Reaching the 'Hard to Reach'

Reaching the 'hard to reach': Inclusive responses to diversity through child-teacher dialogue

Preparing students to be researchers
A guidance manual

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Contents

Introduction

'Reaching the hard to reach: inclusive responses to diversity through child-teacher dialogue', a three-year project (2017-2020) funded by the European Union, involved primary schools and universities in five countries: Austria, Denmark, England, Portugal and Spain.

The focus of the project was on what is one of the biggest challenges facing teachers across Europe, that of including all children in lessons, particularly those who might be seen as 'hard to reach'. These might be, for example, migrants, refugees or students with disabilities, as well as others who might be overlooked. The project involved the use of collaborative action research. This required teachers and students to participate actively as research partners alongside colleagues from universities, with the aim of improving classroom practices.

With support from their university partners, five primary schools became 'hubs': that is, centres for developing and disseminating the work of the project. During the first year they trialled a new way of working and helped in refining the processes involved within their own schools. Then, during the second year, they each led the training of trios of teachers from five more primary schools to develop a local network. In the final year of the project, all 30 schools expanded the approach in their schools.

The guidance manual

The purpose of this manual is to enable teachers prepare and support students to be researchers involved in the process of Inclusive Inquiry (see Inclusive Inquiry Guide). The intention is that student researchers will collaborate with trios of teachers in making their lessons more inclusive.

The specific roles of student researchers are to:

a. gather ideas from their classmates in order to understand better how lessons can become more inclusive;

b. work with their teachers to design 'research lessons' that will be informed by their and their classmates' views;

c. observe the research lessons; and

d. take part in discussions with teachers about how the research lessons can be made more inclusive.

There are different ways in which the work of preparing students to be researchers can be organised. Below we offer illustrative examples from various schools in the five countries involved in the project and the ways in which they developed the work in their schools. We encourage flexibility in organising the work in your school, in such a way that it fits the realities of each context.

The Manual is organised in three sections:

A. Planning the training of student researchers
B. Training sessions
C. Collecting and analysing information

A. Planning the training of student researchers

1. Choosing children researchers:

Identify which children you will train as researchers. Ideally, no more than 9; that is, 3 from each class that will take part in the research lessons.

Which students to involve is each teacher's decision. However, it is important to have a mix of students: both boys and girls, and some children who are, in different ways, seen as 'hard to reach'.

Giving this role to these children is a good opportunity to empower them.   At the same time, any child can benefit by taking this role, and if schools decide to use the approach a number of times during a school year, they can then give opportunities to other children to take the role of researchers.

Since there are three teachers involved and three classes, the same decision should be made for the number of student researchers for each class. Having nine student researchers working together makes the process manageable and allows for productive group work amongst the student researchers.

It is important to be clear about the reasons why you chose the student researchers, remembering that you must include some seen as 'hard to reach'. Examples might include: a student researcher defined as having special educational needs; a student recently arrived in the country; a student that does not seem to be confident; or one that appears to struggle working in groups. Some teachers have made a particular focus on those individuals who seem to be often overlooked.

Example 1: One teacher explained: *"I looked into those who had more affinities with each other, and I thought would be more comfortable going to each other's classrooms to observe. Although one of the selected girls is quite shy, I thought it would be a good challenge for her, as she makes a good pair with the chosen boy."*

Example 2: This teacher said: *"The children we chose were ones that had been seen as 'hard to reach', at different stages of their learning".*

Example 3: In one class, the teacher chose three children that could be seen as 'hard to reach'. These children have difficulties with the language and are often disturbing in classroom. By selecting them as student researchers, the teacher saw an opportunity to increase students' engagement in lessons.

Example 4: A number of the children were seen by the teachers as not being confident in participating in classrooms activities. Three of the child researchers are seen as very quiet and as not being self-confident – the teachers explained how they were dominated by peers in collaborative work in class for instance. Others were seen as children lacking confidence or interest in learning.

Example 5: One of the children was on the autistic spectrum, whereas another one had dyslexia.

2. Details of training:

Decide when is the best time to hold the training and gather all the children researchers together. You will need to devote about three hours overall for the training, although this might be made up of a sequence of shorter sessions. You might decide that one teacher leads the training, or that all three that will be teaching the research lessons are involved.

Also, think about the location that you will use for these training sessions. A quiet room is needed so as to have meaningful, uninterrupted discussions with the student researchers when you are training them for carrying out research, as well as for planning the lessons and analysing these. Keep in mind the need to design an approach that suits your context.

Example 1 (England): The training was organised by the facilitator of the project, a senior teacher who does not have full-time responsibility for a class. It took place over two days, with each session lasting for one and a half hours. During the second day, the three teachers who took part in the research lessons were also involved.

