

## Ethno-culturally diverse education settings; Problems, challenges and solutions

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### Executive Summary

Some 40 years ago, the booming economies of North and Western European countries required extra labour force. These economical conditions elicited a flow of immigrant ‘guest workers’ from Southern Europe and North Africa to Western Europe. Initially, these immigrants were received with open arms and it was assumed that they would return as soon as the extra labour force was no longer needed. However, the ‘guest workers’ did not return to their home countries. Instead they brought their families along and/or created new families in their host society.

Currently, the same Western and Northern European countries have a steady influx of new immigrants, including refugees and asylum seekers. As a consequence, immigrants, ethnic minorities and nationals have created societies in which ethno-cultural diversity is the rule rather than the exception. For society at large, and for the school in particular, this diversity has brought new challenges, as even second and third generation immigrants are often still considered to be – and treated as – ‘second class’ citizens.

There is widespread agreement about the need for active cooperation between research and policy to improve the opportunities of immigrant youth in society and to ease their process of integration. This position paper sets out to inform policy makers, educators, researchers and other relevant persons about educational problems that are related to an increase of ethno-cultural diversity within Western European societies. It scrutinizes educational challenges related to ethno-culturally diverse societies and takes a closer look at relevant ways to cope with the challenges.

### **Educational challenges related to ethno-culturally diverse societies**

An abundance of studies shows that immigrant youth in modern western societies insufficiently benefit from schools and often leave schools without the necessary certificates and qualification. An important challenge for the school is to guarantee that every student, regardless of its ethno-cultural origin, has equal chances for social and economic mobility. Current schools seem to fail in addressing the needs of immigrant students.

Surveys have shown a growing intolerance among nationals towards immigrants’ presence in general and impatience about the rate of their integration. This ‘rejection’ is experienced by the immigrants as a depreciation of their presence. An important challenge for educational settings is to reduce the uncertainty and tensions that have evolved in interethnic relationships, to prevent racism and discrimination and to foster healthy intercultural relationships.

### **The ideal of multiculturalism**

Some scholars put forward the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ as basis and goal of multicultural education and they understand it as a notion that emphasizes ‘the value of diversity as a core principle’ and the principle according to which ‘all cultural groups are treated with respect and as equals’. When

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taking such a position, however, some scholars seem to adopt an essentialist notion of culture. Essentialism can be used to foster racism and intergroup discrimination since culture is understood as being 'natural and unchangeable'. Research has shown that nationals who hold an essentialist view of immigrant culture tend to favour multiculturalism less. On the other hand, ingroup cultural essentialism among minorities is positively related to their endorsement of multiculturalism. It is important to stress that a strong cultural identity does not necessarily imply holding essentialist views about the own and other cultural groups. A person may have strong multiple or hybrid identities, which are not combined with an essentialist notion of cultures. Cultural identity involves a sense of belonging to one or more cultural groups and the feelings associated with group membership. A strong cultural identity has shown to be highly functional for personal well-being and it is positively associated with immigrants' adaptation. Perceived discrimination that can be attributed to prejudice towards one's group strengthens the orientation towards the ingroup as a source of comfort or a defence against discrimination. Studies suggest that academic success among some minority groups may originate in more collectivistic motives for achievement. For example, when 'giving back' to families and communities is an important value, and when there is a strong sense of belongingness to one's cultural group, there is a greater chance for successful academic achievement. However, a strong attachment to one's heritage culture does not imply that the individual is not able to have skills in – and a sense of belongingness to – additional cultures. Multicultural competence is important here since this allows minority youth to master the shifting challenges and resources they encounter in their contacts with different cultures. Research has shown that generally, an adherence to one or more ethnic cultures combined with a positive attitude towards the national culture is more adaptive than preference for a single culture.

### **Strategies for coping with ethno-cultural diversity**

Proficiency in the national language is essential for social participation in social settings. The importance of language for learning and development is indisputable. Research has shown that it is important for children whose first language is not the language of instruction to start to read in their own language, provided there is support from a first language reading method and a first language teacher. Stimulating a further acquisition of the first ethnic language is beneficial for the children's learning opportunities and it is important for parents or siblings to support a child's school learning. In this position paper, three models on how to deal with immigrant languages in schools are presented: the ethnic identity model, the language assimilation model and the language integration model. It is important to explore these models and to identify the model which is most appropriate for a particular group of students, their parents and their teachers.

