



# Teaching diversity in citizenship education: Context-related teacher understandings and practices

Işıl Sincer<sup>a,\*</sup>, Sabine Severiens<sup>a</sup>, Monique Volman<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Psychology, Education and Child Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, P.O. Box 1738, 3000 DR, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> Research Institute of Child Development and Education, University of Amsterdam, P.O. Box 15780, 1001 NG, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Teachers' diversity-related practices are largely influenced by the school context.
- Teachers' diversity-related understandings are less strongly dependent on the school context.
- Teachers' understandings and practices are related to their perceptions of the students.
- Teachers rarely addressed deep-rooted issues such as inequality and power relations.
- Implications for teachers and schools are discussed.

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## ABSTRACT

Many secondary schools address diversity as an aspect of citizenship education. This paper examines how secondary teachers' understandings and practices concerning teaching about diversity are related to school contextual factors, such as student composition and educational track. Semi-structured interviews with 17 teachers at three schools revealed that teachers' understandings and practices regarding diversity are related to their perceptions of the needs and capabilities of their student population. However, teachers rarely addressed diversity in terms of deep-rooted issues, such as inequality and power relations. The paper concludes with implications for teachers and schools and provides suggestions for future research.

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## 1. Introduction

As in many European countries, the increased diversity in Dutch society has posed challenges regarding civic engagement and social cohesion (Dutch Education Council, 2003; Geijsel, Ledoux, Reumerman, & Ten Dam, 2012). Banting and Kymlicka (2013) observed that since the beginning of this century, The Netherlands has been characterized by a decline of multiculturalism policies in combination with a relatively strong emphasis on civic integration. Similarly, Vasta (2007) noted a move towards assimilation in the Netherlands, combined with a rhetoric of 'migrant responsibility'.

Within this context, the Dutch government introduced a law in 2006 that obliges schools to devote part of the curriculum to the promotion of citizenship skills. This call upon schools is aimed at social integration and preparing adolescents for active participation in and contribution to society (Dutch Ministry of Education and Science, 2005). Similar laws have been introduced in other European countries (Eurydice, 2005, 2012).

One of the aspects of Dutch schools' statutory citizenship education (CE) task is teaching students to deal with diversity. While CE is prescribed by law and general goals for schools are provided, Dutch schools are afforded the freedom concerning the content and implementation of CE and the attention given to diversity. Given this freedom, and the observation of declining support for multiculturalism in the Netherlands on the one hand and the need for students to learn to navigate an increasingly culturally diverse world on the other, a question is how schools actually approach teaching their students to deal with diversity as part of CE.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [sincer@essb.eur.nl](mailto:sincer@essb.eur.nl) (I. Sincer), [severiens@essb.eur.nl](mailto:severiens@essb.eur.nl) (S. Severiens), [M.L.L.Volman@uva.nl](mailto:M.L.L.Volman@uva.nl) (M. Volman).

Literature suggests that, in answering this question, school contextual features should be taken into account, as teachers' classroom practices and attitudes towards their students are shaped by and embedded in that context (e.g., Stevens, 2007; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). Considering Dutch schools' autonomy, various approaches of teaching citizenship and diversity in particular can be expected depending on the school context. Teachers are influential actors in schools, as they put the formal curriculum and the pedagogical vision of the school into practice (Leenders & Veugelers, 2006). Therefore this study focuses on teachers; it explores how school context, in particular student composition, is intertwined with secondary teachers' CE understandings and practices related to diversity.

## 2. Review of literature

Various conceptions of citizenship and of CE can be found in the literature (e.g., Haste, 2004; Osler, 2011). In light of the increasing diversity in many countries worldwide, this paper is based on the viewpoint that citizenship concerns finding a balance between unity and diversity within nation-states (Banks, 2004). This balance entails the opportunity to feel connected to one's own cultural background while simultaneously having a sense of affiliation with the nation-state. To promote a sense of inclusion and affiliation and to support the development of participatory citizens, the intended overarching civic culture needs to be (re)constructed with the contribution of all groups in society. This means that voices and experiences of people with diverse backgrounds should be reflected in the values of the nation-state (Banks, 2004, 2008).

Diversity on national levels may also offer young people the opportunity to develop sensitivity to global issues. Hayes and Saul's (2012) interpretation of Banks' (2004) view on global identification is that "the global seems to be infused into the national identification through immigration and immigrants bringing their different national/cultural affiliations and identifications with them into their new national home" (p. 208). Following this interpretation, diversity within the nation-state could potentially also serve as a catalyst for developing understanding of globalization and its associated issues, such as inequality and oppression by political and economic superpowers.

To address such issues, citizenship education should be transformative (Banks, 2017). Transformative CE aims for the development of citizens who critically reflect on societal issues. An additional aim is shaping citizens who are engaged in action to provoke change and achieve values that may also cross national borders, such as social justice and equity. In sum, CE should aim at broadening students' world views, promoting their critical thinking, and contributing to their capacity to navigate an increasingly culturally diverse world.

However, research has shown that different types of CE are offered to different groups of students. Several studies showed that educational track or students' socio-economic background affected the scale of citizenship approaches (local, national, European, and global scale) (e.g. Osler, 2011). Ho (2012) demonstrated that Singapore explicitly differentiates the citizenship curriculum depending on the educational level. That is, students in the higher tracks have access to cosmopolitan CE and students in the lower tracks are allocated citizenship roles on a more national and local level. These findings were echoed in studies focusing on students' socio-economic background. Wood (2014) found that lower socio-economic school communities adopted local/community-focused citizenship orientations and participation. In contrast, both students and teachers from higher socio-economic urban schools put more emphasis on global issues. Goren and Yemini (2017) reported comparable findings, demonstrating that teachers' perceptions of

the relevance and definition of global citizenship education (GCE) are influenced by students' socio-economic background. Ten Dam and Volman (2003, 2007) found that different CE goals were aimed for based on the students' educational track: *surviving* in society for students in pre-vocational education vs. *critical thinking* and *contributing to society* in the higher tracks.

