# Awareness and Consequences of Ethnocultural Diversity in Policy and Cultural Education in the Netherlands


**Lenie van den Bulk**

**Abstract** The Dutch society is becoming increasingly diverse, but to what extent does our policy and education change? In this article, Lenie van den Bulk describes the political, social and educational developments in the Netherlands about ethnic and cultural diversity. She does this on the basis of literature research and a survey among Dutch school directors. The question of how schools deal with ethnic and cultural diversity appears to be closely related to how diverse their pupil population is.

**Keywords** Ethnic diversity · Cultural diversity · Policy · Social · Educational developments · The Netherlands

## 1 Introduction

In recent decades, the Netherlands has become a "superdiverse" society. Of the nation's under fifteens, only a third are of native Dutch origin. That is particularly evident in the major cities. "Amsterdam has been majority-minority city since 2011. Most of the young people there with an immigrant background have their roots in non-Western countries. Officially, 'indigenous' residents are now in a minority" (Crul et al. 2013). But although the native Dutch are declining as a proportion of the population, the same does not apply to their social power and influence. The sociologists Alba and Duyvendak (2017) explain why, in order to assess the true extent of social integration by Dutch citizens of non-Western origin, it is necessary to look not just at population numbers but also at the power of mainstream culture and institutions, including schools.

The term "superdiverse", as a substitute for "multicultural", was first introduced in 2015 by Meissner and Vertovec (Alba and Duyvendak 2017: 2). The idea behind the term is that increased immigration has "normalized" the diversity of cultural backgrounds which characterizes contemporary Dutch society and that if such

L. van den Bulk (✉)
LKCA, Utrecht, The Netherlands



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diversity is no longer atypical then there is no need to pay particular attention to cultural background. The question, however, is whether this approach does proper justice to young people with a non-Dutch background: is the notion that superdiversity has become "normal" in today's society not in fact shrouding tensions between different sections of the population?

Naturally, we do not want to treat young people with an immigrant background any differently from those of Dutch origin. But on the other hand, we do not want their only path to success in life to lie in adapting totally to Dutch culture. Such assimilation is likely to diminish their own identity, because they are unable to express it in full. It might also lead to frustration arising out of inadequately acknowledged experiences of discrimination, for example, if they are repeatedly turned down for jobs and traineeships (Klooster et al. 2016). A recent study by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market at Maastricht University found that students from non-Western backgrounds have to apply for significantly more training placements than their native Dutch peers before securing a position (ROA 2015: 115). In the Netherlands we still have no complete picture of the nature and extent of the discrimination experienced by members of minority ethnic communities because the various systems in which it is registered are uncoordinated and because such incidents are often not reported in the first place (Andriessen et al. 2014: 11).

Moreover, a lack of positive attention to cultural differences may mean that we do not fully benefit from the richness that differences can bring to society and what we can learn from other cultures. In this chapter, we provide an overview of the Dutch situation regarding to the subject of cultural diversity from the educational, the public policy and the social perspective. As well as studying policy documents and Dutch research on this subject we also conducted a survey among 400 head teachers. We investigated how they perceive and value the ethnic and cultural diversity at their school and how they address different cultures other than the Dutch. We wondered how schools deal with ethnic and cultural diversity, how much space and attention do they give cultures outside the Dutch "mainstream" and how does this affect artistic and cultural education in particular? Is there such a thing as intercultural education in the Netherlands, and are artistic and cultural classes a suitable forum for it? By intercultural education, we mean teaching pupils to handle similarities and differences related to characteristics of ethnic and cultural background, with a view to equal and harmonious participation in Dutch society (Van der Niet 2006).

We mean with ethnic and cultural diversity the family background that pupils have. Even though their parents were born and raised in the Netherlands, the link with the country of origin remains recognizable and is important for these pupils. Cultural education is the term that is used in the Netherlands for education in art and culture (heritage). Intercultural education is aimed at getting to know and understand other cultures alongside Dutch culture.

Before answering the above questions, however, we first review social and ethnocultural developments in the Netherlands since the 1990s and how these are reflected in educational opportunities in sociocultural beliefs, in politics and in culture and education policy.

The conclusion from our point of view is that public policy makers and the public are reticent and careful with identity issues and that the Dutch population is divided in their views on cultural diversity with an apparent dividing line between people with higher and lower education. In general people with a higher level of education are more positive about diversity than people with a lower level of education.

Teachers and head teachers realize that the multicultural or superdiverse society is a fact and that this requires policy and practical action. Teachers and head teachers who have many children with a migrant background are dealing with this every day and are constantly looking for possibilities to introduce intercultural education. Teachers and head teachers of 'white' schools also find cultural diversity important but are less active in addressing it. We need to know a lot more about the multicultural practice in schools and how it is developing.

## 2 Three Perspectives on Integration

### *2.1 The Educational-Opportunity Perspective*

The social integration of non-Western immigrants and their children has long been an issue in the Netherlands, but its translation into government policy in such areas as education and cultural edification has evolved over the years. The recent refugee crisis has renewed interest in the whole topic. In particular, there are concerns about the high rate of unemployment among immigrants, especially the young, and their overrepresentation in the crime statistics.

