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Teachers stepping up their game in the face of extreme statements: A qualitative analysis of educational friction when teaching sensitive topics

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ABSTRACT

Friction in the classroom may create useful tension for teachers when they attempt to discuss sensitive topics as part of democratic learning. Due to the openness and indeterminacy of these topics, students can experience what it is like to be (political) subjects in a diverse society and become aware of other people's subjectness in a charged classroom. To better understand how to handle educational friction in the classroom, we observed and interviewed nine Dutch expert teachers and analyzed the empirical data by using our Educational Friction Modelling Framework as a heuristic lens. This study shows how teachers allowed extreme statements and used the subsequent friction during their lessons, challenged and provoked their students, made room for their pupils in several ways to enhance their participation, and made a distinction between rationality and emotions in the classroom. We argue that our framework sheds light on what charges the classroom and contributes to the further development of contained risk-taking as part of democratic education.

KEYWORDS

Democratic learning; friction; multiperspectivity; narrativity; playground; sensitive topics

Friction in the classroom should not be understood as something that must be solved. On the contrary, it is inherent to the process of democratic learning and living together in a liberal and pluralistic democracy (Biesta, 2011; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Hess, 2009; Lozano Parra et al., 2021; Merry, 2020; Mouffe, 2005a; Pace, 2019, 2021; Ruitenberg, 2009; Schuitema et al., 2011). However, research has shown that teachers tend to evade sensitive topics and politically driven subjects that cause friction, often out of fear of consequences in the classroom (Awan et al., 2019; Bertram-Troost & Miedema, 2017; Clycq et al., 2019; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; James & Janmaat, 2019; Kitson & McCully, 2005; Pace, 2019, 2021; Sikkens et al., 2016; Wansink et al., 2018).

For teachers to allow friction, we need to better understand how it appears in the classroom and how it is used for democracy education. In previous research, we have developed our Educational Friction Modelling Framework to understand political conflict as educational friction (Lozano Parra et al., 2021). In this article, we will use this framework to analyze empirical data from lesson observations and interviews. Nine Dutch secondary education expert teachers were asked to design a lesson about a socially, politically, and/or culturally sensitive topic in which different perspectives would appear. We observed and

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transcribed the lessons and conducted stimulated recall interviews to collect empirical data for our analysis. We apply an “informed grounded theory” approach that emphasizes the creative process that emerges when analyzing empirical data while being informed by theory (Thornberg, 2012). To do so, we used the theoretical framework developed in our previous research as a heuristic lens through which to further analyze the meaning of the findings from our qualitative empirical analysis.

The aim of this study, which has an explorative character, is to further understand how teachers handle educational friction by showing how it takes shape in the educational practice of teaching sensitive topics. We argue that the expert teachers we selected handled what we call educational friction. In doing so, they allowed extreme statements in the classroom, which led to teachers allowing pupils to overstep certain boundaries, taking risks that go beyond what Pace (2019, 2021) called contained risk-taking. We will clarify these moments of friction using our model as a heuristic lens. The main research question of this article is: How do Dutch expert teachers handle educational friction in the classroom when extreme statements are made? Our study will hopefully provide new insights that help educators to understand and rethink how to handle educational friction and the extreme statements that are made in this context.

Literature review

Educational friction is the tension in the classroom that sparks different gradations of friction which are verbalized by individuals in a certain context and in relation to each other (Lozano Parra et al., 2021). Friction can, for example, be experienced as *discomfort* about a certain opinion, *resistance* about a certain statement, *surprise* about the appearance of a particular voice in a conversation, or *collision* of two or more viewpoints. It is exactly these gradations of experience that open possibilities for learning (Dewey, 1933, 1938; Lozano Parra et al., 2021).

There are different types of topics and/or issues that could cause the tension in a classroom to rise. In addition, the gradation in which these subjects cause friction is context-dependent. Still, there is a consensus about the importance and educational value of these different types of topics and issues that potentially intensify the tension in the classroom because of their ability to promote democratic values and contribute to the interest of students in politics (see, for example, Bickmore, 1999; Evans et al., 1998; Hahn, 1991; Hess & Avery, 2008; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Lozano Parra et al., 2020; Pace, 2019, 2021). Research has shown that teachers tend to avoid topics or issues that they think causes the tension to rise because of different reasons. On the one hand, there are more general reasons such as a lack of time, an overcrowded curriculum, and a perceived lack of knowledge about the specific topic that potentially causes friction (Erlich & Gindi, 2018). Moreover, teachers also hesitate because of the difficulty they experience in responding to pupils who show intolerance. For example, teachers did not know how to act when some pupils began to cheer during discussions following the November 2015 Paris attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial office (Awan et al., 2019; Bertram-Troost & Miedema, 2017; Clycq et al., 2019). Thus, as in the U.S. context, teaching about topics and/or issues may be a “frightening proposition” because of the possibility that it “generates intolerant discourse that can offend, alienate, or intimidate students” (Journell, 2016, p. 2).

Scholars' conceptions of controversial issues differ, however. Stradling et al. (1984) conceptualized controversial issues as "those problems and disputes that divide society and for which significant groups within society offer conflicting explanations and solutions based on alternative values" (p. 2). Hess (2009) defined controversial issues as "questions of public policy that spark significant disagreement" (p. 37), which change in both time and space from *open* (currently debated) to *settled* (resolved), and vice versa. Ho et al. (2014) showed how controversial issues and controversial topics often become entangled. For example, racism is a topic, while violence against Black people is an issue (Journell, 2016). In countries that have recently struggled with division, teachers often associate controversial issues with historical events that evoke emotional responses as a consequence of community allegiance and national identity (Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). These kind of responses evoked by controversial issues related to contested histories (Foster, 2014) are also part of Dutch education; the different backgrounds of pupils with migrant descent influence what happens in the classroom (Wasserman, 2011). For example, the subject of the Armenian Genocide can evoke a highly tense atmosphere in Dutch classrooms when Dutch-Turkish and/or Dutch-Armenian pupils are present.

Sensitive topics arise from contrasting views between individuals and/or groups within a society because of the perceived conflict about a subject that is multi-interpretable (Dearden, 1981; Evans et al., 1998; Goldberg & Savenije, 2018; Misco & Patterson, 2007; Oulton et al., 2004). Sensitive topics that are discussed in the context of taboos or difficulties involve the determination of what is acceptable and unacceptable concerning a specific topic. This tension is caused—at least partly—by the exposed indeterminacy and openness about the topic that causes friction. When talking about a sensitive topic, interactions between students and teacher do not revolve around "the right answer" or the "skill to achieve a certain goal." Moreover, subjects involved in a discussion about sensitive topics find themselves entangled in a process of sense-making about a certain controversial topic (Lozano Parra & Wansink, 2022, Wansink et al., [submitted](#)). During this act of sense-making, teachers, as well as students, are confronted with multiple perspectives on a certain subject on different levels, in different gradations of tension in the classroom.

These tensions can lead to emotions in the classroom and may cause passionate responses (e.g., Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Journell, 2016). Hess and Ganzler (2007) showed that the ideological composition of the classroom influences how the discussion takes place, arguing that "it is much easier to awaken diversity than create it" (p. 138). Furthermore, a lack of exposure to political conflict can lead to pupils underestimating the level of disagreement in society as a result of a homogenous composition of the classroom (Hess & Ganzler, 2007). Barton and McCully (2012) argued that in the case of Northern Ireland teachers need to both engage the intellect as well as the emotions in students' perspectives on history. Garrett and Alvey (2021) stated that political life is "inextricably linked with non-rational, emotional, and affective aspects and registers" (p. 1). Similar, Lo (2017) presented an agonistic perspective of democracy in education as a way to emancipate students into turning political frustrations into actions, and she advocated for the allowance instead of the dismissal of emotions, consequently accepting that emotional passions are part of political life. These findings connect to our previous study in which we have presented our framework of educational friction, which we will use as conceptual lens for our analysis in this study. What is important for this study is that *both* teaching

controversial issues *and* teaching sensitive topics can cause different gradations of friction and possibly incite students to make extreme statements.

Contained risk-taking in a charged classroom

In her aim to explore how schooling can provide ways for people to live together and learn from another, Pace (2015) adopted the idea of the classroom as a “charged arena” that is a space “suffused with contradictions that create both friction and potential” (p. 4). According to Pace, these charged spaces are full of opportunities for democratic education. At the same time, this space is under pressure due to school testing policies and political polarization (Pace, 2015, 2021). Even in societies not divided by political struggle or war, polarization causes extreme views and contentious media discourse (Pace, 2021). In the Dutch context, this tension is exemplified by the flammatory debate about the use of religious and/or political cartoons in the classroom that intensified after the murder of the French teacher Samuel Paty.

To further map out the strategies of teachers in such a charged environment, Pace built on a number of specific characterizations of history teachers teaching controversial issues: Avoiders, Containers, and Risk-takers (Kitson & McCully, 2005). Further building on this work, Pace developed the concept of “contained risk-taking,” which holds that teacher educators “actively prepared preservice teachers to explore controversial and often sensitive issues through conflicting perspectives and dialogic methods” (Pace, 2019, p. 254).