The attitudes, beliefs and views of the teacher also play an important role in educational practice. The central question here is which beliefs and attitudes are beneficial to the immigrant student. With regard to adaptation of immigrant students, the fit between the immigrant's own orientation – assimilationist or pluralistic - and that of his or her environment (the school and the teacher) seems to be very important. In addition, since modern didactic approaches stress the importance of social interaction and verbal reasoning, students with low language proficiency need special attention. It is also important that teachers adapt their educational practices to the needs of their students for their engagement in fruitful interaction and reasoning related to the learning task. Studies have shown that the some educational contexts are likely to prevent students with low language proficiency from engaging in fruitful social interaction and reasoning related to the learning task: On the one hand, settings in which there is no clear structure, i.e., where a 'laissez faire' atmosphere dominates. And on the other hand settings characterised by a traditional transmission model of teaching.

Teachers often lack information and skills and occasionally they lack motivation that is necessary to successfully cope with increased heterogeneity and to face the challenges of multicultural societies. In many cases there is a 'mismatch' between teaching styles which are developed and successful with native born children and those required for immigrant students. This often contributes to behavioural and academic problems among the immigrants. This mismatch can also cause 'diversity-related burnout' with teachers. It was shown that the highest level of this type of burnout was reported by teachers who hold assimilationist views but work in schools that they perceive as leading a policy of assimilation.

It is often assumed that an increase of intergroup contact is needed to improve intergroup relations but research has shown that contact by itself is insufficient. It is important that groups enter the contact situation with equal status, there must be cooperative interdependence between the groups and the contact must occur in the context of supportive norms. Furthermore, there must be an opportunity for personal acquaintance and friendship between group members and the category membership of the individuals in the interaction must be of at least minimum salience. More positive intergroup attitudes will also emerge when ingroup members observe ingroup members having close friendship relations with outgroup members.

Since intergroup contact is often assumed to be the primary means to improve ingroup relations, school segregation is usually perceived as 'negative' and efforts are usually made to undo or avoid ethnic and religious segregation among schools. However, these attempts often fail because demographic processes, housing policies and parental school choices are strong forces, very hard to counteract by school or national educational policies. A research review suggests that immigrant students may feel more self-confident in groups of predominantly immigrant children which may result in a stronger engagement in learning situations. Assessments of the effects of school segregation on school achievement often focus on academic and linguistic performance, and the research evidence is inconclusive in those areas. The effect of the ethnic school composition on the social competencies of the students is rarely investigated.

### **Conclusions and practical guidelines**

For individual immigrants, a combined positive attitude and orientation towards both the national and ethnic culture is conducive to their development and learning. This can be achieved when:

- Cultural maintenance is desired by the immigrants and allowed (even encouraged) by the broader society, including schools.
- Participation and inclusion in the life of the larger society is sought by the immigrants and supported by the school. Expectations, attitudes and resources of students, their parents and teachers will have to be explored and taken into account when planning changes in social participation and inclusion.
- People are aware of the negative effects of discrimination and understand that adolescents who are confident in their own ethnicity and proud of their ethnic group may be better able to deal with discrimination.
- Teachers and other school staff know that the integrative way of acculturating is likely to lead immigrant youth to more satisfactory and successful transitions to adulthood in their culturally diverse societies and support immigrant youth in accomplishing integration.

In order to change the role of the school from being a cultural transmitter into being a cultural transformer, the approach of teachers and schools needs to change. To succeed in this, in turn, multicultural teacher training will have to take up a crucial role. Furthermore it will be important to stimulate schools to develop expertise and to acquire resources that facilitate the learning and the performance of immigrant students. Providing learning opportunities for the school staff in order to learn how to organise differentiation practices within a whole class is absolutely necessary. An increased attention to the expectations of teachers of his or her immigrant students is also necessary, and a sufficiently rigorous and challenging academic climate that is supportive to the students' needs should be fostered. Determination and support of policy makers is required to provide schools and teachers with the necessary means to cope with the challenges, and to gain more insight in the posed challenges by studying these topics in full force.

## **1. Educational challenges related to ethno – culturally diverse societies**

Most immigrants perceive the school as a chance or an opportunity for social and economic (upward) mobility (Vedder & Horenczyk, 2006). And, indeed, many have succeeded in establishing a better life in their new societies than they would have had in their societies of origin. Nevertheless, for many of them, the process of acculturation is a painful one, due to the loss of personal relationships and of the culturally known. Although they succeed in acquiring new competencies, many immigrants often do not reach the level of social participation that they – and members of the national society – consider

satisfactory. An abundance of studies shows that immigrant youth in Western world insufficiently benefit from schools (Glenn & De Jong, 1996; OECD, 2006). Too many of these youngsters leave schools without the necessary certificates and qualifications (Hijzen, Boekaerts & Vedder, 2006; Driscoll, 1999). These findings lead to the formulation of a first challenge of the school: The school must cater for educational needs and interests of national and immigrant students alike, in order for every student to have equal chances for social and economic mobility.

