Multicultural Education and Inter-Ethnic Attitudes

An Intergroup Perspective

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Abstract. Despite the recent retreat of multiculturalism in various European countries, forms of multicultural education are favored and practiced in many of these countries. These educational practices are considered desirable and necessary for the development of positive inter-ethnic relations. After considering conceptions of multicultural education, we discuss multilevel quantitative research on perceived multicultural education and its effects on inter-ethnic attitudes among early adolescents in the Netherlands. The positive effects of multicultural education are interpreted in terms of children's improved cultural knowledge and understanding, and the establishment of anti-racism norms within the classroom. These two theoretical mechanisms can explain the positive impact of multicultural education on children's inter-ethnic attitudes. The review of the research is concluded by providing directions and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: multiculturalism, multicultural education, inter-ethnic relations, adolescents, The Netherlands

In many European countries and schools, curricula and educational practices aimed at learning about cultural differences and combating racism and discrimination have been proposed and implemented. Prejudice reduction is the most intensively studied aspect of multicultural education and there is quite some evidence that multicultural education improves intergroup relations (see Stephan & Vogt, 2004; Zirkel, 2008). However, this evidence in support of the "multicultural education movement" predominantly comes from the US and little is known about the effects of multicultural education in European countries. In addition, many of the US studies examine the effectiveness of interventions among college students (e.g., Hogan & Mallott, 2005). In this paper we focus on our empirical work among early adolescents (9–12 years) within the Dutch context. One reason for focusing on the Netherlands is that one of the most overt and ambitious European experiments in multiculturalism was developed in this country, but the recent retreat of multiculturalism is also most evident there (Joppke, 2004; Vasta, 2007). Another reason is that, to our knowledge, large-scale quantitative European research on the intergroup effects of multicultural education has mainly been conducted in this country. The reason for focusing on early adolescents is that younger children may

not understand questions on multicultural education and the social meanings and consequences of ethnic group distinctions (Quintana, 1998). Furthermore, developmental research has shown that children's ethnic attitudes show a slight decrease in prejudice until late childhood (8–9 years) after a peak in middle childhood, while no general developmental trend is found for adolescence (10 years and later; see Raabe & Beelman, 2011, for a review). This relative stability of ethnic attitudes implies that early adolescence is a useful period for examining the effects of multicultural education. An additional reason is that in the Netherlands early adolescents attend primary school in which the children stay within the same grade (the same class) for a whole year. This makes it possible to systematically examine the importance of multicultural education at the level of the classroom.

In this review, we consider research on the effects of multicultural education on students' inter-ethnic attitudes, taking into account the perspectives of majority and minority group children. First, we start with a short discussion of the meaning of multicultural education and the ways in which we have examined this in our research. Second, we briefly introduce the social psychological perspective that has informed our work and subsequently discuss

findings for the endorsement of multiculturalism by individual ethnic majority and minority students and at the level of the school class. Third, we discuss research findings about the impact of multicultural education on experiences with ethnic peer discrimination and inter-ethnic attitudes. This discussion is followed by an explanation of learning about cultural differences and anti-racism norms as two key theoretical mechanisms explaining the impact of multicultural education on children's inter-ethnic attitudes. Finally, we provide directions and suggestions for future research.

Multicultural Education

Often no clear distinction is made between multicultural and intercultural education and in some countries – like the Netherlands – the terms tend to be used interchangeably. In general, the concept of multicultural education is more popular in North America (Kahn, 2008), whereas the term intercultural education is more often used in Europe (Portera, 2008). Intercultural education focuses on mutual interactions, dialog, and exchanges that contribute to changing identities and cultures. The main goals of multicultural education are the acknowledgment and recognition of existing cultural differences. The educational aim is "both to know and to tolerate people with different cultural backgrounds" (Portera, 2008, p. 485). Our research is mostly in line with these educational aims and therefore we use the term multicultural education, which, however, has been used to describe a variety of educational practices.

In the US context and for educational sciences, Banks (2004) proposes a well-known and much used conceptualization of five components of multicultural education: cultural content integration in the curriculum, learning to question and consider how knowledge is constructed, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. In the Dutch context, multicultural education is much less articulated and developed than in the US. Furthermore, the research reviewed here is not conducted from the perspective of educational sciences but rather from an intergroup perspective. This means that our focus is not on the evaluation of specific educational practices or initiatives but rather on students' perceptions of multicultural education in relation to their inter-ethnic attitudes.

