GUIDE TO LEARNING

Well begun is half done
Learning happens everywhere and all the time
A child-friendly advice

TEN SOLUTIONS FOR FUTURE LEARNING
FINAL REPORT
DUTCH NATIONAL THINKTANK 2015
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The Dutch National ThinkTank 2015, 24 talented academics worked on solutions for future learning during a period of four months.

Summer school, in August the National ThinkTank spent two weeks at the SAS Institute in Huizen for an intensive kick-start to the program.
About the ‘nationale denktank’ foundation

The National ThinkTank Foundation (‘de Nationale DenkTank’) was founded in 2005. Its goal is to create a critical mass in order to influence decisions in a direction that will result in progress for Dutch society, by presenting an independent vision, thorough analyses, and innovative ideas.

To achieve this goal, the foundation appoints an annual National ThinkTank, consisting of a multidisciplinary team of about twenty highly talented PhD or Master students and graduates. During a period of four months the ThinkTank works on visionary and practical solutions for a topical societal issue such as education, healthcare, or sustainability. The project is facilitated by project leaders from McKinsey & Company and sponsored by a large number of Dutch universities, private companies and public institutions. At the end of these four months, the participants become members of the foundation’s alumni network, a hotbed for new initiatives and future leaders. Together with its steadily growing number of partners and alumni, the foundation continues to seek social impact and innovation.

The programme

The annual ThinkTank opens with an intensive summer school, allowing the participants to freshen up their analytical skills and to acquire knowledge on the topic, while engaging with experts and the ThinkTank’s partners. During the ensuing month, the participants map the main bottlenecks regarding the topic, working closely with experts within the field who have earned their stripes in business, government, or the academic world. An intensive one-week course follows in the sixth week, organized by THNK: School for Creative Leadership. THNK prepares the participants for the next phase: idea generation, creating solutions and workable advice. Two months later, at the beginning of December, the final results are presented to partners of the foundation and representatives from the public, private, and academic world. Subsequently, if feasible, the ideas are implemented either by the participants themselves, by partners, or by other interested parties.
Executive Summary of the Analyses

The Nationale DenkTank 2015 has focused on the following main research question: “How can we organize and facilitate education and learning in the Netherlands, in such a way that individual talent flourishes, and that learning better reflects the constantly changing environment?” While researching this question, the Nationale DenkTank 2015 identified four main aspects: the societal objectives of learning, the development of young children, innovations in education, and the role of the educational system in the Netherlands.

Societal learning objectives are insufficiently emphasized in Dutch education
Dutch education has a track record of scoring well on cognitive skills and testing. However, there is little room for personal development, and societal awareness is underemphasized in Dutch education. This might be partly explained by the fact that these aspects are harder to measure compared to cognitive scores. This also impacts the incentive that schools have to emphasize aspects of personal development and societal awareness.

Development of young children receives little attention, despite great potential
Within children’s learning environments, more attention and awareness regarding the development of young children is needed. Young children (between 0 and 4 years old) develop their brains at an astonishing rate, and this brain development lays the foundation for future social, emotional, and cognitive development. Our research indicates that 60% of Dutch citizens are not aware of the importance of this stage in their children’s lives. Furthermore, 88% of Dutch day-care centres and 96% of Dutch kindergartens receive poor scores on pedagogic knowledge.

Education innovations require ‘learning schools’
A ‘learning school’ forms the basis for successful innovation in education. A ‘learning school’ is a school where the vision on education, the effectiveness of education, and the way in which education is offered, is constantly being discussed and evaluated. Teachers are the key players in those learning school communities, and need to be facilitated and supported in this role.
by their school leaders. Another important factor contributing to learning school communities, are the examples given by radically innovative schools. These radically innovative initiatives can serve as a source of inspiration for innovation within the Dutch education system.

**Education system: different parties keep each other’s hands tied**
Several stakeholders in the Dutch education system are keeping each other’s hands tied at the systemic level, impeding change and innovation. There are potential gains in the day and year schedules, as well as in the transition from primary to secondary education. Bringing together different stakeholders in the system and bridging the gaps between them is also expected to have positive effects. Furthermore, there is a lot of ground to be gained in teacher education. Lastly, the Dutch education inspection (‘Onderwijsinspectie’) could be an important driving factor by focusing more on broader societal educational goals.
Getting to know the field, in September the National ThinkTank mapped the main bottlenecks concerning future learning, working closely together with 400 experts within the field, doing literature research and conducting surveys.

