Teaching in diversity: teachers and pupils about tense situations in ethnically heterogeneous classes
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1. Background
The pupil population of schools in the Netherlands has, as in other Western-European countries, become increasingly ethnically diverse in the past decades. This particularly applies to schools in large and middle-sized towns and cities. It is a result of labour migration (especially from Turkey and Morocco), immigration from the former Dutch colonies (Surinam and the Dutch Antilles) and the arrival of political and economic refugees (mainly from Africa and the Middle East). With the increasing ethnic diversity of the population composition, schools were given the task of preparing pupils for citizenship in an ethnically diverse society. Since the mid-eighties policy regulations have required teachers to pay attention to mutual respect and tolerance through intercultural education. The policy on diversity and immigration since then has been increasingly shaped by concerns about the integration of ethnic minorities and an emphasis on assimilation. Schools are expected to foster the so-called ‘basic values’ of Western societies into all pupils, according to a policy document from April 2004 (Ministry of Education and Science, 2004). In 2006 the law on ‘active citizenship and social integration’ came into effect, which established the obligation of schools to contribute to the integration of pupils in the Netherlands (Education Inspectorate, 2006). The law aims to develop a communal, shared perspective in young people on the contribution they can make as citizens to the Dutch society. Owing to the Dutch principle of freedom of education (article 23 of the Constitution) the content and pedagogical approach are not formally prescribed. Schools and teachers in the Netherlands therefore have a large measure of freedom in how they realize the official goals of citizenship education.

Many studies on citizenship education are restricted to reflecting on the objectives (Schuitema, 2008). Various interpretations of the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes are found in the literature which are related to different ideas about modern society and the type of citizenship that these objectives require. Attention to ethnic diversity in thinking about citizenship education has a short history. In the last decennia considerations about citizenship education have been influenced by philosophical reflections on the question how to realize social cohesion and diversity in democratic multicultural societies (cf. Enslin, Pendlebury & Tjiattas, 2004; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Kymlicka, 1995). Multicultural citizenship became an important concept, of which balancing communality and diversity is generally perceived to be an essential aspect (Banks, 2001, 2004). Citizenship education should therefore be aimed at teaching pupils to develop carefully considered viewpoints on living in ethnically diverse societies, taking the common interest as well as different
perspectives, interests and conflicting values into account (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Parker, 2003b).

There are virtually no specific examples of how to educate pupils for citizenship in an ethnically diverse society, nor for citizenship education in an ethnically heterogeneous class. Citizenship education can find expression in various aspects of education: in the school culture, in the daily interactions in the class, in the curriculum, and in teachers’ actions and behaviour (Solomon, Watson & Battistisch, 2001). As such, pupils not only learn about citizenship in lessons specifically on this subject but also by merely going to school together and being part of the school community.

A class with a diverse composition can be seen both as a rich learning environment for citizenship education and as a complication in putting it into practice, owing to the assumed diversity of viewpoints and value-orientations (e.g. Burbules & Bruce, 2001; Oser, 1991; Parker, 2003a). Parker (2003a) states that educators need simultaneously to engage in multicultural and citizenship education, because the two are aspects of the same thing. He perceives schools as public places where diverse populations of young people are gathered. Their diversity concerns ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as differences regarding for example gender, social class, religion, language, cognitive abilities. In Parker’s point of view, acceptance of diversity is a key element for democratic citizenship education in an ethnically diverse society. Ideally, education consists of the following aspects: ‘increase the variety and frequency of interactions among students who are different from one another; orchestrate these contacts to foster deliberation about the problems that inevitably arise from the friction of that interaction; and strive to develop communicative competence, particularly the receptive practice of listening across social perspectives’ (Parker, 2003a, p. xi). Deliberation involves everyone in the group forging together the alternatives and making a decision about a problematic situation that was experienced by all. By giving these aspects a central role in education, a sense of community is created at school and in the class. According to Parker, the diversity found in schools provides an asset for citizenship education (Parker, 2003a).