From 1985 to 2006, Dutch primary schools were legally obliged to implement a multicultural education program that aimed to improve children's knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity and combat racism and discrimination. In practice, multiculturalism was almost never fully integrated in the curriculum or considered relevant to all teaching practices. Rather it was treated as an isolated issue that was addressed occasionally and in very different ways. Many Dutch schools did not pay much attention to multicultural education or considered it as an "extra" that was of marginal importance (Ledoux, 1998; Overmaat & Ledoux, 1998). Since February 2006, the legal obligation of multicultural education has been replaced by the requirement to advance "active citizenship and social

integration." Multiculturalism can still be an important component of civic education (Doppen, 2007) and schools are expected to make a contribution to more positive inter-ethnic relations, but officially the focus is on citizenship building (*burgerschapsvorming*) and the importance of civic liberties such as freedom of religion and speech. In practice, schools again differ considerably in their approach and many schools have not developed a systematic approach to civic education (Onderwijsinspectie, 2006). There has been much discussion about the design and implementation of multicultural and civic education, and several (qualitative) Dutch studies have been conducted to examine how teachers and school professionals think about these issues (e.g., Doppen, 2007). Our (quantitative) research has focused on multicultural education in primary education and in relation to early adolescents' inter-ethnic relations. In these studies we have focused on both the equality (tolerance) and diversity (knowledge) aspect of multiculturalism (see Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). First, multicultural educational practices may be seen as a way to improve equality by establishing anti-racism norms and stressing the negative consequences for victims of racism. Second, multicultural education aims to educate children about ethnic-cultural differences with the idea that increased understanding and knowledge will lead to mutual recognition and positive acceptance of others. Using a social psychological perspective we have examined children's perceptions of these aspects of multicultural education.

The Study of Multicultural Education

In studying multicultural education we have dealt with some conceptual and methodological problems characteristic of research in this field (see Schofield, 1991). For example, several studies have formulated more general conclusions and policy implications for schooling based on findings in just four or five schools. Yet, apart from the extent and form of multicultural education there are always many other school characteristics that can explain school differences, such as the level of ethnic segregation or the size of the school. In the Netherlands, for example, multicultural education is practiced more in schools with an ethnically mixed population than in schools that have a majority of native Dutch pupils (Van Geel & Vedder, 2011; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b). To avoid such problems, a whole array of schools should be studied and multilevel analysis should be used to examine the characteristics of individual students and schools or classrooms. Multilevel modeling allows for the simultaneous analysis of individual and group level variables without compromising the quality of the information at any level (Hox, 2009). This type of research typically starts by examining how much of the variance in a particular dependent variable (e.g., ethnic attitude) is dependent on the school classes the children are nested in. Next, it seeks to explain this higher-level variance by properties of the classroom context such as multicultural education.

Given the importance of studying a range of schools and classrooms, each with their own characteristics, it is also quite difficult to compare the outcomes of specific multicultural interventions or programs (see Turner & Brown, 2008). Therefore, we have in our research measured the degree of multicultural education according to the students (and teachers). These perceptions allow for meaningful comparisons of different schools and classrooms, regardless of their particular approaches to multicultural education.

Table 1 provides an overview of the measures used in our different studies.[1] All measures address the equality aspect of multiculturalism involving teaching about prejudice and discrimination as well as ''concrete'' reactions toward (hypothetical) instances of discrimination occurring in the classroom. In addition, some measures also address the diversity aspect of multiculturalism including classroom discussions about cultural differences. However, in all our studies it was not possible to make an empirical distinction between these two aspects because the items formed single constructs.

All students in a classroom were asked about their perceptions and these individual perceptions were aggregated (i.e., averaged) to obtain a classroom-average measure of multicultural education. The use of such a classroom-average measure is conceptually meaningful if students agree about the level of multicultural education in the classroom, which appears to be the case (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2011, 2012, 2013). In one study we also collected teachers' reports about the degree of multicultural education (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b). We asked students how often their teacher paid attention to cultural differences and discrimination in the lessons, and we asked the teachers how important it was for them to do so. Students' and teachers' reports were found to be significantly and positively correlated ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). This provides some evidence for concurrent validity but similar to other research (e.g., Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012; Van Widenfelt, Goedhart, Treffers, & Goodman, 2003) the moderate correlation also indicates that student and teacher perceptions are not interchangeable. Because we are interested in the attitudes of the students, we predominantly focused on their perceptions of multicultural education.

