

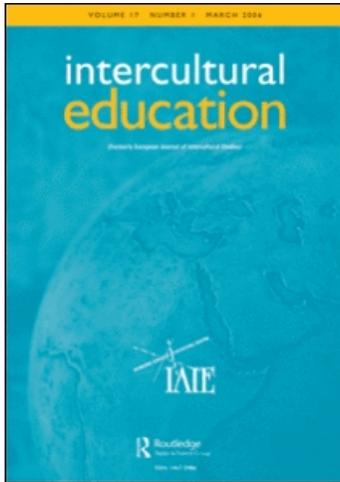
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School Leadership for Intercultural Education

Y. A. M. LEEMAN

ABSTRACT *Concentrating on the Netherlands, this paper discusses the problems and opportunities faced by schools in the directing and guiding of intercultural education. After a description of the concept of intercultural education and an outline of the way intercultural education is directed and guided on a national and school level, the paper focuses on school climate. The concluding discussion suggests that, if schools want to give intercultural education a chance, they must opt for a focused development of vision and direct and guide intercultural education as a part of school policy. In a multi-ethnic school, this demands the inclusion of the perspectives of all the students regarding school culture.*

Introduction

A main objective of intercultural education can be simply stated as: “learning to live in an ethnically and culturally diverse society”. In the last decades of the 20th century, western European countries have put intercultural education on the agenda in reaction to the increasingly multi-ethnic character of their societies (Fase, 1994). The development of multi-ethnic societies in many western European countries has not progressed without problems, however. In many cases, the marginalization of ethnic minority groups has accompanied integration. Opportunities in society remain unevenly distributed, partly along ethnic lines, and intolerance, discrimination and separatism gnaw at social cohesion. It is not surprising that heated political discussion regarding multiculturalism regularly flares up. Meanwhile, new immigrants continue to arrive.

Even though the issue of the multi-ethnic character of society is highly topical, intercultural education has made few inroads in most western European schools. Has the field not been able to develop sufficiently to attract teachers and schools? Has insufficient direction been given to the introduction of intercultural education on a national and school level? This paper discusses the problems and opportunities faced by schools in the directing and guiding of intercultural education, concentrating on the Netherlands. The possibilities open to schools to implement intercultural education are globally comparable, but there are differences (Standaert, 2001). While the UK and France, for example, both have a highly centralized curriculum, Dutch schools, true to the tradition of pillarization and ideological diversity in the

Netherlands, have more autonomy in designing the structure and content of the curriculum.

After describing the concept of intercultural education and outlining how intercultural education in the Netherlands has been directed and guided on a national and school level, I shall turn to the issue of school climate. The concluding discussion suggests that, if schools want to give intercultural education a chance, they must opt for a focused development of vision and direct and guide intercultural education as a part of school policy. In a multi-ethnic school, this demands the inclusion of the perspectives of all the students regarding the school culture.

Intercultural Education: a description

Intercultural education relates to living in society on a national and global level. There is broad agreement on the objective of intercultural education. It relates to the quality of living in an ethnically and culturally diverse society. The term multicultural education is also used, and the two terms can often be used interchangeably. UNESCO and the Council of Europe use the term intercultural, whereas the OECD has opted for multicultural. In the US, Canada and Australia, multicultural education is the established term; in Europe, with the exception of the UK, intercultural education is used. "Intercultural" was chosen in the Netherlands because it expresses the ideal that cultures have a reciprocal influence on each other within society; "multicultural" was considered to be too static a term.

Intercultural education is for all students. All people must prepare themselves for living in an ethnically diverse society. The term is also used to refer to all the educational measures that optimize educational opportunities for students from ethnic minority groups. This can lead to confusing discussions. Providing remedial Dutch lessons, establishing contact between the school and Turkish parents, mentoring projects for Moroccan children, etc. have all been defined as instances of intercultural education. Used in this sense, intercultural education is primarily aimed at ethnic minorities and black schools; it is not seen as being relevant to white schools and white people. The issue can be clarified by differentiating between the interculturalization of schools, where schools adapt their methods and objectives to an ethnically mixed school population, and intercultural education focusing on educational objectives for everyone.

