to keep an eye on things or on me.*	Trust
D	*The parents that you need to speak, never attend any parent-teacher meeting.* *Parents complain about other pupils and demand actions.*	Relationship school – parents.

Table 12: Statements about school-parent relationships

The teachers mentioned that they felt their responsibilities were increasing, identifying parents as one of the factors that complicated their work.

An issue arising from the group discussions related to the difference between the pupils' and teachers' perceptions of the role of education in the development of social skills. The pupils believed that their parents were solely responsible for teaching social and moral skills, (knowing right from wrong, treating others with respect and being well-mannered).

> *The teacher says that we have to come to her when someone is calling you names or is bullying you, but my father says that you have to show such a person who is boss right away by giving him a good punch* (Damien, School A).

In School D, Malik got angry when asked what social skills his parents taught him and stated that this was private. It appears that parents and schools send conflicting messages.

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

In all schools, the main form of communication between parents and school (apart from the scheduled parent-teacher meetings) was through email, telephone, or in limited cases, face-to-face, with some parents seeking interviews with the head teacher. In School A the school took actions about bullying (Bianca and Leanne) and informed the parents afterwards. In School B, Joshua's parents insisted in an email to the head teacher that he must transfer Joshua to another class or to expel Brian, to solve Joshua's problem of feeling victimized. The parents of Ron and Bas were partly responsible for the fact these boys had not been able to solve their conflict. In School C the parents told the teacher how to act in conflicts between their children and implied the teacher was being observed. As part of the interventions, a special parents' evening was planned in School C.

> The parents' evening started with 'a collection of individual parents', all 'knowing' what other parents or the school should do better. After the head teacher had explained the reason for this evening and why the school had decided to involve me, it was my turn. Instead of giving my usual presentation, explaining my interventions, I told the parents about *roles*; how we all perform different roles in different aspects of our lives. Parents recognized the examples I gave, and started to share similar experiences. Next I asked parents about their hopes and desires for their children, and asked the teachers to explain what motivated them to choose a career in education. Then I returned to the different roles.
>
> Becoming aware that, teachers and parents see different aspects of the same children in different settings, but all have similar hopes and desires for these children, resulted in one father asking: *"Why is this the first time in 5 years that we are sitting together like this, discussing and sharing our problems, worries and desires?"* The head teacher offered that parents could use the school if they wished to have more of these meetings.

Figure 21 Reflective Log entree School C 25-02-2014

In School D the teachers complained that the parents of the pupils the school experienced as 'most difficult', did not come to school when invited. Given the current marketization of education, the teachers' motives for not making house visits were understandable. However, the situation in School D had reached a level that, in my view, demanded 'new' actions as I wrote in my log:

19-05-2015

From what I have experienced until now and based on my knowledge of groups, I believe that the problems in class are related to the cultural differences the children are confronted with and cannot be solved without the help of the parents. What confuses me is that the deputy head teacher agrees with my observations, but is of the opinion that the real problem is that the parents do not come to school when invited. The suggestion to organise a parents meeting, as was done in the other schools, was rejected for that reason. My suggestion to visit the parents instead was also rejected, one argument being that house visits do not fit into the school's policy, another that it could send a wrong message to visit just certain parents. It feels that we are in an impasse.

Figure 22: Reflective Log entree School D 19-05-2015

Discussion:

The data suggested that the current marketization of education is inadequate, with parents viewed as 'customers' buying a product (de Winter, 2010), creating a wall between parents and schools. It may be necessary to reinstate some former practices. House visits and general parents meetings to explore non-academic issues were common in the 1980's, but have stopped, no longer being seen as schools' responsibilities, or being funded. In fact, in School D, the teachers complained that the parents they desperately wanted to speak with, never attended any of the parent-teacher meetings. This problem could have been solved by teachers using their professional judgement to visit these parents even if it is no longer a school or national policy to do so, but clearly, policy is largely at fault. Children spend five and a half hours a day in school with their teacher. At present, in an average school, parents and teachers meet two to three times a year on scheduled moments for 10 minutes to talk about the academic results of the children. When there is a problem, in most situations, it is, as the head teacher in School A stated: parents go directly, in a defensive mode, to the head teacher, to demand that they solve the problem. A reason for this negative parental attitude might be the pressure on achievements as mentioned by Biesta (2009), Förrer at al. (2004), or van Overveld (2016).

However, from a group perspective, there might be an alternative explanation, as parents and teachers do not experience the same behaviours at home and in school. Examples of how we all perform different roles in different groups in the parents meeting in School C, was not only helpful for the parents, but also for the teachers. Together we talked about all our different roles in life such as: being a mother, daughter, friend, lover, daughter-in-law, or teacher.

Simply identifying our behaviours in these different roles, or the difference in language we use when being among friends compared to in our roles as mothers or teachers, caused laughter and recognition. It made it easier for parents and teachers to comprehend that teachers and parents see different aspects of the same children. It is not a matter of being on 'opposite sides', but simply of seeing the same child in a different role.

In School A, cooperation between the school and the parents helped in solving the problem between Leanne and Bianca. Initially, because the coordinator acted as accustomed (taking action and informing the parents afterwards over the phone), the school and Bianca's parents were on opposite sides and communicated through email or phone. Initiated by Bianca's parents, the school and parents sat together and discussed the situation. From that moment, they acted as partners and informed each other when something new developed. In School C the parents' meeting changed the relationship between teacher and parents. This supports van Manen (2006) who argued that parenting and teaching derive from the same fundamental experience of pedagogy and that parents and teachers should cooperate as partners in the upbringing of children.

4.2.8　Theme eight: Assumption about cultural differences (equal opportunities and doing justice to all)

The teacher in School C observed how some boys with culturally different backgrounds perceived every wrong step in the labyrinth game (Appendix L) as a personal failure, whereas the other children perceived it as a learning opportunity. Consequently, this made the teachers wonder if this could be explained through their cultural differences (Interview, 13-02-2014), since they could not think of other explanations. For the teacher (and school) it was obvious that all children had to be solely viewed as 'children', irrespective of their backgrounds.

In School D the deputy head teacher made very clear that it was school policy to treat all children the same. During the 3rd intervention in School D, a critical incident occurred in which two boys had an altercation: Malik pushed Denzim, which Malik denied, although it was captured on video. Did Malik consciously lie? With the evidence on video and from a Dutch cultural perspective, the answer would probably be 'yes' as the following video extract shows. The extract starts half an hour into the Labyrinth activity. Denzim, Murad and Erdem were concentrating on the game and were giving instructions. Without realizing it, the group had worked together and found the right way. Malik had already cost the group points for talking

and making mistakes. Urged by the group, he did stop talking, but started to make other noises (banging with the chair, tapping with his feet, clapping his hands). The rule was: not talking, so he was 'behaving' according to the rules.

time in seconds	name	spoken language	visible behaviour	interpretation
33.38	Malik		Enters the circle and pushes Murad. Murad pushes back.	
39.14	Malik		Pushes Denzim.	
39.17	Malik		Looks at the teacher.	Is testing us. He is not talking so he is still behaving 'in line'?
39.19	Malik		Pushes Denzim again.	No reaction from me or the teacher so it must be allowed?
39.30	Malik		Laughs and hides behind Denzim.	How far can I go?
39.34	Malik		Still laughing. Pushes Murad.	
39.37	Murad		Starts to laugh, pushes Malik. Malik bumps into Denzim.	
39.38	Denzim		Looks shocked, confronts Malik. Malik and Murad sit down.	Is frustrated. He is working hard to help the group and Malik an Murad are distracting him.

39.50	Murad		Takes initiative, signs Malik to get up and pushes Malik against Denzim.	Enjoys what is going on and wants to continue.
39.51	Denzim		Looks at the teacher for help.	What should I do?
39.52	Denzim		Shows irritation and pushes Malik against Murad.	No talking allowed, so he tries another strategy to stop the irritating behaviour.
39.56	me	(Stops activity)		
40.00	me	*Why does the group lose points now?*	Denzim looks irritated, Murad and Malik laugh.	
40.01	Denzim	*He pushed me* (irritated and angry tone of voice).	Points at Malik and Murad. Walks away from them. Looks frustrated or irritated. Crosses arms, than rubs his hands.	
40.05	Malik	*He pushed me and he pushed me.* *I am the victim* (defensive tone of voice).	Points at Denzim and at Murad. Walks away and sits on a chair.	
40.08	Murad	*I touched him*	Points at Denzim. Laughs and looks at Malik.	
40.28	Malik	*I was helping. I was pushed. I did not do anything. I do not know. I was pushed for sure* (raises voice). *I am not going to take the blame for this* (very defensive tone of voice).	Sits in the chair, smiles. Raises shoulders, rubs his hands. Opens hands to the side. Opens hands on his lap.	It is not my fault. What did I do? I did not talk so what did I do that was not allowed?

| 40.38 | Malik | | | |
| | | | Withdraws from the scene. | |

Figure 23: Video analysis School D (23-04-2015)

> My goal was to find out how the self-deployed leaders of the group would deal with 'failure' and who would take directions from whom, based on what was observed in school C. Much to my surprise, the 'leaders' were very eager to be successful and gave directions to all (but refused to take directions from the girls). For the first time the group really worked together as a group. Year 6 and Year 7 were both engaged. Perhaps because Erdem was not present. The group even managed to keep Hamid 'in line'.
>
> Malik made mistakes that already had been made by others, thus costing the group points. By complaining and discussing all the time, he did cost the group even more points. I was hoping the group would 'correct' him the way they did with Hamid, but perhaps his role in the group is more influential than Hamid's because no one reacted until he continued to push Denzim.
>
> Why did Malik deny all responsibility? The other 'leaders' reacted frustrated when they made a mistake, but did not start a discussion. Was it a matter of 'losing respect'? Of being afraid to lose his position in the group because all followed Dezim's directions?

Figure 24: Reflective log entry (23-04-2015)

Discussion:

For the schools it was very important to treat all children equally. Although these intentions were good, by doing so they neglected the children's social context. Children are members of different communities, which serve as points of reference for them. Azghari (2013) distinguishes between attitudes in Western, and Asian or Islamic cultures, in terms of what parents believe is important when raising their children. In general, indigenous Dutch parents raise their children in a content-targeted way: the capacity to speak up for yourself, take responsibility or be independent are important values in upbringing. For Dutch parents with an Islamic background, in general, obedience and respect are important values. They raise their children in a more 'form-targeted' way: what the community thinks, or how things are done in the community are highly valued.

For children, living in two cultures can be confusing, as elaborated by Bläser (2001). At home they learn the norms and values of their culture and in school they are confronted with the Dutch norms and values, in this study being Catholic norms and values in all schools. Bläser (2001) also emphasises the importance of not ignoring cultural differences and points out that the second and third generation Turkish and Moroccan people are sometimes more traditional than their countryman 'at home' because they hold onto the traditions they grew up in. This means that there may be a potential clash in terms of the two cultures understanding each other. For example, Bläser argues that punishment and humiliation may have been important features in pupils' upbringing so just 'talking' and being satisfied with apologising, may not be seen as adequate 'punishment' for negative behaviour.

In this vein, Amil stated of his friend: *"If you want H to listen, you have to hit him with a stick, that is what our teacher in the Mosque does"* (source: field notes 15-04-2015)*.*

Although Bläser (2001) writes about her experiences of cultural differences in Germany, her critical comments on the lack of support and awareness amongst teachers is paralleled by the findings of this present study in Dutch schools. Teacher accountability is only for pupils' academic achievements, which are compared on school and international levels (Biesta, 2009). However, developing social and emotional skills, and understanding how to enact gender roles in accordance with expected cultural norms at school are not perceived as being part of teachers' roles and are not discussed in parent-teacher meetings. The data support the need for parents and teachers to talk, enabling common grounds to be found.

Interpreting Figure 23 above with this knowledge, Malik's behaviour may have been caused by a range of intersecting influences, including his cultural upbringing, since the way you perceive and judge the world around you is influenced by the way you were raised (Azghari, 2013). In the Netherlands there is a politically sensitive issue in the form of Act 23 of the Constitution (paragraph 2.2) that complicates the discussion about dealing with different cultures and religions in education. In School C and D, the unspoken assumption was that, by signing the application form when enrolling their child, parents, regardless culture or religion, agreed with the school's mission statement, which is based on the Catholic denomination, and its underlying values and assumptions. *"In our religious education, we want to teach pupils that our religion has norms and values. Everyone is welcome, including children with other religions" (School C, 2018:11).* In turn, this assumed that the school and parents were acting from a common position. The parent-teacher meeting in School C showed that, indeed, parents and schools 'act on common ground' in what their aspirations for the children are. But it also

showed the importance of discussing different views on how to achieve these aspirations. (Figure 21).

In School D the conviction that all children have to be treated equally, meant that all parents were invited to school three times a year to talk about academic results and were invited to come in whenever they wanted to talk about something. But, as the deputy head teacher stated: *the parents that you desperately want to speak to, never come in* (initial interview). In the school behaviour plan I received (Appendix I), major problems that teachers reported were that, even though fluent in Dutch, some children *'continued to speak Arabic in class'* with their friends, which made the teachers feel uncomfortable, and some children *'showed behaviours that felt inappropriate but could not be put into words'.* In School D the teachers and the group were struggling, in particular with the behaviour of five boys. In dealing with this behaviour, the boys were, of course, treated the same as other children. The boys themselves, however, indicated cultural assumptions about why they may be ignoring the behaviour-sanctions of the schools, as one of the boys in School D stated: "*Our head teacher is not a real man. You only have to say I am sorry, I will try harder next time, and it is over*" (source: Field notes 15-04-2015).

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

The data indicate that children with a different cultural background, which may intersect with other aspects of identity, such as gender, may have particular needs that should be respected. The data in School C and D reveal that children are struggling with their identity and with concepts like respect, honour and honesty. Treating them exactly the same as other pupils, rather than considering that they may need additional support is not just. This indicates that the underlying question of *Adequate Education* (what does this child need? – Pameijer & Beukering, 2008) should also include pupils' needs, based on their cultural backgrounds and other identities. In all schools, thought was given to normative needs from an educational perspective. Also, the special educational needs of the individual pupils had been taken into consideration. The specific needs reflecting gender, race, ethnicity, language or socioeconomic background, and the contextual needs (the social environment and cultural content of the pupils life) (Malekoff, 2014), were trivialized or perhaps even ignored.

The group plan in School D noted that certain boys continued to speak Arabic in class, showed no respect for girls and 'lied'. These observations were made by the teachers from a Dutch perspective. For these children, school can be very confusing because they are confronted with

Dutch norms and values. According to Schuringa (2001), this can hamper the development of their identity. The rationale for the school's 'consistent' approach is based on the principle of equality: all children have the same rights and are entitled to receive the same education, regardless of ethnic, cultural or religious background

In a culturally diverse group, safety, a positive atmosphere and achievement are all important. Behind all differences, commonality can be found, as the parents discovered in School C, which leads to acceptance of differences and finding compromises (Prinsloo, 2012; Schuringa, 2001). As long as we fail to acknowledge our differences, there is no dialogue possible.

For the group in School D, establishing safety and a positive atmosphere was a basic need from with purpose and goal should have derived in the first weeks (see Appendix B for explanation). In planning their group, the teachers should have gained some basic knowledge about the home cultures of their pupils in order to establish their contextual needs.

4.2.9 Theme nine: Assumptions about Learning and the Teacher's Role in a Classroom Group

In the initial interviews the (head) teachers stated that the behaviour of the groups or individuals in the group made teaching difficult or sometimes even impossible. In all schools, classes were approached as a group from an educational perspective as in 'reaching their (individual cognitive) targets'. Problems with behaviour were perceived as 'disturbing factors', preventing the teachers from doing their job (see Table 7 and Appendix E).

In all schools, social skills lessons were taught according to the timetable and with the help of course-books (teacher interviews). There appeared to be an assumption that children learn social skills through rules, sanctions, rewards, social skills lessons and behaviour plans and that they learn how to behave because they are 'taught' about behaviour. However, recent research (Orobio de Castro et al., 2018) indicates that social-skills programmes, including the 'Tiger training' used by participating schools, proved to show no verifiable effects in counteracting bullying.

In School A, the head teacher explained that the new school and class rules had been drawn up by the staff and members of the parents' committee. Van Overveld (2016) advises teachers to write group-behaviour plans for their groups with colleagues. Adults think *for* and *about* pupils. They come up with rules starting with 'we', or write group plans, starting with 'this group needs', without having consulted the group. In School A the head teacher stated *'an*

increase in measures only resulted in an increase of the unwanted behaviours'. In School D, the group plan was not based on the group's needs, but on the teachers' need for order, concentration, control and reaching their targets (Appendix I), resulting in '*behaviours that felt inappropriate but could not be put into words'* (initial interview).

Another persistent teacher assumption was of the value of transmissive forms of pedagogy. In School B, the teacher was asked not to interfere while the group had to solve a puzzle without talking. Afterwards, she stated how hard it was for her to watch the frustration on the pupils' faces. She felt that it was her job to *"help, guide and steer because that is what teachers do".* It was only after she had seen pride and the feeling of success from pupils working hard to solve this problem that she realized she had *"never allowed her pupils to learn from the experience".* This experience allowed us to talk about the difference between teaching and facilitating learning and the role of the teacher.

Discussion:

Dewey (1915) and Rogers (1979) both argued that schools should not be places where children are taught artificial lessons that they perhaps might or might not be able to use in life, but should be places that are of importance for the children right now. Children *do* experience problems such as exclusion, bullying, conflict and so on. When problems like this occur, children need guidance in dealing with these problems immediately not by teaching or telling them what they might do in hypothetical situations, as is done in the social skills lessons. A behaviourist 'punish-and-reward approach' to get children to behave as desired (van Engelen, 2014:47), as used in School D, initially appeared to be successful as teachers reported 80% of pupils conforming to these (Appendix X). However, subsequent behaviour demonstrated the inadequacy of this approach.