Example 2 (Portugal): This training was led by the three teachers together, during the programme of curricular enrichment activities. This strategy, which is for children in the first cycle of basic education, includes activities of an optional nature related to sports, art, science and technology. Due to the fact that not all children attend these activities [curriculum enrichment activities], the teachers had to choose children as researchers that they knew would be able to take part in after school hours.

Example 3 (Austria): Here the training was led by each teacher in each classroom that was taking part in the study and was embedded in three different lessons with all children taking part.

Example 4 (Spain): The training was led by researchers from the partner university, but the three teachers and the school principal were also present during the sessions. Six sessions were planned over a number of days: Session 1: 45 minutes, Session 2: 30 minutes, Session 3: 30 minutes, Session 4: 30 minutes, Session 5: 15 minutes and Session 6: 45 minutes. This approach was only used in the first year of the project. In the following years, the training sessions were led by the teachers and the headteacher within school hours, over three sessions, combining some of the six sessions described above.
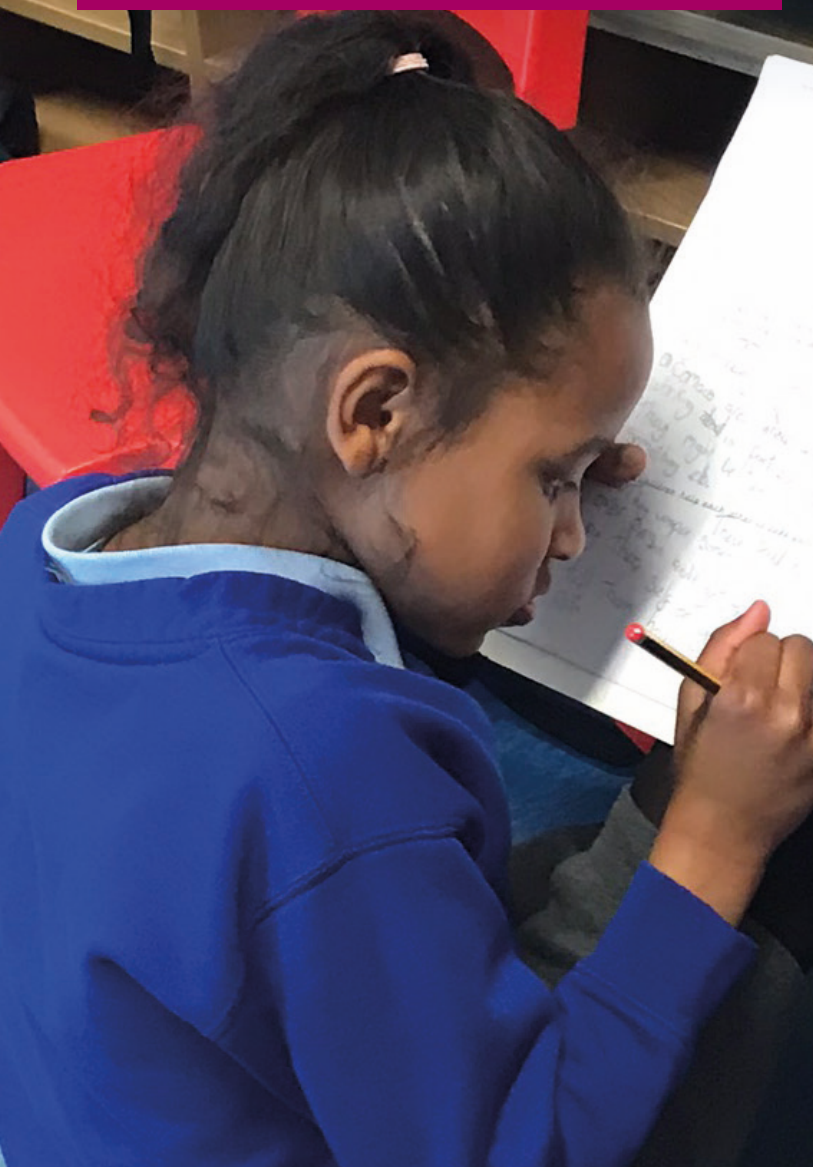
B. Training sessions

The aim of the training is to enable student researchers to understand the purposes of their investigations and familiarise themselves with a range of methods that they can use to collect and analyse the views of their classmates.

The steps below are suggested in order to carry out the training.

1. Introduction:

At the start of the training, explain to students the aims of the session (s). For example, you could say: *"Our aim is to try to understand how lessons can become more inclusive, using the views of children to ensure that all children participate and learn. In order to do this, we need to carry out research. What do you understand by this word?".*

Following students' suggestions, explain to students what research involves, why you decided to give them the role of researchers and how important their role is.