Internationally, almost all tend to agree that "an information package on other cultures" is totally inadequate for learning how to live, and live in a *good* way, in an ethnically and culturally diverse society. This requires social insight, insight into the processes of communication and image forming, psycho-social and moral development, and intercultural sensitivity and skills. Intercultural education has normative aspects. The moral dimension involves stimulating *satisfactory* multicultural living, based on principles such as recognition of cultural diversity, communality, equality and democratic values. Inspired by prominent protagonists of intercultural education (Auernheimer, 1997; Banks, 2001; Olneck, 2000), I consider the following to be a comprehensive package of educational objectives:

- *The development of knowledge about ethnic-cultural diversity*: learning about cultures, processes of change, differences and similarities within and between groups, ethnocultural identities, and processes of communication and image forming.
- *The development of a multiple perspective outlook*: learning that knowledge is socially constructed and is therefore influenced by the experiences, environment and approaches of an author. Learning that there is more than one way of looking at the world (Ledoux, 1998; Banks, 2001).
- *The development of knowledge about inequality in the multi-ethnic society and of values and skills to tackle inequality*: learning about racism, discrimination and the asymmetrical chances of social success, as well as the role of ethnic-cultural background in connection with social-economic background, gender and individual personal characteristics.
- *The development of values and skills aimed at safeguarding ethnic-cultural diversity, personal autonomy and communality in the school and society*: as well as developing these key values, this involves learning to take active responsibility for such values. This is no easy task. The simultaneous support of cultural diversity and stimulating democratic values can prompt complex value conflicts. Questions such as: Should all opinions be valued equally? Should all children learn everything or is it acceptable for some groups of children to cover their ears, for example, when the theory of evolution is being discussed? Should all schools accept a teacher who wears a headscarf or who is homosexual? Is it reasonable to ask state schools to create a special prayer area for Islamic children, and can schools make all children participate in Christmas celebrations? At the same time, these values act as barriers to the concept of cultural diversity. Extreme cultural relativism, non-commitment and conservative cultural preservation (separatism) do not appear to offer a way out of these troubles.
- *The development of values and skills necessary for living democratically in a multi-ethnic context*: this is a broad social and communicative competence which includes respect for others, the ability to empathize, and the development of values and skills to resolve conflicts in a multicultural context (Gutmann & Thompson, 2000).

The definition and further development of intercultural education differ from country to country (May, 1999). In the UK, a precise differentiation is made between intercultural education (with a strong emphasis on knowledge about cultural diversity and respect for others) and anti-racist education (focusing in particular on the political and social-critical dimension). The accent in the Netherlands is on the combination of, and interconnection between, anti-racism and intercultural education. Another example: while migration and living in a multi-ethnic society in western Europe are a reason to implement intercultural education, a more general approach is evident in Flanders and the Netherlands. Here, social and cultural differences, such as those that occur and are of importance in the pedagogical context, are emphasized. The focus is not necessarily on ethnocultural differences. This general approach to intercultural education is linked to the desire to avoid essentialism and imprisoning people in an ascribed ethnic identity, and the

desire to find an interface with the general task of education regarding identity formation (Leeman *et al.*, 1996; Ledoux *et al.*, 2000; Leeman & Ledoux, 2001). It is also connected, particularly in Flanders, to the desire to move away from a normative-ideological approach to intercultural education (Verlot & Sierens, 1997). Learning that people are different, to be sensitive to these differences and to respect them is the core of intercultural thinking and agency in this approach.

The content of intercultural education within nations can vary considerably between types of schools and students' age. Primary schools are more likely to emphasize the relational aspect of intercultural education, while secondary schools may also pay attention to social insight and take a stance against inequality. An instrumental approach to intercultural education is the obvious choice in vocational education. In this type of schooling, students are prepared for working life. This frequently involves working in an ethnically mixed team for an ethnically mixed client basis.

The most frequently described approach in the literature on intercultural education is the *direct* approach, in which the subject matter or course content determine educational activities. Most of the attention paid to teaching methods is on forms of dialogue and co-operative learning (Cohen, 1994; Solomon *et al.*, 2001; Batelaan & van Hoof, 1996). The indirect approach, in which the accent is on pedagogical climate, on coming together and interacting in a safe and democratic school environment, is less developed in the field of intercultural education but it is increasingly attracting attention (Batelaan, 2001).