ExpertForum, on 1 October the National ThinkTank organized an ExpertForum during which the participants presented their research outcomes to 150 experts on future learning.
The ten solutions presented by the Nationale DenkTank 2015 in this report, cover five main themes, corresponding to the bottlenecks identified in the analyses.

1. Learning before school
The development of children peaks during the first few years of life. The period from birth to four years old is crucial for future health, language, and social-emotional development. However, the importance of this peak in development is relatively unknown among parents. Also, there seems to be a lack of attention for this theme in the broader sense, despite the fact that scientific insights could help parents and care givers to better support young children in their development.

2. More effective learning at school
There is a lot of ground to be gained in more effective learning at school, especially by actively involving children in their own learning process and by promoting a true learning environment within the school. Compared to other countries, Dutch students lack sufficient motivation at school. New forms of teaching, educational IT applications, and enhancement of feedback between teachers and students can contribute to a solution for the lack of motivation. Furthermore, a quality incentive for weaker schools could ensure better opportunities for both students and teachers.

3. Learning outside of school
Children spend two thirds of their time outside of school. Even then, they are constantly learning. However, there are large differences in the outside learning environments for children from different socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, more awareness about the differences in outside school learning environments needs to be created, in order to minimize unequal opportunities. Whilst working on challenging assignments outside of school with children from different backgrounds, mutual understanding and a richer learning environment can be created.
4. Innovation in the school system
Ideally, the school system enhances and facilitates innovation, and creates a better learning environment. A well-differentiated school system minimizes information loss, facilitates continuous learning, and ensures optimal learning outcomes and ample opportunities for students. Well-trained teachers play a key role in fuelling educational improvement. Effective teachers are essential for implementing innovations, whilst being supported and facilitated by school leaders and school boards.

5. Balancing learning objectives
Different learning objectives are insufficiently balanced. Personal development and the connection with other individuals and the environment are currently underemphasized, due to the perceived importance of knowledge acquisition and cognitive skills. However, personal development and interpersonal skills will become increasingly important in the future. By connecting children’s cognitive development with personal development and the connection to society, learning outcomes can be increased.

Food for thought
Several discussions concerning, for instance, the duration of summer vacations and paternity leave, do not consider the child as the central figure, but rather focus on commercial consequences or labour market arguments. However, in order to create equal opportunities for all children, the interests of the children need to be put first. In the final chapter of this report we will discuss several key facts in the discussion regarding summer vacation and paternity leave, which can serve as food for thought.
# The ten solutions cover five main themes

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THE 10 SOLUTIONS
1. Learning before school

THE BABY PYRAMID

CAMPAIGN WITH ESSENTIAL TIPS AND TRICKS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN

The baby pyramid | A good start for every child | For growing and grown(-ups)
Motivation
Well before they go to school, children start to learn. Think about it: the major part of brain development happens between the ages of one and four. These early years form the foundation for later social-emotional and cognitive development. However, 60% of the Dutch do not realize this. Information provided to parents by midwives and in postnatal care is strikingly lacking advice on the development of babies and toddlers, despite the fact that parents have an important supporting role in this development.

Solution
The Baby Pyramid is a national awareness campaign, providing information on the development peak of young children, and five practical and essential tips to support this development. Part of the campaign is an app that helps turn daily rituals into learning experiences.

Impact
The Baby Pyramid raises awareness of the importance of the period of development children go through between the ages of one and four. It helps parents and caretakers invest in the later development of children in a playful manner.

Looking for
Producers and sellers of products for young children, parent advisory boards, and other stakeholders interested in putting the Baby Pyramid on the map nationally.

Contact
Dorinde Jansma +31 6 1202 1630 d.jansma@nationale-denktank.nl
2. More effective learning at school

Our Class

Pupils and teachers working together towards a culture of improvement at school

- Provides teachers with valuable insights through constructive feedback from pupils
- Stimulates continuous dialogue between teachers and students
- Allows pupils to actively contribute to their classroom education
Motivation
Pupils rarely get the opportunity to structurally contribute to improving their education. That is a shame, since engaging pupils in improving their own education increases their motivation, improves the learning process, and stimulates the professional development of teachers. Would it not be wonderful if two and a half million pupils actively helped to improve education in the Netherlands?

