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School ethnic diversity and students' interethnic relations

Jochem Thijs* and Maykel Verkuyten

Ercomer, Utrecht University, Utrecht, the Netherlands

Background and aims. School ethnic desegregation has been a topic of strong societal and educational concern. Research has examined the effects of ethnic school composition on students' interethnic relations with diverging outcomes and sometimes inconsistent results. In this review paper, we provide an assessment of this literature to explain why and when school desegregation might improve or worsen ethnic relations and to identify important future research directions.

Approach. We discuss different theoretical perspectives predicting positive versus negative aspects of school ethnic diversity: intergroup contact theory and the perspectives of group threat and power differences. Subsequently, we consider a number of school and educational characteristics that can moderate the impact of ethnic diversity on students' interethnic relations and that could be considered in future research. Furthermore, we discuss the need for studying underlying psychological and social processes as well as the importance of investigating interethnic relations in combination with academic adjustment.

Conclusions. School ethnic diversity is not enough to promote interethnic tolerance. It is important to examine diversity in relation to other aspects of the school environment that may influence how students respond to the ethnic diversity within school. Important factors to consider are the presence of multicultural education and inclusive school identities, student–teacher relationships, and peer norms and networks, but also the role of parents and of peer relations outside the school context.

Migration and questions surrounding ethnic, religious, and other forms of diversity are critical issues in many countries around the world. Societies are increasingly marked by cultural diversity of an unprecedented scale, which is sometimes called 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007). Hence, one of the central questions of our times is how we can live amidst this diversity. This question is particularly relevant for schools because many schools in different countries have become ethnically or racially diverse. School ethnic composition is discussed by politicians, public authorities, teachers, and academics in terms of children's educational achievement, self-esteem, identity development, and ethnic tolerance. The mixing of students from different ethnic groups could enhance students' academic achievement and well-being and stimulate interethnic acceptance (e.g., Driessen, 2002; Van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010). Yet, it also has been argued that ethnically mixed or desegregated schools¹ might have negative consequences for

*Correspondence should be addressed to Jochem Thijs, PO Box 80.140, 3508 TC Utrecht, the Netherlands (email: j.t.thijs@uu.nl).

¹ Here, we use the term '(de)segregated' in a descriptive sense to indicate the proportion of various ethnic groups represented in a school. Thus, we use the term as an alternative for (high/low) ethnic school diversity and not to indicate the political and legal processes by which ethnic majority environments have been altered (e.g., bussing).

non-cognitive outcomes such as self-esteem and ethnic tolerance (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Hanish & Guerra, 2000). These negative outcomes would undermine pupils' right to feel good at home and at school, which, in turn, might have a negative impact on academic achievements (Buhs & Ladd, 2001). In addition to promoting students' intellectual development, schools have the important task of helping children to develop emotionally and socially (see Ladd, Kochenderfer-Ladd, & Rydell, 2011). In this paper, we focus on the impact of school ethnic composition on students' interethnic relations.

There is much research on the relationship between school ethnic composition and interethnic relations, but the findings are rather mixed. For example, whereas some studies show that interethnic relations are more negative in school classes with high proportions of ethnic minority students (e.g., Vermeij, van Duijn, & Baerveldt, 2009; Vervoort, Scholte, & Scheepers, 2011), others find that having a higher minority concentration is associated with more positive outcomes (e.g., Agirdag, Demanet, van Houtte, & van Avermaet, 2011; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2006), and still others find no relationship between school or classroom diversity and interethnic relations (Bekhuis, Ruiter, & Coenders, 2013; Stark, 2011). There are a number of reasons for these mixed findings. One reason is that in research, the term 'relations' is understood broadly and operationalized in terms of ethnic attitudes, self-reported peer victimization, friendship nominations, and social networks. Each of these operationalizations taps into different outcomes which makes it difficult to compare findings. For example, in a study in the United States, it was found that different school characteristics had different impacts on ethnic attitudes and on the amount of friendly and unfriendly ethnic interactions (Patchen, 1982; see also Vervoort *et al.*, 2011). Ethnic attitudes that students express might be sensitive to social desirability concerns and can differ from actual behaviour, whereas friendship might be a stringent outcome to assess the positive impact of ethnic school composition.² Another reason is that school ethnic composition has been operationalized in different ways. For example, some studies have examined ethnic heterogeneity by calculating the number of ethnic groups within a body of students (e.g., Graham, 2006), whereas others have examined the relative number of students from a particular group (e.g., Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). In this review, we will attend to these different operationalizations to make theoretical sense of seemingly conflicting findings.

However, the available research has also examined a wide variety of samples, and it is difficult to systematically address the implications of this variety in a narrative review. First, different countries and different ethnic groups have been included, and this limits the possibility to compare studies. For example, ethnic diversity is more common and accepted in immigrant countries such as the United States and Canada than in European countries in which there is a historically large native majority population, or in societies that have a history of intractable conflict such as Cyprus, Israel, and Northern Ireland. Furthermore, in some European countries (e.g., the United Kingdom), minorities have a history of colonialism, whereas in other countries (e.g., Germany), they have a history of labour migration, and in still other countries, migration (e.g., Israel) is not the main issue. These differences are important because ethnic school composition can develop and be perceived in very different ways in different countries (and also regions and cities), and these differences might affect the outcomes (Cook, 1979).

² To complicate matters even more, these measures of interethnic relations are often inter-related. For instance, friendships with other-ethnic peers can be regarded as forms of interethnic contact that positively influences students' ethnic attitudes, but these friendships themselves may be fostered by positive ethnic attitudes.

