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# Schools as Acculturative and Developmental Contexts for Youth of Immigrant and Refugee Background

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**Abstract:** Schools are important for the academic and socio-emotional development, as well as acculturation of immigrant- and refugee-background youth. We highlight individual differences which shape their unique experiences, while considering three levels of the school context in terms of how they may affect adaptation outcomes: (1) interindividual interactions in the classroom (such as peer relations, student-teacher relations, teacher beliefs, and teaching practices), (2) characteristics of the classroom or school (such as ethnic composition and diversity climate), and (3) relevant school- and nation-level policies (such as diversity policies and school tracking). Given the complexity of the topic, there is a need for more research taking an integrated and interdisciplinary perspective to address migration related issues in the school context. Teacher beliefs and the normative climate in schools seem particularly promising points for intervention, which may be easier to change than structural aspects of the school context. More inclusive schools are also an important step toward more peaceful interethnic relations in diverse societies.

**Keywords:** youth of immigrant and refugee background, school, acculturation, adaptation

Currently there are 244 million migrants (i.e., those not living in their country of birth) recorded worldwide, more than ever before (United Nations, 2015). Among refugees specifically, 51% are under the age of 18. Immigrant- and refugee-background youth are very diverse. Despite this diversity, they share the experience of being a cultural minority, which means they may be confronted with stereotypes and exclusion, also in the school context. Immigrant- and refugee-background youth are therefore more at risk for lower well-being, mental health, and academic achievement (Dimitrova, Chasiotis, & van de Vijver, 2016). Based on a risk and resilience perspective, however, if there are protective factors in place, they can do well (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013).

Our aim is to review different levels of the school context, and their associations with adjustment outcomes in youth of immigrant and refugee background. Within youth of immigrant and refugee background, we include both those with direct migration experiences (first generation) as well as those of the second and third generation.

As these groups are distinct in many respects (as outlined in the first section of this review), we refer to the specific group studied where this information was provided in the original article as much as possible, and otherwise use the general term of immigrant- and refugee-background youth. We specifically focus on adolescents, which is also the target age group of the bulk of the studies in this area. Adjustment reflects the accomplishment of both acculturative and normative developmental tasks and includes a broad range of outcomes, such as positive interethnic relations, as well as socio-emotional and academic adjustment (Motti-Stefanidi, Berry, Chrysochoou, Sam, & Phinney, 2012). Drawing on Eccles and Roeser's (2011) earlier review of school as a developmental context, we conceptualize the school as decomposable into interindividual interactions in the classroom, characteristics of the classroom or school as a whole, and relevant school- and nation-level policies. Our review therefore applies this conceptual framework to the specific context and situation of immigrant- and refugee-background youth, thereby providing

an organizing framework which can guide future research with this group.

As immigrant- and refugee-background youth are extremely diverse, we start by reviewing characteristics of individual adolescents which may contribute to differences in adjustment outcomes between individuals and groups of individuals. Borrowing from Eccles and Roeser's (2011) model and taking an ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), we then work our way through aspects of the school context that are further away from the individual: we start with the most proximal layer, interindividual interactions in the classroom (such as peer relations, student-teacher relations, teacher beliefs, and teaching practices), followed by characteristics of the classroom or school as a whole (such as ethnic composition and diversity climate), and relevant school- and nation-level policies (such as diversity policies and school tracking).

Although we review each layer of context and different aspects within them separately, these are often interrelated and may therefore produce interactive effects in a so-called mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Our aim is to provide an overview of relevant aspects of the school context and their associations with adjustment outcomes of immigrant- and refugee-background youth. Covering each aspect in an exhaustive manner or addressing all possible interactions is beyond the scope of this review. Yet, by highlighting the most important aspects in each layer of the school context we want to guide researchers as to which other aspects of the school context may interact with the main psychological variables studied.

## Adolescent Characteristics

In much of the research (also many of the studies covered in this review) immigrant-background youth are treated as a single group. Yet, individual differences may result in different school experiences and outcomes. These individual-level characteristics may also act as a filter for (mediation) or interact with (moderation) contextual conditions. We therefore provide an outline of individual differences relevant for immigrant-background youth, such as immigrant generation, refugee background, religion and ethnicity, as well as acculturation orientations and ethnic identity. Our aim is to alert researchers to these differences and to pay more attention to the specific samples when interpreting research findings.