Tensions and conflicts are an inherent part of going to school and pupils can learn from them (Oser, 2005; Veugelers & De Kat, 2003). A starting point of this thesis is that tense situations can provide opportunities for citizenship education for living in an ethnically diverse society. Tense situations present teachers with the task of taking pedagogical action. Teachers can, for example, choose to react to a situation by guiding a discussion in the way that Parker illustrates. In such a discussion, values related to living in an ethnically diverse society can be considered and pupils can be encouraged to reflect on them. Pupils can learn about different perspectives, learn how to empathize with perspectives unknown to them, and about the influence of prejudices and stereotyping on inter-ethnic relations.
There is virtually no empirical knowledge about the experiences of teachers and pupils with tense situations in ethnically diverse classes. However, research has been done in the field of teachers’ professionalism in citizenship education on the moral dilemmas teachers experienced in ‘critical situations’ in their classes. This showed that teachers often have to deal with tensions regarding values like justice, concern for others and sincerity (Maslovaty, 2000; Oser, 1991; Tirri, 1999). Very little research indeed has been done on critical situations in teaching in ethnically heterogeneous classes. One exception is the research that Leeman conducted in 2002 (see Leeman, 2003, 2006). The interviews she held with eleven experienced teachers resulted in an overview of situations in which they were faced with moral dilemmas related, in their eyes, to ethnic diversity. Justice is, for example, an issue when teachers are confronted with what they see as unfair accusations of discrimination by pupils, for example, when marking a test. It is also at stake when pupils make discriminatory remarks about someone’s appearance or cultural background. The teachers were generally concerned about the balance between communality and diversity in their classes. They wanted to solve problems in a democratic way with the active participation of all pupils. However, the teachers’ experience was that not all pupils were always prepared to search for a solution together.

The teachers who were interviewed had a positive interest in ethnic diversity, were sensitive to intercultural tensions and had a lot of experience with teaching in ethnically diverse classes. No empirical knowledge about the experiences of a larger, more average group of teachers exists in the Netherlands. Knowledge about the experiences of pupils with tense situations in ethnically diverse classes is also lacking.

The aim of this thesis is to add to the knowledge base on the experiences of teachers and pupils with tense situations in ethnically diverse classes by conducting a nationwide study on this issue. In research ‘critical situations’ are usually categorized by those involved (Leeman, 2006; Maslovaty, 2000; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002; Veugelers & De Kat, 2003). Owing to my interest in tense situations as opportunities for citizenship education, only situations between teacher and pupil(s) and between pupils themselves are the subject of this research. For the same reason only situations that occur in the class during lessons are included. Situations during the breaks, in the playground and in the communal areas of the school do not fall within the scope of this study.

Three subjects are central to this thesis: first the experiences of teachers and pupils with tense situations; second the reactions of teachers to those situations; and third guiding discussions in ethnically diverse classes about sensitive issues related to ethnic diversity in society. An explanation is given below of the research questions that were formulated for the three subjects.
1.2. Research questions related to the experiences of teachers and pupils with tense situations
In recent years, schools with an ethnically heterogeneous pupil population in the Netherlands are regularly confronted with negative images of themselves. Partly due to shocking events, such as the attacks in New York (2001), Madrid (2004) and London (2005), and the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam (2004), the political debate on immigration and diversity has a predominantly negative tone, both in the Netherlands and other Western-European countries. Concern about the integration of minorities and about a growing gap between the Dutch and ethnic-minority groups has increased. In that period the media regularly reported incidents in ethnically diverse schools, for example, about pupils who demonstrated their support for Bin Laden or Mohammed B., the murderer of Theo van Gogh. In the prevailing political climate at that time these incidents were easily interpreted as indications of intercultural relations being under pressure and of the problematic integration of ethnic minorities. With these images in mind, every conflict at an ethnically diverse school is easily perceived as an inter-ethnic conflict. The question is whether teachers and pupils also see conflicts in this way. The experiences of teachers and pupils with tense situations are central to the first research question. The situations that teachers in Leeman’s study reported were used to answer this question (Leeman, 2003). Whether and to what extent a situation is tense or is related to the ethnic diversity of the class depends on the experience of the persons concerned; those involved in a situation can experience it differently. For this reason teachers and pupils were also asked in this study to what extent they experience these situations as tense and to what extent they relate them to the ethnic diversity of the class.