According to the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, SCP), "Many immigrants – especially those with a Muslim background – feel that they are treated as second-class citizens, while a section of the native Dutch population views the presence of immigrants as a threat to important values and associates them with crime and radicalization" (Huijnk and Andriessen 2016: 6).

The above quote is from an in-depth study of the integration of minorities in the Netherlands. The SCP researchers looked at the country's four largest minority ethnic communities – Dutch Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans – comparing both their socioeconomic position (education, work, income, housing) and their sociocultural attitudes (identification, interethnic contacts, opinions and beliefs) with those of the indigenous Dutch population in equivalent demographic categories. This categorization is important because previous research (Herweijer 2011) has shown that the educational performance of children is more closely related to their parent's socioeconomic position than to their cultural and ethnic background. The study also compared first-generation immigrants with the second generation, their children, in search of any changes in their position.

## 2.2 Educational Position

In primary education, the differences between pupils of native Dutch origin and those with an immigrant background are relatively small, although statistically the latter do display a significant deficiency in reading comprehension skills. In numeracy, however, Dutch Turkish, Dutch Moroccan and other non-Western pupils actually perform better than can be expected based on the characteristics of the family background (parents' level of education) and the school.

In the national "eleven-plus" test (Cito-toets) taken by most children in the Netherlands in their final year of primary education (year 8), the average scores of "native" pupils have been more or less stable for many years now, whereas those achieved by pupils with an immigrant background have been rising steadily. We see much the same in secondary education, too, although pupils of non-Western origin are still substantially overrepresented in the "lower" learning pathways (Huijnk and Andriessen 2016) see also footnote 1 below),their backlog gradually becomes less.

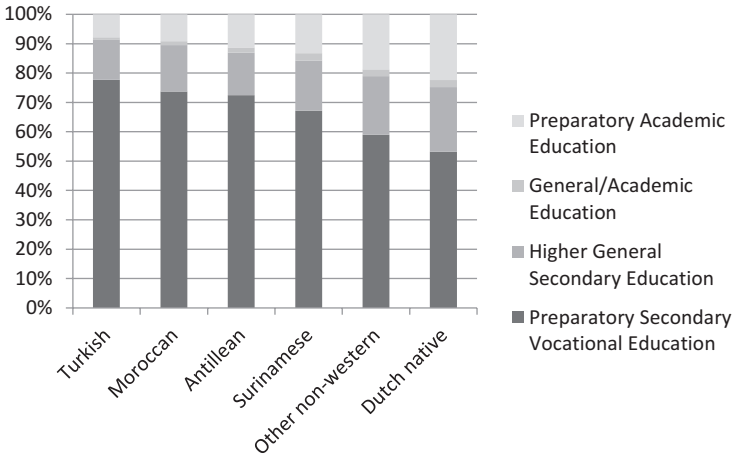
Where pupils with an immigrant background are still disadvantaged, that is largely explained by family characteristics – especially their parents' level of educational attainment. In this respect they are comparable with their native Dutch peers: for them, too, social background is a decisive factor. Based upon these findings, the researchers conclude – albeit with some caution – that the education of children from immigrant communities generates the same "yield" as that of native Dutch youngsters with comparable socioeconomic backgrounds.

The main conclusion is that the crucial factor of the disadvantage is the family background and not being an immigrant, thus validating "social reproduction theories". Any improvement will take considerable patience since changes at the fundamental socioeconomic level occur only very gradually.

In secondary education, the number of premature school leavers is falling across the board, regardless of ethnic origin. In vocational further education, however, students with an immigrant background are more likely to drop out. While inability to find a work placement does not appear to be a major reason for giving up schooling completely, students of Turkish and Moroccan origin in particular – at school and at college – do have more difficulty in securing a placement, with one in three of the former and one in four of the latter citing discrimination as the cause (Andriessen et al. 2014: 23).

In general, pupils of native Dutch origin are more likely to take the more ambitious learning pathways in secondary education than their counterparts from other communities. The diagram below shows the percentages of each ethnic group in each form of schooling (Fig. 1).[1]

[1] Secondary education in the Netherlands is selective, with a number of distinct strands. VMBO (literally, "preparatory secondary vocational education") is for pupils expected to enter employment or professional training at the end of their school career and is subdivided into several pathways, ranging from "VMBO theoretical" to "VMBO practical". HAVO ("higher general secondary education") is a route to vocational higher education (universities of applied sciences). VWO ("preparatory academic education") leads to a university-entry qualification. Initial selection usually takes place in the first or second year of secondary school.




Source: Huijnk & Andriessen (2016), *Integratie in zicht* (Integration in sight). Data from CBS Statline.[35] Figure adapted by T. IJdens (LKCA).