Thus, Pink (2016) argues that behaviourist approaches only work temporarily and can lead to more unwanted behaviour, like deceit or short-sighted thinking, because the desired behaviour change is not intrinsically motivated. According to Ryan and Deci (2000) 'intrinsic motivation' is an eagerness to learn, because of a personal desire to be able to do or know something. They also argue that children are intrinsically motivated to learn how to behave when their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness will be satisfied. In schools however, certain behaviours and values are prescribed and these rules often make little sense to children. Therefore, children rebel against them (Malekoff, 2014), as was experienced in School A and D. The fact that in all four schools, the pupils were able to define and show desired behaviours, indicates that the knowledge gained in the social-skills lessons had been 'internalized' but

given continuing reports of poor behaviour, this knowledge had not been 'integrated'. Echoing Malekoff (2014), by 'teaching' the pupils school and class rules, the pupils were deprived of the opportunity to learn from experience and to own the rules.

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

As Silverlock (2000) argued, teachers often think that they already know about developing social-skills (roles in groups, active listening, or creating space for all pupils to contribute). However, being challenged to enact a groupwork approach made participating teachers realise their lack of *embodied* knowledge and skills. Thus they may have theoretical knowledge of desired social behaviour without knowing how to enable children to enact this, or indeed, enacting this themselves. Thus, listening with respect is not the same as politely waiting until the pupil is finished and then telling the pupil what to do, but involves trying to understand what the pupil is trying to tell you. The teacher has to be open to new interpretations, especially in complex multi-ethnic situations as in Schools C and D, as advocated by Fielding & Moss (2011). Being able to make new interpretations and new connections is not something that can be achieved by teaching, but happens through active dialogue between teacher and pupils, and pupils with peers, as co-constructors of knowledge (ibid). It happens through discussion, interaction, and argument (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). The teachers that took part in this study were impressed by what they learned from their pupils about sharing emotions (School A); children's reasoning (School C); how children can help each other by offering new perspectives (School B); and the influence of different cultures on behaviours in the classroom (School D).

The data highlighted that children *do* want to be in a friendly, cooperative, considerate and respectful group, and are very capable of solving their own problems when given the time and some appropriate guidance (see Appendix J, K and O). In School A, B, and C the group learned to offer help to the group, by offering new perspectives and giving feedback. Real problems or conflicts were discussed, involving authentic feelings and emotions. In School B one of the pupils stated: "*Wow, this way you really solve a conflict"!* Clearly, in order to resolve conflict, pupils also needed guidance. However, this demands knowledge and skills that the teachers in this study seemed to lack at the start of the interventions and were shown, gradually developing, to differing levels, during the research. An important outcome of this study was identifying the skills, knowledge, habits and attitudes teachers need to acquire, in order to help children to learn social skills (Appendix P).

The findings of this study indicate that involving children in establishing rules for behaviour in the classroom is not regarded as 'valuable learning' or as part of the teachers' job. However, all teachers in this research were surprised that, when given greater freedom to engage with complex problems of behaviour and social interaction, pupils demonstrated an unpredicted, sophisticated understanding of what was going on. In School A and B, the teachers believed that André, Bianca and Leanne, and Ron and Bas, needed the help of adults to solve their problems. They did, but not by telling them the 'best solution': they needed the help of adults in guiding the dialogues with peers. This Vygotskyan (1978) scaffolding is what Northen and Kurland (2001) describe as 'mutual aid': children helping each other to grow and change through their relationships and interactions with peers. Instead of solving the problems for the children, the data indicated that teachers should support pupils to help each other to grow and change through their relationships and interactions with others, in building more fulfilling lives for themselves and for the groups of which they are a part.

Clearly raising teachers' conscious awareness about established values and beliefs that underpin their seemingly natural teacher-centred classroom roles (Taylor & Medina, 2013; Sutherland, 2015) was essential in solving the problems they experienced. Showing trust in pupils and making them jointly responsible for what was occurring in the classroom turned out to be more effective than blaming the group for their lack of motivation and uncooperative behaviour (See Appendix J, K and O for examples of how the groups solved problems). This supports the social pedagogical view, in which learning is seen as a social activity, elaborated in chapter two. In this study the teachers realized that not all can be taught through instructing or explaining. They experienced that children can learn from each other or from experience and talking about their experiences. Guiding this kind of learning requires different teaching skills, habits, attitudes and knowledge as I will further elaborate in chapter five when answering the research questions.

If we take the obligation of education seriously when it comes to preparing children for their roles and tasks as responsible adults in our society (SLO, 2006), we have to abandon the neo-liberal view of school as a business with the mission to achieve predefined outcomes that can be achieved by teacher-technicians (Fielding & Moss, 2011). Instead, we must start using the classroom as a communal space for practising the democratic principles that will enable children to become active, fulfilled citizens (ibid; SLO, 2014).

4.3   Summary

In this chapter, I have conducted a thematic analysis, identifying the knowledge that emerged from the AR cycles. The next chapter addresses the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this Action Research study was to better understand the teachers' perceptions and experiences in dealing with negative behaviour in the classroom and to find possible solutions. These research questions informed this study:

1)   To what extent can the perceived discrepancy between the findings of the pupil-monitoring system on the effectiveness of pupils' social skills and teachers' perceptions of their pupils' social skills be explained by the concept of 'group' in education?

2)   In what ways can engaging with the class as a group affect the problems related to pupils' social behaviour that teachers currently experience?

3)   What knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits do teachers need to acquire, in order to engage with their class as a group?

4)   In what ways might a different conceptualisation of the 'group' contribute to the educational and social outcomes, specified in the core objectives (SLO, 2006)?

The following sections discuss each of the four research questions in relation to the findings of this AR study and then presents recommendations for further research.

5.1   To what extent can the perceived discrepancy between the findings of the pupil-monitoring system on the effectiveness of pupil's social skills and teachers' perceptions of their pupils' social skills be explained by the concept of 'group' in education?

In mainstream primary education, children are put together into year groups, ability groups or instruction groups for reasons of efficiency (Braster, 2011). These collections of children are called 'groups': group 1 – first year of education, or four year olds; group 2 – second year, or five year olds, and so on. Since the implementation of WSNS (Together to School Again) in 1992, leading up to the Adequate Education Act in 2014, the central question is: *"What does this child need to reach the set targets?"* (Pameijer & Beukering, 2008:61). In other words, although the children are brought together in groups, the focus is on the academic needs of individual children. Behaviour problems are viewed as 'child characteristics' and 'obstructing factors' in reaching the academic targets.

The data highlight that this was what had happened in the participating schools. In the initial interviews (table 7), teachers or head teachers mentioned that the behaviour of one or more individuals in the group made teaching difficult (School A, B and C) or prevented teachers from doing their work as required (School D). Special behaviour plans had been written for individual pupils, for example for André in School A, or in School D for a group of pupils showing disturbing behaviour and reacting to each other in a negative way (Appendix I).

The data highlight how this way of conceptualizing a group underestimates the dynamics in a group. As stated by Forsyth (2017:10), when people are put together in a group, all sorts of things start to happen. They start to talk, to argue, to comfort, support, help or upset each other. They do things *to* and *with* each other. How people interact not only depends on the situation, but also the composition of the group and the reasons for being in that group (ibid). Brown (2000) explains how, as individuals, we all tend to perform different roles in groups we belong to. Our sense of identity and self-worth are bound up with our group membership. In every new group, we have to redefine who we are, due to the role we take or get assigned in that new group. This explains why one teacher has no problems at all, whereas the next teacher experiences a group, or an individual in the group as problematic, or why the behaviour of a pupil suddenly changes when another pupil enters or leaves the group.

The data also highlight that the individual pupils are not the problem. For example, in his initial interview, the head teacher of School A stated that he perceived the individual pupils as *"nice kids"*. It is in fact the interaction between these individual pupils, or the interaction between pupil(s) and teacher that is experienced as difficult or problematic (Table 7). Nevertheless, the currently deployed pupil-monitoring systems collect the results and progress of individual pupils, assuming stability of behaviour across contexts. Therefore teachers must tick a box such as 'frequently' in response to questions like: *"shows disturbing behaviour",* or *"feels unhappy"* (Appendix N). This, however, is impossible because behaviour is always contextual (van Overveld, 2016). Additional information for the pupil-monitoring system derives from the 'self-evaluations' of pupils (Appendix M), which are, clearly, fallible.

When thinking of the definition of the word 'social': *"living in groups, not separately"* (Oxford English Dictionary), the fact that the pupils' social skills are assessed as individuals is ill-conceived. In itself, the outcomes of the pupil-monitoring system might be correct, but they do not provide explanations for the perceived problems because a group is more than a collection of individuals, achieving their academic goals. As the data highlight, a class is also a *"setting for an infinite variety of interpersonal actions"* (Forsyth, 2017:10).

The awareness of the fact that behaviour is always related to context and interaction, resulted in the development of an observation and evaluation plan (Appendix D), at the start of the AR study with each class. This plan, developed with the teachers and pupils, helped to establish where the group was, in achieving its goals. Since no group and no situation are ever the same, this plan has to be adjusted to every group or to every perceived problem. In this AR study, teacher(s) and group(s) were asked what they wanted to change, when they would have achieved their goals, and what needed working on. During the interventions, every week the groups reflected on their achievements, and helped identifying what they needed to work on further. This approach allowed pupils to give each other or the teacher feedback on their behaviour, and for all involved to reflect on their own behaviour. The video-recordings proved to be a reliable tool for reflection and assessment because not only could pupils view themselves and compare their statements with their behaviours, but also the non-verbal interaction between pupils became visible. The data highlighted how the currently deployed instruments to measure pupils' social skills are also inadequate because they do not capture the complexity of social interaction. Solely based on written language, they do not capture looks, gestures, tone of voice, emphasis, speed of speech, or the impact of other paralinguistic language on others, for example the behaviour of Hamid or Malik in School D.

Summarized, the findings of this study highlight that the discrepancy between the outcomes of the pupil-monitoring system and what is experienced in the classroom can be explained by the educational concept of 'group': a collection of individual pupils, achieving their academic and social targets, whereas the experienced problems relate to the interactions in the classroom. The findings also highlight the necessity of conceptualizing a group in education as a *"setting for an infinite variety of interpersonal actions"* (Forsyth, 2017:10), and for implementing this definition in the assessment tools that inform the pupil-monitoring systems. The developed observation and evaluation plan (Appendix D) provided the opportunity for pupils and their teachers to assess their progress as a group, as well as their individual progress.

5.2   In what ways can engaging with the class as a group affect the problems related to social behaviour teachers currently experience?

In teacher training, teachers learn that 'being in charge' and 'being able to maintain order', are essential teacher skills. When thinking about the experienced problems with social behaviour, in this line of thinking, it is 'the teacher versus the group', making the teacher (or school) solely

responsible for finding solutions. In all four schools the actions taken to address the problems experienced with the class or the individuals, before the AR study, had been initiated by the schools, namely: implementing new rules, extra social-skills lessons, behaviour plans for the group (School D); or individual pupils (all schools); consulting a behaviour specialist (School B); or individual talks with alleged victims and bullies (School A). The real 'experts', the groups themselves, had not been involved in the problem-solving process since they were viewed as being or causing the problems. The groups had been approached as collections of individual pupils that needed to be educated to achieve their individual academic goals. Problems with social behaviour had been perceived as 'child characteristics' and 'obstructing factors'. The experienced problems however, all related to some form of interaction (table 7).

In this study, the groups were approached from a groupwork perspective, as: *"two or more individuals who are connected to one another by and within social relationships"* (Forsyth, 2017:3), acknowledging that in all groups there is interaction between its members. Although the teacher is not a member of the group in the same sense as the pupils, because of the fact that in Dutch primary education, one teacher is teaching all subjects and stays with the group for the entire school year, there is also a social relationship between the teacher and the group.

As noted by Adelman (1993), also in this study, teachers were initially critical about involving their pupils in finding solutions for problems with motivation, involvement, or impudent behaviour of an individual pupil, since this conflicted with their own views on the professional role of a teacher. For that reason, in School A for example, the positive qualities of the group which were apparent on fieldtrips had been suppressed in the classroom. In schools, as in other social settings, certain behaviours and values are prescribed (Pink, 2011). However, as Malekoff (2014) advocates, at the start, these should be restricted to some basic rules and structure. Too many prescribed rules can lead children to rebel against them (ibid).

In this AR study, the aim was to identify problems, related to behaviour, then collaborate to solve these, by engaging with the class as a group. The first step of the AR cycle in all schools was to approach the class as a group, asking them to express the problems from their perspectives, handing the problem back to the group, and involving the group in the problem-solving process. Some basic rules for behaviour during the interventions such as: no abusive language and all have to take part, were non-negotiable from the start. Three different ways of engaging with the group were identified during this study.

5.2.1   Student-led solutions:

The data highlight how, in the first group discussions, the pupils mentioned 'stupid rules', (Table 8), as contributing factors to the experienced problems, and why they felt the need to rebel against these rules. In School A, the group expressed their problems with the restricted toilet times. They were aware of what had caused this rule, but believed that there were other solutions possible, such as: not going to the toilet during instruction. Basically, the group asked for trust and autonomy. Once involved in the problem-solving process, the group in School A showed the same positive qualities the head teacher had noted in other contexts, in the classroom.

In all four schools, talking and having arguments were also mentioned as problems by the teachers and the pupils (Table 7 and 8). The pupils suggested allowing time to discuss their conflicts in class.

5.2.2   Confronting the problem:

In School A, André's problem had been treated as 'a problem within the child'. After school he attended anger-management training, and in school the Year 6-8 coordinator tried to mediate between him and his alleged bully. This approach had partially changed André in that he became aware of where his anger stemmed from, and how he could find better ways to deal with his anger, but still he did not understand his peers' reactions. Much of his behaviour was based on his own assumptions of how he believed the group perceived him. From the moment the problem was brought into the group and André received feedback on his behaviour and how this affected the reactions of the group, the situation changed. The data highlighted how the currently deployed practice of labelling pupils and focussing on the individual in finding a 'cure' for the problems of the child, is ignoring the fact that behaviour almost always is contextual and is often determined by situation and relationship (van Overveld, 2016). In other words, the interaction between André and his peers was a contributing factor to his behaviour in the classroom, and only by confronting the problem in the whole group, was it possible to find a solution that satisfied all.

Also in School B, being allowed to discuss and argue in the classroom opened the possibility for what Mercer & Littleton (2007) describe as 'interthinking'. Bas, Ron, their parents and their teachers, had not been aware of how the conflict between the two boys, and the adult

solutions to the problem, had affected their peers. By confronting Bas and Ron with the consequences of the special arrangements adults had made for them, for the first time the group could express their thoughts and feelings. As stated by Mercer & Littelton (2007), the group was not just sharing information, but worked together in finding solutions for the problem: *"When they do so, people do not only interact, they 'interthink', combining their intellects in creative ways that may achieve more than the sum of its parts"* (ibid: 4). The 'suitcase activity' (Appendix O) allowed pupils to offer different perspectives, combining thoughts and ideas. Not only was the problem between Bas and Ron in School B resolved, but also the problems the group experienced with their ball-game during recess, once the group discovered, through experience and dialogue, what 'a different perspective' really means.

5.2.3   Mutual aid:

The third approach to engaging with the class as a group opened the possibility for what Northen & Kurland (2001:23) describe as mutual (peer) aid: *"People helping each other. People grow and change through their relationships and interactions with others".* The data highlight how the group helped André, Bianca, Leanne, Bas and Ron in ways that adults had not been able to. In School C, the mirror activity made clear that some pupils had no idea how others really thought about them. The activity helped them in understanding why their peers reacted the way they did.

Summarized: prior to the interventions, the groups had been approached as a collection of individuals. The emphasis on 'what does this child need?' sometimes felt like an explanation or excuse for the unwanted behaviours in class. Engaging with the class as a group and involving the group in the problem-solving process, not only deepened their understanding of how behaviour relates to interaction, but also enabled pupils to help each other to change their behaviours. The data highlight the importance of educating teachers about groups and interaction in groups. Behaviour of an individual pupil never stands on its own, but is always behaviour related to other persons in the group. The data highlight that involving the group turned out to be more effective than trying to control the group through rules and sanctions.

5.3   What knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits do teachers need to acquire in order to engage with their class as a group?

Since 2017, teachers in primary education must meet a new set of competence requirements. These requirements describe what it takes to be a teacher (Rijksoverheid, 2017). These

competence requirements serve as benchmarks for training and competence maintenance of teachers and are set out in seven competencies: interpersonal; pedagogical; professional and didactical; organizational; cooperating with colleagues; cooperating with the environment; reflection and development. As one of the interpersonal competencies is mentioned: *"The primary school teacher has sufficient knowledge and skills in the field of group-processes and communication to establish good cooperation with and between pupils"* (SBL, 2019:1). However, this study highlights how teachers appear to lack this competence, since this was the reason I was asked in all four participating schools. Also they do not, or not sufficiently, learn about group-processes in teacher training (Appendix Q).

Prior to the interventions, most teachers had the impression that they knew about groups because they were working with groups, and mentioned they had heard of (to a greater or lesser extent) Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development. Nevertheless, they did not use or apply this knowledge in their classrooms, and perceived normal group dynamics, for example, conflicts or power issues, as problematic behaviour (Table 7).

This research highlights the fact that teachers not only need theoretical knowledge, but also practical knowledge in engaging with groups. The micro-analysis of the videos provided tools for reflecting on 'habits that no longer worked' (Dewey, 1910), offered opportunities for 'learning by doing', and acquiring the following knowledge, skills, habits and attitudes for engaging with their class as a group. (see also Appendix P).

