# Teaching in ethnically diverse schools: teachers' professionalism

Yvonne Leeman

# Teaching in ethnically diverse schools: teachers' professionalism

Yvonne Leeman[*]
*Universiteit van Amsterdam*

This article reports on research on secondary-school teachers and dilemmas they encounter in their work in multi-ethnic schools in the Netherlands. The results of a recent study based on interviews are compared with a survey conducted in 1996. This showed that in a changing societal context, that can be characterized by mounting selection and marketization and the hardening of the debate on integration, the accent in the dilemmas teachers experience have shifted and new dilemmas have emerged. The balance in communality and diversity in schools is subject of concern to teachers. This outcome is discussed in relation to specific characteristics of teachers' professionalism.

Cet article présente les conclusions d'une étude sur les enseignants du secondaire et les dilemmes qu'ils rencontrent dans les écoles multi-ethniques aux Pays-Bas. Les résultats d'une étude récente sont comparés à une enquête menée en 1996. Cette comparaison révèle que dans un contexte sociétal changeant, que l'on peut caractériser par une sélection et une marchandisation croissantes et un durcissement du débat sur l'intégration, l'accent des dilemmes ressentis par les enseignants s'est déplacé et de nouveaux dilemmes sont apparus. L'équilibre entre communalité et diversité dans les écoles est un sujet d'inquiétude pour les enseignants. Ce résultat est mis en parallèle avec des caractéristiques spécifiques au professionnalisme des enseignants.

In diesem Artikel werden Untersuchungen zu Lehrern an weiterführenden Schulen und die Dilemmas dargestellt, denen sie sich bei der Arbeit an multiethnischen Schulen in den Niederlanden gegenübersehen. Die Ergebnisse einer Studie auf Grundlage von Gesprächen, die in 2002 geführt wurden, werden mit einer 1996 erarbeiteten Erhebung verglichen. Dabei zeigt sich, dass in einem veränderten sozialen Kontext, der von wachsender Aussonderung, von Marktdenken und von einer Verhärtung in der Integrationsdebatte bestimmt wird, sich die Dilemmas für Lehrer verschoben und neue Dilemmas entwickelt haben. Das Gleichgewicht zwischen Gemeinsamkeiten und Diversität in Schulen ist von Interesse für Lehrer. Dieses Ergebnis wird im Hinblick auf die spezifischen Merkmale des Professionalismus von Lehrern diskutiert.

Este artículo presenta un informe sobre los dilemas que profesores en escuelas secundarias encuentran en su trabajo en escuelas multi-étnicas en los Países Bajos. Los resultados de un estudio fundada en entrevistas hechas en 2002 estan comparados con una encuesta realizado en 1996. Este mostraba que en un contexto social debajo cambio, que puede estar caracterizado por selección creciente, commercialización y el endurecimiento del debate sobre integración, el énfasis

*Corresponding author. POW/FMG, Universiteit van Amsterdam, P.O. Box 94208, 1090 GE Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Email: y.a.m.leeman@uva.nl

en los dilemas que profesores experimentan se ha desplazado y nuevos dilemas han aparecido. El balance entre la colectividad y la diversidad dentro de las escuelas es sujeto de una preocupación por los profesores. Este resultatdo está discutido en relación a específicas caracteristicas del professionalismo de los profesores.

## Introduction

In Western Europe, multiculturalism entered the educational agenda in relation to immigration after World War II. Policy on multiculturalism has changed in the Netherlands in recent years from a liberal live-and-let-live approach to one of more restrictive assimilation (Leeman & Reid, 2006). The intersections of classroom issues and broader social concerns are visible in the growing media attention to ethnic-cultural conflicts in schools. Practice-oriented literature and the media give us some insights into the complex issues teachers are confronted with, like the difficulties in reaching a consensus and compromise on school rules and regulations in an ethnically mixed school. According to Singh (2002) a lack of understanding between liberal and traditionally non-liberal groups can play a role in this. Teachers say they are very shocked when confronted with pupils whose convictions (on for example citizenship, religion, personal autonomy) strongly conflict with their own and who are not prepared to enter into discussion on them. Educating in a multi-ethnic context makes new demands on balancing individuality, diversity and communality. What happens in daily practice in multi-ethnic schools in the Netherlands has scarcely been researched to date. This article reports on an interview-based study with secondary school teachers and their perception of intercultural dilemmas in teaching in a multi-ethnic context.