Intercultural Education: policy and direction in the Netherlands

Government steering of the process started in the 1980s, when intercultural education became mandatory in all types of schools in the Netherlands. At that time, intercultural education was defined in global terms. The core issue was getting to know and respect each other in the context of living in an ethnically diverse society. Though intercultural education is now a legal obligation, it is not commonplace in the Netherlands. It did develop in a limited number of schools, particularly schools with students from an ethnic-minority background (Projectgroep Intercultureel Onderwijs [Intercultural Education Project Group], 1995). The development of intercultural education has predominantly taken place among enthusiastic teachers and staff of educational support services. This work was been financed on a project basis by the national government. Most attention has been paid to new educational content, while intercultural education materials have been developed to supplement standard teaching materials. Both the text and illustrations used in mainstream school textbooks have been changed, especially since "multicultural society" was included in the national education benchmarks.

Given the fact that on the whole little attention was being devoted to intercultural education in schools, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport set up an Intercultural Education Project Group in 1994. This project was given four years to stimulate the development of intercultural education. The aims were to find ways of integrating this type of

education into general educational policy and to modify the standard way of working in all schools. At the start of the project, the group defined intercultural education as “educational activities aimed at improving relations between people from different ethnic groups on the basis of equality”. This definition moved away from “intercultural education for students from ethnic minority groups only”, thereby emphasizing that intercultural education is important for all students. The Project Group stimulated innovations in primary, secondary, adult, vocational and higher education, working on topics such as the content of teaching materials, formulating core objectives, classroom teaching, the relationship between the school and its environment, and the professionalism of teachers. When the group was disbanded in 1998, it recommended that further direction and guidance was necessary in intercultural education, which at the same time needed to be integrated into standard educational practice and become the hallmark of good education. This further development was viewed as being the responsibility of all those involved in education, with organizations associated with educational support services taking a leading role. The Minister of Education, Culture and Science endorsed intercultural education as a facet of good education. However, the actual responsibility for intercultural education shifted to the national policy level after the Project Group was disbanded. The further development of intercultural education was left to the autonomy of the schools.

Policy and Direction at the School Level

No structural research has been conducted in the Netherlands with respect to school policy and direction pertaining to intercultural education. Inventories of good practice in this field (Leeman & Veen 1996, Projectgroep Intercultureel Onderwijs & Anne Frank Stichting, 1996) show that the reason for introducing intercultural education may simply be an interest in ethnic diversity. It may also be prompted by problems between groups of students from different backgrounds or by problems with a particular group of students and their parents. Criteria for choosing, assessing and developing teaching materials are now readily available for school officials who are planning to introduce intercultural education. Intercultural teaching materials are available for various subject areas. However, little has been developed to date in the area of professional teacher development. This also applies to the school climate and school organization.

According to the available research, schools usually start implementing intercultural education by organizing study days that help to develop a vision on intercultural education. One of the problems encountered at this stage is the reluctance of some team members to accept ethnic diversity, or to put any extra effort into the implementation of intercultural education. The following step often entails a small-scale project, accompanied by professional teacher training on a voluntary basis for those interested in the topic. Quite frequently, the whole process then stagnates, and intercultural education remains at the outer margins of the educational experience. It appears that this is almost totally due to the lack of popular support for intercultural education.

The literature on educational change is clear. Before any innovation can actually be integrated into normal practice, it must first be generally accepted, especially by teachers. Limited rather than full implementation of educational innovation may be linked to the type of change that is planned. However, the capacity of a school to change, as well as government incentives and an appropriate cultural and social climate for such change have a considerable impact (Lagerweij & Voogt, 1999; Fullan, 1993).

Intercultural education is no ordinary innovation. It is not a simple innovation that can be quickly and smoothly incorporated into the daily school routine. First and foremost, innovation cannot be restricted to a single subject area. This makes its introduction into the educational process complicated. An almost permanent demand is placed on the innovative capacity of schools. Multicultural society is developing rapidly, making the content of intercultural education prone to becoming very quickly outdated and subject to change. What initially seemed new and strange does not even seem “different” a few years later. Years ago, for example, Turkish bread was something special in the Netherlands. Now this “flat bread” is well on the way to becoming an ordinary “Dutch” food item for children in the big cities, comparable to French bread.