In short, research has shown that CE approaches are often context-related and linked to students' socio-economic backgrounds and educational tracks. In the current study, the aim is to extend this line of research by, firstly, focusing on the ethnic-cultural student composition in interaction with contextual school factors (degree of urbanization and educational track) and, secondly, by focusing more specifically on the teaching of diversity. The research suggests that teachers' perceptions of their students may shape what kind of diversity-related CE content they offer. Whereas most previous studies examined separate contextual and compositional characteristics, our study aims to add to the literature by examining whether several contextual and student background characteristics are at play simultaneously and interactively. Moreover, although the influence of the school context has been studied widely in relation to general CE approaches, our study focuses specifically on the school contextual embeddedness of diversity as part of CE. Our research question is: what are teachers' context-related understandings and practices on dealing with diversity as part of CE? To answer this question, the following sub-questions are formulated:

- What are teachers' general CE understandings and practices?
- What are teachers' perceptions of their students in the area of citizenship and diversity?
- What kind of diversity-related activities are offered?

## 3. Educational context of the study

The Netherlands has a tracked educational system in which three main types of tracks can be distinguished: pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO), senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). Additionally, pre-vocational education (VMBO) consists of four sectors that students can choose for: a) technology b) health and personal care and welfare, c) economics and d) agriculture. Four learning tracks are offered within each of these sectors: the basic vocational track, the advanced vocational track, the combined track and the theoretical track. Students' placement within the tracks is predominantly based on a primary school final examination score and the school's recommendation in the final year of primary education (Driessen, 2006).

Students with a migrant background have been (and are still) lagging behind their native Dutch peers in secondary education, as reflected in the overrepresentation of students with a migrant background in the vocational tracks (Statistics Netherlands, 2016). However, the gap has become somewhat smaller in the past years and the average educational level of young people with a migrant background has slightly improved (Huijnk & Andriessen, 2016). Differences in educational position are further mainly related to socioeconomic factors.

Concerning teachers, it should be mentioned that the share of teaching staff with an ethnic minority background in secondary education is remarkably low (Driessen, 2015; Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2015). Approximately 5% of the education staff in secondary education consists of employees with a non-Western migrant background, part of which are not teachers. This implies that there is a high level of incongruence between teachers' and students' ethnic-cultural background. Considering

the substantial segregation in Dutch schools (Sykes & Kuypers, 2013), this incongruence may especially hold in urban areas with high concentrations of students with a migrant background. Furthermore, the Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) report published by the European Commission (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017) and Severiens, Wolff and Van Herpen's study (2013) suggest that Dutch teachers are only prepared for diversity in teacher education in a limited way. That is, there are no structural, integral and nationwide policy goals for diversity-related teacher education.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Respondents

Semi-structured interviews were held with 17 teachers from three state-funded Dutch high schools. Given our research goal, we aimed at maximizing differences between schools regarding their contextual characteristics. Therefore three schools were approached that varied by their ethnic-cultural and socio-economic composition, educational track, and regional context.

School A is located in a rural area, comprising predominantly native Dutch students and offering vocational education (VMBO). School B is based in a large city, comprising a culturally diverse student population and providing education in all tracks (from VMBO to VWO). Lastly, school C is located in a large city, encompassing a relatively mixed student population (in comparison to school A, but less mixed in comparison to school B). This school provides senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO).

The schools were asked to select five or six teachers who were willing to participate in our study. The vast majority of the respondents in all three schools had a native Dutch ethnic background. Table 1 provides an overview of other teacher characteristics.

### 4.2. Data collection

Two interviewers, one of whom was the first author, conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers of civic education and other ninth-grade teachers (of students aged 14–15). This grade was chosen because at this age, youngsters explore their identity and gradually start thinking about societal issues (Berk, 2014). The interviewers spent three to four days at each school, spread out over a period of three weeks. In the first week, a one-day scan was

carried out to get a first impression of the school and to get to know the environment. During this scan, interviews were held with two or three teachers. In the third week, some teachers were interviewed for a second time and a few new teachers were included for a first interview. Interviews were held with individual teachers. Depending on teachers' schedules, in some cases two teachers were interviewed at the same time. We allowed teachers to express themselves freely and articulate anything about their understandings or practices associated with CE. The topics addressed during the interviews that were analyzed are listed below:

#### Research question 1:

- Teachers' general CE approaches/understandings
- Teachers' educational goals
- Aims and practices of homeroom teachers regarding social skills

#### Research question 2:

- Differences between students (cognitive, language-related, ethnic-cultural, socioeconomic, residential area, gender-related, and other differences)
- The challenges and opportunities that a certain student population presents in teaching in general or in relation to citizenship education
- Students' current citizenship/social competences

#### Research question 3:

- Deploying the student population as a tool for citizenship education
- Diversity-related citizenship education within the curriculum, e.g., programs, projects
- Discussing controversial/socially sensitive issues in the classroom

### 4.3. Analysis

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by student assistants. To do justice to the complexity of possible interacting dimensions, we chose to apply an open-ended approach. However, the citizenship conceptualizations mentioned in the literature review were used as sensitizing concepts, which were supplemented and refined based on our inductive approach.

