Developing practice-based research for co-operation and co-operative learning

Richard Etienne, Hugo Verkest,
Luisa Freitas and Marcel Meciar

CiCe guides for practice-based research

1

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This Guide has been written and prepared by the CiCe Network's Working Group on Practice-Based Research:

Richard Etienne is a researcher and professor at the university Montpellier III (France). He studies procedures of change in education and teacher training. He works on special needs in education and on project management in schools. As the head of education department in France he had to set up a branch of training in special needs education

Hugo Verkest is both a lecturer at the School of Education (normaalschool) on the Torhout (Belgium) Campus of the Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid- West- Vlaanderen (KATHO - RENO) and senior lecturer in methodology in the Higher Episcopal Institute of Education (HIVO- Brugge). He gives courses and workshops for students and teachers about evaluation and visual data concerning poverty in relation to citizenship. He's engaged as a volunteer in projects about art, rural identity, refugees and equal opportunities and is the international co-ordinator of KATHO– RENO (for primary education).

Luisa Freitas is Associate Professor of Social Studies Education at the Institute of Child Studies at the University of Minho (Portugal). She teaches initial and in-service courses in elementary and childhood teacher education. Her research interests focus on how children develop time and space concepts, as well as identity and citizenship in the context of social studies classrooms in primary schools through several strategies, specifically cooperative learning.

Marcel Mečiar is a researcher and lecturer at the University of Ostrava (Czech Republic). He is interested in the study of social identities (regional identity, identity of immigrants, pupils' identities). On the pedagogical field, he works as a member of the Department of Social Sciences at the Pedagogical Faculty on "a translation" of scientific knowledge concentrating on the form that would be useful for teachers of Civic Education on the level of elementary schools

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CiCe Central Coordination Unit
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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Contents

1. Introduction

These guidelines focus on supporting the development of practice-based research for students in their 1st or 2nd cycle of study, or on CPD[1] courses, that refer to professional practice. The topic of this booklet is how we connect co-operative learning and co-operation with practice-based research.

The appendix gives a set of 'open' sentences and eye-openers. In the CiCe conference in Riga (2006) the authors organised a workshop, which outlined the results and framed these with references to other practice-based research. The workshop was supported by video clips and power point presentations. We hope to present an edited CD with this material with our next set of guidelines.

[1] CPD courses: Continuing Professional Development Courses.

2. Is practice-based-research really research or is it just systematic enquiry?

We begin with a broad discussion around several perspectives. Perhaps the most widespread discussion relates to action-research, though several general texts on research continue to ignore this field. Practice-based research, or practitioner-based research, is even less commonly found in general research methodologies books. Even John Elliot, a founder member (with Lawrence Stenhouse) of the Centre for Curriculum Development and Research (CARE)[2] uses the term practice-based research rather than action research.

Elliot (2004) identifies five aspects that characterize CARE's conception of *Applied and Practice-based Research*, of which the fifth aspect is applied research which is

> is 'practice-based' (this includes 'policy-making') and therefore engages *practitioners*[3]/policymakers in the research process … Practice-based research in the context of CARE's message about Applied Research takes the form of a democratic and conversational construction of actionable knowledge that is disciplined by *evidence*.

The highlighted words stress that practice-based research is developed by practitioners, but should be based on evidence. For Elliot it is not possible to carry practice-based research in isolation: it should be **collaborative** and he stresses that academic researchers

> have a special role to play as facilitators in this process, inasmuch as they are capable of providing practical and theoretical expertise on the methodologies that can be deployed for constructing 'knowledge in the context of action' (or at least in a good position to access it).

We think that stressing the idea of evidence based is a way to reinforce the idea of strong academic research.

In a response to an issue of *Educational Researcher* on Research for Doctoral Students in Education[4], Anderson (2002) argues that practitioner-based inquiry has many features that push it towards the field of true research. He suggested that the two main reasons for the lack of academic attention to practitioner researcher were: "the perception of a lack of guidelines for both the quality of and a formalized methodology for such research, and … the lower academic

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[2] CARE related to the University of East Anglia is being, since 1970, one of the research centers that assumed a most important role in practice-based research, not only in the field of education, but also on Medical and Health, one of most developed fields of practice-based research.

[3] The emphasis is ours.

[4] *Educational Researcher* 30(5), 2001

status attached to it" (Anderson, 2002, p. 22-23). The third reason is about purpose: although practitioner-based research shares the goal of knowledge production, it also has other goals, which may sometimes be excessively emphasized.