Social Psychological Perspective

For decades, social psychologists have been investigating intergroup relations, that is, settings in which people act in terms of their group memberships. Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) insists that these relations need to be understood in their social context. From the start, this theory emphasized the role of ideological and normative issues, particularly in relation to subordinate or ethnic minority groups (Tajfel, 1981). For SIT, group categorization, social comparison, and the need for positive differentiation are the key psychological mechanisms for understanding intergroup relations. Group members are assumed to react toward other groups out of a need to differentiate their own group positively. Because group members derive their social identity from membership in social groups, it can be assumed that people prefer their in-group to be socially recognized, accepted, and valued. This confers a meaningful and positive social identity on them that they will try to maintain and protect. In contrast, a lack of distinctiveness and a devalued social identity represent identity threats that are likely to lead to the deployment of a wide range of identity-management strategies, including the differential evaluation of the in-group and out-groups (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). SIT stresses that these psychological dynamics play themselves out as a function of contextual features, such as the social norms that prescribe reactions and evaluations.

SIT is increasingly being used as an important framework for understanding group evaluations among children (see Bennett & Sani, 2004). The theory has been found to explain gender, ethnic, racial, national, and other group distinctions. Children are motivated to evaluate their own group positively and in-group favoritism is regarded as a primary strategy for securing a positive identity. Research among children has shown that such favoritism does indeed positively affect self-feelings (Verkuyten, 2007). However, in-group favoritism is by no means an automatic product of group distinctions. Approaches such as social identity development theory (Nesdale, 2004) and the subjective group dynamics model (Abrams, Rutland, & Cameron, 2003) emphasize that children's expression of ethnic attitudes is regulated by social norms about what is appropriate and acceptable in particular contexts. Multicultural education provides such norms by stressing the unacceptability of ethnic prejudice and discrimination.

There is not only the need for a positive identity but also the need to stay in touch with social reality. For the developing child, a crucial aspect of the process of growing up is to acquire an adequate understanding of social reality, including about various groups (see Barrett & Buchanan-Barrow, 2005). Such an understanding is central for being able to function appropriately within various situations and contexts. Cognitive development theory (Aboud, 1988) focuses on children's increased ability to make adequate sense of social reality. The idea is that some group judgments reflect actual existing differences better than others and that, with age, cognitive processes and structures become more adapted to reality. Children learn about group differences and this learning is important for their evaluation of diversity and ethnic others. This is important because multicultural education not only involves normative consideration but also tries to increase knowledge and understanding about cultural differences that can limit negative attitudes.

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[1] In the Dutch educational systems, primary school children stay within the same grade (the same class) for a whole year. The data for all studies were collected within classrooms and by using questionnaires that children were asked to fill in. Because the data were collected in classrooms and very few children refused to participate, the response rates were above 95%. The measures used for assessing perceived multicultural education had acceptable reliabilities with Cronbach alpha's > .62.

Table 1. Overview of multicultural education measures used in the Dutch studies

Study	Type	Informants	Sample Questions/Items
Kinket and Verkuyten (1999)	Diversity/discrimination	Students (individual and aggregated)	"Do you ever talk about racism or discrimination during the lessons?" "Do you ever talk about the habits of people from different countries during the lessons?"
	Reactions to discrimination	Students (individual and aggregated)	"Imagine that someone from your class is teased because he is from another country. Does your teacher do something about this?" "Do you inform your teacher about this?"
Thijs and Verkuyten (2011)	Diversity/discrimination/ reactions to discrimination	Students (aggregated)	"Do you ever talk about discrimination and racism during lessons?" "Imagine that someone from your class is teased because he is from another country. Would your teacher say something about it?" "Do you ever talk about the habits of people from different countries during the lessons?"
Thijs and Verkuyten (2012, 2013)	Discrimination	Students (aggregated)	"Does your teacher ever say that you should respect all cultures?" "Does your teacher ever say that you should not discriminate?" "Does your teacher ever say that people from all cultures are equal?"
Verkuyten and Thijs (2001)	Diversity/discrimination	Teacher	"Do you ever talk about different cultures in the Netherlands with the class" "Do the children ever talk about the different cultures in the Netherlands in class?" "Do you ever talk about discrimination and racism during lessons?", "Do you ever devote time to the thought of respect for different cultures and religions?"
Verkuyten and Thijs (2002a, 2002b, 2004))	Diversity/discrimination	Students (aggregated)	"Does the teacher ever talk about being fair to children from different countries?" "Does the teacher ever talk about the habits of people from different cultures during class?"
	Reactions to discrimination	Students (aggregated)	"Imagine that a child is teased or called names because he or she is from a different country. Would your teacher say something about it?" "Would your classmates do something about it?" "Would you tell your teacher?" "Would your classmates tell your teacher?"
	Diversity/discrimination	Teacher	"How important is it for you to teach about cultural differences in the Netherlands?" "How important is it for you to teach about racism and discrimination?" "How important is it for you to teach children to respect other cultures and religions?"

