Coming of age in Dutch schools
Issues of schooling and identity

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Abstract
In this article we compare research we did 30 years ago in Dutch schools among youth of diverse ethnic backgrounds about their identities with today’s research evidence. Taking the position that education is a site for implicit and explicit identity development mediated by the social conditions in which young people grow up and the political climate regarding multiculturalism and inclusiveness, we sketch a picture of changing frameworks relating to education and multicultural societies and a picture of developments in the identification with others and society of urban youth of different descent. The possibility to meet in ethnically mixed schools, a meaningful curriculum and qualified teachers to guide the processes of identity development of all students towards the ideal of inclusiveness are among the features of education taken into account. Lessons that can be learned for the research agenda are reflected in the discussion.

Keywords: inclusive education, identity development, teachers’ professionalism, citizenship education

Introduction
What does coming of age look like for Dutch youth in the last three decennia? About 30 years ago we conducted joint research in schools among young people of diverse ethnic backgrounds about their identities, their lives in and outside of school and their education for the multicultural society (Leeman 1994, Saharso 1992). The solidarity that citizenship assumes requires that citizens in a multicultural society feel connected to their fellow citizens across and above ethnic lines. We were interested in a possible shared identity and mutual solidarity developing among the youngsters of different descent we interviewed. We were also interested in the ways education could enhance this process. We assumed that an ethnically mixed school, a meaningful curriculum and qualified teachers to guide the processes of inclusive identity development are at a minimum among the features of education to take into account. We asked the youngsters about their identifications and about their experiences with lessons in ‘intercultural education’ and with their ethnically mixed school and

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living environment. Now, 30 years later, the newcomers are not that new anymore. Migrants became immigrants. School policies regarding cultural and ethnic diversity developed. Again, we want to pose the question of how urban youth identifies with and in particular whether they have developed a collective identity that transcends ethnic lines. What change, if any, took place? And how have schools developed as sites for inclusive identity development?

**The Netherlands**

The ethnic composition of Dutch society has changed from the early 1950s onwards. Immigrants came from the former colonies of Indonesia, Suriname and the Antilles and as migrant workers from the south of Europe, the north of Africa and Turkey. The largest minority population consists of Muslims of Turkish and Moroccan descent. Immigrants live concentrated in the Randstad (the region that spans the four largest cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht).

A difference with 30 years ago is that the migrants of that time have become permanent settlers. The broader context has changed. Global economic power relations have shifted. Not only immigration, but also Europeanisation and globalisation have affected national identities. Lastly, the Dutch political climate regarding immigration and multiculturalism has changed dramatically over the past years. When we began our project in the 1980s the majority of the native Dutch population had a neutral to positive attitude to immigrants, but since then the percentage of people who think positively about them has steadily decreased until now 61% of the Dutch population believes there are tensions between native Dutch and people of an immigrant origin and 41% of the native Dutch believe that the Western way of life and an Islamic way of life cannot go together.¹ Since 2002 popular discontent has expressed itself in high voter turnout for populist anti-immigrant parties like the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) and nowadays the Freedom Party led by Geert Wilders. Meanwhile, Islamic violence has not only manifested itself internationally, but also on Dutch soil. In 2004 Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh was murdered by a radical fundamentalist. Since the turn of the century, multiculturalism has officially been replaced by an emphasis on shared citizenship. Governments follow an integration policy in which immigrants are expected to respect and share the central values of the Dutch culture and democratic constitutional state. Measures like compulsory integration courses for immigrants are thought to facilitate integration and to ensure loyalty to the central values of Dutch society. The government has explicitly expressed its discontent with the multicultural society.²

In its reaction to immigration the Dutch educational policy shows continuity and change. Striving for distributive justice was and is one of the most important objectives (Leeman and Pels 2006). This policy has mainly attempted to influence the resources (e.g. social and cultural capital) of immigrant students, but left the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion largely untouched. At the time of our study intercultural education was made compulsory to promote the acculturation of both minority and
majority groups. Acculturation was defined as “a bilateral or multilateral process of learning from, accepting and appreciating each other, and of being open to each other’s culture or elements of it” (Ministerie van OCenW 1981: 6). Intercultural education was predominantly embraced in schools that had a student population of mixed origin (Leeman and Ledoux 2003). It was usually aimed at native Dutch students, who had to learn about other cultures and learn not to discriminate against immigrants. One often found a celebration of the cultures of the ‘different other’ and some political critical reflections about processes of migration and immigration. As assimilation has become the dominant ideology, the Ministry of Education no longer actively promotes intercultural education. The focus is now on citizenship education, which has been a compulsory part of the curriculum since 2006. It is aimed at active participation in society and at the acceptance of basic Dutch values, such as democratic decision-making, freedom of speech and respect for cultural and religious diversity (Bron 2006).