## Acculturation Orientations

Acculturation refers to the changes in behaviors, values, and attitudes that result from individuals experiencing

long-term contact with two or more cultures (Ward, 2001). Acculturation orientations to both majority (mainstream) and heritage (ethnic) cultures have been directly and indirectly linked to positive youth development in school. Acculturation orientations also mediate effects of school experiences on outcomes (Schachner, Noack, van de Vijver, & Eckstein, 2016). Although orientations toward both cultures are associated with positive effects, they differ in their effects on specific outcomes.

A higher mainstream orientation is related to higher mainstream language fluency (Birman, Simon, Chan, & Tran, 2014) and greater support from the school context, such as from classmates (Oppedal, Røysamb, & Sam, 2004). This may explain why a higher mainstream orientation is also associated with greater sociocultural adaptation, as indicated by better grades, lower school absenteeism, and less disruptive behavior in class (Motti-Stefanidi, Pavlopoulos, Obradović, & Masten, 2008). A higher ethnic orientation, on the other hand, may facilitate closer and more positive and supportive family relationships, leading to better psychosocial adjustment as indicated by higher self-esteem, fewer depressive symptoms, and lower anxiety (Oppedal et al., 2004). More positive psychosocial adjustment can, in turn, promote better school adjustment (Hascher, 2003).

Similar associations have been found for ethnic identity, which can be seen as an important facet of heritage culture orientation. Ethnic identity is the sense of pride, belonging, and involvement that adolescents have toward their own cultural background (Phinney, 1990). A stronger ethnic identity is linked to fewer depressive symptoms and internalizing and externalizing behaviors, greater self-esteem, well-being, life satisfaction, school engagement, and academic achievement, and better physical health (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Ethnic identity may also be a protective factor by buffering the negative effect of perceived teacher discrimination on children's academic attitudes and school belonging (Brown & Chu, 2012) and low school belonging on reading achievement (Santos & Collins, 2016). The role of ethnic identity may depend on contextual factors such as ethnic density of the community. One study found that stronger ethnic identity was related to more positive functioning in terms of less depression and greater connectedness to parents, for those living in an ethnically dense context but not for those living in an ethnically dispersed context (Juang, Nguyen, & Lin, 2006).

Recent conceptualizations of acculturation orientations argue for multiple (not just two) dimensions (Ward, 2013). A study of Italian-, Portuguese-, and Albanian-heritage adolescents in Switzerland assessed three dimensions of acculturation – heritage culture orientation, majority culture orientation, and multicultural orientation (Haenni Hoti, Heinzmann, Müller, & Buholzer, 2015). The results suggest

that adopting a multicultural orientation (e.g., being open to and interested in different cultures) or a combination of heritage and multicultural orientations were related to greater school satisfaction, higher educational aspirations, and better German reading skills.

Finally, literature on acculturative fit suggests that the effects of acculturation orientations and mainstream and ethnic identity may depend on the degree of fit with expectations of the majority population (Brown & Zagefka, 2011; Zagefka & Brown, 2002).

## Immigrant Generation

Immigration is not always a risk factor when comparing adjustment by generational status. In the US, first-generation immigrant adolescents, compared to the second generation, tend to show better grades, higher academic orientation, and more positive school engagement, known as the “immigrant paradox” (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012). In Europe, however, most studies find either no generational difference or a difference in the opposite direction. A study using Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data from 2012 found that first-generation adolescents across six European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Portugal, and Slovenia) report a lower sense of school belonging, and, subsequently, lower school adjustment than second-generation adolescents (Schachner, He, Heizmann, & van de Vijver, 2017). A study of five European countries (Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Portugal, and Finland) from the International Comparative Study of Ethno-Cultural Youth (ICSEY) found that adolescents across generations showed similar rates of sociocultural adaptation, that is, school adjustment and behavior problems (Sam, Vedder, Liebkind, Neto, & Virta, 2008). Yet, the first generation showed poorer psychological adaptation, that is, lower life satisfaction, self-esteem, and greater psychological problems, compared to the second generation. Overall, youth of immigrant background are better adjusted in countries with better immigrant integration and multicultural policies (Dimitrova et al., 2016). It therefore seems likely that in these countries, there is also less of a disadvantage of the first generation compared to the second generation. This would have to be investigated in future studies.

