This book is based on the results of a research project supported by the European Research Foundation and conducted in four different European countries: Poland\(^1\), UK\(^2\), Turkey\(^3\) and Spain\(^4\). The research forms part of The European Collaborative Research Projects (ECRPs) in the Social Sciences and is entitled “Citizens of the future: the concerns and actions of young people around current European and global issues”\(^5\). The main thrust of the study was to explore

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1. Research members in Poland are Dr. Beata Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz (principal researcher and project leader), Wojciech Siegień at University of Warmia and Mazury, Olsztyn; Anna Zalewska (principal researcher) and Agnieszka Bojarnowska at Warsaw School of Social Psychology. Funded by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (Grant ESF/84/2006).

2. Research members in the UK are Dr. Alistair Ross (principal researcher), Dr. Kim Allen, Sarah Minty, Sumi Hollingworth at London Metropolitan University, Institute for Policy Studies in Education; Dr. Cathie Holden (principal researcher) and Harriet Jones. Funded by the British Academy Small Grants Award (SG 49353).

3. Members of the Turkish research team are Dr. Nilüfer Pembeçioglu Öcel (principal researcher) and Nadi Güler İlKay Kanık, Burcu Akkay, Ece Kayrak, Cemal Uzunoğlu and Gökçen Ardiç at Istanbul University; Dr. Erol Nezih Orhon at Eskişehir Anadolu University. Funded by TÜBITAK (Grant 107KT66).

4. The Spanish research team members are Dr. Melinda Dooly (principal researcher), Dr. Montserrat Oller, Claudia Vallejo, Dr. Esther Collados, Maria Villanueva at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; Dr. Antoni Luna at the Pompeu Fabra University; Dr. Carmen Tabernero (principal researcher) and Dr. Elena Briones at the Universidad de Córdoba. Funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology, Research and Development Projects (Grant SEJ2007-29191-E).

5. This book is a product of the ECRP research of our four teams; however the analysis and opinions of each chapter reflect the views of the authors only.
primary and secondary education pupils’ perspectives about the future, at personal, local and global levels.

The study was carried out because of a growing recognition of the need to comprehend students’ hopes and fears and general perspectives about current and future events, all within the context in which they are developing. Our students of today (who are the future leaders and active citizens of tomorrow) are growing up in a quite different educational environment from that of their parents and teachers. Globalisation has had an impact on many aspects of everyday life. Students coming of age in today’s world have access to diverse and numerous sources of information and their geopolitical references are constantly changing and expanding.

[...] globalization is part of an ever more interdependent world where political, economic, social and cultural relationships are not restricted to territorial boundaries [...] and no state or entity is unaffected by activities outside its direct control. Developments in technology and communications, the creation of intricate international organizations and transnational corporations [...] have profoundly affected the context within which each person and community lives, as well as the role of the state. (McCorquodale and Fairbrother 1999: 736)

Parallel to immense global changes and economic interdependency, massive expansion and rapidly paced innovation in telecommunications have resulted in fundamental changes in both knowledge production and knowledge transmission. These new sources of information and communication allow students to interact on a daily basis with a great variety of people or find out about events that are happening on the other side of the world. At the same time, and almost ironically, in many cases these students hardly know what is happening in their own neighborhood.

Data from a variety of sources indicates that many people in Europe feel uncertainty and impotence – even pessimism – about the future (see Debomy 2001). These feelings are especially marked in three areas:

- The rate of change in society creates a sense of instability and uncertainty. This is coupled with the instant access to information
about events across the globe and suggests fewer stable points of references for overall understanding of different events.

- A general sense of loss of (traditional) values and lack of social cohesion – often perceived in relation to augment of crime, delinquency, immigration; parallel with diminution of solidarity and insecurity.

- Widely documented economic upheavals, which is generally seen as being caused by uncontrolled capitalism, coupled with weakened social infrastructures.

Bauman (1992) has argued that people in the ‘postmodern’ world feel that they have very little self-determination of their own future and that this can lead to political inactivity and general apathy. In his book on European education and its implications on the youth of today, Ross also mentions changes experienced in the postmodern world:

We are living in a society that can be for various reasons described as postmodern, with new kinds of possibilities, fears, hopes and contiguities. In this increasingly globalised world, we are becoming acclimatized to very different kinds of connectivity, information, knowledge, and contact than have been possible in the past. (Ross 2008: 5)

The impact that these circumstances have on children and youth may be significant in their participation as citizens of the future. There have been numerous studies on adult perspectives concerning the future, especially concerning the financial future in the wake of the crisis of 2008–2009. However, there are fewer studies into the perspectives of children and youth concerning the future. (For some significant studies in this area see Repáraz and Naval 2005; Holden 2006; Oller Freixa and Pagés Blanch 2007). There is a need to delve into the issues which children and youth perceive as important in order to better understand their concerns, hopes and expectations of the future so that we (educators, parents, policy-makers, concerned citizens) can help prepare tomorrow’s stakeholders in society.

