Antecedents, implications, and professional development of teachers’ multiculturalism

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Publication date
2022

Citation for published version (APA):

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CHAPTER 8

General Discussion
Multiculturalism has become a highly contested topic across many European and other Western countries for its effectiveness in fostering social membership of minoritized populations (Mikelatou & Arvanitis, 2019). Although initially considered an aid to integration in the Netherlands, implementation of multicultural practices has been abandoned, because multicultural policies were criticized for failing to reduce educational disadvantages and to improve integration of minoritized students (Rijkschroeff et al., 2005). Yet, the same challenges continue to exist today under the current educational integration policies and practices. Students from minoritized groups report feeling less and less at home due to discrimination and perceived lack of equal representation and opportunities in the Netherlands. Additionally, students from these groups continue to have a more disadvantaged educational position and continue to be overrepresented in lower academic tracks compared to their ethnic majority counterparts (Huijnk & Andriessen, 2016).

Persistence of the same challenges despite different policies, as well as the inconclusive findings about the type of policy (i.e., multicultural or civic integration) that yields the most favorable integration outcomes (Lutz, 2017), suggest a change in focus. In this dissertation, we shift from central integration policies to decentralized teacher interpretation and implementation of multicultural practices within their corresponding classrooms (Driessen, 2012). The role of teachers’ responsiveness to diversity in the classroom and how it relates to students’ social and academic experiences are not well explored. The current dissertation tried to fill this gap by offering an analysis of the relationship between teachers’ multiculturalism and student experiences, which teachers are more likely to adopt multicultural practices, and whether professional learning can motivate teachers to endorse a multicultural approach.

We operationalized teacher multiculturalism based on the practices Banks delineated into five distinct but related categories (Banks, 2004). In his conceptualization of multicultural education, teachers should employ content integration from a variety of cultures in what they teach, reflecting and representing the diversity of their students through texts, histories, values, beliefs, and varying perspectives from different cultures (Koshy, 2017). Moreover, teachers should increase their students’ awareness of the knowledge construction process and help students to be critical about who the knowledge serves and from whose perspective it was constructed (e.g., cultural references, biases). Next, teachers should aim for prejudice reduction by modifying their students’ attitudes through teaching methods, materials, and dialogue to decrease negative and improve positive intergroup relations by actively counteracting social biases (i.e., prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination). Further, teachers should aim for an empowering school culture and social structure, by examining disproportionality in attendance and achievement between groups in various aspects of school (e.g., to giftedness programs). Lastly, teachers should strive for equity pedagogy, i.e., equity in how they teach, by modifying their teaching to include various teaching and assessment styles to facilitate the learning and academic achievement of all students. This
lightbox?

General Discussion

requires avoiding standardized, one-size-fits-all approaches to teaching and learning, relating content to students’ lives and creating opportunities for them to engage with learning in accordance with how they engage with the world (e.g., cooperative learning, problem-based learning, role-playing, simulations).

With this conceptualization in mind, our research was guided by the following three questions: i) Does a multicultural approach potentially benefit students’ peer relationships and educational functioning at the classroom level?, ii) Which teachers are more likely to adopt a multicultural approach?, and iii) Would teachers benefit from professional learning on multicultural education and if so, how? In the remainder of this chapter, I interpret the findings of this dissertation in three separate parts to answer these questions. This will be followed by discussing the scientific contributions of the dissertation, and I conclude by sketching future directions and implications of our findings for practice.

PART I: “Does a multicultural approach potentially benefit students’ peer relationships and educational functioning when investigated at the classroom level?”

Intergroup Contact Theory suggests that situations in which individuals from different groups come together on fairly equal terms (i.e., equal status), with the support of social and institutional authority figures, and in cooperative environments, intergroup contact can help to reduce intergroup bias and improve interpersonal interactions (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In the education context, this would imply that improved peer relationships can contribute to students’ feelings of relatedness. According to Self-Determination Theory, this is a basic psychological need of all students; and, the fulfillment of this need is directly related to the extent to which students are intrinsically motivated to engage in learning and the learning environment (i.e., student engagement; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Reeve, 2012). Grounded on the premises of these two theories, in PART I of this dissertation, we investigated teachers’ prejudice reduction, content integration, and equity pedagogy practices in relation to students’ peer relationships and engagement with learning. Chapters 2 to 4 lend support for these propositions by demonstrating the positive relationship between multicultural education, peer relationships, and motivation; and, at the same time, draw boundary conditions under which multicultural education is more beneficial.

In Chapter 2, we approached classrooms as complex social systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Particularly, we charted the network architecture of the reciprocal interactions between prejudice reduction, students’ peer relationships, and their motivation to learn (a strong predictor of academic attainment and achievement; Lee, 2014) within the classroom complex system, wherein the effect of each of these constructs depended on the nature of the other (Burns & Knox, 2011). The findings obtained from comparing network structures of the majority and minoritized group students clearly indicated that different aspects of teachers’ prejudice reduction practices had positive effects on students’ peer relationships and motivation, albeit at varying degrees depending on students’ backgrounds: i) dialogue
about different cultures and importance of fairness towards different others had a stronger connection to minoritized students’ motivation, ii) approachability and acting against discrimination had positive connections to positive peer relationships and motivation, regardless of students’ ethnic background. Notably, peer relationships emerged as a central factor especially in minoritized students’ motivation. Thus, charting the network structures of classroom interactions revealed the specific mechanism through which prejudice reduction can influence students, and the findings suggested a possible mediation effect of peer relationships on the relationship between teacher multiculturalism and student engagement (further tested, partially in Chapter 3, and fully in Chapter 4).