Example (Spain): The question "what does investigate mean?" was asked, to explore children's existing understandings. The students felt that "research" was restricted to science, such as health investigations or researching in laboratories. It was explained that there are many ways of researching and that ours is going to be a collaborative research with the cooperation of teachers and students. Their faces were filled with perplexity, emotion, and expectations. At the end, a booklet and an identity card as researchers was distributed.
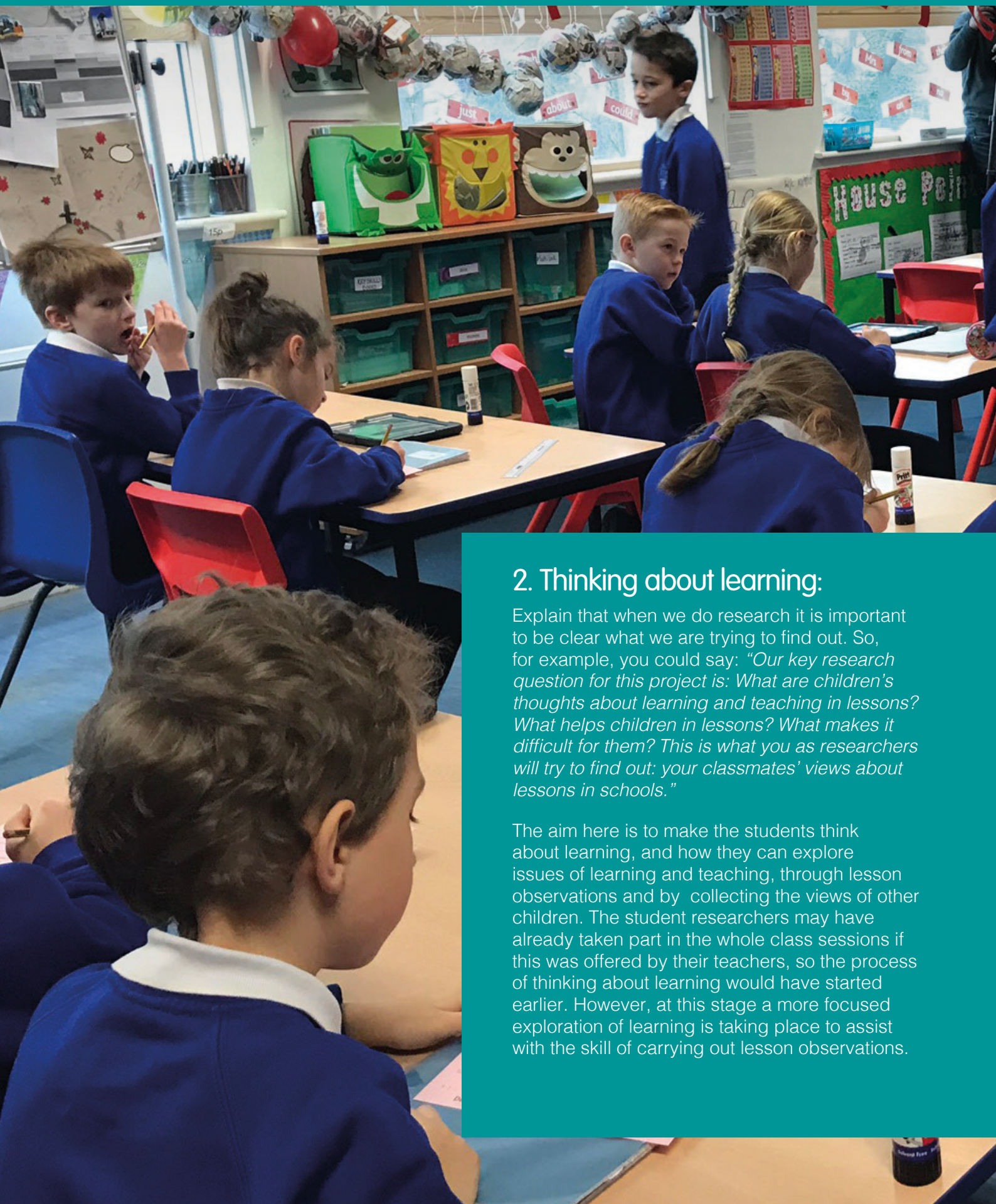
2. Thinking about learning:

Explain that when we do research it is important to be clear what we are trying to find out. So, for example, you could say: *"Our key research question for this project is: What are children's thoughts about learning and teaching in lessons? What helps children in lessons? What makes it difficult for them? This is what you as researchers will try to find out: your classmates' views about lessons in schools."*

The aim here is to make the students think about learning, and how they can explore issues of learning and teaching, through lesson observations and by collecting the views of other children. The student researchers may have already taken part in the whole class sessions if this was offered by their teachers, so the process of thinking about learning would have started earlier. However, at this stage a more focused exploration of learning is taking place to assist with the skill of carrying out lesson observations.