One of the risks teachers take by welcoming the contested dimensions of democracy, consequently allowing conflicting perspectives in their classroom, is the possibility of students making comments that are potentially harmful, uncivil, or downright racist or discriminating. Callan (2011) argued that it is wrong to silence students even “if the social group is widely stigmatized, some members of the the derogated group are in the classroom, and we recognize that their stigmatization is a grave social evil” (p. 17). On the surface, this stance seems rather harsh. However, according to Callan, it is because of the educational space in which extreme statements are made that they should not be silenced or dismissed and, therefore, have educational value. He argued that it is unseemly to see any teacher—student interaction as one between presumptive enemies and stated that in classrooms, the space in which learning is central, “we should expect that our students have shown up in good faith to learn from us” (Callan, 2011, p. 18). What Callan emphasized is the importance of trust between teachers and students, especially when it comes to potentially harmful extreme statements. He recommended that we “remain mindful that our intellectual and political adversaries are at a basic moral level our friends” and, thus, argued that extreme statements have an important purpose as part of the contested dimension of democratic education (Callan, 2011, p. 18). This stance connects to Ruitenberg’s (2009) call to change political enemies into friendly adversaries, as well as our own previous research in which we have built a framework to understand political conflict as educational friction (Lozano Parra et al., 2021). We have argued that it is through friction that students experience plurality, thereby experiencing not only their own subjectness, but also the subjectness of others.

By focusing on educational friction and extreme statements made in the classroom, we aim to contribute to the practice of teaching sensitive topics in general and the further exploration of contained risk-taking specifically. In a recent work, Pace (2021) stated that “particular conceptual frameworks” are needed “to identify more precisely the knowledge

and skills required for skillful teaching of controversial issues in different disciplines and how novices develop them” (p. 178). We argue that our tool, which we will now explicate further, sheds light on how teachers take risks in a charged classroom. Specifically, we show how, in the face of extreme statements, they are not concerned with containing such statements but instead turn them into moments of learning.

Theoretical framework

Mouffe has written about democracy from a political-philosophical perspective. Nevertheless, her ideas about conflict are useful to our formulation and understanding of how political conflict can be understood as educational. In response to the deliberative model of democracy, Mouffe has formulated an alternative agonistic model. The term agonism stems from the Greek *agon*, meaning contest or strife. In *The Democratic Paradox*, Mouffe (2005a) described the paradoxical relation between “liberal” and “democracy” within liberal democracy. For Mouffe, the paradox between these two concepts is shaped by the “liberal grammar” of equality and universalism of liberalism, that contrasts with the struggle for hegemony that is democracy (Mouffe, 2005a). According to Mouffe, democracy is about the fundamental identification of the rulers and those who are ruled, which leads to the existence of power relations between the people that are part of the *demos*. Mouffe stated that these power relations play a significant role in structuring human relations. Democracy is linked to the fundamental principle of the unity and identification of the *demos*. If people are to rule, it is necessary to determine who belongs to the people and who does not; who is to rule and who is to not? Democracy for Mouffe is always about the constitution of “us” and “them.” However, as opposed to deliberative models which see conflict as something that should be solved or avoided, Mouffe has viewed this difference between liberal and democratic grammar as “a *tension* that installs a very important dynamic” that enables the ongoing and necessary (re) negotiation of power relations (Mouffe, 1999, p. 43). Additionally, Mouffe’s aim is not to dismiss liberal democracy as a whole but, rather, to reevaluate the relation between liberalism and democracy, emphasizing the importance of democracy and the constant conflicting (re) negotiation it entails. The very existence of liberal democracy depends on the constant process of (re)negotiating this constitutive paradox.

Mouffe has theorized conflict as the antagonism that is an inherent part of human relations (Mouffe, 2005a). To explain this further, she has made a distinction between *politics* and *the political* (Mouffe, 1999, 2005a, 2005b). The latter refers to “the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society, [which] can take many different forms and can emerge in diverse social relations” (Mouffe, 1999, p. 754). The former refers to “the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of ‘the political’” (Mouffe, 1999, p. 754).

For Mouffe, conflict is not a weakness that should be eliminated but, rather, the foundation democracy is built upon. If we take Mouffe’s idea of democracy and apply it to education, democratic education entails the appearance of conflict as the process of (re) negotiation in which the status quo can be questioned in the classroom. In order for pupils to *learn* how to engage in such a conflict, to take part in liberal democracy, the charged classroom should be the place in which they are challenged to engage in this process where *the political* can be played out.

Friction is a tension that is inherently part of human relations in a pluralistic and diverse democratic society (Banks et al., 2007; Biesta, 2011; Curnow & Jurow, 2021; Hess, 2009; Lozano Parra et al., 2021; Meirieu, 2007; Mouffe, 2005; Merry, 2020; Pace, 2019, 2021; Ruitenberg, 2009; Tivaringe & Kirshner, 2021). As already mentioned, educational friction can be experienced in different gradations, such as collision, perplexity, difference, or resistance, but also as surprise or discomfort. The classroom seems a suitable place to allow friction to become educational since it is the place in which students can be “nudged” to participate in this sense-making process (Lozano Parra et al., 2021). Moreover, in the classroom students can practice and play out this tension on a playground in which there is room for learning (i.e., for movement, rethinking, making mistakes, confusion, and the exploration of new possibilities). Allowing friction will not only lead to pupils to recognize that there is conflict, but also that having conflicting perspectives and differences is “normal” (Hess, 2009). This incorporation of conflict as friction is different from simply “agreeing to disagree.” The latter individualizes the matter at stake and, therefore, breaks the tension by dismissing the context and relations between subjects. Consequently, friction is envisaged as a threat to human relations instead of an inherent part of human relations. To put it differently, agreeing to disagree disables the conversation by simply ending the dialogue and for closing any possibility of allowing educational friction in the classroom to enable students to experience the diversity and plurality that is part of democratic societies.

In previous research we have developed the “Educational Friction Modelling Framework” to further clarify educational friction, which consists of three parts. The first part is the *triangle of friction* (see Figure 1). The points of the triangle represent the three aspects that together shape friction. The first point of the triangle represents the perceived friction by two or more agents or groups of incompatible goals. Based on insights from the field of conflict studies, we have conceptualized the second point of the triangle as *frictional behavior*, meaning “the actions that are undertaken aimed at letting the opponent abandon or modify its goals” (Mitchell, 1981, p. 29). We have formulated the third point of the triangle as *frictional attitudes*: “psychological states, emotions and attitudes as well as patterns of conceptions and misconceptions that arise from entanglement in conflict” (Lozano Parra et al., 2021; Mitchell, 1981, p. 27). These attitudes can be either cognitive, such as the appearance of tunnel vision or stereotyping, or emotional, such as showing anger or fear, encompassing the rational argumentation, strategies, and passions shown in the classroom.

This diagram shows the embeddedness of friction in narrativity, presented in our framework as the triangle that is embedded in the *circle of narrativity*. Fisher (1984) coined the term “Homo Narrans,” pinpointing the need of people to understand their complex surroundings by constructing, telling, and listening to stories (p. 78). In other words, the world is known “through narratives that are told about it” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 641). Narrativity is a sense-making mechanism that helps teachers and students broaden their own position and redefine and restructure how this narrative position relates to historical, cultural and religious presumptions which can be refocused, redirected and reinterpreted (Clark, 2010; Vandervan, 2004). Narrativity allows students to make sense of their own experiences, the experiences of others, and the context in which they live. Narrativity means that friction is always part of making sense of something in which students and teachers are entangled in order to make sense of the world around them (Biesta, 2011; Dewey, 1938).

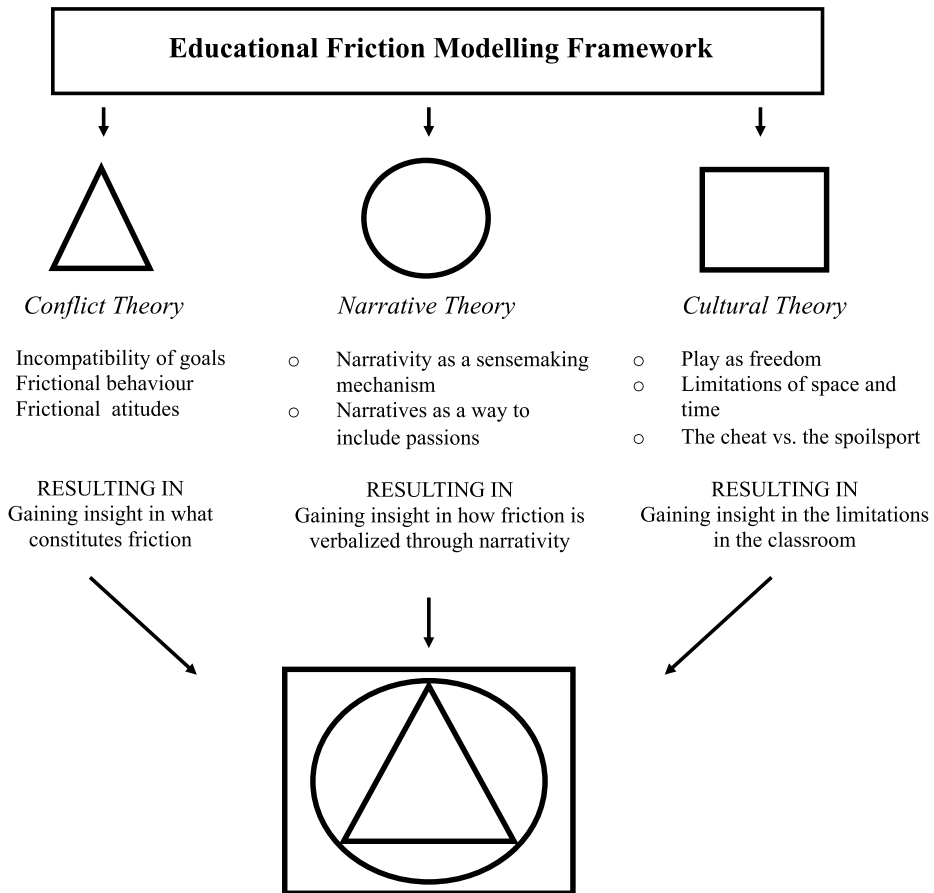


Figure 1. Educational friction modelling framework.