The analysis started with reading over transcripts globally and

**Table 1**  
Teacher characteristics.

| School | Teacher | Sex    | Teaching subject                         | Homeroom teacher | Years of teaching in the school |
|--------|---------|--------|--|------------------|---------------------------------|
| A      | A1      | Male   | Social Studies, Economy, History         | Yes              | 2.5                             |
| A      | A2      | Female | Health Care & Social Work                | Yes              | 10.5                            |
| A      | A3      | Male   | History, Geography and Social studies    | Yes              | 25                              |
| A      | A4      | Male   | Care, Mathematics, Technics              | Yes              | 10                              |
| A      | A5      | Male   | Social studies                           | No               | 16.5                            |
| B      | B1      | Male   | Chemistry                                | Yes              | 8                               |
| B      | B2      | Female | French                                   | Yes              | 13                              |
| B      | B3      | Male   | Social Studies                           | Yes              | 9                               |
| B      | B4      | Female | Social Studies                           | Yes              | 3.5                             |
| B      | B5      | Female | Mathematics                              | No               | 5.5                             |
| B      | B6      | Male   | Mathematics and Biology                  | Yes              | 12                              |
| B      | B7      | Female | German                                   | Yes              | 8                               |
| C      | C1      | Female | Social Studies                           | Yes              | 14.5                            |
| C      | C2      | Male   | Social Studies                           | No               | 18                              |
| C      | C3      | Male   | Theory of Knowledge, Philosophy, History | No               | 10                              |
| C      | C4      | Male   | Artistic and cultural education          | Yes              | 8.5                             |
| C      | C5      | Male   | German                                   | Yes              | 17.5                            |

then reading them line by line. The analysis proceeded with a two-stage process of coding (Esterberg, 2002); during the phase of open coding we used the sensitizing concepts to look for and identify key themes and categories that emerged from the data. After reading and coding a significant number of transcripts, patterns appeared as the themes and categories recurred in various transcripts. In the second phase, focused coding took place. This means a more detailed analysis was conducted of the key themes in which the smaller text segments were grouped into larger segments. The qualitative data software ATLAS.ti 7 was used to code the data and facilitate the data analysis. The coding and selection of quotes was carried out by the first author. The second and third authors provided feedback on the coding and interpretation of the selected quotes.

## 5. Findings

Below, for each school we describe a) teachers' general CE understandings and practices, b) teachers' perceptions of their students' characteristics, capabilities, and needs in the area of citizenship and diversity and c) what kind of diversity-related activities are offered. Each school portrait commences with a description of the school local context and the structural and compositional school characteristics.

### 5.1. School A

School A is located in a town in a small municipality in the southern part of the Netherlands. The town has around 700 predominantly native Dutch inhabitants and the area is characterized by a relatively great dependence on the agricultural sector. A vast majority of School A students have an ethnically Dutch background. Most students do not reside in the small town where the school is located, but are inhabitants of the municipality (12,000 inhabitants). A large fraction of the students' parents work in agriculture or the vocational sector. The school comprises approximately 350 students and offers pre-vocational education for senior stage students (grades 9 and 10). The students are placed in either the basic vocational track, advanced vocational track, or a merged theoretical/combined track. Lessons take place in classrooms and 'open learning centers' where real-life workplaces are simulated (e.g., a nursing home). The school is Catholic but students with any religious belief are welcomed. Lastly, it is worth noting that at the time of the interviews, an asylum seekers center had recently opened close to the town, housing approximately 800 refugees.

#### 5.1.1. Teachers' general CE understandings and practices

Teachers mainly approached CE from two perspectives, which we labelled as a vocational focus and a social focus. Concerning the first perspective, School A teachers indicated being highly engaged with preparing their students for their further education, the labor market, and adulthood. This suggests that teachers had a broad perception of CE. The emphasis appeared to be on the acquisition of practical and career skills and fostering self-reliance. The homeroom teachers regularly mentioned that they are charged with career guidance, in which they let students practice skills needed during internships and in their future jobs. For example, receiving guests (primarily for students in the Health Care and Social Work sector), preparing for a job interview, and having an appropriate job attitude.

The second perspective is reflected in teachers' many references to social goals and perspectives, whereas political content in CE was mentioned sporadically. Two main aspects of the social domain emerged when teachers were asked how they wished their

students to be equipped when leaving school. Firstly, homeroom teachers emphasized intrapersonal skills, such as independence, emotion regulation, knowing one's own competences, and reflecting on one's own functioning. Additionally, interpersonal skills were brought up by almost all teachers, e.g., collaboration skills, presentation skills, taking responsibility, and communication skills. Teachers also referred to skills leading to favorable classroom climate and peer relations, such as good manners and adhering to teacher rules. Goals and perspectives on a more political and societal level were relatively more often expressed by social studies teachers. Among these goals were developing well-informed opinions on societal issues from a multidimensional perspective and critical thinking in relation to the world one is living in. One of the teachers stated attaching importance to political topics such as knowledge of the state system and the working of democracy.

#### 5.1.2. Teachers' perceptions of their students in the area of citizenship and diversity

Regarding teachers' perceptions of their students, School A teachers predominantly mentioned students' local focus, their assumed career path, and students' attitudes towards diversity. Moreover, teachers appeared to adopt an intersectional perspective when talking about their perceptions. Firstly, while School A teachers aimed for CE on a variety of scales (from local to international), the residential context appears to present a challenge for achieving this goal. The low population density and agricultural characteristics of the area seemed to result in a quite local focus of students. This local focus related to students' future career perspectives and their current and future positioning in society. Some teachers indicated that many of the male students (who are more likely than girls to choose the technical education sector) choose a technical/agricultural career. This career path suggests that many students stay in the area. Female students tend to choose the Health Care and Social Work sector more often. Although it was not mentioned explicitly, teachers' responses implied that female students remained in the local area as well.