In Chapter 3, we used a directional model to investigate the effect of prejudice reduction on students’ engagement, with teachers’ explicit multicultural attitudes and implicit attitudes towards minoritized ethnic groups as possible moderators to this relationship. In this chapter, we adopted a slightly narrower operationalization of prejudice reduction, referring to engaging in dialogue about issues around diversity wherein teachers actively confront prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. The findings from this chapter further supported the positive influence of teachers’ prejudice reduction practices on students’ engagement, regardless of students’ ethnic backgrounds. This was, however, only the case for teachers who exhibited positive multicultural attitudes above the average level of other teachers.

Chapter 4 investigated the effects of the equity pedagogy, content integration, and prejudice reduction dimensions of multicultural education on students’ engagement, and their peer relationships as a mediator to these relationships, in classrooms with high and low ethnic minoritized student concentrations. This chapter illustrated the positive effect of equity pedagogy. At the same time, a negative effect of content integration on peer relationships was found, and through these relationships on students’ engagement, in classrooms with a relatively small number of students with a minoritized ethnic background. In classrooms characterized by relatively high number of students with a minoritized ethnic background, the mediation effects were not statistically significant, while equity pedagogy did have a direct positive effect on students’ engagement. Unlike in Chapters 2 and 3, in none of these intergroup contexts did we find a significant effect of prejudice reduction on students. Unfortunately, we did not measure teachers’ attitudes in Chapter 4. However, it is possible that the positive effect of prejudice reduction could only have been identified for teachers who held above average positive multicultural attitudes (as in Chapter 3).

Taken together, we have established the positive implications of different aspects of prejudice reduction in Chapters 2 and 3, and equity pedagogy in Chapter 4, for students’ peer relationships and engagement. Next to the positive implications of multicultural practices, the pattern of findings from the three studies signaled to certain boundary conditions under which multicultural education is most likely to have success: i) when teachers emphasize unifying factors next to differences between groups of students, ii) when multicultural
practices are implemented in a non-superficial manner, iii) when students’ peer relationships have more to gain from multicultural education.

Firstly, based on our findings from Chapter 4, it appears that, in classrooms wherein the disadvantaged position of minoritized students is accentuated through the numerical composition of the classroom, teaching pedagogies that combat structures of inequality (i.e., equity pedagogy) can benefit peer relationships, whereas highlighting group differences through content integration can negatively affect peer relationships, and through these relationships, students’ engagement. The status differences between student groups may also explain why in classrooms characterized by a high number of students from minoritized backgrounds, these mediation effects were no longer statistically significant, while equity pedagogy and peer relationships still had direct positive effects on students’ engagement.

Given former research, this was not a completely unexpected finding. It has been previously suggested that majority group members can develop negative attitudes towards their outgroup members if their perceived representativeness of the larger social context is challenged (Steffens et al., 2017). One way to pose this challenge is through bringing out the diversity of perspectives and values in a particular social context where the majority group members are also in numerical majority. In such contexts, majority group members are more likely to see themselves as highly representative of the context (e.g., Dutch people in the Netherlands) compared to environments in which they are likely to see themselves as just another ethnic group among many others, thus in contexts where they are in numerical minority (e.g., Dutch people in Europe).

Because content integration explicitly highlights and celebrates the diversity of the society and its people, and therefore explicitly acknowledges the diversity of the social context, we believe that content integration might have challenged the perceived representativeness of the majority group members in classrooms where they were also in numerical majority. Equity pedagogy, on the other hand, is a rather subtle form of multicultural education. It avoids standardized, one-size-fits-all approaches to teaching and learning and relates content to students’ lives and creates opportunities for them to engage with learning in various forms. This is different from the more explicit mentioning of intergroup biases through prejudice reduction or to including content from different cultural perspectives into the curriculum and instruction through content integration. The positive influence of a subtler form and the negative effect of a more overt form of multicultural education signal to a need for emphasizing the unity of cultural groups around shared values and psychological needs when differences between students are made explicit (Bokhorst-Heng, 2007).

Secondly, a boundary condition frequently mentioned in the literature concerns the implementation quality of multicultural practices. When implemented superficially, content integration runs the risk of perpetuating existing stereotypes, and all too often, content integration is applied in the form of celebrating ethnic foods, music, and traditional clothes (Sleeter & McLaren, 2009). This could have contributed to the negative effect of content
Chapter 8

integration on peer relationships that we found in Chapter 4. This deviates from the actual intentions of content integration that aims to provide accurate representation and knowledge of cultural groups that may be mis- or underrepresented in teaching materials and offer perspectives on people’s lives that are not reduced to their known stereotypes (Banks, 2004). It is possible that, when adopted for a longer time, or implemented more profoundly, familiarizing students with different perspectives increases empathy and improves positive attitudes. We could not capture such dynamism within our sample in Chapter 4.