The third component of educational friction we have formulated is the *square of play*, which we refer to as the playground. We have used the concept of play, formulated by the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga in the early twentieth century, to explore the limitations of the playground that is the classroom (see Lozano Parra et al., 2021). For this study, it is important to mention that, according to Huizinga (1938/1998), play is an “interlude” which can recur regularly. Play is a free act first and foremost; it contains “a quality of freedom” that enables “the elasticity within human relations,” which is important because it “allows tension” (pp. 8, 300). There are those who undermine play (i.e., “the cheat” and the “spoilsport”). Spoilsports shatter the play-world, often leaving it to “make their own communities,” revealing the fragility of the play-community; cheats, despite bending the rules, still acknowledge the existence of the play and remain part of the playground (Huizinga, 1938/1998, p. 11).

Huizinga’s characterization of play as an interlude connects to Pace’s (2015) idea of the charged classroom. Like Mouffe (2005), Huizinga emphasized that *agon* is part of the play, meaning contest or strive. “Play is tense, as we say,” stated Huizinga (1938/1998, p. 11). In play, which cannot exist without certain rules, there is always something at stake (Huizinga, 1938/1998); there is something to be won. These high stakes do not extend to what game

theorists refer to as the pay-off. For Huizinga, play revolves less around the finalization of a victory and more about the play being played, which is best exemplified by the Dutch saying: “it is not the marbles that matter, but the game” (Huizinga, 1938/1998, p. 49). At the same time, the playground is a place in which individuals are in-relation and in-context with others, all accepting certain rules to move freely within, and possibly slightly overstepping, the limitations of the playground.

Just as society is restricted by law and democracy cannot function without a certain stability (Mouffe, 2005), the playground of the school as a place for learning democracy also has rules and limitations which support its steadiness (Lozano Parra et al., 2021). However, Huizinga’s spoilsport and cheat also leave room for questioning the limitations of the playground, and thereby the status quo, and, thus, enable a process of learning and making mistakes. By leaving room for the different gradations already mentioned, we have argued that to make friction educational is first to understand the topic and what makes it frictional (Lozano Parra et al., 2021). Subsequently, the boundaries that are in place can be crossed. As a heuristic lens, our model offers a way to analyze the extreme statements that are made by students and both the actions and reflections of teachers.

National context

In 2015, the Dutch State Secretary of Education constituted “Our Education 2032” platform which was commissioned to set up a societal debate about a future-oriented curriculum. Democracy education and civic learning were main themes of this curriculum which also made them part of the broader debate about good education in the Netherlands. In 2018, the name “Our Education 2032” changed into “Curriculum.nu,” in which several development teams were given the task to work on the aims and ends of nine “learning areas,” including citizenship education.

Historically, citizenship education has been a contested topic in Dutch society. In a report commissioned by the Scientific Council for Governmental Policy, Dutch Professor of Pedagogy Micha De Winter (2004) argued for the socialization of pupils and their introduction and integration into the existing political and social order. After 9/11, concerns about terrorism caused “shockwaves and triggered anxiety for immediate security risk” (James & Janmaat, 2019, p. 2). More recently, the Dutch National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security has called for more attention to the far-right radicalization of youngsters between the age of 12 and 20 (Editorial Internal Affairs, 2021).

Since 2006, the Dutch government has obliged schools to promote “active citizenship.” When educational practitioners asked for more specific guidelines regarding this promotion of “active citizenship,” the Minister of Education promised to further outline this aim in 2018. After the murder of French teacher Samuel Paty in 2020, further debate ensued about the teaching of sensitive topics in general and the use of cartoons specifically. The Minister of Education consequently decided to speed up the legislative process, which resulted in an amendment of legislation in June 2021, in which the government further specified the schools’ task of citizenship education. The school should promote “active citizenship and social cohesion,” which should be about “teaching respect for and knowledge of the basic values of the democratic, constitutional state,” the “development of social and societal competences needed to be part of a plural, democratic society,” and “imparting knowledge about and respect for differences in religion, belief, political opinion, origin, gender,

disability or sexual orientation, in which all should be treated equally” (Staatsblad, 2021). In previous research, we have analyzed a tendency toward a deliberative model of democracy and an emphasis on consensus seeking as the aim of citizen education (Lozano Parra et al., 2021). Subsequently, we emphasized the importance of friction and argued that the conflicting parts of democratic education as opposed to civic learning are in need of attention in Dutch classrooms.

Method

Participants

For our research, we purposefully selected nine teachers that were nominated by university-based teacher educators from our professional network as experts in their subject (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Furthermore, teachers needed to meet three criteria to be selected for this study. First, they had to be active within Dutch secondary education. We chose to select only in-service teachers because pre-service teachers are often reserved in discussing controversial topics (Nganga et al., 2020). Second, teachers needed to be willing to develop a lesson along the lines of our open instruction: design and teach a lesson in which multiple perspectives occur. This instruction Resulted in a wide-range of sensitive topics and controversial issues. The difference between topics which teachers selected for their lesson was not problematic since we focused on extreme statements. Furthermore, we did not formulate a lesson aim that needed to be achieved; rather, we wanted to see which aims the teachers formulated for a lessons in which friction could appear. Finally, teachers had to have a well-established relationship with their pupils, which is why we asked the pupils to fill in the standardized and evaluated Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (Wubbels et al., 2006). This questionnaire explicates the relationship between teacher and students along two axes: communion (i.e., warmth and closeness of the teacher) and agency (i.e., dominance and influence of the teacher). Research shows that when their teachers score high on communion and agency, pupils feel safe and comfortable to participate during class. Therefore, we only included those teachers who scored high in those two areas (Campbell, 2008; Wubbels et al., 2006). Ten teachers were nominated by teacher educators from our network. The data related to one of these teachers was used in the first phase of this research to further sharpen and improve the research design and was excluded from this analysis. Ultimately, nine teachers, six of them male and three female, met the criteria and were included (see [Table 1](#)).

Data sources

Three data sources were used for this analysis: lesson observations, nine stimulated recall interviews, and video recordings. The purpose of the lesson observations were to gain insight into the manifestation of friction in the classroom and the response to or shaping of this friction by teachers. The stimulated recall interviews were used to let teachers explain how and why they handled the appeared friction the way they did (see [Appendix A](#) for an interview protocol). The teachers were asked to describe this moment, pinpointing what and why specific things were said by their students and what they did at that moment and why. As such, the interviews provided us with the opportunity to further analyze the

Table 1. Respondents.

| Teacher | Teacher experience | Subject | Level | Class composition | Topic/issue |
|------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. James | 10 | Social Sciences | Vocational | Multicultural | Dealing with different perspectives |
| 2. Michael | 2 | Social Sciences | Vocational | Multicultural | Israel & Palestine conflict |
| 3. Mary | 11 | Dutch Language | Pre-university | Monocultural | State of the human being |
| 4. Omar | 6 | Global Politics | Pre-university | Multicultural | Terrorism |
| 5. Steven | 14 | Religious Education | Pre-university | Multicultural | Organ Donation |
| 6. Emma | 13 | Dutch Language | Pre-university | Monocultural | Bullying |
| 7. Brian | 2 | Social Sciences | General | Multicultural | Tolerance |
| 8. Julia | 12 | Social Sciences | Pre-university | Monocultural | Multiculturalism in society |
| 9. Oscar | 27 | History | Pre-university | Monocultural | Dutch Culture |

meaning of the teachers' actions. The video recoderings were used to pinpoint friction by asking the teachers at which moment they thought different perspectives collided. This moment was then analyzed by looking at the film of the lesson. The second author and two research-assistants took the interviews and collected the data. For this study, we focused on the interaction *between* the teachers and their students to unravel the educational process of meaning making caused by the friction that appears in the playground that is the classroom (Lozano Parra et al., 2021).

Positionality

I (first author) work as a teacher educator on the faculty of Humanities. Most of my teaching is focused on the department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, where the teacher education department is accommodated in Utrecht. I teach courses in learning and teaching, citizenship education, and specific courses for future history teachers. I have conducted research on the meaning of democracy in Dutch secondary education. The coauthors of this paper all hold a position at the same university and played a part in the supervision of this study. Their research includes worldview education, (religious) conflict, and multiperspectivity.

In my career as teacher educator, I experienced some of the risks of accepting friction into my classroom. Before that, I was a history and social sciences teacher at a school in Amsterdam with a diverse population. My ideas about conflict and friction were initially formed by European scholars such as Chantal Mouffe, Philippe Meirieu, and Gert Biesta. These ideas shifted when I began reading international work as part of my doctoral research, which also led to a shift in focus on, for example, multiperspectivity and the teaching of controversial issues in a European context.

As a son of a Dutch mother and a Colombian father, my bicultural background influences my decision-making to this day. For example, it led to my decision to work at a school with a diverse student population and the focus on friction in citizenship education in my research. This being said, living in a country in which seeking consensus, or "het poldermodel," has been made an important part of Dutch (political) identity, personal experiences as part of my background caused me to be cautious about this model and its premises.