Multiculturalism in the Classroom

European multiculturalism has predominantly been targeted at immigrants and minorities rather than the majority group (Joppke, 2004). Intergroup theories argue that groups are more in favor of multiculturalism when they see gains for themselves. Hence, it can be expected that the endorsement of multiculturalism will differ between minority and majority group members. Whereas assimilationist thinking provides moral justification and a normative context for the dominant identity of the majority group, multiculturalism is often perceived as challenging this dominant position and supporting the identity and improvement of the position of ethnic minority groups. A multicultural perspective provides the ideological and normative justification for affirming one's ethnic minority identity and to value ethnic differentiation positively. In agreement with research in other European countries (see Verkuyten, 2006), we have found in six different studies that ethnic minority (early) adolescents endorse multiculturalism more strongly than their native Dutch peers (see Brug & Verkuyten, 2007; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Using the Dutch version of Berry and Kalin's (1995) Multicultural Ideology Scale (see Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003), the scores for the former group tended to be above the neutral midpoint of the scale (nor disagree and not agree) whereas those of the latter were in the direction of favoring assimilation.

These findings for individual attitudes do not necessarily mean that the classroom is important for children's endorsement of multiculturalism. However, multilevel analyses have shown that classrooms do matter and that up to 21% of the variance in multicultural attitudes is between classrooms (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013; Van Geel & Vedder, 2011; Verkuyten, Thijs, & Bekhuis, 2010). Thus, a substantial part of student's multicultural attitudes is attributable to the classroom level indicating that classroom characteristics such as the level of ethnic diversity and the type of educational practices are important for these attitudes. It also means that it is meaningful to examine the effects of multicultural education on inter-ethnic attitudes of ethnic majority and minority children.

Perceived Ethnic Discrimination

Little is known about the effectiveness of multicultural initiatives in reducing ethnic peer discrimination (Banks & Banks, 2004; Bigler, 1999). Additionally, this kind of victimization may not only depend on curricula and materials used but probably also on the way teachers actually deal with ethnic diversity and negative peer interactions. What may be particularly important is the extent to which a teacher is perceived to act on ethnic name-calling and social exclusion, which are two important forms of peer discrimination (Verkuyten, Kinket, & Van der Wielen, 1997).

We conducted a large-scale study among 10–12-year-olds in 178 classrooms at 82 primary schools across the Netherlands (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b). We studied perceived ethnic peer discrimination among native Dutch, Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch, and Surinamese-Dutch children. Students reported their perceptions of personal discrimination (peer victimization because of their ethnic background) and of group discrimination (ethnic peer victimization of same-ethnic children). Multicultural education was measured with teachers' and students' (aggregated) reports of classroom attention for cultural diversity and discrimination, and students' average perceptions of a shared anti-discrimination norm ("reaction to discrimination," see Table 1).

The multilevel analyses showed that perceived peer discrimination was not only determined by individual characteristics, but also independently by the classroom (explaining, respectively, 6.6% and 5.1% of the variance for perceived personal and group discrimination). This means that children in the same class are more similar to each other regarding perceptions of discrimination than they are to children in different school classes. Subsequently we examined the effects of multiculturalism while controlling statistically for individual variables, and for the percentage of majority group (Dutch) pupils, the level of ethnic heterogeneity in the class, and class size.

The student's aggregated opinion on the level of multicultural education was found to affect children's perceptions of discrimination in two different ways. First, in classrooms where, according to the students, *more* time was spent on multicultural issues (learning about cultures and traditions of people from different countries), Dutch children reported *more* personal discrimination, and both Dutch and Turkish-Dutch children reported *more* group discrimination. This does not mean that multicultural education causes more negative events but rather suggests that it leads to a higher awareness of ethnic victimization and that children learn to label and interpret negative forms of behavior in terms of prejudice and discrimination (see for a similar argumentation involving bullying interventions, Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). Especially for Dutch majority children, bringing cultural differences and racism to their attention may have a sensitizing effect leading to greater vigilance. In contrast, ethnic minority group children are probably more aware of the existence of racism and discrimination, which could explain why their level of awareness is affected less.

Second, in all of the four ethnic groups, children reported *fewer* personal experiences with ethnic discrimination when there was a shared classroom perception that children would tell their teacher about ethnic victimization and that the teacher would react. A similar result has been found in the US (Crystal, Killen, & Ruck, 2010) and it suggests that actual practices and informal contacts affect ethnic name-calling and ethnic exclusion more directly than do more formal aspects of multicultural education, such as the curriculum and material used. The extent to which teachers

and students together act on ethnic name-calling and ethnic exclusion seems particularly important.