Since the 1990s there has been a strong trend towards functionality in education. A focus on qualification for the job market and on socialisation for continuity in society tends to marginalise the subjectivation aim in education (Biesta 2011). In a quest for efficiency and accountability standard tests have become the main means to test students’ knowledge of the basics. Schools are judged on their test results by the inspectorate. These politics limit the opportunities for the development of inclusive identities through schooling in general and citizenship education in particular.

After positioning ourselves theoretically, we will present the findings of the original study and the methodology of the follow-up study that is based on a review of the findings of current Dutch research on youth’s identifications and on education as a site for identity development.

**Mapping our theoretical position**

As identity development requires separation and insertion into the social world, identity has been described as a synthesising concept that connects the individual and the social environment (Epstein 1978: 101). Our focus is on the social aspect of identity. It is through group identification that individuals develop a social identity. In this idea we follow Tajfel who defined social identity as that part of identity that is derived from a person’s knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) (Tajfel 1981: 255). There are many groups and categories people can identify with. Social Identity Theory (SIT) holds that people can identify with several groups at the same time. We assume that people can and in fact often do have multiple identities and ways of belonging that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. We are in particular interested in collective identity formation among majority and immigrant youth. In this we follow Taylor and Whittier’s definition of collective identity as: “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, and solidarity” (1995: 172) that is narrower than a social identity in that it requires a sense of shared interests and solidarity.
SIT posits that if a group belonging is not experienced as satisfying people will (psychologically) leave, at least if circumstances permit (Tajfel 1981: 256). Hence, if people objectively belong to a category it does not necessarily follow that they subjectively identify with that category. How immigrants and their descendants identify is shaped by a range of factors. The extensive research literature on the subject found that immigrants’ identifications are shaped by socio-economic factors such as level of education and social class (Faas 2009, Lee 2004), discrimination impacts negatively on identification with the host country (Verkuyten and Brug 2002, Rumbaut 2005, Berry et al. 2006) and so does ethnic concentration and segregation at the neighbourhood and school level (Butterfield 2004, Rumbaut 1994). In their study of immigrant life in New York city, Kasinitz et al. (2008) found that the second generation is not likely to identify with the American racial and ethnic identities which native born Americans would ascribe to them or with pan-ethnic identities (e.g. Latino for someone originating from Colombia). In fact, many West Indians distanced themselves from African Americans (Butterfield 2004) and Hispanic respondents found it hard to racially identify themselves. These findings underline that subjective identifications cannot be inferred from objective characteristics; immigrant youth (and native youth) are not necessarily unitary categories.

Moreover, the research literature makes it clear that contexts matter. In a study comparing the United States with France and Germany, Alba (2005) claimed that in Europe ‘religion’ forms a bright boundary comparable to ‘race’ in the United States separating in particular immigrants from Islamic countries from the host society. Other research suggests that within Europe we further have to differentiate between national contexts (e.g. Phalet et al. 2008, Diehl & Koenig 2009, Ersanilli & Saharso 2011). Apart from national contexts, there are also regional and local differences to consider. Comparing majority and Turkish immigrant youth in Germany and England, Faas (2009) found that the native youth had a national identity encompassing a regional identity (e.g. German and Swabian identity). Youngsters of Turkish origin, however, had a weaker identification with the country of settlement and in particular with the regional identity that they experienced as an ethnic identity. Native German youth also identified as European a supra-national identity. Ersanilli and Saharso (2011) found that despite processes of exclusion (and self-exclusion) from national identity in all three countries they compared, the second generation strongly identified with their place of residence. Applied to our subject, a context-bound approach implies that we see identity development as a process that is rooted in young people’s experiences in and outside of school.

As identity development is a reflective process, education can support youngsters in their identity development based on a reflective engagement with the experience of living together in diversity. Shared living conditions, we assume, may be a basis for a shared consciousness. Schools and teachers can offer possibilities for mutual contact between youngsters of different backgrounds and a school climate combined with a
meaningful curriculum that creates possibilities for the development of a collective identity across ethnic lines.

Our studies

Our original research took place in 10 mixed classes in nine schools for secondary education that included the full range of school levels. We stayed in each classroom for several weeks, observing the daily interactions and lessons and the series of intercultural lessons on the multicultural society the teachers had promised to develop and include in the curriculum. Meanwhile, we interviewed 78 pupils of different ethnic backgrounds with a main age of 17. We principally did not differentiate at the outset between native and immigrant youth as this was precisely what we wanted to find out: how did the youth identify and on the basis of what did they differentiate among them? Was having an immigrant or native background a relevant characteristic for the young people’s identifications or was it a characteristic structuring their life experiences? We found ethnicity to be a salient factor in many youngsters’ lives. Whether it concerned friendships or feuds ethnicity was always present. E.g. in schools with a majority of immigrant youth the fall guy, whatever his ethnic background, could be sure that unpleasant remarks about his ethnicity would be made.