Example 1 (England): Student researchers were asked to think and then talk with the student next to them about their favourite subjects, and what specifically makes them like these particular lessons. The teacher then moved on to get the children thinking about learning, instead of just focusing on what the children like. The student researchers moved around to sit with someone from a different year group, so that they could have a chance to talk to someone else. Each pair of students was then given two photographs of children in other schools engaged in various activities: such as children playing around a water tray, children writing down in what looked to be like an exam situation, children chatting, etc. (see Appendix A). They were asked to discuss whether they think the students in the photos were learning and, if they were, say how they know this, or what the evidence that they are learning is. The teacher then raised another question:

"Which picture do you think the children are learning the most? Why?".
After discussing these ideas in pairs, all the pictures were placed on the board and the discussion was focused on the question: "How do we know if they are learning?". So, for example, discussing one of the photos raised the issue of whether children can learn while playing. Students had different opinions about this: some said yes, others said no, and others said a little bit. The teacher encouraged them to justify their answers and give evidence from what they were looking at, such as they were laughing, they had a chat with their classmates, and so on. It became clear through the discussions about all the pictures that observers cannot be sure just by looking/ observing whether learning is taking place, and that there is a need to dig deeper to know what is happening and avoid making quick decisions. This was emphasised by the teacher-facilitator.

Example 2 (Austria): The teacher wanted to demonstrate what could support students in their learning. She gave the students a worksheet and, while they were concentrated on working on it, she opened the windows (it was winter and cold), turned off the lights, spoke very loudly etc. The teacher then asked the students, after they were done with their worksheet: "What did you notice?" The children described the changes in the classroom. *"There are many situations that can affect the learning process in a negative or positive way,"* the teacher said. The teacher, then, described the pictures from the worksheet (listening to music, walking around, turning on the light, silence etc.). The students had to think about what supported them in learning situations and discussed in pairs which picture was most important for their good learning. The students then used the diamond method to organise the pictures regarding their importance for learning.

After that, each child presented his/her results to the group. While the children were doing that, the teacher placed a big sheet with different learning situations on the wall and the children had to assess them with a happy, sad and a neutral emotion. The children could vote for the pictures, which helped them most or the least in learning. At the end, the children and the teacher created a poster that showed the most important aspects for learning in their classroom: namely that it was silent and bright in the classroom, and that they wanted to listen to music while working individually (Appendix B).

Example 3 (Spain): The strategy that was used was photo elicitation, for which teachers had prepared nine colour photos that showed different scenes in classrooms, for example: students working in groups or individually; students sad or as absent in the context of a traditional class, with a teacher in front saying something and some students with hands raised . They then formed three groups of three researchers, and one teacher per group who asked open ended questions, such as: *"What does this image make you think?"; "Are these children learning?"; "How do they feel?" "Would you like to work in this way?". "What can the teacher do to help all children in the class learn and participate?"*, etc.

Teachers highlighted to student researchers that all these ideas would help them with their lesson observations.   It was then agreed that these ideas could be included in a template for recording lesson observations.

3.Practising observation:

It is important to give the children researchers the opportunity to observe lessons before going into the research lessons. This can be done either through a video recorded lesson (three-minute observation is enough), or through going in another classroom that is not taking part in the research lessons. The important issue, both for the teachers as well as for the student researchers who will be observing, is to ensure that the focus is on what in the lesson might be helping or preventing some children from participating and learning. This should be based on what can be seen and heard. It is also important to make sure that no real students' names are used. Instead, "a boy", "a girl" should be used. Please note, the student researchers who are observing should not be observing their own classmates.

Student researchers, especially the older ones, should use the same observation sheet that the teacher observers will be using (Appendix C). Younger children could keep brief points on post-it notes, or on their iPads, or just discuss what they noticed at the end of the observation. At the same time, specific observation grids can be developed that will focus on certain features of the lessons. What has to be kept in mind is that the focus should be on what happens in lessons, and how activities or interactions enable children's participation in lessons or not.

Some general advice for student researchers when carrying out lesson observations!