To start with, it is important to note that research shows a large variability among ethno-cultural groups. Actually, many achieve above the national group, particularly when controlling for SES indices (Westerbeek, 1999). Moreover, the recent OECD mathematics study showed that immigrant students' math performance may lag behind, but they are usually better motivated for math learning than national students are. Moreover, when focusing on measures of psychological wellbeing and social adjustment away from the school context, immigrant youths tend to have similar or more positive scores than national youths (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006).

A second challenge for the school is related to the fact that cultural pluralism, i.e. an ethno-culturally diverse society, is not necessarily a desired state of affairs for everyone. Surveys in a variety of countries have indicated a growing intolerance among nationals towards immigrants' presence and a loss of patience with immigrants' integration, which growing numbers of nationals consider to proceed too slowly (Berry, Phinney, Sam. & Vedder, 2006; Heath & Cheung, 2006; Pettigrew, 1998). This growing impatience is increasingly seen as a justification for avoiding a further influx of new immigrants. At the same time this rejection of new immigrants is being experienced by second and third generation immigrants as a depreciation of their presence. Relatively high percentages of youth in England, Germany and Denmark hold negative attitudes towards immigrants (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). Furthermore, immigrant youth reports discrimination in Germany, England, Norway, Sweden, Netherlands and France (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006). The second challenge of the school is thus to successfully reduce the uncertainty and tensions that have evolved in interethnic relationships, both inside and outside the school. A common goal of educational institutions should be the achievement and fostering of healthy intercultural relationships.

For most immigrant children and adolescents, the school is a central setting for intergroup contact and acculturation. School adjustment, both in terms of academic achievement and healthy intercultural relationships, is thus both an important assignment for the school as well as a desired outcome of educational processes and learning in schools. Doing well in school is a step towards knowing how to deal with the new culture and how to achieve a much desired position in the new society (Horenczyk & Ben-Shalom, 2001).

## **2. The ideal of multiculturalism**

Attempts to deal with the two challenges of the school mentioned above have often been placed under the label of offering – or striving for – ‘multicultural education’. This concept is often used both in theoretical explorations as well as in educational policy and school practices. In this position paper, we use the term multicultural education to refer to the variety of ways in which schools and the school system deal or may deal with cultural diversity. This expresses a neutral approach to the accomplishment of the two tasks of the school described in the preceding section.

However, some scholars take a less neutral stance. They point at the concept of multiculturalism as being the basis and the goal of multicultural education. According to these scholars, ‘multiculturalism’ is a notion which emphasizes ‘the value of diversity as a core principle and that all cultural groups are treated with respect and as equals’ (Flowers & Richardson, 1996, p.609). When taking such a position, some scholars also tend to adopt an essentialist notion of culture. They depict culture as being ‘natural and unchangeable’ and they see the members of a culture as having particular attributes that define their cultural identity (Verkuyten, 2005). The problem with this essentialist notion of culture is that it can be used to rationalize existing social hierarchies and thereby foster intergroup discrimination. This is precisely what we do not advocate in this position paper. Essentialist notions of culture and cultural groups can be used by any ethnocultural group – national or immigrant, majority or minority. Many authors (Allport, 1954; Haslam, Bastian, Bain, & Kashima, 2006; Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998)

have argued that essentialist group beliefs, irrespective of who expresses them, are central to intergroup prejudice and racism. Verkuyten (2005) for example, showed that the more Dutch nationals believed in the essentialist nature of immigrant cultures, the less they endorsed multiculturalism. Another side of the same coin is that immigrants and other minority members themselves may use essentialist notions of their in-group in order to mobilize around cultural rights or against racial oppression. In general, multiculturalism is more important for ethnic minority groups than for majority groups. In the study referred to above, Verkuyten (2005) showed that for Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese adolescents in the Netherlands, ingroup essentialism was positively related to the endorsement of multiculturalism.

Nevertheless, a word of caution is in place here. A strong cultural identity does not necessarily imply holding essentialist views about culture or cultures. A person may have strong multiple or hybrid identities, which are not combined with an essentialist notion of cultures. Cultural identity involves a sense of belonging to one or more cultural groups and the feelings associated with group membership (Phinney, 1990). Moreover, cultural identities change over a lifetime, mostly slowly, as well as rapidly in accordance with situational demands (Verkuyten, 2005). As Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) indicate in their “interactional” model of acculturation, the cultural identities of immigrants are formed and transformed in interaction with the majority population. Results obtained by Branscombe and her colleagues (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobryniewicz, & Owen, 2002) illustrated this; among low-status groups, perceived discrimination that can be attributed to prejudice towards one’s group strengthens the orientation toward the ethnic ingroup as a source of comfort or as a defence against further discrimination. This same effect was confirmed in European samples (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006).