**Fig. 1** Percentages of ethnic group in form of schooling. (Source: Huijnk and Andriessen (2016), *Integratie in zicht* (Integration in sight). Data from CBS Statline (Provisional figures for 2015–2016. Source: CBS Statline). Figure adapted by T. IJdens (LKCA))

As well as family background, school characteristics can also affect educational outcomes. The socioeconomic and ethnic composition of the pupil population may influence teachers' work and expectations – quite possibly negatively if the majority of pupils have poorly educated or non-Western parents. A so-called peer-group effect (Veerman et al. 2013 in Huijnk and Andriessen 2016) can also occur. On one side of the coin, this may mean weaker pupils benefiting from the company of more able ones, so that in particular a class including a lot of children with well-educated parents becomes a stimulating learning environment (Westerbeek 1999 in Huijnk et al. 2016), but on the other a group dominated by immigrant children could be detrimental for everyone's development of Dutch language skills.

Compared with 2006, we now see a slight increase in the number of pupils with an immigrant background entering the highest strand of secondary education (Dagevos and Gijsberts 2007: 113). A number of studies confirm that discrimination against immigrants and their descendants continues to play a role in their social disadvantage in a variety of domains. Having a "foreign-sounding" surname reduces the chance of being invited for a job interview and employment agencies are less likely to take on job seekers from immigrant communities than native Dutch applicants with an identical CV (Andriessen et al. 2014: 25).

## *2.3 The Sociocultural Perspective*

In a situation where the majority of the population consists of people with an immigrant background, integration is a different and more complex concept than in predominantly "native" communities. The pressure to adapt will be greater in the latter than the former, which is more an amalgam of individuals with all kinds of cultural background (Crul 2016: 4).

Despite – or perhaps even because of – the fact that we now live in a superdiverse society, in the Netherlands we are witnessing a hardening of the political and public debate about non-Western migrants (Gijsberts and Lubbers 2009 in Dagevos and Gijsberts 2009). Examples of the polemic include the controversy around the blackface character "Black Piet" (the companion of St. Nicholas, whose feast day is celebrated by young children), politician Geert Wilders' call in 2013 for "less, less" Moroccans and protests against centres for asylum seekers in 2015.

In general, it seems that native Dutch views of the country's ethnocultural diversity and minority ethnic groups have become more negative in the past 10 years. Their fears that the Netherlands is changing too much culturally are fuelling interethnic tensions. This is a perspective more prevalent among those with less schooling than with higher levels of education. Conversely, people with a non-Western background are now more likely to feel excluded than they did before (Huijnk and Andriessen 2016). Asked whether they feel at home in the Netherlands, 90 per cent of minority ethnic respondents aged 55 and over answer in the affirmative. In the 15–24 age group, the figure is just 75 per cent. Here again, the response differs according to the level of educational attainment.

The vast majority of native Dutch people expect tensions between ethnic groups to increase in the future. Although support for cultural diversity has fallen slightly in the past decade, it remains high (70 per cent of the population, compared with 75 per cent in 2006) – primarily among the better educated. Analysis by the SCP reveals that "level of educational attainment correlates with prejudices and with opinions concerning the cultural and ethnic diversity of society. The better educated a person is, the less negatively they feel about migrants, the more positive they are towards cultural diversity and the less likely they are to agree that there are too many immigrants living in the Netherlands. Moreover, there are links between these variables: people who view ethnic minorities in a more positive light are more accepting of cultural diversity" (Huijnk and Andriessen 2016: 256).

Nevertheless, it is when young people with an immigrant background do find success and enter higher education that they encounter resistance and greater pressure to adapt. A recent study of integration by minority ethnic students at Inholland University of Applied Sciences reached the conclusion that many young people are being brought up in separate worlds and when they enter higher education, they encounter for the first time the superdiverse society.

The mutual preconceptions are deep-rooted and they are expressed publicly, both inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, whole groups of young people with an immigrant background have grown up with the idea that their culture, their

ethnicity and their religion are considered inferior, and that has made them angry and sometimes even frustrated. Even when they were born in the Netherlands, many say that they feel like second-class citizens.[…] The current generation, however, refuses to go along with all this. They want to be accepted, and to be treated equally. (Ranitz et al. 2017: 13)

## *2.4 The Public Policy Perspective*

Ethnocultural diversity has been the subject of government policy papers ever since the 1980s. Originally, that policy was group-based. This had the disadvantage that it created a separate "multicultural circuit", with its own cultural institutions, its own experts and its own quality criteria. Because this part of the cultural sector focused specifically upon those from an immigrant background, it made cultural diversity a synonym for ethnic diversity. From 2001 onwards, however, the term "cultural diversity" gained a broader definition which began to restrict specific policy measures and amenities targeting non-Western communities.

At the same time, more attention started to be paid to culture in education – the assumption being that by this route it would automatically reach young people from immigrant backgrounds. "Cultural and artistic education" (culturele en kunstzinnige vorming, CKV) was introduced as a compulsory subject in secondary schools, and cooperation between schools and cultural institutions was intensified (Bussemaker 2013).

## *2.5 Previous Public Policy*

In his policy document *Ruim baan voor culturele diversiteit* ("Make way for cultural diversity") (Van der Ploeg 1999), culture minister Rick van der Ploeg critically observed that the subsidized arts in the Netherlands were too narrowly focused upon the established, dominant Dutch culture. He was determined to make ethnic diversity a theme to be reckoned with, not by supporting separate facilities but by creating scope for new initiatives in the arts and culture and for intercultural programmes by museums and funding bodies. Van der Ploeg wanted a diverse offering which would appeal to a diverse audience. Encouraged by this new policy direction, projects were initiated on such themes as slavery and its legacy, Islamic culture and the history of migration. A so-called two-per-cent rule was introduced, providing additional funds to broaden the reach of subsidized culture, and a diversity advisory body and network were established.