When observing lessons, please, ensure that:

- you do not interrupt the lesson in any way

- write down what you observe – see and hear – not what you think about what you are observing

- do not mention anyone's names (say "a boy" "a girl", "the teacher")

- remember the focus of observation is on what helps children participate and what makes it difficult for them

Example 1 (England): The student researchers were divided into three groups (one child from each class in each group), each accompanied by an adult (the teacher facilitator and two researchers who were observing the session). Before going into the classrooms, the teacher ensured that everyone was clear that they should not distract the lesson and that they should be careful about not jumping to conclusions quickly, and that this time they would only be looking and listening but not keeping notes. The teachers had been notified in advance that observers might come briefly in their classrooms. Each observation lasted for five minutes, after which the student researchers all gathered together to discuss their observations. Most of them did not keep any notes, whereas a few wrote keywords on a post-it note. The teacher facilitator reminded the students that they should not mention specific names. Rather, she suggested, they should say "a child", instead of mentioning his/her name. She also praised them that they took their time and watched for a while before making their judgements. For example, one student researcher said, *"I saw people talking but I realised when I saw them for a bit longer they were talking on task, because I realised that from far away because they were talking with their heads down writing. That kind of tells me they can't be talking about something that's not what they are supposed to be".*

Example 2 (Denmark, Portugal and England):
Student researchers in a school in Denmark focused on the different activities used in a lesson and the kind of participation that occurs during each of the activities. The children used an observation grid (see Appendix D) to identify which activities allow for children's greater participation. This focused on the following criteria: a) participates by listening and following the teachers' instructions, b) do not participate, and c) is occupied with something else. It was important that the observers' attention was on the activity, not on naming children who do not participate or participate in class.

Similarly, in a school in Portugal the teachers with the student researchers prepared an observation form which focused on student behaviour. This form had the suggestions made by the six student researchers and they decided to register the following behaviours:

"I noticed that the students:

- Were attentive,

- Have been doing something else,

- Put their fingers in the air to talk,

- Helped each other,

- Made noise,

- Have the material to work with,

- Played with the materials on the table,

- Were sitting well."

The observation sheet had only two columns to record the observations. One with a pleased smile and the other with a sad smile. Students' names were not noted. The form also had a section for each one to write whatever they wanted, to complement their observations.

Another school in England with very young children (five years olds) developed a grid which focused on activities and the student researchers had to tick the boxes each time they observed that activity alongside their feelings whilst observing (smiley face, sad face). In another school, with older children, a grid was developed where the student researchers had to write what they observed in relation to the activity that they chose to focus on and had been a part of their ideas when designing the lesson.

Example 4 (Austria):
The teachers in this school used a different approach to introduce the students to observation. Every student in the class had the chance to observe and reflect upon a short sequence from a lesson in their class. This was repeated three times. Each observation was followed by a discussion with classmates and the teacher about what they had noticed. These observation sequences were done for a couple of minutes on different days, in order to allow more students to become researchers. So, for example, three or four students were selected to observe 15-minute-sequences from a lesson. They did it either in their own classroom or in a different classroom. After each observation, the teacher had a debriefing with the student observers and the whole class.

4. Constructing dialogues with teachers:

Student researchers will need to discuss their observations with the teachers involved in order to decide how the research lesson can be developed and improved. Here, it is crucial that the student researchers are encouraged to be sensitive with the language they use, in order to have a constructive dialogue with teachers about the lessons.

Example (England): The session started with the facilitator summing up what was discussed during the previous session, especially highlighting that the focus of the observation should be on children's participation in the lesson, especially what in the class seems to prevent them from participating or what helps them participating. Then, the teacher asked them to work in trios (one student from each year group in each of the trios), with one of the teachers attached to each of the trios. The trios were given statements, such as: "There were lots of opportunities for children to work together", "The teacher talked too much" (see Appendix E for the list of statements) and asked to discuss whether they were constructive or not. This was a crucial activity in helping the student researchers how to have constructive dialogues with the teachers that they would be observing.

5. Planning for data collection:

The purpose here is to discuss with the student researchers a range of methods that they can use in order to collect their own classmates' views. Start by asking their ideas: *"How can you find out your classmates' views about their lessons?"* It is very likely that they will mention questionnaires and interviews. However, we want to encourage children's creativity in developing their own activities, as well as using existing methods. After they share their ideas you can also share some of the student voice activities from the Students' Voices Toolkit. It is up to the teachers to decide which activities they want to share. However, it is important to allow the student researchers to decide which methods to use with their classmates.

Example 1 (Portugal): The student researchers developed different activities to listen to their classmates' opinions about the organisation of the classroom. These included:

1. Students drew individually how they would like their classroom to be;

2. Students shared their proposals with the class;

3. One class selected one of the proposals by voting. The other two classes tried out all the proposals presented, considering only the layout/organisation of the desks;

At the end of the process, after trying and discussing about the better way to organise their classes, the students from each class selected what they saw as the more effective option.

