

Youth perceptions of everyday democracy: A case study with early school-leavers in Barcelona, Spain.

Laura Malinverni (laura.malinverni@ub.edu)
Joan Miquel Porquer Rigo (joanmiquelporquer@ub.edu)
Fernando Hernández Hernández (fhernandez@ub.edu)

University of Barcelona, Esbrina Research Group.

*Symposium Critical ChangeLab. Democracy Health of European Educational Institutions,
Perspective of Youth on Democracy and New Model of Democratic Pedagogy.*

ECER 2024. Nicosia, Cyprus. 27-30 August 2024



Summary

1. Aim of the task within CCLab.
2. Case study: educational context, interest of the case, centre, setting, and researchers' position.
3. Data gathering / Methodology
4. Semi-structured guides
5. Outcomes of case study

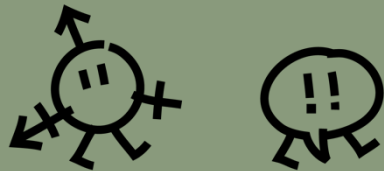


Aim of the task within CCLab

Examining the current state of Democracy in Learning Environments, in order to generate evidence for a participatory democratic curriculum design.

Task 1.2: Exploring young people's perceptions of everyday democracy in challenging educational contexts, based on 10 cases studies developed in 10 European Countries.

Common tools, different target populations (from 12 to 18 y/o).



Case study: Educational context

Public training and placement program

(**PFI** by its acronym in Catalan) in Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain.

Course 2023–2024.

Data gathering between January–February 2024.



Case study: PFI programs

Are designed and coordinated by the Department of Education of Catalonia, as a **response to early-school leaving** (or, effectively, **late incorporation** from different educational systems).

Aimed at **young people aged between 16-21** who have not completed compulsory secondary education.

Voluntary studies, 1 academic course, 1,000 hours.

Focused around **certain professional families**
(I.e. Business Admin, Health, Mechanics...)



Case study: PFI programs

Programs provide students with **basic training to access the labour market** and help them in **returning to the regulated educational system** (access to basic professional/vocational training programs).

Educational modules in: 1) Professional training, including business internships, 2) general skills, and 3) mentoring and support.

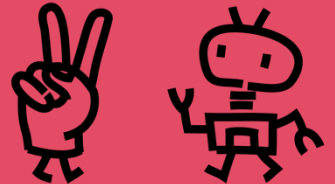
Reduced number of students and close tutorship.



Case study: Interest of PFI for CCLab

PFI programs often cater to students from various socioeconomic backgrounds, including those who may have faced challenges (academic difficulties, socioeconomic disadvantages, or behavioural issues) in traditional educational settings.

Disengagement within mainstream educational systems may have shaped their perceptions of democracy differently from their peers in traditional educational settings. Their experiences with societal inequalities, discrimination, or marginalization can offer other viewpoints into how democratic principles are perceived and experienced by young people facing adversity.



Case study: Centre

Public school that hosts compulsory secondary education programs, post-secondary programs (*bachillerato* and vocational training) linked to commerce and administration, and PFI.

Located in middle-class district of Barcelona.

+1,000 students and +80 staff.



Case study: Setting

PFI with 16 students (although 3 left the program mid-course).

Partly local, partly migrant origin (Honduras, Ecuador, Bolivia, Pakistan).

Heterogeneous personal skills, socioeconomical situations and legal statuses.

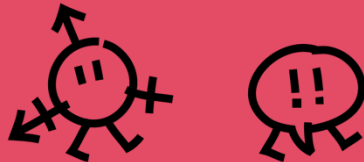
Living across the city and nearby territories (converging at centre).



Case study: Researchers' position

Focus on the value of participants' voices: make them feel they're part of a bigger project, spanning other students in other contexts.

Provision of evidence of the outcomes and recognition on the work: compromise to send the results of the project and a certificate of participation for the students.



Data gathering / Methodology

Actions:

- 1 focus group with PFI students.
- 5 individual interviews with PFI stakeholders.
- Gathering of reflective evidence through Researchers' diaries.