Personal characteristics can play a role in experiencing tense situations. There are indications based on empirical research that pupils differ along ethnic lines with regard to their perceptions of and experiences of school and the teacher (e.g. Den Brok & Levy, 2005; Hermans, 2004; Luciak, 2004; Ogbu, 1992; Portes & MacLeod, 1996; Saharso, 1992; Veldman, Van Tartwijk, Den Brok & Wubbels, 2006). On this basis I assumed that the experiences of pupils with tense situations differ by ethnic origin and their perception of their ethnic identity. Various explanations are put forward in the literature for these possible differences. They vary from group-specific experiences, such as migration history, social-economic status, and stereotyping, to differences in pupils’ norms and values along ethnic lines. The second research question is intended to ascertain whether the supposed differences between pupils along ethnic lines do indeed exist.

With regard to teachers, I am, besides differences along ethnic lines, also interested in the relation between intercultural sensitivity and experiences with tense situations. Intercultural sensitivity relates to various aspects. It means that a teacher has a positive view of diversity, that he can put himself in the position of pupils from a different background, and can attune in education to
Section I - Opening

pupils’ perceptions of the world (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Westrick & Yuen, 2007). Interculturally sensitive teachers are aware of social issues that can have an impact on their pupils (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Wubbels, Den Brok, Veldman & Van Tartwijk, 2006). Intercultural sensitivity is interpreted theoretically as a condition for developing the necessary competences for teaching in ethnically heterogeneous classes, such as forming a relationship of trust with pupils and creating a pleasant, safe learning environment (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Interculturally sensitive teachers possibly experience less tense situations because they are aware of the underlying causes of tense situations (cf. Hanze, Katz & Norte, 2000) and these thanks to the competences they have result less often in explicit, open tensions or escalation. However, it is also possible that interculturally sensitive teachers notice more tense situations as they are more sensitive to diversity (cf. Leeman, 2003, 2006).

Research question 2 also looks at the relation between experiences with tense situations and context characteristics, such as type of education and composition of the pupil population. Reports in the media about incidents in diverse schools often prompt suggestions that tensions are due to the composition of the population of the school. Pre-vocational secondary education schools (vmbo) in particular have an image of a school type where problems abound (Kleijer, Van Reekum & Tillekens, 2004). Pupils from a non-Dutch background and from the lower social classes are over-represented in pre-vocational secondary education. Teachers like Beekmans (2004, 2006) and Paulle (2005) - the latter did participatory research as a teacher - describe forceful images of the daily course of discordant events in two Amsterdam schools for pre-vocational secondary education attended by ‘pupils at risk’ from a non-Dutch background. These are often pupils from broken homes from a low social class, who mainly attend schools providing learning support classes (Iwoo) in pre-vocational secondary education. According to both authors, the quality of education in these classes for this specific group of pupils leaves a lot to be desired. The specificity of the schools in the study prompts the question whether the image of pre-vocational secondary education as a school type, where an excessive number of incidents and tensions occur, is appropriate.

The more diverse the class is, the greater the chance is that divergent values and convictions will be expressed (Burbules & Bruce, 2001). It is plausible that more tense situations will occur in classes in which a large number of diverse groups are represented. On the other hand, teachers and pupils in ethnically heterogeneous classes have experience with ethnic diversity. Their intercultural communication skills are thus probably well developed (cf. Banks et al., 2001; Paccione, 2000). Therefore, I am interested in the question whether tensions that occur during the practice of teaching are related to the ethnic composition of the pupil population.

Summarizing the above, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions to provide knowledge about the experiences of teachers and pupils with tense situations in ethnically diverse classes nationwide:

1. Which tense situations do teachers and pupils experience in ethnically diverse classes and to what extent do they relate these situations to the ethnic diversity of the class? (chapters 2 and 3)
2. Are the experiences of teachers and pupils with tense situations related to personal and context characteristics? (chapters 2 and 3)

1.3. Research questions about the reactions of teachers to tense situations

The second aim of this thesis is to gain insight into the reactions of teachers to tense situations. Teachers can be confronted with all kinds of considerations when they experience these situations: is it better to react to the situation or to ignore it? Is it better to react immediately or to deal with it later? With every reaction to a tense situation (including not reacting) the teacher is giving an implicit or explicit moral message (Hansen, 2001). By charting how teachers deal with tense situations and how pupils appraise teachers’ actions, this thesis aims to provide more insight into the possibilities tense situations provide for citizenship education for living in an ethnically diverse society.