Data analysis

A cross-case analysis (Kahn & Van Wynsberghe, 2008) and an analysis of emerging themes in the empirical data were conducted for this study (Charmaz, 2008). All analytical steps were made using NVIVO software. For the outline of our analytical process, see Table 2. The first analytical step was a close reading of both the lesson observations and the interviews to identify the moments in which friction appeared in the classroom. We selected the data in the lesson observations that were pinpointed by the teachers themselves through stimulated recall during the interviews as the moment in which “different perspectives” appeared. Furthermore, we also selected data in the lesson observations that appeared to be part of one of the three components of educational friction during the close reading but were not recalled by the teacher during the interview. Then, we identified the segments in the interviews that shed light on the question of how and why the teachers chose to act, say something, or otherwise acted in the way they did during their lesson when friction appeared.

The second step of the analytic process was coding those segments in the selected data, which we identified as one of the three components of educational friction, using our framework as heuristic lens. For a text fragment to be coded as friction, the text should point toward “the perception of incompatibility of goals” (Lozano Parra et al., 2021, p. 39). The “perception” part means that words and utterances not only include “what the friction was about,” but also refer to those segments pinpointing what “the friction was ‘actually’ about” according to the individuals that were involved in the conversation. Consequently, descriptions, clearances, and attempts to recapitulate, sharpen, change, or challenge related to the friction in the classroom were included.

We consider both behavior and attitudes as inherent parts of friction. Therefore, we did not code them as separate aspects but chose, instead, to use them as indicators of friction. “Frictional behavior” refers to “actions or statements with the intention to let the opponent abandon or modify its goals;” “frictional attitudes” refers to emotional statements that show fear or anger, as well as cognitive attitudes, such as the use of stereotypes or tunnel visions (Lozano Parra et al., 2021, p. 39).

For a text fragment to be coded as narrativity, the coded text had to be an effort “to understand reality by telling or relating one’s own personal story” to explicate, make a point, and/or understand that what is spoken about in the classroom (Lozano Parra et al., 2021, p. 40). We coded a text fragment as play when it addressed “the

Table 2. Example of coding.

| Coding | Description | Example |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Friction | The perception of incompatibility of goals | Asylum seekers should be sent back, vs. we should take care of more refugees |
| <i>Frictional behavior</i> | Action/statements to undermine opponent | “If you say something like that, do not be surprised when someone throws a brick at your head” |
| <i>Frictional attitudes</i> | Anger, fear, tunnel vision or stereotypes | “All people who seek asylum are fortune-seekers” |
| Narrativity | using one’s story to understand, make a point and/or relate to yourself and/or one another | “My father is Italian, I know what it is like to have a migration background” |
| Limitations of the field of play | The acknowledgment and/or crossing of limitations and/or rules Provoking the limitations in the classroom and/or society about that what causes friction | “We do not use the word foreigner in this classroom” “Do you consider euthanasia as progress?” |

acknowledgment and crossing of limitations and/or rules that are part of the classroom” (Lozano Parra et al., 2021, p. 42). Based on the interviews, we also coded fragments in the lesson observations as play when teachers referred to a specific moment that called for explicating or setting the limitations of the playground. In addition, we coded fragments as play that showed teachers and/or students activating each other to “test the boundaries.” This code referred not only to the limitations of the classroom—referring to what can and cannot be said—but also to questions or statements pinpointing limitations within society about the subject that was debated. In some cases, a segment had more than one code. For example, a sentence that referred to a personal narrative could at the same time test the limitation of the playground. For a clear view of all the analytical steps and their implication, see [Table 3](#).

To make this research process both more transparent and rigorous, we applied an audit trail procedure with an independent researcher to review the analytical steps and outcomes (Akkerman et al., 2008). The results of the audit trail were used in the final data analysis. For example, the coding segments of both friction and limitations were sharpened, and the use of the heuristic tool was further explicated. We wrote an analysis for every respondent to further clarify the interrelation between the three components of educational friction and the relation between the actions undertaken during the lessons and the justifications, thoughts, and feelings of the teacher expressed during the interviews. As a final step, we analyzed all data once again through an emerging themes analysis in NVIVO to reveal those aspects within the selected data during Step 2. We refrained from starting this analysis directly after the first coding of the selected data (Step 2) to separate observation from interpretation as clearly as possible. By doing so, we separated the empirical analytical steps (Steps 1, 2, and 4) from the interpretative analytical steps (Steps 3 and 5), to structure an iterative process that does justice to both the empirical analysis and the interpretative, abductive process.

Limitations

This research project was limited by a small sample size. Therefore, it does not capture the range of teacher practices when it comes to handling friction in Dutch classrooms. Our sample was also limited demographically; the selected teachers were all working in the middle and north of the country. Furthermore, more ethnic, social, and cultural diversity would yield richer data and findings.

Findings

Here we introduce three vignettes that illustrate what we found as a result of analyzing the data through the heuristic lens of our Educational Friction Modelling Framework. For readability, we will start each vignette with a table to present a more general overview of the findings concerning the specific theme of the vignette. If one or more teachers were not part of the table, we did not find segments to code for that specific finding. Also for readability, we present the findings of our analysis of the interviews concerning the specific theme of the vignette separately.

Table 3. Analytical steps, process, and strategy.

| Analytical steps | Analytical process | Analytical strategy ¹ |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Identifying moments of educational friction within the raw data | <p>1.1 Selection of discourse and utterances from the lesson observations based on the stimulated recall interviews that showed a situation or experience that would possibly be characterized as educational friction.</p> <p>1.2 Selection of discourse and utterances from the lesson observations that could also be characterized as educational friction, apart from the stimulated recall.</p> <p>1.3 Selection of discourse and utterances from the interviews that shed light on thoughts, feelings and justifications of respondents' actions that were undertaken in relation to educational friction.</p> | Initial coding |
| 2. Identifying perceived friction, narrativity and the limitations of playground within the selected data of each respondent | <p>2.1 Coding discourse and utterances from the selected lesson observation data considered as perceived friction, narrativity and the limitations of the playground.</p> <p>2.2 Coding discourse and utterances from the selected interview data that connected to the perceived friction, narrativity, and the limitations of the playground in the data of the observed lessons.</p> | Selective coding |
| 3. Reading, reevaluating and rewriting of personal memos and observations | <p>3.1 Memo writing, based on the coding and analysis of Step 2.</p> <p>3.2 Writing analysis reports for each respondent, describing the various ways in which friction, narrativity, and the limitations of the playground appeared, and connected it to the described experiences, justifications, and reflections given during the interviews.</p> | Memo writing |
| 4. Identifying emerging themes that appear within the selected data coded during step 2 | <p>Coding emerging themes how teachers allow educational friction. Themes: live-world, the other perspective, didactics, diversity, own opinion, emotion, extreme statements, in the moment, lesson aim, letting go of lesson aim, power, provoke, relation, rhetoric, making room, steering, time-management.</p> | Selective coding |
| 5. Interpretation of emerging themes to further construct educational friction | <p>5.1 Analysing the meaning of the emerging themes, and relating them to the practice of educational friction.</p> <p>5.2 Analysing the different codes critically, resulting in five results to further outline as ways in which teachers handle friction. Some codes were insufficiently broadly supported. This was the case for: didactics, rhetoric and power.</p> <p>5.3 Formulating five ways that teachers use to handle educational friction: allowing extreme statements, making room, the use of personal stories, challenging and/or provoking pupils, and rationality vs. emotions.</p> <p>5.4 Accommodate themes to the focused new insights: live-world, the other perspective, diversity, and relation connected to the use of personal stories. Own opinion, in the moment, lesson aim, letting go of lesson aim, and steering connected to challenging and/or provoking pupils. Time-management connected to making room.</p> | Memo writing |

The “Moroccan Radiator:” Allowing extreme statements

We observed how students in different classrooms made a harsh or extreme statement, such as a statement that excludes certain (minority) groups and/or might be classified as possibly discriminating and/or racist. In all cases, we coded these statements as friction, covering different gradations such as surprise, collision, and resistance. For an overview of the extreme statements we found, see Table 4.