Moreover, research has included students from primary, secondary, and higher education. These levels of education differ in important ways that might affect interethnic relations. For example, in primary school, students often have long-term extensive contact with the same peers because they stay within the same grade (the same class) for a whole year, whereas this is uncommon in secondary and higher education. Furthermore, students' primary to secondary school careers span the developmental range from middle childhood to adolescence in which important cognitive and social changes take place that influence the meaning attached to ethnicity and ethnic group differences (see Quintana, 1998), and the development of interethnic attitudes (see Raabe & Beelman, 2011).

These differences between the various studies make it difficult to assess the overall impact of school ethnic composition on interethnic relations. Yet, the research literature proposes opposite theoretical perspectives, and the empirical evidence can be discussed in the light of these perspectives to draw more general conclusions. Our aim is to provide a theoretically informed discussion about the empirical research on the effects of school ethnic composition on students' interethnic relations.³ We will first discuss the different theoretical perspectives and their empirical support. Next, we will address some important areas for future research. We will consider a number of school and educational characteristics as well as psychological and social mechanisms that should be examined and that may help explain when, why, and how exactly school ethnic composition has an impact on students' ethnic relations. In addition, we will shortly consider the effects of school segregation on students' academic adjustment, and achievement in particular. Various studies have examined those effects (see, for example, Van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010), but they have not been systematically integrated with the research on students' interethnic relations (for an exception, see Baysu, Phalet, & Brown, 2013).

Theoretical perspectives

Interethnic contact

Theoretically the main perspective for arguing for the social benefits of ethnically mixed schools has been intergroup contact theory. The central idea is that ethnic relations can be improved by bringing children of different ethnic groups in contact with each other. When children have more contact with peers from another ethnic group, they are likely to develop more favourable beliefs and attitudes towards that group as a whole. According to Allport (1954), for contact to lead to better group relations, certain conditions must be met. The following are the four most important ones: (1) there needs to be adequate opportunity for people to get to know each other, (2) the groups need to have similar status positions in the situation that the contact occurs in, (3) the situation needs to be one of cooperation and not competition, and (4) the contact must be supported by institutions and authorities (e.g., schools and teachers). Contact that meets these different conditions can improve ethnic relations through several mechanisms. For example, it allows for acquiring new and positive information about another ethnic group, for discovering unexpected similarities, and for disconfirming negative stereotypes about that group. Contact may also improve ethnic relations because it can generate affective ties in which individuals may experience positive emotions about outgroup members. Related to this,

³ Given the different approaches and foci of the research, it is difficult to conduct a meta-analytic review. Instead, we provide a narrative review involving different theoretical approaches and their related outcomes. To make sure that the most relevant research was included, studies were located with electronic search systems such as Scopus, and the available literature was scanned for further references.

researchers have added friendship as a fifth condition for successful contact. Friendship permits the development of meaningful, positive relationships with peers from another ethnic group and is likely to meet the other conditions for successful contact as well (Cook, 1978; Pettigrew, 1998). Friendship involves self-disclosure, empathy, and perspective taking, and these are important psychological processes that are responsible for the positive effect of contact on ethnic attitudes. Furthermore, intimate contact does not only provide positive feelings and emotions, it also reduces negative feelings such as uncertainty and anxiety to interact with ethnic outgroup members.

Contact theory has been empirically supported among different populations in a variety of contexts, and research indicates that the various conditions are conducive to successful contact, but not essential (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008). A meta-analysis among children and adolescents in school settings indicates that contact has medium-sized effects on negative ethnic attitudes when Allport's conditions are explicitly present (mean $r = -.34$), and between small to medium-sized effects (mean $r = -.19$) when they are not (Tropp & Prenevost, 2008). Importantly, a number of studies in this meta-analysis have examined school or classroom composition (contact opportunity) rather than actual contact.

The relation between students' interethnic contacts and their ethnic attitudes may of course be bidirectional. Students may be more inclined to engage in positive relationships with ethnic outgroup peers when they have a positive attitude towards this group. Indeed, longitudinal research among secondary school students in Germany, Belgium, and England has shown that contact (having many and high-quality outgroup friendships) improves ethnic attitudes, but also that negative attitudes reduce contact (Binder *et al.*, 2009). However, the empirical support for the causal link from contact to attitudes is more strong and consistent than vice versa (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Yet, the ethnic attitudes that students bring to their classrooms may influence their reactions to ethnic diversity in their schools or classrooms. Allport (1954) acknowledged that 'contact as a situational variable cannot always overcome the personal variable in prejudice' (p. 280) and that contact is more effective in 'a population of ordinary people, with a normal degree of prejudice' (p. 281). It is reasonable to assume a kind of curvilinear effect whereby contact is most effective among moderately biased students. In addition, the effects of contact will level off when prior attitudes are relatively favourable as there is little room for improvement (see Hodson, 2011). In one longitudinal research, it was found that cross-ethnic contact improved ethnic attitudes only for students with initially unfavourable attitudes (Munniksma, Stark, Verkuyten, Flache, & Veenstra, 2013).