In line with this account, in Chapter 3, teachers who had positive multicultural attitudes above the average level of other teachers stood out amongst the others. Based on our findings, only these teachers could successfully improve student engagement through prejudice reduction practices. Although teachers in our samples mostly reported to be familiar with and sensitive to issues of cultural pluralism (i.e., positive multicultural attitudes) as they undoubtedly want to accommodate their students to the best of their abilities, in all likelihood, only teachers with above average positive multicultural attitudes not only talk about multiculturalism as an abstract ideal, but they are also able to lead by example. When endorsing a multicultural approach, self-reflection and knowledge enough to lead a meaningful and effective dialogue around diversity seem to be key. Without a certain affinity with the discussed diversity issues, application of a multicultural approach due to expectations from educational institutions or social demands from colleagues is likely to be ineffective or to have negative effects on student outcomes, as teachers may risk appearing unauthentic (Kreber, 2010; Palmer, 1998).

Lastly, in intergroup contexts and for students whose relatedness needs are rather thwarted, multicultural practices may have a bigger impact on students’ motivation. In Chapter 4, we found that equity pedagogy and content integration had significant effects on peer relationships in classrooms characterized by a relatively low number of minoritized students, and no significant effect on peer relationships in intergroup contexts characterized by rather high number of minoritized students. As the relationships in the latter are more likely to be more balanced and on fairly equal terms, they are possibly less likely to predominate students’ educational experiences. Indeed, in these classrooms, peer relationships were also found to have a weaker influence on student engagement. Next, in concordance with this proposition, in Chapter 2, peer relationships emerged as a central factor in minoritized, but not majority, students’ motivation. Since minoritized students experience higher levels of intergroup bias (i.e., prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination; Huijnk & Andriessen, 2016), it is possible that peer relationships are a more salient aspect of their educational lives and have a rather immediate effect on their motivation. For majority group students who, on average, report lower levels of intergroup bias, peer relationships probably do not occupy such an important role in their educational functioning. These findings together imply that multicultural practices may be more beneficial for students when their peer relationships have more to gain from these practices. As such, the strength of the basic psychological need
for relatedness may moderate the effects of need satisfaction on motivation (as manifested in students’ engagement).

In view of the findings aforementioned, it seems pivotal to approach multicultural education also through the lens of equity pedagogy. Just as with other pedagogical practices, one size does not seem to fit all in multicultural education. Different dimensions of multicultural education, or even different aspects of a same dimension, seem to potentially have different impact on different groups of students, in different intergroup contexts. Therefore, these practices should be implemented by teachers who are reflective and knowledgeable enough to recognize and distinguish their students’ needs and can calibrate their teaching and discourse accordingly. Teachers’ efforts should not only be directed at superficially acknowledging and celebrating differences but should also incorporate in-depth dialogue over diverse perspectives and experiences and accentuate the unity of cultural groups in the diversity of the larger social context (Bokhorst-Heng, 2007).

PART II: “Which teachers are more likely to adopt a multicultural approach?”

In the second part of this dissertation, we examined teacher characteristics that are potentially important antecedents of teachers’ responsiveness to diversity in their daily interactions in and around the classroom, as well as in curriculum and instruction. These antecedents reflected i) teachers’ abilities in understanding other people’s goals, intentions, or behaviors either through accurately understanding emotional phenomena (i.e., emotional intelligence) or through taking the perspective of the other (i.e., perspective taking); and, ii) teachers’ familiarity with and sensitivity to diversity, and awareness in their own biases and cultural frames of reference (i.e., multicultural attitudes) that predisposes their behaviors.

Findings from two studies showed that teachers who are more mindful of their own biases and cultural frames of reference and are comfortable with and sensitive to cultural pluralism (i.e., multicultural attitudes) are, in general, more understanding of their students and their behaviors during daily interactions, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Together with teachers’ abilities to take other people’s perspectives, these multicultural attitudes seem to also support teachers’ attempts to understand differences in their students’ needs and effectively navigate through these differences in their curriculum and instruction.

It has been widely documented that teachers are more likely to have positive interactions with majority groups students than with minoritized students (Thijs et al., 2012). These students, in addition, are more often subjected to disciplinary sanctions, and are treated more harshly (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011), even after controlling for achievement and behavior (Glock, 2016). Potential misunderstandings of students’ behaviors due to cultural differences have been suggested to, at least in part, account for these discrepancies in teacher interventions (van Tartwijk et al., 2009). Chapter 5, therefore, tested whether teachers differed in their interventions towards minoritized students compared to majority group students for the same kind of misbehavior and whether
this difference was related to two factors that can affect teachers’ correct assessment of student behavior: their multicultural attitudes and their abilities to recognize and interpret emotions. We did not find differences in teacher interventions to misbehaviors carried out by students with or without a migrant background. Notably, however, teachers who held more positive multicultural attitudes showed significantly more tolerant (e.g., discuss the misbehavior) than dismissive (e.g., expel) intervention strategies towards students, regardless of students’ ethnic backgrounds.

