5. Multicultural attitudes among adolescents: A multilevel model using individual and classroom level variables

In this study predictors of multiculturalism at the individual and classroom level are tested in a multilevel model. Previous studies attempting to find predictors of multiculturalism focused only on the individual level, possibly risking an attribution error. Multiculturalism is presented in this study as a notion stressing equal opportunities and minimizing discrimination as well as the conviction that the access to other cultures enriches one’s own life. Using a sample of 448 adolescents from junior vocational education it was found that immigrants endorsed multiculturalism more strongly than nationals and a greater number of immigrant friends and a higher ethnic diversity at the classroom level were positively related to support for multiculturalism. Contrary to our expectations, socioeconomic status was negatively related to support for multiculturalism. The results indicate that support for multiculturalism is dependent on demographic factors, but the classroom can be used to increase adolescents’ support for multiculturalism.
Introduction

As the western world is becoming more ethnically diverse, so are its classrooms. More than ever, teachers and students alike face ethnic diversity in the classroom. This trend of increasing cultural diversity is strongly linked to immigration, which represents a steadily growing globalization. It is to be expected that a continuing trend of globalization will increase ethnic diversity at all levels of society. Especially western societies benefitted and still benefit from the reception of educated immigrants (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). However, when attitudes towards acculturation preferences between ethnic groups differ, ethnic diversity can lead to conflicts (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002). Furthermore, The ethnic composition of classrooms in schools has been found to be related to racist victimization (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). As ethnic diversity is may be related to conflict and racist victimization, the increase of ethnic diversity in society requires policies and mindsets that are conducive to strengthening positive consequences and avoiding or resolving the negative ones.

What is the best way to prepare adolescents for participation in an ethnically diverse society? Some scholars argue that support for multiculturalism is essential to manage a culturally diverse society (e.g. Berry & Kalin, 1995). Here it is important to distinguish between multicultural policy and multicultural attitudes. Multicultural policies refer to policies designed to prevent discrimination, create equal opportunities and facilitate cultural maintenance for all cultures and ethnicities in an environment (Banting & Kymlycka, 2004). These policies are implemented and maintained by social or political groups. A multicultural attitude is the conviction that individuals view the world from within deeply rooted cultural beliefs, and the conviction that other cultures not only have the right to exist, but also may provide valuable learning opportunities (Parekh, 2002). Multicultural attitudes are related to multicultural policies as those people that hold strong multicultural attitudes usually support multicultural policies, and a culturally heterogeneous society (Berry & Kalin, 1995).

Parekh presents a largely positive notion of multicultural attitudes. Based on a conceptual and philosophical analysis Verkuyten and Brug (2004) conclude that multicultural attitudes are rooted in essentialism, which refers to the existence and corresponding categorization of ethnic and cultural groups as being authentically and inherently different from other groups. Multiculturalism then entails that essential differences be respected, because denial is treated as equivalent to short sightedness and injustice. As an essentialist notion, multiculturalism comes close to a notion of strong or extreme cultural relativism that cannot be bridged. It fuels prejudice and racism. As such multiculturalism elicits strong critique, because it creates a breeding ground for conflict. A color blind ideology has been suggested as an alternative (Barry, 2001). Empirical studies, however, suggest that this is not really a good alternative. A study of Richeson and Nussbaum (2004) suggests that persons who endorse multiculturalism experience less prejudice than persons who endorse color blindness. Tatar and Horenczyck (2003) suggest that when it comes to dealing with ethnic
diversity in the classroom, teachers benefit from a multicultural attitude. Those teachers who
embraced multiculturalism more strongly reported fewer feelings of stress as a consequence of
ethnic diversity in their classroom.

Based on these empirical studies, and inspired by Parekh’s notion of multicultural attitude,
in this paper we adopt a notion stressing equal opportunities and minimizing discrimination as well
as the conviction that the access to other cultures enriches ones own life.