## Refugee Background

Forcibly displaced children and youth face challenges beyond normative acculturative stressors associated with migrating to a new country. They have a higher likelihood of having witnessed violence, experienced trauma, having disrupted education, and having been separated from

primary caregivers (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012). Experiencing such hardships is detrimental to mental health (Seglem, Oppedal, & Raeder, 2011) and learning, leading to poorer academic outcomes (Birman & Tran, 2015). From a risk and resilience perspective, however, children can do well despite adversity in a supportive environment (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013). For refugee-background children especially, support from teachers, access to school services, and a positive school climate promote a stronger sense of school belonging, and ultimately, better academic adjustment (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009; Tyrer & Fazel, 2014). To what extent such a supportive environment is provided may also partly reflect immigrant integration and multicultural policies as well as the overall attitudinal climate toward immigrants and refugees in a particular country.

## Ethnicity and Religion

Immigrant groups perceived as being more culturally distant are more likely to be the target of discrimination and “othering.” In Europe, there are pervasive negative stereotypes toward people of Turkish, North African, or other Muslim heritage, which increases the risk for experiencing stereotype threat and discrimination (Baysu, Celeste, Brown, Verschueren, & Phalet, 2016), and can negatively affect school adjustment (Schachner, van de Vijver, & Noack, 2018) for adolescents from those groups. Pre-service teachers in Germany, for instance, reported more negative stereotypes regarding competence (e.g., in education and work), social behaviors (e.g., behaviors in social interactions), and culture (e.g., traditions, religion), for Turkish-heritage students compared to both Italian-heritage or nonimmigrant-background Germans (Froehlich, Martiny, Deaux, & Mok, 2016). Importantly, pre-service teachers who held more negative competence stereotypes about Turkish-heritage students were also more likely to attribute underachievement to internal rather than situational causes. Similar stereotypes about Muslim individuals (e.g., “they do not want to integrate,” “they do not want to have contact with non-migrants”) persist, despite evidence to the contrary (Foroutan, 2012). Possibly as a response to belonging to a stigmatized group, Muslim youth had a stronger ethnic orientation than adolescents from other groups and reported that religion was more important in their families (Schachner, van de Vijver, & Noack, 2014). Yet, counter to common stereotypes, they did not differ in their orientation toward the mainstream culture. Thus, attention to the specific ethnic or religious group is important as each group is exposed to different attitudinal climates, with consequences for adolescent school adjustment and well-being.

## Teachers, Peers, and Social Interactions in the Classroom

Within the classroom context, interactions with both teachers and peers contribute to a child's developmental trajectory. Youth of immigrant and refugee background encounter many of the positive and negative experiences all children face, yet factors such as teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices, as well as the nature and strength of both peer and teacher relationships can affect their developmental and acculturative outcomes in ways that may differ from their nonimmigrant-background peers.

### Teacher Beliefs and Expectations

In a US meta-analysis it was found that teachers held lower expectations for and offered less positive encouragement to ethnic minority students, excluding Asian Americans (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). A similar result was found among teachers in the Netherlands, revealing achievement expectations heavily biased against Turkish- and Moroccan-heritage students (Timmermans, Kuyper, & van der Werf, 2015). Such low expectations can lead to self-fulfilling prophecy effects, which can be particularly harmful for children of already stigmatized groups (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Moreover, unfounded low expectations can have direct consequences on students' academic paths, particularly within-school systems tracked ostensibly along ability lines. A recent study in the US found that teachers advanced first-generation immigrant students less often to university-bound math classes than their peers, even when performance was equal (Blanchard & Muller, 2015).

Because prejudiced or stereotyped expectations can be difficult to measure, studies have employed indirect methods to assess their impact. For instance, experimental research found that teachers gave less favorable recommendations and/or assessment to immigrant-background students, despite equal performance with their non-immigrant-background peers (Glock, Krolak-Schwerdt, Klapproth, & Böhmer, 2013; Sprietsma, 2013). Other work examining explicit expectations in conjunction with implicit associations tends to find no link between teachers' reported expectations and student performance, but significant links between teachers' implicit bias and lower scores among students who belong to stereotyped groups (Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne, & Sibley, 2016), and greater achievement gaps in classrooms wherein teachers showed high implicit bias (van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010). This research is particularly important today, as overt discrimination is less common, but the effects of underlying bias may still have a detrimental impact on student outcomes.