The two-per-cent rule was scrapped in 2004, the principal argument for its abolition being that it should go without saying for cultural institutions to seek the widest possible audience and so making that effort should be their own responsibility. Moreover, the administrative burden for both the government and the institutions

themselves outweighed the benefits. The scheme was not regarded as very effective. However, it had drawn attention to the fact that certain groups – most notably the young and those with an immigrant background – were making little or no use of cultural amenities. A report evaluating the effectiveness of group targeting in general and this measure in particular included a recommendation that more money be spent on cultural education in primary schools as it would then reach every child. It was also recommended that traditional categories like "ethnic minorities" and "young people" be replaced with a more detailed segmentation based upon shared values and preferences rather than origin or age.

Recent years have seen the launch of many new initiatives, in both the educational and the cultural sectors. More thought is now being put into reaching a wider audience, with new unsubsidized institutions proving particularly successful in this regard. By contrast, according to a 2009 report by Netwerk CS (2009), more established subsidized concert halls, theatres and museums have been lagging behind. In terms of staffing and management, too, there has been little progress: people with an immigrant background remain a small minority in the cultural workforce. Almost all institutions forming part of what is called the "basic culture infrastructure" (90 per cent) recognize the importance of cultural diversity in general, but far fewer (60 per cent) consider it is important for their own organization. And fewer still – just 20 per cent, a mix of established institutions and newcomers – say that they are actually taking action in this respect.

Netwerk CS sums up its conclusions using the metaphor of the elephant in the room, obvious to everyone but never challenged. Upon this basis, it then goes on to recommend the introduction of a cultural diversity code, regular monitoring, more complex assessment of artistic quality and a national plan for arts education.

## *2.6 Current Public Policy*

In a 2015 report to Parliament, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science Jet Bussemaker (2015) stated that government culture public policy for the period 2017–2020 needed to better reflect the changed composition of the Dutch population. Institutional plans would therefore be tested against three criteria, (1) quality, (2) education and participation and (3) social value, with the aim of providing an accessible nationwide offering which would enable everyone in the Netherlands to enjoy a rich and varied cultural mix. The document had relatively little to say about cultural diversity, although Bussemaker did mention the challenges it poses and referred to a report by the Rotterdam Council for Arts and Culture (Rotterdamse Raad voor Kunst en Cultuur, RRKC) stating that many opportunities in this domain are not being taken advantage of. These include drawing on national funds for cultural development, cooperation with private sector partners in building creative industries and reaching young people more effectively by making use of their own knowledge and experience to develop activities that appeal to them. Bussemaker also noted that artists from a wide variety of different backgrounds are making a

major contribution to cultural innovation in the Netherlands and are the nation's link to the increasingly international arts scene (RRKC 2013).

In assessing grant and subsidy applications from institutions making up the basic culture infrastructure, the national Cultural Diversity Code (Code Culturele Diversiteit, CCD; http://codeculturelediversiteit.com) has become an important yardstick. It aims to foster diversity in four areas: programme, public, personnel and partners. Although signing up to the CCD is voluntary, it is now a prerequisite to secure public funding. The code is founded on four principles.

- The cultural institution formulates a vision of cultural diversity in line with its own objectives.
- The institution translates that vision into specific policy and ensures that this receives sufficient funding.
- The institution works ceaselessly to improve its performance in respect of cultural diversity and organizes itself accordingly.
- The institution's supervisory body monitors its compliance with the CCD.

In summary, we can state that the Dutch government has made attempts to create more space for cultural diversity in the arts and culture in recent decades, but those efforts have now largely ended. As a result, today such support is confined mainly to participation subsidy funding and has become quite marginal. The key to greater diversity in the sector now lies with cultural institutions themselves, in their programming and their staffing policies, and with artists (including the institutions "producing" them, such as art schools) and with audiences. The government has only limited influence in this arena. The question is how this approach encourages – or hinders – progress towards diversity in cultural and educational practice.

The government is now pinning its hopes on staffing policy in the cultural sector, the idea being that bringing more people with an immigrant background into established institutions means that they pay greater attention to cultural diversity and broad community access in their programming. But does it really work like that? Coming from an immigrant background does not automatically make a person a representative of the arts and culture of their ethnic community, after all, and in any case it is always questionable how much influence they have within the organization they work for. As newcomers to an institution, they must first secure a position of strength within its "native Dutch" stronghold before they can start exerting any influence over its policy.

## 3 Arts and Cultural Education and Cultural Diversity

Whether increasing cultural diversity has had any effect upon artistic and cultural education in the Netherlands is hard to ascertain, simply because there has been very little research on this topic. Differences in cultural background do not automatically make pupils "different" in themselves. But they may well bring their own mores and values from home into the classroom. These particularly tend to find

expression in citizenship lessons, in art history and on museum visits. Schools and other educational institutions are aware of the need to address cultural diversity, but there are two ways they can interpret that need.

