6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research project was to gain insight into the acculturation and adaptation of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education in the Netherlands. Junior vocational education may be seen as a particularly challenging context for undergoing the acculturation process, because immigrant adolescents in this educational track lack opportunities for upward economic mobility (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2008; Herweijer, 2009). Whereas in older literature (Aronowitz, 1984; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987) it has been described that migration may cause considerable stress, in this book we hypothesized an immigrant paradox among immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education.

Immigrant paradox

Our research in chapter two indicated that immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education did not show a poor pattern of adaptation at all. The immigrant adolescents in our sample showed a pattern of adaptation that was at least as good as the national adolescents’ in the same educational track, despite a lower socio-economic status. The first generation immigrant adolescents even showed a pattern of adaptation that was superior to that of the national adolescents. The second generation had a slightly poorer pattern of adaptation than the first generation, but still performed as well as the national population. The same pattern was found for a more homogeneous population that included only immigrant adolescents with Islamic religious backgrounds. The pattern of adaptation found in this study showed strong resemblance with earlier immigrant paradox findings in Canada and the United States (Beiser, Hou, Hyman, & Tousignant, 2002; Harker, 2001). The specific aspect of the immigrant paradox that first generation immigrants show a better pattern of adaptation than second generation immigrants has been explained in terms of a higher degree of cultural maintenance. It has been argued that maintenance of the ethnic culture helps immigrants to succeed in their new environments.

Patterns of acculturation among immigrant adolescents and its relation to adaptation

To gain more insight into the immigrant paradox finding, the acculturation of these immigrant adolescents was studied in chapters three and four. In chapter three, two theoretical frameworks were discussed that explicitly took cultural maintenance into account, namely the bidimensional model of acculturation (Berry, 1997, 2005) and the segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Zhou, 1993). To gain a broader understanding of the acculturation of immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education, the variables ethnic and national language comprehension, ethnic, national, and immigrant friends, perceived discrimination, and the preference for assimilation, separation, and integration were analysed. Multivariate regressions were used to analyze the effects of these acculturation variables on adaptation. Most notably, perceived discrimination was related to a greater number of psychological and behavioral problems and with
lower self-esteem. This fits into a large body of research literature (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Van Geel & Vedder, 2009). Although the overall levels of perceived discrimination were low, the negative effects perceived discrimination has on adaptation still make it a serious problem.

In the third chapter we entered all variables into a cluster analysis. We could discern four acculturation profiles, showing a high degree of similarity with the profiles previously found in the ICSEY study (Berry et al., 2006). One cluster resembled the ethnic profile: Immigrant adolescents who have a high competence in their ethnic language, prefer to have co-ethnic friends and tend to opt for a separation strategy. A second cluster resembled the integrated profile: Immigrant adolescents who tended to have co-ethnic, other immigrant, and national friends, opted for an integration strategy, and scored low on separation and perceived discrimination. The third cluster resembled the national profile: Immigrant adolescents who preferred to make national friends, make few co-ethnic and other immigrant friends, and scored high on the assimilation subscale. The fourth cluster is the diffuse profile: Immigrant adolescents who scored high on ethnic language competence, tended to make co-ethnic, other immigrant, and national friends, and felt more discriminated than immigrant youth characterized by an integrated, ethnic or national profile.

Categorization in the ethnic profile was related to a lower socio-economic status. In terms of segmented assimilation it makes sense that immigrants with a lower socio-economic status have a strong preference for cultural maintenance, because these immigrants have little to gain by assimilating into suboptimal circumstances, while maintaining their ethnic culture will provide them with support from their ethnic community. Interestingly, in terms of adaptation the immigrant adolescents in the ethnic profile performed as well as the immigrant adolescents in the integrated profile, and better than the immigrant adolescents in the national and diffuse profiles, despite lower socio-economic status. The successful adaptation of immigrant adolescents in an ethnic profile cannot be easily explained with the bidimensional model, as studies using the bidimensional model often find integration to be the most optimal strategy in terms of adaptation (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 2006; Neto, 2002). However, the results can be explained in terms of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1994; Zhou, 1997). Acculturating into the conditions of low socio-economic status and relatively poor chances of upward mobility may not help these adolescents. Acculturating in this segment of society may lead them to socialize into an unfavourable pattern of adaptation. A pattern of selective assimilation may produce better results for these adolescents. This means that these adolescents only acculturate to those aspects of the national society that directly promote success, such as learning the national language. For the rest they endeavor to maintain their ethnic cultures.
**Family obligations and adaptation**