Building on these findings, and on a vast body of previous qualitative research, Chapter 6 sought quantitative evidence in support of two teacher qualities that are suggested to be important factors in multicultural curricular and instructional practices (culturally responsive teaching in this case): their multicultural attitudes and abilities to take others’ perspectives (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Our results indicated that both teacher characteristics are antecedents of practices that require willingness, effort, and ability to understand individual differences that relate to the cultural backgrounds of their students (e.g., using the cultural background of students to make learning meaningful). It is not surprising that the multicultural attitudes, which we found to determine the effectiveness of prejudice reduction on student engagement in Chapter 3, also predict the extent to which teachers employ these multicultural practices in the first place. Teachers’ familiarity with and sensitivity to issues of cultural pluralism, might hint to their heightened critical consciousness, thus their ability to recognize inequity and interpersonal biases, and their subsequent commitment to challenging them (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). As such, their efforts around diversity issues are likely to be due to a genuine interest and their beliefs in the effectiveness of multicultural practices, which underlies their success in improving student engagement (Chapter 3). Importantly, although to a lesser extent, the same teacher characteristics also predicted practices that require tapping individual differences between students and their social and academic needs that are not necessarily due to cultural elements (e.g., understanding academic strengths and weaknesses of students, promoting positive relationships with classmates). This may signal to an overall responsiveness of teachers that possess these characteristics.

PART III: “Would teachers benefit from professional learning on multicultural education and if so, how?”

Having unveiled the possible benefits of multicultural education on students’ peer relationships and engagement, and some of the important possible precursors of a multicultural approach to diversity, the remaining question is how we can prepare and encourage teachers to endorse a multicultural approach. On this account, in Chapter 7, we investigated whether teachers who have participated in professional learning in multicultural education differed in their approach to diversity from teachers who did not have such professional learning.
Professional learning opportunities that aim to improve teachers’ effective response to diversity ideally target teachers’ awareness and knowledge of their students’ lives, their attitudes and beliefs around diversity, and practices that build on their students’ cultural and linguistic resources (Liang & Zhang, 2009). In Chapter 7, we focused our investigation on the relationship between professional learning in multicultural education and teachers’ attitudes and beliefs around diversity.

Two types of multicultural professional learning opportunities for teachers were distinguished: i) professional learning in \textit{multicultural education} (ME) and ii) professional learning in teaching \textit{English as a Second Language} (ESL). Although ESL is one aspect of multicultural education that also incorporates elements of, for instance, inclusive curriculum and anti-racism, it requires more detailed attention to methods for second language acquisition and is therefore dealt with as a distinct area of expertise in this chapter (as in Watkins, Lean, & Noble, 2016).

Our results confirmed that, compared to teachers who did not receive any professional learning, teachers who received professional learning in ME, but also in ESL, were more likely to believe in the effectiveness of multicultural strategies in fostering cultural inclusiveness and recognize providing equitable chances for all students as an important goal of multicultural education. In addition, teachers who followed professional learning in ESL were less likely to support monoculturalism (as opposed to multiculturalism) compared to the teachers who did not receive any training. Having received professional learning in ME, however, did not have such significant effect on teachers’ monocultural attitudes.

These results signal that while learning about multicultural strategies can be an effective tool to change teachers’ beliefs around the goals and effectiveness of these strategies, it may not be enough to change teachers’ general multicultural attitudes. These findings may be attributed to the extensiveness and organization of the two professional learning programs. Becoming a discipline in its own right, professional learning in teaching ESL in New South Wales (where the study was conducted) typically includes a rather extensive program wherein teachers have ample opportunities to engage in and reflect on multicultural strategies, compared to sporadic professional learning in ME (NSW Department of Education, 2018). A prolonged exposure to multicultural ideology might, therefore, promote multicultural as opposed to monocultural attitudes in teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). This is less likely during professional learning in ME, which is most often provided in the form of sporadic workshops, each lasting one day or less, leaving no room for supervised application to practice (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011).

Moreover, our results indicated that the most effective time to receive professional learning is during in-service years, compared to during the initial preservice training or as part of a postgraduate qualification. These results imply that initial teacher training is unlikely to be sufficient in fully preparing the teachers to serve in multicultural classrooms, and it is more constructive to approach this preparation as an on-going process. In addition, our
results suggested that some teachers are likely to benefit more from professional learning than others, which is further discussed in ‘Implications for Practice’.

**Scientific Contributions**

Moving away from the discussions in the literature on the effectiveness of multiculturalism as part of a central integration policy, this dissertation concentrated on teachers’ interpretation and implementation of multicultural practices at a classroom level. Teachers’ multicultural approach to diversity can manifest itself in different forms, from attitudes and beliefs around diversity to inclusive curriculum and instruction, and daily interactions. It is therefore hard to conceptualize and operationalize multiculturalism and multicultural education, which is also evident from the plethora of definitions that refer to the intertwined and overlapping conceptual and pedagogical philosophies within the literature (Dover, 2013).

