Culturally responsive teaching in Dutch multicultural secondary schools

Theeuwes, B.C.

Chapter 1

General introduction

“You can’t teach what and who you don’t know”

--- Geneva Gay ---

1.1 Introduction

Student diversity in Dutch schools has increased in recent decades due to immigration. In the school year 2021/2022, 26.9% of all students in secondary education had a migration background according to the Netherlands Education Inspectorate (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2022a). This proportion has been steadily increasing for several years. The number of newcomers, which refers to students whose parents were not born in the Netherlands and have been in the country for less than four years, has risen from over 35,000 in the school year 2016/2017 to nearly 55,000 in 2021/2022 (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2022a). Particularly in the four big cities and Almere, the percentage of students with a migration background is high: Amsterdam 54.4%, The Hague 53.2%, Almere 49.5%, Rotterdam 47.4%, and Utrecht 40.7% (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2022b). Thus, teachers who teach at schools in these cities often face great cultural diversity in their classes. The diversity in students' country of origin is often accompanied by differences in languages, home cultures, religions, and values.

Due to this great diversity among students, multicultural classrooms offer authentic learning environments in which to bring citizenship goals into practice. If properly supervised, students can, for example, develop social and societal competences that enable them to be part of and contribute to the pluralistic, democratic Dutch society. This is a requirement placed upon schools by law in Article 17 of the Dutch Law on Secondary Education. However, as well as this enriching opportunity, the multicultural classroom also presents challenges for teachers. It can for example be a challenge to ensure that students with many different values respect each other and the teacher (Tielman et al., 2012; Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). Teachers must be attentive to social exclusion, racist name-calling or to students making hurtful comments regarding perceived differences (Shah & Coles, 2020). Moreover, teachers, whose cultural frames of reference often differ from those of their students (Banks et al., 2005; Voion, 2022), do not naturally recognize their own lifeworld and values in their students and vice versa (Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Leeman, 2006; Radstake, 2009; Tielman

et al., 2021). This can lead to mismatches in classroom interactions: for example, when students say little in class because quiet and obedient behaviour is seen as a crucial value in their home culture while the teacher finds it important to be autonomous and stand up for yourself. If the teacher interprets this situation from his own cultural frame of reference, he may interpret this behaviour as insecure. Differences in cultural backgrounds can also lead to mismatches in the learning process or misconceptions of the topics presented in the curriculum (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016). For example, a teacher can interpret off-task behaviour as disinterest on the part of the student, but it might be that the student did not understand the instruction because Dutch is his second language and his Dutch vocabulary is limited, or because the examples did not match his prior cultural knowledge or experiences.

To prevent cultural misunderstandings and misconceptions and meet all students' educational needs, it is important that teachers in multicultural classrooms can (1) cross cultural borders by building bridges between different cultures and (2) use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and cultural frames of reference of their students in their teaching (Gay, 2018). These two aspects come together in the competence of *culturally responsive teaching* (Gay, 2018). The first aspect is also known as intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006), which Deardorff elaborated as a set of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. The formulated core features of each of these components of intercultural competence provide an overview of what a teacher needs to develop to become interculturally competent. However, the components are not specifically formulated for teaching in a multicultural classroom context and they only focus on the first aspect of culturally responsive teaching.

This dissertation focuses on the further elaboration of the competence of culturally responsive teaching with respect to teaching in multicultural secondary schools in the Netherlands. I aim to expand the limited research on culturally responsive teaching in Dutch schools and provide insights for teacher educators to prepare student teachers for teaching in a multicultural classroom context. Three studies were conducted to investigate the competence of culturally responsive teaching: (1) an interview study in which expert teachers spoke about

their practices in their multicultural classrooms; (2) a qualitative questionnaire study that investigated expert teachers' and student teachers' noticing of events through a cultural lens in spherical video-based virtual reality (SV-VR) clips of a multicultural classroom; and (3) a qualitative focus group study that investigated expert teachers' attitudes, knowledge, noticing skills and response intentions regarding events in a SV-VR multicultural classroom.