Roughly speaking, two traditions can be differentiated in thinking on education. One tradition sees education as a technical, goal-oriented process with, in general terms, predictable, verifiable outcomes. The other tradition, a source of inspiration for this article, considers education to be less predictable, as teaching and learning is a complex process in which teachers and pupils interact with each other, the teaching materials and the educational environment. In this approach personal well-being, mutual respect, trust and cultural differences in orientation on the world and in communication style play a crucial role in learning. This tradition perceives the professional practice of teachers as being value ridden and rich in moral dilemmas. It interprets education as a cultural practice giving meaning to citizenship, values and norms, the image of people and the relationship between individuals and groups (Bruner, 1996; Hansen, 2001). Teachers regulate learning and the interaction in the classroom and in so doing contribute to the hidden moral lessons of school. At the same time, the content of teaching offers pupils overt cognitive lessons laced with moral lessons (Bernstein, 1996; McCutcheon, 1988).

In a multi-ethnic context good teachers are teachers who know about different cultural perspectives on the world, the multicultural society and hold moral values like justice (see for example Walker and Snarey, 2004) and who are aware of the

cultural and moral dimensions of teaching. They are able to notice (Mason, 2002) and take responsibility for (Moore, 2004) their own role regarding social justice and cultural diversity in education.

Like the critical aspects of the professional identity of the teacher (Moore, 2004), the moral aspects of teaching as a profession have recently attracted interest again (Hansen, 2001, Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001). Theoretically a differentiation can be made between personal morality and professional morality (Tirri, 1999). Husu (2002) points out that teachers' professional morality regarding value dilemmas has not been crystallized. Many of the value dilemmas experienced by the teachers in his research in Finland remained unsolved. That might be the same with the intercultural value dilemmas experienced by teachers.

## Context: the Netherlands

In the 1980s the number of immigrant pupils in Dutch education rapidly increased. This was partly due to the processes of labour migration and of decolonization and the arrival of refugees. Migration quickly became immigration. It was the school's task to educate the new generation of pupils for the multi-ethnic Dutch society.

Increasing attention has been paid in the last decade to moral and citizenship education in the Netherlands. This is linked, for example, to concern about social cohesion, good forms of interaction and safety in public spaces. Stronger demands have been made regarding integration of immigrants and the acceptance by all of the 'core values' of Dutch society. Strong emphasis is placed on the problems of the multicultural society and they are often mentioned in the same breath as current themes like terrorism, crime and lack of social cohesion. The nuance has not been lost. Young people from ethnic-minority groups are now considered to be problem youth, who do not want to integrate, and are perceived as different and difficult, owing to their religious and cultural background. A direct connection is made between problems and divergent culture with no attempt being made to shun an essentialist vision of culture. An interactive approach to ethnicity, diversity and learning (Hall, 1992, Ogbu, 1992) has been marginalised. If the accent in the integration policy of the last century was on dialogue, it has now made way for an emphasis on enforcing rules and compelling integration. Meanwhile the climate in education has hardened. Marketization emphasizes measurable quality, such as efficiency in the transfer and progress of pupils. A more selective school system has developed. At the age of twelve, pupils are segregated into an academic or a vocational track. In the lower streams of the vocational track it is no longer possible to repeat a year, which was previously possible for pupils who had not achieved the educational targets. This particularly affects ethnic-minority pupils who are over-represented in the vocational track (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2003).