Knowledge:

1) Knowledge about group development and group dynamics. The diagnostic model developed during this study (Appendix C), helped teachers to realize that, for example, conflict, is normal in a group-developmental process. Also they learnt that at different stages of group development, the role of the teacher must change because of the changing needs of the group.

2) Teachers need knowledge about behaviour related to child development from a more holistic perspective, as advocated in social pedagogy (e.g. Cameron & Moss, 2011). At present, teachers learn about individual special needs, and labelling behaviours as 'child attributes', instead of viewing behaviour in the context of the group and the situation. In addition, teachers need knowledge about how group processes can help motivating children to change their behaviour.

3) Teachers need theoretical knowledge about societal structures and discourses that influence children's identities, beliefs and value systems. This includes the impact of, for example, cultural diversity (Azghari, 2013; Bläser, 2001) on the academic and social learning of their pupils, for example in: expressing thoughts and feelings; the roles of boys and girls; the role of school and the relationship between parents and school.

4) Knowledge about how children learn social skills. The data highlight how exploratory talk within the peer group helped children to think and reason together. Through dialogue, in School A and B the group solved problems adults had not been able to in two years. This research has shown that not all answers are 'in the back of the book', and learning social skills and rules of behaviour cannot be planned because one never knows what problems or arguments can come up during the day.

Skills:

1) Teachers have to learn to listen actively and respectfully without imposing solutions (Silverlock, 2000). The data highlight how difficult it is for teachers not to impose solutions and to allow pupils to work things out among themselves.

2) Teachers have to learn how to 'confront' pupils with their behaviours or statements without judgement, by asking open, clarifying questions. For example, when in School A, Theo got up to close the windows without being asked or told to do so, the teacher could have asked for his motives, without judging him.

3) A practical skill teachers have to learn is 'reading behaviour' and interpreting the behaviour in the context of the group.

4) Teachers should learn using silence and other 'non-intervention' strategies. Teachers are used to reacting immediately, and to show that they are 'on top of things'. In many occasions, doing or saying nothing can be much more powerful (Doel, 2005).

5) Also teacher need to learn facilitating group discussion in conflict or problem situations. This involves summarizing, clarifying, helping pupils to phrase their feelings and emotions, helping pupils to talk *with* each other instead of *about* each other.

Habits:

1) Teachers need to acquire the habit of waiting for a question before 'giving an answer'. *"In schools, all the answers are ready and waiting, before a child has had the opportunity to ask a question"* (de Boer, 1980:57). In all four schools, the answers, in the form of school and class rules, were there before the children.

2) Next, teachers should learn handing the problem back to pupils, instead of immediately trying to solve it with imposed adult frameworks.

3) The data (School A and B) highlight the importance of involving the entire group in a conflict or problem situation.

4) Teachers should acquire the habit of viewing their pupils holistically, instead of their behaviours or grades.

5) Most importantly, teachers should acquire the habit of using 'the moment' to support social learning, as opposed to 'teaching' social learning in discrete lessons.

Attitudes:

1) Being open and willing to learn from children's creative ways of looking at things.

2) Having faith in their pupils capacities in finding solutions that will work for them.

3) Being open for solutions that seem to be unsatisfactory from an adult perspective, thus allowing children to learn from the experience.

4) Modelling the behaviours and values that teachers would like to see from their pupils.

5) Being open to different cultural perspectives.

5.4 In what ways might a different conceptualisation of the 'group' contribute to the educational and social outcomes, specified in the core objectives (SLO, 2006)?

Before being able to answer this question, we have to take a closer look at different concepts or definitions of groups. In groupwork literature, groups can be classified in various ways. A first distinction can be made between primary and secondary groups. Primary groups involve, face-to-face interaction and a high level of interdependence between the members. These groups are a key means of socialization in society, the place where attitudes, values and orientations are developed and sustained. Examples of these kinds of groups are: families or close friendships (Smith, 2018). Secondary groups are relatively large, formally organized, social groups, in which the members are rarely in direct contact (e.g., trade unions, membership organisations, or congregations). These groups influence members' attitudes, beliefs, and actions, but as a supplement to the influence of smaller primary groups (ibid). Smith explains how this distinction is helpful for understanding why schooling in important areas of social life, as is currently done in education, only has limited impact because teachers nowadays rarely work in a direct way with children's primary groups: the families. Or as stated by de Winter (2010): a wall has been erected between parents and schools.

A further distinction can be made between: Planned groups, groups specially formed for some purpose, either by their members or by some external individual, group, or organization; Emergent groups, groups that come into being relatively spontaneously where people find themselves in the same place (e.g., relatives of victims of a plane crash); and Mandated groups, groups in which the members have been ordered, forced or referred to attend this group by some form of authority, and this might include the threat of a court order, legal action, or compelling pressure from parents or other adults in a position of authority (Malekoff, 2014; Nebel et al., 1997).

At present, there is no clear definition when it comes to conceptualizing a group in primary education. One could argue that a group in primary education is a mandated group, because education is compulsory and the members (pupils) are required to attend school by the authority of their parents and the government. It is also possible to argue that a group in primary schooling is 'planned' for the purpose of education. However, we have to take into consideration that, in the Netherlands, children enter primary education at the age of four, and almost always stay together for the duration of eight years. This is a period in which friendships are developed and sustained; attitudes, values and orientations are developed; there is a high level of face-to-face interaction; and socialization in the school society, so there are also many similarities with 'primary groups'. Thus, from a group perspective, one could argue that a group in primary education is a mandated, planned and primary group. In reality, however, children are educated in groups for reasons of efficiency (Braster, 2011). These groups are collections of pupils of approximately the same age and at approximately the same level, that can be instructed at the same time. This conceptualization of a group is underestimating the natural dynamics that occur when people are gathered in groups.

Although the data highlight that the participating pupils believed that parents, not schools, should develop moral education, for centuries, schools have had a social obligation. In the Netherlands, when whole-class teaching for all became compulsory in the Education Act of 1806, the same Act also stated that *"societal and Christian virtues had to be taught"*, thus acknowledging the socialisation task of education (ibid). Christian, at this time, was not meant as simply religious', but as *"educating the mass as moral and rational human beings"* (ibid:22). At present, this task is expressed in the Government's core objectives for primary education (SLO, 2006). The question remains: *how*? Where the Education Act of 1806 was clear (societal and Christian virtues had to be *taught*), at present schools are free to choose their own pedagogy with participating schools choosing, prior to this study, to *teach* social skills in an abstract way.

This study highlights that social skills cannot simply be transmitted in an abstract way, but real, actual problems have to be experienced, discussed and practised in meaningful situations. The pupils practised and experienced how to solve problems (School A: André, Bianca and Leanne; School B: Bas & Ron, the ballgame during recess), how to act with respect and tolerance (School C), and how to relate to others (all Schools). The data highlight how conceptualizing the group from a 'group perspective' (in all groups there is interaction and interdependence) as opposed to an 'educational perspective' (this group is composed for educational purposes), contributes to the core objectives for social education the government desires.

In all participating schools, in the initial interviews teachers or head teachers stated that the experienced social behaviour in class made teaching more difficult or sometimes even impossible, and solving problems was taking a lot of time at the expense of valuable learning time (table 7). Important aspects of improving the social behaviour in the group, were less distraction, and more involvement in the academic learning (statement head teacher school A).

Summarized, what can be achieved when a class is not approached as a group of pupils in the same year but as 'a group', meaning allowing children to learn *from*, *with*, and *to* each other in a meaningful experiential way was what the pupils and teachers experienced in this study in terms of 'mutual aid', and reaching the targets set by the government. The pupils in this study showed how they do want to behave with respect for generally accepted norms and values (core objective 37, SLO, 2006), but first they need to understand what the benefits of these norms and values are. The data highlight how the groups established rules of engagement themselves through experiential learning and dialogue, that equalled the pre-determined rules set by the school, but because they were now established by themselves, the groups were more willing to live up to their own rules.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins with acknowledging the limitations of this research before considering its contributions to knowledge, with recommendations for future work and for the professionals involved. The value of action research as an approach for teachers in learning about groups is discussed, as well as the value of experiential learning for pupils. Next this chapter reflects on my personal journey as a practitioner researcher. This chapter concludes with the implications of this study for educational practice.

6.1   Limitations

My dual role of being a practitioner, colleague and a researcher sometimes required me to juggle my responsibilities. Researching practice in schools other than my own, sometimes made it difficult to find the necessary time for face-to-face reflections, but we managed to tackle this problem through email exchange and 'phone-reflections'. Due to all the 'non-teaching responsibilities' of the teaching participants, including my own, teachers were not always able to keep their logs as agreed, or to work with me on the micro-analysis of the videos. Therefore it became my responsibility to make notes of the teachers' reflections and to add them to my reports, and often, to select the critical incidents for feedback moments with the group, which should have been joint decisions. This could have impacted the outcomes, since I was in the expert/researcher position and, clearly, looking through my own lens, identifying what I perceived as key incidents to explore (Dunne et al, 2005). Thus, I was, inevitably influencing what the teachers focused attention on. However, because I took the vulnerable position in the classroom, by taking over the group, putting the teacher in the position of the 'critical observer', this limitation was also an advantage as I was then viewed as a colleague and partner. Because I was the one that had to explain my actions and decisions, and had to share my thoughts and feelings, the teachers were also very open and sharing. Thus, they emailed me situations that they had experienced during the week, described how they had dealt with these, and identified arising questions. There was, therefore, a high level of critical reflection from all participants, face to face and on email, central to AR (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Ponte, 2005).

Initially, my main reason for wanting the teachers to keep a log was because I wanted to find out how teachers experienced the transition process from 'teaching social skills' to 'facilitating learning social skills'; and identify what skills and knowledge they needed. However, demanding a log, as agreed prior to the interventions, would, clearly, have been unethical, given teachers' workloads (Drake & Heath, 2011) and I would have placed myself in a more

powerful position as researcher. What I have learned from this experience, as an 'insider/outsider' researcher, is that participants and I discussing our thoughts and feelings made our relationship more equal. We cooperated as colleagues exchanging ideas, in the spirit of AR (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), supporting teachers' current and future development.

Carrying out linear (and cyclical) AR in a series of schools across time, is challenging, even for an experienced researcher. The significant amount of data collected was difficult to manage and report on, especially using time-consuming video interaction analysis. However, the knowledge gained in each school proved to be a significant advantage to the cycles of each of the subsequent schools. For example, the different concepts of 'bullying' in School A, raised our awareness of the importance of language and definitions in social interaction, which was then used in the other schools, enabling understanding on key topics to be deepened.

A final limitation was the fact that School D withdrew from the research, having decided to divide the participating class into two and not to persevere with supporting pupils as a 'group', raising ethical and other issues. The decision was caused by pressure from pupils; I and one of the class teachers did not agree with it, although of course we respected the head teacher's decision. The research ended in an amicable way, with the head allowing me to use all data collected thus far. Schools C and D had particularly interesting contexts, having Catholic denominations but with many non-Catholic pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds. School D's above decision was based on their principle of treating all children equally. Although several of the problems experienced in class could be related to the cultural and religious background of some boys, based on the experience in School C, I suggested involving the parents in finding solutions. The school however was hesitant, stating that the parents that they 'desperately wanted to talk to' would not come to school, and the school did not want to make exceptions by making house visits to these parents, thereby putting them in a 'special' position.

Due to Act 23 of the Constitution (summarised in Appendix A), the influence of religion on education is a sensitive issue to discuss. All participating schools had Catholic denominations, although the majority of pupils in School C and D had other religions. The assumption of the schools however, was that, by enrolling their child in a Catholic school, parents and schools had 'common grounds'. Also, in both schools, teachers wanted to treat all children equally. However, wanting to treat all children equally, is not a synonym for 'doing justice to all'. Literature (e.g. Azghari, 2014; Bläser, 2001) highlights that children growing up in two different cultures or religions may struggle with their identity and as a result, have their own 'special

needs', that are underestimated, or perhaps even ignored, due to the ideology in Act 23. Although a limitation, School D's withdrawal enabled me, with the permission of the head teacher, to deepen understanding of issues about 'equal rights', adding a new perspective to the concept of 'Adequate Education'.

Finally, as in all AR, this qualitative research is small-scale and the knowledge generated is situated, not generalizable (Ponte, 2005). A strength is that it was longitudinal research, conducted in four contrasting schools with similar themes and findings and the problems reported in the schools all showed many similarities to what is stated in the inspectorate reports. Thus, it deepens knowledge and understanding of the complexity of developing pupils' interactions and social skills in school.

6.2 Contribution to knowledge

This thesis makes contributions to knowledge in three key areas:

6.2.1 Teacher knowledge and practice

My first contribution to knowledge is pedagogical: perceiving and approaching classes in primary education as a 'group' is a powerful way to develop pupils' social skills and social understanding. This relies on an experiential learning approach, where pupils and the teachers have to interact in authentic contexts to form respectful relationships, and to practice dealing with actual conflicts and problems (Cameron & Moss, 2011; Smith, 2001). It is a more productive approach than the current reliance on teaching abstract knowledge about social skills, which does not become integrated and embodied (e.g. SLO, 2014). In this study, children learned how to relate to others and how to solve problems (two of the core objectives, SLO, 2006) through experiential learning activities. 'Viewing things from another perspective' is a figurative expression. Actually taking different positions and experiencing different perspectives, helped the pupils in School B to solve not only the conflict between Bas and Ron, but also their conflicts during recess. Also, experiencing how 'assumptions' guide our actions, helped pupils and teachers to understand the need for taking time for discussion.

This distinction between 'teaching social skills' and 'facilitating learning social skills' is important because it extends theoretical understanding from social pedagogy (Cameron & Moss, 2011; Smith, 2009) about the importance of not solely using the head, but also involving the heart and the hand when educating our children. The current educational practice is focussed on the academic needs of individual learners (Pameijer & Beukering, 2008), and national and international league tables have turned academic achievements into a

competition (Biesta, 2009; Förrer, 2004). This study highlights children's capacities in acquiring social skills and democratic principles through social interaction and dialogue (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978), once the class is approached as a group.

The second contribution to knowledge is that teachers need support in developing the required knowledge and understanding about groups. This study enabled teachers to explore their existing knowledge, which resulted in our being able to define the deeper knowledge about groups that teachers need to have, which resulted in the schedule: Knowledge, skills, habits and attitudes (see Appendix P). This could be helpful in teacher training since literature (Luitjes & de Zeeuw-Jans, 2017; Miedema, 2002), as well as the data, show that currently, knowledge about groups is not regarded as an important subject in teacher training. Teachers have to pay a high prize for this neglect (Malekoff, 2014), and the 'cures' for the perceived problems in the classroom, the social skills programmes and behaviour specialists, do not bring the desired results (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2019; Orobio de Castro et al., 2018). This study highlighted that, having just theoretical knowledge about group development was insufficient. Being taught to 'teach', the participating teachers needed to practice skills like facilitating group discussion or active listening, as this study highlights.

A third, related contribution to knowledge is the development of the 'diagnostic model for groups in education', establishing where the groups were in their developmental stage (Appendix C). Learning that the behaviours they were struggling with in class were 'to be expected' (Doel & Kelly, 2014), rather than being a result of 'not being able to be in charge' or 'pulling the strings firmly' (van Overveld, 2016), was a great relief for the participating teachers. Therefore, the developed 'diagnostic model' could also be helpful in teacher training to alert student teachers about the needs their classes / groups have in different stages of group development.

A fourth contribution to teacher knowledge is the way the class viewed and reacted to 'pupils with special needs' once they were approached as a group. With the current focus on *"What does this child need?"* (Pameijer & Beukering, 2008), teacher and class learn how to adept to the special needs of individual pupils (School A and B). However, as stated by Cameron & Moss (2011:155) *"The most excluding factor for children is not being able to relate to other children".* This study highlights the importance of facilitating dialogue, for reflection and feedback, and for mutual aid (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Northen & Kurland, 2001). The data show how pupils like André or Patrick wanted to belong to the group and how honest feedback and dialogue was more helpful for developing social competencies than protection or a special treatment.

6.2.2   Assessment of social skills and current policy

This thesis also found a gap between the way that policy-makers 'measure' pupils' abilities in social skills (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2014b:39) and pupils' embodied understanding and competence of social behaviour. The measurements, especially giving priority to pupil self-reports, were found to be inadequate, largely because of their unreliability and the complexity of interpretation in language (4.2.4). In their desire to be able to 'measure and compare' (Biesta, 2009), the government prefers standardized measuring tools. However, measuring behaviour is rather impossible, since behaviour is always contextual (van Overveld, 2016). Also, because the needs of pupils in a small village school differ from the needs of pupils in a large, pluriform school (Malekoff, 2014; Northen & Kurland, 2001), simple standardized questionnaires will not provide the information needed to address the behaviour problems currently experienced. This study exposed pupils to confronting their statements and assumptions in activities and in reflecting on these same statements and assumptions by viewing the video recordings made during the activities.

The next contribution to knowledge is the observation and evaluation plan that was developed during this study (Appendix D), which allowed pupils to discuss and negotiate their social proceeds together, to give each other feedback, and to assess what needed working on. This kind of qualitative data, gathered from teachers *and* pupils throughout the year, as opposed to twice a year on a given date, offers a more nuanced judgment of pupils' social proceedings.