The following sections of this chapter describe the Dutch multicultural context and how it relates to schools in the Netherlands. The theoretical framework regarding teaching in a multicultural classroom context is elaborated, zooming in on the skills component of noticing in a multicultural classroom context. Finally, an overview of this dissertation is presented.

1.2 The Dutch multicultural context

The term 'culture' is defined and used in many ways. In this dissertation, we refer to culture as 'the norms, values, practices, patterns of communication, language, customs, and meanings shared by a group of people located in a given time and space' (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 36). This space can be a region within a country where certain cultural aspects are shared. For example, in some parts of the Netherlands Carnival is celebrated and in Friesland, which is one of the 12 provinces of the Netherlands, Frisian is a formal working language. However, as a result of migration processes since the 1950s, a variety of cultures have emerged in the Netherlands. The Dutch population has become increasingly diverse making the Netherlands a pluriform society.

At the time of writing, the population of the Netherlands was 17,917,875 (CBS [Statistics Netherlands], 2023a). On 1 January 2022, almost 15 % of the Dutch population was born abroad. In addition, almost 12 % of the population had at least one parent born abroad. (CBS, 2023b). For a long period, a distinction was made between Western and non-Western residents with a migration background but since 2022, this distinction has been avoided and replaced by one based on continents and common immigration countries (CBS, 2022a). The

population groups with origins outside the Netherlands are now categorized as: (1) residents with a non-Dutch European origin; (2) residents with an origin in one of the classic migration countries (Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, Suriname, the Dutch Caribbean); and (3) other residents with a non-European origin. Residents with origins from Suriname, the Dutch Caribbean and Indonesia came to the Netherlands from the 1950s onwards during the decolonization process. The main reasons for this were educational opportunities and, particularly for Indonesian residents, political motivations. These migrants were mixed in terms of socio-economic position and often already had some knowledge of the Dutch system and language (CBS, 2022b; Stevens et al., 2011). Migrants from Morocco and Turkey came to the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards as guest workers and were often unskilled (De Valk, 2010). A large proportion of migrants from the classic migration countries stayed in the Netherlands and had children. Thus, current students with a country of origin in one of the classic migration countries, have often been born and raised in the Netherlands.

People continue to migrate to the Netherlands for various reasons. The group of residents who were not born in the Netherlands and whose parents, were also not born in the Netherlands is called 'newcomers'. Over half of newcomer students have a refugee background, and a quarter of newcomer students are children of European labour migrants. The remaining group have come to the Netherlands for unknown reasons (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2022c). Regarding people with a refugee background, Syrians form by far the largest group (40%), followed by refugees from Turkey (8%), Yemen (6%), Afghanistan (5%), Eritrea (4%), Somalia (4%), Algeria (3%), Iran (3%), Iraq (3%), Ukraine (2%) and refugees from other countries (SER [Social Economic Council], 2023). Regarding labour migrants, the group of migrants from Central and Eastern European countries has grown over the past two decades: mainly from Poland and to a lesser extent from Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary (Van der Heijde et al., 2022).

Within the group of newcomers, there is huge diversity in country of origin, age of arrival in the Netherlands, migration motive, language, trauma, parental education, and school experience (Inspectie van het Onderwijs , 2022c) but there is also great diversity within the group of people who have been born and raised

in the Netherlands but have an origin in one of the classic migration countries. Within each community, there are numerous subgroups that distinguish themselves from one another based on factors such as ethnic, religious, and value diversity. Furthermore, in each subgroup individuals can have a different socioeconomic status and there are myriad individual differences in terms of level of resilience, perseverance, adaptability, empathy, intelligence, etc. Vertovec (2007, p.1024) introduced the term '*superdiversity*' to refer to this 'dynamic interplay of variables among an increasing number of small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants. The diversity of the population in a country can be described in terms of cultural groups with a specific history, such as Moroccan guestworkers or Syrian refugees but in this dissertation, diversity is viewed more broadly, referring to what is meant by superdiversity.