To understand the multiple meanings of a multicultural approach, within this dissertation, the conceptualization, operationalization, and analysis of teacher multiculturalism are therefore also manifold and cover a large ground ranging from its implications to its antecedents and development. This adds valuable insights to the literature focusing on equity in education that centers mostly on the U.S. educational contexts and relies heavily on qualitative approaches (Agirdag et al., 2016). In approaching teacher multiculturalism from different angles, the current dissertation documents several contributions to the teaching for social justice literature and research in educational psychology.

**Classrooms as Complex Systems**

Complex systems are characterized by multiple variables that are in constant interaction with each other and are part of other complex systems (Burns & Knox, 2011). Such a relational model of classrooms as complex systems has been previously put forth by researchers within Applied Linguistics (Burns & Knox, 2011). In this model, classrooms are not merely the context of teacher practice, but themselves are systems in which teachers are one of the multiple agents that continuously interact with each other, and changes in one have an impact on all the other agents and variables that are part of the classroom complex system.

Despite conceptualization of classrooms as complex systems, modeling of the statistical relationships between the components of these systems has been absent from the literature to date. In Chapter 2, we introduced a first application of state-of-the-art exploratory research methods to educational research in which *psychometric* network models were used to map out different aspects of students’ lives in relation to each other. The use of network modeling for exploratory studies has been extensively applied in personality

25 Previously referred to as psychological networks.
research (e.g., Costantini et al., 2015), and has been insightful in various other fields of research such as health sciences, social relations, and more recently psychopathology and psychiatry (e.g., Isvoranu et al., 2019). However, this type of analysis was not yet applied in the field of education at the time of our study.

Distinct from social networks (Wasserman & Faust, 1994), psychometric networks (Borsboom & Cramer, 2013; Epskamp, Borsboom, & Fried, 2018) are abstract models comprised of a set of nodes that represent variables (e.g., attitudes, symptoms, test items), a set of edges that represent unknown statistical relationships between nodes, and information about the nature of the nodes and edges (e.g., strength of the relationships). The estimation of edges separates psychometric networks from social networks in which the links between the nodes are already known (Epskamp & Fried, 2016).

The hypothesis generating and exploratory nature of the network approach extends the benefits of hypothesis testing statistical techniques widely used in the social sciences (extensively discussed in Chapter 2). Complex systems can better approach reality (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and represent students’ developmental environments with improved methodological rigor (De Schryver et al., 2015). We therefore expect this innovative and comprehensive modeling approach to substantially contribute to our knowledge about interpersonal processes in educational contexts.

**Measuring Teachers’ Multiculturalism**

Throughout the dissertation, we experimented with different ways through which we can measure teachers’ multiculturalism, reflected in their daily interactions, and their curricular and instructional practices. In doing so, we have developed tools that can benefit future efforts to study multiculturalism in the classroom.

To study teachers’ daily interactions with students from different ethnic backgrounds, in Chapter 5, we first determined the issues and areas of concern within Dutch classroom through teachers’ reports on the kinds of problematic situations they face within their classrooms and how they react to these situations. Using a free association paradigm to investigate which specific student behaviors teachers associate with problematic situations allowed us to get an understanding on the current state of affairs in Dutch primary school classrooms. This investigation revealed similarities between the student behaviors associated with problematic situations in the Netherlands and various other parts of the world (e.g., Iran: Aliakbari et al. 2013; US: Beaman et al., 2007; UK: Houghton et al., 1988; Spain: Kyriacou & Martín, 2010; Australia: Little, 2005; Norway: Stephens et al., 2005; China: Sun & Shek 2012; Turkey: Türnüklü & Galton 2001). Based on teacher reports on frequent problematic student behaviors and how they manage these problematic situations, we developed vignettes to investigate teachers’ intervention strategies to student misbehaviors more broadly. Given the revealed similarities across countries, the collection of these vignettes based on actual teacher reports offer a valuable tool to study sensitive aspects of teachers’ day-to-day
classroom management practices that may be otherwise difficult to explore (Jeffries & Maeder, 2005).

Similarly, next to teachers’ daily interactions, to investigate teachers’ curricular and instructional practices, we have adapted the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSES; Siwatu, 2007). The adapted scale measures the frequency with which teachers apply multicultural practices rather than their self-efficacy beliefs in applying those practices. We have successfully conducted research with this adapted tool both in Chapter 4 and 6. Using this tool, we found empirical support for teacher characteristics that were suggested to be important antecedents of culturally responsive teaching in previous qualitative studies, and demonstrated the relationship of the culturally responsive teaching practices with students’ peer relationships and motivation. As such, we have not only provided empirical confirmation of the importance of these teacher characteristics for multicultural education and of multicultural education for students’ social and academic functioning, but we have also offered a new way to study teacher multiculturalism through the adapted questionnaire.