As well as focusing upon the problematic aspects described above, which require primarily pedagogical solutions, there is also a more positive approach – one which utilizes cultural diversity and its potential as input for artistic and cultural education. By this route, education can contribute towards interculturality and class cohesion.

## *3.1 A Challenge for Education*

It is part of the pedagogical function of education to do "something" about the tensions which can arise as a result of increased ethnic diversity, both within the school and between the school and the family. Teachers of classes containing a large proportion of pupils with an immigrant background are often aware of a gulf between the cultures of the street, the peer group and the school. The disruptive behaviour sometimes gives rise to may in part be caused by the youngsters' feelings of inequality and lack of acceptance by Dutch society: a sense of "us and them", inciting an attitude of resistance (Pels 2011). Such situations need to be tackled root and branch. The tensions they engender make huge demands of a teacher's pedagogical professionalism.

In a study of the literature on diversity in education, Trees Pels (2011) has attempted to answer three pertinent questions on this topic: what pedagogical challenges do schools face in dealing with diversity, how do they reflect these challenges in their pedagogical policy and how do teacher training colleges adapt their curricula to prepare students for work in multi-ethnic schools? In her conclusions and recommendations, Pels calls for a stronger pedagogical vision of diversity and more diversity-sensitive educational science, including much more coverage of this theme during teacher training. But she does not discuss what this means for artistic and cultural education in particular, nor for any other classroom subject for that matter. This may be because her pedagogical points apply across the board.

But are these the only aspects which need to be considered, or is the "mainstream" content of education important as well? In this respect, it is interesting to ponder whether there is any such thing as a culturally "value-free" form of education and to consider what knowledge and values education imparts (Alba and Duyvendak 2017) because surely artistic and cultural education then has a specific contribution to make.

## *3.2 "Exploitation" of Diversity*

Art and culture offer plenty of opportunities to facilitate interaction between pupils and to raise their cultural awareness. However, few teaching materials designed specifically to stimulate such interaction and awareness are currently available. In

an attempt to improve the situation, the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (Stichting leerplanontwikkeling, SLO) released the publication *Intercultureel onderwijs in de kunstvakken* (Intercultural education in the arts; SLO 2002), describing teaching methods which encourage cultural interaction. As the title indicates, this work focuses upon intercultural education – that is, teaching pupils to handle similarities and differences associated with the characteristics of cultural background. This is an integral part of the socializing function of education and should therefore be an aspect of every classroom subject.

At school, children need to learn how to operate as equal and participating members of Dutch society. Intercultural education emphasizes the relations between different cultures, not only in the Netherlands but also in other contexts. Ethnic diversity is usually about pupils with an immigrant background. All pupils, regardless of their origins, should be able to recognize themselves in the teaching material, in their teacher's didactic approach and in the themes covered. Stereotypes and prejudices need to be addressed and also forms of inequality.

All of this requires a multicultural perspective on the part of the teacher, meaning that his or her lessons and approach must allow scope for a variety of cultural outlooks – unlike a monocultural position, which has room for only one culture as if all others are irrelevant. A multi-ethnic perspective, by contrast, is more about the relations between different ethnic groups, although both approaches do justice to the diversity of cultures found in today's classroom.

## *3.3 Similarities and Differences*

In intercultural education, pupils from a variety of cultural backgrounds learn that there are similarities and differences associated with their origins – and how to handle these in practice. Fundamentally, this is about respect, acknowledgement, recognition and equality.

> Through artistic and cultural education, pupils can learn that there are different forms of art in the world, and different styles and genres. And that these forms reflect values, attitudes and beliefs. Learning about art and creating it themselves, in the form of practical assignments, can therefore help pupils find out more about different cultures. (Koot et al. 2002: 8)

For example, they can learn that art in non-Western countries is often functional and imbued with tradition. That set subjects, colour palettes and symbols are key and often have a very particular meaning. Those stories are based upon tradition and history. And that this is different from the Netherlands, where devising novel stories and forms of expression is greatly valued. Creating a climate of openness, interaction, mutual understanding and appreciation is essential.

### 3.4 Didactic Methods

The SLO publication (Koot et al. 2002) includes descriptions of didactic methods for intercultural artistic and cultural education, suitable for pupils aged about seven and over. The lessons draw a link with the norms and values behind customs and displays, asking why they exist, what they are for, where they come from and so on. Good communication is key. Every pupil needs to feel safe and involved. It is therefore important that the teacher be honest, engaged and understanding and that he or she expects the same from the children. Start with a thorough insight into your own actions, motives and objectives. The pupils need the same, and it is something they learn in part by the example their teacher sets them at school. For example, they can be given guidance in recognizing prejudiced attitudes, discrimination and racism. In artistic subjects, there are various ways of expressing yourself: through imagery, music, movement and so on. Didactic models and cooperative teaching methods with a focus on personal experience, collaboration and interaction are therefore well suited to artistic and cultural education.