In addition, research shows that academic success in some minority groups may originate in more collectivistic motives for achievement. For example, when ‘giving back’ to families and communities is an important value, and when there is a strong sense of belongingness, there is a greater chance for successful academic achievement (Freeburg & Stein, 1996). A likely consequence of this is that we should be careful when judging the role of strong identification with the own ethnic group in students’ learning and development. Educators are well advised not to deny or neglect the educational and developmental importance of more enduring identities with long-term commitments and connections to, for example, former and future generations (Verkuyten, 2005).

In the context of multicultural education, it is also important to know that it is possible for an individual to have a sense of belongingness to two or more different cultures, without compromising his or her sense of cultural identity (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Mostly, an adherence to one or more ethnic culture combined with a positive attitude toward the national culture is more adaptive than preference for a single culture (cf. Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Vedder & Virta, 2005). Identities in multicultural contexts may also converge, blend or mix, sometimes challenging existing category conceptions. Increasingly, notions of heterogeneity and multiple identities are being advanced. However, often ‘multiple identities’ refer, in fact, to “partial identities”, as social identities are always composed of several different social categories and can thus be flexibly categorized in a multitude of ways. Individuals may thus alternate their behavior to fit into the cultures in which they are involved (Liebkind, 2001; Verkuyten, 2005). Research has shown that such individuals will feel less stress and anxiety than those who undergo a process of linear acculturation, i.e. assimilating into the dominant culture. Multiculturalism is, in this framework, essentially multicultural competence, allowing minority youth to master the shifting challenges and resources they encounter in their different “worlds”. This is an additive model of cultural acquisition parallel to the code-switching theories found in the research on multilingualism (Liebkind, 2001).

### **3. Strategies for coping with ethno-cultural diversity**

#### ***3.1 Language competence***

Being proficient in the national language is essential for social participation in all kinds of social settings. Language carries information and is an instrument for structuring thinking processes. As such, its role for learning and development is evident and indisputable. However, with immigrant

children and youth who have to acquire proficiency in the national language, learning that language is not the only educational challenge. An equally important challenge, at least as long as these students are not sufficiently proficient in the national language, is to optimally capitalize on the cognitive, linguistic and emotional resources that come with the students' proficiency in their first or ethnic language. In European countries many children enter primary school at a stage where their ethnic language proficiency has developed far further than their proficiency in the national language, which generally is also the language of instruction (Extra & Yağmur, 2004). For these children, it is beneficial to start to learn to read in their own language, provided there is support from a first language reading method and a first language teacher (Verhoeven, 1994). But even when immigrant children start school with good proficiency in the national language, it may be beneficial for these children's learning opportunities to stimulate the further acquisition of their ethnic language. Good ethnic language proficiency may allow parents or siblings to better support a child's school learning (Extra & Yağmur, 2006).

In their studies, Extra and Yağmur (2006) note that the problem of how to deal with immigrant languages in schools is common for all of the European Union. Available research findings and theoretical models seem of little help for solving this problem, given the many unresolved controversies and the abundance of models proposed by researchers. Nevertheless, we will suggest three models that seem most influential. The ethnic identity model (Alkan, 1998) assumes that immigrant youth grow up between at least two cultures, which leads to identity confusion and adaptation problems if the children experience a lack of appreciation for the skills, knowledge and feelings that are typical of their ethnic background. The model proposes that a strong ethnic identity is important for immigrants' healthy integration and well-being in the new society. The model, albeit not necessarily under this name, has had a clear impact on the school curriculum for ethno-cultural minority students in countries like the Netherlands and Sweden (Alkan, 1998; Viberg, 1994). Lessons in students' first language and classes on the students' cultural heritage are seen as important for preventing or overcoming adaptation problems. Such lessons are deemed to allow immigrant youth to experience appreciation for their parents' language and culture. The assumptions are that language maintenance and a good knowledge of one's own culture contribute to the adolescents' ethnic identity, and a strong ethnic identity is conducive to well-being and social adjustment. Research supports the expectation that ethnic language proficiency affects adolescents' ethnic identity and that a strong ethnic identity is related to positive adaptation of minority youth (Horenczyk & Ben-Shalom, 2001; Virta, Sam, & Westin, 2004). The ethnic identity model stresses the role of attitudinal factors for learning, not only language learning.