**Implications of Multicultural Education**

In investigating the implications of teacher multiculturalism for students, we used the broad 5-dimensional conceptualization of multicultural education brought forward by Banks (2004). In adopting such a broad conceptualization, we were able to examine i) how different aspects of multicultural education function for different groups of students, and ii) how these aspects independently relate to students’ peer relationships and engagement in different intergroup contexts.

Firstly, the extant research to date on the effects of school diversity policies (e.g., multiculturalism, colorblindness) focuses either on the school adjustment of minoritized students, or on aspects of intergroup relations (e.g., attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping; as reported in Celeste et al., 2019). Rarely, however, have researchers sought quantitative evidence on the effects of diversity practices on student outcomes. Rarer still are the comparative investigations of the effects of these practices on majority and minoritized group students. It has been suggested that valuing cultural diversity can be costly on majorities who may feel excluded, alienated, or challenged (Jansen et al., 2015; Plaut et al., 2018; Steffens et al., 2017; Stevens et al., 2008). Yet, we are not aware of any studies that investigated the role of diversity practices on student outcomes in different ethnic groups. Two recent studies investigated the role of school diversity policies, but not practices, on student outcomes in both majority and minoritized student groups (Baysu et al., 2021; Celeste et al., 2019). These studies conceptualized school multicultural policies as ‘valuing diversity’, referring to a narrower construct than multicultural education that does not include multicultural pedagogical practices or prejudice reduction efforts. To the best of our knowledge, the study detailed in Chapter 2 is the first to have comprehensively investigated the distinctive effects
of aspects of multicultural education on minoritized and majority group students’ school outcomes.

A related contribution of this dissertation is the quantitative examination of distinct dimensions of multicultural education in relation to students’ peer relationships and engagement with learning and school. On a larger scale, the effect of multiculturalism on intergroup relations and participation in country’s institutions occupy the political discourse on integration. While Dutch integration policies abandoned multiculturalism due to being considered a responsible factor for integration difficulties of minoritized groups (Rijkschroeff et al., 2005), examining these interactions at a classroom level with different demographic profiles (in Chapter 4) actually revealed the possible positive effects of multiculturalism. This provides a contrasting story against populist anti-immigration rhetoric, which has been growing in Europe under the increasing influence of far-right parties in legislative bodies and have deemed multiculturalism ineffective (Mikelatou & Arvanitis, 2019). Importantly, in the course of examining various different dimensions of multicultural education, we have identified certain boundary conditions for the effectiveness of these practices. These boundary conditions might help to explain the criticism towards forms of multiculturalism as reifying groups as separate entities, ignoring similarities, and ultimately rationalizing segregation (Barry, 2001; Brewer, 1997; Turner, 1993 as reported in Verkuyten, 2005).

Although the boundary conditions yield only circumstantial evidence for the suggested costs of multiculturalism on majority group students, the negative effect of content integration on peer relationships within classrooms where the majority group students are in numerical majority (Chapter 4) is not at odds with possible negative effect of, at least, this aspect of multicultural education on majority group members’ outgroup attitudes. Given the findings from Chapters 2 and 4, this dissertation inspires distinct but related theoretical predictions for the majority and minoritized group students, and for different dimensions of multicultural education within different intergroup contexts. In line with our complex systems approach to classrooms, the experiences of students are not isolated from each other. It is, therefore, worth conducting in-depth investigations of the effects of different multicultural practices on majority next to minoritized students within different group dynamics, not least to optimally improve intergroup relationships and minoritized students’ educational positions.

**Teacher Professional Learning**

Professional learning opportunities in multicultural education are not prevalent in the Netherlands, even though teachers list teaching in multicultural/multilingual settings as one of the areas in which they need more training (OECD, 2019). We therefore turned to New South Wales, Australia, and examined the extent to which investing in such professional learning opportunities could benefit public school teachers’ approach to diversity and, as such, potentially improve their performance in accommodating students from diverse backgrounds.
Previous evidence for the effectiveness of such programs in positively influencing teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and practices is rather limited and mixed (for a review see Parkhouse et al., 2019). To our knowledge, being the largest study in scale that sought quantitative evidence for the effectiveness of professional learning in multicultural education, the study detailed in Chapter 7 allowed us to compare the possible influence of professional learning in multicultural education between different groups of teachers that were previously investigated in isolation from each other. This research was unique in its ability to integrate information from teachers who received professional learning in different aspects of multicultural education at different stages of their careers, who were appointed to both primary and secondary schools, and who occupied both executive and non-executive teaching positions. As a result, it gave us unparalleled insights on which type of professional learning when and for whom might make the biggest impact (further discussed under ‘Implications for Practice’).

Limitations and Future Research

This dissertation was not without its limitations. It is recommended that further research be undertaken keeping the following limitations in mind: Firstly, an arguable weakness is the lack of a unified operationalization of teacher multiculturalism throughout the dissertation. This added to our understanding of different aspects of multiculturalism and multicultural education, but it has also lowered the comparability of our results across the studies.