A positive attitude towards cultural diversity such as multiculturalism is most important for
those people who often deal with people of may different cultural backgrounds. In the Netherlands
one such a population is adolescents in ethnically diverse classrooms. Despite the relatively high
percentage of immigrant adolescents in the Netherlands, there is a trend of segregation in Dutch
schools (Vedder, 2006).The immigrant population is mainly concentrated in the highly urbanized
western part of the Netherlands. The sample for this study was gathered in junior vocational
education, the lowest of the three regular educational tracks in Dutch secondary schools. The
majority of the immigrant adolescents in the Netherlands attend junior vocational education. The
largest immigrant groups in the Netherlands are the Turks and Moroccans, of whom 78 percent
attend junior vocational education, as compared to 53 percent of the nationals that attend junior
vocational education. The overrepresentation of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational
education is mainly due to poor socio-economic circumstances and language disadvantage among
immigrant adolescents. (Herweijer, 2009).The fact that immigrant students are overrepresented in
junior vocational high schools means that they are relatively ill prepared for social participation in
Dutch society. The ill preparation for social participation makes issues concerning ethnic diversity
and multiculturalism particularly important for these students. Multicultural attitudes correspond
to acceptance of cultural maintenance and support equal rights. Most immigrant adolescents prefer
cultural maintenance (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), and support for cultural maintenance
is a key point of multiculturalism. Moreover, in ethnically diverse classrooms multicultural attitudes
among nationals may help to reduce interethnic tension: Agreement concerning cultural
maintenance between immigrants and nationals is necessary to ensure harmonious intergroup
relations (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002).

The present study

Studies attempting to find identifiers for multiculturalism have typically focused on
predictors at the individual level, such as intercultural contact, ethnic identity and nationality (Berry
& Kalin, 1995; Ward & Masgoret, 2006; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Increasingly social
scientists are realizing that people exist within a context, and that variables at the contextual level
need to be included in designs to correctly explain variations in peoples’ attitudes and behavior. In
this study we will look at the classroom level as a predictor for adolescents’ multicultural attitudes.
Adolescents in the same classroom will likely share experiences which may influence their attitudes.
Merely focusing on the individual level may cause an attribution error as several scholars discuss the
important role of group composition and school characteristics for adolescents’ interracial friendliness (cf. Gniewosz & Noack, 2008).

Earlier studies found that intercultural contact rarely persists outside the school (Masson & Verkuyten, 1993). This suggests that the classroom is the primary and major medium, and perhaps an ideal one to bring adolescents from different ethnic groups in continuous first hand contact. This is an important challenge, since at least for the situation in the Netherlands, it has been found that, when controlling for gender and sociometric status, adolescents prefer to have friends with similar ethnic backgrounds (Fortuin, Ziberna, & Vedder, 2009). However, this preference does not necessarily mean that students avoid contact with adolescents from other ethnic groups. Studies and reviews suggest that school policy with respect to ethnic composition and regulating intercultural contact has an impact on the quality of interethnic relations and may stimulate interethnic friendliness (cf. Khmelkov & Hallinan, 1999; Moody, 2001; Stearns, 2004). Hence, our first hypothesis was that the classroom level would explain a significant portion of the variation in adolescents’ intercultural attitudes.

Studies attempting to identify predictors of multiculturalism have typically focused on predictors on the personal level. In contrast, the main focus of this study was to find out whether ethnic heterogeneity of the classroom predicts students’ multiculturalism. However, a model containing personal variables was analyzed first. In this way, it could ascertained whether or not, and to what extent, adding predictors at a classroom level would result in a model that would be significantly better than a model with only predictors at the individual level.

An important predictor at the individual level is nationality because immigrant adolescents have been consistently found to embrace multiculturalism more strongly than nationals (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Support for multiculturalism is likely to increase when people see the benefits associated with it (Berry & Kalin, 1995). Immigrants’ appreciation of multiculturalism is linked to a sense of justification—or at least a belief in the justified wish for cultural maintenance and equal opportunities—whereas nationals may perceive multiculturalism as threatening to their social dominance and their ethnic identities (Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998). Therefore our second hypothesis was that immigrants would endorse multiculturalism more strongly than nationals.

Breugelmans en Van de Vijver (2004) found that a higher level of education was related to a stronger support for multiculturalism. In this study all adolescents attended the same level of education, namely junior vocational education, but socio-economic status was included in the design. Because socio-economic status and level of education are strongly related concepts (cf. Curry, Elton, Todd, & Platt, 1997) our third hypothesis was that socioeconomic status was positively related to support for multiculturalism.