The second model, the language assimilation model, focuses on the direct relationship between national language proficiency and adolescents' learning and development. This model suggests that immigrant students' proficiency in the national language is a better predictor of academic performance than their proficiency in the ethnic language and that therefore immigrant children should learn the national language as rapidly and as well as possible, even if this is detrimental to their use and learning of the ethnic language. Several studies found support for this model (cf. Driessen, 2000; Vedder, 2005).

Lastly, the language integration model is inspired by research on multilingualism showing that children who acquired high levels of proficiency in more than one language developed extra cognitive resources as compared to children who grew up with one language only (for an overview of research, see Baker, 2001). Accordingly, it is expected that immigrant students who are proficient in both their ethnic and the national language will report higher well-being and acquire more positive social adjustment scores than students who are less balanced in their bilingualism or who lack proficiency in either language. In a sample of Turkish adolescents living in Sweden we found support for the language integration model (Vedder & Virta, 2005).

The fact that support could be found for the validity of each of these models is indicative of the plain truth that one size (or one model) does not fit all (school situations and students). Policy makers and educators will have to find out what model is best for their students, their parents and their teachers.

### ***3.2 The teachers' attitudes and views***

Knowledge and attitudes are closely and mutually interrelated, and both are likely to affect the classroom practice. As indicated by Vollmer (2000), teachers' beliefs have a strong impact on the classroom's educational and social climate. Often, teachers are unaware of their ideological assumptions which have been "naturalized" to such an extent that they are finally seen as being part of 'common sense'. Among teachers who work with immigrant students, these ideological assumptions might include the societal beliefs regarding newcomers' acculturation and the role of the school in this process. Although the multicultural rhetoric is slowly permeating the educational discourse, actual educational practices in many immigrant-receiving societies suggest that schools continue to seek to integrate immigrant children into the societal mainstream (Olneck, 1995).

One may ask whether pluralistic attitudes held by teachers are always beneficial to the immigrant student, and whether assimilationist expectations are necessarily detrimental. It has been widely argued that a multicultural climate promotes newcomers' psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Berry, 1998). A pluralistic attitude by members and major agencies of the receiving society is likely to encourage the adoption and development of a multicultural orientation by the immigrants. Multiple positive cultural identities, in turn, have been shown to be related to higher school adjustment among immigrants (Horenczyk & Ben-Shalom, 2001), probably by exposing them to a wider range of available social and cultural resources (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). The teacher can play a significant role in legitimizing and fostering the maintenance and development of multiple cultural and social identities (Igoa, 1995). However, we would like to call for a more cautious and complex analysis of multiculturalism at the teacher-student interface, by researchers as well as by educators. As proposed by the "interactional" (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001) or "ecological" (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002) approach to acculturation, we see that the fit between the immigrant's own orientation and that of his or her relevant environment is an important factor related to adaptation. This implies that the pluralistic attitudes of teachers and schools are not always beneficial to immigrant students, and assimilationist expectations do not always have to be detrimental. Although generally a pluralistic stance by teachers is likely to be more conducive to the adaptation of their immigrant students, it cannot be ruled out that in some cases immigrant students holding assimilationist orientations will adjust better when their teachers and other educational agents also hold assimilationist expectations.

There are additional reasons for the importance of teachers' views and attitudes. Modern didactic approaches stress the importance of social interaction and verbal reasoning. Research clarifies that with such an approach, students who score low on language proficiency need special attention. In order for these students to benefit from such an approach, teachers need to invest more in regulating these student's social interactions and in creating conditions that optimize the quality of their verbalisations, than would be necessary for teaching students who score high on language proficiency (Chinn, O'Donnell, & Jinks, 2000; Oortwijn, Vedder, & Boekaerts, in press). However, teachers do not automatically adapt to the needs of their students. They have their own opinions on what students with low language proficiency students are capable of doing, on how to deal with student autonomy in learning and on whether or not immigrant students know how to deal with Western notions of autonomy and individualism (Palfreyman, 2001; Vedder & Horenczyk, 2006). These views may lead teachers to adopt educational practices in which they does not adapt themselves - or adapt inadequately - to their students' needs (Hijzen, Boekaerts, & Vedder, 2006; Lee, 2001; Walqui, 2000). These may create class environments in which "laissez faire" dominates, and students who need a more structured setting get lost both cognitively and emotionally. Alternatively they may employ practices characterized by a traditional knowledge transmission model of teaching in which the teacher does the talking and books contain the truth (i.e., so called teacher-centred teaching, addressing the class as a whole without attention to differential needs); as a consequence, students do not engage in fruitful social interaction and reasoning related to the learning task. Both types of settings are less than optimal for students who have low language proficiency.