In relation to students dealing with ethnic/cultural diversity, many of the teachers, especially those teaching social studies, referred to the homogeneous ethnic make-up of the student population and region. Consequently, this resulted in low levels of familiarity with diversity. Teacher A5's response illustrates how gender, educational track and sector intersect with respect to attitudes towards diversity:

But what stands out most, I think, is the ethnic-cultural part, whereby... open-mindedness, tolerance towards people with a different background is very limited. And that varies; in a technology class it's less nuanced than in a health and personal care and welfare class. And I think, in any case, it has to do with differences between boys and girls. Boys are a little less nuanced than girls in that respect. You also see that as the [educational] level increases, so to say, in a theoretical combined group ethnic groups are discussed in more nuanced ways and in a basic vocational or advanced vocational group it is less nuanced.

#### 5.1.3. CE activities in the area of diversity

According to the teachers, students experience ethnic/cultural and regional diversity mainly through three school-initiated CE activities: 1) social studies, 2) class outings to Dutch cities and European trips and 3) discussing the news in the classroom. Below, these three types of activities are discussed and related to student background factors.

Teachers stated that during social studies classes, diversity-related topics such as the Dutch multicultural society are

addressed. The teachers varied in the importance they attached to familiarity with ethnic/cultural and regional diversity, but they also varied in the type of diversity-related knowledge and skills they wished their students to acquire. Teacher A1 held multiple views regarding diversity, which tied in with his views on the characteristics and needs of his students. On one hand, he approached diversity mainly in terms of mitigating the local focus of the students, taking into consideration their assumed future education and residence in the local area. On the other hand, students' regional focus was at the same time a reason for this teacher not to concentrate excessively on teaching about ethnic/cultural diversity. This is in line with a statement of another teacher (A2), demonstrating teachers' local focus and the extent to which attention is paid to urban life: "They visit the city occasionally. But to say that we are engaged with it; no, not me, at least."

Teacher A3 put more emphasis on direct exposure to the noticeable elements of multicultural society, which is somewhat compatible with an exoticizing approach. He felt that pupils should learn about multicultural society by:

Every now and then showing them things; driving them to [nearby city] to a more ethnically diverse school in senior secondary vocational education. By talking about soccer players that are not 100% Dutch. . . . What I always mockingly present is Dutch salad, Belgian fries, and Middle Eastern kebab, from Egypt or other countries.

In addition to his consideration of multicultural society, this teacher also appeared considerate of the socio-economic and local reality of his students. In fact, the teacher utilized the prominence of local agriculture to elevate his students' sense of pride and self-esteem. The teacher stated that even in this school the term "silly farmers" occasionally occurs, and he mentioned that he tries to negate this image by emphasizing the idea of the Dutch agricultural sector as a profitable sector with high standards of animal welfare.

Lastly, we asked teacher A5 about the relevance of open-mindedness towards diversity given the ethnically homogenous environment of his students:

And I believe it is too easy to say: they won't progress any further than this, so they do not need to be tolerant. . . . Because here also... an asylum seekers center is established. You could do two things: you could either condemn it. . . . That is the easy one and you hear that a lot, but I think that we should counterpose that: why do people come here? And the fact that you are from another country, does that make you less of a human or could you also just participate and be part of society? . . . They [asylum seekers] could also end up in your village, so you are going to give them a wide berth?

Teacher A5 explained that one of the ways in which he discusses diversity-related topics is by linking current migration to similar migration patterns in Dutch history.

As mentioned above, European trips and class outings are the second type of activity offered in the area of diversity. CE aims on a global scale are evident through charity events organized every now and then for the benefit of developing countries worldwide. However, School A students get the opportunity to familiarize themselves with cultural and regional diversity more directly by participating in European exchange trips, albeit occasionally. Teachers additionally indicated organizing local outings, such as trips to a college in the neighboring city or more distant urban areas for the purpose of promoting familiarity with diversity. These local trips are again mostly approached from a future education

perspective as one of the teachers explained that encountering diversity is aimed at "subsiding the shock" when students go to senior secondary vocational education. Hence, the local, rural, and non-diverse context of the students invokes a considerate and 'protective' attitude in some teachers.

Finally, School A teachers stated that they discuss controversial issues related to the Dutch multicultural society and other worldwide news events with students during classes. One of the teachers (A2) explained that, even though students are often not that involved in societal issues, she addresses these issues by asking students how they would act in certain situations. Other teachers pointed out the occasionally stereotypical utterances of students when discussing societal issues. These usually seemed to occur while discussing topics related to diversity/multicultural society. Furthermore, at the time of the opening of the asylum seekers center, the school organized an informational meeting to discuss its impact. Similar to teacher A3, teacher A1 expressed that stereotypical statements were noticeable during these discussions. However, the teacher also stated that his students are quite flexible and are able to abandon these viewpoints as time passes and as they become more informed on the subject.

## 5.2. School B

School B is based in a large and diverse city. More specifically, the school is located in a district with a higher share of low-educated and low-income households compared to the city average. School B has approximately 1600 students divided into six so-called 'section schools'. At School B, students are predominantly from families with a Surinamese, Antillean, Ghanaian (or other African) background. The remaining share consists mainly of students from Dutch, Turkish, and Moroccan origin. According to the teachers, approximately 70% of their students reside in the district and the other 30% come from areas adjacent to the city. These latter ones are areas with high(er)-income households. Some of School B's structural features are its education founded on the middle school concept and the opening and closing of each class in a circular seating arrangement. Another focal point of School B is the broad curriculum, which offers sports, music, and other creative and cultural subjects. The school includes all educational tracks, distributed over the six section schools. Based on the middle school principle, students are placed in educationally heterogeneous classrooms in the first two years of secondary education (grades 7 and 8), that is, all education tracks are mixed for most school subjects. Although all education levels are offered, students from the pre-vocational track are overrepresented (around 70%) within the school.