We now zoom in on one of the extreme statements that were made to show what the teacher in question did before, during, and after the statement was made. Oscar discussed “Dutch identity” with his pupils by asking all students to name aspects which they classified as “typically Dutch,” inviting them to say out loud those things that came to mind. Oscar’s lesson clearly had a teacher-directed approach in which he encouraged pupils to name more examples or explain a specific aspect that was mentioned. One of his students replied: “Dutch people do not trust what they do not know.” When asked by Oscar to elaborate, the student stated that for White people it is different to ride a bike through town than for people with a migration background, casually mentioning they could say so from personal experience. Oscar asked if he could ask one of the other students a personal question, and after confirmation, he asked: “do you recognize this yourself?” We will come back to this anecdote further below when we discuss our findings concerning teachers who directly invite specific students to share their stories. In this case, it is important to mention this moment to explain the context of the lesson. The whole class discussion directed by Oscar was at a point in which students were invited to share their own thoughts and experiences

Table 4. Extreme statements made during the observed lessons.

| Teacher | Extreme statement made by a student during the lesson | Gradations of tension as a consequence of the extreme statement made during the lesson | The response of the teacher concerning the extreme statement during the interview |
|------------|--|---|--|
| 1. James | “If you say something like that, do not be surprised if someone throws a brick in your face.” | <i>Surprise</i> because of the violent character of the statement | “See, then I will question him about the use of violence and about the use of violence and acceptable and legitimate |
| 2. Michael | “The Jews, the Jews. It is all because of the Jews.” | <i>Resistance</i> toward to exploring of both sides of the Israel Palestine conflict | “There is still a lot to gain when it comes to these students.” |
| 3. Omar | “Is there something like justifiable terrorism?” | <i>Discomfort</i> about the possibility that a controversial issue could be understood in a different way | “I want them to learn that words contain power. To articulate something means making sense of social reality.” |
| 4. Steven | “That is the same as saying you are not gay, when you actually are.” | <i>Collision</i> , frictional behavior to convince the other of the difference between them | “I think one is allowed to reject homosexuality, as someone may think being gay is fantastic.” |
| 5. Brian | “I have never seen a North-African guy with blue eyes and blonde hair.” | <i>Collision</i> , frictional behavior to convince the other of the point being made | “All conversations eventually come back to this point of framing people.” |
| 6. Julia | “a school that is characterized = by having a lot of foreigners is often a lower class kind of school.” | <i>Surprise</i> about a student using a specific concept when pinpointing fellow citizens with a migration background | “They know they will lose points if they use ‘foreigner’ in their exams.” |
| 7. Oscar | Teacher: “when I walk through the hallway, I see all the Moroccan students by the entrance.” Student: “the ‘Moroccan-heating.’” | <i>Disagreement</i> between the native students, and the students with a migration background about what it means to be discriminated | “Those remarks about the ‘Moroccan-heating’ are very politically incorrect (. . .), do not let journalists hear it.” |

with respect to cultural, social, and ethnic differences. The debate went from a more general discussion toward a more personal conversation. The following vignette presents what happened next.

Oscar mentions that it is a shame that [student A] and [student B] are absent because of the celebration of Eid al-Fitr because he wanted to ask them what they think. He says: “Can I make it more personal? I often play a little game of soccer with [student A] and [student B]. The children who join are always only the Moroccan children. Dutch boys never do.” Oscar continues: “If I walk through the halls [of the school], I always see the Moroccan students standing apart, close to the school entry. Apart from you,” to which one of the students replies: “The Moroccan radiator!” Oscar replies: “Okay, you call it the Moroccan radiator,” to which [student D] replies: “I hear you [Oscar] say that you only play with Morroccans, but they are actually Dutch. They are not ‘first grade migrants,’ I forgot how to say it correctly, but they were born and raised in The Netherlands.” Another pupil says: “they do have a Morrocan background,” to which another student yells: “they call themselves ‘Mocros.’” Oscar replies: “you are right, I find this very difficult as well, because it is a sensitive issue nowadays, how to call them. How I should call them. But [Student D], you know what I was trying to say. [Student E]?” Another student picks up where they left off: “they stick together because they share the same experiences. Different groups may share the same experiences; this is not only the case for Moroccans. I have a very good friend who is Moroccan, and she is always standing with us during breaks.” Another student says: “it is not the case that we are not accepting or something like that,” to which Oscar replies: “You are not? Would you go and stand with them during breaks?” to which several students reply: “No!” “Why not?” Oscar asks. “Because it is none of my business. There are other groups I don’t join; they are not my friends.” “So,” Oscar asks, “you accept that they,” and makes a circle with his arms. The pupil replies: “I am not looking for new friends.” “Well,” Oscar says, “is this a good example of Dutch tolerance then?”

Oscar then steered the conversation about experienced segregation at school toward a more general debate on tolerance and thus zoomed out. His students followed his lead and talked about how tolerance is different in The Netherlands from other countries and concluded that “racism is everywhere.” Instead of asking students about their experiences and their own stories, Oscar verbalized more general questions in the aftermath of the extreme statement, such as: “is tolerating different groups a possible threat for Dutch culture?”

Interview

In the interview Oscar called himself “the director” of the conversation, in which he often “provokes” his students. When asked to select a moment in which different perspectives collided, Oscar mentioned the moment described above. He explained that it was a shame that two students with a migration background were absent. Oscar’s aim was to show different stories that are part of the classroom, emphasizing his role as “the technical chairman.” When asked to explain what happened during this moment, Oscar noted how he tried to challenge his students and pull the conversation into “the school context.” He said:

Yes, about “the Moroccan radiator,” I thought, okay, now you guys are showing me your true colors. That is the moment I am getting somewhere, but it ended rather quickly. But I thought, now it is getting exciting. It is hard work for me, do you understand? I have to think, respond, seek other angles, I am doing three/four things at the same time. Every time when I get an answer, I think “okay, which road should I take now, what options do I have,” that is what I am thinking. You do not know what people are going to say, and you do not know where you want to go.

He aimed to “not confirm a collective perspective,” for which he tried to invite other stories in the classroom and challenge “rational answers” that his students tend to make to get past the “socially desirable answers” pupils often give. He was aware of the extremity of the remark and stated “not [to] let journalists hear it. It is a very politically incorrect statement.” Later during the interview, Oscars returned to this term and stated: “I thought it was a terrible term. (. . .) But as a teacher, it is my duty to get pupils to discuss such matters.”

When explaining why he did what he did during the conversation involving this extreme statement, Oscar clarified his aims when teaching sensitive topics. He seemed to have a clear idea about why he allowed a student to discriminate a whole group by using the term “Moroccan radiator.” In the end, Oscar aimed to make his pupils learn that “everyone has prejudices” and that is important “to be aware of them to eventually let them go.”

“Hey you, foreigner, over there on the left:” Challenging and provoking students

There were several moments during the lesson observations in which we saw teachers challenge their students in two different ways. Teachers asked their students questions that concerned the narrativity of the pupils themselves and made remarks to provoke them (see Table 5). In the following vignette, we describe the context in which Julia made a personal remark toward one of her students during a class discussion about multiculturalism in society.

Julia takes the lead during the conversation, asks clarifying questions, and invites students to respond to what is said by others. To start the discussion, she asks her pupils to raise their hands if they agree or disagree with the statement that “plurality in a community only causes danger to society as a whole.” She looks around to see who agrees and who disagrees. They talk about how multiculturalism shapes a certain “we versus them vibe” at school when different people learn about Dutch culture and traditions. They refer to the differences in school populations at other schools in their city and connect cultural and ethnic origins to problems which they then connect to social class differences. Then, Student A makes the following statement: “the common thing that is said about a school that is characterized by a lot of foreigners, is often ‘o yeah, foreigners, that means that it is a lower class school,’ which Results in an immediate aversion toward the school. For me, it is more about the socio-cultural aspect than about the economical aspect.” Julia immediately responds and says: “I am so happy that you talk about foreigners. Does anybody wants to respond?” Student B reacts: “Foreigners are tourists, right? It is not allowed to say foreigners, but okay.” Julia asks the whole class: “what is the difference between foreigners and immigrants?” Student B answers: “A foreigner is a tourist, and leaves the country at a certain moment.” “So, what bothers you about the term foreigner?” Julia asks. Student B responds: “Well, it is just the definition, I don’t know.” “It

Table 5. Teachers’ provocative remarks, and questions regarding narrativity during the observed lesson.

| Teacher | Provocative remark |
|---------|--|
| James | “What if someone says: go back to your own country?” |
| Mary | “That is exactly what I want, that you are not certain of anything anymore.” |
| Omar | “Is there something like justified terrorism?” |
| Julia | “Hey you, foreigner, over there on the left!” Narrative questions |
| Steven | “God gave you your body, that is interesting. Does that mean you will decline an organ if you need one in a life-or-death situation?” |
| Brian | “Now were going to look at the question what it [tolerance] means personally. Where in your personal live have you experienced tolerance? Who’s got an idea? Would you [student A] like to start?” |
| Oscar | “Can I ask you a personal question? Do you recognize this yourself?” |

emphasizes the feeling of we versus them when you talk about foreigners,” Julia responds. Student C replies: “I think some migrant groups do not want to integrate, like that group in the auditorium. If I join that group, they will laugh in my face and ask ‘what are you doing here standing with us now;’ I do not think they would want that.” Julia says: “Hey you, foreigner, on the left from Gelderland, what do you think?” Student A says that it is necessary to pinpoint “certain things” when they cause problems. Student A says that it is simply not about religion or something else, it is about how certain groups behave in society, to which Julia responds: “you think that it is politically correct nonsense?” to which the pupils responds consentively. “It is funny, right,” Julia responds, “how one uses specific terms unconsciously when describing a certain context.” The conversation continues. Julia challenges her students to think about Syrian refugees, explains how their own district evolved because of different groups of migrants, and provokes them by saying that “they are not ten anymore,” challenging them to analyze multiculturalism from an economical perspective while also asking them to show historical reasoning. To wrap things up, Julia asks the whole class which student was the most convincing during the conversation and asks them to give each other compliments and tips to do better next time.