## Research

The research question in the interview-based research was as follows: what intercultural dilemmas do secondary-school teachers experience in their work and

how do they appraise their professionality for dealing with these dilemmas? The conjecture was that teachers in the context of the multi-ethnic society are confronted with situations in their daily practice which raise dilemmas about the best way of dealing with them. I was curious whether they follow in their considerations the hard line of assimilation that is emphasized in the prevailing debate in politics and the media.

   The debate on democracy in a multi-ethnic context pays attention to values such as autonomy, tolerance, diversity and communality (Anderson, 2002; Enslin *et al.*, 2001), It is interesting which values and considerations colour the dilemmas of the secondary-school teachers. The considerations, which form the background to the dilemma and may influence the reaction to it, are about the conditions presented by work in schools for dealing with dilemmas well, the image of the actors involved, the political orientation on multiculturality and social justice and the professionality of the teacher. As it is interesting to ascertain whether the dilemmas and considerations of teachers have changed, given the recent developments in the debate on the multicultural society in the Netherlands, I will compare the results of the interview study conducted in 2002 with those of a survey I conducted in 1996 with van Praag (Leeman & van Praag, 1996).

## Method

Owing to the profound, exploratory nature of the interview study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as the research method. An interview makes it possible to explore the breadth of a subject and to consider the affective and cognitive elements of its meaning, in this case the profession of teacher. I interviewed 11 teachers, working at 9 different schools. Representativeness is not of great importance in this study. It is about charting the spectrum of dilemmas teachers experience in professional practice. For this reason, teachers with at least five years' experience in teaching ethnically heterogeneous classes were chosen. It is feasible that experienced staff are so good at teaching that potential problems in the interaction with a pupil or pupils do not materialize because of their way of working. Paccione (2000) shows that experience with ethnic heterogeneity is important for teachers' intercultural sensitivity. Teachers with experience in an ethnically heterogeneous context probably have more experience with intercultural dilemmas. I wanted to interview teachers who showed themselves to be actively involved in issues concerning education and ethnic-cultural diversity. For this purpose, informal networks of teachers interested in these issues were used in the selection. Only two of the teachers approached declined, giving lack of time as the reason. The teachers interviewed do not therefore represent the average teacher. They have experience of ethnically heterogeneous classes and are interested in intercultural issues in education. The nine schools where the teachers work are in four different cities. The types of school reflect secondary education as a whole, with the academic and vocational tracks being proportionately represented. The ethnic composition of the schools' pupil population varies. In all the schools, pupils of Moroccan, Turkish,

Surinamese and refugee background are to be found. Three schools have almost no 'Dutch white' pupils, one school has a few immigrant students and the other five schools have a percentage of about 40% immigrant pupils. Nine teachers at the nine different schools are of Dutch origin. I did my best to include immigrant teachers in the research. Teachers from ethnic-minority groups are extremely underrepresented in Dutch secondary education. I only succeeded in interviewing one teacher of Moluccan origin and one of Moroccan origin. They do not work at the same school. Three men were interviewed and eight women. The teachers teach different subjects: philosophy, history, physics, Dutch, English, economics, chemistry/ physics, general science and geography.

The interviews started with a general introductory question about the multi-cultural society and the moral task of the school in this. This question prompted interactive clarification of these two concepts. The teachers were then asked to describe critical situations in their daily teaching practice that express this task and prompt moral reflection on the best way of dealing with them and on possible tasks for themselves in the school. Attention was paid to actors, values and considerations in the dilemmas. The actors involved could be pupils, colleagues, parents and out-of-school contacts.

The analysis of the interviews was aimed at obtaining information on the incidence of moral dilemmas linked to teaching in ethnically heterogeneous schools. The results give an overview of the dilemmas teachers experience in different schools in the Netherlands. A quick analysis was made after each interview and an initial categorization of the results was made in the analysis of the interviews as a whole. The categorization was based on the *actors* and *values* mentioned and the considerations made by the teachers when describing and discussing the dilemmas. The teachers' words were scarcely changed at all. To ensure authenticity, the results were returned to the teachers with the question whether their views were accurately reflected and whether they wanted to add anything. Nobody made any corrections. Two teachers reacted with 'very accurately'. The dilemmas were then counted. A further analysis examined whether there were commonalities and differences in the dilemmas experienced and in the reactions considered to be possible. This took into account variables like the type of education teachers were working in and teachers' personal characteristics such as orientation on the multicultural society and on the moral task of education. Possible links between the dilemmas and the ethnic composition of the teacher's school were also considered.