Solution
The OurClass programme stimulates an open culture of improvement, by allowing pupils to give constructive feedback. In participating schools, teachers are trained to ask for and to receive feedback from their pupils. The free app OurClass (OnzeLes) facilitates this process, allowing pupils to give feedback quickly and easily. In the next phase of OurClass, the teachers are trained to engage in conversation with their pupils, using the results of the feedback app. In this way, pupils are invited to actively shape their own education.

Impact
OurClass can give teachers a helping hand by soliciting pupil feedback that can be used to improve their lessons. By engaging pupils in improving lessons, education can become more aligned with the inner world of the pupils. Engaging pupils also improves the relationship between teachers and pupils and increases their motivation to learn.

Looking for
Teachers willing to participate in a pilot project, together with their students, to further shape OurClass. Investors, feedback trainers, and software developers to develop a supporting app.

Contacts
Niels Agterhorst +31 6 4298 3305
n.agterhorst@nationale-denktank.nl
Lisa Hu +31 6 1255 6762
l.hu@nationale-denktank.nl
3. More effective learning at school

QUALITY EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS FOR EVERY LEARNING GOAL

- Easily find quality educational videos online
- Quality control by teachers and pupils
- Sharing lessons with pupils across the country
Motivation
Lecture-style instruction followed by individual homework assignments is inefficient, as pupils need interaction and supervision, especially while processing new information. If pupils watch educational videos at home, the time in class can be used to process the content; through group work and active learning, supervised by the teacher. This teaching method, flipping the classroom, is effective, but unfortunately seldom applied. The major barrier is the difficulty in finding suitable educational videos.

Solution
FlipFilm is an online platform showing all learning goals within a curriculum in a clear, structured network. All educational videos on FilpFilm are connected to a learning goal and come with trustworthy quality assessment.

Impact
FlipFilm ensures that teachers all across the Netherlands can combine their efforts, leaving more time for personal attention in the classroom. In addition, FlipFilm allows pupils to watch videos appropriate for their learning style, making learning more fun.

Looking for
Producers of quality educational videos, parties that could provide support in creating the network of learning goals, and parties to develop and maintain the online platform.

Contact
Jonas Voorzanger +31 6 8195 8192 j.voorzanger@nationale-denktank.nl
4. More effective learning at school

EDU BOX

A BOX WITH FRESH IDEAS FOR EDUCATION, DELIVERED TO SCHOOL QUARTERLY

Easily accessible initiative for all schools | Subscription to educational innovation | Stimulates sharing of best practices
Motivation
Good schools are learning schools: open to new ideas to continuously improve their tuition. Despite the fact that the majority of teachers are open to educational innovation, only a few are actively engaged in applying such innovations. Dissemination of good ideas is slow. It proves difficult to get a good idea to many schools and there is almost no sharing of best practices between schools. On top of that, schools lack an overview of what is available and have little time to search for suitable innovations.

Solution
The EduBox is delivered quarterly to any school with a subscription. The contents of the box can range from a lesson in citizenship in the form of a game, to a 3D printer on loan with coupons for a workshop. EduBox ensures its quality by selecting suitable partners. Initially, these are developers of educational materials. Later, partners could also be teachers willing to share their best practices. EduBox can put schools that are excited about the content in touch with its developers for further collaborations.

Impact
The EduBox enables a faster and more widely supported dissemination of educational innovations. The EduBox allows teachers and schools to be introduced to new ideas, and to share experiences in an easily accessible manner.

Looking for
Some parties for distribution and quality control are already involved, so sought after are enthusiastic partners for the contents of the box and schools willing to participate in a pilot version of the EduBox.

Contact
Rosa Stapel +31 6 4378 7733 r.stapel@nationale-denktank.nl
5. More effective learning at school

PUTTING THE BEST TEACHERS WHERE THEY ARE NEEDED MOST

Investing in teachers improves the quality of education
Regional teams of competent and caring teachers
Enhances equal opportunity for everyone in the educational system
Motivation
Children with lower socio-economic backgrounds have a higher chance of receiving poor education. They less frequently reach high levels of secondary education. High quality education is especially important for these children, because their (language) development is often less stimulated by their parents or guardians. For instance, in 2005, one quarter of students finished elementary school with a reading skill level lagging two years behind. Highly competent teachers are required to effectively support these children.

Solution
The Teacher Squad is a regional group consisting of teachers with a track record of correctly handling difficult classes, and a broad experience in education. These teachers will work in an elementary school with opportunity challenged children for three years. Together with the already present group of teachers, they will work on improving the level of education; for instance, by making individual care programmes and materials for lessons. Alternatively, effort can be put into improving the relationship between school and parents.