Anderson defends practitioner researchers as knowing the field better than the ethnographic researcher: their "knowledge is deeper, more nuanced, and more visceral. Of course these characteristics make this knowledge not only more powerful but also more in need of researcher *reflexivity* and triangulation with other data sources" (p. 23). In relation to the status, he argues that not only do "educational researchers belong to a community of practice" but also that they "might constitute a community of researchers" (p. 24). On the purpose of practitioner-based research, he stresses that the ultimate purpose of research is not knowledge itself, but the transformation of practice.

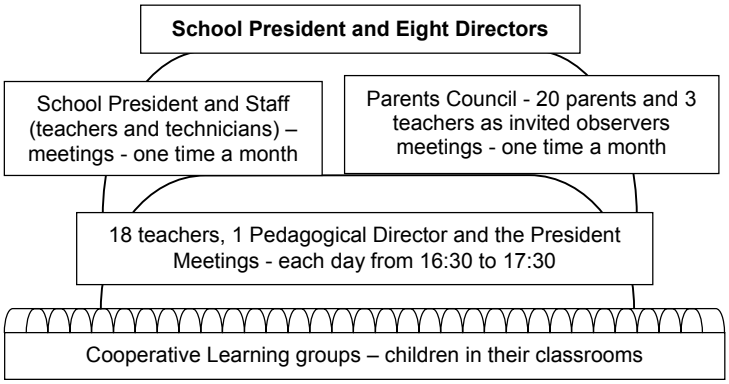
This idea that practitioners-researchers are more reflexive than other researchers recalls Schön's special role for the development of reflection among educators and other professionals; reflection in practice and reflection on reflection in practice. A reflective teacher would have been prepared to develop practice-based research. In his AERA presentation, Schön (1987) ended with the hope that the promotion of reflective practitioners would be a first step "to create a new kind of research presence, who want to produce experiences and knowledge which is usable by teachers" - the kind of research that would effectively "healing the splits between teaching and doing, school and life, research and practice, which have been so insidiously effective at deadening the experience of school at all levels."

3. Team Meetings about Co-operative Learning and Practitioner Based Research

This section is based on observations in pre-school and primary school (3rd grade classroom and a kindergarten for 3 to 6 years olds). These classroom teacher interviews[5] show the importance of collaboration between school staff and parents, and the significance of this for co-operative learning and practice-based research.

The three kindergarten teachers placed great importance on their regular daily meetings with the pedagogical director, their monthly faculty and technician meetings, their monthly meetings with the parents association, and their perceptions of the importance of a culture of collaboration growing in their institution. This led us to consider these meeting in more depth. The teachers use co-operative learning in their classrooms, despite the constrains with very young children: Caroline - *During planning time ... two children were certain they wanted to go to the construction area to make a train with the child who already had chosen to do this, but when there, they all constructed their own training in isolation.*

Our classroom observation, visits and interviews of these three teachers showed how they were developing a culture of collaboration. According to Johnson and Johnson (1994) this is the most essential factor to promote successful co-operative learning implementation in classrooms: they presented a scheme showing several co-operative groups in a Co-operative School Organizational Structure: the School board; Superintendent and Staff; Principal Collegiate Groups; Teacher Collegiality Groups and Co-operative Learning Groups (1994, p. 61). The Co-operative School Organizational Structure could be represented as follows:



[5] Teachers names are pseudonyms

Teresa, the first to start teaching in the school, recalled the differences from when she started, alone in her classroom. There are now teachers meetings, a supportive president and a pedagogical director. She and her colleagues have two teacher aides in their classrooms. The integration of these staff into the cooperative school structure seemed to us the less well integrated. Teresa observed: *Sometimes it is frustrating when we want children to some conclusions by themselves, and a teacher aide gives the answer, or when she draws for the special needs child.* Richard said that sometimes, when he thinks that teacher aides may be going to answer, he says: *No one answers without raising their hand!*

Teacher assistants do not participate in any of the meetings listed. Our analysis of the interview suggested that this would be different if there were meetings of teachers and teacher' aides. Caroline, Richard and Teresa valued their collaboration: t*hey are much more experienced, and in some areas much more knowledgeable … they do many things … for example, Rita is an extraordinary source of ideas for visual art, she solves technical problems with several kinds of paintings and drawings.*

Schmuck (1998) developed the concept of *Organizational Development* associated with *Co-operative Learning*. Organizational development

> aims at helping school participants to manage their school collaboratively and effectively. It focuses on improving the participants' communication and meeting skills on their learning together to carry out co-operative goal setting, problem solving, action planning, decision making, and assessment of outcomes. (p. 244).