In Saharso (1992) we noticed that the identity of the immigrant youngsters was connected to a specific culture, language and history that made them differ from each other. For the children of colonial immigrants, like Surinamese, their family history was related to the Dutch history as a colonising and slaveholder nation. They were sometimes prepared by their parents that they might meet with racism. For youngsters of Moroccan or Turkish descent the Netherlands still was very much a new country. They were less aware of racism. As children of labour migrants they strongly aspired to carve out for themselves a successful future in the Netherlands and were confident that they would succeed. On the other hand, immigrant youth shared the experience of being excluded as ‘foreigners’, as they were named at that time, and we saw among them a shared subjective identification developing as ‘foreigners’ in the Netherlands. This ‘foreigner’ identity sometimes also included ‘white’ native Dutch youngsters. There were mixed friendships between youngsters of different immigrant groups occasionally including native Dutch youngsters. Humphrey, for instance, an Indo-European youth, explained that the two native Dutch in his circle of friends were Dutch but just as well could be foreigners because they do not discriminate and they were “cool”. We found that in ethnic mixed cities like Amsterdam friends did not act as if ethnicity did not exist. In boys’ groups mutual commitment and solidarity was expressed by making in an ironic fashion the ‘wrong’ sorts of jokes about ethnicity. The girls expressed their solidarity by showing each other that they knew and accepted each other’s culture. In this we saw signs of an emerging collective identity.

In Leeman (1994) we found that the indigenous youth who grew up in the heterogeneous environments of the Dutch big cities of the Hague and Amsterdam more
frequently have an ethnically mixed circle of friends than those living in smaller towns. An example is Sietske, an indigenous Amsterdam girl who had a mixed circle of Turkish and Moroccan friends, whom she met every day at the playgrounds around the apartment she lived in. She experienced that native Dutch friends whom she met frequently at a camp-site in the south of the Netherlands and who live in smaller less mixed towns usually did not understand her friendship with immigrants. According to Sietske, they did not know and did not trust immigrants. Like ‘immigrant’ is not a unitary category we found that neither is ‘Dutch’ a unitary category among the indigenous Dutch youngsters interviewed. It was differentiated by personal and local differences and also by social class.

Looking for context differences between schools we studied the identity politics of the schools the youngsters attended. We found that the identity politics implicit in the practice of (intercultural) education had a static outlook on ethnic identities and a schematic view of the social positions of the indigenous Dutch and immigrants with regard to each other. This was evident from the content of the lessons and the way the students were addressed: the message usually was that ‘we’ should not discriminate but should respect ‘them’ and their cultures. No important differences between schools were found. These politics ran counter to the diversity of interpretation models that the mixed group of youth interviewed had and to the diverse interethnic relations among the youngsters. Some native Dutch youth had the experience of being excluded by the ‘foreigners’, of ‘being discriminated against’ as they saw it, but could not bring this forward. On the other hand, youngsters had interethnic friendships. These youngsters often had intricate knowledge of each other’s lives, but again they were not encouraged to bring up this knowledge in the discussion. Opportunities, we felt, for mutual learning were missed. How are things now, 30 years later?

To answer this question we studied recent literature. Like in the original study, we focused on studies conducted in the Randstad in the Netherlands. We assumed and still do that the potential influence of education in general and special lessons on young people’s identity development is always mediated by everyday experiences in and outside of school influenced by the social conditions in which they grow up and the political climate regarding multiculturalism. It is this position that informed our search strategy regarding the academic literature. We looked for empirical studies published in scientific journals and books in and after 2005. The keywords we used were: youth, ethnic identity, inclusive identity, intercultural education, citizenship education, inclusive education, segregation, teachers’ professionalism. As the official circuit did not provide us with enough sources we added a quick search in the grey circuits of studies by MA-students at the main universities in the Randstad.

(Immigrant) youth’ identifications in the Netherlands

A common experience of people with an immigrant background is that they are excluded from national identity because of their accent, name or appearance; Zhou
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and Lee (2007) call this phenomenon “the immigrant shadow”. This is also true for Dutch youth of immigrant origin; this has not changed in the past 30 years. What has changed is immigrant youths’ perceptions. Their peers of 30 years ago were largely unaware of Dutch racism and full of hope to find a bright future. The current generation born and raised in the Netherlands, as most of them are, know their way in Dutch society. Measured in terms of educational attainment or value orientations they are better integrated, yet they feel not accepted. Both native Dutch and Moroccan youth and to a lesser extent youth of Turkish origin agree that the events of the past years (e.g. 9/11, the success of anti-immigrant parties, the murder of Van Gogh) have drawn the groups apart, according to the findings of Entzinger and Dorleijn (2008).