Impact
An estimated 35 elementary schools can be assisted yearly in this programme, leading to a system of education with more equal opportunities for all students.

Looking for
Participants and supporters. Enthusiastic teachers willing to participate, support of educational institutes, school board members, city council members and sponsors.

Contacts
Frank Westhoek +31 6 41718594 f.westhoek@nationale-denktank.nl
Thijmen Jessen +31 6 42978653 t.jessen@nationale-denktank.nl

Target group: 5% of elementary schools

5% = 73,000 children

Four types of quality enhancement programmes

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Improves schools that are already of good quality

Improves weak schools to a higher quality

Four types of quality enhancement programmes

- Externally
  - Education consultancy
  - Quality enhancement programmes in Amsterdam

- Internally
  - Stichting LeerKRACHT (Teacher’s Foundation)
  - De Lerarenbrigade

The level of education; for instance, by making individual care programmes and materials for lessons. Alternatively, effort can be put into improving the relationship between school and parents.

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Contacts
Frank Westhoek +31 6 41718594 f.westhoek@nationale-denktank.nl
Thijmen Jessen +31 6 42978653 t.jessen@nationale-denktank.nl
6. Learning outside of school

MAKE & MEET CHALLENGE

PUPILS WITH DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDs COMPETING TOGETHER

Teams feature a mixture of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds

The library recruits pupils from black, mixed and white schools

Working together creates mutual understanding and friendship
Motivation

42% of elementary schools in the Netherlands’ four largest cities are so-called “minority schools”: meaning more than 70% of their students are of foreign descent. Moreover, there are huge differences between schools in terms of the number of extracurricular activities per pupil. The Make and Meet Challenge (M&MC) serves both as an extracurricular activity and as an opportunity for cooperation between pupils of different backgrounds.

Solution

The M&MC is a national contest, (for instance in LEGO robotics, dance or theatre) for teams of pupils of varying backgrounds. The organisation works together with libraries to recruit and select pupils. Teams work towards the national finals during an intensive nine month period. A pilot project could comprise ten to twenty teams (100 to 200 children). A nationwide cooperation could reach 4000 pupils.

Impact

Working together to reach a common goal takes away prejudice and enables friendships. Secondly, a rich learning environment outside of school will promote a strong and broad development of all pupils.

Looking for

Libraries and schools willing to do recruitment and to provide working space and project coaches. A project partner willing to supply a challenging programme and to provide material support. A project partner to provide large scale accompaniment, and funding to cover the salaries of the organising committee. (pilot: 1 FTE, nationwide challenge: 3 FTE).

Contact

Job Kahmann +31 6 4275 1058
j.kahmann@nationale-denktank.nl
7. Innovation in the school system

the FIRST YEAR BLEND BONUS

STUDENTS OF MORE DIVERSE LEVELS ATTENDING CLASS TOGETHER

- Brings together children of different backgrounds
- Enables late bloomers and pupils lagging behind to realize their full potential
- Enables schools to offer a more differentiated educational programme
Motivation
In the Netherlands, children are categorized into vmbo (trade school), havo (mid-level) or vwo (pre-university level) schools at the early age of 12. However, three years into their education, 40% of students have switched to a level that is different than the one advised at the end of their elementary school. Broad first year classes in secondary education give students more time to level up before their final education level is decided. In past years, there has been a sharp decrease in the number of broad first year classes.

Solution
The First Year Blend Bonus counteracts this harmful trend. This financial bonus, with which schools can finance high quality, differentiated education, is calculated based on the pupils’ advised education levels. The higher the level of variation, the higher the bonus. As a result, a more accurate classification in education levels and a stronger development of citizenship is achieved for all students, without disadvantaging stronger students.

Impact
Of all OESO countries, the Dutch system of education is currently worst in class in terms of preventing social inequality. A larger number of broad first year classes will promote citizenship and equal opportunity. More children will have the opportunity to reach a higher level of education, which will have positive effects, both socially and economically.

Looking for
Social partners to support the implementation of the First Year Blend Bonus.

Contact
Laura de Adelhart Toorop +31 6 2959 3157 l.deadelharttoorop@nationale-denktank.nl
8. Innovation in the school system

TEACHER’S RESIDENCY

TEACHING CLASSES FOR A FULL SALARY AS A GRADUATE

Attractive perspective for every academic: teach sooner and earn a salary right away

Become a better teacher with the help of experienced teachers

A better fit with teaching practice will reduce loss of young teachers
Motivation
Good teachers are of the utmost importance for high quality education. The course towards a first grade teacher’s diploma is currently not popular among successful academics. Following the course adds a year of study and paying tuition without income. Because of the focus on research and due to limited guidance during internships, there is a poor fit between the teaching practice and the student’s prior education.