Contact opportunities

Adequate opportunity for students to get to know each other is one of Allport's conditions. School ethnic composition has implications for opportunities for interethnic contacts and friendships, which tend to be more frequent in integrated than in segregated schools (e.g., Stringer *et al.*, 2009). But opportunities are not necessarily used, as the phenomenon of re-segregation in desegregated schools indicates (Baerveldt, Van Duijn, Vermeij, & Van Hemert, 2004; Hallinan & Williams, 1989; Schofield, 1995). Moody (2001) made the distinction between formal and substantive integration. Schools that are ethnically mixed are formally integrated, yet they can be substantively segregated because students prefer to interact with in-group peers most of the time. Ethnic groups can live rather segregated lives in ethnically mixed schools, and the level of segregation varies between schools with the same-ethnic composition. Meaningful contact can be much less

frequent in mixed schools than one would expect, because of tracking and ability grouping or separate host language classes for immigrant and minority students, for example. Furthermore, students from mixed classrooms might re-segregate during free time and extracurricular activities in school. One study asked ethnic Dutch secondary school students about the frequency of interactions with ethnic outgroup students (having lunch together, cooperating in activities). Contact frequency was positively correlated with the proportion of outgroup students in the classroom (Verkuyten, Thijs, & Bekhuis, 2010), but the correlation was not very strong ($r = .40$). This means that students might prefer and actually interact with ethnic in-group peers despite the presence of outgroup peers.

Obviously, ethnic diversity is a precondition for interethnic contact, and it has been shown that students are more likely to befriend ethnic outgroup students when their numbers increase (Al Ramiah, Hewstone, Voci, Cairns, & Hughes, 2013; Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Vermeij *et al.*, 2009). However, this effect may level off when the proportion of outgroup peers is high, because a high proportion can be perceived as threatening making relations with in-group peers more important. In a large-scale study in the Netherlands, Vervoort *et al.* (2011) found that ethnic majority adolescents were less positive about ethnic minorities in classrooms with many (>50%) as compared to few ($\leq 25\%$) minority peers. Assuming that being in a numerical minority position increases the need for in-group support, Quillian and Campbell (2003) hypothesized and found that adolescents are more likely to befriend students of their own race when their proportion in school is lower.⁴ This finding was based on a relative measure of friendship segregation (the odds that a same-ethnic dyad is a friendship dyad), which was constructed to be mathematically independent of the availability of ethnic in-group peers. School diversity increased the relative preferences for in-group friends, but at the same time, it also increased the absolute number of ethnic outgroup friendships.

Other large-scale studies have also used compositionally invariant measures to examine how ethnic diversity affects ethnic friendship segregation in schools. Using a heterogeneity index reflecting the probability that two randomly selected students were racially different, Moody (2001) found that there was a nonlinear relation between school diversity and friendship segregation among American students in grades 7–12. Segregation increased with increasing levels of diversity, but the effect was curvilinear and levelled-off when diversity was high. This finding might be due to the situational salience of race: in racially diverse schools, race is probably more of an issue than in racially homogeneous schools. Yet, when there are very many different groups in schools, group distinctions may become less important (Moody, 2001).⁵

These studies examined the role of school diversity, but students are more likely to interact with classmates than schoolmates. Even in ethnically heterogeneous schools, there may be relatively homogeneous classrooms, for instance as a consequence of tracking (see Moody, 2001). Vermeij *et al.* (2009) examined ethnic relationships at the classroom level in Dutch secondary schools and among ethnic majority and minority students. They found that the level of friendship segregation was unrelated to the proportion of ethnic minority students in the classroom. This finding indicates that factors such as group salience and the need for in-group support may play less of a role there.

⁴ This effect was obtained for White, Black, Asian, and Black Hispanic students, but not for White Hispanic and other Hispanic students.

⁵ In theory, the heterogeneity index in this study can approach a value of 1. However, when there are only two groups, the maximum score is .5.

Possibly, the ethnic composition of the classroom is less relevant for secondary compared with primary school students because their class composition changes more and they have more opportunities outside the class to learn to know each other. Possibly students focus less on the ethnic background of peers compared with other potentially relevant characteristics, such as music taste or school attitudes.

Ethnic composition and negative relations

It has sometimes been held that merely by assembling people without regard for race, colour, religion, or national origin, we can thereby destroy stereotypes and develop friendly attitudes. The case is not so simple.

This quote comes from the beginning of chapter 16, where Allport (1954, p. 261) discusses the ‘effect of contact’. The term ‘contact theory’ suggests that contact is in itself sufficient to improve group relations. But, as the quote indicates, that is, of course, far from always the case. Contact can involve negative experiences which can evoke feelings of fear and threat that reinforce stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. A study in the Netherlands among ethnic majority and minority adolescents (13–16 years) found positive contact to be associated with more favourable attitudes and negative contact with less favourable attitudes (Bekhuis *et al.*, 2013). Likewise, in their research on (pre) adolescent students (12–14 years), Stark, Flache, and Veenstra (2013) found that both liking and disliking of individual outgroup classmates had independent positive and negative effects on students’ attitudes towards the ethnic outgroup in general.

In ethnically mixed schools, students may not simply try to avoid contact with ethnic outgroups (re-segregation), but might be involved in forms of interaction that increase mutual disliking. Both negative interactions and positive relationships are important to consider because they can be present at the same time. Stark (2011) shows that the positive and negative effects of interethnic contact can counterbalance each other so that school ethnic composition does not seem to have an effect on students’ interethnic relations. The mixed evidence of the existing research (positive, negative, and no effects of school ethnic composition on students’ interethnic relations) might be because different studies vary in the proportion of positive and negative relationships in a school or school class and thereby in the effect that they find for contact at the school or class level. Thus, both positive and negative contacts need to be examined to assess the overall effect of school ethnic composition.