Local identities

Local identities have been presented as an alternative to national identity (Uitermark et al. 2008). The big city integrates is the idea; a shared identification and commitment to the city of all living there can promote social cohesion. Several Dutch studies indeed found among youngsters of different ethnic backgrounds a strong identification with the big city (Ersanilli & Saharso 2011, Groenewold 2008). For example, Van der Welle and Mamadouh (2009) found that for many young people of Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese and native Dutch origin in Amsterdam the identity of Amsterdammer is more open to diversity, more cosmopolitan, than Dutch identity and they, including native Dutch, take pride in that. On the other hand, there is a small group of native Dutch (6%) who saw with regret that they had lost their position as a majority group (currently about half of Amsterdammers have an immigrant origin). These nostalgic Amsterdammers perceive the increasing ethnic diversity as a threat to Amsterdam’s identity (Van der Welle & Mamadouh 2009: 34).

Other research suggests that a shared identification with the big city is, however, not a sufficient precondition for social bonding across ethnic lines. Cultural difference has become a taboo subject among schoolgirls, according to Duits (2010). Girls do not ask a classmate why, for example, she is wearing a headscarf as this is considered an inappropriate question. Yet the effect is that they cannot talk about cultural difference which means that the other remains unknown. What young women consider as beautiful is determined by their ethnicity, according to a study by De Rooij (2004). Afro-Surinamese young women do not mirror themselves in the Western beauty image. Overweight is a non-problem for them; a real woman has flesh on her bones (also see Kropman 2007). As beauty is very central in girls’ culture, we can conclude that this is a subject that, instead of uniting, pulls girls of different ethnic backgrounds apart. There exists in the big cities a lively ethno-party scene so urban youth do not necessarily meet on the dance floor either (Boogaarts 2009). Despite their shared identification with the city, these research findings suggest, Dutch urban youth do not necessarily identify with each other.
Islamic identity

Another alternative for Dutch national identity is for youngsters of an Islamic background to identify as Muslims. Several studies conducted in different Dutch cities and towns confirm that the primary identification of youngsters of Turkish and in particular Moroccan descent is with a Muslim identity (Duijndam 2009, Ketner 2008, De Koning 2009, Verkuyten & Yildiz 2007). This is for them a way out of several identity conflicts: they are not recognised as Dutch and, most importantly, the Muslim identity gives them a positive identity to counter the negative stigmatisation Moroccan youth in particular experience in Dutch society.

Radical identities

A study on radicalisation among Islamic youth of Moroccan descent (Buijs et al. 2006) again lends more credibility to the picture of Islamic youth experiencing identity conflicts because of the low social position of their community and negative stereotyping. The 38 youngsters interviewed, themselves highly educated but stemming from lower class families, reported feeling alienated from their parents and from Dutch society. As they are more oriented than Turkish-Dutch youth to Dutch society, they are more vulnerable to discrimination and the negative public image of Islam – the researchers speak aptly of an “integration paradox” (Buijs et al. 2006: 202). The radical belief in a superior religion offers them a solution to their identity problems (also see Van der Valk 2010).

We know very little about radical identities of native Dutch youth. The Dutch youngsters appear as objects of research primarily when it comes to subjects such as toleration and racism (e.g. Van der Valk & Wagenaar 2010). Van San, Sieckelinck and De Winter (2010) took a different theoretical stance and showed in their study on radicalising youngsters from native Dutch and immigrant backgrounds that all are persons with extreme ideals about citizenship looking for active participation in society.