### ***3.3 Attention to the teachers' problems***

Teachers and other educational agents play a central role in the well-being and social adjustment of immigrant youth. For most of these students, the behaviour and attitudes of the teacher seems to epitomize the expectations held by the new culture with regard to the proper role of youngsters and students, and they are also perceived as reflecting the criteria for success in their society (Tatar & Horenczyk, 1996). Moreover, teachers exert major control over crucial rewards and punishments affecting academic and social behaviour inside – and also outside – the school setting. It is thus imperative to address the complex and intricate challenges facing teachers who work with culturally diverse student populations. One major problem reported by these teachers is insufficient knowledge. In spite of the growing number of immigrant children entering schools all over the world, research evidence shows that teachers usually lack the information, skills, and, on occasion, motivation necessary to cope successfully with the challenges posed by the increasing cultural heterogeneity (e.g., Taylor & Sobel, 2001).

The increasing cultural diversity in schools and classrooms weighs heavily on teachers, and one can say that the reality of the educational setting at present is one of increasing 'cultural mismatch' (Cockrell, Placier, Cockrell & Middleton, 1999) between teachers and their students on the one hand and between teachers and their students' parents on the other hand (Shor, 2005). This affects teachers working with immigrant students and makes teachers less able to face the challenges posed by multicultural educational contexts. Lucas (1997) discussed the mismatch between teaching styles developed for - and successfully implemented with –native-born children and those necessary for immigrant students, and on classroom difficulties related to the students' lack of basic knowledge about how the school functions. The result of this mismatch is immigrant children performing worse in academic tasks and showing behavioural problems in class. All these 'acculturative stressors' may negatively affect the personal and professional well-being of teachers who work with immigrant students. An effect of this can be 'diversity-related burnout' (Horenczyk & Tatar, 2002) among teachers. This type of burnout has been shown to be related to the degree of cultural heterogeneity of the school and to the teachers own views toward multiculturalism: The highest level of diversity-related burnout was found among teachers holding assimilationist views but working in a school that was perceived by them as leading a policy of 'assimilation'.

### ***3.4 Creating conditions for successful intergroup contact***

Intergroup contact has long been considered to be one of the most effective strategies for improving intergroup relationships and for solving problems related to ethnocultural diversity. As school and other educational institutions are traditionally viewed as major arenas for intergroup contact and acculturation, they are perceived to be of great importance for attaining the desired goal of creating 'multicultural societies'. As a consequence, when there is an increase of ethnicity- and culture-related problems in the society, it is easy to point a finger at the schools and to blame them for failing to contribute to the successful integration of immigrants.

To improve intergroup relations, the contact hypothesis has offered a promising and popular strategy for reducing intergroup conflict. This hypothesis proposes that simple contact between groups is a start, but in order to be successful, there must be certain features present in the contact. Groups must enter the contact situation with equal status, there must be cooperative interdependence between the groups and the contact must occur in the context of supportive norms (Allport, 1954). Other critical conditions for successful intergroup contact are that there is an opportunity for personal acquaintance and friendship between group members and that the category membership of the individuals in the interaction is of at least minimal salience. This is necessary in order to ensure the generalization of the improved intergroup attitudes to the outgroup as a whole (Dovidio et al., 2003). Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) commented that acquaintance and friendship take time to occur and have an impact. They therefore define time of exposure between members of different groups as an additional important feature of efforts to improve intergroup relations.

A number of studies have reported significant correlations between adolescents' racial attitudes and the attitudes of their peers. Conformity to ingroup norms regarding intergroup attitudes may be particularly important during adolescence (Duckitt, 1992). Furthermore, social and institutional support is very important to help create a new social climate in which more tolerant norms can emerge. The so called Extended Contact Hypothesis takes these conditions as a starting point. This hypothesis maintains, and empirical evidence supports (Liebkind & McAlister, 1997), that observing an ingroup member having a close relationship with an outgroup member is sufficient for more positive intergroup attitudes to emerge. The ingroup friendship partner provides a positive model for more tolerant norms for interaction with the outgroup, and the outgroup member - if perceived as typical - provides a positive exemplar that disconfirms negative expectations and beliefs about the outgroup. Through extended contact, therefore, widespread reduction in prejudice is possible without everyone needing to have out-group friends themselves (Liebkind & McAlister, 1997).