Solution
The Teacher’s Residency is a revision of the first grade teacher’s curriculum, with a paid, on the job specialisation as the end goal. After a summer school in which basic teaching skills are covered, students will learn the trade in two years of on the job training. They receive intensive coaching from an experienced colleague. Training and learning to develop courses are done separately, in development teams, together with other participants.

Impact
The on the job training and support during the Teacher’s Residency will lead to more qualified teachers, and it will limit the high loss rate among young teachers (currently 25% in the first two years).

Looking for
An ambitious first grade teacher’s educational institute or an educational institute to facilitate the summer school. Schools at which participants can teach, and experienced teachers for coaching and support.

Contact
Sarah van Ierlant +31 6 1215 0296 s.vanIerlant@nationale-denktank.nl
9. Innovation in the school system

FREEDOM OF SCHOOL-MANAGEMENT

ALLOW SCHOOLS TO WITHDRAW THEIR PARTICIPATION IN COORDINATING BOARDS

Dialogue between school and board | Space for educational leadership | Strong school leaders for education
**Motivation**
It is difficult for school leaders, who are in charge of managing the school, to implement innovations. They often experience resistance from within the coordinating board. Consequently, school leaders cannot utilize the constitutional freedom of education, which is supposed to provide space for innovation in schools. This is unfortunate, because analyses show that good leadership is crucial for educational improvements.²⁶

**Solution**
Freedom of school management would make it legally possible to separate the school from the coordinating board. The school can freely choose to associate with another board, on the condition that the quality of education is sufficient, and with agreement of the Participation Council (Medezeggenschapsraad).

**Impact**
The stronger position of the school facilitates an equal dialogue between school management and board. It will give rise to an incentive for boards to pay closer attention to the needs of individual schools. In practice, switching boards by schools would not occur frequently, because there are disadvantages for both parties.

**Looking for**
School boards who are willing to adopt existing schools in their organization and parties who will support this proposal in the political context.

**Contact**
Jaco van der Veen +31 6 2230 6891 j.vanderveen@nationale-denktank.nl
Milan van Manen +31 6 4978 8071 m.vanmanen@nationale-denktank.nl
10. Balancing learning objectives

LEARNING WISE

COORDINATE ACTION FOR ENHANCING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIALIZATION

Students with self-confidence and resilience | Action-oriented coalition connecting social parties | Expanding the task statement of teachers and adapting the course content
**Motivation**

Unilaterally, education erroneously focuses on ‘vacuous’ knowledge transfer. Insufficient attention is paid to enabling children to develop a personal connection with the course content and to find their own place in society. Increasingly, there are signals pointing towards the negative consequences of these inattentions. For example, one in five children worry too much. Children experience performance pressure, have elevated self-expectations, and are not allowed to ‘fail’.27 Although various stakeholders plead for increasing attention for personal development and socialization in education, a large transformation has yet to come.28

**Solution**

Once every two months, LearningWise gathers a group of twelve to fifteen social stakeholders, including teachers and educational researchers. This coalition takes action in the areas of scholar and educational practice, teacher trainings, and social awareness. The starting point is to pilot a transformation programme in five schools willing to expand task statements and course content.

**Impact**

Two years from now, personal development and socialization will be integral parts of the course content in schools. Furthermore, the curriculum of teacher training programs will have been permanently changed.

**Looking for**

Social partners who share this rationale and who are willing to take action on the abovementioned issues.

**Contact**

Richard van den Berg +31 6 1422 9949 r.vandenbergl@nationale-denktank.nl
Practice research, the National ThinkTank spoke to students (see photo), teachers, school management and policy makers about improvements concerning future learning.

Public debate in ‘De Balie’, on 4 November the National ThinkTank presented their first ideas about possible solutions for future learning during table conversations.
Finally: Food for Thought

Apart from paying attention to the ten proposed solutions, the National ThinkTank 2015 considers various topics of great importance for further improvements in Dutch education. These are the current debates around paternity leave, the long duration of the summer holidays and the inequality of chances in Dutch education.

The current social debates around these topics are primarily focused on emancipation and the labour market. This underexposes the concern for the development of children. The National ThinkTank 2015 suggests to give priority to the latter in these discussions. This chapter summarizes the most important facts.