## Perceived Discrimination From Teachers and Peers

The consequences of teacher bias can be dire, and are related to the negative outcomes associated with discrimination experiences. For instance, perceived ethnic discrimination from teachers has been linked to a lowered sense of academic competence (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2012), academic futility (D'hondt, Eccles, Houtte, & Stevens, 2016), and diminished school belonging (D'hondt, Houtte, & Stevens, 2015) among immigrant-background students. In recent qualitative work, Turkish-heritage emerging adults in Germany cited the lasting impact of teacher-based foreigner objectification, a form of micro-aggression in which national belonging is called into question, noting that it led to feelings of alienation and exclusion (Moffitt, Juang, & Syed, 2017). Feeling academically competent and a sense of belonging are both closely linked to academic engagement, which in turn is predictive of school success among immigrant-background youth (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013). If such feelings are jeopardized, such youth face much higher hurdles on the path to adaptive outcomes.

The source of discrimination in the school context is not always the teacher. A recent review found that first-generation immigrant students experience peer aggression and bullying at school more often than their native-born peers (Pottie, Dahal, Georgiades, Premji, & Hassan, 2015). Any bullying can be harmful, but ethnicity or race-based bullying has been found to be particularly emotionally detrimental (e.g., Mendez, Bauman, Sulkowski, Davis, & Nixon, 2016), as it implicates something about the self. Among immigrant-background youth in the Netherlands, the negative effects of ethnic bullying on global self-worth were mediated by ethnic self-worth, while this link was absent in other forms of peer victimization (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). Among refugee-background youth, discrimination experiences have been linked to stilted acculturation processes as children feel rejected by the majority group, leading to lowered self-worth and school engagement (Stark, Plosky, Horn, & Canavera, 2015). Yet, as with teachers, peer discrimination can also be indirect. A recent diary study found that adolescents already experiencing anxiety who faced ethnic teasing from peers then reported heightened and prolonged anxiety (Douglass, Mirpuri, English, & Yip, 2016).

## Student Relationships With Teachers and Peers

On the other hand, supportive relationships with both teachers and peers can protect against the negative effects of ethnic harassment (Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014),

and buffer against general feelings of exclusion (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). Positive teacher-student relationships have been linked to outcomes including higher self-esteem (Agirdag, van Houtte, & van Avermaet, 2012), more positive attitudes toward the majority group (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2012), higher mastery goal orientations (Thijs & Fleischmann, 2015), and fewer problems with school personnel (Garcia-Reid, Peterson, & Reid, 2015) among immigrant-background students. Moreover, immigrant-background students who reported that their teacher would stand up against discrimination showed higher global and ethnic self-esteem (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). Among refugee-background youth, supportive educators were found to be the crucial component in fostering academic engagement (Mendenhall, Bartlett, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017). Moreover, while majority youth tend to have a greater sense of belonging at school (Chiu, Pong, Mori, & Chow, 2012), the association with supportive teacher relationships on immigrant-background students' school belonging has been found to be greater than among their majority peers (den Brok, van Tartwijk, Wubbels, & Veldman, 2010).

The presence and possibility of relationships with immigrant-background teachers may also be important for students' academic and acculturative trajectories. Studies from both the US and Europe have found that ethnic minority students tend to do better academically when the cultural diversity in the student body is also reflected among educators (Donlevy, Meierkord, & Rajania, 2016). This may relate to ethnic minority teachers incorporating more multicultural content into their lessons (Agirdag, Merry, & van Houtte, 2016), or understanding and speaking the heritage language of their immigrant-background students (Conteh, 2007). Qualitative work from Australia highlighted the greater empathy displayed by indigenous and ethnic minority teachers, emphasizing the importance of being able and willing to recognize the lived experiences of their ethnic minority students (Santoro, 2007).