Daily teacher meetings are central in school change, though the three teachers also stressed the president's support in this. Support in the school direction is for many commentators a central factor in any school innovation. The administration of key actors not only promotes organizational development, but also co-operative learning. The relationship between these is two way and reciprocal, and they have some similar goals:

Organizational Development	Co-operative Learning
1. To increase understanding of how staff members with different jobs interrelate and effect one and other.	To increase empathy and understanding among students with different personal characteristics.
2. To develop clear communication networks up, down, and laterally.	To establish clear communication among all classroom members.

3. To increase understanding of different educational goals in different parts of the educational system.	To help students understand the different values and attitudes that exist in their own peer group.
4. To uncover organizational conflicts for constructive problem-solving.	To assist students in dealing with conflicts and in converting frustration into problem solving.

(Schmuck, 1998, p. 252)

Many ideas about organizational development and/or professional development have a close relationship with practice based-research. To develop practice-based research it is necessary to promote professional development, but to do practice-based research contributes to professional development. A good initial education in developing practice-based research would be an important preparation for teachers to implement co-operative learning and vice-versa. Sharan and Sharan (1992), the authors of the co-operative method known as Group Investigation, advocate a model for preparing teachers based on the two principles of 'Experience and Reflection' and 'Conceptualizing and Planning'.

The experiential learning model also develops the teacher's conceptual framework and lends order to his or her observations and reflections about their experience. When teachers summarize what they have learned from carrying out the stages of Group Investigation, the general principles about the structure and process of this method serve as a basis for implementing Group Investigation in their classroom. (Sharan and Sharan, 1992, p 155).

Our experience of mentoring practitioner-based research with undergraduate students, and with postgraduate student teachers, shows that the experience of Group Investigation is a good start to understand the principles of practice-based research. Practice-based research is similar to Group Investigation learning. Students with deadlines and grades would be less stressed if they have some previous practical preparation. Our experience tutoring students developing practice-based research also suggests that previous experiences are more helpful than attending general methodology courses.

The three interviewees confirm this: Caroline said - *Our meetings are very good for us, we reflect on our experience, what worked well, what didn't; we also listen to other colleagues reflecting on their experiences. Then, based on this, we plan our projects and in this way improve them.*

Without consciously having any theoretical model as guide[6], our interviewees' conversations showed several steps in a theoretical model of creating a community context for co-operative learning. Graves (1994) stresses that such a community is a more secure and inspiring work environment for teachers and students, and that it encourages new teaching/learning strategies and empower teachers to run faculty meetings more efficiently and actively. Graves suggests how to develop this slow development process through several steps, for each of which she presents a question. We could identify these steps in the construction of a co-operative community in our observations of Caroline, Richard and Teresa's school.

Teresa's initial experiences were of coming to school and the classroom without speaking to anyone. While she talked with colleagues in break times, this has now changed: they still talk, but - *How different our group dynamics are now!* They also meet with speech therapists, nurses and parents – not just individual parents, but also with a body with influence. Teresa experienced the first step of co-operative community building - where the question was: *Who are we*?

Starting to use unifying schools rituals began thinking about developing common projects. Caroline and Richard entered in this phase, when they were thinking about more interesting projects. Richard recalled - *Do you remember when Caroline's idea was so well accepted by all of us?* This second phase is characterised by the question *What can we do together?* The three teachers, one by one, listed the projects developed as a school that started in a classroom.

We do not notice problems in the third phase, when the question is: *How can we do our best*? Sometimes there is a sense of frustration because the tasks are more complex and demanding and some conflicts are more evident. This moments was shown in the school when they started the project *Collaborating with families*[7]*.* This was when the Parents Council was created, a very important moment.

The fourth phase gave much satisfaction; the question is *How can we help others*? The group organise events to show to other institutions their projects, and encourage them to share their experiences. This kind of community does not end, but is continually modified. They have not reached the last phase when the question is *How to say goodbye*? However, Teresa

[6] The three followed a program in their initial teacher training education or in GPD courses that were truly concerned to teachers' professional development and that included practice based research and some other colleagues also had a similar education.

[7] Most families were and continue to be from middle class and only the last years the school, that already maintain the name crèche, is a school with more middle class parents, in spite of only who, for some reason, know well the institution have a good idea about its excellence.

stresses that the group dynamic is the reason why no one has moved to another institution. But they are not a closed group, because each year *new teachers come to the nurse classes, now they do not have only teacher's aids but they already have an early education teacher for all groups, which was one of our fights, dreams.*

From our interviews, we would draw attention to just one more comment from Richard. He spoke less, maybe because it was only he who attended our course. When the other spoke of the importance of having a supportive group and a President who paid attention to new ideas to improve school, he exclaimed - *How could a teacher in a village in a region like Guarda[8], with just a dozen children, develop projects like we do, or carry out any kind of research?*

Collaboration is necessary in developing practitioner–based research it - not only between the tutor, the higher education faculty and the practitioner-researcher - but with others that have an interest in it.