The importance of providing future citizens with the ability and skills necessary for facing the challenges of the future is patent. Arguably educators are in an optimal position to help in the development of
this process, but in order to do so; teachers need to be aware of their students’ perspectives about issues which are of concern to them.

As well as allowing students to speak freely about their hopes and fears for the future we also need to know what they feel about key issues which affect all communities. Hicks (2007) maintains that ‘long standing global issues – those to do with poverty, environment, conflict and social justice – constantly take on new forms, whether in relation to the complexities of globalisation, the “war against terrorism” or global climate change’ (2007: 1). One of the focuses of the current study is to ascertain the extent to which students’ feel optimistic or pessimistic about solutions to such current local and global issues, where they get their information from about these issues and the part school plays in facilitating their understanding. (Holden 2008:78)

Arguably, the era of a globalised, hybrid post-modern world is a vibrant, but uncertain time for both teachers and students. “Changes can produce a sense of challenge and opportunity for exploration while provoking ambiguous feelings towards those same changes” (Dooly 2008: 2). Knowing how students deal with these changes now (and in the future) is essential for designing effective pedagogical, cross-disciplinary approaches that help students move beyond their situations in school to understand the role they can take in a broader transformation in/of society.

What was the study about?

During 2007–2009, field work was carried out in Spain, Turkey, Poland and the UK, through varied research activities (both quantitative and qualitative). The study was designed to get a sense of the representations, ideas and opinions held by children and youth concerning current and future events on local, national and the global levels. Deriving from their own experiences, the study was devised to

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6 Due to force majeure, specific examples from Turkey cannot be included in this chapter, only overall statistical data.
illustrate the students’ hopes and fears related to their understanding of democratic processes, poverty, unemployment, human rights, environmental issues, and conflict on personal, local, regional, state, national and world levels.

The study also explored the students’ current engagement in social projects (voluntary work, NGOs, etc.) as well as their predictions of whether they would be involved in these type of activities and/or political activities when they are adults. The research was interested in their outlook (optimistic, pessimistic) about the possibility of change and whether this was related in any way to their commitment to work towards change or other pro-social behaviour. Additionally, the research participants were asked about their principal sources of information for these issues in order to better understand the different ways the students come to know (or actively seek information) about these topics.

Briefly, the study endeavoured to come to a better understanding of how children and youth approach, comprehend and learn about key social issues such as violence, conflict, peace, work and unemployment, respect for others, intolerance, and environmental and health issues. Corollary to this was the attempt to pinpoint the focal points and sources of knowledge about these topics in order to determine in what ways their immediate environment and social relationships (school, care-takers, extracurricular activities, mass media, etc.) influence the construction of knowledge and perspectives about such issues.

Data was collected from two to four urban and rural areas in all four countries and comprised three different age groups: 10–11 year olds; 13–14 year olds; 17–18 year olds. 2800 samples were collected from diverse educational centres (primary and secondary) in the four countries. In Spain, the primary and secondary education centres were public and principally drew students from working class to middle class families. In at least two of the schools (primary and secondary) the student profile was made up of 25 percent immigrant or newly arrived students and all of the schools were quite active in projects at local (experimental schools; schools affiliated with teach-
ing faculties) and national and/or international projects (new technologies, student exchange programmes, Comenius projects, etc.).

In the UK, data was collected from state schools in the South West of England which were predominantly rural and mono-cultural, and state schools in London where the students were from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The schools in the South West catered for families from a range of socio economic backgrounds, running from poor rural families to middle class professionals.

In Poland, the study covered children and youth from two different environmental niches – a little more than half of the participants were from a major city and slightly under half were from two small towns of approximately fifteen thousand inhabitants each in the north of the country. The data came from both public and private schools.

The data compilation consisted of questionnaires (open and closed type questions), a role-play activity in pairs and focus group interviews of selected students. In the open-ended questions, students were asked to indicate specific hopes and fears about their own (personal) future, the future of their neighbourhood (local area) and finally about the future of the world (global hopes and fears). In other words, the open-ended questions aimed to help determine the respondents’ perspectives and opinions at ‘micro’ levels (about one’s self or immediate, emotionally close relations such as family); ‘meso’ level (geographically close); and ‘macro’ (society and World). (See Boehnke et al. 1998; Schwartz et al. 2000 for more information about these levels as a means of analysis).

