

# GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING AS CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

*Mainstream idea of participation revisited*

## GROEPSGEWIJS PROBLEEM OPLOSSEN ALS BURGERSCHAPSVORMING

*Heersende opvatting over participatie herzien  
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)*

Proefschrift

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door

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*« La puissance publique ne peut même sur aucun objet, avoir le droit de faire enseigner des opinions comme des vérités ; elle ne doit imposer aucune croyance. »  
(Sur l'instruction publique, premier mémoire, 1791, Condorcet)*

# Acknowledgements

When I arrived in the Netherlands in 2001, I started working as a volunteer in children's hospices intended to support terminally ill children and their families in the last phase of their lives. These houses had cost millions of euros. The founders of the hospices, the medical staff and volunteers, were wondering why these houses were not reaching their goals. Parents of children with a life-threatening disease used them as respite care for a weekend or a short vacation. When I started studying pedagogical sciences at the University of Utrecht and working for the University's website [pedagogiek.net](http://pedagogiek.net), I decided to write my first article on the pedagogical needs of families and terminally ill children. I read quite a lot of research on this topic and also on the educational problems, parents and siblings may face in this situation. The results of this literature research show that parents would rather have their children stay at home or in hospital during the last phase of their lives. Thus, the best response to their needs would be ambulatory medical and pedagogical help and not such houses. For me, this was an example that good intentions and ideals do not always hold the best answers to concrete problems and that being informed is one of the pillars of good practice. I started to become very interested in the relation between science and practice and in just how relevant informed practice is.

While I was working as a student assistant at the University of Utrecht, I became involved in discussions on education and the curriculum, including discussions on sustainable development and citizenship. The position of one of the professors I was working with was that primary students are unable to cope with complex societal issues. My problem was that empirical evidence did not support this statement. It was a conviction that some educationalists in the field of educational sciences held. I wanted to prove them wrong: there was some empirical research going on at the time that seemed to support my position. The numerous discussions I held about this topic laid the foundations for this dissertation. This thesis could not have been realised without people supporting the process.

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