How teachers actually react when they experience tense situations in ethnically diverse classes, and whether they find it difficult to determine how to react, is not known from systematic research. The purpose of the third research question is to chart this with the help of insights from research on critical situations in education in general. The ways of reacting can broadly be differentiated firstly by the extent to which there is room for pupils to contribute and secondly whether the teacher adopts a personal stance or not (Maslovaty, 2000; Oser & Althof, 1993; Van Veen et al., 2003; Veugelers & The Kat, 1998).

In the context of citizenship education aimed at developing critical, democratic citizens, educational strategies are to be preferred that attribute a great deal of value to an open learning environment and the active learning of pupils, such as dialogue and co-operative learning (cf. Solomon, Watson & Battistisch, 2001). According to the classification that Solomon, Watson and Battistisch (2001) used in their review study of research on moral education, this type of strategy is an indirect approach to moral education. This type differs from direct approaches, which are strongly teacher-centred and oriented on the transfer of values. The teacher then gives instruction on specific values, explicitly propagates them and encourages their use via rewards and punishment. Solomon and his colleagues conclude in their review that even though little thorough research is available on the effects of moral education, there seems to be more evidence that indirect approaches are more effective than direct approaches in moral education.

To what extent the teacher should stimulate specific values is the subject of discussion in the field of moral education. In recent decades there has been wide support for the notion that it is neither desirable nor possible for the
teacher to have a value-neutral position (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). A value-neutral position of the teacher would stimulate a value-relativistic attitude in pupils. According to Veugelers (2000) and Oser (1999), ideally an optimal balance is found between pupils developing values independently and teachers stimulating certain values.

The fourth research question focuses on pupils’ appraisal of their teachers’ actions in tense situations. Knowledge about pupils’ appraisal of the actions of their teacher in tense situations is relevant to teachers. I assume that pupils’ appraisal of the actions of their teacher in tense situations differs according to pupils’ ethnic origin and according to the ethnic composition of the class. Related to the appraisal of the specific ways teachers act in tense situations, this thesis analyses whether pupils appreciate teachers’ reactions more when there is room for pupils to talk about their perceptions of the situation than when the reactions are more teacher-centred. It also analyses whether pupils appreciate it when not only they, but also the teacher expresses a viewpoint. The latter offers more possibilities for reciprocity in the relationship between teacher and pupils.

Summing up, the following research questions were formulated about teachers’ reactions to tense situations:

3. How do teachers react to tense situations? Do teachers find it difficult to determine how to react to tense situations? (chapter 2)

4. How do pupils appraise the reaction of teachers to tense situations during class discussions? Is their appraisal related to ethnic origin, the ethnic composition of the class, and the specific way the teacher reacts? (chapter 4)

1.4. Research question on guiding discussions in the ethnically diverse class about sensitive issues related to ethnic diversity

From the perspective of citizenship education this thesis focuses on guiding discussions as an educational strategy. The results of the empirical studies on the questions described above also provide reasons for further research on class discussions and how these progress. The results of the survey (see chapters 2 to 4) showed, for example, that when tense situations occur, teachers mainly enter into discussion.

Guiding good class discussions, in which there is a real exchange of ideas between pupils and reflection on several perspectives, is not easy (Parker & Hess, 2001). There are a few indications that teachers of ethnically diverse classes face extra difficulties (Leeman, 2003, 2006; Stichting Voorbeeld, 2005; Wubbels, Den Brok, Veldman & Van Tartwijk, 2006). Some teachers do not know how to deal with certain opinions of pupils (for example about anti-Semitism or homosexuality) or with pupils’ strong emotions (for example on the public debate about ethnic diversity). Besides, teachers experience that not all pupils are prepared to seek solutions together, in a group discussion, to problems that occur at school. A huge demand seems to be made on the intercultural
sensitivity of teachers to interpret the position and contribution of pupils in the discussion and to create a safe climate in the class (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Schultz, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This raises the question whether professional demands are required for guiding discussions in an ethnically diverse class about sensitive issues concerning ethnic diversity in society and what those demands are.