In segregated schools, students are relatively protected from peer prejudice and discrimination, and with desegregation comes the possibility of victimization along ethnic lines (see Rosenberg, 1979). Research on the consequences of school ethnic composition for students’ experiences with peer victimization has used different measures of ethnic diversity, including the Simpson index which combines the number of different ethnic groups with their relative proportions (e.g., Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; Juvonen *et al.*, 2006), and the proportion of minority (e.g., Vervoort *et al.*, 2011) or majority students in the classroom (e.g., Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

Some of these studies have yielded support for the imbalance of power thesis (Graham, 2006; Juvonen *et al.*, 2006). This thesis claims that perpetrators of peer victimization are typically more powerful than their victims and that students whose ethnic group is much larger than another group have more power. The implication is that students are more likely to be victimized when their ethnic group is much smaller than the group of potential perpetrators. Consistent with these notions, it has been found that the *overall* probability

of peer victimization in a particular classroom or school is lowest when there are many different groups of equal sizes (i.e., high diversity according to the Simpson index; Bellmore, Nishina, You, & Ma, 2012; Graham, 2006; Juvonen *et al.*, 2006). From the perspective of the *individual* student, the imbalance of power thesis predicts that ethnicity-based peer victimization is more likely when there are fewer co-ethnic students (or more other-ethnic students) in school or in the classroom. There is empirical support for this prediction (Agirdag *et al.*, 2011; Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Thijs, Verkuyten, & Grundel, 2014; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), but other studies have shown that ethnic minority students are more likely to be victimized or discriminated when there are more ethnic minority peers in school (e.g., Durkin *et al.*, 2011; Vervoort, Scholte, & Overbeek, 2010). This indicates that the link between school ethnic composition and peer victimization depends on various conditions.⁶

Summary

In spite of wide differences in samples and operationalizations, the available studies on school ethnic composition and students' interethnic relations tend to support intergroup contact theory. In mixed schools, there are more opportunities for positive interethnic contact, and despite a higher relative preference for ethnic in-group friendships, the absolute number of outgroup friends tends to be larger among students in such schools (Al Ramiah *et al.*, 2013; Moody, 2001; Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Vermeij *et al.*, 2009). Hence, across studies, school mixing appears to have positive effects on students' ethnic attitudes (Tropp & Prenevost, 2008). However, this average effect is not very strong which indicates that ethnic diversity can also give rise to negative experiences such as peer victimization (Agirdag *et al.*, 2011; Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Stark, 2011; Thijs *et al.*, 2014; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). It also suggests that there are important conditions that strengthen or weaken the positive and negative effects.

Future directions

Based on the existing research, we will discuss several areas for future study. First, we will consider various conditions that may affect whether students respond positively or negatively to ethnic diversity in their school and classroom. How students respond to ethnic diversity might depend on the ways in which teachers, schools, and classmates approach diversity and how students experience their school context. Hence, we will discuss the roles of multicultural education, inclusive school identity, relationships with teachers, and peer norms but we will also consider the contribution of out-of-school settings. Second, we will discuss the importance of examining more closely the underlying psychological and social processes that are involved in the effects of school ethnic composition. Third, we will discuss the importance and possibilities of integrating research on school ethnic composition for students' interethnic relations and academic adjustment.

⁶ Most studies that examine peer victimization as an aspect of interethnic relations tend to focus on peer victimization in general (e.g., 'how often are you excluded at school by peers') rather than in reference to ethnicity (e.g., 'how often are you excluded at school because of your ethnic background'; e.g., Agirdag *et al.*, 2011). Being victimized because of one's ethnicity may be hidden in non-ethnic forms, but a focus on these forms might also lead to an underestimation of the incidence of ethnic victimization. Additionally, it is possible that peer victimization is unrelated to ethnicity and thereby not very relevant for understanding the impact of school ethnic composition on interethnic relations.

Conditions

Multicultural education

Ethnically diverse schools can take different approaches towards diversity, ranging from a colour-blind approach to a multicultural one. The latter involves forms of multi- and intercultural education⁷ that focus on norms of tolerance and students' knowledge about cultural diversity (Banks, 2004). The main goal of multicultural education is 'both to know and to tolerate people with different cultural backgrounds' (Portera, 2008, p. 485). Although the ethnic group thinking involved in forms of multicultural education contains the risk that it increases ethnic stereotyping and strengthens ethnic group boundaries, it has the potential to improve interethnic relations (see Bigler, 1999; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013). The impact of school ethnic composition on students' ethnic relations might depend on curricula and educational practices aimed at learning about cultural differences and combating racism and discrimination.

A study among university students in the United States found that intergroup contact especially benefits students who hold less favourable beliefs towards cultural diversity (Adesokan, Ullrich, Van Dick, & Tropp, 2011). Yet, no research on interethnic relations we know of has examined school ethnic composition together with multicultural education. Such an examination can be important for different reasons. One reason is that multicultural education is practiced more in schools with a more ethnically mixed population (Van Geel & Vedder, 2011; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Students' ethnic attitudes and behaviours may depend more on multicultural education than on school composition. Another reason is that the combination of school composition and multicultural education might be particularly important for students' ethnic relations. Students' everyday experiences with ethnic diversity might work out differently depending on the extent and form of multicultural education they receive. Theoretically, it can be expected that ethnic mixing and contact are more effective when there is more multicultural education. Multicultural education resembles Allport's (1954) condition of institutional support, and its normative aspect of tolerance might act against ethnic peer victimization (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002) and stimulates cross-ethnic friendships (Jugert, Noack, & Rutland, 2011). Furthermore, multicultural education might be more effective in ethnically diverse schools because of its higher contextual relevance. Yet, educational messages about cultural diversity and tolerance might contradict or confirm what children in ethnically mixed schools 'know already' and therefore be less or more effective (Bigler, 1999). In addition, multicultural education can primarily focus on the recognition of ethnic minority groups and the prejudice and racism of majority group students and therefore have a different meaning and impact for both groups. School ethnic composition should be examined in relation to different forms and practices of multicultural education. One possibility is use of Banks' (2004) well-known and much used conceptualization of five components of multicultural education: cultural content integration in the curriculum, learning to question and consider how knowledge is constructed, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture.