The political characteristics and values associated with intercultural education are a hindrance to its general acceptance in schools. It is not easy to reach a general consensus on living in a multi-ethnic society and how to achieve this—think about the debate in Dutch and European media that flares up regularly when the issue of multicultural society is mentioned. Opinions can vary enormously. Intercultural education also suffers from the fact that popular support for intercultural issues is considered a lower priority than school achievement, though this concept can be interpreted in different ways. Within the current interpretation of interculturality, it is deemed more important to encourage ethnic minorities to participate in Dutch society than to respect ethnocultural diversity. The following equation is widely supported: success at school = social success = prejudices disappear = intercultural education is no longer necessary. In this equation, multi-ethnic society is reduced to a relational issue centered on image formation. This predominant view of life in multicultural society will not garner more support for intercultural education.

Another barrier is that intercultural education is not seen as in line with the primary tasks of education. Many view it as connected to the “moral task of education”, a lower priority than improving achievement. On the other hand, the legal obligation to implement intercultural education in schools does provide a solid basis for developing this type of learning. However, a legal obligation is hardly sufficient in the Netherlands, where “freedom of education” is the norm, if our aim is to move towards the implementation of this kind of educational change (Fase, 1997; Ploeg *et al.*, 1999). We know that teachers are more prepared to change if that change is compatible with their own ideals, questions and problems. Their interest will increase if change is sufficiently concrete and clear, and if they think that they can cope with it in terms of time, competence and resilience. Teachers are also more likely to make an effort if they can imagine the specific consequences that change will have for their teaching. Intercultural education poses problems with respect to

the foregoing, since the field is still developing and can easily fail to give the clarity that teachers desire. Moreover, there is no general demand for intercultural education, and problems are defined differently from teacher to teacher and school to school. Owing to growing ethnic segregation within the Dutch educational system, the extent to which schools are confronted with multiculturalism society will vary widely. This also has consequences for the possibilities teachers have to develop intercultural sensitivity (Forum, 2001).

There are a number of approaches open to school leaders who are contemplating a policy focusing on intercultural education. As mentioned earlier, policies focusing on intercultural education rarely make it into the everyday routines of schools. One approach is to focus on the daily practices and methods of the school and assess where intercultural interventions can take place. A key question then becomes: how can the regular lessons be influenced in such a way that they become more intercultural? Such an approach hardly represents a comprehensive and qualitatively good form of intercultural education. The results of the “Intercultural Learning in the Classroom” project (Ledoux *et al.*, 2000), which adopted this strategy, bear witness to this. The project did produce some good examples of intercultural education, but pointed to another problem. The results showed that a considerable number of teachers were more inclined to pay attention to social and cultural differences when dealing with intercultural education in a very general and abstract way. There was no indication how and whether they would translate their knowledge and attitudes to concrete classroom situations involving ethnic diversity. Another possible approach might involve educational innovation that, like intercultural education, pays attention to the differences students, emphasizes interaction, and which already enjoys wide support in the school. Possibilities include new pedagogical approaches such as “co-operative learning” or “dealing with differences among students”. Recent projects in the Netherlands and Flanders, such as “CLIM” and the “Project Intercultureel Leren in de Klas [Intercultural Learning in the Classroom Project]” show that opportunities exist to interface with these general reforms in terms of both content and pedagogy (Ernalsteen, 2002; Ledoux *et al.*, 2000). Pedagogical climate provides another possibility for interface. I shall explore this further in the next section.

Pedagogical Climate as an Approach to Change

School climate can especially have a powerful influence, although indirectly, on “the development of values and skills for living in a democratic society in a multi-ethnic context”. Several important aspects of the school climate that appear to influence the development of moral values such as community spirit, responsibility, respect for others and tolerance are (Solomon *et al.*, 2001; Klaassen, 1996; Roede *et al.*, 1999):

- value commonality among the members of the school team;
- an atmosphere of trust and personal involvement (between the teachers themselves and between teachers and students);
- an open way of solving conflicts that is perceived as fair;

- active participation of students in the school;
- emphasis on interaction among students in the pedagogical-didactic approach.