The following question on guiding class discussions is central to this thesis:

5. How do teachers shape and guide discussions in the ethnically diverse class about sensitive issues related to ethnic diversity in society and which professional demands can be identified for this? (chapter 5)

The ideal research situation would have been to be present when a tense situation actually occurs, which a teacher then discusses with the class. This approach was almost impossible for practical reasons: for the purposes of comparability the researchers would have had to wait until the same type of tense situation occurred in different classes. Another possibility would have been to provoke a tense situation. This would have meant distancing myself from the normal course of events in the class and there are also some ethical objections to this. I therefore chose a different strategy and focused on class discussions about a subject that might be tense, namely about sensitive issues related ethnic diversity in society. Teachers can organize such discussions in advance and prepare an identical stimulus for the discussion. In this way I could fulfil the requirement of comparability.

1.5. Research design

This thesis consists of a nationwide survey study to answer the research questions on teachers’ and pupils’ experiences of tense situations (questions 1 to 4) and an interview and observation study to gain insight into discussions about sensitive issues related to ethnic diversity in society (question 5). The general research design of both empirical studies is described below. Since all the chapters of this thesis have been published or submitted as articles for publication in scientific journals or books, the research design is elaborated in each chapter. However, slightly different aspects of the design are described, depending on the specific research questions the chapter deals with.

1.5.1. The survey study

To obtain a large-scale picture of the experiences of teachers and pupils with tense situations (research questions 1 to 4) I set up a national survey. As situations that occur in a class context are central to this research, I made the class level central to the sample selection. My aim was for teachers and pupils from 100 classes to participate. This number offers sufficient possibilities for relations between class and pupil variables to be identified (cf. Snijders &
Since we also wanted to be able to detect possible relations with school variables we strived for 34 schools to participate with three classes each.

Schools with an ethnically diverse pupil population are mainly located in large and middle-sized towns and cities. I wanted schools from both types of towns and cities to be equally represented in the sample and therefore chose half of the sample from schools in the four largest cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht) and the other half from schools in the middle-sized towns and cities all over the Netherlands. For both types of towns and cities I made a file of all the secondary schools with a pupil population of at least 10% pupils from a non-Dutch background. From both files I selected three random samples, each comprising 17 schools. I first invited all the schools in the first sample from both files to participate in the research. If a school from the first sample did not want to participate, I approached a school from the second sample with a comparable percentage of pupils from a non-Dutch background and providing the same type of education as the school that had declined the invitation. If the school from the second sample also did not want to participate, I then approached a school from the third sample in a similar way. In line with the national distribution of the pupil population, I wanted 60% of the classes participating to be pre-vocational secondary education classes (vmbo) and 40% to be general secondary education classes (havo and/or vwo). When it was known which schools wanted to participate, I then selected the general secondary education classes (havo-vwo) and the pre-vocational secondary education classes (vmbo) on the basis of the forty-sixty per cent ratio. Each school was asked for mentors and pupils in the second year to participate in the research because then pupils still have many lessons together taught by the mentor. The class then still has meaning as a unit.

In this thesis, ‘pupils from a non-Dutch background’ is used for all pupils who have one or two parents who were not born in the Netherlands or Western Europe. This is the definition used by the Central Office of Statistics (2000). As pupils’ actual origin, based on the country of birth of the parents, does not necessarily coincide with the group a pupil identifies with most, this research not only looks at the ethnic origin of pupils, but also at their ethnic identification.