⁷ Often no clear distinction is made between multicultural and intercultural education and in some countries – such as the Netherlands – the terms tend to be used interchangeably. In general, the concept of multicultural education is more popular in North America (Kahn, 2008), whereas the term 'intercultural education' is more often used in Europe (Portera, 2008). Intercultural education focuses on mutual interactions, dialogue, and exchanges that contribute to changing identities and cultures. The main goals of multicultural education are the acknowledgment and recognition of existing cultural differences.

Inclusive school identity

One reason why school ethnic composition might have positive effects on ethnic relations is that it leads to more positive contacts that contribute to a sense of belonging to the same school community. In educational and developmental psychology, there is a substantial literature showing that students' sense of school or classroom belonging is associated with all kinds of favourable outcomes including academic motivation, academic engagement and achievements, and social competence (for a review, see Osterman, 2000). This sense of belonging may also play a role in promoting positive interethnic relations. Students can identify with their schools or classrooms (see Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013), and this can diminish the importance of ethnic group boundaries. According to the so-called Common In-group Identity Model (CIIM; Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989), outgroup members ('them') can be seen as fellow in-group members ('us') if a shared over-arching category (i.e., school or classroom) becomes salient. Because the focus of the shared category is on similarities rather than differences, the attitudes and behaviours towards the erstwhile outgroup will improve. Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, and Anastasio (1994) demonstrated the importance of a common school identity for students (13–17 years) in a large multi-ethnic school in the United States (see also Houlette *et al.*, 2004, for a related research among first- and second-graders). They found that the more students reported that it felt like a single community at their school, the more favourable ethnic attitudes they had. Furthermore, this inclusive understanding mediated the effect of positive contact on ethnic attitudes.

An inclusive school identity does not have to imply that ethnic identities are ignored or denied. The dual-identity model is an extension of the CIIM and argues that the sharing of a common identity is more effective in improving ethnic relations if subordinate ethnic identities remain relevant (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007). Specifically, under those circumstances, students are more likely to generalize their experience of commonalities with (former) outgroup members ('he or she is like us') to the outgroup as a whole. Cameron, Rutland, Brown, and Douch (2006) conducted a contact intervention study in which they examined the attitudes of White British children (age 5–11) towards refugees. As the children were in schools with little to no refugees, the intervention did not involve actual but rather extended contact (knowing that someone of your ethnic group has contact with an outgroup peer). Children were presented with stories about White British children who had close friendships with a black refugee child. There were three different intervention conditions. The first condition stressed the individual characteristics of the two story characters, the second stressed the school as a shared, overarching identity (*common in-group*), and the third condition (*dual identity*) stressed both the school identity and the ethnic identities of the two characters. Relative to a control condition, all three intervention conditions were associated with improved attitudes towards refugees, but the dual-identity condition led to the most attitude change.

There is very little research on the implications of classroom identification on students' interethnic relations. Jugert *et al.*'s (2011) research on ethnic friendship preferences is an exception. They found that classroom identification diminished ethnic in-group preferences among Turkish-German students (preadolescents), but not among their ethnic German peers. They suggest that this might be due to the ethnic composition of the classrooms. The Turkish-German students were a numerical minority in the classrooms examined, whereas the German students tended to be a numerical majority, and moreover, all teachers were German. Accordingly, it could have been that the students predominantly associated their classroom with the German group and did not perceive it as an overarching category (Jugert *et al.*, 2011). This illustrates that it is important to

examine how ethnic composition interacts with classroom identification, and how students perceive their classroom. If classrooms and schools are not seen as truly inclusive they cannot provide the intergroup benefits of a shared, common identity that promotes positive interethnic relations.

Relationships with teachers

Teachers may be important for students' interethnic relations not only through what they teach and communicate about ethnic diversity, or through their own ethnic attitudes (see Vezzali, Giovannini, & Capozza, 2012), but also by the interpersonal relationships they develop with their students. In many countries, the large majority of the educational workforce has an ethnic majority background (see e.g., Jugert *et al.*, 2011; Little & Bartlett, 2010; Thijs, Westhof, & Koomen, 2012). Thus, many ethnic minority students have teachers from another ethnic group (majority outgroup). In educational psychology, there is a large and expanding literature showing that the student–teacher relationship can develop into a high-quality bond where there is mutual trust and positive affect, and where there is plenty of opportunity to get to know each other well (Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). Because of their strong acquaintance potential, positive relationships with ethnic outgroup teachers can be important additional sources of outgroup contact despite the general role and status differences between students and teachers. Indeed, this is what was found in a study among ethnic minority primary school children (9–12 years) with ethnic Dutch teachers (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012). Students who experienced the relationship with their teacher as close and warm were more positive towards the native Dutch. This was an effect of intergroup contact because for the native Dutch classmates, the link between student–teacher relationship and outgroup attitudes was not significant. Moreover, there was a significant interaction with classroom composition. The proportion of outgroup classmates had a positive effect on the outgroup evaluations of the minority students, but this effect was absent when they shared a positive relationship with their Dutch outgroup teacher. Thus, relationships with ethnic outgroup teachers may mitigate the importance of classroom ethnic composition for students' interethnic attitudes.

For majority students, the probability of having an ethnic minority teacher is relatively small, but in principle, the same contact effects can be expected. In addition, even if they do not have ethnic outgroup teachers themselves, noticing other outgroup staff members in their school may positively change students' perceptions and beliefs about particular outgroups. It may also cause them to see their school as very inclusive rather than associating it with their own majority group (see Jugert *et al.*, 2011).