Urban street culture

We found the only identity that seems to transcend ethnic lines in street culture. Street culture is a lower-class youth culture and often a reaction to growing up as a marginalised group in a deprived urban neighbourhood (De Jong 2007 & Paulle 2005). It is in the schools, in particular the lower tracks of schools for middle vocational training that have a regional function, that youth from the city and youth from the smaller municipalities around the city meet. El Hadioui (2010) found a deep gap between the youth who grew up in Rotterdam’s working-class areas and youth from these small towns and rural areas. The latter were confronted with street language they could not understand, an overly masculine attitude, gangster rap texts denigrating females in the classroom, youth carrying weapons and security checks at the entrance of the school building. The demarcation between the young people was not so much along
ethnic lines, but a demarcation between an urban street culture and a suburban civic culture, according to El Hadioui. To illustrate: girls of Antillian and of Turkish descent were teasing each other by reproducing existing prejudices about their ethnic backgrounds. This is done in street language that excludes the students who did not grow up in Rotterdam’s working-class areas. When native Dutch youngsters from outside Rotterdam, who do not speak the street language, joined in the conversation their ‘wrong’ jokes were not appreciated (El Hadioui 2010: 35-36). Those, including native Dutch youth, who speak the street language and act according to the street codes are in the eyes of Rotterdam’s youth ‘allochthonous’. It should be noted, however, that this street culture is hardly present in higher tracks of vocational education and in schools preparing for academic education. Moreover, not all research reports that street culture transcends ethnic lines. Duijndam (2009) compared the identifications of youth in Amsterdam’s Osdorp (a neighbourhood in the new West of Amsterdam) and Le Bourget-Drancy, a Paris banlieue. While in Osdorp there is some identification with the neighbourhood as revealed by names such as ‘supermocro Osdorp’ (a variant on ‘mocroboys’, mocro is in street language someone of Moroccan descent) it is much weaker than Paris’ youth identification with their city. Another difference is that the youth of Paris refer to themselves in racial terms (noir, beur, blanc), while the Amsterdam youngsters describe themselves primarily in terms of their country of origin (Turkish, Moroccan, Dutch, Surinamese). Duijndam reports for Amsterdam youth group formation on the basis of a common country of origin. There is also group antagonism between Turkish and Moroccan youth and Surinamese youngsters complain that Moroccans jeer at them with racial names (‘What are you looking at me, monkey?’).

Despite the limited ethnic blending in actual social settings, a shared youth culture flourishes through local (social) media. There are multicultural dance and theatre companies. To a large extent, this shared youth culture is generated by FunX, a radio station partly financed by public funds and founded in 2002 to cater primarily to ethnic youth and provide a media outlet for new types of popular urban music. FunX broadcasts on air in the Randstad. FunX has become highly popular amongst urban youth, both immigrant and native. In addition to daily broadcasting, the radio station has launched an interactive website and actively uses social media. An important ingredient of the station’s success is the staff, which in its mixed composition fully reflects FunX’s target group.

What now is the overall picture? Bearing in mind that our sources are mostly based on qualitative non-representative data, the picture is: urban youth, whatever their ethnic background, identifies with the city as a cosmopolitan city, yet there also exist many differences among them, including how they perceive their interests and with whom they feel solidarity. This makes it hard to consider this identification with the city as a collective identity. Ethnic background is a salient feature structuring their life experiences and also their identities. The context of the harsher political climate
clearly impacts on the youth’s identifications. Youth of immigrant origin continue to feel excluded from a Dutch identity and, compared to 30 years ago, all youth perceive the multicultural society more negatively as inherently problematic and fraught with tensions. Our sources suggest that urban youth culture is divided along ethnic and socio-economic lines. Girls’ subcultures are differentiated along ethnic lines and some of the youth of different ethnic backgrounds visit different club scenes. The only urban youth culture in which an urban identity has developed that sometimes seems to transcend ethnic lines is urban street culture, in which youth of an immigrant origin and native Dutch youth of a lower socio-economic origin mix. This street culture is primarily dominated in the Dutch cities by Moroccan and African and Surinamese young men. We caught glimpses of a more positive, creative and hybrid urban youth culture – we are thinking of radio station FunX – but our sources are too limited to draw strong conclusions from that.

**Education as a site for identity development**

While there is extensive literature on the school careers of immigrant youth the literature on processes of identity development mediated through education is scarce. There are several surveys of the images students have of immigrants and about the students’ experiences with ethnic tensions in schools. However, these studies do not inform us about the relation between interventions and developments in knowledge and attitudes. There is some explorative research on the professionalism of teachers to guide processes of inclusion and identity development in the classroom. Case studies inside schools tend to focus on problematic interactions and problematic images of each other. Studies focussing on ordinary classroom interaction in ordinary mixed schools are heavily under-represented. The literature on the curriculum is dominated by policy documents on what ought to be taught.

Policy-makers see compulsory education as an important site for the identification with others and society. Although official policies influence school culture and the curriculum, it is the practice of teaching in interaction with students which makes a contribution to the experiment of inclusiveness. A process of identity development that is open to inclusiveness presupposes the acceptance of ethnic and cultural differences, the development of the art of communication across differences, and thinking and acting in terms of meeting, of trying to understand and of working together without denying differences (Giddens 1991; Gutman & Thompson 1996; Parker 2003) Requirements for this are:

1) the possibility to meet in ethnically mixed schools;
2) a meaningful curriculum that facilitates the formation of inclusive citizenship;

and

3) qualified teachers to guide the processes of the cognitive, moral and personal identity development of all students towards the ideal of inclusiveness.
Do Dutch schools offer young people such an ideal site for learning?