Research on aspects of the pedagogical climate that have an influence on intercultural education point to the following as being important:

- ethnically heterogeneous composition of the student population;
- specific opportunities for inter-ethnic contact;
- co-operative learning in ethnically heterogeneous groups;
- personal involvement of the school and teachers with all students; and
- open repudiation of racism and discrimination by the school.

Research conducted by Leeman (1994) and Saharso (1992) on ten ethnically mixed secondary schools shows, for example, that students from ethnic minority groups consider a small school where the teachers know them personally to be very important for the development of a general feeling of well-being. It also stimulates learning. These students, and most of the students from the majority population, respect a teacher who speaks out against discrimination and pays attention during lessons to the issue of living in a multi-ethnic society. Verkuyten and Thijs (2000) also conclude, on the basis of research they conducted with children in the 7th and 8th grades, that teachers who denounce discrimination (in combination with intercultural education subject matter) make a difference. They have a positive effect on the acceptance of, and respect for, students from other ethnic groups and their attitude discourages ethnically based abuse and bullying at school.

The positive influences on intercultural objectives, associated with the above-mentioned elements in school climate, are conditional. If the teacher, for example, makes sure that students, no matter what their background, contribute equally to co-operative learning, positive effects can be expected regarding the relationships between students. Variables such as the ethnic composition of the class can influence educational objectives in different ways and can also have different consequences for different groups of students. Verkuyten and Thijs (2000) conclude, for example, that for Dutch children in relatively “black” schools, inter-ethnic contact and experiences in the school environment can alter the traditional ethnic social status hierarchy (in which Turks and Moroccans find themselves at the bottom rung of the ladder). Mixed education can serve to reduce the social distance among children from different ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, Dutch children who are in a minority in their class have a greater chance of being discriminated against and feel less accepted than other Dutch children. This also places classroom relationships among children under pressure.

Several factors make it difficult to choose appropriate educational intervention strategies. These include:

- the limited knowledge we have regarding the influence of school climate on intercultural learning;
- the absence of unequivocal effects associated with certain interventions for different groups of students;
- the conditional character of many interventions; and

- the need to take several educational objectives into account simultaneously.

It is unavoidable that school management teams end up weighing various pros and cons. There is an ever-present danger that they become burdened with a long list of social problems and questions that need to be resolved. A common solution in the Netherlands is to emphasize the general school culture rather than address specific issues such as diversity, safety and combating discrimination and bullying. The school culture is described in this view as a set of values and meanings shared by the members of that (sub-)culture. These values are particularly apparent in the way in which mutual relationships are formed in the school and the level of involvement in school matters.

“Know What’s Going On”

The process of being involved with each other is strongly linked to the level of contact teachers have with each other and the knowledge they have of each other. Ethnic diversity discussions have long been dominated by predominantly dichotomous models that focus on cultural differences between ethnic groups. Because of their simplicity, these schematic models continue to be popular, and it is difficult to combat them. Conveniently packaged information can never provide an adequate description of ethnocultural differences. This is especially the case in contemporary Dutch society where, after years of immigration and multi-generational families, there is now a wide range of orientations and lifestyles. During the process of identity formation among today’s young, ethnic lines can become blurred or, quite the contrary, acquire extra meaning.

There is another problem that I should like to address here. Being aware of the differences among students is no guarantee that one will “deal correctly” with these differences. Experience shows that categorizing and addressing students according to their ethnocultural characteristics does not always have the desired effect and that students often do not appreciate it. They can become locked in “their own culture” against their wishes. Students frequently feel unsafe if they are labeled and treated as a member of a specific ethnic group at school. No matter how well intended, an imposed cultural identity does not necessarily coincide with how a pupil experiences his/her identity, or with the strategic choice of identity students make in certain situations. (This can be compared to the situation of some career women in the business world that, in the workplace, do not want any special favors relating to their family responsibilities.) At the same time, schools tend to be criticized if ethnocultural sensitivities are not taken into account. Consider the dismay expressed by one student, now attending a higher vocational school, “It would have been a lot easier for me if one of the teachers had understood how I felt when my Grandmother in Morocco became seriously ill. Everyone expected me to not be affected by it and simply carry on with my school work as if nothing had happened.” Consider also the situation of teenagers from an ethnic minority background who are brutally teased about their ethnic background. They would appreciate it if their problems with fellow students at school would not be dismissed by calling them “over-sensitive”.