Ethnically incongruent relationships between students and teachers can also be important even if students are not directly involved in them. It has been shown that students use the relationships between their teachers and *other* students to form impressions about those peers (Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson, 1999; Hughes, Cavell, & Willson, 2001). This is a type of extended intergroup contact effect whereby the mere knowledge that a member of one's own ethnic group (teacher) has a close relationship with someone from another ethnic group (student) improves ethnic attitudes (Feddes, Noack, & Rutland, 2009; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). Yet, there is also evidence that teachers share less positive relationships with students of (some) other-ethnic groups compared with students of their own ethnic group (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005; Saft & Pianta, 2001; Thijs *et al.*, 2012). The perception of such differences might negatively affect students' evaluation of ethnic differences in their classrooms.

Peer norms and networks

Research on the association between school ethnic composition and interethnic relations tends to focus on attitudes, friendships, and experiences of individual students. The underlying assumption is that individual students are either involved in processes of getting to know and to learn from each other, or feel threatened by ethnic others and try to defend or gain control over the school setting. However, how students deal with the ethnic diversity in their school is not just an individual matter.

Due to peer influence, ethnic in-group peers may react to ethnic outgroup students in a similar way. For instance, a Pakistani British child might refrain from interacting with native English children not so much because of his or her own ethnic preferences but because his or her Pakistani British classmates expect him or her to do so. However, peer norms are not necessarily negative and restrictive. A study in Sweden assessed friendship networks across three annual measurements and found that friends' positive and negative attitudes towards immigrants predicted increases in adolescents' positive and negative attitudes, respectively (Van Zalk, Kerr, Van Zalk, & Stattin, 2012). Furthermore, a study among ethnic Norwegian adolescents from 89 classrooms showed that extended contact (the contact of in-group friends or classmates) affects attitudes towards ethnic minority peers by changing the perception of in-group norms (De Tezanos-Pinto, Bratt, & Brown, 2010). Other studies have also found that students influence each other's ethnic attitudes (Kiesner, Maass, Cadinu, & Vallese, 2003; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2013) and that ethnic in-group rather than outgroup classmates are an important source of influence (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2011).

Another study (Thijs *et al.*, 2014) demonstrates the value of examining classroom diversity in interaction with peer norms. Self-reports of peer victimization were collected among minority (Turkish-Dutch) and majority (ethnic Dutch) primary school students (10–12 years), and the impact of the proportion of outgroup (respectively, ethnic Dutch and Turkish-Dutch) students in the classrooms was examined. Consistent with the balance of power thesis, it turned out that students with relatively more ethnic outgroup classmates reported more experiences of peer victimization. However, this effect was moderated by the average ethnic prejudice of these classmates. When they made a strong evaluative distinction between their own group and other-ethnic groups, the positive relation between the proportion of these classmates and peer victimization was moderately strong. However, the relation was absent when the outgroup classmates did not show a relative preference for their own group. This finding shows that the average ethnic attitudes among ethnic in-group classmates may act as a peer norm that regulates victimization of peers of other-ethnic groups. The interaction effect was equally strong for minority and majority students. These findings indicate that it is not self-evident that students victimize ethnic outgroup peers who are a numerical minority in the classroom and that it is important to consider how students together evaluate and make sense of ethnic group differences.

In addition, social network researchers have shown that what appears to be a preference for ethnic in-group friends can be partly due to other features such as socioeconomic status, or school attitudes, musical tastes, and other cultural and leisure preferences that tend to be very important for adolescents (see Moody, 2001; Quillian & Campbell, 2003). When there is no overlap with ethnicity, these features can function as shared interests and common activities that form the basis for an inclusive identity which improves interethnic relations (Gaertner *et al.*, 1994). However, friendship selection on the basis of similar opinions, tastes, and preferences can foster ethnic segregation when ethnicity is correlated with these features. This makes group distinctions cumulative and thereby ethnic boundaries stronger. This effect was shown in research by Stark and Flache

(2012) who examined the effects of students (12–14 years) similarity in ethnicity and interests in a three-wave longitudinal network study. They showed that ethnic segregation is higher in classes in which ethnic group membership and interests (e.g., music taste, social attitudes) are associated, whereas it is lower in classes in which interests are not associated with ethnicity. These findings indicate that common interests and also shared activity interventions in classes can have positive or negative effects on the promotion of positive interethnic relations, depending on whether these interests or activities overlap with the ethnic background of the students.

Out-of-school settings

Most of the research on school ethnic composition has ignored the fact that schools are embedded in a local context and that students have a life outside school. Research has shown that adolescents meet about 40% of their friends exclusively outside the school (Kiesner, Kerr, & Stattin, 2004) and that interethnic friendship between schoolmates is more likely when they live close to each other (Mouw & Entwisle, 2006). School and neighbourhood ethnic composition are related (see e.g., Ledwith & Clark, 2007), and it is important to consider the role of both. A study among Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland found that the effect of having outgroup friends at university was more strongly associated with favourable outgroup attitudes for students who had fewer compared with more outgroup friends at home. Thus, positive contact was more powerful when it was relatively new in a students' life (Al Ramiah *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, research on the generalization effect of intergroup contact suggests that out-of-school peer contacts can both positively and negatively influence students' interethnic relations within schools (Binder *et al.*, 2009; Stark, 2011). Thus, out-of-school contact needs to be considered in order to accurately assess the effect of school ethnic composition. Related to this, students from some ethnic groups may engage in extra-school activities with ethnic in-group peers, such as religious or cultural meetings, and this could also influence their responses to diversity in their school.