6.2.3 Research Methods

The final contribution to knowledge is methodological, in terms of how I collected and analysed my video-data. Using video in qualitative research is not new, nor is micro-analysis in video interaction (Brons, 2008; Flewitt, 2013). As argued by Brons (2008) or Cameron & Moss (2011), using video allowed us to open up discussion for professional development of the teachers. However, combining the two and using video-interaction with the whole group, not just with individuals, was innovative, enabling us to explore complex interactions from multiple perspectives: pupils', teachers' and my own. Since this study found issues with the way in which social skills are currently taught and mainly result in internalized behaviours, the videos offered the possibility for reflection and gave pupils autonomy in changing their behaviours (Pink, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Once the pupils got used to viewing themselves on video, they were very critical about their own behaviours. The videos not only offered the possibility to see the effects of their words or actions on others (facial expressions or body language), they

also offered the possibility of viewing their own behaviour from an 'observer' perspective, resulting in personal reflection. For us, teachers and researcher, it resulted in a more contextual understanding of the critical incidents. Confronting pupils with their own behaviour turned out to be more effective than telling them what behaviour was expected, or practising desired behaviour.

Nevertheless, using video the way I did in this study, turned out to be a real challenge for accounting for my decisions. However, as a licenced video interaction counsellor, and knowing the 'power' of reflecting with the help of video images, the choice of using video in this study seemed obvious.

6.3   Action

Successful AR involves generating new knowledge, as explored above *and* changing practice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Ponte, 2005) so I will elaborate on any resulting changes occurring in the four contexts. In all schools, pedagogy shifted and teachers, having observed and critically reflected with me on the value of teaching the class as a 'group', adopted this approach when I left. All said that they had started to deepen their understanding of, and skills in, how to use groupwork and were keen to have more professional development in this. Indeed, most teachers have continued to keep in touch, after the end of the project, emailing to ask advice, inviting me to facilitate one-day seminars on groups for the entire staff, update me about their groups and in one case even, asked me about joining the IASWG (International Association of Social Work with Groups) to learn more about groups.

As a result of this study, the head teacher of School A added a statement about the importance of involving the group in conflicts and problems in the school prospectus. Although I did not follow the schools officially in my role as researcher, since at some point one has to stop gathering data, I still meet the teachers involved in the study at informal meetings. During these meetings, the participating teachers stated how the interventions had changed their views, and hence their teacher behaviour in class. The process of being involved with collaborative AR, using experiential learning and engaging in constant critical reflection on practice about the social aspects of children's learning affected participating teachers. They appeared to became more knowledgeable about groupwork (theoretically and in terms of their practice) and also seemed more purposeful, capable of exercising their own judgement and being creative with their practice, not simply implementing policy. In two of the participating schools I have been back since to work with a group and to work with the staff, since the participating teachers noticed that the role of the teacher in children's social

competences in class was crucial, and their colleagues would benefit from experiencing a groupwork approach themselves.

Although many (head) teachers still believe that solving problems and conflicts in class is a very time consuming enterprise and therefore have invested in extracurricular social skills training with a clear timeframe, as a result of this study (word spreading) I have received many requests for seminars from other schools, all expressing their needs in dealing with groups, confirming the importance of adding knowledge about groups on the curriculum of teacher training courses.

Unfortunately, two of the participating schools have new head teachers since the interventions. Therefore I have no idea how the participating groups maintained the acquired skills.

6.4   Recommendations for further research

The findings of this study suggest a number of beneficial areas for further study. First, since the participants stated that *"solving problems was taking a lot of time at the expense of valuable learning time"* or *"prevented teachers from doing their work as required"* (Figure 7), it is interesting to investigate further if engaging with a class as a group will also affect the academic achievements of pupils.

A second recommendation for further investigation derives from the critical incident in School C, the parents meeting. The parents clearly stated the value of discussing concerns in the upbringing of children together with other parents and teachers. Although the current marketisation concept of education, with parents as 'customers', 'buying' the 'product of educating their children' from schools (de Winter, 2010), reduces the contact between parents and school to two or three pre-determined moments a year, mainly discussing academic results, the parents in School C realised the importance of sharing. Therefore, investigating the impact of facilitating small-scale, general parents meetings on the relationship between parents and teachers and the social behaviour of pupils in class, including their cultural and religious diversity, would be interesting.

The third theme that derived from this study is the possible impact of group size and the

environment on pupil's behaviour. Although there are rules for the size of a classroom[7], pupils start primary education at the age of four. Once they are in their pre-adolescence, it seems obvious that they need more space. In School A and B the pupils mentioned the lack of space as a contributing factor for irritations and for reacting to each other in a negative way. Since it is not possible to generalise based on two schools, it is an interesting theme for further investigation.

6.5   The value of Action Research

My initial decision to adopt Action Research as a methodology derived from Dewey, stating that the problems and motives of pupils should be the starting point for all educational situations (1915). Involving the pupils in finding solutions for the problems experienced in class seemed to be an appropriate, and logical decision. I then drew heavily on Carr & Kemmis (1986) and (Ponte, 2005) in designing my AR study.

An important feature of Practitioner Action Research is reflection at every stage during the process. The need for reflection, as stated by Ponte (2005) derives from the complex educational reality that can be variable and hence unpredictable. Teachers constantly make decisions and the quality of their decisions can improve when they not only reflect on the outcomes of their teaching, but also on the learning processes of their students (ibid). Therefore, an important tool in this AR study was the video data, providing not only opportunities for the teachers to view cause and effect of their own actions on the behaviour of their pupils or the interaction between pupils, but also on their learning processes, resulting in the statement of the teacher in School B: "*I now realise that I have never allowed my pupils to learn from the experience*" (teacher statement, 28-01-2014).

A second important part of this AR study was including the pupils in reflecting upon the effects of the interventions on the perceived problems in the classroom. These reflections were done with the entire group in the form of group discussions, allowing the pupils to challenge each other's statements. At the start of every intervention, the group was asked about the current

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[7] The minimal space per pupil is indicated in gross floor area in square meters (m2) per pupil. Gross floor area is the floor area of the entire school building. This includes spaces such as corridors, stairs and toilets. For primary education the minimal gross floor area is 3.5 square meters per pupil (Rijksoverheid, 2018).

situation: what is their goal?; when will the goal be achieved?; how do we know it has been achieved? Involving the pupils in the reflections after each intervention, not only added important information about, and understanding of the perceived problems in the classroom, but also raised pupils' awareness of cause and effect of their own actions.

6.6   The value of Experiential Learning

In chapter three I have explained my motives for including Experiential Learning in the AR cycles. In agreement with Dewey (1915), I believe that social competencies are best learned through engaging directly with the social environment and through practising with real situations from which understanding evolves through direct experiences and interaction and is free from the abstract definitions used in social skills courses. For the teachers, it was a revealing to witness the difference in learning effect between teaching social skills and allowing pupils to learn from experience. As an insider/outsider researcher, I collaborated with teachers to facilitate their experiential learning and that of the pupils. The best way to express the learning effect of experiential learning is quoting Andrea (pupil School C), reflecting on how the tower building activity helped to understand how an action of one individual can have consequences for the entire group:

> When everyone is just thinking about themselves, the tower falls down. We are connected through the ropes; if one pulls, the other has to let go a little. It is not about what you want, but about what the group needs of you.

6.7   My learning journey

This study has changed me in three key ways, first as a professional in education. What I have learned from the pupils in this study, is how our educational system is 'forcing' pupils to 'come up with the right answers', and is rewarding them if they do so. In my role as teacher trainer, I am raising awareness of the fact that by rewarding pupils for reproducing the right answers, in fact we prevent them from thinking for themselves, generating creative thoughts, and therefore from learning. It has also changed my own behaviour in the classroom in this way that I focus on asking open questions and encourage dialogue, also in academic subjects. I have also learned how pupils desperately want to have the opportunity, in a dense curriculum, to do things 'their way', and if given the possibility, come up with solutions and ideas their teacher never would have anticipated.

Second, this study has changed me as a researcher. In my own learning journey, I have come across similar experiences as the pupils in this study. Due to the fact that the university where I started this study, unilaterally decided to stop their contracts with 'part-time overseas students', I felt forced to find my own way in reaching my personal goals. Intrinsically motivated, I studied research books and came up with ideas and solutions to carry out the research I had in mind. Fortunately, I found a university that was willing to accept me as a student, for which I am very grateful. However, having 'free-wheeled' for a year, this meant as I learned, that even on a university level, a student is supposed to 'conform to the system'. In my solitary journey, being between universities, and in the middle of my AR study, I developed mixed and combined methods that suited the goals I wanted to achieve, resulting in much discussion with my supervisors. I subsequently discovered that this is 'bricolage' (Cohen et al, 2011) an approach highly suited for complex AR by practitioner researchers, which has supported me in gaining rich, layered data from multiple perspectives. I am very grateful for the time and effort my supervisors spent on listening to my arguments for the choices I made and for also guidance towards 'what the system expects' of a doctoral thesis. But most of all I thank them for the suggestion to view the way in which I conducted this research, as a contribution to knowledge.

And third, this study has changed my interaction with parents, which has been supported by my understanding of social pedagogy (de Boer, 1980; Brown, 2000; Cameron & Moss, 2011; van Manen, 2006;). Parents, as well as teachers, never see the 'whole picture' of a child, due to the different roles people have in different groups. In my professional role, I have many meetings with parents, teachers and specialists, all having a different view on what is in the best interest of the child. Since this study, I have gained the habit of starting meetings by giving an example of how we all have different roles in different settings, but still have a core identity. I explain that all teachers, parents and specialists, are right with their view on a child, but at the same time only have one piece of the puzzle. Only by putting all the pieces together, can we get the whole picture, and be able to cooperate in the best interests of the child.

6.8   Implications of this study for policy and practice

This section returns to the question of how social skills or citizenship should be 'taught'. This study shows the value of using spontaneously arising events (for example, conflicts) as practical and meaningful learning situations, reinforcing Forsyth's (2017) argument that children spend five and a half hours each day in a group in which they do things to and with

each other, upset each other, make advantage of each other's weakness and help and support each other. Related to this, teachers should receive professional development on groupwork, ideally during their training, so that they understand the theoretical rationale and some practical, facilitating strategies, which they can implement.

Although only a small-scale study with tentative findings, it suggests that there may be a need for teachers and, indeed, policy-makers to re-consider how social skills are taught. It addresses the tendency, in a culture of performativity and high-stakes assessment, for policy-makers, researchers and teachers to focus only on the academic achievements of pupils (see Biesta, 2009), and to consider 'difficult' behaviour of individuals as 'disturbing factors' in achieving these academic goals. The Adequate Education policy (Min. OCW., 2011b) also leads to a focus on individual pupils and their needs, not the collective needs of the group, and in the end society.

Based on the outcomes of this research, I argue that social skills and citizenship skills should be embedded in the entire school culture as opposed to being discrete subjects on the time-table. Schools are not businesses with customers and clients, targets, and profits; and children are not 'performing units'. Schools are social environments where indeed, children have to be prepared for participation in society, academically *and* socially. The children participating in this study made clear statements about the importance of learning how to deal with problems and conflicts when they are young. Although participating teacher initially complained that *"dealing with problems and conflicts in class was a very time-consuming",* as a result of this study, they experienced how, with some guidance, children were able to find solutions for their own conflicts and problems. Therefore I argue that, restoring the balance between academic and social learning not only will help solving the problems teachers, parents and pupils currently experience in the classroom, but in the end, also benefit society.

6.8.1   Adequate Education

The study also identifies the Adequate Education policy as being potentially problematic and in need of review. In the first meetings, teachers and head teachers mentioned Adequate Education as a contributing factor to the problems experienced in the classroom because it had led to increased numbers of pupils being identified as having special needs in every class. However, if one of the purposes of primary education is to *"prepare children for their tasks and roles in society"* (SLO, 2006), another interpretation of the Adequate Education question:

"what does this child need?'' might be necessary. Related to the concept of groupwork, the study suggests rephrasing the central question of Adequate Education, for example*: "this child needs peers that understand that he has problems in understanding the rules of the game"* (indicating that the group has to adapt to the needs of the individual) into *"this child needs peers that help him to play according to the rules of the game"* (indicating that the group assists the individual in understanding the rules when playing social games during recess). Shifting the focus from the individual to all, in the end will not only benefit pupils with learning difficulties or problems with social interaction, but prepares all children for their role and tasks in society.

Based on the experiences in School C and D, Adequate Education should not be limited to academic or behavioural needs alone. Adequate Education aims to present all children an adequate educational offer (Min. OCW., 2011b). That should also include the specific needs and contextual needs concerning the social environment children live in, the cultural components, ethnicity or religion. Growing up between two cultures can be challenging and such children deserve the same attention and support as children diagnosed with SEN. Worthy of note, was how generous all schools in this research were in sharing their information about the special educational needs of individual pupils and yet how reluctant they were to talk about the possible cultural and related gendered aspects of certain behaviours. At present, decisions are made *about* and *for* these children without involving the pupils or the parents as experts on the topic of cultural diversity and this needs to change.

6.8.2   Assessment of social skills

Another aspect that may need to be reviewed, emerging from this study is the current way of assessing pupils' social development. Given the fact that the definition of 'social' is: living in groups, not separately (Oxford English Dictionary, 1975) it is contradictory that the Inspectorate gives priority to the so called 'self-reports' in the pupil-monitoring system and that social skills are assessed on an individual level. As the data from this study show, in simple observation forms or questionnaires, there is the problem of interpreting language used. Also, as the data indicate, using quantitative data in assessing pupils' social skills can be misleading. A group in which 80% of the pupils is behaving as desired, as in School D, sounds positive, but the findings of this study highlighted how the behaviour of one pupil affected the entire group. In a group with 28 pupils, that is approximately 4% of the pupils.

In this study, making the group jointly responsible for the pedagogical climate in the classroom, allowing the group to develop rules for behaving together, repeatedly reflecting on these rules and how they worked for the group, resulted in increased feelings of ownership and pupils showing desired behaviour without adult supervision. Therefore, any government assessment needs to focus on the group, not the individual and to use qualitative data (e.g. the group's and the teacher's assessment of behaviour across different contexts and time), not invalid quantitative data. The observation and evaluation plan developed during the course of this study could be adjusted to all groups, based on the starting situation and the goal(s) to be achieved. As the data showed, children were very capable of being involved in assessing the progress of the group and in identifying points for further development. In the assessment of social skills, pupils should be involved, but as a group, not as individuals.

6.8.3   Parents and school

The study also suggests that schools need to find ways of engaging more fully with parents, to support the social development of their children. At the start of the study, in School A , B and C the teachers were suspicious of parents, mentioning the protective attitude of parents or the fact that parents felt the need to 'keep an eye on things' as an influential factor in the problems experienced in the classroom. However, the study showed that engaging parents with teachers and exploring their common understandings, for example, their goals and aspirations for their children, created a partnership that supported the pupils. This reinforces van Manen (2006) and de Winter (2010) that raising children should be a joint responsibility, a partnership between parents and school. The data indicated the need for parents and teachers to talk about more than just the academic achievements of children (e.g. Appendix K). Based on the data, I argue that making house visits should become common practice again.

6.8.4   Planning

The final aspect that policy-makers and indeed, teachers, may need to take account of, drawing from this study, is the definition of 'planning the group'. Although writing group plans is not compulsory (Min. OCW, 2018), at the time of this study, many schools required teachers to write group plans for reading or spelling, or individual plans for pupils with special needs. The participants stated that it took a lot of time, and mentioned it as one of the reasons for not being able to keep a log. However, what teachers do not plan is their group itself. Although not all components of the planning model developed by Kurland (1978) that was used in this study, can be applied on groups in education, with some modification, they could serve as a

framework for educational settings. It could be helpful for teachers, for example, to know about the social environment and cultural context of their pupils when planning their education. The consequences of not planning the group became particularly evident in School D (see Appendix B).

6.9   Summary

This Action Research study presented an explanation for the perceived discrepancy between the pupil-monitoring system and what teachers, pupils and parents experience. The findings give evidence of how engaging with the class as a group, affects the behaviour of pupils inside as well as outside the classroom in a positive way.

As long as one of the obligations of primary education is to prepare children for their tasks and roles in society, a society that is diverse and multicultural, the data highlight that children should learn this from the beginning and not once their school period is over. The Dutch word for primary school is 'Basis school', basis as in 'foundation'. So it makes absolute sense to start laying the foundation for our pluriform society in 'multi-ethnic and culturally diverse schools' as opposed to the wide variety of schools we have at present due to the Act 23 in our constitution. In agreement with Prinsloo (2012) and Schuringa (2001), I would argue, from this study, that we need to acknowledge that there are differences between cultures, religions or convictions and allow these to be explored openly. The data in School D show how behaviours had been interpreted and dealt with from a Dutch perspective. Only by confronting and discussing our differences, will teachers become aware of their own beliefs, prejudices, and values, and can begin to share ideas and find solutions.

Society also has to deal with problems and conflicts and as the pupils so perceptively stated:

> *It is better to learn how to solve problems and conflicts when you are young,*
> *since most grown-ups appear not know how to solve conflicts, maybe because*
> *they have not learned it when they were young.*

Telling children how problems and conflicts are or should be solved in the adult world as is done in the currently deployed social-skills programmes, only results in theoretical knowledge that, according to the children in this research, does not work for them. As advocated by Mercer & Littleton (2007:57), when children are encouraged to use talk as a thinking tool, they learn a skill that will serve them in many different situations. This study not only showed the

power of exploratory talk in problem-solving, it also showed how mutual aid (Northen & Kurland, 2001) can be used in the classroom; the importance of working in partnership with parents as opposed to 'delivering a service to clients', and the difference between internalized knowledge and integrated knowledge (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The main finding of this study is that education professionals should reconsider their concept of the group. Although mandated and planned, the fact that in most primary schools, children stay together for eight years, years in which friendships are developed and sustained; where there is face-to-face interaction; where members do things to and with each other; and where values and orientations are developed, the educational field should realise that a class in primary education is, above all, also a primary group. During the course of this study, the participating teachers learned that working with *groups of children* is not the same as *working with groups*.