### 3.5 Less Explicit Focus Upon Diversity in Schools

A 2008 literature review by SLO centred on the following question: "What are the prevailing trends and challenges in respect of dealing with cultural diversity in education, and how do they impact curriculum development?" (Thijs and Berlet 2008: 73). Its conclusion noted that there was now far less explicit consideration of cultural differences than there had been in the 1990s. Instead, distinctions related to such issues as policy on educational deficiencies were more likely to focus upon parental levels of educational attainment. There was also less emphasis upon pupils' native languages and more upon improving their proficiency in Dutch. Explicit consideration of cultural differences in the context of intercultural education had been incorporated into citizenship education and now prioritized "shared" norms and values. According to SLO, the reason for this shift was that ethnic diversity had become an accepted aspect of Dutch society and that efforts henceforth were focusing upon integration and upon reducing inequality of opportunity.

Meanwhile, the Education Council of the Netherlands (Onderwijsraad) declared that it was pursuing a "bonding" school culture dominated by a sense of community (Gramberg 2007). The majority of schools consider it important to encourage mutual respect and equality and to prepare children for life in a multicultural society. In practice, however, the Inspectorate of Education (Inspectie van het onderwijs) has found that this ambition is rarely translated into concrete policy measures (Inspectie van het onderwijs 2007). By framing cultural diversity in the context of citizenship and thereby emphasizing congruent norms and values, distinct examination of the subject in all its richness is being overlooked.

## 4 Research into Intercultural Education

To gain a better understanding of interest in diversity and intercultural education in the Netherlands, in the final quarter of 2017, the National Centre of Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts (Landelijk Kennisinstituut Cultuureducatie en Amateurkunst, LKCA) commissioned a survey using a national online panel of head teachers in primary education (with approximately 900 members) and secondary education (approximately 300 members) (DUO 2017). With some 400 primary and 200 secondary head teachers responding, the results can be taken as providing a representative view of the current situation. The survey took the form of an online questionnaire, preceded by the following introductory text:

> More than ever before, schoolchildren come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Schools can help their pupils realize that they live in a multicultural society. This questionnaire is about intercultural education. That is, 'Teaching pupils to handle similarities and differences related to characteristics of ethnic and cultural background, with a view to equal and harmonious participation in Dutch society' (Van der Niet 2006). In other words, learning about and accepting different cultural backgrounds, and preventing and opposing prejudice, discrimination and racism.

The survey provides a representative view of the current situation. In analysing its results, we have looked at the extent to which these vary by region (north, central and south), school size, identity (denominational or secular) and percentage of pupils with an immigrant background. Where significant differences were found in any of these respects, they are mentioned in this report.

### *4.1 Survey Results*

We first asked respondents to estimate the percentage of pupils in their school with an immigrant background. As the graph below shows, there are few differences on this point between primary and secondary education. But the proportion of such pupils is many times greater in the big cities than in smaller towns and villages. The only significant differences, then, are between schools with a high and a low degree of diversity (Fig. 2).

We also asked whether the school sees diversity as beneficial or as a problem, on a five-point scale. The vast majority opted for the former end of the spectrum, with 30 per cent in the primary sector and 38 per cent in the secondary sector opting for "only beneficial". Particularly striking about the responses to this question is that secondary schools with more than 50 per cent of pupils of diverse cultural origin are more likely to see that as beneficial (40 per cent) than secondary schools which are less diverse: the figure is 14 per cent where 30–50 per cent of pupils have an immigrant background and 11 per cent where that proportion is 10–30 per cent. However, the schools with the least diverse pupil populations (fewer than 10 per cent with an immigrant background) are actually more positive about cultural diversity (40 per

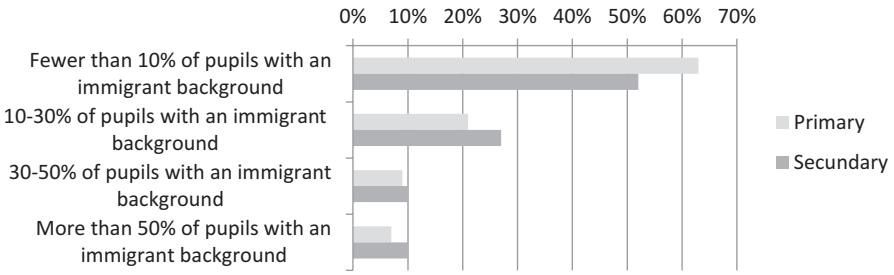



**Fig. 2** Our school has…

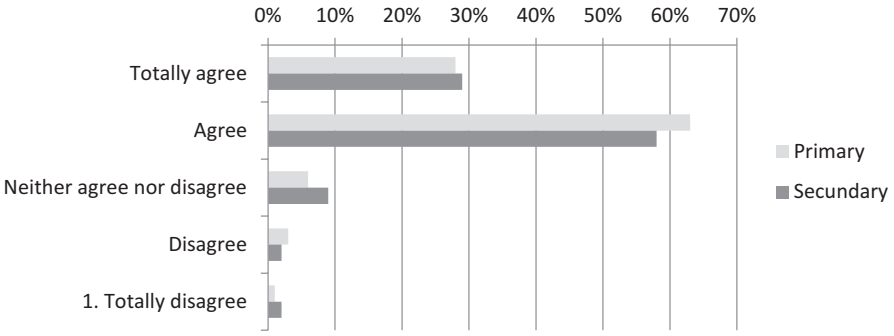



**Fig. 3** In our citizenship lessons, we cover different cultures, lifestyles, norms and values

cent). In the primary sector, the distribution is more or less even, and it matters very little how many pupils have an immigrant background.