Inter-Ethnic Attitudes

We focused on ethnic majority and ethnic minority children to investigate whether multicultural education and the way teachers are perceived to deal with negative ethnic peer interactions, have positive consequences for out-group evaluations and inter-ethnic bias (more positive evaluation of the ethnic in-group compared to out-groups). One study was carried out among early adolescents in 47 classrooms from 24 primary schools in various Dutch cities (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001). The multilevel analysis indicated a significant between class-variance for inter-ethnic bias (10.8%). Hence, differences in ethnic group evaluations not only depended on individual differences but were also determined by the classroom context. Thus, the similarity in group evaluations between children in the same classroom was greater than the similarity in these evaluations between children in different classes. In addition, the results showed that multicultural education (as reported by the teacher, see Table 1) had a negative effect on bias among Dutch and Turkish-Dutch children. There was less bias in classes in which teachers pay relatively frequent attention to ethnic differences and discrimination, and this was mainly due to a more favorable evaluation of the out-group.

In another study, we examined Dutch and Turkish-Dutch children in 35 classes from 19 primary schools (10–12 years of age) in eight Dutch cities (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999). We measured the presence of multicultural education through students' perceptions of attention for diversity and equality in the classroom and their reports of whether they and their teachers would react to discrimination in the classroom (see Table 1). Again, the multilevel analyses indicated that inter-ethnic bias was not only determined by characteristics of the child, but also by the classroom context in which the child was situated (explaining 7.5% of the variance). Students' *aggregated* (i.e., consensually shared) perceptions of classroom attention for diversity and equality had a positive effect on the out-group evaluations and a negative effect on inter-ethnic bias of both the minority and majority children. This suggests that multicultural education positively influences their ethnic attitudes.

In a further study, Dutch and Turkish-Dutch children were explicitly asked to make an evaluative comparison between their ethnic in-group and the out-group (e.g., "Dutch children are smarter than Turkish children," "Turkish children are smarter than Dutch children," or "Dutch and Turkish children are equally smart"). This explicit measure assesses children's endorsement of in-group superiority and such an endorsement is normatively less acceptable than inter-ethnic bias that is based on separate in-group and out-group evaluations. It turned out that there was a negative effect of multicultural education on this direct bias but only for the native Dutch children and not for the Turkish-Dutch minority children (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2011). This might indicate that majority children are more likely to respond to the anti-racism message of multicultural edu-

cation. Research in the Netherlands has shown that minority and majority children are more likely to consider native Dutch peers as perpetrators of discrimination than ethnic minority group peers (Verkuyten et al., 1997). Thus, majority children might have a stronger concern for not appearing prejudiced or discriminatory and therefore be more strongly affected by equality norms. However, on average, the native Dutch children were significantly biased (more positive evaluation of the in-group compared to the out-group) whereas the Turkish-Dutch children were not (equal evaluations of both groups; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2011). This means that the lack of effect for the Turkish-Dutch children might be due to the relative absence of explicit bias in this group.

Multicultural approaches involve learning about differences and diversity and imply that one's own cultural standards are considered more relative (e.g., Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004). Limited knowledge and experiences make that the in-group is seen as the center of the world and its norms and customs provide the self-evident and invariant standards for judgment. However, multicultural education may broaden children's horizon by recognizing the value of other cultures and thereby put the taken-for-granted own cultural standards into perspective, making children less in-group centric. Consistent with this reasoning, three of the abovementioned studies found that perceived multicultural education was related to less positive in-group evaluations among minority and majority children alike (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012, 2013). However, this does not mean that multicultural education urges children to devalue their ethnic group membership. In fact in two other studies we found that perceived multicultural education was associated with higher ethnic self-esteem in Dutch and Turkish-Dutch children (Verkuyten et al., 1997) as well as in children with a Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese background (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). Thus, multicultural education appears to provide a setting in which children of all ethnic groups can develop a less ethnocentric cultural perspective but still learn to appreciate the positive aspects of their group membership.

Taken together, the results of these studies show that multicultural education has an impact on children's ethnic attitudes. It can lead to more positive out-group evaluations and can instill a less ethnocentric, and perhaps more "realistic," evaluation of the in-group in majority and minority children alike. This impact is probably due to the normative significance of group distinctions as well as to children's increased knowledge and understanding. The tendency to make a positive distinction in favor of the in-group is restricted by normative concerns and by the need to develop an adequate understanding of social reality.

