

Cluster: Youth and education

Project 3: The impact of teacher-student interactions on children's sense of belonging and the acceptance of diversity.

Aim

To examine how teachers' daily classroom interactions with children of different ethnicities affect students' sense of belonging and acceptance of ethnic out-groups, both in the classroom and society at large.

Background

This project departs from the two-folded assumption that classrooms are micro-societies that parallel society at large, and that "good" classroom citizenship promotes "good" societal citizenship. Following the Dutch Educational Council's broad definition of citizenship as the "willingness and ability to be part of a community and to make a significant contribution to it" (2012, p. 8), this project will examine students' sense of classroom and societal belonging and the acceptance of diversity as individual citizenship outcomes.

Specifically, it will examine how teacher interactions with children of different ethnicities affect these outcomes via students' perceptions of teacher's interpersonal relations with themselves and their classmates. The research will focus on the last years of primary school where students tend to have one teacher (sometimes two) the whole year round, and it will combine Social Referencing Theory (Walle et al., 2017) with insights about the importance of children's relationships with their teacher for their group attitudes and classroom belonging (e.g., Thijs et al., 2018). Social Referencing Theory describes how people rely on significant others to guide their own behavior and attitudes, and there is a growing body of literature suggesting that students look to their teacher for cues about how to behave and how to evaluate differences in their classrooms. It is expected (a) that children's sense of belonging (to the classroom but to society at large as well) is affected not only by their own daily interactions with their teacher but also by the interactions between their teacher and one's classmates, and (b) that these effects are mediated by children's perceptions of teacher-student relationships.

Research design

For this PhD project, data will be collected in seventy ethnically diverse primary school classes (Grades 6 and 7) and their teachers at four waves during two school years. We will use established classroom observational measures to measure teacher behaviors and questionnaire to measure students' relationships and citizenship outcomes. Data will be analyzed with longitudinal multilevel SEM.

Literature

Thijs, J., Keim, A., & Geerlings, J. (2018). Classroom identification in ethnic minority and majority students: Effects of relationships and ethnic composition. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12253.

Walle, E. A., Reschke, P. J., & Knothe, J. M. (2017). Social referencing: Defining and delineating a basic process of emotion. *Emotion Review*, 17, 254-252.

Project initiators

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Location

Utrecht