An important problem for research on school ethnic composition is self-selection at both the institutional and individual levels (Schofield, 1995). For example, desegregation policies can imply an involuntary process of altering the ethnic composition of schools. Also, schools can try to discourage or prevent ethnic minority children from choosing their school. Likewise, parents who raise their children in a culturally tolerant way might send them to ethnically mixed schools, whereas intolerant parents might opt for homogeneous schools. Parents have an influence on children's interethnic attitudes (Stringer *et al.*, 2010; Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 2001), but despite possible selection effects, there is almost no research on the interplay between parental attitudes and school composition. Parents may be crucial for the way students experience ethnic diversity in their schools. For example, ethnic diversity in schools can have a positive effect on ethnic attitudes in students who were socialized by their parents to be open to ethnic differences. However, it may trigger feelings of threat or resistance among students who were taught to reject ethnic others and to avoid cross-ethnic friendships (Munniksma, Flache, Verkuyten, & Veenstra, 2012).

Processes

It is essential to not only examine the conditions under which ethnic diversity affects students' interethnic relations positively or negatively, but to also identify the ways in

which this happens. There has been some research on the effects of classroom cooperation on students' interethnic attitudes (e.g., Smith, Boulton, & Cowie, 1993). Yet overall we know little about the psychological and social processes by which school ethnic composition affects students' interethnic relations. This gap is unfortunate from a psychological as well as educational point of view.

In relation to psychological processes, research on contact theory has shown that contact can diminish negative attitudes by reducing intergroup anxiety and by increasing empathy and perspective taking as well as outgroup knowledge (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). In school contexts, additional potential mediators are the ways in which students reason about the social and moral implications of drawing ethnic group boundaries (see Ruck, Park, Killen, & Christal, 2011) as well as their normative beliefs about cultural diversity (see Verkuyten *et al.*, 2010). However, research on the effects of school ethnic composition typically does not measure these mediating mechanisms. Similarly, studies have assumed that children and adolescents use ethnicity as a criterion to victimize other-ethnic peers who are in a numerical minority position (Graham, 2006; Juvonen *et al.*, 2006), or that the mere presence of ethnic minority groups threatens the position of ethnic majority students (Durkin *et al.*, 2011; Vervoort *et al.*, 2011). This would lead to negative attitudes and behaviours towards ethnic minority students. However, these studies do not include perceived threat measures, and it might be the case, for example, that feelings of ethnic threat are more common in contexts in which different ethnic groups are more or less of equal size.

Apart from psychological processes, we also do not know enough about the social processes and actual interactions in ethnically diverse schools. Research using a network perspective indicates that the social dynamics in peer and friendship networks are important for understanding how opportunities for interethnic contact translate into positive or negative interethnic relations (Munniksma *et al.*, 2012; Stark, 2011). Contact between students evolves over time. They meet each other, perceive similarities and discover commonalities, and slowly begin to develop a bond. But if they barely know each other, they are more likely to go by differences that are considered socially meaningful. There is a tendency for 'birds of a feather to flock together' or what is sometimes called peer homophily in social networks (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Popp, Laursen, Kerr, Stattin, & Burk, 2008). Similar peers have a higher chance of interacting, and interaction leads to more similarity and thereby to stronger group boundaries. The tendency to structure relationships along ethnic lines is particularly strong at the beginning of the school year and among first-form students. In these new situations, students feel insecure, and they have little idea where they stand and what they are in for (Stark, 2011). Irrespective of their perhaps limited experiences with ethnic outgroup students, they are more likely to form bonds with members of their own ethnic group and to mark their differences with other-ethnic groups.

This initial drawing of group boundaries might lead to casual contact or competition with ethnic outgroup peers, but not necessarily so. For example, if students do not receive friendship invitations from out-group members that they can reciprocate, they might feel rejected and threatened by them. However, when ethnic in- and outgroup students have shared preferences for cultural and leisure activities, cross-ethnic friendships may develop. As extended contacts, such friendships could positively influence the ethnic attitudes of others in the social networks of the students. Research on these kinds of network dynamics can greatly improve our understanding of interethnic relations in the classroom.

In addition, it is important to examine actual interactions within schools and classrooms. Most of the research on school ethnic composition is rather limited in its

practical usefulness because it ignores the fact that schools increasingly serve students with different ethnic backgrounds with highly diverse, shifting, and complex identities and patterns of interethnic contacts and interactions (see Harris, 2013; Thomas, 2011). How students understand interethnic peer interactions and relations and how they actually live with diversity in ethnically mixed schools are largely unknown. Qualitative research has indicated that there are diverse ways in which ethnicity is interwoven in students' social life and how macro-political and local conditions as well as school dynamics play a role in this (e.g., Connolly, 1998; Faas, 2008; Rassool, 1999). This type of research can make an important contribution to a more detailed understanding of the everyday and diverse ways in which interethnic relations are defined, challenged and negotiated in ethnically diverse schools.

Interethnic relations and academic adjustment

There have been several studies on the effects of school ethnic composition on students' academic adjustment and their achievement in particular. A full discussion of those studies is beyond the scope of this review because they have not been related to students' interethnic relations. This is unfortunate for two reasons. First, from a policy perspective, it is important to evaluate the overall impact of school diversity, which means that different types of outcomes (academic, emotional, social) should be considered. Second, the effects of school composition on students' ethnic relations might help to explain some of the school composition effects on students' academic adjustment, and vice versa.