In relation to 1) above, when we conducted our research in the 1980s and early 1990s it was relatively easy to find secondary schools with ethnically mixed classes, including native Dutch pupils. In those days, the population in Randstad was in the majority of native Dutch descent. Nowadays, more than half of the Amsterdam population aged 0–19 years is of immigrant descent (Herweijer 2010). There is growing ethnic segregation between schools. In primary education this coincides with the existing socio-economic segregation in living areas. In 2006/2007, nearly 40% of primary schools in Amsterdam had more than 80% of immigrant pupils. One out of four primary schools had 80% of pupils of Dutch descent. The way to school segregation is paved by parents’ right of free school choice and by market forces in education making schools focus on a specific segment of the pupil population.

In secondary education segregation is partly a different story. Like in primary education, free school choice has an influence, but the connection with the place of living is less strong. The Dutch big cities are (compared to London and Paris) relatively small. As the whole of Amsterdam is easily accessible by public transport, scooter or bicycle, schools cater to pupils in a large area. The segregation in secondary schools is partly due to the system of early (at the age of 12 years) tracking (see OECD 2010). Immigrant students are found more frequently in the lower levels or (pre)vocational track and are underrepresented in the academic track.

Native Dutch pupils in Randstad secondary education have on average 27% immigrant fellow students; for immigrant students themselves, this figure amounts to 64% (Herweijer 2010). This leads us to the conclusion that not for all urban youngsters are schools an ethnically mixed site to meet each other and have full possibilities to identify with each other. At the very top end, there are the categorical grammar schools (in Dutch: gymnasia) where native Dutch can live as if in a white enclave while, at the very bottom end, there are schools for lower vocational training of which some have hardly any indigenous Dutch pupils. In-between are schools offering both higher and lower levels of education that have ethnically mixed classrooms.

Students differ in their opinions on segregation. Researching student opinions on citizenship education, Veugelers and Schuitema (2009) interviewed 42 pupils from four secondary schools (academic track). Two of these (one all immigrant and one a mix of immigrants and native Dutch are located in Amsterdam, while the other two (native Dutch with a small immigrant student population) are in communities very close to Amsterdam. They found that all youngsters are interested in learning about youngsters of another ethnic descent. They prefer to learn through real encounters and are not that much interested in abstract lessons about cultures. One of them said: “We can learn about other youngsters in real life situations. In meeting them at school and while working in the supermarket for example”. For the youngsters attending the school with only immigrant peers incidental meetings are not enough. They very strongly express their preference for an ethnically mixed school where they are able
to associate with native Dutch youth. They feel that ethnic segregation is linked to issues of equity. The centre-left coalition government that held office between 2007 and 2010 stimulated desegregation and allowed municipalities to experiment with interventions. In several Dutch cities an official policy towards desegregation and integration developed. The initiatives incorporate the system of student application and acceptance by schools and parent initiatives aimed at developing neighbourhood schools (Bakker, Denessen, Peters and Walraven 2011). However, in the Randstad these initiatives were not very successful. Yet mixed schools are an important but not a sufficient condition for the development of a collective identity. This learning has to be organised in a meaningful curriculum.

In relation to 2) above, 30 years ago we found in mixed schools examples of intercultural education aimed at the preparation of youngsters for life in a multicultural society. Intercultural education did not become a regular part of the curriculum in all schools and in teacher education either. It has been replaced by citizenship education which has been framed in a national educational policy focused on Dutch core values, democracy and active participation in society (Onderwijsraad 2012).

Several possibilities exist for shaping citizenship education. It can be incorporated in the regular subjects or find a place in the extracurricular activities. Incorporation in the core curriculum has more status and subsequently more possible influence. Recent reports of the Inspectorate show that citizenship education is not yet developed and implemented in Dutch schools. There is an abundance of extracurricular activities such as short periods of service learning, participation of students in decision-making inside school and events to meet ‘other’ people or to serve or help poor and disadvantaged people. Among these there is a practice of student exchange between segregated schools over a short period of time. Research (Schuitema & Veugelers 2010) showed that it is a pedagogical illusion that learning about the complexities of living in diversity and learning to appreciate multicultural contacts can be realised in such short projects. The material provided to assist teachers to develop citizenship education and the existing ‘good practices’ show diverse approaches. These include lessons on abstract knowledge delivery about democracy, lessons in character education, lessons in which debating skills or social interpersonal skills are trained (Onderwijsraad 2012). Ethnical inclusiveness as a lived practice is not among the mainstream of these approaches.

In relation to 3) above, in our previous research (Leeman 1994) teachers liked teaching in mixed schools but lacked the professionalism to address identity and diversity issues. We saw a lot of avoidance of sensitive issues among fixed identity policies. In our previous research all teachers were of Dutch origin. It is very likely that the teachers in Randstad’s schools are still in the majority native Dutch as nowadays less than 5% of the Dutch teacher force is of immigrant descent (OECD 2010).