At the very least, they expect to be listened to and taken seriously. Ethnic minority students who plan to attend higher education institutions would benefit if more attention was devoted to their specific problems. It is not surprising that they feel uncertain about how comfortable they will feel in a predominantly “white” university. In short, ethnocultural differences are meaningful in education (for the well-being of students and their achievement at school). What kind of meaning is attached to these differences in practice and how to deal with such situations requires questioning, consultation and consideration. Because unequivocal guidelines for charting and dealing with ethnocultural diversity do not exist, schools need to develop a broad understanding of diagnosis and intervention strategies. They must develop intercultural knowledge and sensitivity. Differences acquire meaning in a given situation, so it is advisable for schools to assess their own specific situation and learn to relate it to general and intercultural policy.

There is some experience in the Netherlands with this combination of general and specific policy. One particular general policy, entitled the “Safe School Campaign” has been combined with intercultural efforts. The evaluation of this campaign showed that the intercultural focus is one of the reasons why schools have made special provisions for safety in their school policy. Since the campaign, their approach to tackling problems has become more professional and systematic. They also express more concern about social relationships and behavior in the school (Mooij, 2001). In the midst of the campaign, the SCO-Kohnstamm Instituut was asked to conduct research on the possibilities of combining safety policies with policies on ethnocultural diversity. Their assignment included developing a quick, easily manageable method that would provide insight into safety and the lack thereof at school, as experienced by the ethnically diverse student body. The main instrument used was questionnaires. One can ask whether this is the most appropriate way to measure such feelings. It takes little time to ask about known incidents, and it is easy to process the answers, but do they provide schools with sufficient information about safety and multicultural issues? Feelings that tend to be more subtle and hidden more deeply below the surface are more elusive, yet often more revealing. A compromise was found to address this issue. Instead of only asking about the frequency of teasing and bullying, name calling and threats, stealing and destruction, scuffles and physical violence, as was generally the norm in the context of “safety at school”, more emphasis was placed on questions regarding students’ feelings about safety and the lack thereof (Leeman *et al.*, 1999). Attention was also devoted to feelings that related to ethnic diversity. The question about feeling safe at school was as follows:

I feel safe enough at school to:

- be myself;
- speak up about my religious beliefs;
- give my opinion;
- choose what I want to do and to do it;
- go wherever I want to.

The question about *feeling unsafe at school* focused on:

- name calling;
- verbal threats;
- breaking or stealing my things;
- exclusion (not being allowed to join in);
- teasing;
- physical violence;
- threatening with a weapon;
- discrimination;
- sexual intimidation (staring, words, touching).

A question about *teasing* and *discrimination* read as follows:

I'm teased or discriminated against at school because

- of how I look;
- of what I can and can't do well;
- of my background, religious beliefs, culture;
- of the way I speak and write;
- I'm a boy or a girl;
- I'm a homosexual or a lesbian.

Using a questionnaire approach like the one described above provides the school with an overview not only of the incidents that have occurred, but also of the wide spectrum of feelings experienced by students about safety (including factors relating to gender and ethnic heritage). Answers to the questions varied from school to school, showing that different groups of students feel differently about safety. Girls, for example, generally felt less safe than boys, and Dutch students only appeared to experience discrimination at black schools. With the help of the questionnaire results schools were better able to develop appropriate policy measures. The results can also form the basis for discussions among and with students. Such discussions can teach students more about each others' sensitivities regarding living in a multi-ethnic society and how to reach a better understanding of how to successfully co-exist at school. They can also help school management understand how various students feel about school culture and offer an opportunity to include students in deliberations about school policy.

Things That Are Taken for Granted: a closer look

When assessing how intercultural a school is, we also need to examine the everyday thinking and behaving patterns that develop, slowly but surely. Such patterns that are taken for granted give meaning to ethnocultural differences in the school and can influence students' feeling of well-being and their performance at school. Let us look at one example: Gerold is a boy from a Surinamese family. He was badly teased on a regular basis by a group of Dutch boys. They wouldn't give him enough space to pass on the stairs, for instance. Gerold had had enough of this and decided to take

action. Together with his friends, he placed a note on the notice board. The gist of it was, "Just you wait, we'll get you lot after school." The official rule at the school was that threats of violence were not *tolerated*. Gerold was punished and his tormentors got off scot-free. Ethnic discrimination often occurs in this way. This kind of teasing is difficult to prove, and many schools do not have a policy to address these issues. Feeling powerless, Gerold resorted to the threat of physical violence, and there were clear rules regarding such behavior at his school. Originally the victim, in this example Gerold became the perpetrator.