The closed questions dealt with issues such as environmental concerns, health issues, social issues (poverty, unemployment) and interpersonal relationships (violence, conflict, respect, etc.). When answering these questions, the respondents had to indicate if they felt that these issues would be more or less important in the future or if they thought the importance of the issue would stay the same as now. The participants were also asked to rate the frequency that they consulted different information resources and to predict their amount of participation with political parties and/or political activities. To finish the questionnaire, the students were asked whether
they were involved in any type of organization that was working for change (voluntary groups) and whether they thought they would remain/get involved in this type of organization or work in the future. They were also questioned about their views of current leaders and the role of politicians in helping to bring about social change. The students had to indicate in the questionnaires if (and where) they had they had learnt about such issues. The subsequent data from the field work was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Another important element to the study involved the students’ perceptions of themselves and others as ‘agents of change’. Whereas most research into children and youth’s views about social issues and political awareness have tended to cast them more as bystanders or targets of action by others, rather than as potential agents of social change (Yates and Youniss 1998; Ginwright and James 2002); this study was interested in seeing how the children and youth positioned themselves in relation to their ability to influence their immediate environment, to bring about positive changes and whether they saw themselves as ‘empowered’ to do so (Shor 1992; Heidron and Rabine 1998; Fetterman 2003). The open-ended questions were analysed through an approach based on grounded theory (Glassner and Strauss 1967), thus the categories were not established prior to analysis (profiling) since using grounded theory implies an inductive approach that allows the analysis to ‘emerge’ from the data, according to the students’ answers. This provided a means of analysing the data of the project within a “socially-constructed” paradigm of meaning as opposed to a strictly empirical, numerical analysis.

This should not be taken to mean that the qualitative data analysis is totally relative, it implies that the data is contextually bound (contexts which have been duly noted and described in each intervention). The qualitative paradigm allows for a privileging of insider perspectives on exactly how the concept of certain knowledge is socially constructed, thus helping avoid the ‘filtering’ of research data through a mesh of preconceived notions of the researcher. Taking Holden’s (2006) admonition to heart that children are capable of “reflect[ing] on issues affecting their lives” (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000:
and in so doing [we must take] seriously what children have to say about their hopes and fears for the future” (p. 232), then it was imperative to combine qualitative data, such as focus groups, with the questionnaires, so that the participants themselves could ‘construct their meaning’.

A complementary part of the study consisted of a role-play designed to delve into the development of pro-social behaviour of the young people involved in our study. The game consisted of offering a sum of money (the amount differed according to age levels but was enough to make it motivating for the students to play) which was to be divided between the pairs. This role-play was based on an experimental economic game, first developed in 1982 (Güth, Schmittberger and Schwarze 1982). It is commonly known as ‘The Ultimatum Game’ and has been widely used (principally with adults) to explore concepts of negotiation and reciprocity. Two individuals are brought together for a one-off encounter. They are told that one of them will be asked to divide a single sum of money – ideally enough to interest the participants – into two amounts, in any proportion that they choose. One person is assigned the role of dividing up the money and the second person decides whether to accept or reject the offer.

Before beginning the game, the pair is advised that the final decision of the second person would decide whether the money was given to the players (as divided) or returned ‘to the bank’ (in the case that the person receiving the money refused the offer). Because the game is over as soon as a decision is taken there is no possible calculated trade-off as to what might happen in a second ‘round’ of the game.

After the game had been played out, the students were asked about the reasons for the decisions and how they felt about the results. The theoretical premise of the game is that each individual will try to maximize their own interest or benefits, whether they are the one who is offering the money or receiving the money.

Traditional economic realism would suggest that the participant making the division should split the sum in such a way that they maximise their income, and minimise the fraction offered. Homo economicus would behave, if they were the first player, by keeping the great majority of the sum, say 90%, for
themselves, and only offering 10% to the other player. The second homo economicus would rationally, in their own self-interest, accept what was on offer, as being better than nothing. Unfortunately for this economic theory, in practice the great majority of people do not behave in this way. Most offers made are of between 40 and 50%, while offers that are made of 20% or less are usually rejected (Henrich et al, 2004; Oosterbeek et al, 2004). Most people make more generous offers than would be predicted, and most people would rather have nothing than accept what is perceived as an unfair distribution. (Ross and Dooley tbp 2010)

It should be borne in mind that the research took place in eight different locations in four different countries, over a two year span, and thus, was inevitably quite complex. During the course of the study, the students were asked to play in pairs in the same school and to play (‘virtually’) with a partner in another city in the same country as well as partners in another country.

In particular, we offer a rather different analysis than that proffered for most iterations of the ultimatum game. Our analysis covers both statistical findings (largely descriptive), as well as providing a qualitative analysis of how these young people explained their actions and behaviour that offers a particularly original contribution to previous literature dealing with this topic. In order to do so, focus groups made of three or four students were recorded as they discussed their answers to the questionnaires and issues which emerged from their experience with the Ultimatum Game. The discussion groups usually lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and were recorded (with previous permission from parents, teachers and students) and then transcribed.