[8] An interior area in the less developed Portuguese region.

4. Co-operative learning in a lesson

> There are three basic ways students can interact with each other as they learn. They can *compete* to see who is "best"; they can work *individualistically* on their own toward a goal without paying attention to other students; or they can work *co-operatively* with a vested interest in each other's learning as well as their own. (Johnson & Johnson 1988: 34)

Co-operative learning is a group-based approach. This type of learning differs from individual learning, in that it is based on cooperation in solving complicated tasks. Pupils are led to share social roles, plan the whole activity, divide tasks, solve particular conflicts, join particular outcomes to a complex whole, and evaluate the benefits to participants. Most school work is done in groups, but cooperative learning does not just involve students performing some task in a group: they have to facilitate each other's learning in the task, and this often requires help from the curriculum designer and instructor.

Co-operative learning has been defined as "small groups of learners working together as a team to solve a problem, complete a task, or accomplish a common goal" (Artz & Newman 1990: 448). According to Slavin, "co-operative learning refers to classroom techniques in which students work on learning activities in small groups and receive rewards or recognition based on their group's performance" (Slavin 1983: 332). Johnson, Johnson, Holubec (1993: 9) define it as "the instructional use of small groups, so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning".

First, it is necessary to emphasise that many teachers do not understand the essence of co-operative learning. Co-operative learning **does not** mean that:

- Students sit side by side at the same table and talk with each other as they do their individual assignments.
- Students do a task individually, with the instruction that those who finish first are to help the slower students.
- Assigning a report to a group where one student does all the work and others put their name on it.

Johnson and Johnson argue that co-operation is **much more** than being physically near other students, discussing material with other students, helping other students, or sharing materials with other students, although each of these is important in co-operative learning.

4.1 The basic elements of cooperation

In order for a lesson to be co-operative, five basic elements are essential (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993). These are:

Interdependence: Since the students are helping each other learn, they must work together to learn well. If all do not contribute, the group members will not learn as much: to promote interdependence, students need to be able to make unique contributions to the group, possibly by being divided into different roles or by being assigned different parts of the task.

Interaction: Students cannot learn together in isolation. They should meet face-to-face or on-line, to review the overall task and their particular pieces of it so that everyone understands what is expected of them. Sometimes, the task (or part of it) can be done separately, but even then students should ask each other questions and find resources for one another. The task often requires team members to work together. Before completing the final project, students need to review each other's work and suggest revisions. This step is often skipped, resulting in a poorer project, with less good grades - and hard feelings within the group.

Individual Accountability: Since the goal of co-operative learning is enhanced individual learning, it is possible to assess students individually. Assigning part of the grade on the group projects promotes interdependence, but the instructor must reserve part for individual assessment, to prevent hitchhiking (one student failing to do their fair share, damaging his or her team-mates' learning and grades).

Interpersonal Skills: Effective teamwork requires motivation, communication skills, and assessment skills. Students may come in to the class without good small-group skills and will need to develop them. For this reason, later group projects will probably run more smoothly and efficiently than early ones as students develop their skills.

Group Processing: The group assesses at least some of its work together with an eye to improving it or towards doing even better on the next project (this includes the review of work before turning it in).

4.2 Is the teacher's role important and needed in the co-operative learning process?

Most descriptions of cooperative learning deal with students and their assessment during a lesson: fewer authors concentrate on the role of the teacher. We asked professional teachers and academics in a workshop on co-operation (in Riga, May 2006) what they thought of cooperation and the role of the teacher in cooperative learning. Is she/he needed in it? What should she/he do and what not to do?

The main points raised are in the following section. How did we elicit these reactions from our colleagues? The workshop was divided into four parts (intended to be four corners, but the shape of our room did not allow this). Each part was moderated by a team-member, and visually accompanied by a video or picture presentation prepared for the workshop. The records consisted of real-life situations in a school (a class council, a staff session, a lesson, a space).

4.3 The role of the teacher

The role of the teacher in a co-operative learning process is to be a person in whom pupils trust. He/she must be able to present and explain the difference in this learning approach, compared to 'classic' competitive and individual approaches, to give a clear plan and quietly control the process. The authority of teacher and the pupils' confidence is assumed in using this method: without these, the lesson can disintegrate and the aims will not be achieved.