Many schools seem to be 'multicultural', and thus ensure intergroup contact. Everyday contact between ethnic groups is perceived to be an inherent feature of multicultural schools. The fact is, however, that everyday contact between ethnic groups in a multicultural school setting often bears little resemblance to the ideal contact conditions outlined by the contact hypothesis (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005). If these conditions are not taken into account, segregation and avoidance remain the norms in many multicultural settings, including the school.

### ***3.5 School segregation***

Schools are generally seen as major arenas for intercultural contact. However, not all schools are ethno-culturally diverse, at least not when looking at the cultural make-up of the student body. Segregation along cultural, religious and, as a consequence, ethnic lines, is characteristic of many Western societies, albeit in different degrees. For example, it is quite common in the Netherlands, but not in Sweden.

The discussion on this topic is typically characterized by segregation being depicted mainly in negative terms and by the assumption that ethnic and religious segregation between schools is a matter of choice that can be changed at will. Research on the effectiveness of attempts to avoid or undo ethnic and religious segregation between schools conducted in the USA and the Netherlands concluded very clearly that these attempts have failed. Demographic processes, housing policies and parental school choices are so influential that school policies or national educational policies cannot counteract these forces, except in rare, individual cases (Kahlenberg, 2002; Orfield, 2001; Rutten, 2004; Vedder, 2006; Vermeulen, 2001).

Is the commonly negative attitude towards school segregation justified? Are religiously or ethnically segregated schools preparing their students less adequately for social participation than do non-segregated schools? A review of research by Westerbeek (1999) suggested that immigrant students may feel more self-confident in groups of predominantly immigrant children and that this may result in stronger engagement in learning situations. However, she also reviewed studies that did not confirm this regularity.

In addition, she concluded that research evidence with respect to school and class composition and students' academic and linguistic achievement is largely inconclusive. A recent Danish study (Rangvid, 2005) explored the impact of school factors on the achievement gap between native and immigrant students. It concluded that immigrant students are worse off in schools with a high proportion of fellow immigrant students than in schools with a high proportion of fellow national students, despite relatively better resources and smaller classes in the former schools. Rangvid (2005) suggests that this might be due to the quality of the teachers. A study in the Netherlands, however, suggests that with time, schools with higher percentages of immigrant students may develop sufficient levels of expertise and resources in working with immigrant students in order for immigrant students to perform better in these schools. Immigrant students in these schools simply progress more rapidly in acquiring the Dutch language, which is beneficial for their learning in general (Gijsberts & Dagevos, 2005). An evaluation of the school inspectorate (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 1999) showed that most Islamic schools in the Netherlands are better than other denominational schools or the public schools

in catering for Islamic parents' enculturation interests (see also Driessen 1996). Moreover, they also do a good job in preparing the children for their school careers in the Netherlands. The students in these culturally segregated schools perform academically slightly better than Islamic students in non-segregated schools (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2004). This is in accordance with international research showing that students in denominational schools outperform students in public schools (OECD, 2005). The study of Westerbeek (1999) suggests, however, that when controlling for relevant student characteristics, including parents' socio-economic status, the composition of classes and schools in terms of variation in proficiency levels with respect to the national language and school subject related skill and knowledge domains is more important than the ethnic or cultural composition of classes or schools as such; It is not so much the ethnicity or cultural background of the peers that matters, but the relevant academic competencies of the classmates. Westerbeek also clarifies that academic competence related class composition overlaps with ethnic and cultural composition. In many schools with high concentrations of immigrant children or generally children with a low SES-background, the general level of academic performance is low. This contributes to a lack of academic challenge in such classes. One specific and remarkable finding is that both national and immigrant students perform worse in classes with higher numbers of recently arrived immigrants, children who have a low national language proficiency, and children who lack a preparation for learning in Dutch schools. The simple explanation is that in such classes teachers have to invest effort and time in supporting these least well prepared children even at the expense of time and effort needed for the national and better prepared immigrant children. These findings were largely confirmed in a more recent study (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). As stated earlier, however, teachers and curricula matter. Rumberger and Palardy contend that when teachers hold high expectations and the academic climate is geared towards raising effort and taking up cognitively more challenging tasks, the negative impact of the class composition of low performers can considerably be reduced.

#### **4. Conclusions and practical guidelines**

As indicated earlier, a look at educational practices in many immigrant-receiving societies suggests that teachers and schools continue to reflect mainly the values and knowledge of the dominant society. At the same time in most North-Western European countries the multicultural education movement is underway, bringing about curriculum change so that all people living in these countries can find themselves represented in the classroom, without stereotyping or discrimination.