As studies on interethnic relations, the research on school diversity and academic adjustment is characterized by divergent samples, methods, and findings. For instance, research has looked at the proportion of specific minority groups such as African-Americans (Van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010) but also at the impact of diversity in combination with the proportion of ethnic in-group students (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011). Moreover, some of the available research suffers from methodological limitations. For instance, the effects of school ethnic composition on academic achievement might be due to socioeconomic composition or other structural and organizational school features (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

Still, one of the recurring conclusions is that students' academic achievement is lower in schools where there are more ethnic minority students and that this effect is most evident for students from ethnic minority groups (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2009; Van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010). One reason for this is that in these schools, students have less opportunity to learn from majority students (i.e., language) and that teachers have lower expectations of students (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). However, students' interethnic relations may also bear upon their academic outcomes.

Different process models of motivation claim that a sense of secure belonging and relatedness to the social surroundings promotes students' engaged and self-directed academic behaviour and thereby their academic achievement (Boekaerts, 1993; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, students who experience ethnic victimization or who feel excluded at school because of their ethnic background are at risk of low achievement (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Moreover, ethnic prejudice from peers or teachers might fuel the experience of stereotype threat that undermines academic performance (Steele, 1997) or lead to a process of academic dis-identification in which students defensively detach their self-esteem from academic performance (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). These possibilities suggest that there is a downside to ethnically diverse schools. However, as argued earlier, these

schools also provide opportunities for positive contact experiences. A study in four Austrian and Belgian cities showed that ethnic minority students who attended less segregated schools reported more school satisfaction and higher school performance (Baysu *et al.*, 2013). These effects were (partly) explained by students' friendships with ethnic majority peers in their school and existed despite their having experiences with ethnic victimization. According to the authors, the intergroup friendships functioned as a source of identity protection. Students may have felt that their ethnicity was accepted and valued, which could have increased their sense of school belonging. This simultaneous focus on academic and social outcomes of school ethnic composition is rather unusual and future studies should investigate these issues more extensively.

Conclusions

Concerns about school ethnic segregation are voiced in different countries, and various initiatives and policies have been proposed and implemented to promote desegregation. Ethnic segregation would be unfavourable for educational achievements and later occupational success, especially for minority group children, and would be undesirable for society at large because it hampers the development of positive interethnic relations. However, apart from concerns about parents' freedom to choose a school for their children, it has been pointed out that ethnically mixed schools can have unintended negative consequences for outcomes such as self-esteem and ethnic relations (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Hanish & Guerra, 2000).

However, the overall effect of intergroup contact on interethnic relations tends to be positive, which indicates that an ethnically mixed school population can stimulate ethnic tolerance (Tropp & Prenevost, 2008). This finding means, for example, that separate religious schools can have negative implications for intergroup relations. In countries such as Great Britain and the Netherlands, the establishment of these schools is endorsed by the government or by minority organizations, but one important consequence of these policies and initiatives is that the opportunities for intergroup contact are reduced.

Yet, it is clear that ethnic desegregation in itself is not enough to promote interethnic tolerance. The research findings are not conclusive, and there are many methodological issues, which makes it difficult to compare the different studies and to draw general conclusions. The findings can differ between countries and even cities and neighbourhoods, between primary and secondary schools, and for the measures used to operationalize school ethnic composition and students' interethnic relations. Unfortunately, there are no studies that focus on the same students at various points in time and in relation to actual changes – gradual or sudden – in school ethnic composition. Most of the research is correlational and this limits the possibility to make causal inferences. Thus, one important task for future studies is to examine the effects of desegregation through longitudinal designs.

Furthermore, there are important issues that future studies could examine to develop a better understanding of why and when ethnic desegregation improves students' interethnic relations. We have discussed the possible role of multicultural education, relationships with teacher, an inclusive school identity, peer norms and networks, and out-of-school settings, as well as the importance of underlying psychological and social processes. But there are additional issues that we were not able to discuss within the space of a journal article. For example, there are several individual characteristics that may affect how students respond to ethnic diversity in their school environment. We already referred to the importance of age

for students' ethnic attitudes and ethnic identity development (Quintana, 1998; Raabe & Beelman, 2011), but other individual characteristics such as students' ethnic background and their level of ethnic group identification should be considered as well. A finding in the contact literature is that contact is generally more effective for members of ethnic majority compared with ethnic minority groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Vezzali, Giovannini, & Capozza, 2010). Likewise, ethnic group boundaries are likely to be more important for students who strongly identify with their ethnic group, which implies that these students more easily feel threatened in diverse contexts.

Ethnic desegregation can play a role in developing positive interethnic relations. However, mixing schools is not without its problems and might lead to ethnic tensions, conflicts, and group divisions. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the effectiveness of school desegregation depends on other school characteristics such as multicultural education, school climate and size,⁸ and differences in types and levels of schooling, local and national contexts, and differences between students of different ethnic (minority) groups. In addition, we know little about what actually happens in ethnically mixed schools. It seems important to have a more detailed, 'close-to-the-action' understanding of how students and teachers understand and negotiate ethnic differences in their everyday school life.

These considerations indicate the importance of concentrating on when, how, and why specific effects occur. More systematic attention should be paid to different aspects of schools and classrooms, to types of interethnic attitudes and behaviours, to the perspective of both majority and various minority groups, and to different situations and contexts and how they change across time. By doing so, researchers can continue to make an important contribution to finding viable and productive ways of living with ethnic diversity and improving interethnic relations in schools. There is quite a lot at stake in the debate about school ethnic composition and desegregation, and it is important to seriously weigh the different costs and benefits and to examine why and when it has positive or rather negative effects on different outcomes, including students' interethnic relations.

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⁸Cheng and Xie (2013), for example, have shown that increased social context size promotes racial segregation and discourages inter-racial friendship.

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