Supportive friendships, in addition to teacher relationships, were strongly linked to academic success among Latino/a immigrant youth in the US (Lee & Lam, 2016). Cross-ethnic friendships in particular are linked to positive outcomes such as greater well-being, greater conflict solving ability, higher self-esteem, and better social adjustment (for a review, see Jugert & Feddes, 2015). Among newcomer immigrant youth, however, language barriers and separated classes can create difficulties in making friends and feeling accepted by majority peers (Tsai, 2006). Greater perceived cultural distance can also make such friendships less likely and is an obstacle particularly for nonimmigrant-background youth (Schachner, Brenick, Noack, van de Vijver, & Heizmann, 2015). Such findings create strong evidence in favor of inclusive, open, and supportive classrooms.

## Culturally Responsive Teaching

When considering the pedagogical strategies teachers employ to engage students from non-majority families, culturally responsive teaching (or culturally relevant pedagogy) is a framework promoting high expectations and encouraging teachers to draw on students' diverse funds of knowledge (e.g., Gay, 2013). It is made up of a range of positive pedagogical strategies, including differentiated teaching practices, cultural engagement, and heritage language affirmation (Dickson, Chun, & Fernandez, 2016). Diverse teaching practices in combination with high teacher expectations were related to higher academic self-efficacy and better classroom performance among first- and second-generation students (Garcia & Chun, 2016). Though culturally responsive teaching has been understudied within the European context, European research on multicultural education, which can be seen as a facet of culturally responsive teaching, shows positive effects on student self-esteem (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004).

## Classroom and School Characteristics

In addition to student interactions in the classroom, characteristics of classrooms and schools as a whole contribute to adjustment outcomes for immigrant- and refugee-background youth. These include structural diversity or ethnic composition and the normative climate, specifically around issues of cultural diversity.

## Ethnic Composition

Immigrant-background students are often concentrated in particular schools, which may reflect ethnic segregation in certain neighborhoods. School segregation is amplified by so-called "white flight" wherein (particularly high-socioeconomic status [SES]) parents of nonimmigrant background avoid putting their children into schools with a high concentration of immigrant-background or ethnic minority students. A high proportion of immigrant-background students is therefore often confounded with a high proportion of low-SES students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Effects of the ethnic composition have been studied for interethnic relations (including ethnic discrimination), but also for achievement-related outcomes.

Findings concerning interethnic relations diverge (see Thijs & Verkuyten, 2014, for a review). A higher proportion of immigrant-background or ethnic minority students has mostly been associated with better interethnic relations, such as more interethnic friendships (Schachner et al., 2015)

and higher popularity of immigrant-background students (Motti-Stefanidi, Asendorpf, & Masten, 2012), lower levels of ethnic victimization (Agirdag, Demanet, van Houtte, & van Avermaet, 2011), and fairer and more equal treatment of diverse students by teachers (Juvonen, Kogachi, & Graham, 2017). Yet, some studies also report associations with more negative interethnic relations, such as higher perceived discrimination among immigrant-background students (Brenick, Titzmann, Michel, & Silbereisen, 2012), and more negative outgroup attitudes (Vervoort, Scholte, & Scheepers, 2011). A nonlinear association between composition and intergroup outcomes may partly explain these conflicting findings (Baysu, Phalet, & Brown, 2014): specifically, when there are only few minority or immigrant-background students in class, higher proportions of these students may be associated both with decreased opportunities for contact with majority students and a higher likelihood of experiencing ethnic discrimination. Yet, in classrooms where there are many minority or immigrant-background students, there may be fewer instances of ethnic discrimination and the joint experience of discrimination may make it less harmful for minority students in these classrooms.

Diversity in terms of number and relative size of ethnic subgroups may also shape interethnic relations. Power is distributed most evenly when there are many groups of equal size (Graham, 2006). Thus, some studies found a positive association between ethnic diversity and interethnic relations (Schachner et al., 2015; van Houtte & Stevens, 2009). Others did not find such a link after controlling for the proportion of ethnic minority students in the classroom (Agirdag et al., 2011; Vervoort et al., 2011).

To conclude, several mechanisms are associated with intergroup outcomes. On the one hand, a higher proportion of immigrant-background students decreases opportunities for interethnic contact with majority students and – up to a certain point – increases discrimination experiences. On the other hand, a more diverse group of immigrant-background students may create more equal relations between different ethnic groups in the classroom and make these groups more accessible. As few studies systematically disentangle these different mechanisms, this makes the overall picture less clear.