Points of interest for educators: Issues that emerged

As it has been previously stated, the study provides insight into the subjects’ perceptions concerning desires, fears and expectations of the future at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of their lives. This
knowledge is significant for researchers, educators, policy-makers, politicians, parents and any other stake-holder in education concerned about the well-being of tomorrow’s citizens.

People’s hopes and fears for the future influence what they are prepared to do in the present and what they are prepared to work towards. Hicks (2002) and others have suggested that images of the future are a critical measure of a society’s inner well-being, acting as a mirror of our times. Ascertaining the views of children towards the future thus serves as an indicator of their current concerns, beliefs and actions, as well as indicating the role they see for themselves as future citizens. (Holden 2006: 232)

The reader should bear in mind that our study was limited to two cities (or towns) within each country and thus results cannot be extrapolated to such a point as to generalise about children and youths’ concerns and perspectives everywhere. Nonetheless, it does appear that there are enough similarities between the responses of the nearly 3000 subjects for us to be able to create teaching proposals, based on issues observed, that can rightfully be understood as widely applicable.

At the same time, the study also allowed us to consider young people’s perceptions in their particular social context – so that we can catch a glimpse of how children and youth participate in constructing what they conceive of and accept as social reality; and thus better understand their own sense of agency. In the early 1980s, Lyotard criticised the idea of trying to provide a totalizing, comprehensive account to explain social and cultural phenomena and historical events; calling for an attitude of “incredulity towards metanarratives” (1984: 24). Lyotard argued for a recognition of the plurality of small narratives, or what one might refer to as ‘micro-narratives’, in opposition to the meta-narrative. We present here a series of ‘micro-narratives’ that together constitute a shared – albeit unevenly shared – conception of the social world these children and youth inhabit.

These micro-narratives are clearly tied in with the immediate environment of the participants of this study. As Brodschöll (2005) explains, discourses contain “particular historical narratives of the development and trajectory of the social phenomena in question”
For instance, in Spain the research data had already been collected before the ‘Collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) crisis’ became widely publicised and before the global economy was hit by the ‘subprime mortgage crisis’ at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009. Nonetheless, the topic of unemployment was already salient for several of the groups – especially those coming from working class families. This topic was more notable in the second round of data-collection, which was shortly before the much publicised stock market drop at the end of 2008 but during the time that the first rumours of a crash (and rising unemployment) were resonating.

Results from the UK also indicated that students were very much aware of the economic crisis of 2009 with constant references to the ‘credit crunch’ and concerns about lack of employment and affordable housing. Similarly, the students from Poland indicated that some of their fears revolved around being poor, homeless and without a job, although their principal worries appeared to be centred on personal relationships (being friendless or never marrying).

Arguably, these disparate foci of hopes and fears are, in part, due to the distinctive contexts in which the youth live. Financial reports about 2007’s financial perturbations (mainly of the subprime crisis preliminary to the global bank crisis) were well known at the beginning of 2008 in Spain and the UK since these two countries were hard hit almost immediately by the real estate crunch (real estate and construction are especially key industries in Spain and house ownership is very high in the UK). At the same time, it has been argued that specialists paid little attention to capital markets global crisis and the subsequent impact of the crisis upon smaller countries; public attention to crisis impact depended on the country’s industrial structure (Albulescu 2008). Moreover, the effects of this crisis on the real economy were less obvious at the beginning of 2008 in emerging markets (like Poland), although the economic growth forecasts turned pessimistic in 2009 (too late for these events to have much of an impact on Polish youths’ responses). This difference in responses strengthens the argument that children and youth are very much aware of current events going on around them.
In the first round of data compilation, the students were hopeful that there would be more material goods available for them in the future – that they will be able to afford considerable luxuries such as a big house, to travel around the world, to have a car. At the same time, many of their worries centred on illness and death in their families. At the ‘macro’ level, the respondents demonstrated more altruistic concerns. At this level, their hopes and fears appeared to be centred on desires for resolution of current environmental problems, current global crisis related to wars and terrorism and socio-economic inequality between countries. Similarly, children and youth in Poland indicated that they were worried about global environment, terrorism and war. Interestingly, a few Polish respondents stated that they were worried about a return to communism.

The different age groups all appear to be aware and concerned about environmental issues and most of them indicated having been involved (or willing to become involved) in some sort of activity to help with environmental problems. In Spain, the respondents stated that this issue is a prevalent topic in most of the schools and the more publicised environmental problems (e.g. the 2007–2008 droughts in Barcelona) were also prevalent in the students’ answers. This was more noticeable in the lower ages than in the older students, although this can probably be attributed to many different factors (more project-based work in primary education, higher teacher influence in the students’ answers at primary level, ‘group’ answers of the younger students, etc.). The survey participants in Poland also mentioned environmental problems as a main fear about the future, specifying worries such as global warming, the cutting down of too many trees, and pollution as well as man-made disasters such as flooding.