### 5.2.1. Teachers' general CE understandings and practices

Like School A teachers, School B teachers tended to focus mostly on the social domain rather than on the political domain in CE. Secondly, the teachers regularly referred to the school's urban environment when talking about CE. On a national, local, or community level the social domain mainly involves participation in charity-affiliated events. Furthermore, the teachers indicated that they attach importance to the development of certain values, virtues, and character qualities that are beneficial for students' daily interactions with others. These goals include the enhancement of good manners, listening to others and showing respect. Teachers also emphasized the importance of forming and stating one's own opinion freely and critically, and displaying positive attitudes towards differences. Additionally, many teachers referred to the circular seating arrangement in classes, which supposedly stimulates direct interaction among different students, whereby teachers



draw a parallel with diversity in society. Teachers also indicated that the seating arrangement promotes the development of cooperation skills, and values such as equality and openness towards others. Moreover, School B teachers frequently alluded to the diverse, urban environment in which their students are growing up. This diversity and urban perspective is reflected in the CE understandings of some of the teachers. Teacher B5 stated the following when asked what she would like her students to gain from school:

I believe they should have learned that there are other solutions than the street solutions they often know; to conflicts, to difficult situations, also to situations that actually are not conflicts. To issues they are not in agreement with or of which they feel there is injustice. I feel it is very important that we [teach] children a way... that we let them practice with situations in which they find their own way, but also let them learn what is effective, that is what I would really want.

### 5.2.2. Teachers' perceptions of their students in the area of citizenship and diversity

In the evaluation of their students' citizenship and diversity-related functioning, School B teachers underlined their students' local focus within urbanity, family backgrounds, and social capabilities. In relation to the first focus, a few teachers talked about the local orientation of the students residing in the southeast part of the city (approximately 70%), within the context of a highly urbanized area. Teacher B3's response illustrates this local orientation:

I think the aspect... national and international level [of citizenship], is less accessible for the majority [of students] at our school. Because they indeed, as I said, they know their world [as]

Interviewer: they are [inhabitants of the city]?

Teacher: No, they are inhabitants of South-East. [name of district]-people. That is really a difference. And the ones [students] coming from outside South-East are a bit more aware of that.

In line with the above, teacher B3 additionally indicated that his students experience citizenship more on a school-level:

I think you should be aware of the fact that the atmosphere at school is to a large extent very positive. That is due to a form of citizenship, but citizenship especially in a small environment. Outside that environment, to them it is actually, because for a large part... it is not always that fun. To them, I think, this, the school is their safe environment and perhaps therefore they [act] more consciously to keep a nice atmosphere.

Regarding the second focus, teachers regularly referred to students' home resources when discussing preparing students for society. In these cases, teachers generally assumed a compensating role. The following quote by teacher B4 serves as an example:

What you just said [referring to teacher B3's response] that as a teacher, you are also partly an educator. Well, in this environment where the school is located... it is even more so the case. You see, we are teachers first and foremost, but many of the students who enroll in this school just have a more difficult home situation and many single-parent families, for whom you are actually a supportive figure.

Lastly, teachers referred to students' (diversity-related) social capabilities. They explained that students from different backgrounds interact well with each other. Even when students do not mix outside of class, they do seem to appreciate and learn from the in-school diversity. Moreover, as stated earlier, School B puts much emphasis on the development of students' social skills in a more broad sense. Teacher B6 indicated that their students' social skills makes them stand out:

Look... the feedback we receive, also from these children, when they go to senior secondary vocational education, higher vocational education or university - because there are these feedback moments -... What we always hear is: School B children stand out. We can immediately pick them out. Because they can get socially along with anyone, dare to stand in front of a classroom, give a presentation, express their opinion, with good arguments.

### 5.2.3. CE activities in the area of diversity

Teachers in School B mainly described two types of diversity-related CE activities: discussing the news and opportunities to deploy the diverse student population. It simultaneously seemed that preparing students for a diverse society is not a conscious focus within CE, as some teachers remarked that the diverse society is already reflected in the student composition. Instead, some teachers focus more on "eradicating students' blinkers" and trying to show that "this is not the whole world. And that this is not all of the Netherlands, and that the Netherlands is more than, the borders of the subway."

Additionally, School B teachers indicated that controversial issues are discussed during social studies classes, but also to some extent during Dutch classes where the news is addressed to develop students' vocabulary (*Nieuwsbegrip*) (Centre for Educational Services, 2011). One of the teachers (B4) mentioned that every now and then conflicting perspectives emerge. She stated that it is important to point out the issues in those cases and to demonstrate multiple perspectives. The teacher also showed awareness of her intermittent normativity in teaching:

Just by naming that this is a difficult topic and why one can differ in opinion and make both sides heard. Sometimes that is a bit more difficult ... but then... I try to just at least show both sides, and be unprejudiced, but with my view on reality. Yes, you try to do that unprejudiced but sometimes you can't help but influence it.

Teacher B3 added that he believes that some topics, such as sexual preferences, are easier to discuss with these students than students in, for example, a strict Protestant Christian school.