When engaging with a class using this conceptualization of groups, schools can become a training ground for learning and practising democratic principles as desired by the government (SLO, 2010) and a powerful resource for learning. Based on the data, informing teachers about what can be expected in groups and how to work *with* the dynamics in groups instead of *against* them, and experiencing that learning is a social activity as advocated in social pedagogy, should become an important theme in teacher training again. This is valuable knowledge, that is essential for every teacher.

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APPENDIX A: DUTCH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

One of the most distinguishing features of the Dutch educational system is the existence of several forms of discrete learning environments. First of all, since 2003, there are the so called REGIONAL EXPERTISE CENTRES (RECs are: consortiums of special schools and secondary special schools within a district). Special education is divided into four clusters:

REC 1 – education for children with a visual impairments (blind or visually impaired);
REC 2 – education for children with communicative disabilities (hearing, language and / or speech problems);
REC 3 – education for children with a mental and / or physical handicap or chronic illness;
REC 4 – education for children with psychiatric or behavioural disorders.

The consortium of mainstream and special schools manages and divides the means and the finances. When a mainstream school has shown proof of not being able to meet the needs of a child, the Regional Expertise Centres can offer certain forms of diagnostics and support to the school, and to parents in writing an application for support by one of the RECs (a so called 'indication'). Once the 'indication' has been accepted, support can be offered in different ways: peripatetic supervision for mainstream schools that have enrolled children with an indication for one of the RECs, supporting and assisting parents with the paperwork, coordinating the different forms of support a child needs (WEC raad, 2012).
This means that Dutch education comprises:

- special schools (REC 1 – 4)
- special primary schools (for children with learning and behavioural difficulties and children with moderate learning difficulties)
- mainstream schools with pupils with SEN in regular classes
- mainstream schools with a special group for children with SEN within the school
- mainstream schools that specialise in a particular target group
- mainstream schools that collaborate intensively with special schools (European Agency, 2014).

Apart from these, another form of separated learning environments also exists: publicly run schools or privately run schools (including schools based on religion) and black and white

schools. The phrase 'black and white schools' originated in the cities and since than is used in articles and documents. A 'black school' in the Netherlands is a school in which more than 60% of the pupils has a migration background. A black school is equipped by the government with extra teachers and teaching aids, but that does not prevent many parents with a Dutch background from looking for a white school in the area for their children. Sometimes people cover considerable distances for this. This phenomenon is called 'the white flight' (Alkema et al., 2015).

All these learning environments have a legal foundation except for the latter that originated because parents are free to choose a school for their child they feel is most suited to their needs (Kriens, 2004). In the Netherlands the freedom of education is laid down in Act 23 of the Constitution: parents have the right to find a school for their child that agrees with their philosophies or convictions and if such a school does not exist, to found one (Onderwijsraad, n.d).

In 2017, 70% of the 6804 primary schools in the Netherlands base their education on religious or philosophical convictions, such as: Catholic, Protestant, Reformist, Islamic, Hindu, Jewish, Montessori, Petersen or Steiner, the majority being Catholic. All of these schools receive the same funding as publicly run schools. The main difference is that publicly run schools cannot reject pupils, parents or teachers, whereas the others have the right to reject pupils, parents or teachers if they do not agree with the school's philosophy. For example, Catholic schools are allowed to forbid pupils to wear a headscarf and Islamic schools to refuse teachers, parents or pupils with another religion. (Rijksoverheid, n.d.; CBS, 2017). Clearly, the Act 23 causes tension with Act 1 of the Constitution that forbids all forms of discrimination and therefore generates debate when thinking of the social obligation of education.

Summarised, it means that all types of schools mentioned above can be either publicly run or privately run, and can be white, black or mixed.

APPENDIX B: PLANNING COMPONENTS

   1) Context

Children are members of their communities that serve as points of reference for them. What does the community the children live in look like in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, or shared norms, values and worldviews? Northen and Kurland (2001) refer to this phenomenon as social context.

   2) Pre-group contact

Pre-group contact most often requires some preliminary work with parents (Malekoff, 2014). In most schools pre-group contact is a formality. In the Netherlands parents have the right to choose a school that they think suits their child best (see Appendix A). The first contact generally is when parents visit the school of their choice for the first time. Some teachers visit the family prior to the first school day of the child, but most often this is on a teacher's personal initiative. Making house visits and discussing issues in the upbringing of children with parents no longer is an obvious thing to do. Teachers state that they have no time for house visits (de Winter, 2010). Instead, parents are invited in school at pre-determined moments to discuss the academic progress of their child or when there is a serious problem.

As already argued by Arendt (2004), de Boer (1980) and Dewey (1915), being in relationship with parents is very important from a pedagogical point of view. Not only is it a very effective way of getting in contact with the parents, as a school / teacher, you also express that you are interested in the child and that it is important to you to know where the child comes from and who its parents are. It allows you to become viewed as a partner (van Manen, 2006; de Winter, 2010).

   3) Structure

Structure is about space, time, resources and finances (Malekoff, 2014). In an educational setting, the structure for the groups already is pre-determined by law: the number of years of education, the hours per year, the place where education takes place and how it is financed.

Structure also includes security (rules for emotional and physical safety and confidentiality). Although some rules must be established from the start, in general norms for behaviour and group rules will continue to be negotiated throughout the life of a group. However, according to van Engelen (2014) and van Overveld (2016), in education it is important to make clear what the rules are from the very first day. Malekoff (2014) on the other hand states that if rules are forced upon a group from the start, the group is not only deprived of the opportunity to draw ideas from their own experience, but is also offered the opportunity of rebelling against them.

> *When a group formulates its own rules, they become a policy statement of sorts, reflecting the wishes of the group and providing members with the challenge of living up to and enforcing these rules* (ibid:86).

In schools however, rules and norms for behaviour are often pre-determined by the school and written down in the school plan, school prospectus, and on the walls. Almost always these rules start with "we", like in: we do not exclude others; we walk quietly in the hallways; we

treat each other with respect, without further explanation of words like 'exclusion'; 'quietly'; or 'respect', leaving room for multiple explanations. More importantly, pupils have had no say in it so, not only have their needs for autonomy and relatedness been ignored (Ryan & Deci, 2000), also they were deprived of the opportunity to learn why rules sometimes are necessary and helpful in a democratic group (Arendt, 2004; Dewey, 1915).

4) Needs

Knowledge of the context in which children grow up in is essential to identify the needs, problems or issues of children. Knowledge about developmental psychology and obstacles that might prevent optimal development and also the level of support, not only when it comes to the academic needs of the pupils, but also in meeting the social needs of pupils. The group can be a powerful force in assisting children to meet the needs of establishing social relationships or role functioning (Northen & Kurland, 2001).

Needs can be divided up into: **normative needs** (universal to the age group or target group); **specific needs** (reflecting the problems of particular individuals like illness, developmental problems, divorce, child abuse, but also broader categories like gender, race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic background); and **contextual needs** (the social environment and cultural content of pupils life) (Malekoff, 2014).

5) Purpose

A group's purpose flows directly from the identification of the needs that the group is formed to address (Malekoff, 2014; Northen & Kurland, 2001). Purpose and goals should derive from the needs of a group, and so in theory, should differ from school to school and group to group. In education however, the purpose and goals are pre-determined by the government and/or schools and are about the educational goals and objectives that need to be achieved as written down in the core objectives (SLO, 2006). The purpose and goals are the same for all children and are not related to the needs of the group or individuals in the group, but to the needs of society and/or the government.

It seems obvious that the needs of children growing up in a pluriform community in the city centre differ from those of children in a wealthy all-white city area. The end goal, *"equipping all children for participation in society"* (SLO, 2006) might be the same for all children, but the purpose, deriving of those needs, differs once the needs of a group have been identified.

In planning a group it is important to consider the purpose of the group and the goals they want to achieve as a group or as individuals in the group as perceived by themselves too (Northen & Kurland, 2001). Questions like: what are the important commonalities and differences between the group members; what are the differences in perceptions; where are possible conflicts that need to be worked on, should also be asked in advance (ibid).

6) Content

Content refers to the means used to achieve the purpose for which the group is formed and encompasses what is done in the group, how it is done, and why it is done. It is not the same as the purpose, it is the means or activities the group uses to get there (Malekoff, 2014). The means can be adjusted to what the group needs at that point. However the content of groups in education is pre-determined by the school (course books and/or teaching methods), written

down in the school plan or school prospectus (Min. OCW., 2014) and allows little flexibility, with 'social learning' being fixed in a 'citizenship curriculum'.

Groups are dynamic and *do* things. There is interaction, messages are exchanged through nonverbal behaviours, children do things *to* and *with* each other during or in between academic lessons that influence the dynamics or climate in the group (Doel & Kelly, 2014; Northen & Kurland, 2001). At present the content of the social skills education is pre-set and neither the pupils nor the teacher have had much say in it. Most social skills programmes seem to be based on the principle of 'one size fits all' when it comes to needs, purpose and content, since in the approach is 'whole class' (NJI, 2013) and over 50% of the teachers state that they do not differentiate and all pupils in their class follow the same programme (Kuhlemeier et al., 2012).

7) Composition

Composition refers to the number and characteristics of the members and the teacher that participate in the group (Malekoff, 2014). When planning a group, groupworkers consider for example the size of the group. A group should be small enough for each person to be heard and to feel the impact of the group on his or her beliefs and behaviour. Another thing groupworkers ask themselves when planning the group is:

Will this child benefit from the group? And, will this child be able to participate in a way that his or her presence will not interfere seriously with the realization of the purpose of the group for others? (Northen, 1988).

In the majority of primary schools, the composition of the group is determined by the Year group system or by numbers, leaving little room for determining if some pupils would be better off in another group. Although larger schools with more than one Year group do have the possibilities to make choices, and combine or mix groups, many schools are reluctant to make these choices because they do not only involve organisational issues, but most often also lead to discussions with parents. Nevertheless, composition is very important when planning the group. Girls differ from boys; home language, ethnicity or culture influence the dynamics in the group; and the number of pupils with special needs or the degree of the special needs of only one pupil can affect the group.

APPENDIX C: DIAGNOSTIC MODEL

Diagnostic characteristics	Interventions needed	Teacher role
Orientation: (forming) **T**here seem to be no problems; the group appears to be willing and cooperative. **P**upils test and investigate the situation; they test the teacher and their peers. **N**ew pupils are looking for protection. **P**upils are looking for children they know to connect to or to avoid; little contribution; low risk; observing the situation. **P**upils are reluctant to engage closely with new children or new teacher. **P**upils make use of the rules and norms they have learned at home, in the neighbourhood or have used in similar situations. ***The group is a collection of individuals.***	**A**ctivities that allow investigating, observing, and getting to know the others. **A**ctivities that create a good feeling and a sense of 'being part of', but do not demand a high level of cooperation and deliberation or skills. **A**ctivities demanding basic rules and ways of communication. **T**he activities have to feel safe for all and have to be inviting to all.	**A**wareness that this behaviour is just temporary and can change any moment. **O**ffering a basic structure and a few basic rules. **H**elp pupils examine and discuss basic rules. **F**acilitate establishing group norms. **A**llowing the need for distance and exploration. **H**elp pupils understand what needs to happen. **R**eaching out to individual pupils; encouraging, confirming, acknowledging. **O**bserving; getting to know all. **E**stablishing relationships: what kind of relationship does each child need; connecting to pupils. **E**xchanging expectations and informing the group about teacher expectations. **O**ffering him/her self to the group; *I am here and this is what you can expect of me.* **O**ffering and facilitating activities.
Transition: (storming) **L**ot of conflicts during recess or in the changing rooms. **B**attle for power and influential positions in the group, including the role of the teacher/sizing up. **W**hat is my position in the group/where do I fit in? **W**ho has the most influence? **W**ho should be avoided / who will protect me? **D**iscussions with the teacher ('talking back') sometimes even resulting in oppositional behaviour. **R**eacting to each other in a negative way. **E**xploring and testing the situation. **F**orming of sub-groups. **C**ompeting for friends, complaining/snitching to the teacher.	**A**ctivities from which structure and rules can derive. **A**ctivities in which pupils can measure up and can learn about their own strengths and weakness. **A**ctivities that support good feelings and the sense of 'being part of'. **A**ctivities to raise awareness of what is going on. **A**ctivities to achieve a 'common language'. **A**ctivities that help developing patterns of social interaction and communication.	**A**wareness that conflict is necessary and a normal phase in group life. **H**elping children understand what is going on. **H**elping children to phrase and express their problems and wishes. **H**elping pupils to get to know each other and help identifying how they can help others. **T**he teacher has to offer help in the problem solving processes through: active listening, summarizing, clarifying, turning remarks into questions. **P**rotecting weaker pupils. **F**acilitating reflective moments. **E**xplaining in reflective moments what exactly the power issues in the group are and 'translating' these issues to similar situations outside the group.

Competing for leadership: 'queen bee' / 'alpha male' situations. **C**omplaints about bullying or exclusion. **C**yber conflicts. **L**ot of emotions. **S**capegoating. **T**eacher dependent behaviour. ***The group is on its way.***		**R**eflecting on the scapegoating. **R**eflecting on cyber issues.
Intimacy and relationship: (norming) **T**he personal involvement intensifies. There is more willingness to express feelings and emotions. **S**ome pupils feel strong enough to profile themselves. **G**roup rules and norms are formed and there is a need to obey to these rules. **C**onflicts are discussed with strong emotions. **G**roup decisions can be very conflict laden and emotional. **G**roup asks/takes time to discuss and solve issues. ***Pupils want to be in the group.***	**A**ctivities that help clarifying issues and open discussion. **A**ctivities that support the feeling of 'groupness'. **A**ctivities that involve cooperation and deliberation. **E**xperiencing the difference between leadership and being bossy. **E**xperiencing the concept of perspective. **D**eveloping common definitions of keywords like: respect, bullying, cooperation etc.	**A**llow pupils to test rules, but set limits (e.g.: no hurting others). **P**romote flexible roles. **O**ffering time and opportunity to discuss issues. **U**nderstanding the group's needs. **S**tructuring the situation: what is happening? **S**ummarising, clarifying, interpreting what pupils are expressing; explaining feelings and emotions; helping pupils to talk *with* each other. **H**elps pupils to reach decisions by involving the rest of the group to come up with suggestions or alternatives. **H**elp improve group communication. **A**llow emotions and feelings. **E**ncourage pupils to support or question the comments or behaviour of others. **B**ring issues into the group. **C**onfront pupils about irrational thinking or unaccepted behaviour. **S**tep in if conflicts get too threatening. **M**akes sure that the classroom is used as a training ground in which feelings of self-esteem can be developed.
Cooperation and differentiation: (performing) **T**he pupils feel more accepted and understood. **C**ommunication is free and easy. **T**he leadership of the teacher is understood, accepted and respected. **T**he pupils are able to interpret situations from different perspectives and roles become more flexible.	**C**ooperative and competitive activities. **G**roup projects. **C**ross-curricular projects based on interest of the group. **C**ross-cultural projects based on the composition of the group.	**S**trengthen the group as an autonomous unity. **I**nforming and directing to sources. **O**ffering opportunities for reflection. **O**ffering opportunities for transfer to other situations outside the group. **R**eflecting with the group on the role of the individual for the

There is more tolerance for differences. **T**aking roles is functional. **P**upils are willing and prepared to communicate and cooperate. **T**he group is able to make practical and realistic group decisions. **T**he internet is no longer used for bullying campaigns. ***The group has found an own identity.***		group: A group is more than the sum of its parts. **S**upport pupils who have not made as much progress as hoped. **H**elp pupils stabilize their gains.
Separation: (adjourning) **B**ehaviours like in earlier stages might come back. **T**he group denies that the end is near (Year 8); **T**he group is eager to move on….is ready with this year (Year 2 – 7). **T**he group is getting more close than ever. **I**t is difficult to understand that the school year has come to an end. **S**trong attachment to the teacher.	**A**ctivities that bring the group into action and out of their comfort zone. **A**ctivities that the group liked in previous stages. **A**ctivities to celebrate the end of the group and/or possible reunions.	**B**eing prepared to let go. **B**e aware of own feelings. **E**mpowering reflection and value of what the group has achieved. **H**elping to guide feelings. **H**elping to raise awareness that feelings of sadness or wanting to hold on are normal and will return in other situations in life. **T**rying to bridge to new situations and showing direction.

Baar (2015) Diagnostic model for primary education, adapted from Kersting & Krapohl (1987).