For achievement, a higher proportion of immigrant-background students in school was associated with a larger achievement gap between students of immigrant and nonimmigrant background across 45 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, based on data from PISA 2003, 2006, and 2009 (Teltemann & Schunck, 2016). A small negative effect on achievement for immigrant-background students was also found in a meta-analysis (van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010). The disadvantage for minority students varied by ethnic group, whereas the effect of a higher proportion of minority

students was close to zero for majority students. A longitudinal study following newly arrived immigrants also confirmed that students with positive academic trajectories were more likely to attend schools with a lower proportion of immigrant and low-SES students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). However, in PISA 2015, students of immigrant background did no longer experienced disadvantages of attending a school with a high proportion of immigrant-background students once the socioeconomic background of students was also taken into account (OECD, 2016). This may also be an indication that more resources are invested specifically into those schools.

Contrary to some of the negative outcomes associated with a higher proportion of immigrant and immigrant-background students, some studies report higher achievement (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; Rjosk, Richter, Lüdtke, & Eccles, 2016) and better psychological school adjustment (Schachner et al., 2016) in highly diverse classrooms (i.e., classes with many different ethnic groups) when the effect of the proportion is controlled for. Higher diversity has also been associated with more classroom disruptions, however, which may counteract some of its positive effects on achievement (Veerman, 2017).

In studies including both the diversity and the proportion of immigrant-background students, the positive effect of diversity (i.e., more different ethnic groups represented) on achievement-related outcomes is usually smaller than the negative effect of a high share of immigrant-background students. One reason for this may be that a high proportion of immigrant-background students is often confounded with a high proportion of low-SES students and generally less resourced schools. The positive effect of the diversity and the negative effect of the proportion of immigrant-background students on their achievement and school adjustment are partly mediated by a higher (for diversity) and lower (for proportion) mainstream orientation (Schachner et al., 2016) and a higher (for diversity) and lower (for proportion) sense of school belonging (Schachner, Schwarzenthal, van de Vijver, & Noack, 2017). A shortage of qualified teachers and teaching materials, fewer opportunities for contact with majority students, and more discrimination experiences were identified as additional mediators for the negative effect of the proportion of immigrant-background students on their achievement (Baysu et al., 2014; Veerman, 2017).

## School or Classroom Culture and Climate

The norms and climate around issues of cultural diversity are crucial for school adjustment outcomes of immigrant-background youth (for a review, see Schachner, 2017). A school environment free of discrimination and promoting



equality and positive intergroup contact among students is important. Such a climate has been associated with a higher likelihood of interethnic friendships (Schachner et al., 2015), better intergroup attitudes and less perceived discrimination (Schwarzenthal, Schachner, van de Vijver, & Juang, 2017), as well as better achievement, school engagement, and psychological school adjustment (Schachner et al., 2016; Schachner, Schwarzenthal, et al., 2017). It can also buffer the negative effects of stereotype threat (Baysu et al., 2016). In addition, schools should acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of students in the classroom and provide space for discussions about cultural diversity and ethnic identity exploration. Such a climate of cultural pluralism has mainly been associated with positive psychological outcomes, such as higher academic self-concept and academic motivation, better well-being, and fewer disruptive or delinquent behaviors and mental health problems (Schachner et al., 2016).

Both of these aspects of cultural diversity climate promote positive outcomes through a strengthened sense of school belonging among immigrant-background students (Heikamp, van Laar, Verschuere, & Phalet, 2016; Schachner, Schwarzenthal, et al., 2017). A positive effect of the cultural diversity climate on school belonging was also found for refugee-background students (Due, Riggs, & Augoustinos, 2016). Additionally, a climate characterized by equality may facilitate a higher mainstream orientation and identity, whereas a climate characterized by cultural pluralism may strengthen students' ethnic orientation and identity, both of which contribute positively to adjustment (Schachner et al., 2016). The effects of the cultural diversity climate also differ between groups and individuals. A stronger positive effect could be observed among those who had a strong identification with their minority group (Byrd & Chavous, 2011) as well as those experiencing higher levels of discrimination (Closson, Darwich, Hymel, & Waterhouse, 2014). Although boys perceived the climate more negatively than girls, they did not differ from girls in the effects of these experiences (Schachner et al., 2018).