Example 2 (Spain): The purpose of this meeting was to consider how student researchers could ask questions that would provide relevant information for planning the research lesson. This involved the use of role-play, during which the student researchers had to say if they considered the questions asked to be appropriate. Reflecting on these discussions, the children went on to agree a list of the sorts of questions they would use (see page 6 in the Inclusive Inquiry Guide).
The children also agreed general guidance about carrying out either individual or group interviews. This was that the student researchers should make sure that:

• people are happy to be interviewed

• you are friendly with the people you interview and respect their answers

• you have prepared a set of questions in advance to help you during the interview

• you avoid questions that can give only yes or no answers.

Example 3: (Austria): The main topic of this session was to think about "How do I know if students like the lesson or the way of learning?" The teacher showed the students three pictures with the following: positive (green "thumbs up" symbol), negative (red "thumbs down" symbol) and middle (yellow "thumbs middle" symbol). The students gave examples where they had already used these symbols ("I used the thumbs up for telling my mum that I liked the dessert"). After each example, the matching movement with the thumbs from the three pictures was made.

After that discussion, each student read a card with a sentence on it. The cards described assessments of learning situations: "I understood that well", "I liked that", etc. The children made the matching movement with their thumbs from the three pictures again.

Then, each child was given a worksheet with the three symbols on it. Additionally, they each had another worksheet with sentences of assessments of learning situations. Each

child had to assign the sentence to a matching symbol. The results were discussed and shared with everyone in the group. These symbols could be used at the end of lessons to gain students' views about the lessons.

In addition, at the end of this lesson, the teacher asked: *"How can we use these sentences to help us think of questions that we can ask in our interviews with other students after lessons?".* The teacher gave one example. The children then gave many other suggestions such as: "What did you like? What did you understand well? What was not easy for you?" Therefore, they found many questions that they could use as researchers when interviewing their classmates at the end of the lessons.

C. Collecting and analysing information

1. Collecting data:

Using the methods described above, including student voice activities (see the 'Students' Voices Toolkit'), the student researchers are expected to gather their own classmates' views before any of the research lessons are carried out, as well as after each of these lessons. In essence, this gives them the opportunity to lead whole class sessions, something that adds to their experience of taking the role of researchers.

Example 1 (Portugal): With the help of teachers, the student researchers created questionnaires to collect their classmates' opinions. There were two versions: one multiple choice and the other involving open questions (see Appendix F).

The first questionnaire included four questions:

1. How do you prefer to work?
   a. Alone
   b. In pairs
   c. In groups

2. You like to work...
   a. With the class-book
   b. With worksheets
   c. With materials

3. You learn better...
   a. When the teacher explains
   b. When a classmate explains

4. What does not let you learn well?
   a. When a classmate starts talking with me
   b. When someone interrupts the teacher
   c. When there is noise in the class
   d. When I am tired

When the student researchers discussed the results with the trio of teachers they suggested:

- Using an open questionnaire;

- Eliminating question number 2.; and

- Rephrasing the question "You learn better..." into "How do you learn better?".

The refined version was used by student researchers in all the participating classes in order to gather their classmates' views.

Example 2 (England): After introducing the project to their classmates, the student researchers in a Year 6 class presented a flip chart statements that they read out loud to the whole class. There was a total of nine statements, as follows:

- I learn best when I can work in a group

- I learn best when I work on my own

- I learn best when I can choose where to sit

- I learn best when I can decide how I learn

- I learn best when I get helped by the teacher

- I learn best when the teacher lets us get on with it

- I learn best when we have music on

- I learn best when we have silence

- Your own suggestions

The student researchers then asked their classmates to go around the room, where they had placed pieces of papers with the above statements on the tables, and vote which ways of learning they liked best. In addition, they were asked to justify their voting by adding comments on post-it notes. Then, the children discussed in groups, talking about why they chose those statements.

After the discussion, one student researcher said: *"What we are doing now can change learning in a good way for the teacher and what we are doing now with other countries we might change it in a few years to come"*. One of the statements that had the most votes was: *"I learn best when we have music on"*, with an extra comment (added on a post-it note) "I love music because it helps me concentrate more, especially the calm ones". Another statement with the most votes, "I learn best when I can choose where to sit", was accompanied by an extra comment from the children: "We sit next to someone we work well with because we can sit with people who have the same tasks and we won't get distracted". At the end of the session, the student researchers explained to the class what they planned to do after having the suggestions from the children.

Example 3: (Denmark): Posters with the following questions were placed on the walls of the classrooms:

• When is it difficult to participate in the practice of teaching?'

• What makes you happy in the practice of teaching?'

• Which activities do you like?'

• When is it easy to participate in the practice of teaching?'

• What happens in the practice of teaching when it is at it's best?

• Which activities do you not like?