Interview

Julia almost immediately referred to the “foreigner” comment in the interview. When asked about the school culture and student population, she explained that “economically speaking, there are differences in this classroom, but it is not a diverse group.” Then she said: “The funny thing is that during class someone said: ‘I am multi, I am a migrant,’ even though he has an Italian father who is totally out of the picture. But he does mention it and still he talks about ‘foreigners,’ calling himself a migrant because it is convenient, because he is no foreigner. So yeah, they make a certain distinction.” Not much later, when talking about her own background, Julia again referred to the “foreigner” comment. She said: “Student A knew that I condemn this term, and if they use it in their exams, I will deduct points for it.” Julia also said that “to challenge my students, that is maybe one of my most important goals. To challenge them on what they really think, why they think that way, and how they substantiate it.” When asked what she means by substantiating, she answered: “well, because they, we all say The Netherlands is a very plural society, but if you ask, ‘how can you tell or notice this?’ Well, zero. A circle of friends, the number of friends that they make over here that are truly migrants, and I do not mean something Indo or something Italian somewhere afar, it is very limited, our [circle of friends] as well.” When asked how she responds to these kind of statements, she said: “In the beginning it is hard, but at the end [of the year] you have known your students for almost a year . . . that is the moment I am very close with my students, and then I dare to challenge and provoke them, even to tease them a little . . . For example with Student A, well he did put the cat among the pigeons, and then I think, what comes around goes around, and I say: ‘hey you, foreigner, on the left from Gederland.’ My intention is to spice things up a bit, because a lot of the debates are kind of obedient.”

“Throwing a brick at someone:” Making room

We noticed how all teachers showed their awareness of the selection, timing, and framing of the topics that came up during their lessons. After coding these aspects as parts of the

playground, we further thematized these segments as “making room.” During the interviews, the teachers emphasized that the selection, timing, and framing choices they made were related to making room for their students during the lesson. For an overview, see Table 6. How teachers make room differs, as presented in Table 6. Still, the desired outcomes as described by the teachers during the interviews were the same: making room on the playground for students to express themselves. We will illustrate this process of making room by zooming in on James’s lesson and presenting the explanation he gave of his actions during the interview.

James opens his lesson by outlining the possibility that when his students leave school to work somewhere, they might have to work together with people which they do not agree with. He asks his students to take five minutes to write down some rules to ease their cooperation with people they do not agree with. After five minutes, James divides his class into groups and asks those groups to discuss the rules they came up with and talk about the skills you need to have a conversation with someone you do not agree with. James simultaneously walks around, stops at different groups, and joins the conversation. One student says: “one should not be surprised when he gets a brick in his face.” James replies: “You think there are situations in which you can justify . . .” to which the students replies: “I mean, if you say something like that [referring to a hurtful statement], you know the possible consequences.” James sticks with this group and says: “But well, a brick in someone’s face . . .” to which the groups responds with laughs. James

Table 6. Examples of making room, and how teachers describe this action.

| Teacher | Example of making room during lessons | Description in interview of making room |
|------------|--|--|
| 1. James | Approaches a group of students, and switches position toward his students | “I want to get up, but immediately I am aware that I will be standing, and [pupil A] is sitting down. So, I adjust my posture: I take a step back, [I put my] hands on my back because I thought I had to make space.” |
| 2. Michael | Planning a debate in which pupils need to take a stand | “I find it important to make a lot of room, or at least create incentives to change one’s perspective (. . .).” |
| 3. Mary | When two students end up defending their position during class, Mary ends the discussion by saying: “we are not having an extensive discussion right now.” | “I made this choice based on time management. What I find very difficult is that the the lesson only lasts fifty minutes. (. . .) I get the feeling that twenty minutes more would do more justice [to the lesson], in which I could have let more students talk about what they think” |
| 4. Omar | Postponing a task in which pupils would make an individual checklist | “I reserved some more time at the end of the class (. . .), I made up eight scenarios to confront my pupils, but I will do this next class, to round it all up, but I did not have enough time (. . .), but I wanted to do this [the discussion], so it is okay.” |
| 5. Steven | remains in front of the group, does not approach individual and/or a group of pupils | He always uses “we” during class and shows how he does not approach a pupil when he cannot hear him properly. This is a “pitfall teachers often fall into because it minimizes the distance,” causing other students not to be involved anymore, and consequently, the “we” gets lost. |
| 6. Brian | Making sure the pupil(s) is/are engaged during the lesson | Brian emphasizes the importance of “his body language to show his sincere interest.” |
| 7. Julia | Asking students different types of questions regarding the topic of the lesson | “you can plan all kinds of nice aims and activities, but [students] always bring other things [into the classroom] than you had planned.” She is mostly concerned with the kind of questions she could ask. Then all she can do is “hope that it will bring something good: usually it works, but not always. Sometimes it does not work.” |
| 8. Oscar | Asking students different types of questions regarding the topic of the lesson | “you do not know what people will come up with, and you do not know where you want to go either.” |

continues by asking them: “What is a consequence that is justifiable? When something says, what was the example you guys mentioned? Fucking Moroccan, go back to you own country?” Another student in the group replies: “Then you say: ‘Fucking Dutchmen.’” James responds: “Yeah? Is that allowed? What do you think?” James asks another student in the group. The conversation takes up seven minutes. Eventually, James breaks up the conversation in which his pupils all are talking at the same time and refers to a clip that he showed in which a Dutch comedian states that violence is a bridge too far, but “everyone can and may say anything they want to everybody.” One of the students replies: “I don’t think that is the case.” James replies: “Why, because it hurts?” Another student in the group explains how it depends on what has been said, and working together with a person who says such things also depends on what they are working together on—if it’s a minor job or something bigger. James then states that “he pauses this conversation for a moment” and returns to his desk in front of the class to start a whole class discussion to collect the conversations about the necessary skills other groups have been talking about.

Interview

James explained how he came up with the subject of the lesson. In a preceding lesson, he had asked his students to select a subject that they wanted to discuss, which led to the subject of discrimination because “a lot of these students experienced fierce examples of discrimination.” James explained how, in a previous conversation, one of the students told the group he had spent the night in a cell because he fitted a certain profile. “Then, three, four five pupils pointed to something similar.” When we asked James what he did, he said “well yeah, I want to make room for something like that, so I threw my lesson overboard, and we talked about it.”

Furthermore, James also recalled the comment of one of his students about throwing a brick in someone’s face. He explained that he allowed the statement because he wanted his students to think, stating that “this goal has been achieved, because I saw that they were conscious about [the question] how to converse with such a person.”

Moreover, apart from mentioning that he made room for his students to talk about personal experiences of discrimination, he also explained during the recall how he physically made room. When recalling the extreme statements, James described how he consciously “makes room” while he watched to conversation on camera: “I wanted to get up, but immediately I was aware that I would be standing, and [pupil A] was sitting down, which could lead him to back off a little. There is a relationship of authority, but I want to have a conversation as equals, so I have to adjust my posture. At that moment I noticed: ‘wait a minute, maybe I am intimidating [him].’” When asked how James noticed he was intimidating, he responded: “I noticed it in his reaction. So, I adjusted my posture: I took a step back, [I put my] hands on my back because I thought I had to make room, and therefore, I also need to physically make space.”

“Making it emotional:” Rationality versus emotions

Before discussing our findings, we want to mention one last theme we found in the interview data, which are best exemplified through statements teachers made during the interviews (see [Table 7](#)). We believe this finding to be important because we suspect that their thoughts and ideas on how to cope with emotions and their expectations when it

comes to rationality influence how these teachers handled friction. Therefore, we conclude this section with examples from the interviews and a description of the context in which these teachers made their statements.

Some preferred communication based on rational argumentation, while the others expressed how emotions help to clarify what students *really* think, moving beyond rationality. Oscar was triggered by “socially desirable answers,” pinpointing this in the interview as “rationalizing” students “not saying what they actually think.” James preferred rationality over emotions. During the interview, he stated that “students sometimes connect their opinion to their identity,” which “fires up the conversation” and “makes it emotional,” which he does not appreciate. He hoped that conversations are based on rationality, which is something that he “exemplifies,” showing “that you must accept emotions, but not make them part of everyday life.” If a student is emotional, he intervenes by saying that “it is okay that you feel emotions, but [decide that] now is not the moment [to show them].” He also stated that he thinks it is impressive if a student makes clear to him that “maybe you are right, maybe I am not capable to have this conversation right now.” Other teachers also emphasized the importance of rationality. Mary asked herself what to make of emotions in debates, saying that emotional arguments can be a very fruitful strategy in a debate. Nevertheless, she stated that “in my area of expertise,” she teaches her students “not to use emotions,” but to use “good arguments,” meaning “arguments based on stats and numbers, and research from experts, and not to act from gut feelings.” Julia also liked it “if it is not only ‘I think this or that’ or ‘that is how I experience it’.” She “like[d] the combination of experience with rationality, because otherwise, you will come back to the level of ‘tak[ing] me as I am,’ and then everything stops. The debate stops, and then your personal growth stops.” It seems that in order to decide upon their next step, teachers distinguish between rationality and emotions. For example, for teachers like Oscar, rational arguments are a sign to challenge students on another level. He may, for instance, ask a specific student if he “can ask her a personal question” and invite her to share her narrative which he knows has the perspective of the Other and will, therefore, cause friction. For teachers such as James and Mary, emotional arguments or remarks are a sign that a specific student or the

Table 7. Interviewed teachers about emotions in the classroom.

| Teachers | Interview |
|----------|--|
| James | “Pupils sometimes connect their opinions to their identity. Then, it can become a heated and emotional conversation, which I do not always value that much. There has to be room for emotions, but I hope that one has a conversation based on rationality. Then, emotions have to absent.” |
| Michael | “I sometimes pinpoint the tone of the conversation when it hardens, and then ask my pupils to tone down their voice, or I quiet down the discussion altogether to calm them down in the hope they will start using arguments again.” |
| Mary | “I also lead the debate team, and sometimes pupils use emotional arguments, but those are not always necessarily good arguments. In essence, for this subject and during a lesson like this one, I do not teach them to use emotional arguments.” |
| Emma | “Sometimes some students collectively start crying, especially when it comes to first graders, (...) for example when one pupil confesses to being bullied, and then pupils start crying, well, then your class is over.” |
| Oscar | “I bring it [the subject of the lesson] closer to them, I point out that they are ‘caught up in their own minds,’ and when I make it more personal, that is when they see, and that is what I hope, that they will realize: ‘wait a second, I say this or that, but I feel it differently.’ This group has a talent for rationalization, (...) and as a result, you get socially desirable answers.” |

interaction between students needs readjusting toward a more rational way of expressing themselves.