When it comes to the deployment of the diversity of the student population, several teachers seemed to hold multiple perspectives. On one hand, teachers thought that the obviousness of their diverse population makes it unnecessary to actively act upon it or utilize it. Yet, they also recognized that this diversity can facilitate teaching practices surrounding citizenship and diversity-related topics. One of the social studies teachers (B3) stated that he uses his students' background characteristics incidentally for teaching purposes:

I have never avoided anything. I am also not always going to name it, every time like: yes, "you as a Surinamese", or "you as a Ghanaian". I get a bit tired of that. Then I'd rather view someone as a person and not just always directly look at where someone is from. But it is convenient, when you are discussing different religions, to have some randomness every now and then, that's

nice, [like asking] different people ...“yes, you tell us something.”

Teacher B5 explained how, in her view, the school is somewhat avoidant in addressing their student population:

The multiculturalism, it's actually, we don't address it, but it is evidently, it is like that. And you learn by doing that people have different views on all kinds of things and one would say: you could deploy it [diversity] much more. But we don't do it. Perhaps also a little because it is rather, before you know it, you'll end up having a discussion that you don't want. It also is a bit of avoidance behavior what we are showing, I think.

### 5.3. School C

School C is a bilingual (English and Dutch) school for senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO) in a large and diverse city. Both educational tracks are almost equally represented within the school. In this school, English is the main language of instruction for approximately 70% of the classes. The student population of School C can be considered ethnically diverse or mixed since 30–35% of the students have a migrant background. Also in comparison with School A, the make-up of the student body is relatively diverse. The diversity of the city is not fully reflected within the school: students from School C are mainly from high-income families. Accordingly, the school charges a relatively high school fee to cover some of the (bilingual) education costs. For efficiency reasons, in the 10th grade, students from another location (called ‘regular department’, where teaching is fully in Dutch) affiliated with the bilingual school, are transferred to School C and distributed among the classes. The students of the regular department mainly have a migrant background, which alters the make-up of the student body of School C.

#### 5.3.1. Teachers' general CE understandings and practices

In School C two main themes emerged in teachers' statements regarding CE: world citizenship and, similar to Schools A and B, a focus on the social domain of citizenship. The statements of some teachers suggest that, overall, School C is internationally oriented. With respect to CE, one teacher (C4) explained how the aim to create world citizens is reflected in school:

And I also think, the multiple languages, English is also a thing which... yes, we are more engaged with making them [students] world citizens actually. World citizenship and Chinese, Spanish, and English, and it evidently also encompasses a lot of culture ... Finally, in the senior classes it is supposed to all merge in the social traineeship obviously ... Yes, I think this school is highly engaged with making them [students] world citizens.

However, none of the teachers explained exactly what constitutes ‘world citizenship’ in their view. On a national and community level, students participate in activities for non-profit organizations and charities as part of the school's ‘Community and Service’ program.

Teachers' responses additionally pointed to a principal orientation towards the social domain of citizenship at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal level. The teachers referred to, for example, developing life wisdom, entering society and continuing education in a mature manner, interacting with others, benefiting others in society, learning about other cultures and being unprejudiced. Some teachers also mentioned the opportunity for students to

participate in political institution simulations, such as ‘Model United Nations’ and ‘Model European Parliament’.

#### 5.3.2. Teachers' perceptions of their students in the area of citizenship and diversity

Teachers expressed that although group formation along ethnic lines is somewhat visible in school, in general, interaction between students is positive. Nonetheless, one teacher (C3) critically evaluated school policy for eliciting segregation between students from different backgrounds:

What I regret... is that in the first year of secondary school, children are grouped according to postal code ... It is a difficult step for primary school children to enter into secondary education. In this way they can cycle [to school] together. But amongst others it has the effect of always having four VWO-classes of which three are from the North and one from the South. That means that also segregation is induced right from the start. Because you have one ‘black’ [colored] class and three ‘white’ classes. And I regret that.

Concerning diversity-related attitudes and knowledge, some of the teachers indicated that challenging classroom discussions can take place every now and then due to students' seemingly unbalanced statements concerning controversial international issues. In view of diversity closer to home, teacher (C2) emphasized his students' expertise: “We discuss all these things and especially when it concerns a subject such as pluralistic society, those kids are highly knowledgeable, because they are firmly rooted in it, so to speak. So they understand that quite well.”

#### 5.3.3. CE activities in the area of diversity

School C teachers described three types of CE activities in the area of diversity: long- and short-distance trips, discussing the news (similar to Schools A and B), and the utilization of the diverse student population (similar to School B). As for the first type of activity, the students have several opportunities to participate in international trips, e.g., exchange trips to China and Germany. Furthermore, an international traineeship of 40 hrs is a compulsory part of the curriculum. Romania, India, South Africa, and Japan are among the available destinations. Two teachers referred to the generally affluent backgrounds of their students and argued that it is important for their students to be aware of their privileged position. This awareness is fostered by exposing students to poverty across the globe. In that sense, students' boundaries are expanded as they witness other people's lives internationally. Consequently, feelings of compassion may be elicited. Teachers underscored how students upon return from poverty areas are affected and overwhelmed by what they observed. Students get the chance to put things in perspective and realize their own purchasing power. Notwithstanding, none of the teachers stated that this event subsequently elicited discussions in the classroom on societal and/or political issues and change, such as the root causes of poverty or inequality. Furthermore, one of the teachers (C3) drew attention to the elitist character of these school trips, explaining that not all students' parents can afford these trips, which also stresses class differences.

In relation to the second diversity-related activity, many of the (homeroom) teachers indicated that news, current affairs, and diversity-related topics are discussed in class. One of the civic education teachers (C2) explained that he occasionally avoids certain discussions in class. One reason is that international controversial issues are not always part of the formal curriculum. Secondly, the teacher referred to the complexities of particular subjects and the resulting difficult discussions. Another teacher (C3) stated that he

questions certain sensitive topics and challenges his students by contradicting their statements. In this way he attempts to foster students' ability to change perspectives. He also admitted being normative in his teaching when students express viewpoints that are unacceptable in his view.