Superdiversity is particularly prevalent in the Randstad region. The Randstad encompasses the four provinces in the western part of the Netherlands: North Holland, South Holland, Utrecht, and Flevoland. It is a conglomerate of large and medium-sized cities where nearly half of the Dutch population lives and works (House of the Dutch Provinces, 2023). The four major cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague are located in the Randstad. Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague are now cities without an ethnic majority and are referred to as *majority-minority* cities (Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2013; Crul, Uslu, & Lelie, 2016). However, the group of Dutch origin is still the largest minority group.

The diversity of the population in the Randstad is also reflected in the schools in that region. Teachers face the challenge of meeting the educational needs of this diversity of learners in order to provide all of them with equal opportunities to excel and succeed. This seems not to be self-evident.

1.3 Multicultural context and schools in the Netherlands

Secondary school students can follow various educational tracks in the Netherlands: 1) three vmbo-tracks provide practical and vocational-oriented training, of which the vmbo-t track has a theoretical curriculum; 2) a havo-track, which refers to general secondary education; and 3) a vwo-track, which is the highest level of secondary education in the Netherlands and prepares students for university. Students are advised on the track they may follow in year 7 of primary school, based on their results from their primary school career and, where relevant, also based on an additional national test. During their school careers in secondary education, there are opportunities for upward mobility to a higher educational track. This allows students who received too low a track advice at the end of primary school to still obtain a higher diploma.

Disparities can be seen between the educational tracks attended by students with a Dutch-native origin and students with an origin in one of the classic migration countries. The disparity begins as early as primary school. At the end of primary school, students with a Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese or Dutch-Caribbean origin, on average receive a lower educational track advice than students with a Dutch native origin, and they are more often under-advised for the educational track they could pursue in secondary education (CBS, 2021; 2022b). Moreover, more of them leave education without a starting qualification (CBS, 2018). In contrast, students with an Indonesian origin follow on average higher educational tracks than students with a Dutch native background: about 50% of them follow one of the two highest educational tracks. Most of the non-Dutch European students and the group of 'other' students also pursue education at least at a vmbo-t level or higher.

The school careers of the group of newcomers, are less straightforward than those of non-newcomers. A study on the educational pathways of newcomers (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2022c) reveals that they often take longer to complete their education, are more often held back, and change schools more often than non-newcomers. Having to learn a new language, getting used to a different culture, and often needing time to process traumas might contribute to

the extended duration of their school careers. Nevertheless, compared to non-newcomers, newcomers appear more frequently to take final exams at a level above the advice they received at the end of primary school and less often below this advice (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2022c). They also appear to utilize opportunities for upward mobility in educational tracks more frequently than non-newcomers. However, this study on the educational pathways of newcomers (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2022c) does not indicate whether the advice they received from primary school aligned with their abilities. It could be that they were under-advised.

To break patterns of inequality in educational attainment, it seems crucial to provide students with additional time when necessary to catch up on any disparities arising from environmental factors, for example through midstream progression or diploma stacking (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2022c; Visser et al., 2022). However, in the classroom, the teacher can also make a difference. For example, previous studies have found that teachers' expectations of individual students and cultural groups of students influence their academic achievement and placement in higher educational tracks (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Rubie-Davies, 2009). Moreover, it appears that effective teachers for multicultural classrooms can cross cultural borders and adapt their teaching to their students' prior cultural knowledge and learning strategies (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016). To achieve this, it is important that they see their students in all their facets, including their cultural background, and not only pay attention to students' cognitive performances in academic subjects and standardized test scores. The concept of culturally responsive teaching offers opportunities in this regard (Gay, 2018).