APPENDIX D: EXAMPLE OF OBSERVATION AND EVALUATION PLAN

	beginning	development	achieved	visual behaviour
step 1	The activities only demand that the children are willing to abide by simple rules regarding interaction and behaviour towards each other.	The activities help children to get to know each other. Who is the other and where do I stand in the group?	All children are taking part in the activities, are having fun and are looking forward to the next meeting. The atmosphere in the group is positive.	Children start to interact directly; they do not always need the teacher to solve minor issues.
step 2	The activities demand that the children are willing to learn about each other.	The activities help the children with establishing rules (norms and values) for interaction and behaviour towards each other.	Awareness: we all have individual differences but together we are in this group.	First group rules are established and children try to act according to these rules and remind each other.
step 3	The activities demand a respectful attitude towards the activities as well as each other.	The activities invite children to become aware of different qualities and characteristics that belong to certain roles and/or behaviour.	I know my peers; I understand why we do this.	The children know where they stand in the group. First attempts to express thoughts and feelings in the group.
step 4	The activities do not yet demand specific responsibility towards own (online) behaviour.	The children develop their personal definitions of bullying. The activities offer the opportunity to reflect on their own (online) behaviour in relation to their own feelings of safety and the safety of others.	A common definition of bullying is agreed. Complaints about bullying can be evaluated against this definition.	The children address each other in a respectful manner and are willing to stop certain behaviour when asked.
step 5	The activities demand a common definition of what kind of group they want to be.	The activities demand that children become aware of the consequences of their words and actions on others in and outside the classroom.	The children start to express their own thoughts and feelings in group discussions lead by the teacher.	The children start reacting to each other in an open, positive way.
step 6	The activities demand common definitions for concepts like bullying, respect or diversity.	The activities demand that children are able to act in a respectful manner towards others and are able to reflect on their own norms, values and opinions.	All children feel safe in the group; are able and prepared to talk about their feelings and start asking for time in class to do so; there is room for pleasure; no-one is excluded or laughed at.	All children like to come to school, trust their peers and are capable of working, learning and playing together in a positive way. Conflicts are open and discussed in the group.
step 7	The activities demand a common understanding of individual responsibility for own behaviour towards others and/or belongings of others.	The activities demand that the children are able to use their skills and knowledge in and outside the classroom.	All children feel safe, inside as well as outside the classroom. They behave respectful towards each other and personal belongings of others. They feel safe to express their feelings, thoughts and opinions.	The children do not depend on adult supervision to create a safe learning environment. Everyone is accepted the way he is. Differences of opinion are accepted and openly discussed.

APPENDIX E: example of open interview

Translation interview head teacher School A, 19-04-2013

Q – First of all, thank you for inviting me and for your permission to make notes of this conversation. On the phone, you mentioned problems in Year 7. Could you elaborate these problems for me?

A – There are several things going on in this group. It is first of all a large group, 28 pupils. As I have experienced them so far – this is my first year as head teacher in this school, but I am 'in the business' for quite some time so I can compare - they are nice kids. Lively, noisy sometimes, but not in a negative way. When I see them coming down the stairs I notice some pushing and pulling among the boys sometimes, but not in a negative way. It looks harmless and playful, like boys do.

On the other hand, parents of one boy in particular, complain that their son is constantly excluded from the group and is being bullied. He does not get invited to birthday parties and according to the parents, the other children are calling him names. There is one boy in particular who, according to the parents, is leading in the name calling and excluding. This boy is diagnosed with PDD-nos. He can get very angry when things do not go the way he expects or children do not do what he wants.

My colleague, who is responsible for Year 6 till 8, and I have had several talks with both boys. They do admit that they cannot get along, and that "some things are being said between them", but in school, we do not experience what the parents are complaining about. All colleagues have been informed and in the last weeks we have had extra surveillance during the breaks but we have not found any evidence that confirms the complaints of the parents.

Q – You described the group as 'a lively group'. How should I interpret lively? How does that show in the classroom?

A – Well, I am not in the classroom but according to the teacher, the group is difficult to motivate. They are able to work very hard, but the teacher has to open all registers to motivate them, keep them involved. It is a constant struggle to finish the things that she has planned. The group is 'eating energy'. I had to send the regular teacher home on sick leave because I started to get the feeling that she was not teaching the group anymore but was fighting them. It is not that these kids are rude or nasty, or misbehave on purpose. They feel very bad that their teacher is on sick leave for example, and they feel very guilty that it is because of them. Several children have come to see me to say that they are sorry and that it was not their intention, that they honestly have no idea what they did that made their teacher sick. But, it is just simple things, like not being quiet when asked or reacting to each other when the teacher wants to instruct or has asked them to be quiet, continuing a discussion or an argument when the subject already has been closed. Not because they want to be impudent or nasty, such groups also exists but that is absolutely not the case here. In the end they do start to work, but it costs so much time and energy.

Q – Now this teacher could not cope with this group anymore, but how was the group in previous years? How did other teachers experience this group?

A – As I already mentioned, this is my first year as head teacher here so what I know is what I have heard from the staff. What they all tell me is that this group really is a group. As a group, they have always been a challenge for the teacher. The teachers who had this group in Year 3,

4 and 6 had to use all their skills to manage this group. In Year 5 the (two) teachers have had Video Interaction Counselling sessions to help them with the interaction between them and the group and this year the teacher has had Video Interaction Counselling as well. The children do not act nasty on purpose or have the intention to make it difficult for the teachers. It is more […] there is a lot of dynamic in the group […] they form a closed front […] They are spontaneous, helpful, friendly […] it is more that, when they are together […] we cannot get exactly put a finger on what it is with this group.

Q – What do you mean when you say: "this group is really a group"?

A – Hm, let me see […] Well, for example, when I meet them after school or during holidays, they are always together. Like in the swimming pool, they hang out with the group. […] Or sometimes there is something going on with children in Year 8 […] they always stand up for their classmates […] It is amazing actually because, when you take this group on a fieldtrip, you do not need extra surveillance. They are a very pleasant and easy group to take […] they watch out for each other, are cheerful, helpful, make fun […] That is why we cannot figure out what is happening.

Q – Apart from the Video Interaction Counselling, what other actions the teachers or the school have taken until now?

A – The Video Interaction Counselling was meant to give the teachers more insight in the interaction between them and the group. It seemed to help for a while, but after a few weeks they fell back into their old behaviour. This year we have organised a special parents meeting, hoping to get the support of the parents, for example when a child continues to talk after a warning and his name gets on the board, and after 3 crosses after his name he has to stay longer or make extra work […] But most parents see it as a problem of the school.

We have also given our school rules a face-lift. When I came here, there were so many rules that even the staff could not remember what was or was not allowed. So we have made new rules and introduced the new rules over a period of several weeks and turned it into a kind of a project. Every week something was done with the children around one of the rules. These new rules are visible all over the school.

Q – Who made these rules? Where the children involved in making the rules?

A – We, as staff did, together with the parents committee [….] I get the feeling that you want to imply something with this question?

Q – I have asked this question because I would like to know if these new rules have resulted in more wanted behaviour compared to the old rules.

A – […] To be honest […] I do not actually know if the new rules have any effect on the behaviour […] I think […] It is easier now to refer to the rules […] It is also more clear for everyone. But your question is making me think […]

Q – Lets go back to the group. Have you any idea what causes the problems teachers experience with this group in the classroom?

A – We have given this question a lot of thought. One important factor in this school is the role of the parents. When there is something with their children, the first reaction of the parents is to go in 'defensive mode', blaming the school, the teacher, other children, other parents, the head teacher, but never their child. Children do not learn to take responsibility for their own actions this way.

Another problem is that parents do not come to the teacher when something has happened, but start talking to other parents at the school gate. A simple conflict between two children sometimes results in a conflict between the parents. It happens that children already have made up but cannot play together because the conflict between the parents is still going on, or parents have heard from other parents about a conflict and do not allow their child to play with a certain child because of this hearsay. This village is thriving on gossip.

My door is always open for parents. I encourage parents and pupils to come to me when there is a problem, so we can find a solution together. Parents do come more, but they expect me to solve their problems. They expect that I am going to address other parents for example.

Q – Now thinking of the group, what are your expectations? What do you expect of me?

A – I have heard your presentation. I was triggered by what you told about group dynamics, roles in a group, and making the group responsible. That is why we decided to take part in this research. We would like to find a way to turn this group into a positive group. We hope to find out how the dynamics in this group are and to get tools to work with this group. They are nice children but the ways things are now is not nice for them and not nice for the teacher.

Q – Once again, thank you very much for your trust and for this frank conversation.

APPENDIX F: Initial template

1. **Group dynamics**
   1.1   positive
   1.2   negative
   1.3   relationship group size?
   1.4   impact of rules?
   1.5   interaction teacher – group

2. **Role of teacher**
   2.1   control
   2.2   assumptions about teaching and learning
   2.3   rules
   2.4   interaction / fighting the group?
   2.5   motivation
   2.6   classroom management

3. **Role of parents**
   3.1   raising?
   3.2   responsibility for teaching social skills?
   3.3   focus on individual?
   3.4   relationship parents – school?

4. **Problems**
   4.1   definition problematic behaviour
   4.2   interventions: rules / VIB counselling
   4.3   medical-diagnostic model: special treatment individual pupils
   4.4   probable causes
   4.5   teaching and assessment of social skills

5. **Group development**
   5.1   interaction inside the classroom
   5.2   interaction outside the classroom
   5.3   initiative
   5.4   responsibility

APPENDIX G: Final Template

1. **Behaviour**
   1.1   definitions
   1.2   possible explanations
      1.2.1   more children with special needs in the group (diagnostics)
      1.2.2   impact of space
      1.2.3   educational system
      1.2.4   parents (new theme)
   1.3   interventions
      1.3.1   rules
      1.3.2   specialists
      1.3.3   social skills lessons / citizenship (new theme)
      1.3.4   individual / group behaviour plans

2. **Parents**
   2.1   relationship parents – school
   2.2   responsibility for raising children (diagnostics)?
   2.3   cultural issues
      2.3.1   justice to all
      2.3.2   equal opportunities
      2.3.3   views on raising
   2.4   consequences of marketization of education

3. **Social skills**
   3.1   views on learning
      3.1.1 active (experiential)
      3.1.2 passive (lessons and programmes)
   3.2   assessment
      3.2.1 tests
      3.2.2 'real life'
   3.3   responsibility for teaching social skills (see also 2.1)
   3.4   society: group versus individual (new theme)
   3.5   language and definitions (new theme)
   3.6   emotions and feelings (new theme)

4. **Language and definitions**
   4.1   views on learning
   4.2   assumptions in education

5. **Emotions and feelings**
   5.1   views on learning
   5.2   impact of emotions and feelings
   5.3   motivation for changing behaviour

6. Groups
- 6.1   group development
- 6.2   group dynamics
    - 6.2.1   pupil – pupil
    - 6.2.2   teacher – group
- 6.3   roles in groups
- 6.4   groups in education
    - 6.4.1   educational view
    - 6.4.2   group work perspective
- 6.5   groups needs
- 6.6   planning groups

7. Teacher skills & knowledge
- 7.1   assumptions about role of teacher
- 7.2   assumptions about learning
- 7.3   control versus interaction
- 7.4   teaching versus learning
- 7.5   motivation
- 7.6   assessment

APPENDIX H: **Overview of Intervention Activities:**

Activity	Goal	Description
Greeting game	Establishing group developmental level	Children have to greet each other as described on their cards and have to find the person that is greeting them back in the same way.
Marbel track	Experiencing what it takes to reach a set goal and what cooperation means	All children receive a piece of wood. Together they have to figure out a way of transporting a marble without touching the marble.
World of difference and world of same	Defining bullying	Half of the group has to make a collage of a world of same, the other half of a world of difference.
Talents, qualities and characteristics	Defining bullying	The group has to make three posters.
Heartbeat	Experiencing what it takes to become a group	Through a drumming activity, without talking, the group has to find one rhythm.
Connecting	Finding out what we have in common with others	All pupils receive a length of rope. They make a statement (I have a dog) and a peer who has a dog too, takes the other end of the rope.
Take one give one	Experiencing why cooperation is so difficult	The group is standing in a circle. Every pupil has a ball in its left hand and has to pass it to the person on the right with its right hand.
Portraits	Experiencing what different perspectives means	All pupils start painting a portrait of a peer. Every 5 minutes they have to step one place to the right, leaving the portrait in place, and continue to work on the portrait in front of them. The end result is a portrait of all individuals, made by the entire group.
Puzzle game	Experiencing what cooperation and cooperative learning mean	Without talking, in small groups 5 identical squares have to be made out of different shaped pieces.
Reflective Bingo	Experiencing the difference between how you see yourself and how you are seen by others	On a bingo card all pupils first have to write their qualities and talents. Next they have to find two peers who agree with their statements.
Stand up for yourself	Raising awareness that different opinions are okay	The group is sitting on chairs in a circle. When they agree with a statement they stand up. If not, they stay seated. If they are not sure, they get up half.
Quality dans	Raising awareness of the relationship between talents, qualities and characteristics	All pupils have a paper pinned on their back. When the music stops, the person closest to them has to write a positive or negative quality on this paper.

If you know what I mean	Experiencing the difference between assumptions and facts in communication	Two pupils are divided by a sort of wall. One has to build a figure with blocks and small items, the other has to build the same figure with only oral instructions.
Labyrinth	Experiencing the concept of perspective	As a group, the pupils have to find their way through an 'invisible' labyrinth by combining their knowledge.
The suitcase	Experiencing mutual aid in problem solving	Problems are written down and put in a suitcase. One by one the problems are interpreted by peers who can offer new perspectives.
Mirror mirror on the wall….	Experiencing the difference between how you see yourself and how you are seen by others	Pupils answer questions about themselves on a mirror. Next the mirror (peers) answer the same questions.
Building a tower	Experiencing the concept of group dynamics	All pupils hold a rope that is connected to a hook. Together they have to move the hook and build a tower of blocks.
Detective game	Experiencing how combining different talents and knowledge can result in an achievement that could not be achieved on your own.	The group has to solve a mystery. All pupils have a piece of information and a different task. Only by combining everything, they can find 'who did it'.

APPENDIX I: Group plan (translated for the purpose of this thesis)

Action plan Year 6/7 starting 13-10-2014.

School year: 2014-2015

Problem:
There is a lot of anxiety in the group. Pupils react to each other in a very negative way. As a result of this anxiety, pupils cannot concentrate. They are not able to finish their work and the results are lower than expected.
The way things are going now means that a number of pupils cannot meet the cognitive and social norms.
In addition, the teachers do not feel comfortable with the situation that has arisen and cannot properly perform their work.

Group goal:
The pupils:
- Treat each other and the teachers with respect
- Adhere to the agreements made regarding behaviour and work.
- Acquire skills to learn optimally.

Time frame:
Start: 13-10-2014. Intended end date: December 18. In the first week after the Christmas break we will assess if the children are able to keep their agreements and are able to apply the learned skills.

Compensating factors:
- A number of pupils is able to work goal orientated.
- A number of pupils is behaving respectful.
- A number of pupils dare to address another in a positive way about their behaviour, work or attitude.
- Several pupils like it if they can help determine something.
- A number of pupils is capable of carrying out an assignment with others.

Approach: start:
In order to let the pupils achieve the above goals, we start with the following approach:

Together with the pupils we came to the following rules that will be applied in the coming period:

- The pupils will sit in rows, separately.
- The pupils are not allowed to get out of their seats without permission.
- The pupils are quiet.
- All pupils are working on their assigned task. When they are ready, they start with another agreed assignment. There is no excuse for doing nothing.
- The pupils use the cubes for asking task orientated questions. For other questions they have to raise their hand.
- The pupils get in row one by one. No talking in the hall way.
- The pupils can go to the library one by one.
- The pupils can start working immediately after instruction and continue to do so until the work is ready within the set time. In case the work is not ready, (reasonable) sanctions will follow.
- Homework has to be in school at the agreed days and times.
- When using the computer, pupils can only do this alone. They have to ask permission first.

- Practical issues have been discussed and agreed.
- Every day, the group will do a group bonding activity.
- If necessary, there is a group discussion after playing during the break.

All pupils must strictly adhere to the rules. If this succeeds for a longer period in succession, then we can change the approach, based on the following approaches (follow-up approach).

With this approach, we will be working directly on:

- Silence in the classroom.
- Pupils being able to deal with delayed attention.
- Pupils adhering to the teacher's instructions, which will benefit the learning processes.
- Pupils learn more because they master collaborative skills.
- Discipline to actually complete work and to be responsible for it themselves.

Follow-up approaches:
The next steps are an extension of opportunities for the pupils. These too are offered step by step in consultation with the pupils. If a step fails; let's take a step back. It is also possible that a number of pupils are ready for the next step. If possible, we must provide the opportunity for this.

- Pupils may walk through the group for certain things such as: point grinding, changing a filling, picking up a 'ready assignment pack', computer task, etc.
- Pupils are allowed to sit in pairs at set times. Permanently in pairs, and at a later stage in groups.
- Pupils are allowed to ask each other for help.
- Pupils are allowed to work together.
- Pupils…………

Evaluation:

At the end of this period (the teachers and indoor counsellor) will evaluate this period. Evaluation will be aimed at the group as well as individuals.

Period 1: 13 oktober- 28 oktober.

Findings	Next step
Year 6: - Even after instruction, the pupils still have a lot of questions, also about things they should be able to solve themselves. The keep waiting until the teacher comes to answer their questions: delayed attention. - The cubes are not used as agreed. - There is a lot of agitation when standing in rows. - Not all pupils is bringing their work to school as agreed.	- Start working after 10 minutes. No more questions - Repeat after instruction: * what needs to be on your table? * what should you do when you are ready? - Implementing a clear order when making a row. - Repeat the sanctions for not bringing homework to school. - More group bonding activities (if needed outside the classroom with just a small group of children).

	- Step by step increasing the amount of work. Per subject.
Year 7: - The pupils are responding well to work on their 'ready assignments' after finishing their work. - The pupils start working quickly without asking a lot of questions. They are able to focus on their work. - With a number of pupils, the urge to break appointments is present at certain moments (talking through the classroom; reacting to each other). - A number of pupils still react negatively to each other: especially XX, XX and XX. - The use of the cubes is not in order. - There is a lot of agitation when standing in line. - Not all pupils take their homework or other items to school as agreed.	- Implementing a clear order when making a row. - Repeat the sanctions for not bringing homework to school. - More group bonding activities (if needed outside the classroom with just a small group of children). - Step by step increasing the amount of work. Per subject. - Working independently for a longer period. Most pupils want to continue working (more subjects, one after the other).