There were also indicators that the children and youth were more altruistic in the ‘meso’ and ‘macro’ levels. Their answers showed that they hoped for resolutions for world conflicts, better distribution of wealth and eradication of world poverty. Nonetheless, these ‘desires’ contrast with rather negative perspectives concerning the eventual evolution of the world in the future, in fact all the age groups demonstrated a more bleak outlook in terms of the world as a whole.
Their responses indicated that they expected violence and unemployment to increase and that environmental problems and world poverty will become worse. The only area where most of the respondents were optimistic was with health issues; generally, the respondents felt that health problems will lessen as new cures are found.

Another point of interest for teachers which emerged from the data was the level of awareness and knowledge of the students about social and political issues and their sense of ‘agency for change’ in today’s society. The study showed that students were generally aware of different opportunities for making a change in the world. The younger students’ answers focused principally on charity (donating food; clothes; money) and improving the environment (recycling; not littering; saving water; stopping uncontrolled construction and urbanisation). Environmental issues were also relevant for the middle group, with an emphasis on areas that they could participate in (recycling; not littering; saving water; using electric cars; studying to resolve the problem of global warming).

Indicative of their state of transition into the adult world, the older group commented on their roles as grown-ups in the immediate future, mentioning possible professional venues such as studying to find ways to contribute to a better world in the future; becoming leaders and acting as social models of dialogue and respect and becoming members of neighbourhood associations. The students showed an understanding of collaborative social work in conjunction with individual actions. “Whatever improvement there has been, it is not due to one person’s efforts – it is through collaboration” (Spanish male student, age 18).

As has already been mentioned, the respondents’ showed considerable awareness of current political events, especially in the area of environmental issues (Al Gore was mentioned frequently by respondents as exemplification of environmental awareness) and different events aimed for World Peace. The students were noticeably well-informed about different political issues, particularly about events that in some way or other, affected them or their families. In the Spanish survey for instance, when asked what leaders have done
recently to improve the situation of the world the younger students had some difficulties in answering, however the other two groups mentioned both historical events (women’s right to vote; Spanish democracy) as well as recent measures, such as financial aide to different disadvantaged groups, legislation centred on the question of immigration (such as financial aide to immigrants; control and regulation of immigration; obliging immigrants to respect the host country). Polish children and youth mentioned leaders that they admired (Wałęsa, Owsiak and Tusk) as well as indicating that they appreciated the work of organizations such as WOŚP, Solidarność and the political party PO.

At the same time, while demonstrating considerable knowledge of social and political issues, as well as a certain level of critical thinking, the older students held quite negative perceptions of political leaders in general. “I don’t like politics or politicians – they are going to cause us a lot of problems in the future” (female student, age 14). Some of the younger students reflected a more general belief in the current political system; they felt they might influence political leaders (write them letters, talk to them, join public demonstrations, etc.), although many of the younger students indicated that they were not interested in voting (perhaps because it is not a part of their lives as of yet). In the Polish study the majority of the girls aged 14 indicated that there was nothing they could do to influence politicians.

Not only did many of students (especially the older ones) indicate negative perceptions about the possibility of influencing political leaders or being able to make a difference in the future, they were also somewhat sceptical and disheartened about the political system in general. The fact that the children and youth showed awareness of political and social issues, but little faith in politicians and current political systems suggests a mismatch between mainstream politics and politicians and today’s youth. It also forces interrogation of the widely held belief that young people of today are not interested or aware of current social and political issues.

Apart from the questionnaire responses and focus group interviews, data stemming from the ‘Ultimatum Game’ also revealed
points of interest for educators. According to the majority of decisions of how to divide the money in the ‘Ultimatum Game’, students overall – of all the age groups – proved to act in a ‘prosocial’ way, especially in actions of sharing. There were even instances where the students were willing to give away all the money because the other partner ‘might need it more’, thus demonstrating considerable empathy for the ‘other’. At the same time, the responses to the questionnaires indicated a certain ambiguity towards the ‘other’ when dealing with situations ‘closer to home’, e.g. immigration in the school or neighbourhood. Inevitably, learning to deal with this type of ambiguity and confusion about their own place in society and their feelings about how society is made up are key factors in growing up.

The results of the ‘Ultimatum Game’ also revealed a marked emphasis by the students on the concepts of ‘fairness’ and ‘justice’ (see Dooley and Vallejo 2009). Along these lines, Fehr and Schmidt (1999) propose that sensibility to fairness is an important factor in ‘Ultimatum Game’ type situations. Similarly, in research that involved children’s distribution of money (contextualised within a situation of distributing rewards for artwork) McGillicuddy-de Lisi, Watkins, and Vinchur (1994) found that younger children were more likely to allocate the money based on principles of equality, equity, and benevolence than on economic reasons. These results imply that students, especially young students, are at an ideal period during their school years to be taught social justice, modelled through pedagogical reasoning tasks. It has been argued that fairness rules can play an increasingly dominant role in intergroup allocation decisions – if students are given sufficient input (Van Avermaet and McClintock 2006). This implies that teacher intervention can play an important role in the development of a fairness paradigm.

