Individual pupil-teacher dialogues: a tool for pupil participation, adapted teaching and quality of school life?

A Longitudinal Study of How Pupil-Teacher Dialogues within Secondary Schools May Contribute to Promoting Qualitative Learning Experiences and Arenas Minimizing School Failure and Dropout

The objective is to further develop understanding of individual pupil-teacher dialogues situated in educational, communicative and institutional contexts, their consequences and possibilities for promoting pupil participation, adapted teaching, quality of school life and minimizing school failure and dropout.

Description of the study

This project consists of both a quantitative and a qualitative part. They focuses on institutional pupil-teacher dialogues in lower and upper secondary schools as a tool for promoting pupil participation, adapted teaching and improving quality of school life. Since 'continuous dialogues' first became compulsory in 2007, knowledge about their application, consequences and possibilities is limited. There are, however, indications that the relationship between pupils and teachers, developed through such dialogues, are strongly related to pupils' quality of school life, possibly preventing school dropout and minimizing school failure. This project's relevance is threefold: 1.Generating a theoretical base for understanding pupil-teacher dialogues; 2. Investigating positive consequences of such dialogues for pupils' learning and well-being; 3. Investigating preventive effects on youth at risk for school failure and dropout.

While there is a large body of research internationally on the teacher-pupil relationship and communication, the focus of these studies has primarily been on classroom or small group communication and rarely on individual teacher-pupil dialogues emphasising listening to individual pupils. This project is motivated by two ongoing international research developments. The first is the growing interest in *listening to children's voices and promoting children's participation*, i.e. research on children's experiences, perspectives and participation in general, and in pupils' school experiences and participation especially. The second is recent developments in educational research based on *socio-cultural theory of learning* emphasising the importance of intersubjective and dialectic communication for pupils' development. In addition, there is also a third motivation for the study. This is the lack of theoretical understanding of pupils' subjective *quality of school life*, which seems somewhat paradoxical in light of the overall attention being paid to quality of education.

Identifying high quality institutional pupil-teacher dialogues enhancing pupil participation and quality of school life, is of great importance in developing effective interventions that can prevent school failure and dropout. This project aims at contributing original knowledge to the ongoing discourse in the international research community through basic multi-methodological research.

Part 1; Quantitative survey studies

Part 1 of the study involves two sub-studies. Both are quantitative survey studies: The first with teachers as respondents; the second with pupils as respondents. The research group has during several previous and ongoing projects access to a large number of schools in Eastern Norway. A purposefully selected sample of (contact teachers) in lower (grade 8, 9 and 10) and higher (grade 11, 12 and 13) secondary schools will be used. The sample will not be random, but highly representative for 'Eastern Norway'.

I. Survey study based on questionnaires to teachers
The questionnaire will be divided into two main sections. The first section will be a *description* of the routines and practices, while the second section will ask for the teachers' *experiences* and *judgement* of the impact of pupil-teacher dialogues on adapted teaching, effective learning and quality of school life. The description section will cover three aspects of pupil-teacher dialogues: the frequency, the structure and the content. In addition specific sub-questions will be added regarding pupils in risk. The next section will investigate the teachers' experiences with and opinions about the possibilities and problems of pupil-teacher dialogues as a tool for promoting adapted teaching, effective learning and quality of school life. In addition this section will include general questions about the school's competence to establish high quality pupil-teacher dialogues and needs for competence development.

II. Survey study based on questionnaires to pupils
A purposefully selected sample of pupils stratified on the six levels (grade 8,9,10,11,12 and 13) from the same schools as above will be used. Again the sample will not be statistically random, but highly representative for the region 'Eastern Norway'. The questionnaire will consist of exactly the same questions as in the *description* section of the teacher survey. Thereby useful comparisons can be made and differences and similarities between teachers and pupils can be analyzed and theorized. In addition the pupils will also be asked to *judge* the impact of high quality pupil-teachers dialogues, but in a less detailed way than teachers.

Part 2; Qualitative research

To achieve a manageable amount of information, sample size in Part 2 will be restricted to four groups of 10-12 youth, sampled to achieve optimal within-group diversity. By thus aiming for large in group variations we expect to discover diversity and patterns of quality of school life and participation. The groups will be followed over three years through in-depth studies of pupil-teacher dialogues in grade10 to 12, thus capturing the transitions from lower to higher secondary school, first general year of higher secondary school and later diversified years. Four designated groups will be studied: 1. introverted, quiet youth; 2. traumatized youth; 3 youth with serious behavioural problems; 4. youth at risk for dropping out of school will be studied. Teachers will be asked to identify and contact pupils for possible participation in these various groups based on their behaviour at school. (In groups 1, 2 and 3 there will probably also be pupils at risk for dropping out of school. In addition, group 4 will be selected with a special focus on pupils at risk of dropout.)
   The target content of Part 2 is built on theories concerning the possibilities of teacher-pupil dialogues for stimulating pupil participation, meta-cognition, self-efficacy and motivation. These areas are central for attaining quality of school life and coping with the educational challenges. Analysis of the dialogues will build on theories of intersubjectivity as

a basic, primary motivational system, sociocultural theory and theories of self-efficacy (Stern 2004, Vygotsky 1986, Bandura 1997). Stern's theory focuses on intersubjectivity in present moments of interaction as a basic, primary motivational system for change and growth. His paradigms of moments of meeting and moments of movement are, therefore, central units for capturing dialogues where children's voices are listened to and their "being" recognized. From a sociocultural perspective, a youth's movement towards the next proximal zone of development entails interaction that may be present in the dialogue. The analysis will also be built on and further develop theoretical understanding of quality of school life. The methodological openness and flexibility in this part will require theoretical openness and sensitivity.