With the start of the new millennium we see a national political climate of problematising the multicultural society and of reinforced dichotomous thinking on religious
and ethnic differences. This is the context for students and teachers living with diversity and commonality in ethnically diverse classes. There are a few studies (Radstake 2009; Stichting Voorbeeld 2005; Veugelers, Derriks and de Kat 2010) available on the opinions of teachers about teaching in an ethnically mixed class. Since September 11 there has been a focus in the national media on problematic interethnic relations in schools and on separatist tendencies among Muslim youth. Stichting Voorbeeld (2005) conducted a quick scan of the intercultural relations at schools for general secondary and intermediate vocational education in Amsterdam. The interviewed teachers of Amsterdam secondary schools sketched a far less problematic picture of the actual intercultural relations in their schools and classrooms than the media. These findings correspond with research (Roede et al. 2008) conducted in a representative group of schools in the Netherlands into the importance of ethnicity and culture in the few escalated conflicts inside schools. It was found that ethnicity and culture were only important in the escalation of a conflict but not at the start of it. Research among students of ethnically mixed schools offers a mixed picture of their companionship inside schools (Verkuyten en Thijs 2002; Bakker et al. 2007). Ethnically segregated groups of friends exist alongside mixed groups. According to a national study, 85% of immigrant youth claims to have a close native Dutch friends against 44% of the native Dutch who state they have close friends of immigrant origin (Vieveen et al. 2009:20). Radicalising students present teachers with questions about the best approach to “keep communication open” (van Eck 2008) and youngsters who identify with an urban street culture prevent teachers in the lowest track of vocational education from serious teaching (Paulle 2005).

Teachers are aware that it is necessary to prepare pupils to live in an ethnically diverse society. There is a broad consensus that education for diversity is necessary for social cohesion, but there is a lot of misunderstanding and debate regarding the content of it. Education for diversity requires a relationship of trust between pupils and between teacher and pupils. In mixed classes with a teacher from the dominant group, it cannot be automatically assumed that mutual trust exists between the teacher and all pupils (Hermans 2004; Ogbu 1992). It is indeed the experience of Amsterdam secondary school teachers that this is not always the case (Stichting Voorbeeld 2005).

Immigration and the multicultural society are nowadays considered as very sensitive issues. This makes an explicit discussion in class difficult. There are teachers who avoid the subject. Teachers mention insufficient professionalism and a lack of societal support (Stichting Voorbeeld 2005; Leeman 2006). “How to balance diversity and commonality” and “how to address separatism” – these are new questions for teachers. Major incidents like 9/11 and the murder of Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam have had an impact on teaching. These incidents have a great emotional load and can give rise to tensions between students of different descent and between students and teachers. According to the study of Veugelers and Schuitema (2010), these are new requirements for teachers.
The recent study by Radstake (2009) offers new empirical evidence about the objectives and actual behaviour of teachers guiding discussions on diversity issues in their classes. The results show that the five Amsterdam teachers researched are very much aware of the possible constraints on guiding discussions about such topics in ethnically diverse classrooms. They demonstrate a variety of opinions and perspectives on ethnic diversity. Four of them did not have any experience with discussions on diversity issues and only decided to guide such a discussion after the encouragement and help offered by the researchers. They preferred to avoid this kind of issue in the classroom out of a fear of emotional reactions and trouble. The only teacher who had experience with guiding discussions on these topics was a teacher with a Surinamese background. She assumed that her origins automatically gave her an insight into a broader range of perspectives on ethnic diversity in society and she felt that her origins had a positive influence on her relationship with pupils of immigrant origin.

In sum, the mixed schools of the 1980s turned into ethnically segregated schools where in the lower tracks of vocational education immigrant youngsters meet immigrants’ peers. There are mixed schools where urban youth of different descent can meet each other, but in comparison to 30 years ago these schools are more of an exception. The turn in the political climate toward a plural society and the turn from intercultural education to citizenship education present teachers with fewer incentives to focus on ethnic inclusiveness. Democracy and ethnic inclusiveness as a lived practice are not among the mainstream of citizenship activities in schools. Teachers mention here insufficient professionalism and a lack of societal support.

The majority of the teachers still love to teach in the Randstad and subscribe to the ideology of the former Amsterdam Mayor Cohen “to keep things together” and react in a distanced way towards the current political hype in which the multicultural society and the immigrant youth are disqualified as problems. However, street culture and radicalising youngsters pose challenges for which they lack professionalism.