1.4 Teaching in a multicultural classroom context

Schools and teachers themselves have their own culture with a set of norms, values, educational vision etc. Students with a home culture and language that is congruent with the school culture and the teachers' culture, come into

the classroom with experiences that they recognize in class. For example, they recognize the modes of communication, expectations for behaviour, and the context in which content is presented. These students are likely to feel a sense of belonging which is a predictor of academic success (Schachner et al., 2019; Walton & Cohen, 2007). However, in multicultural classrooms, students have a range of knowledge, experiences, skills, histories, and cultures acquired outside school. These are referred to as 'funds of knowledge' and those funds of knowledge that students themselves consider important aspects of their identity are called 'funds of identity' (Hogg & Volman, 2020).

This variety of students' funds of knowledge/ identity provides opportunities for students to develop socio-civic skills for effective membership of a pluralistic society (Gay, 2018). Yet, students filter what happens in the classroom, such as curriculum content, the teacher's behaviour and teaching strategies, and classmates' behaviour through their own cultural frames of reference (Gay, 2013; 2018). This can lead to misconceptions or misunderstandings. To create a classroom environment in which all students can unleash their full academic potential, it is crucial that teachers create bridges to cross cultural borders. Pedagogies that strive for these equal educational opportunities for all students while respecting their cultural identity are reflected in the concepts of *multicultural education* (Banks et al., 2005; Banks, 2014; 2019), and *culturally responsive teaching* (Gay, 1993; 2010; 2018; Gay & Howard, 2000).

Multicultural education emerged in the United States from the civil rights movement in the 1960s/ 1970s. It initially aimed to address racial and ethnic inequities in learning opportunities and outcomes, but the concept was expanded over the years to other marginalized groups such as women, people with disabilities, low-income groups, and LGBTQ people (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2018). Banks (2019) focuses on total school reform to increase educational equity for a range of marginalized groups and not just on curriculum reform. To achieve that, he distinguishes five dimensions that together form one integrated whole: (1) content integration; (2) knowledge construction; (3) prejudice reduction; (4) equity pedagogy; and (5) an empowering school culture (Banks, 2014; 2019). In short, content integration refers to using examples and content from

a variety of cultures. Knowledge construction is defined as the teacher's help in getting students to understand, investigate, and determine how knowledge is constructed and influenced by culture. The term prejudice reduction refers to helping students to develop positive racial attitudes and reduce prejudices. Equity pedagogy means modifying teaching methods to enable students from diverse cultural groups to achieve. Empowering school culture transcends the classroom and refers to making the whole school culture more equitable.

Culturally responsive teaching focuses on effective teaching practices regarding teaching the whole child (Gay, 2018). Besides educational equity and excellence, socio-civic skills are pursued for effective membership of a pluralistic society and personal development of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. To achieve this, culturally responsive teaching pursues 'Using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performing styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students' (Gay, 2018, p. 36). This requires teachers to be interculturally competent (Gay, 2013), which means that they can communicate across cultural borders (Bennett, 2004; Deardorff, 2006).

Deardorff (2006) described intercultural competence in a compositional model, which is called the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (PMIC). In this model intercultural competence is seen as a set of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Based on agreement among intercultural scholars, which was examined with questionnaires and a Delphi technique, the core features of each component of this model were identified. The required attitudes of intercultural competence listed in the PMIC were respect, openness, and curiosity/discovery. The knowledge component was listed as cultural self-awareness, deep cultural understanding and knowledge, culture-specific knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness. The skills component contained listening, observing, interpreting and analysing, evaluating, and relating. In Chapter 4 these features are further elaborated as goals to be pursued for culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education.

The features mentioned in the skills component of the PMIC are also reflected in the concept of noticing. Like the skills features 'observing and interpreting/ analysing', mentioned in the PMIC, noticing refers to the ability to identify and interpret classroom events in the complexity of the classroom context (Sherin et al., 2011; Van Es & Sherin, 2002). The concept of teachers' noticing in multicultural classrooms is examined in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation.