To further test the notion of segmented assimilation we studied the role of family obligations in explaining adaptation outcomes among immigrant adolescents in chapter four. Family obligations have been presented as a trademark cultural characteristic of immigrants with non-western backgrounds. In both conceptual and empirical articles it has been concluded that a strong sense of family obligations promotes a motivation to do well in school and helps immigrant children to achieve a positive pattern of adaptation (Fuligni, 1997, 1998; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Suarez Orozco & Suarez Orozco, 1995; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Our results indicated that immigrant adolescents indeed endorsed a sense of family obligations much more strongly than national adolescents and immigrant adolescents also showed a better school adjustment. Both family obligations and school adjustment were found to be related to a positive adaptation of immigrant adolescents, indicating that adhering to certain aspects of the ethnic culture may indeed be related to a better adaptation for immigrant adolescents. Regression analyses indicated that a strong sense of family obligations was related to a better school adjustment, higher grades, a better self-esteem and fewer behavioral problems in immigrant children. The relations between family obligations and behavioral problems, and family obligations and self-esteem, were partially mediated by school adjustment.

**Support for multiculturalism among adolescents in junior vocational education**

Our results in chapters three and four suggest that adhering to aspects of the ethnic culture may be conducive to the adaptation of immigrant adolescents. Thus for the benefit of immigrant adolescents’ adaptation, as well as for harmonious intergroup relations, it is desirable that the direct context in which immigrant adolescents are acculturating is supportive of cultural maintenance (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002). An ideology that respects the need for cultural maintenance is multiculturalism. In this book we used a definition of multiculturalism inspired by Parekh (2002) and Berry and Kalin (1995): a notion stressing equal opportunities and minimizing discrimination as well as the conviction that the access to other cultures enriches one's own life. In chapter five the analyses indicated that among national adolescents there was little support for multiculturalism. However, the analyses also revealed that the support for multiculturalism was related to the ethnic heterogeneity in the classroom, which suggests that adolescents support for multiculturalism may be increased by prolonged contact with adolescents from different cultures.

The low support for multiculturalism among national adolescents in junior vocational education found in chapter five may explain why there was a relatively large percentage (21.3 %) of immigrant adolescents who were classified as having a maladaptive diffuse profile, as reported in chapter three. These adolescents felt discriminated and lacked support in the environment for cultural maintenance. Their lack of direction may have been caused by the pressure in the school environment to assimilate combined with the pressure from family members to maintain strong
links with the ethnic group. Aronowitz (1984) describes how different expectations from society and family may cause psychopathology in immigrant adolescents.

The relation between the results in this book and the state of affairs in the Netherlands

The sample in this study included only national and non-western immigrant adolescents attending junior vocational education. Given that context has been found to be an important factor in the acculturation processes (Birman, Trickett, & Buchanan, 2005; Vedder, 2004) we should be wary of generalizing these findings to other settings. Immigrant adolescents in higher educational tracks are in a context of favorable opportunities for economic mobility and may fare better when assimilating then when using a pattern of selective assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Nevertheless, we would like to consider what the results in this study mean for the larger context of the Netherlands.

In chapter two immigrant adolescents showed a positive pattern of adaptation when compared to their national contemporaries. How does this relate to the high drop-out rates among immigrant adolescents (Herweijer, 2009)? The low socio-economic status of many immigrant adolescents may frustrate their scholarly achievements, but other explanations are possible. A strong sense of family obligations may promote a positive pattern of adaptation. However, when faced with economic adversity those adolescents who have the strongest sense of family obligations may choose to quit school and help their families (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). The combination of low socio-economic status and high family obligations found among immigrant adolescents in chapter four of this study may thus help to explain why immigrant adolescents experience high drop-out rates in junior vocational education. As such, a strong sense of family obligations may be a double-edged sword, promoting positive adaptation outcomes but simultaneously increasing the chances of drop-out.

