



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Culturally responsive teaching in Dutch multicultural secondary schools

Theeuwes, B.C.

### Citation

Theeuwes, B. C. (2024, May 29). *Culturally responsive teaching in Dutch multicultural secondary schools*. ICLON PhD Dissertation Series. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3754860>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Universiteit  
Leiden  
ICLON

ICLON, Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching

# ico

The research was carried out in the context of the *Dutch Interuniversity Center for Educational Sciences*.

Title: Culturally responsive teaching in Dutch multicultural secondary schools

Titel: Cultuuresponsief onderwijs in Nederlandse multiculturele Voortgezet  
Onderwijs scholen

ICLON PhD Dissertation Series

Print: Mostert & van Onderen!

Cover design: Suzanne Hertogs, Ontwerphaven

Lay-out: Mostert & van Onderen!

ISBN/EAN: 978 9490383 473

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**Culturally responsive teaching  
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Dutch multicultural secondary schools**

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,

op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,

volgens besluit van het college voor promoties

te verdedigen op woensdag 29 mei 2024

klokke 10.00 uur

door

Brigitte Christiane Theeuwes – De Bock

geboren te Borgerhout

in 1971

*Promotores*

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Prof.dr. E.J.P.G. Denessen, Radboud Universiteit

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Dr. T.L. Mearns

Dr. L. Gaikhorst, Universiteit van Amsterdam

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*“We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep.”*

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--- William James ---



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## Preface

I spent most of my school career at a Catholic girls' school in Antwerp. We all wore a brown uniform, my classmates and I and our parents were born and raised in Belgium, and we had no migration background. At the cognitive level, there were few significant differences between us. If you could not keep up, you had to go to another school. We were taught Catholic values at school, and these were recognized in our homes. Everyone received First Communion and Confirmation, which was organized by the school. There was no thinking about it, you just did it. Only one girl in my class was Protestant. We found that a little strange, and we also had some students in class, including myself, one of whose parents was Walloon and French was spoken at home. Some Flemish students also spoke French at home because the language was considered elite. They were called 'Franskiljons'. Those were the cultural differences I can recall from that time. Thus, there was not much diversity when I was at school from about 1974-1989. Yet, a Physics teacher in Year 12 of my school career failed to notice me and meet my educational needs. At a parent-teacher meeting, at a time when it was not customary for students to be present, my mother had scheduled an appointment with him because my grades for physics were noticeably worse than in the other subjects. The teacher asked if my mother might bring a photo with her as he did not know who I was. At an age when identity development is in full swing, this affected me. How could it be that a teacher did not know me even though I had been taught by him for two years? It was perhaps what prompted me to choose teaching with the drive to 'do things differently'.

Now many years later, and due to the positive trend towards inclusive education, there are hardly any more girls-only and boys-only schools in Belgium. Moreover, because of the increasing cultural diversity of society, many schools, including the school I attended, have student populations with diverse ethnic, religious and socio-cultural backgrounds and with migration histories. In this multicultural classroom context, what competence should my physics teacher have developed to 'see' his students and respond to their educational needs?