1.5 Noticing in multicultural classrooms

To react appropriately to classroom events that support or disrupt academic and social-emotional learning, teachers need to notice these events. Teacher noticing is defined in the literature in a variety of ways (König et al., 2022). In this dissertation, noticing refers to two key processes: 1) identifying relevant classroom events and 2) interpreting what is identified by knowledge-based reasoning (Sherin et al., 2011; Van Es & Sherin, 2002). Identification refers to paying selective attention to events perceived as relevant (Sherin & Russ, 2015) and interpretation to how teachers make sense of what they have identified (Sherin & Russ, 2015). Knowing which situations are relevant to focus attention on and interpreting these situations accurately requires professional knowledge. This is why the interpretation facet of noticing is also called knowledge-based reasoning. This refers to both knowledge about general principles of learning and teaching and knowledge gained from experiences with the specific teaching context such as knowledge about the students, curriculum, school, home situation etc. (Sherin & Van Es, 2009; Sherin & Russ, 2015; Wolff et al., 2021). Wolff et al. (2021) refer to this latter, more specific and situated knowledge, as *scripts*. In a multicultural classroom context, it is imperative that teachers include a cultural perspective in their scripts to properly interpret classroom events (Bennett, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Van Es et al., 2017; Weinstein et al., 2003; Wubbels et al., 2006). For example, when students have disagreements, it is important that teachers are aware of possible discrimination based on differences in, among other things, religion, values, and ethnicity (Shah & Coles, 2020). Another example is that

when a student does not understand what is being taught, teachers should consider whether the instruction may not match the student's cultural frame of reference or whether the language used is too complex for students who have Dutch as a second language. Van Es et al. (2017) call this noticing of classroom events with an additional cultural perspective 'noticing for equity and equitable teaching practice'. Shah and Coles (2020) refer to this phenomenon as 'racial noticing'. In this dissertation this term is extended to *noticing through a cultural lens*.

Little attention has been paid in research and teacher education programs to the skill of noticing classroom events through a cultural lens. In 2016, Cochran-Smith et al. conducted a 'landscape review' that mapped the major territories of research on teacher preparation. One of these territories was how to prepare a teaching force for providing all students with equitable learning opportunities and outcomes in a diverse classroom context. The review revealed that most studies that focused on coursework or fieldwork to achieve this goal aimed to change students' attitudes or to develop practices for teaching in a diverse context. Shah and Coles (2020) called for teacher education programs that go beyond changing attitudes. They argued that teachers should also be prepared for noticing through a cultural lens.

Although little attention has been paid in research and therefore possibly also in teacher education programs to the skill of noticing classroom events through a cultural lens, focusing on this form of noticing might provide an entry point from which student and established teachers' attitudes, knowledge and practices regarding bridging different cultures can be discussed. A commonly used method to foster teachers' noticing is watching videos, followed by guided reflections (Borko et al., 2008). 360° videos, which can record the entire surroundings and can be viewed with a head-mounted display (HMD), are even more promising because they provide an immersive experience in an authentic and realistic environment (Ferdig & Kosko, 2020). This dissertation reports on two studies in which this technology was used to investigate student and expert teachers' noticing through a cultural lens and in one of these two studies it was also used as a conversation starter regarding teaching in a multicultural classroom context.

1.6 This dissertation

The context of this dissertation is the multicultural or culturally diverse classroom, which is referred to as a classroom with a large diversity in country of origin, religion, language and home culture. The main theoretical frameworks used are culturally responsive teaching and noticing. An overview of this dissertation is presented in Table 1.1. In the three studies presented in this dissertation, I investigated components of culturally responsive teaching competencies in a Dutch secondary education context.

The first study, presented in Chapter 2, is an explorative study in which 13 expert teachers from three different multicultural secondary schools were interviewed in depth about how they provide a supportive classroom environment in their multicultural classrooms. The aim of this study was to gain more insight into Dutch secondary school expert teachers' culturally responsive teaching practices. These teachers mentioned practices which, in order of most to least mentioned examples, could be clustered into five categories: (1) fostering interpersonal relationships with students; (2) preventing and addressing disruptive behaviour; (3) fostering social cohesion; (4) fostering personal development; and (5) supporting students' learning process.