The hardest task for a teacher is to prepare the class for cooperative learning. The idea that one 'just jumps on the cooperative learning train' is too optimistic. Preparation is important, essential and necessary, the extent depending on how much the pupils are used (or not) to team-work, delegating roles and so on. There are differences between educational systems, schools, and teachers. The obligation of the teacher is to create the conditions for passing on knowledge so that a pupil understands a sense of things and looks for links and a sense of coherence.

Teachers using co-operative learning in their classroom play multiple roles. The teacher's repertoire in co-operative learning includes:

- explicit instruction on how to behave (see Jacobs' norms in the next paragraph),
- modelling – the teacher must be a role model and must practise what he/she teaches - which means cooperating with others in the class!,
- feedback - the teacher makes clear what is expected of students as they work, both individual and group

feedback is expected, with a focus on what is working well and on what needs improving,

- intervention – for example, if noise level disrupts others, or there is persistent off-task behaviour by pupils,
- strategic task selection – the teacher has to plan worthwhile, rich tasks for students to co-operatively engage in.

4. 4 Promotion - building a climate of co-operation

> Classroom atmosphere forms a key ingredient in the success of co-operative learning (Jacobs 2002: 5).

To create a co-operative atmosphere, class building activities can be used. *Class building* is working to build a feeling of trust and solidarity among all the members of the class, which is crucial for the success of co-operative learning. To an extent it is similar to the contract that (according to approaches of some pedagogical traditions) used to be concluded between pupils and teacher, and between pupils.

George Jacobs (2002: 5) suggests sticking up several norms so that everyone can see them on the wall:

- I listen when others talk.
- I encourage everyone to participate.
- I help others without doing the work for them.
- I ask for help when I need it.
- I am critical of ideas, not people.
- I remember that we are all in this together.
- I value and respect each person as an individual, as a group mate, and as part of our class regardless of race, religion, nationality, or academic performance.

We call these norms rather than rules because norms flow from shared values, such as the value of cooperation.

Students need to understand that:

- Co-operative learning benefits us in many ways, both at school and in life outside school.
- Effective co-operation takes work. Teams can work effectively or ineffectively. There are ways of recognising an effective team.
- We can influence the success of our team by the way we behave as individuals.
- Everyone can learn to improve their capacity to cooperate with others.

(Murdoch & Wilson 2004: 14)

4.5 Classroom environment and co-operation

The proper arrangement of the classroom is another important way to effect co-operation. The creation of a constructive classroom environment – reflected both in the physical facilities and in the general organization of activities – depends on the teacher's tactful and judicious management of resources and constraints, to be a helpful leader but not an authoritarian oppressor, and thus provide a context in which pupils will be free to learn and develop vigorously.

Freinet (1896-1966), a reformer who promoted co-operative learning (see section 6, below), proposed detailed leadership rights and duties that effective teachers must assume. The teacher will be promoted to the dignity of a new role, involving:

- constantly improving – individually and co-operatively, and in collaboration with the pupils – the material organization and the community life of the school;
- letting all pupils engage in work and play that meets their inclinations and vital needs as much as possible;
- eventually directing and efficiently helping workers who are having trouble, with neither bad temper nor useless scolding;
- finally, assuring the constant reign of all-powerful and harmonious work at school. (1993:415-6)

Students should sit close together to share materials more easily, and to use quiet voices that can't be heard by other groups. On the other hand, they need to have enough room for a free movement. Seating arrangements foster co-operation, so a group will function well or not just by the way they sit (e. g. somebody in a corner unable to reach the materials, or out of the inner circle). Real problems can be caused by a shape of a room (narrow and long) or with furniture fastened to the floor for frontal teaching, that can't be moved for co-operative learning. Jacobs (2002) concludes that the teacher also needs space to circulate round the room to visit all the groups.

5 Co-operative class council in an urban single class

In school systems in southern Europe traditional transmission is based on professorship: pupils use the skills of listening, understanding and transforming professorial speech into knowledge which must be related to an academic task (to write an essay, to solve a problem, etc). Freinet (1950) contributed to a new view of education through a natural method based on the activity of pupils and their cooperation.

Regular meetings with the whole school – or with parts of it- can stimulate staff and student awareness of whole school issues. This in turn is important for the formation of a school identity, and develops links and associations across peer-group or class boundaries.

The policy in Freinet schools is that assemblies at the beginning of each school year should be led by the headteacher to demonstrate good group management and communication techniques. Later, when pupils are accustomed to the format, assemblies could be guided by members of the class themselves. This is a good opportunity for young and new pupils to gain experience in talking to a large group. However members of staff may need to be prepared for personal, and sometimes even controversial views. Form tutoring demands very special qualities and skills, and experiences may need to be shared between staff.