Contact has often been found to improve relations between ethnic groups. Intercultural contact reduces prejudice and improves the relations between different ethnic groups (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Contact with immigrants may lower prejudice and
increase sympathy for immigrants’ positions. It has been found that both national and immigrant adolescents with more out-group friends endorse multiculturalism more strongly (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). In this study, instead of out-group friends we focused on friends with immigrant backgrounds. Out-group friends always have an ethnic background different from the respondent’s, while immigrant friends are all those friends who have an immigrant background, but may have the same ethnicity in case the respondent is an immigrant. The fourth hypothesis was that the number of immigrant friends was positively related to support for multiculturalism.

All thus far presented hypotheses dealt with individual level variables, while earlier we argued that classroom variables add considerably to explaining students’ multicultural attitude. An ethnically diverse classroom enables students to come into prolonged contact with different cultures and learn about new cultural ways. The opportunities or inevitability, as well as the willingness to meet adolescents with other backgrounds, is likely to depend on the ethnic composition of or ethnic diversity in a classroom. The ethnic heterogeneity of the classroom will be included in a model testing classroom and individual level variables. As adolescents tend to be ethnocentric (Fortuin, Ziberna, & Vedder, 2009), it is expected that in ethnically homogenous classrooms adolescents will mainly befriend same ethnicity peers. However, in ethnically heterogeneous there is a higher likelihood of coming into prolonged and frequent contact with immigrant classmates. This increased contact may increase support for multiculturalism because adolescents develop more understanding for the position of immigrants. The fifth hypothesis was that the ethnic diversity in the classroom was positively related to multiculturalism.

In an exploratory manner, the individual level variables gender and age and the classroom level variable classroom size were included in the design.

Method

Participants

A total of 264 national students and 184 immigrant students completed the questionnaires. The students were spread out across 7 schools and 24 classrooms. The mean age of the students was 14.46 (SD = 1.07). The sample consisted of 222 boys and 226 girls, one respondent did not answer the question concerning gender. The sample consisted of 264 national students (58.8 percent), 37 Turkish (8.2 percent), 36 Moroccan (8.0 percent), 15 Surinamese (3.3 percent), 15 Antillean (3.3 percent) and 81 immigrant adolescents with a different ethnicity (18.0 percent) like Pakistani or Chinese. Of one respondent the ethnic background was not known.

Measures

A survey consisting of several scales was administered to the students. The survey began with questions about demographics namely school, classroom, age, gender, the birthplace of respondents’ both parents, the birthplace of the respondent and the respondent’s religion. To measure multiculturalism an adapted version of the multiculturalism ideology scale (MIS) was used (Berry &
Kalin, 1995). The scale consisted of ten items and was adapted to increase understanding among young adolescents in junior vocational education. The items were scored on a five point scale ranging from ‘completely disagree’ up to ‘completely agree’. Sample items are ‘Dutch people should accept that immigrants live in the Netherlands’ and ‘If immigrants want to maintain their own culture, they should be allowed to do so at home only’. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .87. Socioeconomic status was measured with the Family Affluence Scale (Curry, Elton, Todd, & Platt, 1997). A sample item of this scale is ‘How many computers does your family own’. Since the scale has different response categories for the separate items Cronbach’s alpha could not be computed. The Family Affluence Scale has been found to be a valid indicator of adolescents’ socio-economic status (Boyce, Torsheim, Currie, & Zambon, 2006). To get an indication of how many Dutch and immigrant friends the respondents had they were asked ‘We would like to know how many friends you have and what their cultural background is’. Respondents were asked to write down how many friends they had in each of the following ethnic categories: Dutch friends, Moroccan friends, Turkish friends, Surinamese friends, Antillean friends and friends with different ethnic backgrounds. To correct for outliers, all number of friends beyond ten were recoded to eleven. To measure the ethnic diversity of the classroom we used an index devised by Simpson (1949). This index is based on the number of different ethnic groups as well as the relative representation of each group in a classroom, ranging from 0 for a population with no ethnic diversity to 1 as the highest possible degree of ethnic diversity. The index is calculated as:

\[ D_c = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{g} p_i^2 \]

The index \( D_c \) stands for the ethnic diversity in the classroom \( p_i \) is the percentage of students in the classroom that belong to ethnic group \( i \). We calculated \( D_c \) for every classroom and the diversity ranged from .14 to .88. A higher \( D_c \) indicates a more ethnically diverse classroom.