The second study, presented in Chapter 3, focuses on a skills component of culturally responsive teaching, in particular on student teachers' and expert teachers' noticing through a cultural lens. In this study, noticing is defined as the identification and interpretation of relevant classroom events. To present participants with an immersive, authentic, and comparable experience, we developed three spherical video-based virtual reality (SV-VR) clips of approximately two minutes each. SV-VR clips refer to Virtual Reality technology with 360º- videos. These clips were installed on 20 head-mounted displays (HMD's: Oculus Go). Each clip simulated a common multicultural classroom with students from different ethnic-cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. Events occurred in the classroom that can be encountered in all classes such as students using their mobile phones, wearing a cap and/or jacket, leaving the classroom without asking permission from the teacher, a boy at the

back of the classroom standing up, and joining another group, two girls with headscarves turning to another girl without a headscarf sitting in another group, a boy with an Asian ethnic background standing up to get a dictionary. Because of the multicultural context, all events could potentially be interpreted through a cultural lens. Viewing the clips with an HMD allowed participants to have an individual experience unhindered by distractions from the 'real' environment. Moreover, to make the experience even more immersive and authentic, the clips were recorded from a first-person point of view, which means that the participant was the teacher in the clips who watched the class from a central position. After watching each video, the participants completed a questionnaire with two open questions: (1) Which three events caught your attention the most in the clip? and (2) What do you think was going on in these events? Most identified events in both participant groups were the events that involved students' use of cell phones and student movements. Participants were not inclined to notice these events through a cultural lens.

In the third study, presented in Chapter 4, we used the same SV-VR clips watched with an HMD as in the previous study but now with a different aim, different participants, and using a different methodology. The clips were used as steppingstones for deeper reflections in focus groups. The aim of this study was to further explore expert teachers' culturally responsive teaching competence. With this in mind, we used Deardorff's Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (PMIC, 2006). The different components of the PMIC (attitudes, knowledge, skills, intended practices) emerged during the focus group reflections that were initiated with an opening question that primed the teachers to look through a cultural lens on what they had seen in the clips.

The concluding Chapter 5 revisits the overarching aim of this dissertation: unravelling culturally responsive teaching competencies. The main results are presented and discussed. From there, recommendations are made for further research and for preparing teachers to teach in a multicultural classroom context.

Table 1.1
Dissertation overview

CHAPTER	TITLE	RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1	General introduction	
2	Teachers and their multicultural classrooms in Dutch secondary education	How can expert teachers' reasoned practices with respect to teaching multicultural classrooms be characterized?
3	Noticing through a cultural lens: student teachers' and expert teachers' identification and interpretation of events in a multicultural classroom context	(1) Which events do student teachers and expert teachers identify in a multicultural classroom context? (2) What culture-specific interpretations do student teachers and expert teachers give to events in a multicultural classroom context? (3) How do student teachers and expert teachers differ in the way they identify and interpret events in a multicultural classroom context?
4	Unravelling expert teachers' intercultural competence when facing a multicultural classroom context	(1) How do teachers notice events in a multicultural classroom? (2) What attitudes and knowledge do teachers demonstrate when confronted with events in a multicultural classroom? (3) What intentions do teachers report to respond to events in a multicultural classroom?
5	General discussion	

Table 1.1 *(continued)*

COMPONENTS OF CRT	MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS	PARTICIPANTS
Practices	In-depth interviews	13 expert teachers from three different multicultural secondary schools
Noticing skills	Watching three spherical video-based clips from a first-person point of view with a head-mounted display. After each clip, a questionnaire with two open questions was completed.	25 student teachers 10 expert teachers from one multicultural secondary school.
Attitudes, knowledge, noticing skills, and intended CRT practices	Watching three spherical video-based clips from a first-person point of view with a head-mounted display. 5 semi-structured focus group reflections, with 3 teachers each, primed to look at events in a multicultural classroom through a cultural lens.	10 expert teachers from multicultural secondary schools, of which nine are at the same school. 5 expert teachers from rural, more culturally homogeneous secondary schools.