In this study, we found low support for multiculturalism among national adolescents in junior vocational education in chapter five. These results fit into a nationwide pattern of declining support for multiculturalism among nationals (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998). Because most immigrants live under poor socio-economic circumstances and most immigrant adolescent attend junior vocational education (Herweijer, 2009), the immigrant adolescents are likely to rely on aspects of their ethnic culture to achieve a positive pattern of adaptation. The declining support for multiculturalism among nationals may make it increasingly difficult for many immigrant adolescents to realize social participation in society that is desired and respected by all.

It is important to realize that the confirmation of the existence of the immigrant paradox presented in this book does not mean that immigrant adolescents are doing fine. It merely means that when compared to nationals at the same educational level, immigrant adolescents do not necessarily have a poorer pattern of adaptation. From a nationwide point of view however, there is still work to be done as immigrant adolescents are still underrepresented in the higher educational
tracks and live under poorer socio-economic circumstances than nationals (Herweijer, 2009). Although the theories and results in this book suggest that immigrants can achieve remarkable positive results on their own, the conditions have to be created for immigrants to experience a positive acculturation process.

Limitations and directions for future research

The results in this study have been obtained by using self-report questionnaires. To obtain meaningful results we used questionnaires that were validated and structurally equivalent across cultural groups as much as possible. However, in studies with immigrant children it has been found that using teacher and parental reports may provide results that are different from those obtained in self-reports (Achenbach et al., 1990; Stanger & Lewis, 1993; Stevens et al., 2003). As schools only had a limited amount of time to participate in research we could not use a longitudinal design. The hypothesized directions of effects that are presented in this book are all derived from theoretical frameworks and prior research, but without a longitudinal design we cannot be sure that the hypothesized direction of the effects is correct. A third important point of critique has to be made with regards to the samples. Immigrant students are known to drop out of junior vocational education more often than national students, 16.8 percent as opposed to 11.2 percent (Herweijer, 2009); this may have contributed to finding confirmation for the immigrant paradox.

This study provides an overview of the acculturation and adaptation of the largest group of immigrant adolescents in the Netherlands, those in junior vocational education. When compared with other adolescents in junior vocational education these immigrant adolescents are doing rather well. However, when compared to a nationwide sample, the under representation in higher education suggests that the position of immigrant adolescents remains to be improved. As such, future studies should address the question why immigrant adolescents have a positive pattern of adaptation, but fail to perform as well as national students in terms of education.

Conclusion

Despite a low socio-economic status and comparatively poor chances for upward economic mobility immigrant adolescents, especially first generation immigrant adolescents, show a positive pattern of adaptation. The second generation decline suggests that further assimilation to the national society may not be conducive to the adaptation of immigrant adolescents. To further test how assimilation was related to adaptation, we studied the acculturation of immigrant adolescents. In chapter three we found that the bidimensional model of acculturation gives a plausible description of the acculturation of immigrant adolescents, but it was not found that an integrated profile was best in terms of adaptation. The ethnic and integrated profiles were related to the most positive patterns of adaptation, although the immigrant adolescent in the ethnic profile achieved the positive pattern of adaptation despite a lower socio-economic status than the immigrant adolescents in the integrated profile. This result could be better explained in terms of segmented assimilation
than in terms of the bidimensional model of acculturation, in which integration is usually found to be the most optimal choice in terms of adaptation (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 2006; Neto, 2002). To further test this we analyzed how one specific aspect of the culture of many non-western immigrant adolescents, namely family obligations, was related to their adaptation. It was found that a strong sense of family obligations was related to a more positive pattern of adaptation in immigrant adolescents. This led us to conclude that the maintenance of at least some parts of the ethnic culture may help immigrant adolescents in junior vocational education achieve a good adaptation. Multiculturalism is an attitude towards cultural diversity that recognizes the importance of cultural maintenance. Among national adolescents in junior vocational education, there is little support for multiculturalism, but this support can be increased by creating ethnically diverse classrooms.