Procedure

Forty-eight junior vocational schools in the Netherlands with an ethnically diverse student body were invited to participate in a survey about multiculturalism and adaptation. Schools were first contacted via telephone. When schools showed an interest in the study an appointment was made to explain the study in more detail. This led to seven schools participating in the study. Prior to the data collection the teachers were informed about the goal of the study and letters of informed consent were sent to the students’ parents. Strict anonymity was promised for the schools, the teachers and the students. The questionnaires were administered in the classroom during school hours under the supervision of a teacher and a researcher. Prior to the admission of the questionnaires the teachers received instructions about administering the questionnaire.


Analyses

In this study variables at the individual and at the classroom context level were used. Because students within the same classroom may not be statistically independent, using classical regression analyses to analyze this data is not appropriate as statistical independence is an important assumption of classical regression. If the nested structure of students within classrooms is ignored and regression analyses are used to test the hypotheses this may lead to spurious results. To correctly analyze the data multilevel modeling will be used (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Hox, 1994).

Results

In Table 1 the means and standard deviations for the variables in this study are provided. The mean of immigrant friends is rather high, but the standard deviations suggest a population that varies strongly in the number of immigrant friends and the embrace of multiculturalism. The low standard deviation of SES suggests that this population is homogeneous in terms of affluence.

Table 1

The means and standard deviations of the variables in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiculturalism</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant friends</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic diversity</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom size</td>
<td>20.02</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistical program MLwiN was used to analyze the multilevel models. To discover whether between-class variances were significant, a model with a fixed intercept was compared to a model with a random intercept. The random intercept model tests the first hypothesis that variance in multicultural attitudes can be explained by the classroom context. The results are reported in Table 2.

The results indicated that the variance between classes was significant, meaning that support for multiculturalism in adolescents is not only dependent on personal factors but also on the classroom context. The intra class correlation coefficient (class level variance divided by total variance) indicated that 21.0 percent of the variance in multiculturalism can be accounted for by the classroom level. Thus, while the within class variances are larger than the between-class variance, classroom context still explains a significant and substantial part of variance in multiculturalism.

In the second model the individual level variables were examined. With this model the second third and fourth hypothesis concerning nationality, socioeconomic status and immigrant friends were tested. The variables ethnicity (split up in nationals and immigrants), gender, age, SES,
and number of immigrant friends were included in the model. Dichotomous variables were dummy coded. The results are summarized in Table 2. The deviance difference test indicates that this model fitted the data significantly better than the model with random intercepts. This means that adding individual level variables in the model significantly improved the model fit. Ethnicity was a significant predictor of multiculturalism, with immigrants ($M = 3.76$, $SD = .63$) more strongly endorsing multiculturalism than nationals ($M = 2.81$, $SD = .83$). Girls ($M = 3.37$, $SD = .86$) were more in favor of multiculturalism than boys ($M = 3.03$, $SD = .86$). SES was negatively related to multiculturalism. Those adolescents with higher SES tended to have lower multicultural attitudes. The number of immigrant friends was positively related to multiculturalism. Adolescents with more immigrant friends tended to have a stronger multicultural attitude. Age was not significantly related to multiculturalism.

Table 2

The results of the multilevel analysis for multiculturalism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nationality</td>
<td>-0.735c</td>
<td>-0.661c</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>-0.177a</td>
<td>-0.175b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant friends</td>
<td>0.032b</td>
<td>0.024b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>-0.181a</td>
<td>-0.192b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom variables</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>0.948c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simpson (cultural diversity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variance

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between classes</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between individuals</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td>0.480</td>
<td>0.478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance difference</td>
<td>65.501c</td>
<td>135.895c</td>
<td>16.652c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained variance</td>
<td>21.35</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>37.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05; a p<.01; c p<.001.

The regression weights are reported with the standard errors between brackets.