## Educational and School Policies

At the level of school policies, those most frequently discussed in relation to immigrant-background students are diversity policies and streaming (also known as tracking or ability grouping). Streaming involves a system in which students are grouped by ability within schools (i.e., in different classes or courses) or, more commonly, between different types of schools. Whereas diversity policies are usually subject to individual schools, streaming policies are often at regional or country level.

## Diversity Policies

Similar to the diversity climate, approaches to diversity can be distinguished at the level of school policies. For example, Celeste and colleagues analyzed the rules and mission statements of 66 schools in Belgium and linked them to student outcomes (Celeste, Baysu, Meeusen, Kende, & Phalet, 2017). They identified four types of policies: color blindness (e.g., stressing individual talent), assimilationism (e.g., prohibiting headscarves and use of heritage languages at school), multiculturalism (e.g., teaching and learning about diversity), and equality (e.g., promoting equality as a value). Color blindness and assimilationism were by far the most common policy themes. Whereas multiculturalism was associated with better grades 1 year later, the opposite effect was observed for color blindness. Similarly, multiculturalism promoted and assimilationism reduced school belonging among immigrant-background students. In another study, Celeste and colleagues experimentally tested the effect of a new multicultural school policy explicitly valuing a dual identity among ethnic minority students (Celeste, Baysu, Phalet, & Brown, 2016). Black students in the UK who were asked to write about a multicultural school policy (reinforcing a dual identity) performed significantly better on an achievement test compared to those students who received the traditional self-affirmation intervention (see Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006, for details on the original intervention), where students are asked to write about their individual values and a new school policy that acknowledges them as individuals (Celeste et al., 2016). This effect was mediated by reduced stereotype threat. Policies requiring students to only use the mainstream language at school are a common example of assimilationism. Such policies are supported by many teachers, especially in schools with a roughly even distribution of ethnic minority and nonminority students; at the same time, teachers endorsing such policies hold lower achievement expectations toward immigrant-background students, which are likely to negatively affect those students' engagement and academic outcomes (Pulinx, van Avermaet, & Agirdag, 2015). It should be noted though, that effects of different approaches to diversity, as manifested in the cultural diversity climate or policies, may also vary between countries as a result of different immigrant integration and multicultural policies. On the basis of the current evidence reviewed above, it seems that greater positive effects of multiculturalist or pluralist approaches are observed in countries where there is also more support for such policies at the country level (the UK and Belgium). On the other hand, benefits of pluralism are weaker and more positive effects are observed for egalitarian and/or color blind approaches in countries with less support for multicultural policies and more support for assimilation,

such as Germany. Yet, there is a need for more comparative research across countries of settlement to get more clarity on this.

## Streaming

Streaming has received systematic attention in the study of minority student performance. Western European countries in particular are known for their early tracking in which students are split across vocationally oriented and academically oriented schools. Other countries, such as the UK, Canada, and the US, are more characterized by comprehensive schooling, which means students are only split into ability groups late in their educational career. Schnell and Crul compared the educational performance of second-generation immigrant-background students in Austria, the Netherlands, and Sweden, using large-scale educational surveys (Crul, 2013; Schnell & Crul, 2015). In these countries, streaming is introduced at the ages of 10, 12, and 15 years, respectively. These authors found that educational enrolment of immigrant-background students in tertiary education was highest in Sweden and lowest in Austria, and that parental SES was least important in Sweden, where streaming is introduced at the oldest age. Using three waves of PISA data (2003, 2006, and 2009), Teltemann and Schunck (2016) found that streaming at school level was counterproductive, yet, interestingly, that streaming within a single school was associated with higher performance among immigrant-background students. Lancee (2016) found that the adverse effects of streaming at school level persisted after graduation and also had a negative effect on the employment of immigrant-background youth. All in all, the research evidence suggests that the educational achievement of immigrant-background students can be hampered by early between-school streaming (after having been assigned to a “lower” track, it is difficult to gain access to a “higher track” later), though potentially facilitated by within-school streaming.

## Discussion

Our review shows that school experiences and outcomes among immigrant- and refugee-background youth are shaped by multiple layers of the school context. Such complex and interacting experiences are further diversified by individual differences, such as acculturation orientations, immigrant generation, or refugee experiences.