Teachers and pupils were asked to fill in a questionnaire that focused on tense situations. The operationalization of tense situations was based on an interview study conducted by Leeman (2003, 2006) about situations that confronted teachers with dilemmas related to teaching in ethnically heterogeneous classes. As no such study on pupils’ experiences was available, the questionnaire that was constructed for pupils was also based on these teachers’ reports. The questionnaire for teachers and pupils presented 20 situations that are illustrative of the variety of dilemmas teachers experienced. The situations were all located in the class and represented a wide range of possible experiences: some situations were overt; others were more disguised in nature; situations were included that can occur in any lesson as well as situations
that arose during class discussions; some concerned the contact between teachers and pupils; others concerned tension among pupils themselves; and lastly, the situations varied in content.

In the questionnaire, teachers and pupils were asked about the frequency in which they experienced the 20 situations over a period of five to six months (the first months of the school year 2003/2004). They were also asked about the level of tension they experienced in each situation, and the extent to which they related the situations to the ethnic diversity of the class. Furthermore, teachers and pupils were asked to point out how teachers reacted to the situations. They could choose from options that reflected more teacher-centred and more pupil-centred reactions. Virtually nobody – neither pupils nor teachers – experienced one situation that had to do with pupils quarrelling over sexuality issues during a class discussion. Therefore, this situation was excluded from the analyses. In total, 19 situations were analysed.

1.5.2. The interview and observation study
To gain insight into how teachers actually shape a discussion in an ethnically diverse class about sensitive issues related to ethnic diversity in society and the professional demands this makes on them, I carried out a small-scale interview and observation study. Five teachers in the middle level of Dutch secondary education (vmbo-t) were asked to guide a discussion in their classes. Four classes were almost completely made up of pupils from a non-Dutch background. One class consisted of 50% pupils of Dutch origin. For a correct interpretation of the class discussions, an impression of the daily routine in the classes was acquired by observing four lessons of the participating teachers. With the help of interviews with the teachers before the discussion, an overview was made of the objectives and approaches that they considered to be desirable and attainable. Observations gave an impression of what teachers actually did and said. Information on how teachers looked back on the discussion, what they had achieved and what they thought of their own professionalism, was provided by interviews afterwards. The objectives of the teachers and the approaches, which they had planned and realized, were analysed in the context of the professional demands that were derived from literature study.

1.6. Outline
In the different chapters of this thesis, several synonyms are used to describe ‘education that prepares pupils for citizenship in an ethnically diverse society’, such as ‘citizenship education’, ‘moral education’ (‘for living in an ethnically diverse society’) and ‘intercultural education’ (idem). This is because the chapters have been published or submitted as articles for publication in scientific journals or books. However, all these terms refer to the same concept.

Chapter 2 reports on the results of the national survey of teachers. 87 teachers from secondary schools in large and middle-sized towns and cities all over the Netherlands participated in this study. Teachers of all types of
education were represented (from pre-vocational secondary education to pre-university education (vmbo to vwo). This chapter deals with teachers’ experiences with tense situations in ethnically diverse classes and the way they react to them. It describes the frequency with which teachers experience situations, the relation with personal characteristics (such as ethnic origin and intercultural sensitivity) and context characteristics (such as type of education and ethnic composition of the class).

Chapter 3 describes the survey of pupils. 1,987 pupils participated in this study. They were questioned about the same 20 tense situations that were submitted to the teachers. The chapter discusses whether pupils’ experiences with tense situations differ by ethnic origin and ethnic identification. Lastly, it analyses whether there is a relation between the frequency with which pupils experience tense situations and the ethnic composition and type of education of the class.

Chapter 4 is about pupils’ appraisal of the way in which teachers react to tense situations that occur during class discussions. It looks at the extent to which pupils’ appraisal for teachers’ actions is related to ethnic origin and ethnic identification, both at an individual and class level. It also discusses to what extent their appreciation is dependent on the specific reaction of the teacher.

Chapter 5 focuses on guiding discussions in the ethnically diverse class about sensitive issues related to ethnic diversity in society. Five teachers working in the theoretical track of pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo-t) in different schools in Amsterdam were asked to guide a discussion in their ethnically diverse classes. With the help of interviews and observations, the professional demands that are made on teachers in guiding such a discussion were identified.

Finally, chapter 6 discusses the most important findings and reflects on the research methods used and on recommendations for further research. The thesis concludes with suggestions for the educational field.