Secondly, Chapters 2 and 5 aimed to map out differences in classroom dynamics between the ethnic majority Dutch group and specific minoritized groups. In these chapters, the minoritized groups were comprised of individuals with a migration background from Turkey and Morocco. This choice was based on their relatively high levels of experienced exclusion (Huijnk & Andriessen, 2016) and the discussion on cultural diversity in the Netherlands that revolves around issues pertinent to Islam (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). In contrast, the main interest of Chapters 3 and 4 was not determining differences in these groups’ experiences from that of the majority group. In these chapters, we simply utilized minoritized status to control for the effect of teachers’ and students’ ethnic backgrounds, and only measured the share of minoritized students in classrooms.

Minoritized groups in the Netherlands, however, have different migration histories and occupy different hierarchical positions within society, with minoritized groups from former colonies on the top and the groups with history of migration from Turkey at the bottom of the hierarchy (Weiner, 2015). Teachers’ preferable preconceptions about one ethnic group over another could itself influence the degree to which they incorporate multicultural practices in their teaching. Similarly, the extent to which students benefit from these practices could differ as a function of their hierarchical position in the society. Future research is encouraged to examine whether psychological and behavioral principles established within our studies are
applicable to different minoritized groups than groups with Turkish and Moroccan migration history. These studies can furthermore examine whether applications of these principles to classrooms with different ethnic profiles in different neighborhoods, and increasing/decreasing diversity as the share of one ethnic group grows warrant alternative solutions.

Thirdly, our findings are limited by our cross-sectional design. Further research in the effects of continued engagement with multicultural practices as well as in their lasting effects are, therefore, essential next steps in creating a more complete understanding of multiculturalism. For instance, the negative influence of content integration on peer relationships (Chapter 4) may be an artifact of initial reactions from students who, in time, learn to take and appreciate each other’s perspectives. On a related note, teachers themselves may become more skilled in time in incorporating multicultural practices. As teachers do not receive a formal training as to how to effectively respond to diversity in their classrooms, we do not know how skilled teachers in our sample were in adopting these practices. Perceptions of the students, as well as the quality of the implementation may in fact be different from how teachers perceive their practices to be. What one teacher judges as good content integration may be considered a superficial practice for others. Although quantitative research offers robust and generalizable results, further research is encouraged to supplement it with a qualitative approach to gain more insights into the quality and content of teacher practices.

Additionally, further studies regarding the role of student engagement on teacher practices would be worthwhile as the cross-sectional nature of our studies prevents us from making definite claims about the suggested direction of effects. When discussing our statistical models and results, we mostly assumed a unidirectional feed forward effect of multicultural education on students’ peer relationships and engagement. Yet, students’ motivation can have a feedback effect on the way teachers, as well peers, respond to them. In line with a complex systems approach to classrooms, it is worth investigating the reciprocal connections between students’ motivation, as expressed through their engagement, and teacher practices (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Do increases in student engagement in turn increase teacher competence, autonomy, and support? Similarly, do students who show initially higher levels of engagement show higher increases in their engagement, and benefit more from multicultural practices? Following up the same classrooms across the school year can deepen our understanding of how these feedback loops affect each other over time.

Lastly, we tried to respond to our research question about the effectiveness of professional learning in multicultural education based on findings from a study conducted in Australia. We do not yet know how the conclusions we make about the possible positive impact of professional learning on multicultural education would transfer to the Netherlands. Australia is one of the first countries to introduce multiculturalism in political and educational spheres (Bulmer & Solomos, 2012). From the introduction of multiculturalism until the time of our research, we could expect certain advancements in how professional learning is
tailored and delivered to the teachers in Australia. Therefore, future professional learning opportunities in the Netherlands may need to undergo substantial crafting before they can instigate positive impact on teachers. More positively, however, teachers in the Netherlands may benefit more from these professional learning opportunities as they have more to gain considering the current lack of formal education on responding to diversity.

On a related note, we found positive relationships between professional learning and teachers’ multicultural attitudes and beliefs. This, however, does not guarantee that teachers’ attitudes and beliefs will translate to actual behavior. Structures surrounding the individual teachers, such as the school environment, can reproduce inequalities. Teachers may perceive the reforming of these structures to be out of their reach unless they receive sufficient institutional and administrative support (Banks, 2016). It would be fruitful for future research to examine to what extent and under which circumstances do factors such as teacher attitudes and beliefs translate to actual multicultural practices. Such research is especially relevant given our encouraging findings that multicultural attitudes are not only important for the adoption of multicultural practices, but also the effectiveness of such practices in improving students’ engagement with learning.

Implications for Practice

It is well known that teachers have a crucial role in students’ experiences and opportunities in their school trajectories (Gay, 2000); therefore, the impact of teachers’ approaches to diversity can be large. We found that a multicultural approach to diversity can benefit all students’ peer relationships and engagement with learning, under certain boundary conditions. Based on our findings, we can devise the following recommendations for educators and policy makers who aim to improve and implement a multicultural approach to diversity in the classroom.

Corroborating earlier findings (Steffens et al., 2017), we found that certain aspects of multicultural education, perhaps also because they are implemented superficially, could have a negative impact on peer relationships (Chapter 4). It is possible that activating the idea of otherness through reifying group distinctions, especially if they perpetuate stereotypes, could jeopardize the quality of intergroup relationships, and through these relationships, students’ educational functioning. This signals to the importance of not only acknowledging and celebrating differences between cultural groups, but also celebrating and accentuating the values that bring groups together.