Conclusion and discussion

What does coming of age look like in the Dutch ethnically mixed urban environment? We compared the 1980s with the present. There is now a more negative political climate regarding ethnic diversity and a school context that leaves less space for inclusive learning. Immigrant youth in the 1980s were newcomers who were full of hope to build a future for themselves in the Netherlands. The current youth of immigrant origin know their way in Dutch society, are better integrated than their peers of the 1980s, but feel alienated from Dutch society. Native Dutch youth still feel cultural gaps between themselves and immigrant youth.

The identity of Amsterdammer or Rotterdamer has a cosmopolitan flavour to it that is attractive to all urban youth, including indigenous Dutch youngsters. Native Dutch can integrate that urban identity with a national Dutch identity. Youth with an immigrant origin feel excluded from Dutch identity. For them an urban identity next
to, for those who adhere to Islam, a Muslim identity offers a way out from conflicting identity claims. Their joint identification with the big city does not imply that young people with different ethnic backgrounds identify with each other. If we look at the lived identities in the big city, our sources suggest that urban youth culture is divided along ethnic and socio-economic lines. Girls with different ethnic backgrounds find talking about cultural differences inappropriate, they are not united around shared beauty ideals and part of the youth of a different ethnic background visits different club scenes. Ethnicity is still a salient feature structuring their life experiences and identities. The only urban youth culture that occasionally seems to generate an identity that transcends ethnic lines is urban street culture in which youth of an immigrant origin and native Dutch youth of a lower socio-economic origin mix. This street culture is, however, far from the ideal of collective identity that we expected to find or resembling the creative multiculturalism that Kasinitz et al. (2008) observed in New York. There is a shared consciousness based on shared underclass experiences, and group loyalty, but the experiences are negative and the consciousness is in opposition to Dutch society. Rather than an ideal to pursue this, in its violence and sexism street culture is more reminiscent of the oppositional culture that Portes and Zhou (2003) found among American native black and Latino youth, and among immigrant youth of colour, and in an earlier decade Willis (1977) found among white British working-class boys. We suspect there may exist a creative and hybrid youth culture in the cities in the Randstad. The existence of the FunX radio station in Amsterdam and the mixed youth dance and theatre companies bear witness to that, as do the smooth mixed school cultures that do exist next to the (over-exposed) problem schools, but our sources do not allow us to draw firm conclusions on this.

We asked ourselves how schools have developed as sites for inclusive identity development. In the Randstad, segregation in primary and secondary education has increased over the years. The possibilities for everyday encounters inside schools between immigrant and native Dutch youth have diminished. Meanwhile, teachers’ professionalism in addressing identity and diversity is an issue. They do not feel well-prepared to address ethnic and racial tensions, to realise a meaningful curriculum for all and to guide processes of cognitive, moral and personal identity development towards the ideal of inclusiveness. Some teachers stay away from teaching about identities and issues of inclusion and exclusion. They limit themselves to an instrumental perspective on education. Others want to place an inclusive identity development on the curriculum agenda. In comparison to 30 years ago this is less easy. National education politics tend to emphasise the basics and a concept of citizenship education with a focus on assimilation has replaced the multicultural ideology of intercultural education. Problematic situations inside schools have been reported. In some ‘black’ schools the situation is, according to some research, dramatic with the street culture invading the school preventing the students from learning and the teachers from teaching (Paulle 2005). Other research paints a different picture. Teachers in mixed
urban schools are positive about the general school climate and relations among the students. But, again, research is scarce. It may well be that our picture of the way diversity is played out in Dutch schools is therefore distorted. The same counts for our portrait of urban youth. The youth studies tend to focus on problem youth and studies on ordinary classroom interaction in ordinary ethnically mixed schools are heavily under-represented.

Our sources are mostly based on qualitative non-representative data. Research into the identity development of Dutch youth has been rare and studies on youth of immigrant descent tend to focus on those who are perceived as problem groups. How ordinary young people of both native Dutch and immigrant origin identify is therefore an issue that still needs to be researched. Likewise, education as a site for inclusive identity development is seriously under-researched as educational research tends to focus on measuring school results and the comparison of educational success among youngsters of different descent. This points to new and important subjects for the Dutch research agenda and, more generally, the research agenda of those interested in how education can enhance a sense of collective identity among youth of different origins in a multicultural society.

Notes
1 COB Kwartaalbericht 2010/1 (SCP).
2 Integratienota Integratie, binding en burgerschap. Ministry of Home Affairs, 16 June 2011, http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/notas/2011/06/16/integratienota.html (downloaded 6 June 2012). For a more extensive reconstruction of the retreat of multiculturalism in the Netherlands, see Prins and Saharso 2010.
3 We included in this section both studies that directly address identity development and studies on urban youth cultures assuming that how they spend their leisure time tells us about who they are.
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