The children were asked to work in groups in order to support one another in producing answers/suggestions on post-its and place them on the posters alongside the relevant question. The student researchers participated in this part of the activity on equal terms with their classmates – they were placed in different groups in order to listen to different discussions in groups. In total, 200 post-its were produced and placed on the different posters.

2. Analysing

Once the student researchers have collected information from their classmates, they will need to be supported in making sense of it. In particular, you will need to ensure that the main issues that emerged from the methods used are highlighted. The student researchers could, for example, prepare a table summarising the issues that are raised through the various methods (e.g. students want fun activities; students said they find group work difficult; etc.). Or, they could write on post-it notes key words that emerge from the students' views about issues that help with their learning, such as "group work", "games". These can then be shared with the teachers in order to inform the planning of the research lesson.

Example 1 (Denmark): Following on from the collection of the 200 post-it notes (see previous example), the teachers and the student researchers analysed the statements from the two classes systematically. They found patterns in the post-its and made posters for eight of the statements.

This process enabled and facilitated dialogues among children, and between children and teachers. The student researchers and the teachers grouped the statements and agreed 16 about 'good teaching'. Inspired by the 'The Diamond' method, these statements had to be prioritised. The overall focus for this process was the question: 'What is important for participation in classroom activities? 'The children - in groups and in their own classrooms - did this activity, with the student researchers listening. The product from this process was a series of smaller posters with prioritised statements that were displayed on the walls of the classrooms.

Example 2 (Portugal): A questionnaire was designed, based on the student researchers' ideas. This included unfinished statements such as: 'I learn best when...', 'There is silence', 'There is noise', 'There is music', 'Working alone', 'Working in pairs', 'Group work', 'I help others', 'I am sitting correctly', 'I'm watching the class', 'I have the necessary materials to work' and 'I wait for my turn to speak'. The questionnaire required responses in relation to three levels of agreement: a happy smile, a neutral smile and a sad smile.

The student researchers used the 'I learn best' questionnaire with students from across the whole school in the playground during morning and lunch breaks. Commenting on this approach, a teacher observed: "Any student, regardless of the year of schooling, could answer the questions. The students felt that their opinions were important for the work to be done." After using the questionnaire, the student researchers analysed the results with the support of their teachers.
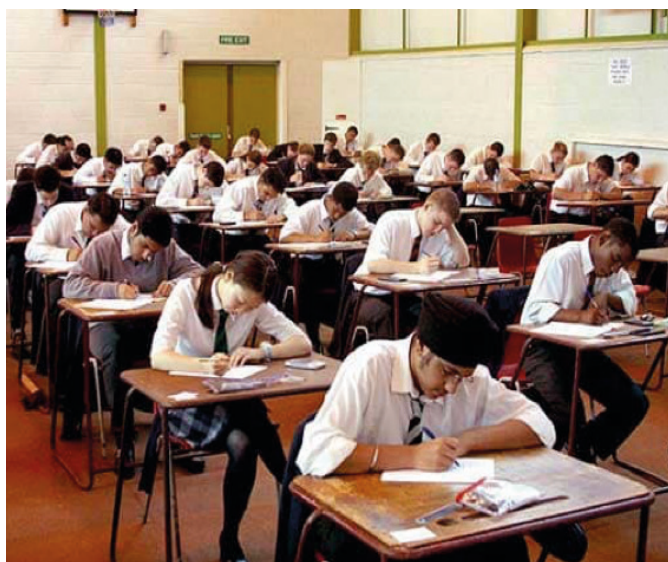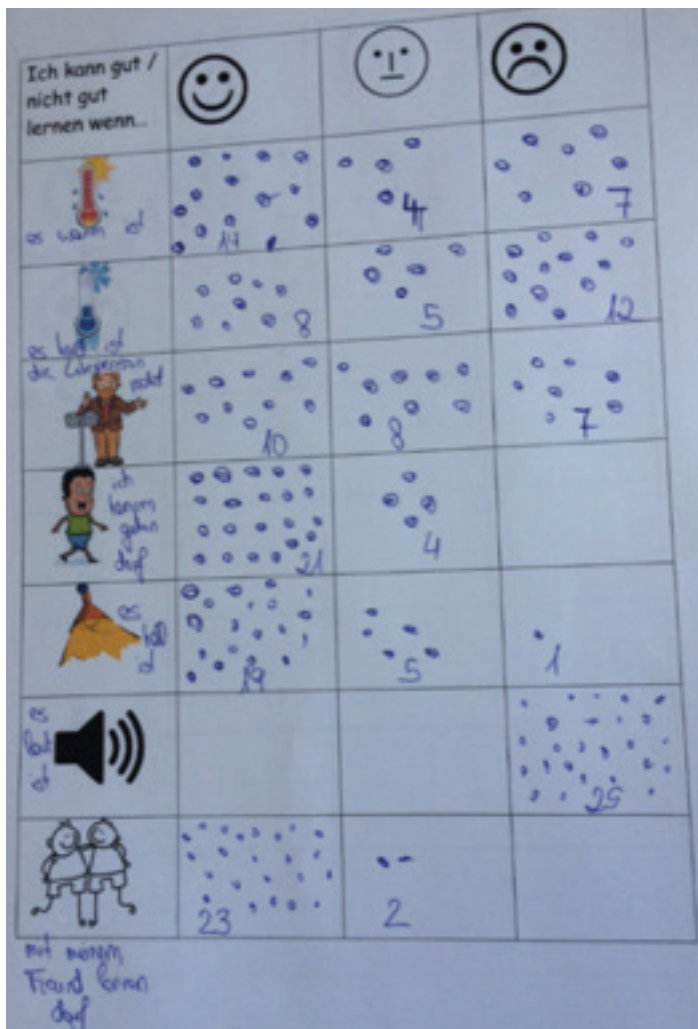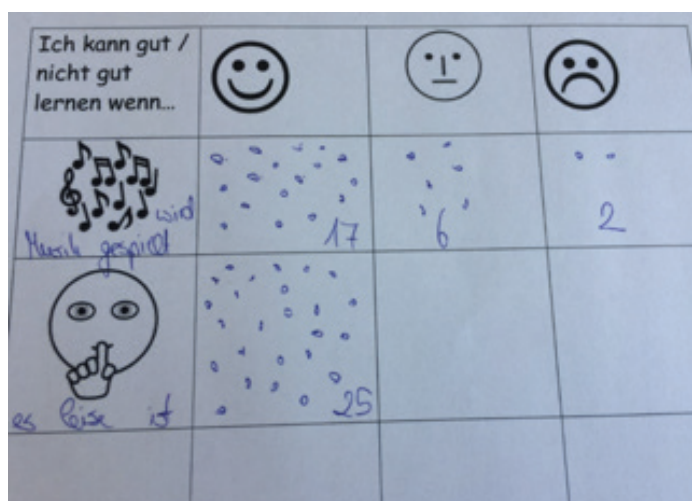
**I learn best…
(rated by icons)**