This form of schooling requires working groups and cooperation. School activities for democratic life (Amiel, Étienne & Press, 2003) are facilitated by an institutional approach (Imbert & GRPI, 1994). The pedagogy of 'new education' is sometimes accused of granting a central place to the child and of rejecting knowledge. Researching in a school located in priority network of education (Étienne, 2003), I researched to determine if these objections are well founded. I deal here with just two issues: to what extent the class council is concerned with citizenship education? How does the class council contributes to citizenship education?

This practice-based research is based on three minutes of a single class council filmed in Sylvain Connac's class (Connac, 2003). We provide a complete and verbatim account (Nick & Bodet, 2006). A multireferential analysis (Fumat, Vincens & Étienne, 2003) of this shows the extent to which this short sequence is used to build the idea of law and its acceptance, where the pupils are initially only looking for agreement. Finally, to bring closer together research, training and teaching (Savoie-Zajc, 2001 & 2004), we mix researchers, trainers and teachers so that they can confront each others' views on the co-operative class council.

Despite thinking that this research aim is limited and focused, we find value in the four dimensions (each one comprising several sub-dimensions) proposed for assessing the quality of

applied and basic research (pp. 10-15).

5.1 A single … and singular urban class council

Built in the sixties, 'Antoine Balard' is a co-operative school with 12 classes situated in the suburbs of Montpellier. There are four urban single classes (Étienne, 2006) which are composed of 25 children of different age groups (ranging from 6 to 10). Each of these classes teaches five pupils taken from each age group. Issues within the class are discussed and settled by the class council which meets every morning. Today, Jallal has beaten Sofiane.

At Antoine Balard in Montpellier, teachers make sure that the older pupils tutor the younger ones. When there are misunderstandings [9] between the children, they are solved through communication. However, it does not prevent incidents…

Class council

Sylvain, class teacher: I am not happy with Jallal who has got an orange belt [10] for his behaviour, who has lots of rights in the class and who beat a pupil a few moments ago (…) he kicked Sofiane. I think it is a serious offence for a pupil with an orange belt. If he wore a white belt, I would not mind so much. But in this case, I do mind a lot. He wears an orange belt.

Ridouane, President of the council: Now, Jallal, what have you got to say? Go ahead! What can you say?

Jallal: It is true. I mean I am sorry. I apologized when we left the class. I do not know if he has accepted my apologies.

Ridouane: Go ahead Sofiane

Sofiane: I say it's true. And when he apologized, I accepted. It is okay.

Ridouane: The case is settled

Sylvain: It might be settled between the two boys, which is all right. But it might not be settled for the class; that a pupil with an orange belt should hit someone when he has other solutions and on top of that he is an older pupil who knows all the other solutions; he has used his feet or hands –I don't know really how it happened- instead of using his brain first.

Riouane: Sofiane…, sorry I mean Sonia

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[9] In order to solve misunderstandings, pupils learn how to apologize clearly and directly to the person they have offended.

[10] In the class, no marks are given but belts, like in judo; from the white belt to the black belt. Pupils who have obtained a belt can lose it.

Sonia: We will give you another chance, but you have to stop, it will be your last chance; if you stop then you keep your orange belt but if you keep saying 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry' after that, 'I'm sorry' is nothing but words; you could say 'I won't do it again', you could commit yourself to do something…

Sofiane: I suggest he write a letter of apology, not for me or someone else but for the whole class; he goes over there; everybody listens to him and he reads a letter of apology to the whole class ; either a letter of apology or a poem, or whatever.

Ridouane: Is that all right, teacher?

Sylvain: Anyway, when the council gives a warning, if a pupil behaves badly again, he gets the golden belt[11]. The council does not give a warning just to decorate the walls[12]. (…) Yes, you have to take note of the fact that Jallal got a warning because he hit a child and he must present something to the class to show that he has understood (…) that he will not do it again. If he forgets, it would be the same as doing it again.

Ridouane: And if he prepares something now, if he finishes it today, can he present it to the class today, teacher?

Sylvain: yes, he can. He can present it today or tomorrow

Jallal is very much impressed by the unanimous decision of the class meeting. When the respect of the law decided by the whole group is supported by the schoolmates' authority, all the children have to abide by it. Besides, when the children know that this law is the key to their individual progress, they do everything they can to comply to it. Jallal, an older pupil, is particularly anxious of losing his status as someone to whom the younger ones look up to (**a child says to Jallal :** I want to hold your hand). *So, since then and up to the autumn half-term break, Jallal has gone back to being the perfect model that he likes to be.*

Schools in France: learning how to live together: *A film by Nick & Bodet – © France 2 – Translation by P. Monjo – 2006*

This sequence must be understood as a significant moment in the construction of a public space and its principal stake is not summarized with a simple resolution of conflict between two people. The presentation of the excuses is not enough. The will of the President to consider that 'the case is settled' does not carry the agreement of Sylvain. What are the stakes of this situation? Why does Sylvain introduce 'the class' into the discussion and what are the clues for educational success?