Discussion

We began this article with the claim that friction in the classroom should not be understood as something to be solved but, rather, as an inherent part of democratic education in a liberal and plural democracy. By using our Educational Friction Modelling Framework, this study provides insight into how teachers handle friction as tension that charges their classroom when extreme statements are made (Pace, 2015). Instead of dismissing or downplaying the friction, these teachers let it play out and tried to use its potential and opportunities.

Educational friction entails the tension that charges the classroom, in which the dynamic and contested dimensions that are inherently part of democracy are shown (Hess, 2009; Mouffe, 2005; Pace, 2015). Therefore, our framework deepens the concept of the charged classroom by presenting a framework to analyze how the classroom gets charged in the first place. Furthermore, it notes how the teachers respond to the tension—whether they acts as an avoider, container, or risk-taker (Kitson & McCully, 2005). The ways in which our selected teachers chose to shape their democratic education are in line with previous research about the teaching of controversial issues (Hess & McAvoy, 2015) and about teacher educators and the strategies they teach preservice teachers, which Pace (2019, 2021), called contained risk-taking. As such, our framework not only deepens the concept of the charged classroom, but it also contributes to further developing teacher educators' efforts to teach teachers contained risk-taking. The Educational Friction Modelling Framework, in general, and the three components of friction, narrativity, and the playground, specifically, function as sensemaking concepts in this respect. Our framework supports the teachers' analysis of their own positionality and actions in the charged classroom by:

- (1) Signaling the different behaviors and attitudes that enable them to pinpoint the gradation of friction;
- (2) Making teachers aware of different narratives in the classroom and of which stories are told, and *not* told, so they can distinguish different perspectives and how these relate to each other in the perceived friction;
- (3) The metaphor of the playground enables teachers to reflect on their own boundaries, how to cope with cheats and spoilsports, and reevaluate the boundaries of the charged classroom as a playground in which the agon as part of democratic learning is played out.

We further explicate this analysis by connecting the vignettes to our framework, and relate the latter to insights concerning the teaching of controversial issues, silencing students, and the emotional dynamics of political discussion.

Extreme statements

Our first vignette exemplifies how teachers allowed extreme statements in the classroom. Had these statements been made by adults outside the classroom, at least some of them

would have been potentially prosecutable. These statements were made both in the homogenous and heterogenous groups. It was clear that teachers teaching more homogenous groups often took “the other perspective,” challenged and provoked opinions when they felt this extreme statement hinted toward the voice of the majority, and in some cases, played devil’s advocate. Nevertheless, extreme statements were “accepted,” and charged the classroom in both class compositions. Our selected teachers seemed more concerned about a lack of multiple perspectives than about colliding perspectives. Some of the teachers even mentioned that they felt bad because some students—all with a migration background—were not present.

During the interviews, teachers showed awareness of the extremity of the statements being made. Still, they chose to accept them because of their potential educational value, even if those statements were stigmatizing. All teachers emphasized the importance of the establishment of a trust-bond, which we have classified as a precondition for handling friction. As such, this trust-bond enables what Huizinga called the “elasticity of human relations.” The bond empowers teachers and students as players to be more flexible with each other, hence the extreme statements and their acceptance by the teacher.

With Callan (2011), we argue that in a room in which learning is central, and the trust-bond is strongly manifested, silencing students is wrong when we keep in mind that the charged classroom is a space that offers room for learning, and thus for fumbling, falling down, and making mistakes, with students having shown up in good faith and showing a willingness to learn (Callan, 2011; Lozano Parra et al., 2021). Callan’s view about not silencing students even when they utter extreme statements connects to our framework and its rationale: democratic learning also entails experiencing conflict through, or maybe even because, it is sometimes painful. The classroom as an agonistic playground has its boundaries. Teachers already have an idea about those boundaries; classifying statements as extreme during the interviews shows that a certain boundary has been crossed because such a statement outside of the classroom would be unacceptable. However, the student is not dismissed but, rather, invited to speak up and reflect on what has been said. Teachers used the friction in their charged classroom.

We believe, then, that derogatory statements, even when a particular (marginalized) group is highly stigmatized, should not be silenced or dismissed from the playground (Callan, 2011). Oscar tends to agree; during the interview, he showed disappointment about the fact that two students with a migration background were not present when another student made the “Moroccan radiator” comment. It could well be that this student would not have made this comment when the two students with a migration background were present. However, the point is that Oscar apparently would have still allowed the statement if these students were present. Accepting such statements does not mean allowing pupils to insult or harm each other; flagrant, individually targeted insults that do not state anything about the sensitive topic or controversial issue as a contested dimension should be condemned (Callan, 2011). In most cases, however, such flagrant statements are more of a class-management kind of intervention. In all other cases, the question should be: “what can be experienced, and thus learned, if I as an educator choose to let this statement exist in my classroom?” If the answer can be directed toward a further clarification of the perceived gradation of friction, and/or the appearance of different narratives on the playground, and/or the (re)negotiation of the status quo, then the extreme statement can contribute to an

important aspect of what democratic education entails: letting students experience the conflict that is an inherent part of human relations.

The trust-bond is an important condition through which to allow the friction, not only to keep all pupils *in play*, but also to acknowledge the togetherness on the playground even if the tension rises. In the case of Oscar's lesson, he was aware of the extremity of the statement, but because the statement opened an opportunity to talk about segregation in their own school building and the fact that the statement, however painfully discriminating, was not aimed at insulting or harming an individual. Oscar chose to allow the statement and use the friction to talk about a difficult subject that needed to be discussed, asking different students to share their narratives and ideas.

Our framework is built on the assumption that conflict and difference is at the heart of democratic education. Furthermore, democratic education from an agonistic perspective also means to accept that "equal deliberation" is not a given. The classroom getting charged is precisely what is needed to engage into those contested dimensions of democracy (Hess, 2009). The friction as a consequence of an extreme statement enables the ongoing and necessary (re)negotiation of power relations (Mouffe, 2005a), facing the inequality that is even present in students' own schools in some cases. Silencing a student would risk losing that opportunity. Our framework can be used as a tool for peer group learning to map out this friction, reflecting on what to do if these voices are not silenced and speak out.

Challenging and provoking students

We have focused on how teachers handled friction when extreme statements were made. In our view, the question at stake at that specific moment is: "which risk do I as a teacher take at this specific moment, and why?" As we showed, some of the teachers chose to challenge and even provoke their students after the extreme statement was made. Many teachers defined challenging pupils as one of the most important aims of their lessons.

In divided and politically polarized societies, teachers should allow more extreme voices to be heard because of the more direct connection of students to controversial histories and the different perspectives on those stories (Barton & McCully, 2007). One could argue that the political landscape of the Netherlands is polarized. Nevertheless, because of the absence of conflict, and its focus on consensus and deliberation, The Dutch political landscape cannot be characterized as conflictual as, for example, Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, we argue that in highly developed liberal democracies, playing out what Mouffe (2005a) calls *the political*, experiencing gradations of friction such as discomfort, resistance, and/or surprise, is of pivotal importance. To learn democracy also means to attend to its conflictual parts and its contested dynamics every now and then (Hess, 2009; Mouffe, 2005a). In this sense, one could argue that polarization is not only an opportunity for democratic learning; it is also a signal that *the political* has not been attended to properly. When their teachers allow friction in the classroom, pupils learn that democracy entails a certain conflict that needs to be played out *within* the commonality of the playground from time to time, instead of digging oneself into trenches with their "own" people. Alternatively, democracy flourishes because of the relation with fellow citizens who are others (Lozano Parra et al., 2021). We argue that challenging and provoking pupils is the teachers' attempt to play out *the political*. Allowing friction to be part of the classroom, without aiming toward a certain solution, is an important aspect

of democratic learning if we accept that conflict and difference are important parts of democracy.

Needless to say, *how* a teacher handles friction influences the participation of students. We want to emphasize this point by making a distinction between *taking part* in play and *being part* of the playground. In taking part, the teacher participates as a player, possibly influencing other players. By being part of the playground, teachers are involved in the play without losing a certain distance from it in order to retain their position to handle the friction that is played out. During the interview, Steven made frictional statements about his allowance of students' statements. He showed awareness of *what* he thinks about a sensitive topic and explains *how* it relates to him as a subject *within* the classroom at that moment. Because of this reflection, he classified himself as "more professional" than his colleagues. The relevance for the point we want to make does not lie in *what* he believes and teaches but, rather, lies in his *awareness of* those beliefs and his choice to act or not to act on his own beliefs in his educational practice. This awareness, we argue, is part of what Biesta (2011, 2020) called subjectification: Steven is existentially aware of *how* he is. Occasionally, some of our selected teachers seemed to make it hard for students to participate as subjects as a consequence of teachers taking part in play, which seems to make students hesitant to engage further. By choosing not to act, Steven made space for his students to make up their own mind, to say what they want to say, without his interfering in the subjectness of his students. His interference could potentially refrain his pupils from participating or showing a perspective that differs from what their teacher stated. This awareness is also reflected in Oscar's statement that "you don't know what people will come up with, and you do not know where you want to go either." We do not classify this as a lack of awareness on his part or as disinterest in what happens in the classroom. Instead, it shows a radical commitment to that moment and an awareness of teachers as subjects on the playground. If teachers want to handle the different gradations of friction and make it educational, they must allow themselves to be surprised, feel resistance, or sense collision. When they commit to being a subject in the charged classroom, they can subsequently think, feel, and choose to act or not to act as subjects and, as such, choose *how* to challenge or provoke without reducing the room for students to participate.