Researchers:

- 2 members of Esbrina Research Group and 1 Master's Student from University of Barcelona (UB) in focus group. 2 members of Esbrina on interviews.



Data gathering / Methodology

Focus group:

- 9 students of PFI (7M, 2F) between 16 and 18 y/o.
- Guided by semi-structured guide.
- Focus on perceptions and experiences of participants regarding: being young, their relationship with institutions, experience with democracy and participation, and perspectives on their future.
- Location: same class where they attend mentoring sessions.



Data gathering / Methodology

Individual interviews:

- 5 stakeholders involved in the PFI program at the centre:
 - 1) Tutor of the PFI,
 - 2) Technical teacher of the PFI,
 - 3) Coordinator of PFI programs in Barcelona,
 - 4) Pedagogical coordinator of the centre,
 - 5) Coordinator of association where students participated in Service-Learning internship program.
- Guided by **semi-structured guide**. Different locations.



Data gathering / Methodology

Researchers' journals:

- Team involved in each action briefly describes knowledge acquired during sessions, missing information and reflections on the process of research, with an ethnographical focus.
- Guided by a unified format.
- Exchanges with the bigger UB group involved in CCLab.



Semi-structured guides

Focus group question areas (adapted):

1. Presentation. *What is your name and age?
What do worry about in your everyday and in life?*
2. Being young today. *How do you feel being part of PFI?
What does characterize being young today?
How is it different to be young in other countries?*



Semi-structured guides

Focus group question areas (adapted):

3. *Community identity. What do you students from PFI have in common? How would you describe your group relationships? Do you feel part of the institute life? How do you feel treated by [other students/staff/externals/institutions/government]? Anyone you know has been discriminated for being into this program?*



Semi-structured guides

Focus group question areas (adapted):

4. **Democracy.** *What do you think about when you hear the word “democracy”? How do you see the state of democracy in this country? Do you feel that your daily life and your interactions are developed in a democratic way? Do you feel that your voices matter in your contexts? What would you like to change in the world? How can you favour change?*
5. **Participation.** *What does it mean to you being an “active citizen”? In which initiatives or collective projects have you participated that had impact? What would the institute need for you to feel more heard and engaged?*

Semi-structured guides

Focus group question areas (adapted):

6. *Future perspectives. How do you see your life in 10 years? How do you feel your future will be? What do you think are the biggest challenges Catalonia/Spain and Europe will face? How do you see the interaction between people, climate change, and nature in the future? How do you perceive the role of technology in the future?*
7. *Closing remarks. How do you value the experience of the talk we had? Did you find something particularly interesting?*



Semi-structured guides

Individual interviews question areas (adapted):

1. **Being young.** *How do you think youngsters in PFI programs feel? What differences do you see between being young in PFI and in other studies in your institute?*
2. **Experiences with the community.** *How would you describe the position and challenges of youngsters in PFI? How do you feel PFI students are treated in relation to [other students/staff/externals/institutions/government]? Is there discrimination while pertaining to this community?*



Semi-structured guides

Individual interviews question areas (adapted):

3. Civic competences and participation of young people.
Do students in PFI have opportunities to be active citizens? Are their voices and opinions being taken into account by the community? How can the participation of students of PFI be boosted?
4. Future perspectives. *How you see the future of PFI [in this institute]? How you see the future of its students?*



Outcomes of case study

Students expressed satisfaction with their participation in PFI, highlighting its positive impact on their educational experience and the good relations that they have with the teachers.

“When I come, I don't feel like when I was in ESO, where I was going to study and follow a guideline. ... it's like a home, you know? I like being here sometimes.” (student)

“It feels good because they [teachers] give you confidence. That you can tell them about anything. And apart from scolding you, they also give you advice.” (student)



Outcomes of case study

However, on being young and in the PFI, others pointed out **questions of struggle and guilt:**

“As a teenager, I **feel like I have failed**. That is, my parents had put expectations of me, so to speak, and I have disappointed them not once, but many times. And yet they still have hope in me.. I think of being a teenager in a PFI.... You feel like you haven't done everything you could to be in a better place. ... Instead of being here now, I could **be doing what I like the most: being a stewardess.**” (student)



Outcomes of case study

Students **reported feeling discriminated** against by both other teachers and students within the school. Discrimination was evident in various aspects, including the physical layout of the school, where PFI students were **situated in a relatively isolated area**, as well as **differences in the school schedule** that seemed to **segregate PFI students** from the rest.