[11] In that case, a pupil loses his/her belt and the golden belt means he/she has regressed.
[12] Rewards and regressions are written on a board.

5.2 The construction of the law like local common good

In this conflict, the temptation to move on as fast as possible is all the stronger because there is no continuing argument between Jallal and Soufiane. The boys confirm that the excuses were presented and accepted, but Sylvain cannot be satisfied with this first level of 'living together'. Sonia's remark seals the success of this strategy: the law is not only verbal. This pupil points out that one cannot be satisfied with words, and that it is behaviour that counts. The comment launches the new idea of amends, and this idea is then associated with graduation: first, the apology, but when this is not enough, it is necessary to pass to reparation, which does not exclude sanction (belt loss). The aim is to make Jallal think about citizenship. Sofiane passes immediately from his case which is now 'settled'. He overlooks his own case, and suggests a sanction that will help Jallal reintegrate the class.

Sylvain's concern is to recall the law: a whole range of sanctions is available. The problem is to keep the memory of the previous decisions of the class council so as not to change the law each time. This urban class keeps the pupils in a unique background that will last at least five years for each, and it is essential that there are traces of this progression to become citizens.

This short extract of a co-operative class council raises the essential issues of teaching, training and researching: the analysis of practice, carried out with experts, makes it possible to develop them. I limited my ambition to two of them: to what extent is the class concerned with citizenship education? How can we explain how the class council contributes to the education of the citizen?

The class is the ideal place allowing the development of citizenship and teacher training, and the cooperative class council contributes to this. This analysis encourages the development of new training and research, and to look for answers to questions that have only been partially solved:

- How to include/understand, describe and acquire the essential concepts of stakes and roles in the building of co-operative class council?
- What place and what methods - but also what limits - for the teacher in the class?
- How to jump from conflicts to the construction of law and knowledge?
- How to assess the quality and the effects of the co-operative class council?
- How eventually to have a lasting effect on this form of citizenship education?

6. The visual and spatial dimension of co-operation in school!

6.1 Freinet, the architect of co-operation in education?

This section is based on interviews in five Flemish Freinet schools. These method schools started in Flanders 25 years ago, and now 51 schools are linked in this educational approach in which co-operation is the key concept. The teacher and headmasters received only five 'open' sentences, and their answers became the starting point of a dialogue. This practice-based research from interviews gives the headteachers and teachers the opportunity to think about the 'social narratives of the school and the neighbourhood', and to the everyday lives of pupils. We can talk with the researching teachers or headteacher interested in sustained investigation in relation to what children create or produce. For these teachers, research suggests an endeavour that is exploratory, collaborative, dynamic but also an intellectual engagement and some degree of objectivity. Not only teachers but also students are assumed to be carrying out research.

Parents are no longer enrapt contemplators or appreciators; they are consumers, participants or supporters. A teacher said: 'we are beginning to see the folds and shadows that surround the practice of co-operation in very complex ways'.

In the vision of French educational reformer Freinet, the physical arrangement of the school and the practical equipment available to the children were important conditions for good co-operative education. In his books Freinet (1990, 1993) presented detailed floor plans and construction outlines for various models of school buildings, adapted to schools of different sizes (though never for more than eight classes), providing normal classroom space with special attention to corner work, as well as specialized workshops in agriculture, shop work, domestic science, mechanics and commerce, library research, laboratory experiments, visual arts and music. Moreover, the land around the school should ideally include a garden, sports fields, an orchard, bee hives, a fishpond, a small stable, and perhaps even a stream. The classrooms themselves should feature large windows at children's eye-level, movable desks arranged in variable work-groups rather than fixed in rows, no podium or teacher's desk, and easy access to various educational materials shelved along the walls.

6.2 School building from ghetto to oasis

Schools sometimes used to be a kind of ghetto, expressing a fear of difference and a dominant model of spatial zoning derived from the 19th century, yet had at the same time the structure of segregation, to exclude the non–productive from street visibility.