7 Pro-social behavior is understood here as “behavior intended to benefit another” (Eisenberg et al. 1999: 1360). This may include actions or behaviours intended to comfort or share and to facilitate cooperative work or play; as well as displaying empathy for others (Simmons and Sands-Dudelczyk 1983). Prosocial behaviour has been defined by Eisenberg et al. (1999) as encompassing a sense of altruism.
Still, it must be noted that not all the students behaved in an altruistic manner during the ‘Ultimatum Game’, nor, as has been stated previously, is it assumed that these cases can be extrapolated in such a way to make generalised statements about children and youth’s behaviour. Even in our sample, a wide variety of behaviour was observed, for instance, there were several cases where the students decided to keep more money (or all of the money) for themselves, often placing the ‘blame’ on external forces (e.g. the ‘crisis’ or a having a greater need for money than the other partner). At other times the students indicated that the money was really of no interest for them. This lack of interest in the money cannot be attributed to pro-social behaviour, instead it is due to a more pragmatic attitude: the students clearly stated that they could get money whenever they wanted from their parents or other sources!

What, if any, points might stand out for educators to heed? Within education, there is a growing emphasis on situated, learner-centred social practices as part of the learning process (in a large part due to the influence of thinkers such as Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1985; Tharpe and Gallimore 1988, to name a few). There is now a widely accepted paradigm of the teacher as a knowledge facilitator (Doolittle and Hicks 2003; Karpov 2003; Fosnot 2005) whose job is to set up an optimal environment for learners to construct knowledge through engagement with ‘artefacts’ within their ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD)\(^8\) (Vygotsky 1978; Reiber and Carton 1987, Chaiklin 2004). Just as the children and youth were the centre of focus for the research described, it must be children and youth who are the centre of teaching practices across all disciplines. The issues that emerged in this research can provide a sound base for teachers to attain specific curricular goals while integrating students’ personal interests and concerns about the world around them. The following

\(^8\) ZPD is a concept Vygotsky used to represent the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what a child can achieve when provided with ‘expert’ assistance. Vygotsky was interested in the child-adult dyad; however, the term is also used to describe other learning situations that include peer assistance or group assistance.
chapters in this book aim to set out examples of ways in which this can be done.

Why this book?

Based on the study, it is evident that there is a gap between students’ perspectives about the future and a clear pedagogical base for helping students confront these issues as critically aware citizens. Arguably teachers are in a principal role for this challenge since they are in contact with children during a major part of their time of formation – in some cases they have more daily contact with children and youth than the parents do. Thus the role of the teacher may be one of the more influential factors in children and youths’ lives.

While many politicians would settle for a passive citizen, who votes, subscribes to the state, and obeys the law, many others – including perhaps most teachers – would hope to empower active citizens, who critically engage with and seek to affect the course of social events. (Ross 2008: 23)

In today’s society, students are growing up in a society that appears to be undergoing transformation at incredibly fast rates. They live in “an increasingly ‘interconnected world’ [where] people coexist in ever-changing societies, [and] patterns of relations broaden and diversify continuously” (Dooly, Foster and Misiejuk 2006: 1). Consequently educators are faced with seemingly daunting challenges.

Educators must prepare students for careers in “the knowledge society” (Schleicher 2003; Tovar and Castro 2007), prepare them to be responsible participative citizens of democratic societies (Papanastasiou, Koutselini and Papanastasiou 2003) and concomitantly guide them in their development of the necessary prosocial life skills to live in an increasingly complex society. (Dooly and Vallejo 2009: 1)

The ‘knowledge society’ should also be factored into the way in which teachers and researchers understand ‘political engagement’. The way in which students partake in social and civil activities may not cohere
with traditional views of civic participation (and how it is approached in the classroom). Non-traditional areas of youth activity and attitudes, in particular online activities and online communities are often overlooked. Young citizens have traditionally been seen as disengaged and apathetic, nonetheless there is evidence to suggest that they may be politically engaged in their own ways and with issues that they consider as relevant to their everyday lives. Our research shows that, across the board, the participants indicated that their information about political issues was more likely to come from papers, Internet and television (in that order) than from school, friends or family (which figured the lowest as a source of information).

While this may not, however, explain a widening scepticism and distrust that is often associated with the process of globalization and increased access to information worldwide, other studies looking at youth political participation indicates that their engagement may take ‘alternative ways’. Teachers need to learn to recognise, acknowledge and explore this alternative ways in different subject areas: civics, foreign languages, art education, general education courses and so on.