It seems though, that several aspects of the school context are beneficial for most youth of immigrant and/or refugee background: first, to have positive interactions and

relations with teachers and fellow students in the classroom (den Brok et al., 2010; Lee & Lam, 2016; Mendenhall et al., 2017), which are characterized by positive beliefs and nondiscrimination. Such positive relations in the classroom can also buffer some of the negative effects of discrimination experiences immigrant- or refugee-background youth may make in the classroom or elsewhere (e.g., Bayram Özdemir & Stattin, 2014). Second, that teachers attend to the diversity of their students and the different needs they may have, for example, not only by employing culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013), but also by providing opportunities to all students to engage with the heritage cultures represented in the classroom through multicultural education (see Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013, for a review of effects on interethnic relations).

Teachers who actively attend to the diversity of students may also foster a diversity-friendly climate at school, which has been linked with a range of positive outcomes (for a review, see Schachner, 2017). Third, more diversity in terms of number and relative size of subgroups seems to be mostly beneficial for achievement and interethnic relations (Rjosk et al., 2016; Schachner et al., 2015, 2016; van Houtte & Stevens, 2009). At the same time, a high proportion of students of immigrant background can provide a risk for those students' achievement, especially when paired with a high proportion of students of low socioeconomic background (for a review, see van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010). However, the most recent PISA results from 2015 suggest that the net disadvantage resulting from a high proportion of immigrant-background students is shrinking (OECD, 2016). Fourth, diversity policies at school matter. Multicultural policies seem to be particularly effective in countries where there is also support for such policies at the national level (Celeste et al., 2016, 2017). Yet, assimilative and/or color blind policies are still the norm and often not very helpful (Celeste et al., 2017; Pulinx et al., 2015). Finally, between-school tracking appears to be linked with a greater achievement gap between students of immigrant and non-immigrant background and should therefore be avoided, whereas tracking within schools may be beneficial for youth of immigrant and refugee background (Teltemann & Schunck, 2016).

Conceptually, we drew on contextual models of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Eccles & Roeser, 2011) and assumed that individual adolescents are nested in different layers of the school context, ranging from proximal (interindividual interactions in the classroom) to distal (school- and nation-level policies). We found that aspects of the school context at different levels were associated with adjustment outcomes of immigrant- and refugee-background youth. Yet, most of the research has concentrated on proximal aspects of the school context and there

are few multilevel studies, which simultaneously investigate effects at different levels of the school context. This type of study would be required to compare effects across levels and also to test for interactions and indirect effects across levels. In addition, there is also a need for more integrative studies, which simultaneously include multiple aspects of the school context within a level. Often, different research lines, sometimes reflecting different disciplines, are concerned with different aspects of the school context and different aspects of adjustment.

We therefore need more interdisciplinary work in this area. This could mean, for example, collaborating with sociologists or political scientists to study how multicultural and immigrant integration policies at country level are associated with more proximal layers of the school context and/or individual academic outcomes and adjustment of immigrant-background youth (for exemplary studies see Arikan, van de Vijver, & Yagmur, 2017; Schachner, He, et al., 2017). It could also mean turning to linguistics for the effects of language policies and teaching in schools. Finally, research from education and didactics may shed light on effects of specific teaching practices. In school development research, increasing interest has also been paid to the role of the principal. A concept of culturally responsive school leadership has been put forward (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016), yet, we are not aware of any studies linking school leadership to outcomes among immigrant-background students.

For education practitioners and policymakers, research on diversity policies and climate provides interesting new insight into possible points for intervention. Whereas the ethnic composition of schools depends on hard to control factors, such as the ethnic composition of the neighborhood and parental decisions of where to enroll their children in school, diversity policies and climate within schools are easier to change. Such changes, combined with teacher training initiatives, may help to alter teacher beliefs and shape interactions, both between students and teachers, and among students themselves. Teacher training initiatives are most effective when they are part of teacher education at university. Yet, those initiatives differ considerably in content, intensity, and effectiveness (Civitillo, Juang, & Schachner, in press). Improving and consistently providing training to better prepare teachers to work in culturally diverse schools requires this as a top priority on the political agenda. Finally, although this may take longest to change, early streaming should be abolished, in favor of comprehensive schooling. Besides the benefits this may bring for students of immigrant background, more diverse, inclusive schools are also a more adequate reflection of today's societies in Europe and beyond. Attending such schools can help all students prepare for life in a diverse society.

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