“It's like we're frowned upon. The other day, for example, we were walking downstairs and a teacher asked us, ‘are you from PFI?’ I told her, ‘yes,’ and she looked at me blankly. Like, in a strange way” (student)

“They despise us for being here, more than anything. As my colleague said, they ask ‘where are they from?’... And sometimes they throw us out [from places].” (student).

Outcomes of case study

Importantly, this discrimination was not solely perceived by PFI students themselves but was also acknowledged by the main teachers involved in the program. However, the other members of the school community did not perceive this discrimination.

“I think we’re all super-tolerant until the issue is close to us. Then we become less tolerant. ‘Yes, we’re inclusive with all of them’, but then don’t let them bother you in the corridor.” (tutor)

“I think that happens less, as PFI is becoming better known and its success is shown. I could not tell exactly; I don’t believe they have to be more discriminated against because they take a PFI...” (PFI coordinator)

Outcomes of case study

At the same time, students were **not proud of their identity as PFI participants**, with many students opting to conceal their affiliation outside of school.

“I think they like to impersonate. When they leave from here, since nobody knows they’re from PFI, they can say they’re something else. Or not mentioning it, or saying they do “professional training”. They like it because they can feel less judged. ... Externally I’ve never heard [anything negative]. That happens more here, in educational environments.” (Tutor)



Outcomes of case study

Additionally, some students reported **additional challenges with external institutions**, primarily stemming from their **migrant status and documentation issues**.

“What worries me the most is this question of internships, because of the Social Security number... [If I don't have papers], I won't be able to do anything. I mean, I'm going to be apart.” (student)



Outcomes of case study

When addressing democratic values, students expressed **perceptions of democracy as synonymous with politics**, leading to a **lack of trust in political systems and abstraction, discontent with formal democracy**.

- “— When you hear “democracy,” what do you think of?
 - Political system.
 - A political system that is garbage.
 - Why?
 - **Everyone lies.**” (students/researchers)

“My kids don’t even know what a strike is. It is very difficult for people with such a **small social conscience to unite** and do if there’s not **something that gets them motivated.**” (tutor)

Outcomes of case study

Students recognized democratic elements in various settings such as classrooms, interactions with friends, and family, albeit not explicitly labelling them as democratic. Their conceptualization of democracy centred on the idea of living together harmoniously rather than formal political structures.

“Well, in my case I’d not use the word democracy but, for example, in class it is used a lot. For instance: who votes to do this or who votes to do something else... the majority wins, because they have voted. Same with your parents, when deciding what to do when going out. Maybe my dad doesn’t want to do it, but in the end, he’s going to have to do it because we voted. I mean, it’s a fair way, so to speak.”
(student)

Additional highlights

Stable job, desire of future. Students' biggest concern seemed to be related with having a stable job in the future, in order to have a decent life.

Problematic referents. Stakeholders expressed that local students sympathized with local far-right political parties. Migrant students from central-America stated their favour for populist and repressive political movements in their home countries –**negative experiences of democracy.** **Influence of Social Media campaigns.**

Associative movements. Students shown interest in local associative campaigns (related to gender, climate change...), although stakeholders perceived **reluctance to engage collectively.**

Further steps

Cross examination and comparison of results of 10 case studies, based on focus groups, interviews and researchers' journals, as part of CCLab.

See: criticalchangelab.eu



Thank you!

Laura Malinverni (laura.malinverni@ub.edu)
Joan Miquel Porquer Rigo (joanmiquelporquer@ub.edu)
Fernando Hernández Hernández (fhernandez@ub.edu)

University of Barcelona, Esbrina Research Group.

Symposium *Critical ChangeLab. Democracy Health of European Educational Institutions, Perspective of Youth on Democracy and New Model of Democratic Pedagogy.*

ECER 2024. Nicosia, Cyprus. 27–30 August 2024



Funded by
the European Union



UNIVERSITAT DE
BARCELONA

esbrina 