Pertaining to utilization of the student population in teaching practices, one homeroom teacher (C4) explained that during homeroom classes, personal backgrounds in terms of ethnicity/culture are discussed. This homeroom teacher indicated that students are invited to discuss whether they personally experience friction within the school, following worldwide issues. Teacher C3 articulated his wish for more deployment of the student population concerning CE:

I am also a teacher coach here. So you are sitting in a social studies class and the class is full of children and the whole lesson is about multicultural society, while, it [multicultural society] is just sitting in front of you. It's just sitting in front of you. Have the kids discuss it together.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, secondary education teachers' context-related understandings and practices regarding teaching diversity as part of citizenship education (CE) were examined. The results show that teachers' practices more so than their understandings concerning teaching diversity, are indeed context-related. Overall, the results indicate that diversity and teaching students to deal with diversity had different meanings in different contexts. This varied between cosmopolitan orientations and familiarizing students with different living styles in their own direct environment. Teachers' practices, and to some extent their understandings, were connected to their perceptions of the needs and capabilities of their students. These perceptions were influenced by several features, such as students' cultural and socioeconomic background, the degree of urbanization of the school location, and the educational tracks offered. Moreover, the findings indicate that there is an interplay between these contextual characteristics.

In School A, 'diversity' seemed to mean looking beyond the boundaries of the rural/agricultural context and becoming familiar with life in big cities and with Dutch multicultural society. Additionally, in their teaching, teachers tried to take students' backgrounds into account; e.g. they introduced their students to diversity in somewhat careful and protective ways. The teachers also took into consideration students' local focus by adopting a local focus in their teaching themselves. Moreover, through discussing news events and migration, teachers aimed to foster tolerance and reduce prejudice.

Comparable to School A, School B teachers were committed to broadening their students' societal views and implicitly or explicitly referred to characteristics of the student population when explaining how they approached this. They talked about how they endeavor to broaden their students' local focus, but in this school 'local' refers to the realities of living in an urban area and to the (socioeconomic) family backgrounds of their students. In this school, teaching diversity seemed to imply equipping students with social skills to interact with the 'other', rather than just meeting the 'other'. In line with this, the variety of student backgrounds at times served as a resource for facilitating discussions on diversity-related topics.

In School C, in addition to preparing students for participation in Dutch society, and making them aware of Europe as an international context for citizenship, teachers referred to citizenship orientations on a cross-continental level. More specifically, in this

school, teaching diversity seemed to entail educating world citizens. In explaining the school's focus on world citizenship, all teachers mentioned the importance of students coming into contact with other cultures through the international trips, however they emphasized different aspects. The social studies teachers expressed the emergence of students' feelings of compassion and connectedness to the communities in the areas they visited. Other teachers spoke more in terms of helping students to put their own lives into perspective given their privileged positions.

Our findings are partially consistent with general context-related CE approaches. Different citizenship scales (local, national, European, and global) were discernible among the aims across all teachers (Osler, 2011). However in practice, global citizenship activities were offered more frequently at School C. This is in line with literature on differentiated citizenship practices according to socioeconomic background (Wood, 2014) and educational level (Ho, 2012), as School C is more affluent compared to Schools A and B and offers bilingual education at the pre-university level. Furthermore, the distinction between educating for adulthood versus educating for citizenship in relation to educational track (Ten Dam & Volman, 2003, 2007) can also be partly confirmed in this study. School C teachers' aim of developing world citizenship appears to comply more with the notion of educating for citizenship (compared to the adulthood focus of School A, marked by their vocational orientation). School B teachers' CE understandings and practices did not clearly match aspects of either one of the conceptualizations. A more prominent feature of school B teachers is their aim to educate socially skilled students. The different ways in which the teachers of school C explained their focus on world citizenship seems to reflect Weenink's (2008) Bourdieu-based distinction between 'pragmatic cosmopolitanism' and 'dedicated cosmopolitanism': an instrumental attitude in the sense of acquiring cosmopolitan capital for future advantages, such as job opportunities and study, versus an internalized orientation towards the world, characterized by flexibility and openness to other cultures (Weenink, 2007). More generally, in a future study, it would be worth theorizing and exploring the relationship between the type of CE and diversity education offered and schools' contextual and compositional characteristics more deeply, using Bourdieu's framework (1986).

Although the aim was to present three distinct school and teacher portraits in relation to their unique contextual characteristics, the data also show more general patterns across the three schools. A first notable general observation is that the transformative CE conceptualization (Banks, 2017) was hardly reflected in teachers' responses. In all three schools diversity-related issues were discussed in the classrooms. However, these discussions did not necessarily seem to be intended to yield 'change-minded' students.

Secondly, when asked about their citizenship aims, the majority of teachers in this study stressed the importance of the social domain (e.g., listening to opinions of others, dealing with diversity, behaving appropriately in various situations), rather than emphasizing a more political domain (e.g., future intention to vote, political interest). Our findings are remarkable in view of Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, and Ten Dam's review study (2013), which showed that researchers study the political domain in relation to CE effects more frequently than the social aspects. Hence, our results may have uncovered a discrepancy between theory (the focus of researchers) and practice (the focus of teachers). Interestingly, our findings are consistent with research on civic education in several countries (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Alviar-Martin & Baildon, 2016; Leung & Yuen, 2012), showing a depoliticized approach to civic education. This approach implies a focus on developing social skills and creating harmony.