Period 2: 28 oktober -11 november

Findings	Next step
Year 6 After instruction, the pupils are able to work for 10 minutes. The practical questions create a lot of disturbance for the teachers. The teacher not always reacts within the 10 minute time-frame or during independent working, resulting in pupils not being able to continue. The pupils are not using the cubes appropriately. On average, pupils have to many questions about basic things. Walking in line in set places is experienced as positive by the pupils and teachers. Homework is taken to school. Pupils enjoy coming to school. A lot of talking. (concentration? Attention span?). XXX is not conforming to the rules: he continues to speak Arabic, keeps forgetting his work, behaves contrary, does not raise his hand, lies. He has been send to the head teacher. Mother and head teacher have talked.	More group bonding activities. More rewarding, either individual, small groups or the entire group per day or per week. We do not keep a system.
Year 7 After instruction, the pupils are able to work for 10 minutes. The practical questions create a lot of disturbance for	More group bonding activities. More rewarding, either individual, small groups or the entire group per day or per week. We do not keep a system.

the teachers. The teacher not always reacts within the 10 minute time-frame or during independent working, resulting in pupils not being able to continue. The pupils are not using the cubes appropriately. On average, pupils have to many questions about basic things. Walking in line in set places is experienced as positive by the pupils and teachers. Homework is taken to school. Pupils enjoy coming to school. XXX is attracting attention when it comes to reacting to other pupils. XX and XX are doing this sometimes too, but their behaviour is improving.	

Period 3: 11 november- 4 december

Findings	Next step
Rewarding has a positive effect. Not only with the large group who comply to many rules, but also with the pupils who have a lot of problems with this. The crafts lessons are messy. PE lessons go well with the own teacher. If the teacher is not teaching himself, the atmosphere is more negative and there is unrest, also in the lessons that follow. However, the PE lessens go well.	Keep rewarding. Crafts lessons: certain pupils will have to work on an assignment in the classroom.

Periode 5: 4 december- 18 december

Findings	Next step
XX continues to speak Moroccan in class. The head teacher talked to mother about it. Mother will take action. Because the group has more than one teacher, they are more agitated after the change (own teachers). The cause of the agitation is a different person, not a different pedagogical or didactical approach. For the crafts lessons and PE it is different: pupils only see these teachers once a week and their approach is different.	In class, the pupils receive small tasks such as: handing out books. In class, the pupils are allowed to correct their own work at their own table. For the time being, only for mathematics. Starting in January, the pupils get assigned new seats. Still in rows.

End conclusion:

This approach has been successful. 80% of the pupils is able to adhere to the rules. 20% of the pupils still has problems with rules and agreements. This 20% sometimes causes unrest and includes a number of pupils who are more easily influenced.
The rest in the group has returned and teaching can be done in a decent way. A lot of work is done by the pupils. The quality of the work is also more than adequate.
In general, the negative behaviour is 'unlearned'. This means that children work and respond properly in this guided situation. This does not mean that they can be released much more loosely. A start can be made to let children work more in line with the school's vision. This will have to be done in small steps.
We see the following steps for the next period:

- Checking work yourself.
- Working with tablets.
- Working in pairs (first individual – task cards, next per Year / per lesson….) Longer periods.
- Allowing pupils to work on the computer (in the classroom).
- Start making interventions within the group.

What will we continue to do?

- Fixed rows.
- Individual places (rows).
- Tight rules.
- Rewards (individually and class level).
- Checking work and task card.
- Interventions outside the group.

Evaluation 29 januari 2015

Findings	Next step
80% of the pupil scan work according to the rules as described in this document. 20% have a lot of trouble and drag other pupils into negative behaviour. It is difficult for the teacher to prevent this in the current situation. The reason that it difficult for the teacher to prevent this and must fall into penalties, is partly due to the 80% of the pupils. The teachers notice that the pupils want to work in pairs or in groups. Also the teachers notice that the pupils are ready to make a start.	Per 2-2-2015. Attention to: - Use of cubes (red + question mark) - Instruction / evaluation of work - Exercise books in the drawer - Tidy drawers - Rest in the group - Assessing own work where possible and permitted - No raising hands during work (2 fingers for permission to use the toilet is allowed) Afternoons: The majority of the pupils is allowed to work in pairs. Other children work separately. Twice a day the teacher will work with children for extra instruction or interventions at the instruction table. Behaviour evaluations: before recess, lunch, and in the afternoon.

	Short instructions. Carrying out rewards immediately. Social-Emotional activities. Needed: more pencil sharpeners, 1 per every 4 pupils. Notice: The children will experience that there is progress and that positive behaviour will be rewarded.

APPENDIX J 5th EL cycle school A – Critical Incident

Video Analysis 13-06-2013

The group has been asked to make a circle to start a group discussion about the previous activity. This extract starts 5 minutes into the group discussion.

time in seconds	name	spoken language	visible behaviour	interpretation
05.23	André	*I want to share an observation*	Making himself tall, raises his hand, waits for permission to speak	Wants to draw my attention.
05.29	André	*For example, there they are all sitting in a group and I have 10 meters of space over here.* (opinionated tone of voice).	Uses gestures to accompany his words.	
	Group	Silence	Most pupils are sitting very still and close together while there is room enough near André; Looking away, looking at their feet; staring at the floor.	The group is feeling uncomfortable and does not know how to react.
05.41	Theo, Martin & Stefan	T: *Because we just want to talk together.* M: *We just want to sit together with our friends. That is normal, is not it?* S: *Yes we are friends.*	S patting his neighbour on the shoulder; Exchanging looks, wondering who is going to do the talking.	André might have a point here. The group did not see this question coming and feels uncomfortable and does not know how to react.
	Group	Group: muttering	Exchanging looks and thoughts	
06.50	Leanne	*I think it is because most children do not like André.* (soft, shy voice).	Listening seriously; picking at her trousers with her fingers.	Leanne is nervous about sharing her thoughts with the group.
	Group	muttering	Exchanging looks.	

07.40	Frank		Crosses the room to sit next to André.	The group is feeling 'uneasy'. By taking a different position, Frank and Leanne show that they want to support André.
	Martin	*I can move, but then the rest has to move too.*	Moves closer to André.	
	Leanne			
08.49	me	*André, how does it feel for you that 2 children decided to change places?*	Looks like he can start crying any minute.	His emotions are real. He did not anticipate the reaction of Frank and Leanne. The group starts to think about Andrés feelings.
08.54	André	*I am very surprised. This is the first time that someone has sat next to me* (emotional, broken voice).		
09.15	me	*André, have you ever asked the group why they might not like you or why they make you sit alone? Group, did you ever talk about it with André?*	André wants to get up to react.	Defence mode?
	Group		Getting restless.	
09.39	Bianca	*This morning in the library André came to me and asked me: Why do so many children in the class not like me, but when I explained to him what it is that we do not like about him, he suddenly got angry.*	Is looking at her peers, arms around her knees, rocking her body.	Looking for permission? For support?
	Group			Raising hands.
10.02	André	*It is true, I did get angry, but I can explain why. I really*		Raises hand.

		wanted to hear what Bianca was saying, but the others were so loud so I could not hear a thing. That made me angry.		
10.24	me	*You have asked Bianca. Does that mean that you really want to know what it is that you are doing that others in the group do not like? That you want the group to help you to change what it is you are doing that annoys them?*		
10.54	André	*I want to ask the group: What is it that I am doing that makes you do not accept me?*	Gestures while asking his question.	Is genuine and serious.
11.12	me	*Does that mean that you are prepared to change your behaviour?*		
11.14	André	*I want to try but I want to tell them that I know that I can get angry very quickly.*		
	Leanne		Is observing the group (face down, eyes up) while biting her hand.	Feels nervous.
11.36	Theo	Starts raging		Theo is getting emotional. He wants to share his feelings and did not expect feedback from the group.
	Group			

	Theo	*Stay positive Theo! (telling off tone of voice).*	Covers his face with his hand and starts to cry.	
	Group	Muttering	Is looking at Theo. Does not feel comfortable with the situation.	
	André	*I want to give an example: in Year 5 and 6 I got a lot more and a lot quicker angry than I do now. I have been working on it.*		
	Several pupils	*Yes that is true*		Group is supportive
12.24	May	*Well, sometimes you act like a wimp [..]. Than you start to do something to someone and when they do something back to you, you go to the teacher.*	Nervous, moving her body.	I am impressed! The group is sharing emotions and appears to feel safe to do so. They are nervous and are looking for reassurance.
	Theo	*Well, that happened this morning too. He starts irritating me the whole time and when I do one thing to him, he immediately goes to the teacher.*	Is still crying with his hand over his face. 	
	Stefan		Is emotional too. His lips vibrate and is voice shakes.	
15.25	Patricia	*Now you make it sound as if it is just André's fault but think about the situation with the window: André gets up to close the window because*		

		he is cold and then the whole group starts to shout: "Oh André" (using a high pitched voice) as if he is doing it to annoy us. We would not react this way if someone else had closed that window. Because it was André we started to make something big out of something small.	Is playing with her sleeves, stares at a point on the wall, raises her hand.	
	Leanne	Muttering		
	Group		Exchanging looks and comments	Something is happening.
17.20	me	*André, do you understand why the group does what they do?*		
	André	*I understand what they are saying except for what Stefan said. I would like to ask him more about that. "Stefan, what do I do according to you to bully you"?*	Calm and attentive.	He is open for feedback.
	Stefan	*A lot. He is calling me names [..] and Martin too [..] a few weeks ago he said that I am darn gay.*	Is laying on the floor with his hand under his head; tries to be tough; broken voice.	Wants to share his emotions and feelings but it is difficult to separate facts from emotions.
	Martin		Touches Stefan on the shoulder while biting his fingernails.	Giving support?
	André	*That was a few weeks ago and Stefan told me that he did not like it and I have not said it again. I know now*	Calm	

		that it is not nice to say things like that.		
19.56	Nico	*Most times André gets angry, it is provoked by the group.*		The group is starting to realise cause and effect.
20.58	John	*When André gets angry, he goes out of the room most of the time.*		André gets credit for working on his problems.
21.38	Theo	*I think André is working on his anger. Earlier, when you asked him to stop he did not and now he does.*		Groups is open. There is trust and willingness to solve the problem.
	Group	Agrees	Nodding, confirming.	
22.20	Leanne	*I understand why André gets angry sometimes. When he does something wrong, a small thing, the whole class starts off against him (soft tone of voice).*		
23.53	Frank	*When we play soccer, for example, André always wants to be in the goal. He never discusses it with his team, he simply takes that position.*		
	Group	*Yes, that is the same with other ballgames.*		
	André	*That is true, but if asked I would never get a turn.*		
	me	*Could that be an assumption? Look at what is happening now?*		
	André	*I see what you mean. I think asking would work.*		

25.43	Mark	*When André tells us what he wants we can take it into account.*		
27.05	Simon	*During the break we do play with André (gives examples).*		
27.08	me	*Are you saying that André is a member of this group? André, did you hear that? You belong to this group.*		
27.15	André	Completes example of Simon	Looks happy.	New perspective?
27.30	André	*I want to give a compliment to the group. I think I have a different group now.*		
27.35	Martin Group	*That is impossible!* Agitation.		
27.49	me	*André, can you explain?*		
27.53	André Group me André	*At first I saw you as a horrible class.* *That was your perception, correct?* *When I look at you now I see a fine class with children who just want to be nice to me.*	Agitation, commotion. Emotional.	The group did not expect to hear this.
28.55	me	*Stefan, how are you feeling now?*	Still drawn back.	
29.00	Stefan	*It is much better now, but I still feel a little depressed [..]*	Still sniffing	
30.08	May	*I think we should all draw a line under the past and make a fresh and positive start.*	Giggling, nervous.	There is a willingness to move on. The group is tired.

Reflective log fragment (13-06-2013):

I was surprised that André asked this question in the group, but I also was very proud of him. It took a lot of courage. The teacher got nervous when first Theo and later Stefan started crying. She put the camera away (no images, only audio on the tape) and started looking for phone numbers. Afterwards she stated that she was preparing for what to explain to the parents.

Pupils should feel safe in school, not make each other cry. The open emotions scared her. It did not occur to her that being able and willing to share emotions means that the children *do* feel safe.

The group had no idea about André's feelings. They reacted to his behaviour. André had no idea what exactly he did that caused the reactions of the others. He assumed that he was the only one working on the problem, because he was having anger management training, and that the group did not give him a chance. The examples the group gave were very illuminating for him.

The teacher, head teacher and coordinator had talks with André about his complaints and the alleged bully, but couldn't find evidence. What have they been looking for? It is difficult to find evidence for assumptions and *feeling* bullied.

Emerging knowledge and understanding:

The teacher perception of 'feeling safe' did not include emotions and feelings. In fact, she believed that showing emotions in the group was creating an unsafe situation. In her 'first thoughts and feelings', she expressed: *"In such situations, I always want to help and make suggestions"*. Opening the wound helped the group to understand what was happening and opened the possibility for mutual aid.

APPENDIX K: 7th EL cycle school A – Critical incident

Reflective log fragment (26-06-2013)

As a result of the session in which André confronted the group, Leanne confessed to her parents that she had been the victim of bullying for a long time and that an 'I hate Leanne club' existed. The leader of the group, according to Leanne, was Bianca. The parents took this information to school and Bianca's parents received a phone call that the coordinator was going to have a serious talk with Bianca. The initial reaction of the school was the customary procedure: talking with the victim and the alleged perpetrator. Bianca's parents were shocked and angry and included me in the email exchange with the school. My feelings are mixed. I am happy that Leanne took this step. After the intervention with André, she waited for me in the hallway and thanked me, without giving a reason. From her behaviour during the intervention I sensed that she could relate to André's feelings and had something on her mind too. Maybe if I would have paid more attention or would have encouraged her at that moment, she would have said something in the group, but I was focussed on André. Now the school already has acted according to their protocol. Result: Bianca denied everything, cried because of being wrongly accused, and because she would never do such a thing having been a victim of bullying herself in the past. Conclusion of the school: Bianca's emotions seem to be sincere, Leanne needs help. I want to share my thoughts with the school, since I see this as an important part of the group process.

I viewed the video images of the last group discussion again. Initially I had interpreted Leanne's body language as being hesitant to stand up for André and not knowing how this might affect her. With this new information, Leanne's body language could also be interpreted as: moving closer to André is not just to help him, but also to help herself; biting her hands and observing the group might be to figure out who she can trust.

Translation of email fragment written by the Year 6-8 coordinator: (26-06-2013):

Bianca's emotions are not acted. The grief is visible and deep as I can tell from experience. She tells that she has been extremely honest in this talk and that she has admitted her share, but that Leanne perhaps does not always see what is going on, that others do things and Leanne blames Bianca for it. It was difficult for Leanne to deal with this situation, which is logical. I noticed her unhappy feelings and frustration from her body language. I asked her if it was possible that others do things that she blames Bianca for. She said 'perhaps' but maybe this is just a socially desired answer.

Translation of email written by the coordinator Year 6-8: 03-07-2013:

The process in the group went on all week after Leanne's confession. Some of Bianca's friends did not feel comfortable with their roles in the group anymore and started to put pressure on Bianca to come clean. Since she did not, two of Bianca's friends came to see me and confirmed the existence and their role in the 'I hate Leanne club'. Something is brewing, no idea what will happen next.

Reflective log fragment (03-07-2013): After being confronted, Bianca confessed to her parents that everything is true and that she is the founder of the 'I hate Leanne club' and initiator of all bullying. I am impressed by the reaction of her parents. They are not trying to solve the problem for her, but tell her to think about what she has done during the summer holiday 'so you can feel for six weeks how Leanne must have felt all this time'. The parents included me in the email exchange with the school and asked the school to invite me back in the first week of the new school year to support Bianca and Leanne in asking the group for help.

Reflective log fragment (15-08-2013): After reflecting on what we had done last year, how the group is feeling now and what they think is most important for the group, Leanne and Bianca shared their concerns with the group. Leanne stated that she is afraid that the bullying will continue and Bianca is afraid that no one will trust her anymore. In the group, Leon explains that it is difficult to stand up for your friend if he is the victim of bullying because the bullies can turn on you too. It takes courage. I had high expectations of today's meeting, but the critical incidents occurred after school. First Stefan approached me after school, telling me that now the focus was on what Bianca had done, but Leanne also had done things in the past that should be included. I asked him if he was willing to state that in the group next week and he agreed.

On my way out, Bianca was waiting for me. She was very emotional. *"I have been honest in the group and told everything. Leanne is acting as the victim now and did not tell her share. That hurts".*

Reflective log fragment (22-08-2013): Prior to the meeting with the group I met with Bianca and Leanne. Bianca shared with Leanne what she had told me last week and explained*: "We have had many arguments over the years. The teacher would take us apart and I could say what was on my mind, you could say what was on your mind and then the teacher would tell us to make up. At the moment it felt okay, but it started all over again after a few days".*

In the group we discussed how emotions and feelings can be in the way of solving problems. May stated that adults themselves do not know how to solve problems and gave examples of adults in the village who do not speak to each other. With the group, we talked about causal chains, about how certain behaviour can cause an increase in other behaviour. Next we drew up a behaviour pattern chart, starting with the 'I hate Leanne club'. From there we worked back to the first incident between Leanne and Bianca. This turned out to be an event of three years ago. The group supplied the facts, Bianca and Leanne added their thoughts and feelings. Due to a misunderstanding about a playdate, Bianca felt hurt, wrongly accused and betrayed and Leanne felt hurt and ridiculed. With adults (parents and teachers) they had been talking about the facts, not only of this incident, but of other incidents that followed in the course of three years. What they had never talked about were their thoughts and feelings that resulted in assumptions.