We also asked the head teachers to score a number of statements concerning diversity and intercultural education at their schools, again on a five-point scale. Approximately two-thirds agreed or totally agreed that their artistic and cultural education includes teaching about different cultures and their forms of expression. However, there is more coverage of this subject in citizenship lessons. As with the responses to other questions, we see little difference here between primary and secondary schools (Fig. 3).

Asked whether their schools prefer to organize visits to cultural activities with a multicultural character, the majority gave the most neutral answer. But primary schools with more than 50 per cent of pupils with an immigrant background say they do attend such activities significantly more often (30 per cent, a statistically significant figure). We also asked respondents to provide examples of intercultural activities organized or co-organized by their schools in the past 2 years. Most cited a visit to a church, mosque or other place of worship, museum visits, projects, exchanges or similar activities. One example is provided by the head of a secondary school with more than 50 per cent of pupils with an immigrant background: “We draw attention to a variety of religious festivals and try to emphasize the similarities between them”. Only a small proportion said they pay no heed to intercultural activities.

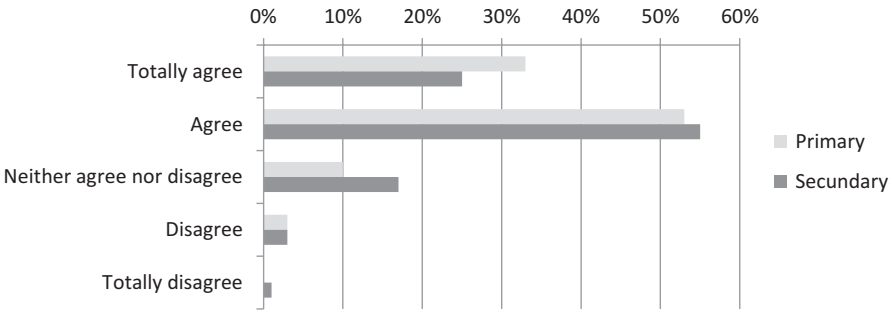



**Fig. 4** We believe that children at our school should learn or discover that ways of life different from those they are used to at home can also be good

The head of a secondary school with more than 50 per cent of pupils with an immigrant background writes, "We have introduced Personal Development and Socialization as a classroom subject. This is taught by teachers who feel really comfortable with the topic. Essentially, it is an internationalization course. Dealing with differences and similarities. Developing your identity. The narrative story, pride in your origins. Placing political and social events in a broader context and reflecting on them. Looking after each other and the city. Learning to debate. We also have theatre and arts programmes, like World Stories" (Fig. 4).

The final statement presented concerns the professionalization of teachers with a view to enabling them to consider pupils' diverse culture backgrounds in a positive way and to make use of this ability to enrich the education they provide. More than a third of respondents agree or totally agree with this. On the other hand, about a fifth disagree or totally disagree. Schools where more than 50 per cent of pupils have an immigrant background are significantly more likely to be in the former group. In the secondary sector, 36 per cent of the head teachers agree or totally agree with the statement (Fig. 5).

In response to a question as to how their schools deal with diversity within their walls, a number of head teachers pointed out that this is nothing special, simply a normal reflection of society. One said, "All children have their own talents. Cultural differences are irrelevant to that". Another stated that his or her school functions as a collaborative society in miniature, where diversity is a fact of life.

Cultural diversity is generally seen as enriching schools but also as challenging. According to one head teachers, "It is an enjoyable but tough challenge doing justice to other cultural backgrounds and our own". Schooling is regarded as a good way of supporting pupils who are new to the Netherlands, too, although one of the head teachers does point out that the resources available for this purpose are minimal. Another, secondary school head teacher puts it as follows: "We do not look at things in those terms. Every child asks something different of a school, and contributes something different. We do go in search of specific support if a problem seems to involve ethnic or cultural background, but we embrace diversity in our population in all its forms. Gender, sexual preference, cultural background, economic status,

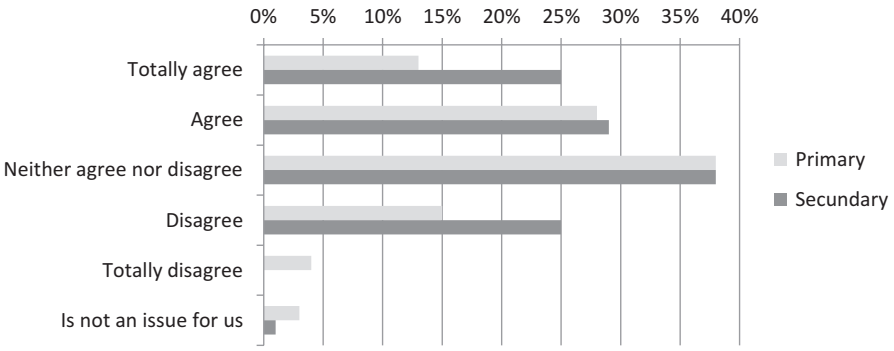



**Fig. 5** We professionalize our teachers to enable them to consider pupils' diverse culture backgrounds in a positive way and to make use of this ability to enrich the education they provide

etc.". Yet another respondent says that the real problem is not cultural background but the socioeconomic position of many children and families.