A third common response pattern is teachers' positive appraisal of and uncritical attitude towards diversity. In all three schools, multicultural Dutch society was considered a given and teachers' statements indicated that CE was geared towards preparing students for participation in a diverse society. Diversity-related activities that teachers mentioned were also alike to some extent. Two of the common activities that stand out are 1) class outings and trips on a local, national, and international level and 2) discussing controversial issues and news events during classes. The content of these discussions and the associated skills fit the core objectives of CE, namely dealing with diversity, taking different perspectives and reducing prejudice (Bron, 2006). In fact, returning to our research question, our study suggests that teachers' diversity-related CE practices show similarity to some extent, yet they are also largely context-related. Teachers offered miscellaneous practices tailored to their perception of their students' background characteristics and capabilities. By contrast, context-relatedness is less obvious in teachers' diversity-related CE understandings: teachers evaluated diversity in similar, positive ways and they hardly expressed clear visions on dealing with diversity that go beyond what can be considered as subcomponents of the concept, such as promoting tolerance and diminishing prejudice.

A number of potential limitations and suggestions for future research should be considered. First, although teachers have a pivotal role in schools, we are aware that taking the perspectives of other actors into account, such as the students themselves and the school leader would create a more complete picture of daily practices and understandings in schools. The perspectives of school leaders may uncover whole-school policies and visions, which in turn may influence teachers' CE understandings and daily practices. Moreover, it is important to have students' voices heard as they may have different perceptions of the teaching they receive.

Secondly, the schools included in this study were not selected randomly and we did not conduct interviews with the majority of teachers in the schools. Therefore our study does not allow for generalizations. However, rather than generalizing, our purpose was to show examples of the contextual embeddedness of teachers' diversity-related CE understandings and practices. Nonetheless, for generalization purposes we recommend that future studies adopt a mixed-method or quantitative approach with larger sample sizes. If teachers align their CE practices to the alleged needs and capabilities of the student populations, this may affect students' citizenship outcomes. We suggest future quantitative studies to investigate whether the school composition influences the way teachers and schools deliver CE. In turn, it should be examined whether possible differentiated understandings and practices are associated with students' citizenship outcomes.

Our findings have implications for teachers and school management teams. We propose that actors within schools enter into a dialogue and reflect carefully on their views regarding diversity-related CE and how they wish to translate these views into practice. Our study shows that the school composition and other contextual characteristics are salient factors for general and diversity-related CE, as teachers frequently referred to the needs and capabilities of their student population. However, teachers in our study rarely mentioned rooted and institutionalized diversity-related questions in society such as (reproduction of) inequality and power relations in relation to the characteristics of their student population. Teachers displayed positive attitudes towards diversity and addressed diversity in their teaching practices, which is in accordance with the core objectives of CE in the Netherlands (Bron, 2006). Notwithstanding, it is also important to address the challenging aspects of a diverse society and student population, and the more deeply rooted issues mentioned above. This is needed in order to prevent superficial diversity approaches, as these may

facilitate feelings of exclusion for students of diverse backgrounds. Therefore we suggest school actors to also address more fundamental social issues and deliberate on their diversity-related CE views and practices.

When it comes to the observed overall lack of a critical stance in teachers' diversity-related CE understandings several explanations are possible. It is conceivable that it is illustrative of a struggle. That is, teachers may find it complicated to find a balance between unity and diversity, a difficulty which is also debated in relation to citizenship and CE conceptualizations (Kiwan, 2008; Parker, 1997, 2001). Due to the sensitivity of the subject, teachers may experience difficulties and discomfort in addressing diversity that goes beyond meeting the 'other', promoting tolerance and perspective-taking. Teachers may therefore display a more 'uncritical' stance. This uncritical stance fits into the earlier stated observation of depoliticization of civic education (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Alviar-Martin & Baidon, 2016; Leung & Yuen, 2012). Our findings demonstrate that, next to CE in general, depoliticization is also visible in the aspect of teaching diversity. Teachers could be more inclined to, perhaps unconsciously, depoliticize their diversity teaching endeavors, in order to maintain harmony in their classroom. Integrating politics in the discussion of diversity-related issues may excite conflict and controversy in the classroom, situations which some teachers in our study wished to avoid. This finding is in line with a small-scale qualitative Dutch study by Radstake and Leeman (2010), showing that a majority of teachers experienced deficiencies in their professional competences to guide discussions on diversity in diverse classes. With the depoliticization of diversity-related issues, it is not possible to take a transformative CE approach, as raising deeply rooted and institutionalized issues concerning diversity is utterly political and a prerequisite for counteracting societal issues.

In sum, our findings show that teachers' general and diversity-related CE conceptualizations are indeed influenced by their students' educational level, ethnic-cultural background, socioeconomic position as well as their rural versus urban location. Additionally, the data show that the various contextual factors interact, which adds to existing research, as most prior studies examined separate compositional or contextual characteristics. Furthermore, our study contributes to knowledge about CE and diversity education by its unique focus on the school contextual embeddedness of diversity as part of CE.

On the one hand, The Netherlands forms a unique case to study in the European context given its clear reduction in multiculturalism policies, compared to other European countries (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013). On the other hand, there is a common trend among the general public across Europe of growing negative attitudes towards diversity and stronger support for right-wing parties. Our research suggests that, also in light of the rise of negative diversity attitudes, the teaching of diversity and citizenship education should become more interlinked. Moreover, within this climate, it is important that teachers develop a nuanced and critical stance regarding diversity in relation to the specific context of their school. This suggestion also has implications for (teacher) education and policies in the Netherlands and across the rest of Europe, as responsibility for the development of nuanced diversity stances cannot be solely assigned to individual teachers. Policy measures that aim to incorporate diversity themes in teacher education in a structural and integral way, could support teachers in developing their understandings and practices related to diversity.

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