The different chapters in this book will examine the role that education can play in the European Union’s target of promoting critical awareness of its future citizens. Teaching and learning, in almost any circumstance, is complex and at times, even controversial, however, a critical pedagogy, aimed at the education of world citizens must necessarily integrate a broader framework that involves interrogation of dominant ‘voices’ at the micro-, meso- and macro-level of student understanding. Both teachers and students must recognise that they are working, on a daily basis, with materials and concepts that are often seen as unproblematic and homogenous. Using the students’ own perspectives as a basis for interrogation, teachers may be able to guide their students (and themselves) towards alternative perspectives.

Unveiling the dominant hegemonies, questioning both the ruling and the subordinate ideologies, making connections between the different narratives at the local, national and global levels, and giving voice to those discourses that have been silenced are important steps that uncover the power relations
which determine the nature of intercultural interactions amongst individuals
or amongst groups. (Guilherme 2007: 78)

Advocates of Critical Pedagogy (Shor 1992; McLaren 1995, 1997; May
1999; hooks 1994, 2003; Giroux 2000) propose a teaching approach
that strives to ‘push’ students to interrogate and challenge domination
at all levels – including dominant beliefs and practices in the class-
room. Students are encouraged to think critically about the material
and content they are being taught in order to make connections
between what is going on inside the classroom, their own individual
experiences and the social context they are living in. Most teachers –
even if they do not explicitly promote Critical Pedagogy – are aware
of the need to ensure dialogic, interactive and interdisciplinary ap-
proaches to teaching and learning. In all cases, a main objective of any
education project is to provide resources for the students to be able to
exist competently and responsibly in society.

Critical pedagogy shares some considerable historical and contextual territory
with critical theory. Critical theory concerns itself with issues related to the
socialization of people for existence in society, usually a society defined by do-
minant discourses, and this is also the starting point for critical pedagogy. […]
Critical thinking encourages an analysis of situations and arguments to identify
faulty or unreliable assertions or meanings. While it may well encourage
discernment in relation to the social and human condition, it does not
specifically demand social action. Critical pedagogy, however, is preoccupied
with social injustice and examines and promotes practices that have the
potential to transform oppressive institutions or social relations, largely
through educational practices. (Keesing-Styles 2003: Critical Way para 1–2)

This book is a compilation of the knowledge, insight and experience
gained during the aforementioned project. As the results show,
students are too often unaware or unconvinced that they “have the
potential to transform oppressive institutions or social relations”
(ibid.), and this is often due to the very ‘educational practices’ they
are subjected to. The chapters in this book stem from the results that
emerged from the study and attempt to “make connections between
the different narratives” (Guilherme 2007: 78) arising from student
voices. By examining the student perspectives, concerns and
expectations, diverse theoretical and practical aspects in different
subjects are approached so that these issues are covered from many fields and from various didactical approaches; approaches that examine and promote transformational practices.

The book is divided into nine chapters, including this introduction. The first three chapters spell out specific ways in which the issues which emerged from the study can be approached from diverse fields (geography, language learning and arts and crafts). The second chapter, written by Vallejo and Oller, begins by looking at how the perceptions of ‘other’ emerged from the data in this research. These varying perceptions of ‘other’ are examined in relation to the different topics of the research, such as respect, solidarity, altruism or as linked to current issues of relevance to the young people’s lives: immigration, poverty, third world circumstances, unemployment, violence and delinquency, cultures, languages, diversity or multiculturalism. The impact of textbooks and mass media on perceptions of ‘other’ is considered, following this, the role of class and teacher is examined and finally the authors describe a teaching sequence, based on “issues-centred instruction” (Hahn 1996: 25), that places the topic of immigration at the centre of the activities.

In chapter three Dooly picks up on explicit concerns expressed by the children and youth in this study related to being prepared for the future – both personally and professionally. Inevitably, this brings to mind the question of the knowledge that will be needed in a globalised economy. As the students themselves pointed out, knowledge of more than one language, as well as intercultural knowledge that accompany communicative exchanges is paramount to future employment. Basing her proposal on Project-Based Language Learning (PBLL), Dooly outlines a teaching approach that aims to make the communicative experience meaningful inside and outside the classroom.

Collados then discusses how teachers can use arts and crafts as a point of convergence for dealing with current issues central to children and youth. It is commonly accepted that art education has a key role in individual development of self-awareness and creativity. In this chapter, it is argued that art education can also play a key role in inculcating not only values, but skills for dealing with conflict,
controversy and adversity. The chapter begins with a brief historical overview of art education – and academic links to other areas such as multiple intelligences – before considering the positioning of the art teacher within the general curriculum, as well as the learner role in art education. Finally, Collados suggests some lines of action, based on local reality of each classroom, that can bring together student concerns such as those described in this research project and a learning process that emphasizes creative problem-solving.