The evidence from our studies suggests that teachers who can take the perspectives of their students, who value diversity of perspectives, and who are aware of their own biases (i.e., multicultural attitudes) are also more likely to be better negotiators of such complexities of diversity in the classroom. Although many teachers report having egalitarian self-concepts and value diversity, and therefore to have positive multicultural attitudes, our results indicated that only the teachers who hold relatively strong positive multicultural attitudes
could have a strong impact on students’ educational functioning through multicultural practices (in this case prejudice reduction). This implies that top-down school policies may not be effective in improving student outcomes unless teachers themselves are ready to walk the talk and are proactive rather than reactive to the needs of their students. Therefore, it is advisable that professional learning opportunities target teachers’ multicultural attitudes before they provide them with a blueprint for employing multicultural practices.

We found that, while short term professional learning can demonstrate the effectiveness and importance of multiculturalism, a prolonged engagement with multicultural ideology and practices, providing ample opportunities to engage in and reflect on multicultural strategies, may be necessary to change teachers’ multicultural attitudes. In-service professional development, compared to initial preservice training, can be especially effective in improving teachers’ multicultural attitudes and beliefs. This is probably the case because in-service professional development is more relevant to teachers’ experiences at the time of the professional learning. In-service professional development tends to be specific in scope and pursued at point of need to prepare the teacher for a present or a future role (Parkhouse et al., 2019). Since student teachers do not have practical experiences with many components of multicultural education, these components do not go beyond abstractions for these teachers (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Experiences with students with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds through, for instance, compulsory internships at schools in urban areas, may render the content of the initial preservice training in multicultural education more relevant for practice.

Along these lines, Warren (2018) recommended three specific professional learning experiences that could further improve teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and perspective taking abilities. First, teachers should be exposed to texts written by culturally and linguistically diverse individuals in order to better recognize, determine, and scrutinize examples of institutionalized oppression. Second, teachers should participate in the social worlds and realities of individuals from cultural communities that differ from their own. Meaningful direct contact with people from diverse backgrounds (Allport, 1954), and opportunities to reflect on how culture shapes our values, beliefs, biases, and behaviors have been shown to improve attitudes and awareness (Case, 2007). Third, these experiences should be accompanied by critical dialogue with colleagues on a regular basis. Introspection on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions towards students and their families should form the basis of these dialogues.

Therefore, teacher education experiences similar to that recommended by Warren (2018) can be incorporated to teacher professional learning programs. This would support teachers’ capacities to become more effective in teaching a diverse student body. Importantly, our results suggest that strengthening these capacities would not only improve the culturally sensitive teaching but also teaching in a socially sensitive manner to student needs in
general. As such, strengthening these capacities would benefit all students regardless of their backgrounds.

Findings from our study conducted in New South Wales suggested that professional learning in multicultural education can especially benefit teachers who would be expected to spend longer time in the classroom, and teachers who are or will be teaching in rather heterogenous classrooms. Specifically, primary compared to secondary school teachers, classroom teachers compared to executive staff with teaching duties, teachers who are appointed to schools with higher percentage of students from minoritized backgrounds, and teachers who have been in the teaching force for a longer period may benefit more from professional learning as these teachers reported to believe less in the effectiveness of multicultural strategies in fostering cultural inclusiveness. Several mechanisms could be underlying these findings. First, teachers may feel ill-equipped for accommodating diversity in the classroom (OECD, 2017), because the strategies do not seem effective or realistic, or the professional learning programs are not easily accessible. Second, as previously mentioned, teachers may feel discouraged with time because they do not receive sufficient institutional and administrative support (Banks, 2016). Third, employing multicultural strategies may increasingly exhaust teachers if it increases the pressure towards another performance standard they have to meet (OECD, 2017). Regardless of the mechanism involved, teachers cannot be expected to effectively respond to diversity unless they are trained for it. This stresses the importance of institutional and administrative legitimization and support for teachers’ efforts to adapt to the diverse needs of their students (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003).

**Concluding Remarks**

To conclude, this dissertation provides the first comprehensive assessment of teachers’ multicultural practices in the Netherlands. Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation, we can conclude that multicultural education can contribute to students’ positive peer relationships and engagement for students from both minoritized and majority groups, albeit within certain boundaries. In substantiating this, this dissertation has been one of the first attempts to apply a complex systems framework for studying classroom interactions and appears to offer the first comparison of the experiences of majority and minoritized students. Our findings are encouraging in that teachers who can take the perspectives of their students and who hold positive multicultural attitudes seem to be more likely to endorse multiculturalism in their curricula, instruction, and daily interactions. A prolonged, in-service professional learning opportunity in multicultural education can be effective in improving these teacher qualities that are essential for teachers’ effective response to diversity. Well-trained teachers, in turn, can play a major role in increasing student belongingness, reducing the achievement gap between student, and shaping student success (Nieto & Bode, 2008).