.... when it is warm

.... when it is cold

.... when the teacher is talking

.... when I am allowed to walk around

.... when it is bright

.... when it is loud

.... when I am allowed to learn with my friend

**I learn best…
(rated by icons)**

.... when my music is on

.... when it is silent

Observations Grid

How are the students encouraged to participate and learn in the lesson?

What factors in the class seem to prevent some students from participating and learning in this lesson?

How do students contribute to others' participation and learning?

Observation Tool

Activity and Materials	Observation: Participates by listening and following	Observation: Do not participate	Observation: Doing something else
1. Welcome and plan for this lesson			
2. Video: Watch this video and listen to the words			
3. Mix and match game			
4. Read a text a. images b. keywords c. read me d. read with a mate: copy sheet			
5. Board game: rules, teams, games			
6. Explore: review activities - and get started			

This lesson was boring

The teacher talked too much

The teacher is really nice

The activity allowed everyone to be involved

There were lots of opportunities for children to work together

Everyone joined in with the starter task

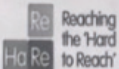Only two people could take part in the starter and everyone else just had to watch

Some children were off task when they were waiting for their turn

Children were working on their own a lot

The task was way too hard and no one could do it

The children should be able to learn without any adults in the room

The children should teach the adults

Guião da entrevista aos alunos

Entrevistadores: Emma e Catarina, Turma 2

1) Como preferem trabalhar?
   a) sozinho   2
   b) a pares   10
   c) em grupo   9

   Observações: Ciências, experiências

2) Gostam mais de trabalhar...
   a) com os manuais   4
   b) com fichas   2
   c) com materiais   13

   Observações: Ficheiros, Cadernos, t.p.c.

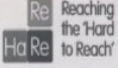3) Aprendem melhor...
   a) quando explica a professora   15
   b) quando explica um colega   11

   Observações: Silabário, testes

4) O que não vos deixa aprender bem?
   a) quando um colega se põe a conversar comigo   18
   b) quando interrompem a professora   14
   c) quando há barulho   25
   d) quando estou cansado   22

   Observações: indireta Cirala a Cirala

Guião da entrevista aos alunos

Entrevistadores: Catarina e Emma   Turma 2

1) Como preferem trabalhar?
   Observações: grupos, pares, sozinho, lá fora

2) Como é que aprendem melhor...
   Observações: professora, colegas

3) O que não vos deixa aprender?
   Observações: barulho, brincar, falar

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