Learning and Norms

Learning about cultural differences can increase students' understanding and appreciation of out-groups, and this is

especially likely when it is accompanied by an equality or anti-racism norm. Hence, learning and norm transmission can complement each other and multicultural education often includes both aspects (Banks, 2004). For example, Turner and Brown (2008) evaluated the impact of a 4-week Friendship Project designed to improve English primary school children's attitudes toward refugees. The project aimed to teach children "about the culture, lifestyle, and experiences of refugees in the various countries from which they originate" (p. 1299), but coming from an anti-racist perspective, it also encouraged the children 'to question their existing attitudes through interactive discussion' (p. 1299). Thus, the positive effect of the Project that was found in the short run (1 week after the program), but not in the long term (7 weeks after the program), was probably due to learning about cultural differences as well as norm endorsement. Intervention efforts typically address several components of multiculturalism and research using measures of perceived multiculturalism within the classroom also tends to focus on different aspects simultaneously. To our knowledge, there is no research that has tried to develop separate measures for these aspects. An exception is the shared perception of the way in which ethnic victimization is addressed in the classroom. Unlike the more formal aspect of teaching about cultural differences, this normative anti-racism aspect of multicultural education was associated with fewer rather than more reports of ethnic discrimination (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b).

A basic assumption underlying most multicultural educational initiatives is that prejudice and out-group dislike result from ignorance about cultural others. Therefore, learning about cultural difference is considered of crucial importance (see Nagda et al., 2004; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). In her 1999 review, Bigler concluded that relatively few intervention programs were firmly based on theory yet all of them assumed that learning played a key role. Theoretically, learning about cultural differences may be effective in various ways. First, when counter-stereotypic information is acquired, negative out-group attitudes can be challenged (see Pettigrew, 1998). In addition, through learning, students can develop a better understanding of different cultural traditions, practices, and behaviors as well as a less ethnocentric worldview (see Pettigrew, 1998; Verkuyten et al., 2010). Furthermore, there are not only differences between cultural group but also many similarities, and learning about these similarities might stimulate the perception of cultural others being children or people "just like us," which results in a more inclusive social identity (Houlette et al., 2004; Levy et al., 2005). Finally, by learning about negative historical and social experiences and circumstances of minority groups, students may develop more understanding and empathy and thereby greater acceptance of these groups (Hughes, Bigler, & Levy, 2007).

Multicultural education does not only involve learning about cultural difference but also the transmission of social norms. It teaches about diversity, or what cultural groups and their experiences are like, but also aims to improve equality by prescribing how one should treat members of other groups. In two studies in 38 and 26 classrooms we assessed multiculturalism in a normative way (e.g., "Does your teacher ever say that you *should* respect all cultures?," italics added; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012, 2013). Thus, the presence of a prescriptive anti-discrimination norm was assessed and this norm draws students' attention away from the out-group and toward the in-group and the self as potential perpetrators of discrimination. It turned out that higher perception of this classroom norm was associated with less positive in-group evaluation, whereas there was no association with out-group evaluation.

The prejudice reduction or anti-racism component of multiculturalism is central in most educational approaches. Students may conform to these norms for external reasons (e.g., social approval, punishments) and still be prejudiced and discriminate when significant others are not around. Experimental research has shown that the situational salience of anti-racist norms reduces discriminatory behavior in children (Monteiro, de Franca, & Rodrigues, 2009; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005). Yet, conformity may eventually lead to norm internalization. As Allport (1954, p. 477) noted in his discussion of anti-discriminatory legislation: "Law is intended only to control the outward expression of tolerance. But outward action, psychology knows, has an eventual effect upon inner habits of thought and feeling. And for this reason we list legislative action as one of the major methods of reducing, not only public discrimination, but private prejudice as well." This means that in schools this normative aspect of multicultural education should be clearly and consistently expressed and endorsed.

Multicultural or anti-racism norms can also be internalized so that students adopt and personally endorse them. In addition, these norms can be expressed by classmates. Classmates are an important reference group for (early) adolescents and students might adopt classmates' beliefs to guide their own evaluations (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999). A study by Poteat, Espelage, and Green (2007), for example, shows that the social dominance beliefs of peers have an impact on the homophobic attitudes of adolescents. In one study we examined the impact of classmates' beliefs about multiculturalism on children's ethnic attitudes (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013). We expected that the relationship between classmates' aggregated multicultural beliefs and the children's own group evaluations is mediated by the children's personal endorsement of multiculturalism.

Reference group influence is not uniform and can be normative but also lead to internalization (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Turner, 1991). In the former case, people publicly but not privately conform to the group's norms out of a desire to gain social approval (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; see also Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005). However, when the reference group influence is internalized, people rely on their group for reducing their own uncertainty. Internalization implies that the values, norms, and beliefs of the referent group are adopted and personally endorsed. In our study, we focused on ethnic out-group attitudes that were privately given rather than publicly expressed. Thus, the responses of each

participating child were not known by their classmates, making normative influences unlikely. Rather, we anticipated that classmates' multicultural beliefs were personally adopted. This was the reason for expecting that the association between classmates' multicultural beliefs and ethnic out-group attitudes is mediated by children's own beliefs about multiculturalism.