An earlier inventory of complaints about discrimination in schools (Landelijk Bureau Racismebestrijding [National Bureau for Combating Racism], 1998) showed that complaints about teasing at school by students from ethnic minority backgrounds at school were regularly dismissed by claiming the students were being "over-sensitive". In other words, the complaints were dealt with in the "normal" way. It thus appears that some school staff are not sensitive enough to how certain students experience existing rules and incidents and how communication about these experiences between students and the school management team can be improved.

It is not an easy task to gain a sufficient overview of the intercultural climate at any given school and to make the right policy choices. Diversity is one of the many starting points for policy. It is important for policy makers to consider how intertwined the intercultural and the mainstream are already, and how improvements can be made. Incidental, isolated interventions to improve the way schools deal with ethnocultural diversity will rarely succeed. The literature on organizational functioning is clear, and it argues strongly in favor of a contextual approach to intercultural management (Zee, 1999). The cornerstones of that policy are: development of a vision, procedures for the acquisition of knowledge about students' perception of the school climate, ongoing procedures to link general policy with, and to test it against, the objectives and points of specific policy.

Discussion

Intercultural education is aimed at learning to live in an ethnically and culturally diverse society. Ideally, it comprises a comprehensive package of educational objectives. These objectives have normative properties. It is overly clear that countries like the Netherlands are a multi-ethnic society and that many people from different ethnic-cultural backgrounds live here. What *is* a subject of public discussion is the structure and design of the ideal multicultural society. Schools cannot avoid this discussion. Intercultural education is mandated by Dutch law. Intercultural objectives are included in the attainment targets of primary and secondary education, although due to the "freedom of education" in the Netherlands, the content of intercultural education is not prescribed. School management teams in the Netherlands face a difficult task. They must encourage a change in their schools that is far from being value neutral. This is not an easy task.

To facilitate the adoption of intercultural education, school management teams can seek to interface with current trends in education, and also connect to how

teachers define their problems, needs and interests. However, such an approach is often insufficient to achieve a comprehensive and qualitatively effective form of intercultural education. This is because differences rapidly disappear from the picture while we are still looking for similarities. With regard to the content of education, difficult subjects such as anti-racism are quickly dropped, and more neutral subjects focusing on image-formation processes are emphasized. This approach can only have a chance of succeeding when intercultural objectives are monitored as well. With regard to the pedagogical climate, linking intercultural education with the development of a safe school or with the development of a democratic school has the advantage that it becomes possible to interface with the priorities and expertise of schools. Ethnocultural diversity does not have to be further problematized, however. Interculturality can drown in the waves of non-commitment. This has happened to many in the Netherlands who have much to say on this subject. One way of keeping ethnic diversity in ethnically heterogeneous schools on the agenda is by taking the principle of “know what’s going on” seriously. Conflicts at school can have different emotional connotations for students from different ethnic backgrounds. In addition to indifference to ethnic diversity (among some students from the majority population), an emphasis on ethnic difference can be found in other students with the result that possible conflicts may be experienced and interpreted very differently in emotional terms. There will not always be a consensus on values and norms and such consensus cannot simply be assumed. Living in a multicultural society requires interaction and discussion and learning to deal with dilemmas regarding values. These may pertain to fundamental values such as the “right to autonomy”, the “right to freedom of choice” (what students wear, for example), and “freedom of expression”. A critical analysis of “things that are taken for granted” and knowing what’s going on are crucial for an effective pedagogical climate in an ethnically heterogeneous school. We have presented an instrument that endeavors to reveal the range of feelings that different students have when it comes to the aspect of school safety. The further development of instruments and procedures which do justice to “diversity” is open to school management teams. Schools cannot, however, go it alone. An appropriate cultural and social climate is essential if they are to give focused direction to intercultural education.

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