The head teacher of a Freinet schools described his school as 'an oasis for children living in a desert of alienation. It is only

a reaction against the cultural problems of the cities where impersonality, coldness and emptiness are in charge. We could settle the school in an area with many activities [nearby is an industrial park, and around the school are meadows and farms]. To me, school zoning is a form of purification, of setting up a rigid model which excludes difference, of splitting off the unacceptable other, the dirt.' He made these remarks on the policy of single-use zoning, characteristic of urban planning in the 20th century. This single–use zoning is against the philosophy of co-operation.

In another school the head teacher introduced the 'living room project'. This is not childcare: it simply offers children a safe haven where they can relax and be themselves, with cooking and sewing lessons.

The layout of an area has a direct link to behaviour. Teachers learn to translate their pedagogic policy plans into the layout of the infant play area or childcare centre. The theory suggests that the creation of play and reading corners would improve co-operation. The experience of teachers and heads has shown that groups are calmer and the corners are good for creativity and co-operative play. The aim to provide a space to co-operate, and an opportunity to be empowered through the management of the space, meets an educational aim.

One school in urban area researched the potential for cultural responses to the social needs of elderly people, those with mental health difficulties and members of ethnic minorities in the inner city. The headmaster and his team stressed the relationship between cooperation and citizenship. They create a critical culture where they can discuss with parents issues of gender, racism and segregation in ways that confront not only the legacy of subjugation but also radical traditions of resistance One of their 'community' project was collaborating with a defined community to embody memories of place, in dealing with local rather than global history Children became co–designers of their city, to occupy that place where the form of the city is determined.

6.3 Symbolising co-operation at school

Openness to aesthetic and poetical experience in creating new school logos - sensing the emotional import of different colours, for instance in some logos (the rainbow, the tree of live, the house of the giants, the garden of turtles, the butterfly) - might be a form of visual interpretation of cooperation. The identity and the pronouncement of their specific school project will be realised in a combination of picture and world. We talk of visual literacy as if it involved someone looking at things. But to one of these headteachers 'visual literacy is not just the art of seeing things but also the

art of showing, and of knowing how a school might present its values'.

Most school logos are very child-friendly images. Some are based on a child's creation, while others are made by design studios imitating the child's way of drawing. Teachers find these logos necessary: one said 'If the images could be explained by words, then you wouldn't need the images. Their distinctness, their presence, their quality of appeal could be dispensed with.'

Images have long been recognized for their transformative power, but this can be a new concept for teachers and pupils, coming from the literal and rational tradition in which texts and records are not supposed to change. Logos can be very disturbing for the older generation of teachers - and very invigorating for the younger generation. A headteacher remarked 'School logos have a deep faith in the positive, creative powers of all human beings and especially of children'.

7. General conclusions

This research comes from four countries, and is based on several levels of co-operation: it creates a need and an opportunity for universities and colleges to integrate practice-based research in their curriculum. Institutions in these times resemble warehouses, with different departments, in which knowledge is kept separate from practical contexts and thus, potentially, available to be used in any situation. During our research the authors of this guideline recognised the conflict between spectator theory and work-based inquiry as a dilemma-ridden relationship of 'learning organisations'. It becomes a hermeneutic process, changing the perceptions of those involved - in the first place, the perceptions of the researchers. Working in a practice-based research partnership enabled us to meet the challenges of both the practice and the research. Practice-based research should be seen as an empowering process for the future.

8. Appendix

The class council

Eye–opener: How can the class be related to becoming a citizen?

5 sentences to fill in or complete

To understand class council I need …

In class council the teacher must …

If there are conflicts in class they have to do …

Standards of quality in class council are …

After and between class councils they have to …

The meeting with the teachers

Eye–opener: How would the 'staff meeting' (teachers, nurses, social workers) be related to support children become citizen?

5 sentences to fill in or complete:

In staff meetings should be included the following topics …

The role of staff meetings in helping children to become citizens would be …

During their practice future educators should participate in staff meetings because of...

A staff meeting will be democratic if …

In Staff meeting they should not …

The lesson on citizenship

Eye–opener: what does mean cooperation in the setting of a lesson?

5 sentences to complete

The role of the teacher in cooperation during the lesson is...

I evaluate cooperation during the lesson by …

To promote cooperation in citizenship education I as teacher …

To promote cooperation the classroom should be like as …

The difficulties in cooperation in a classroom might be …

The design of the building and the logo in combination with the name of the school

Eye–opener: How a school building and a school symbol invited the children (actors) to cooperate with each other?

5 sentences to fill in

A school building shows that cooperation is important by …

A school building is contra–productive to cooperation by …

To express cooperation over the name of a school could be …

To express cooperation the colour of cooperation will be …

A logo with (?) refers to cooperation …

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