We tested this expectation in a study among native Dutch early adolescents attending 38 school classes from 23 schools. Controlling for ethnic diversity in the classroom and perceived multicultural education, we found that classmates' aggregated multicultural beliefs were positively related to Dutch children's evaluations of ethnic minority groups (Turks and Moroccans) and that this relationship was mediated by children's personal multicultural beliefs. This finding suggests that children adopted these beliefs to guide their own ethnic evaluations (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Turner, 1991). Another finding in line with this interpretation is that this influence was stronger for children who felt highly accepted by their peers, whereas the relation was weaker and not significant for children who felt weakly accepted. Well-accepted children are more easily influenced by their peers and more likely to personally endorse peer beliefs (Allen & Antonishak, 2008), and this is due to their stronger tendency to identify with their peer group (see Kiesner, Cadinu, Poulin, & Bucci, 2002). As argued by Social Identity Theory (SIT), group norms are more important for individuals with stronger group identification.

Multicultural Benefits

Our research provides evidence that multicultural education in primary schools can lead to more positive inter-ethnic relations. From the perspective of children, multicultural education predominantly involves learning about cultural group differences and the importance of anti-racism. Classroom practices like teachers addressing ethnic victimization and discussing the need for equality and fairness help to establish an anti-racist, inclusive norm within the classroom that improves ethnic attitudes. In addition, teaching children about cultural differences and other more formal aspects of multicultural education stimulates more positive attitudes by improving children's knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, the multicultural beliefs of classmates are an important source of reference for children's own beliefs and thereby for their ethnic attitudes. We found little support for the idea that multicultural education predominantly addresses the (negative) attitudes of majority group children. Only when children were explicitly asked to indicate whether their in-group is relatively superior, did multicultural education have an effect for majority but not minority group children. This may have to do with the former's concern about appearing prejudiced or discriminatory. In general, however, multicultural education had similar positive effects on the experiences and attitudes of Dutch majority and different groups of ethnic minority children.

Final Discussion and Future Directions

Based on the review of our research on multicultural education and ethnic attitudes, four directions for future studies will be discussed. A first direction is to more systematically examine different components of multicultural education using, for example, the work of Banks (2004). To our knowledge, there is no large-scale European research that has examined these components systematically and in relation to inter-ethnic attitudes. We focused on student's perceptions of multicultural education in terms of learning about cultural diversity and anti-racism norms. From the perspective of the children, these components are probably the more important ones and our research has found that children's perceptions have a greater impact on their ethnic attitudes than teacher's own assessments of their multicultural educational practices (Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). However, future studies could examine other components and perspectives on multicultural education. In addition, using multilevel analysis, our research examined classroom differences by studying a whole array of school classes. This has the advantage that specific characteristics of two or three classes are less likely to determine the results. Yet, future research could also examine the effectiveness in improving ethnic attitudes of specific interventions and projects. There are many of these projects in various European countries (Keast, 2007), but multicultural interventions are seldom founded upon systematic psychological research evidence and we know little about their effectiveness (for an exception see Turner & Brown, 2008, see also Aboud & Fenwick, 1999; Stephan & Vogt, 2004). In fact, by highlighting stereotypic activities (e.g., cultural traditions and practices) these interventions sometimes have divisive and detrimental effects on children's ethnic attitudes by reinforce negative ethnic stereotypes (see Bigler, 1999).

A second direction for future research is to examine children's inter-ethnic relations in diverse and more extensive ways. Our research has used explicit measures of group attitudes, but it is possible to use more implicit measures to examine the effects of multicultural education on children's attitudes (Degner & Wentura, 2010). The use of these measures is also important for theoretical reasons because it allows for a better test of the underlying mechanisms. For example, whereas anti-racism norms might affect the explicit attitudes of children they do not necessarily have an impact on their more implicit attitudes. When this is the case, it is likely that this norm is not internalized and that children's tolerant responses in a multicultural classroom setting do not generalize to situations in which this norm is not socially endorsed. In addition, it is important to examine multicultural education in relation to actual behaviors, social interactions, and cross-ethnic friendships. For example, children tend to consider their friendships to be personal matters and therefore these friendships might not be influenced by multicultural education. This was indeed found in a large-scale study in the Netherlands (Bakker, Denessen, Pelzer, Veneman, & Lageweg, 2007). Furthermore, we know almost nothing about the cross-situational

and longer-term effects of multicultural education. Research examining children's perceptions and behaviors outside the school class context as well as research adopting a longitudinal design is seriously missing.