Reflective log fragment (22-08-2013):

In both bullying problems, the school's anti-bullying protocol was followed meaning the school investigated the complaints by talking to the victim and alleged initiator of the bullying, the parents and by extra surveillance. Bullying however is never just a matter between bully and victim. There are always more in the group that know about it or are involved. The examples show that the currently deployed anti-bullying protocols are insufficient. Firstly these protocols do not allow to involve the group. Secondly it is not always possible to find 'hard' evidence when the victim is not openly beaten, locked up, or called names. And thirdly these protocols 'stick to the facts' and leave little room for emotions, feelings and assumptions that turned out to have played an important role in these two cases.

In our talk, Leanne stated today:

> *"The first time the teacher asked us to tell what had happened. Then she said that it had all been a misunderstanding. She told us that we both had acted silly. Bianca should not have banged on the windows and yelled through the letterbox and I should not have hidden behind the couch. We both should apologize for what we had done, and make up. At that moment, it felt okay, but as soon as something happened, something small, all old feelings would come back again and we had a new fight".*

Bianca stated:

"Telling how you feel and why you did things is difficult and I did not like it much, but I feel much better now. I think adults find it difficult too. Maybe they haven't learned it when they were our age".

In the group evaluation Martin said:

"It concerns us all. We are a group and if there is a problem, we all have to talk about it, even if you have not done anything yourself".

In the end evaluation with the teacher, head teacher and coordinator, both bullying cases were discussed as well. All mentioned that involving the group had been the key.

The head teacher said:

"What I have learned most from this approach is the importance of talking with the group; making the whole group responsible for what is happening with an individual in the group".

The coordinator Year 6-8:

"I have realized from this process that a bullying problem is not so straightforward as it looks. In both bullying cases I offered myself as a confidant but I was not aware of the role of the group. What I take away from this process is involving the group".

The teacher:

"I always want to help so I offer or suggest possible solutions. That is where I go wrong. I have seen now that I should wait, give them more time, should keep my mouth shut".

What I am going to take away from this experience and will feed into the next cycle is the remark of Martin: It concerns us all.

APPENDIX L: LABYRINTH

Labyrinth

Draw squares on a big plastic cover sheet (3 x 4 meters) of 50 x 50 cm each. Draw a path on a piece of paper that only you can see. Now the participants have to find their way through the labyrinth by going each one by one, step by step, through the labyrinth. When they make a wrong step (the wrong way) you say "boom" and the person trying has to go the same way back (Important because it is a metaphor for learning from mistakes – your own or others). Goal of the game is to bring all participants safely through the labyrinth. At the end is a reward (gold treasure like chocolate in gold paper) waiting, one for each participant. The group gets 5 minutes to discuss how to handle the task. After those 5 minutes, no one is allowed to talk or to touch the labyrinth (only the one who is trying to find the way). Every foul will cost the group one reward (it is wise to give the group 5 – 10 extra rewards at the start). The group will only succeed when they help each other (nonverbal) and by building group knowledge.

Observations:

At some point the participants will notice that it is a lot easier when you are standing at the side (you have a different perspective) than when you are walking in the labyrinth (everything looks the same and the responsibilities weighs heavily on you). Who do you trust for help? Why is it so difficult? (different perspectives). How does that relate to other situations in the classroom or in the playground?
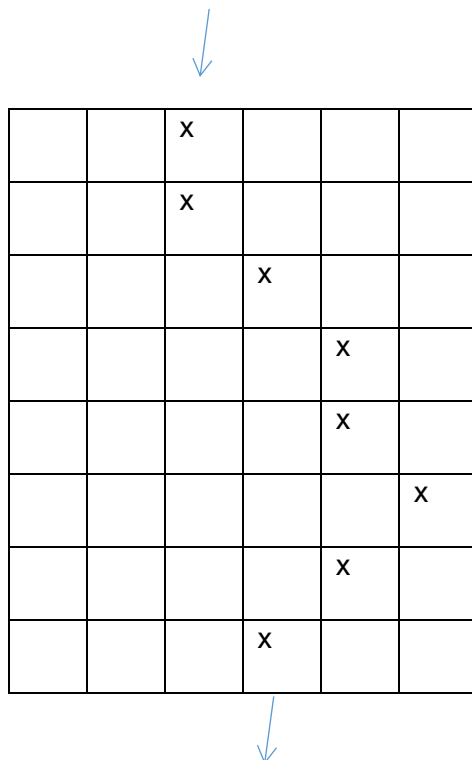
APPENDIX M: Example of Pupil self-report questionnaire

Antwoorden

Filter

Vraag

Toepassen Wissen

Overzicht - ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Vraag	Helemaal niet waar	Niet echt waar	Best waar	Helemaal waar
Hulpvaardig sociaal gedrag (witte pet gedrag)				
Ik ben te vertrouwen				X
Ik kan anderen goed helpen				X
Ik doe aardig				X
Ik help kinderen in de klas			X	
Ik kan veel				X
Als ik iets beloof aan mijn juf of meester, dan doe ik het ook				X
Ik help als iemand valt of verdrietig is				X
Ik vind het leuk om klasgenoten blij te maken				X
Ik wil eerlijk zijn op school				X
Ik wil dat de juf of meester trots op me is				X
Onrustig verstorend (rode pet gedrag)				
Ik maak rare geluiden in de klas	X			
Ik roep door de klas		X		
Ik doe brutaal op school	X			
Ik doe dingen die niet mogen op school	X			
Ik gedraag me zoals het hoort			X	
De juf of meester is vaak boos op mij		X		
Ik ben rustig in de klas			X	
Ik let goed op in de les				X
Ongelukkig, somber (gele pet gevoelens)				
Ik ben waardeloos	X			
Ik doe alles fout	X			
Ik vind mezelf stom	X			
Ik voel me hulpeloos	X			
Ik wou dat mijn leven anders was	X			
Niemand vindt mij aardig	X			
Ik ben verdrietig	X			
Ik word gepest	X			
Ik moet vaak huilen	X			
Ik voel me vaak alleen	X			
Negatieve intenties (zwarte pet willen)				
Ik pest op school	X			
Ik wil anderen uitlachen	X			

Items 1 t/m 38 van 38. Pagina 1 van 1.

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Vraag	Helemaal niet waar	Niet echt waar	Best waar	Helemaal waar
Ik wil kinderen pesten	X			
Ik wil ruzie	X			
Ik wil stout zijn	X			
Ik vind het leuk om kinderen aan het huilen te krijgen	X			
Ik vind het leuk om gemeen te doen op school	X			
Ik vind het leuk om kinderen bang te maken	X			
Ik wil de juf of meester storen in de klas	X			
Ik ben bang dat ik gepest word	X			

Items 1 t/m 38 van 38. Pagina 1 van 1.

APPENDIX N : Example of Teacher assessment form

Antwoorden

Filter					
Vraag					
Toepassen Wissen					

Overzicht - ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬					
Vraag	**Nooit**	**Zelden**	**Soms**	**Regelmatig**	**Vaak**
Algemeen					
Afhankelijkheid		X			
Angst		X			
Onrustig verstorend			X		
Faalangst		X			
Gebrek aan concentratie			X		
Gebrek aan motivatie			X		
Gebrek aan zelfvertrouwen			X		
Ongelukkig somber			X		
Slecht aanspreekbaar op het gedrag				X	
Agressie			X		
Pest				X	
Wordt gepest			X		
			Items 1 t/m 12 van 12. Pagina 1 van 1.		

APPENDIX O: 9th EL cycle school B – Critical incident

Reflective log fragment (12-05-2014):

Today Ron approached me and stated: *I cannot work in the same group as Bas. One of us has to change groups.* Both Ron and Bas were not willing to put their differences aside for the duration of the activity and sat at the end of the table, arms crossed, facing the wall. Both explained that, until two years ago, they had been best friends. Something had happened and since then, they were no longer on speaking terms. Both stated: *I have tried. We have talked with the help of our teachers and our parents. I have given him so many chances but he does not want to change. The best is to avoid each other. It is our problem, so just assign him to another group.*

The group stated that it was not just *their* problem. In fact, this situation affected the entire group as well. Examples the group gave were: birthday parties, going swimming or picking teams. They were always forced to choose between the two. The group stated they would prefer Ron and Bas to work on their problem and offered their help. Ron and Bas reluctantly agreed to give it a try. I promised to come back with an activity to work on this problem.

Video analysis school B (19-05-2014)

The planned activity is that both boys write down their issues and put them in a metaphorical suitcase. Each issue will be analysed with the help of the group.

First issue Ron wanted to address: *what makes me angry is that Bas only tells what I did and never admits what he did because he does not want to be punished*. The group will offer possible thoughts and feelings of Bas. This video extract starts 21 minutes into the activity, just after Ron has taken his position and read his first card in the group.

time in seconds	name	spoken words	visible behaviour	interpretation
21.09	Marieke	*I think that he (Bas) thinks: if I say what Ron did, Ron can say what I did.*	Takes the position of Bas near the suitcase.	The pupils take this assignment very seriously and make an effort to place themselves in the emotions of the boys.
21.24	Gina	*What keeps him occupied most is what Ron did. He thinks, yes I did this, but that is because Ron did something to me first.*	Takes position next to Marieke.	

21.36	Nina	*He does not want to admit what he did himself.*	Takes position next to Marieke and Gina.	
22.17	Bert	*It is easier to say what the other did because it is always super difficult to say what you did yourself when you know that what you did was super wrong.*	Takes position next to the girls.	
24.17	me	*Do you recognize any of these thoughts?*	Addresses Bas.	
25.05	Bas	*Ooooh No. Can I go back to my seat?*	Takes physical position of the "voices". Looks at the floor, shivers. Goes back to his seat.	Does not feel at ease at all.
25.17	Bas	*It is because he always says: Bas does this and Bas does that and I cannot get a word in and he only says what I did and I do not get a chance to say what he did.*	Looks at me, plays with his hands.	
25.30	Group Nina	*Hey!!!* *That is exactly the same!*	Look at each other, sit up straight. Exchange looks.	The group realizes that what Bas is saying now is what Ron put in the suitcase to begin with.
25.45	Bas	*And then I do exactly the same back because he does it too and that is what he is probably thinking too.*	Gestures with his hands and looks at the group.	Without realising it, Bas confirms that what he and Ron are doing is the same.
26.01	me	*Who wants to take the place of Ron and say*		

		what Ron might be thinking?		
26.13	Thom	*I did not expect this. I did not know that you did not have a chance to say what you wanted to say.*	Takes the position of Ron.	
26.38	Gina	*I did not realize that it is the same for you.*	Takes position of Ron next to Thom.	
26.50	Ronald	*You think that what you are doing yourself is correct .*	Takes position of Ron next to Thom and Gina.	
28.37	Ron	*I do not agree. I always say what I did at home and to the teacher and also in the conversations we had with your parents.*	Steps forward, hands in his side.	Ron still feels that he is 'in the right' and Bas in 'the wrong'.
29.08	Bas	*I do that too. I also tell at home what I did.*	Getting up in his chair a little, looks at Ron.	
29.17	Samir	*It is in fact the way you see it. Everyone experiences it differently. He sees things different from you.*	 Gets up and takes different positions to show what he means.	Samir refers to the activity about perspective: from where you stand, things can look differently.
29.39	Bas	*I sometimes have the feeling that Ron only tells half the story.*	Looks at the floor, at the group, not at Ron.	
29.50	Ron	*I think the same. When we had that talk with your parents, I felt that you were telling half the story.*	Looks over the heads of the group.	
30.01	Gina	*You know what it is: sometimes you think something has happened but it did not really happen.*	Looks at Ron.	
30.38	Bert	*When you have a conflict, you do not trust each other anymore.*		
30.41	Bas	*Yes that is true, you do not trust what the other is saying.*		

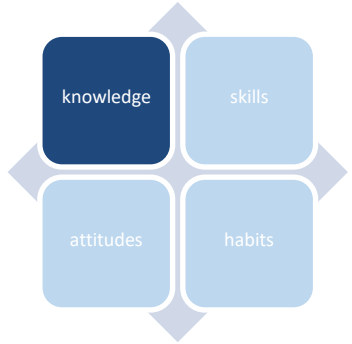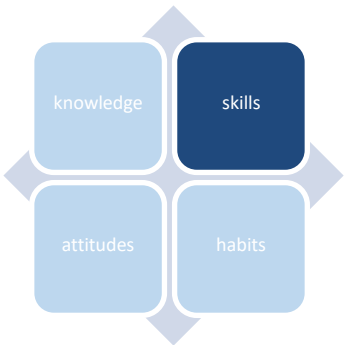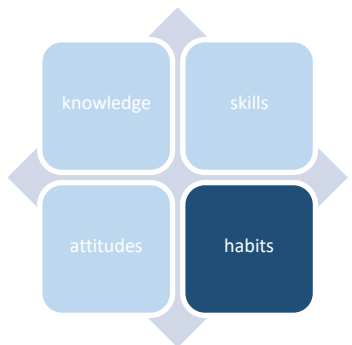| 30.45	Gina and Emina		Put resources (listening and trust) in the suitcase.	

Reflective log fragment (16-6-2014): Before today's meeting, Ron approached me and told that he and Bas had successfully worked together on three different occasions. Moments later in class, Bas told me the same. They explained how they achieved this by being aware of different perspectives and seeing something from the other's situation. The group added what they had learned from the situation: the meaning of perspective. Since the activity, they stated, there had been no more conflicts when playing their ball game during playtime.
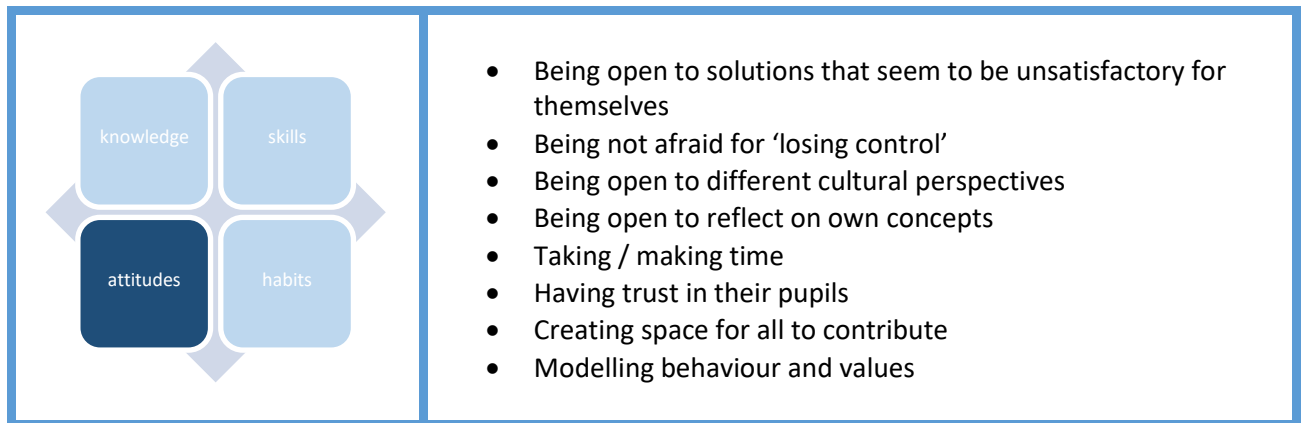
In class Gina (pupil) stated:

> *I have realised that most adults do not know themselves how to solve a conflict. They tell you to avoid the situation, to ignore it, to accept it, to tell an adult, to force your way out [..] but it doesn't solve the problem. It is not easy to confront the problem and to reflect on your own share, but it helps if you really want to put an end to the situation*.

The situation between Bas and Ron had been 'solved' with adult advice: you have to avoid each other. The school went along with this 'solution' and tried to accommodate it by not making the boys sit in the same group or work on an assignment in the same group. The adults had not been aware of the impact of this 'solution' for the group and how it made children struggle with concepts like loyalty and friendship. By imposing an adult solution, they denied not only Bas and Ron, but the entire group to learn from the experience in finding a solution that worked for all.

APPENDIX P: Teacher perceptions of knowledge and understandings needed when approaching the class as a group

knowledge / skills / attitudes / habits (knowledge highlighted)	• Group processes and group dynamics • Benefits and risks of groups • Function of roles in groups • Planning a group • Behaviour: what is 'normal' and what needs attention? • What motivates children to change their behaviour • How children learn (cognitive – affective) • Viewing behaviour in the context of the group rather than as a 'child attribute' • Child development • Cultural aspects (raising children; roles of boys and girls; expressing thoughts and feelings) • Language (concepts)
knowledge / skills / attitudes / habits (skills highlighted)	• How to develop active and respectful listening • Dealing with emotions and expressions of feelings • Coaching in conflict or problem situations • Using 'non-intervention' strategies • How to 'confront' • Facilitating group discussion and problem solving • 'reading' and 'interpreting' behaviour • Using silence
knowledge / skills / attitudes / habits (habits highlighted)	• Being a leader • Asking open questions • Summarizing and clarifying without judgement • Involving the group • Handing back the problem instead of solving the problem for the pupils • Involving the heart and the body • 'letting go' • 'seeing' all • Using the moment • Waiting for a question before giving an answer

knowledge / skills / attitudes / habits	• Being open to solutions that seem to be unsatisfactory for themselves • Being not afraid for 'losing control' • Being open to different cultural perspectives • Being open to reflect on own concepts • Taking / making time • Having trust in their pupils • Creating space for all to contribute • Modelling behaviour and values

APPENDIX Q: Student teacher email

A (Year 4) student teacher in school B, being present during one of the interventions, wrote afterwards in an email:

"*In Year 3 we learned about Adequate Education, but the focus was very much on the individual and not on the group. Viewing the class as a group is absolutely new for me and I think that knowledge about group dynamics and how groups form, for sure would be an addition in teacher training because a safe pedagogical climate is essential for children to be able to learn. I am very grateful for the new insights I have gained today"* (Email, 17-06-2014).