Research findings suggest that for individual immigrants a combined favorable attitude and orientation toward both the national and the ethnic culture contributes to the development and learning of immigrant youth. In order to achieve this, cultural maintenance should be desired by the immigrants, and enabled (even encouraged) by the broader society, including schools. Second, participation and inclusion in the life of the larger society should be sought by the immigrants, and permitted and supported by the school. This is not to say that all schools need to adopt and deliver multilingual curricula or that culture studies should get a more prominent position in the curriculum. It means that schools will start exploring wishes, attitudes, and resources that can clarify the need and may give clues as to opportunities to accentuate particular aspects of multicultural education. Expectations, attitudes and resources of students, their parents and teachers will have to be explored, because as suggested by Lewis (1981) either school management and policymakers carefully explore these and take them into account when planning changes, or else the educational change is likely to fail due to opposition by students, parents and/or teachers.

We also reported that discrimination has negative effects on personal well-being. Discrimination is unlikely to disappear by itself, and individuals need to be aware of its negative effects. Adolescents who are confident in their own ethnicity and proud of their ethnic group may be better able to deal constructively with discrimination, for example, by regarding it as the problem of the perpetrator or by taking proactive steps to combat it. Teachers and other school staff who are involved in counseling immigrant youth may all benefit from knowing that the integrative way of acculturating is likely to lead immigrant youth to more satisfactory and successful transitions to adulthood in their culturally diverse societies. Recent research on and theoretical developments in intergroup relations increasingly take also culture and societal influences into account, but so far, relevant research and theories have focussed mainly on relatively mild forms of intergroup tensions (for an overview, see Liebkind, 2004).

However, there is also more extreme bigotry in individuals as well as in ideologies, which de-legitimize victims and assign them to an extreme social category outside the common ingroup of humanity (Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002). The current in social psychology and educational sciences to study these more extreme forms of intergroup bias is welcome, but still meagre. It is both timely and important to address these topics in full force (Liebkind, 2004). It is not only desirable, but increasingly a social necessity to successfully meet the challenge formulated earlier, namely, to reduce the uncertainty and tensions that have evolved in interethnic relationships both inside and outside the school.

Several efforts are needed to change the approach of teachers and schools so that the school evolves into an institution that cherishes cultural diversity as a resource for development and learning. Within this context, multicultural teacher training plays an important role. Multicultural teacher training should focus on three major foci: knowledge, attitudes and skills. These three components are generally interrelated and they are likely to affect immigrant students' well-being and social adjustment, as well as the personal and professional well-being of teachers who work with them. Multicultural teacher training should be supported by interventions at the organizational level of the school. This support primarily consists of a clear mutual understanding between teachers and management regarding the implementation of educational and instructional practices aimed at improving the multicultural climate in schools. Teachers should be provided with sufficient decision space and resources to achieve the intended changes. Moreover, schools should make sure that colleagues and management are backing innovative teachers when they run into problems due to a high workload, opposition or misunderstanding from colleagues, students or their parents. A second important issue is to allow and stimulate schools to develop expertise and to acquire resources that facilitate the learning and the performance of immigrant students. This is especially important if the schools are segregated ethnically, religiously or in terms of parents' SES. Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to what the teacher expects of his or her students and to create a sufficiently rigorous and challenging academic climate that is both emotionally and instructionally supportive to students' needs. These are important ingredients for an educational intervention that counteracts the negative consequences of segregation. More specifically and concretely, teachers have to make sure that they allocate sufficient time to those subjects or knowledge domains that are more problematic to the low achieving students. For students with low academic achievements it is important to take basic skills training as a starting point for curriculum delivery instead of their social and emotional development. Moreover, teachers need to closely monitor students' progress and make sure to discuss students with learning and behavioural problems with colleagues, the students' parents and with students themselves, aiming at optimizing the educational resources for overcoming the problems (Weide, 1993; Westerbeek, 1999). Independently of the students' background, the same characteristics of the learning environment are generally important for improving academic achievements. In this way, and as suggested above, schools will be or will become better able to cater for educational needs and interests of national and immigrant students alike, in order for every student to have equal chances for social and economic mobility. However, in the case of specific efforts aimed at optimizing students' educational resources, these may vary depending on the students' and educators' background, for instance, when a students' parents or siblings organize learning support at home in their ethnic language or when a school arranges reading lessons in the student's ethnic language.

With respect to differentiation and individualisation efforts in class, a final remark is in place. We pointed out that a class composition with many students who lack proficiency in the national language may result in a disproportional amount of teacher efforts directed at these students even at the detriment of instructional attention for the other students. This can best be avoided by organizing differentiation practices within a whole class for instance by arranging more opportunities for cooperative learning and peer tutoring (cf. Orlich, Harder, Callahan & Gibson, 1998).

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