A third direction for future research involves the examination of multicultural education in combination with other classroom characteristics. In our multilevel analyses, we have investigated the impact of multicultural education on ethnic attitudes while controlling for classroom characteristics such as the size and the ethnic composition of the school class. This allowed us to estimate the independent or unique effects of multicultural education. This is important because research has shown, for example, that support for multiculturalism at the classroom level is higher in more ethnically diverse classrooms (Van Geel & Vedder, 2011), and there are quite a number of studies in European countries that have shown that school class ethnic composition matters for children's inter-ethnic attitudes (e.g., Dejaeghere, Hooghe, & Claes, 2012; Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000; Vervoort, Scholte, & Overbeek, 2010). However, it might be important for future research to examine multicultural education in combination with the ethnic diversity within classrooms. Such an examination can be important for applied as well as theoretical reasons. Because of children's everyday experiences, multicultural education might work out differently in ethnic heterogeneous compared to more homogeneous classes. Messages may contradict or confirm what children "know already" and therefore be less or more effective (Bigler, 1999). Theoretically, it can be expected that the learning mechanism of multicultural education is less effective for ethnic majority students with more (versus less) ethnic minority classmates. Due to the higher opportunity for inter-ethnic contact those children may already know much about their ethnic out-group peers and therefore have less need for further learning. The normative mechanism of multicultural education is probably more effective for these majority children, as norms against discrimination and prejudice have higher contextual relevance in ethnic diverse school classes. Similar expectations can be formulated for ethnic minority students in relation to ethnic majority peers. In relatively "white" classrooms, minority children may have less need for knowledge about the majority group, but the anti-discrimination norm is probably more important for developing a positive attitude toward native peers. In addition, teachers' ethnicity and the teacher-child interpersonal relationship might be relevant for understanding the implications of multicultural education. For example, Dutch majority teachers tend to have less positive relationships with Moroccan-Dutch children compared to native Dutch children, but only if they pay little attention to multicultural issues in the classroom (Thijs, Westhof, & Koomen, 2012). In turn, relationships with out-group teachers can affect students' ethnic attitudes (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012).

Fourth, future studies should consider the role of parents. Both parents and school are influential in children's lives and together they have an influence on children's inter-ethnic attitudes. There is research on the transmission of ethnic attitudes between parents and children (e.g., Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 2001), and there are

various studies on the effect of school characteristics on children's inter-ethnic relations (e.g., Moody, 2001). But the former type of research does not take the role of the school into account and the latter type ignores the role of parents. Yet, it can be expected that for multicultural education to have a positive effect on inter-ethnic attitudes it is of importance that parents support positive ethnic relations. For example, multicultural intervention programs in schools can have a positive effect on children's ethnic attitudes who are socialized by their parents to be open to ethnic differences, whereas it may trigger feelings of threat or resistance for children that were taught to reject ethnic others. More generally, multicultural education might have a positive effect for children with parents that are open, but a negative effect for children with parents that hold a resistance toward, for example, cross-ethnic friendships (Munniksma, Flache, Verkuyten, & Veenstra, 2012). This would mean that the effect of multicultural education on ethnic attitudes depends on parents' ethnic socialization practices and peer management strategies regarding cross-ethnic contacts. It would also mean that there can be important individual differences that are responsible for multicultural education having a positive effect for some children but not for others.

Conclusion

Multicultural education can play an important role in developing positive inter-ethnic relations, not only in the US context (see Bigler, 1999; Zirkel, 2008), but also in Europe and the Netherlands in particular. However, in European countries, multiculturalism is clearly on the retreat with an increasing lack of public support for official multicultural policies and initiatives (Joppke, 2004). In addition, multicultural education is not without its problems because it might lead to ethnic stereotypes and group divisions (Brewer, 1997; Bigler, 1999). Furthermore, it is unclear whether the effectiveness of multicultural education depends on other school characteristics like ethnic school composition, differs between local and national contexts, and depends on the age of the children. Our studies focused on early adolescents (9–12 years) and multicultural educational practices might have different effects for younger and for older children. Younger children do not have a clearly developed understanding of ethnic group membership and cultural differences (Quintana, 1998). And research shows that older compared to younger native Dutch adolescents are less in favor of multiculturalism (Gieling, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2010, 2011), probably because they are more concerned about ethnic minority groups threatening Dutch culture and social cohesion in society.

These considerations indicate the importance of concentrating on when, how, and why specific effects occur. This means that more systematic attention should be paid to different forms of multicultural education, to types of inter-ethnic attitudes and behaviors, to the perspective of both majority and minority groups, and to various situations

and contexts and how they change across time. It also means that it is centrally important to examine how multicultural education is defined and the ways it is actually implemented and practiced. By doing so, psychologists can continue to make an important contribution to finding viable and productive ways of living with cultural diversity and improving inter-ethnic relations.

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