## *4.2 Summary and Discussion*

Most schools regard cultural diversity as beneficial and do address the subject in the classroom, in cultural education and in citizenship lessons. This is particularly the case where a large proportion of the pupil population has an immigrant background – a finding consistent with the 2002 study (Hoorn et al. 2002, p. 17), which asked whether schools organized visits to performances and exhibitions of a multicultural nature. It is not clear from this, however, whether these opportunities are used to explore pupils' experiences and any differences in their norms and values. A qualitative study of the pupils' perspective might clarify this matter.

One striking point revealed by this survey is that schools where more than half of pupils have an immigrant background appear to be undergoing a transformation in their approach to diversity. Their attitude towards the subject is becoming more positive, they are putting greater effort into teacher professionalization and they are more likely than ever to organize visits to performances and exhibitions of a multicultural nature. From this we can conclude that the ratio of "native" to "non-native" pupils does make a difference, with diversity regarded as a normal phenomenon when the latter are in the majority. This impression is reinforced by the answers to the open questions we put. For example, this one is from the head of a primary school: "Our population is 100 per cent pupils with an immigrant background. This makes all our activities multicultural. For Christmas dinner, for instance, everyone brings dishes from home so that the meal has an international character. That is what we prefer to call these activities, international. 'Multicultural' emphasizes the differences, whereas we would rather look at the similarities and how different nationalities can best live together".

Schools where more than half of pupils have an immigrant background pay significantly more attention to intercultural education and are significantly more likely to have teaching staff professionalized in this area. It is understandable, too, that in cases where the school's entire population is growing up in a "native" Dutch cultural context, the issue of how to handle diversity is far less pressing and so attracts much less interest. Pupils at schools with a culturally diverse population, which consider diversity to be beneficial and approach it in a positive manner are therefore learning something extra.

This study provides us with a first impression of experiences with cultural diversity and the various responses to it. But whether considering diversity in the classroom really counts as intercultural education is another matter. To explore this further, more qualitative research is needed. Moreover, we surveyed only head teachers. Had we questioned teaching staff, the results might well have been different. After all, they are ones who are in day-to-day contact with pupils and who are therefore more likely to encounter any tensions with or between those from immigrant backgrounds. We also need to factor in potential social desirability bias in some responses since, generally speaking, well-educated people in the Netherlands consider positive attitudes towards ethnic and cultural diversity to be socially desirable. As the SCP study cited earlier (Huijnk and Andriessen 2016) reveals, in this respect there is a clear difference of perception between those with higher and lower levels of educational attainment.

## 5 Final Remarks: Superdiversity Versus Adaptation to Mainstream Culture

When we try to connect the results from our survey of schools to our analysis of public government policy, we find that cultural diversity emerges from neither as a problematic phenomenon. Indeed, both acknowledge it as a fact of contemporary society. The attention for cultural diversity is articulated as a general interest and not as an action aimed at the emancipation of cultural minorities. At best, positive attention is given to promote mutual acceptance, perception of each other's culture and enrichment of society.

Secondary schools at which more than 50 per cent of pupils have an immigrant background appear to have fewer problems with diversity than those where that percentage is lower. They pay more attention to the issue and are more active in professionalizing their teachers to deal with it. This finding supports the argument put forward by Crul (2016) that the increase in the number of people in the Netherlands with an immigrant background has made the superdiverse society an accepted fact, with "integration" now an outdated notion. On the other hand, we also observe that, overall, the native Dutch population has become more negative in its attitudes towards minority groups and that opinions in this respect have hardened (Huijnk and Andriessen 2016). With regard to government policy, meanwhile, the

current approach to the issue of integration seems rather non-committal. Advice is issued, and we see some encouragement here and there, but there is no firm policy backed up with concrete measures, let alone sanctions. This seems to confirm the supposition that, since 2001, government culture and education policy has subjected cultural diversity to the "mainstream orientation" referred to by Alba and Duyvendak (2017).

The educational disadvantage traditionally suffered at school by pupils with an immigrant background is slowly disappearing, and more of them are entering higher education. Once there, however, they often feel less favourably treated than native Dutch students and so are more likely to drop out before graduating (Ranitz et al. 2017).

It would appear that two opposing forces are at work in the Netherlands: the power of numbers versus the strength of the established order. Whether cultural education has a contribution to make in this arena is a question that remains to be answered. We can conclude, however, that a large number of schools are certainly trying to play their part and that there are definitely opportunities for cultural education to contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of diversity. At most schools, however, that effort is taking place in the context of citizenship lessons, not cultural education.

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