Please check out www.nationale-denktank.nl/factpacks-2015 for a more extensive overview (please note this website is only available in Dutch). We also provide suggestions on how to conduct these debates from the child’s perspective.

1. Unequal chances in education

Currently, the Dutch education system is insufficiently able to provide equal chances to children from different backgrounds. The Dutch education system even amplifies the inequality by the inability of preschool programs and elementary schools to tackle this inequality, by the early selection at the age of twelve, and by decreased utilization of growth opportunities in the individual education path.29, 30, 31 Educational policy should contribute more to stimulate social mobility.

Contact
Frank Westhoek +31 6 4171 8594
f.westhoek@nationale-denktank.nl
2. Extension of paternity leave

There is an evident and significant relationship between paternity leave longer than two weeks, and the involvement of fathers in the nurture of their children. It has also been shown that increased commitment of fathers has a positive effect on both cognitive development and the behaviour of children, even if the analysis is adjusted for socio-economic status. Currently, fathers in The Netherlands only get five days of paid paternity leave. This is very limited in comparison to other countries. Therefore, the National ThinkTank 2015 recommends extension of the paternity leave.

Contact

Fleur ten Hacken +31 6 2048 3093
f.tenhacken@nationale-denktank.nl
3. Shorter duration of summer holidays

During the summer holiday period, when children are not going to school, the progression in lingual skills and numeracy of children decrease.\textsuperscript{35, 36, 37} Although the effects vary per child, the summer holidays predominantly negatively affect the children of parents with a lower socio-economic status.\textsuperscript{38, 39} Policy makers are recommended to reconsider the duration of the summer holidays.

Contact

Noreen van der Linden +31 6 4413 2334
n.vanderlinden@nationale-denktank.nl
Additional information

With this final report, the Nationale DenkTank wants to draw your attention to ten carefully selected, promising, and feasible solutions, derived from research conducted by the Nationale DenkTank 2015. In addition to this report, the following information is also available (in Dutch):

Additional information per solution
For almost every solution, additional information is available in digital form on the website: www.nationale-denktank.nl/denk-tank-2015/. Questions can also be directed to the participants of the Nationale DenkTank 2015. The corresponding contact details are provided in the various chapters of this report.

Summary of the analyses
The Nationale DenkTank 2015 has thoroughly analysed the opportunities for Dutch society regarding ‘the education of the future’. The summary of these analyses is available on the website of the Nationale DenkTank: www.nationale-denktank.nl/analyse-2015/.

How to contribute?
The Nationale DenkTank 2015 intends to bring these ten solutions into practice. Every solution chapter contains specific questions for stakeholders that can support the implementation of the solutions. Would you like to contribute to a solution? Please contact the person mentioned in the specific solution section.
References

Page 14: Themes

Page 22: The Baby Pyramid
2 Examples of recent neurological research into developmental stimulation are babylabs in Amsterdam (http://www.hoelerenbabies.nl/), Leiden (http://www.babylab-leiden.nl/) and Utrecht (http://babylab.wp.hum.uu.nl/) and Eveline Crone’s Brain Laboratory in Leiden which researches development in adolescents in the ages of 12-25. (http://www.brainanddevelopmentlab.nl/)
3 60% of the respondents was not aware of these processes in the first two to four years, Newcom General Public Questionnaire Nationale Denktank 2015.

Page 24: OurClass
6 From expert interviews we gained that feedback in class is not incorporated structurally, the questions asked don’t align with the student’s experiences or that results of feedback moments are not discussed with students. Also a lot of teachers fear criticism from their adolescent students.

Page 26: FlipFilm

Page 28: EduBox
10 This observation can be explained through the Technology Adoption Lifecycle of Moore (1991). This model describes the spreading of technology to different types of people. Spreading is easy in the first phase, in which innovators and early adopters use the innovations, but the next step (reaching an early majority of 34%) is more difficult.

Page 30: Teacher Squad

Page 32: Make & Meet Challenge

Page 38: Teacher Squad
17 This is the amount of students that participates annually in the First Lego League, a similar initiative with an open registration.
Page 34: The First Year Blend Bonus

Page 36: Teacher’s Residency

Page 40: LearningWise

Page 44: Food for Thought
29 Same as 28.
Solutions and implementation, the National ThinkTank generated numerous ideas and worked out ten solutions. Where possible these will be implemented either by the participants themselves, partners or other interested parties.