Making room

Teachers challenge the boundaries of the classroom by inviting narratives that were constituted outside and let them play within the four walls of the classroom. Two of the teachers Pace (2021) analyzed also used "narratives to involve students affectively and intellectually" (p. 173). In this study, making room was exemplified by James's decision to use one student's narrative about the discrimination she felt outside the classroom. Furthermore, this example shows how friction is verbalized through the different pieces of narrative that students share, which can also be seen as a challenge teachers present to their students on the playground.

In their decision to extend or limit the time of students, teachers also handle the extent to which the friction is played out. By thinking about their physical presence, some of the selected teachers show awareness of the ways in which their body limits and/or challenges their students' presence, worrying that if their bodies are too present, as subjects on the same playground, their students' appearance as subjects could be affected. These

ways of making room all connect to Huizinga's idea of play as an act of freedom. By allowing not one direction but several, teachers enact their own subjectness and invite their students to be subjects and move freely on the playground, deciding where to go in the moment. As such, teachers need to ask themselves: where is my body on the playground? How does my non-verbal communication affect the space for this student? Do I need to make room or focus my presence to invite students? These questions lead to teachers' reflecting on how to act when engaged in friction in the charged classroom as they are aware of the differences in outcome when they are *taking part* or *are part* of the playground.

Emotions vs. rationality

Some of the teachers made a distinction between emotions and rationality and used it as signals to choose how to further handle the friction at hand. For some, emotions in the classroom were a sign to limit the students on the playground and emphasize that communicating rationally is preferable. Alternatively, others saw "rationalization" as a sign to challenge students to dig deeper, moving beyond "socially desirable answers." As such, this distinction seems to help teachers decide when they need to act or refrain from acting in the charged classroom when friction appears.

Teaching sensitive topics often causes passionate response (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Journell, 2018). Barton and McCully (2012) argued that teachers need to engage both the intellect and the emotions in the classroom. When it comes to the agonistic model of democracy, Mouffe (2005a) emphasized the importance of *passions* as part of the political and the need not to dismiss them in favor of rational deliberation. Furthermore, there is a growing interest in the emotional dimension of political discussion, and scholars have argued that emotions need to be examined because they are inherent to political life (Garrett & Alvey, 2021).

This research has been limited to the analysis of transcribed data from lesson observations and interviews. Still, this study shows how teachers are not only aware of the possibility of passionate responses and the appearance of emotions, but that they also function as a trigger for teacher's actions. The majority of the teachers tried to build upon certain emotions, and if certain emotions or affect were absent, they tried to enhance them. Furthermore, in making room for their students, teachers made clear that they are conscious of their physical presence. In our view, this not only notes the power relations at stake in the charged classroom, and how this affects students' engagement when friction arises, but it also connects to the idea of emotional and affective embodiment as a way of communication that is part of dialogue in a charged classroom. Therefore, to further grasp emotions and passionate responses when friction arises, it would be interesting to study the videos we made as a next step to further investigate passion as part of the political and focus on how "bodies register emotion through stillness, movement, posture, breath, and other gestures" (Garrett & Alvey, 2021, p. 7).

Conclusion

Allowing extreme statements in the charged classroom and refraining from silencing students who utter stigmatizing words and sentences should not be taken lightly.

However, arguing that extreme statements are allowed in the classroom because in a liberal democracy freedom of speech is of pivotal importance is missing the point. The question “should teachers allow students to say everything they want?” is simply the wrong question. What can and cannot be said is not at stake here; it is the experience of what it means to live together in difference, which, in some cases, can be conflictual and, thus, painful. That is precisely the reason why friction as a consequence of an extreme statement should be something every teacher needs to be able to handle. Leaving the conflict outside of the educational realm would mean that painful conversations will never be played out or practiced within an educational context. Furthermore, it also could cause the idea that learning is not something that is part of disagreement or another gradation of friction. Or to put it differently, dismissing conflict also endangers the Deweyan idea of democracy as a collective experience.

Therefore, the above-mentioned question, “what can be experienced, and thus learned, if I as an educator choose to let this statement exist in my classroom?” should be the first question that teachers need to answer on the spot. If this question can be steered toward one or more of the following points, then the extreme statement should be allowed, and the friction can become educational:

- (1) The extreme statement can be directed toward a further clarification of the perceived gradation of friction.
- (2) The extreme statement can be directed toward the appearance of different narratives.
- (3) The extreme statement can be directed toward the (re)negotiation of the status quo.

The teachers included in this study pinpointed the established trust-bond as an essential condition to teach in a charged classroom in which friction arises. Then, an extreme statement being made can contribute to an important aspect of what democratic education entails: letting students experience the conflict that is an inherent part of human relations. We hope to have shown how our Educational Friction Modelling Framework, and the components of friction, narrativity, and play, can contribute to become better at answering these questions by reflecting on what happens when the tension rises.

Subsequently, our framework concerning educational friction deepens the idea of the charged classroom because it sheds light on what charges the classroom in the first place and, based on these insights, where to go next. Therefore, it also contributes to the further development of contained risk-taking as a way to educate novice teachers how to teach what Hess (2009) calls the dynamic and contested dimensions of democracy.

Our framework can be used to further develop what contained risk-taking means for the teacher in question. The three components can help structure the conversation about the risks and how to contain them and, more importantly, in case of an extreme statement being made, allowing it because of its educational value. To start, novice teachers can use the tool to observe a more experienced peer handling friction in the classroom. When they have become more experienced, having established a trust-bond with a group, they can film themselves when allowing friction and analyze their actions. Friction depends on the context in which the friction is perceived; therefore, our framework is timeless in the sense that more experienced teachers could also use it to reevaluate their practice since friction, and thus also what constitutes a sensitive topic or controversial issue, changes over time. From a research perspective, it would be our ambition to connect our findings to Results of similar international studies.

Comparing the commonality and differences when classrooms get charged could lead to interesting insight that transcend national borders.

Focusing on friction and its educational potential will hopefully contribute to the idea that occasional fireworks going off during class is not necessarily a bad thing. Friction is not something that needs to be fixed or needs to be eradicated in the name of civic learning or “proper deliberation.” In contrast, friction is an opportunity for learning democracy. An extreme statement being made in a space in which a strong trust-bond exists should not automatically lead to the dismissal of a student. Moreover, it should not lead to abandoning teaching difficult topics. Instead, these moments should be seen as invitations to learn an important part of democracy—the existence of friction as an inherent part of human relations in a pluralistic and diverse society.

Note

1. All strategies come from Charmaz (2008).

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Dear x,

Thank you for your time to do this interview, and for letting us observe one of your lessons. This interview will roughly take an hour. Would that be okay for you?

The purpose of this interview is to study how you handle certain aspects in the classroom. Subsequently, we will use these insights to strengthen the education of young teachers.

You invited us to observe a lesson in which there was room for different perspectives of students. For this interview we would like to ask you some open questions, and we will watch some moments of the lesson on film.

During the interview I will ask a lot of follow-up question, and I will keep my own opinion out of it.

All information will be studied anonymously. We will send you a transcript of the interview as soon as possible.

Do you have any question at this moment?

First, some general questions

- Name
- Subject
- Years of experience
- How long do you teach this specific group of pupils?
- How would you describe this school? Urban/rural, open/closed
- How would you describe, in percentages, the population of the group? Which kind of backgrounds are present in this group?
- Which migration- and/or cultural backgrounds are present in this group?
- Which religions are present in this group?

Questions about the lessons

- How did the lesson go? (Blow off steam)
- Which theme did you choose, and why?
- What were the aims of the lesson, and have these aims been achieved?
- Which strategies did you have in mind for this lesson?
- Could you explain why you make room for different perspectives of students in the classroom?

Questions during recall

- When did these different perspectives were best visible during your lesson?
- Is it okay to watch this moment or moments together on film? First, we will watch the clip. If you want, you can make some notes.
- Why did you choose this moment?
- What do you do here, and why?
- Which perspectives of students are visible here? Which strategies do you use to invite the pupils to share their perspectives?
- When you watch this clip, do you recognize your own views and/or perspectives in this moment?

Pedagogical relation

- To what extent is the relationship between you and your students important when talking about different perspectives on a certain theme?
- How do you stimulate and/or influence this relationship when talking about different perspectives? Refer to the recall.

Case-study

- What exactly are “valid” arguments?
- When a student discard homosexuality based on the Bible or Quran, would you say this is a valid argument?

Social media

- What is the impact of social media on the perspectives of students in the classroom? How do you notice this impact?
- Does social media play a role when you talk about different perspectives in the classroom? If yes, in what way?

Result

- To what extent do you share your own views with students?
- What is your own opinion concerning the topic of the lesson?
- Did your own opinion change as a consequence of the lesson?