The next three chapters discuss some cross-disciplinary educational issues relevant to all teachers – (general education) – based on issues that emerged from the research. In chapter five, Alistair Ross casts a critical eye on what it means to act in a ‘political’ manner and then brings this interrogation to bear on the results of this research and other relevant literature. The author then outlines how a critical awareness of ‘acting politically’ can be brought into the classroom, exemplified by a proposed model for classroom action.

In the following chapter, Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz and Zalewska discuss the roles and responsibilities of active citizens. After discussing different perspectives that emerge from ‘active citizenship’, the authors consider these perspectives in light of the results of the ESF research, especially in the area of how students seek information about the issues discussed in the study. Other issues discussed in chapter six is the question of optimism and pessimism and how this might affect a child’s belief in their own agency or power to bring about social change. Finally, Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz and Zalewska look at what educational stakeholders can do to foment social agents equipped for the new millennium.

Chapter seven, by Cathie Holden, looks at the difference between what children in primary schools (aged 11) have to say and what teenagers voice (aged 14, 17) about global issues and their role as active citizens. She provides a quick overview of civic engagement and young people, within the context of studies carried out in the UK, before delving further into a key strand from the research – children and young people’s perceptions of themselves as actors for change. In particular the chapter looks at what children and youth do
now and what they feel their country’s leaders have done. Holden considers what teachers can do to maintain the enthusiasm demonstrated by younger students into adolescence when considering themselves as actors of change. She ends by suggesting several classroom approaches and provides case study examples.

There is a shift of focus in the final two chapters, from proposals for classroom activities to be carried out with students to a consideration of how the teacher can count on sufficient psychological support to face the challenges of teaching in an increasingly complex environment, followed by a chapter on research into studies underlying concepts of cooperative behaviour. In chapter eight, Briones and Tabernero outline the syndrome of teacher burn-out, highlighting the factors that can contribute to it and describe psychological and social theories that help explain the cause of burn-out. They then describe a programme for training for self-efficacy. In the final chapter, these same authors examine some of the variables that help to construct a context of cooperation between people (although theoretically applicable to students in the classroom).

There are several points of convergence, and perhaps not surprisingly, some points of divergence among the chapters. Considering that these chapters derive from data of children and youth of three different age groups in four different countries, all of whom live in their specific socio-historical and cultural contexts, different results and, inevitably, different interpretations of the results must necessarily emerge. Likewise, the authors involved in writing this book have different disciplinary backgrounds. It is this author’s opinion that this contributes to the richness of the perspectives and proposals that lie herein.

Some points arise quite frequently; for instance, the question of political participation is seen as a relevant point for educators. Ross, in chapter two proposes that this concept must be problematised before it can be dealt with inside the classroom. Along those lines, different perspectives on what it means to ‘participate’ are provided by Ross (chapter two) and Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz and Zalewska (chapter three). These varying definitions are then considered within
the framework of each proposal – whether these are project-based, issue-based or as part of a wider understanding of political activism. In a similar vein, Holden (chapter four) calls for a more critical understanding of why students should be engaged in social and political activities in the first place.

There are also differences of opinion about how to define ‘altruistic’ behaviour based on the results of our study, in particular the decisions made by the children and students in the Ultimatum Game. While it may be argued that giving away more than 50% of the money can be considered a generous or altruistic act (Tabernero and Briones), others (Dooly and Ross, 2010) have argued that the students’ interviews often revealed other motivations behind these decisions (e.g. “I don’t need the money; I can get money from my father whenever I need it”). Although these differences are not engaged directly in this book, it is significant that they emerged in the first place since they can give rise to varying approaches in the classroom, depending on the teacher’s understanding of their students’ behaviour.

The chapters also highlight the different understandings educators (and researchers) can have concerning what are the basic premises of activism, civic or citizenship education, and citizenship itself. The question of youth voting comes up more than once in these chapters, but there is no consensus whether the supposed decline in voting must necessarily be understood as a lack of active participation or not. Some of the authors note that children and youth appear to be looking for ‘alternative’ participation in social and political events (Ross, Dooly) and that this may be a fertile ground for educators to explore. There is also a frequent call for more open-ended, dialogic classrooms (Ross, Holden, Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz and Zalewska, Oller and Vallejo) although the proposals for reaching this aim are different, according to the context of each proposal. Arguably, this is how it should be – each classroom is a world to itself (paraphrasing a common axiom) and the subsequent proposals must reflect this.

The research outlined here aimed to delineate the different ways in which children and youth approach, comprehend and learn about cur-
rent social issues such as violence, conflict, peace, work and unemployment, respect for others, intolerance, and environmental and health issues. By profiling the focal points and sources of knowledge about these topics (micro and meta-narratives; social relationships) educators are better equipped to use this information in the collaborative construction of knowledge and perspectives about such issues.

Works Cited