In the third model classroom variables were added to the individual level variables. This will test the fifth hypothesis that ethnic diversity in the classroom is positively related to multiculturalism. The Simpson measure of ethnic diversity and the classroom size were entered as variables. The results are reported in Table 2. More ethnic diversity in the classroom was found positively related to more support for multiculturalism. Thus, adolescents who attended classrooms
that were more ethnically heterogeneous tended to hold stronger multicultural attitudes. Classroom size was not significantly related to multiculturalism. The deviance difference test indicated that this model fitted the data significantly better than the model with only individual level variables.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to find individual and classroom level predictors of multiculturalism among adolescents in Dutch junior vocational education. Consistent with previous studies it was found that immigrants embrace multiculturalism more strongly than nationals (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Support for multiculturalism is likely to increase when people see the benefits associated with it (Berry & Kalin, 1995). For immigrants their appreciation of multiculturalism is linked to a sense of justification of or at least a belief in the justified wish for cultural maintenance and equal opportunities whereas nationals may perceive it as threatening to their social dominance and their ethnic identities. A simpler explanation may be that nationals score lower on multiculturalism not because they are opposed to it, but simply because they think it has nothing to do with them. For example, Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver (2003) found that Dutch nationals viewed assimilation and integration solely as a task for immigrants, which implies little interest in multicultural affairs.

SES was found negatively related to support for multiculturalism. This contradicts an earlier finding of Breugelmans and Van de Vijver (2004) who found that multiculturalism was positively related to the level of education. Although Breugelmans and Van de Vijver studied an adult sample in which the respondents had different levels of education. People with a high level of education may learn the benefits of ethnic diversity through travel or study. However, this sample is homogenous in terms of level of education. The different results are still peculiar but may perhaps be explained by the poor socioeconomic circumstances most immigrant adolescents experience. Most immigrants live in relatively poor neighborhoods and under such circumstances usually show the best patterns of adaptation when they adhere strongly to their ethnic culture (Portes & Zhou, 1993). The awareness that immigrants under poor socio-economic conditions benefit from cultural maintenance may be more present among adolescents with low socio-economic status, as they are most likely to be immigrants or live in neighborhoods with strong immigrant representation. In other words, adolescents with low socio-economic status may be more likely to witness the benefits immigrants reap from cultural maintenance, and thus favor multiculturalism more strongly.

Verkuyten and Martinovic (2006) found that having more out-group friends was related to an increased support for multiculturalism. In this study we used a different measure, namely immigrant friends. In the study by Verkuyten and Martinovic respondents used a seven point measure to indicate how many ingroup and outgroup friends they had, while in this study respondents directly wrote down how many friends of different ethnicities they had. Although we used a more direct and precise measure of friendships, we could not make a distinction between
ingroup and outgroup friends. Nevertheless, the same explanation can be used for the results in both studies: having more immigrant friends would increase understanding and sympathy for immigrants’ positions, resulting in a stronger support for multiculturalism.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to report that the ethnic heterogeneity of the classroom is related to multiculturalism. This result can be explained with the intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), stating that intergroup contact improves the intercultural relations. Classrooms seem an ideal setting to establish intergroup contact as classrooms meet at least three of the important conditions hypothesized to lower prejudice as a result of interethnic contact. In classrooms there is (a) a common goal (success in education), (b) opportunity for cooperation, and (c) support of the same authority (teacher). However, as adolescents in high schools tend to be ethnocentric (Fortuin, Ziberna, & Vedder, 2009), it is to be expected that adolescents will only engage in intergroup contact in ethnically heterogeneous contexts. The increased contact facilitated by the ethnically heterogeneous classroom may result in improved relations and more positive evaluations of different cultural groups and thus a stronger support for multiculturalism.

In this study it has been found that multiculturalism is significantly related to the unchangeable variables gender and nationality and the stable characteristic SES. Much of the variation in multiculturalism is thus determined by factors that can hardly be changed through interventions. However, interventions can be aimed at the classroom. This study indicates that a substantial part of adolescents’ multicultural attitudes is attributable to the classroom level. Providing adolescents with ethnically diverse classrooms will provide them with the opportunities or inevitability to form interethnic friendships and learn about other cultures.