The results of the interview study conducted in 2002 were compared with those of the 1996 survey. The respondents in the two studies are roughly comparable. More respondents were involved in the questionnaire study, however, with 192 teachers being approached. In total 55 teachers working in 43 secondary schools completed and returned the questionnaire. Like the 11 teachers in the interview study, they were from different types of schools with varying ethnic heterogeneity. They also represent a varied collection of subjects taught. The teachers in both studies were experienced. Whether the teachers in the questionnaire study were experienced in teaching in an ethnically heterogeneous context is not known.

The subject of the two studies is roughly the same. The interview research posed questions on intercultural dilemmas and the survey asked about bottlenecks in intercultural communication in school. Both studies gave teachers the opportunity of illustrating their experience and views with critical situations that they had themselves experienced in their professional practice. There was every opportunity to discuss situations in the interviews. The questionnaire used in the survey comprised both open and closed questions. Teachers were invited in the open questions to describe a situation that they had experienced themselves and their thoughts and reflections on it.

## Results

In this section on results I will pay attention to the actors involved and the values pertaining to teachers' dilemmas and to the considerations teachers take into account when giving meaning to the dilemmas, multiculturality and their professionalism. I will present the results of the interview study and the comparison with the survey topic by topic.

### Intercultural dilemmas: actors

Both studies produced an overview of intercultural dilemmas linked to critical situations encountered by teachers in their work. The 11 teachers in the interview study mentioned a critical situation 93 times. The 55 teachers who returned the questionnaire named 53 dilemmas. Whether the number of critical situations has increased over time cannot be determined from this study. It is clear that intercultural dilemmas are part of the daily reality of teachers in multi-ethnic classrooms. A categorization of the dilemmas by the actors involved produced the following results for the interview study: contact between the teacher and the pupils (41), between pupils (19), contact with colleagues (19), with parents (7) and with individuals and organizations outside the school (7). In comparison the teachers participating in the survey were given the opportunity of describing one or more of the dilemmas within the two categories, contact between pupils and contact between teacher and pupil. The dilemmas they named were evenly distributed over both categories. In the interview study the relationship between these categories was different. Contact between pupils and teachers prompted twice as many dilemmas as contact between pupils. Teachers are presumably more personally involved as teachers when confronted with stressful intercultural situations. In 1996 teachers were particularly concerned about the relationship between pupils of Dutch and immigrant descent, mentioning quarrels in the schoolyard and the canteen. One typical remark 'a good teacher should not necessarily have problems in intercultural communication'. In the interviews all teachers emphasized the necessity of competence in intercultural communication. In other words, it is according to the teachers interviewed no longer sufficient to be a good teacher in general terms.

*Intercultural dilemmas: values*

During the interviews there was every opportunity to discuss in depth the concept of 'intercultural dilemma'. Both before and during the interviews, teachers were not given a specific format for describing a critical situation and the associated value dilemmas. There was time during the interview for interactive clarification of concepts. This taught me that what one teacher sees as a dilemma is not necessarily a dilemma for another teacher. This is apparently linked to their experience with ethnic diversity, their personal vision on the multi-ethnic society and the characteristics of the school they work at. For some teachers, the concept of intercultural dilemma was linked to essential cultural differences between ethnic groups. They reacted in terms of the well-known dichotomy of cultural differences between the dominant group and the immigrant groups. Others emphatically distanced themselves from this way of thinking and gave evidence of thinking in terms of interactive ethnicity.

The values that are important to teachers are manifested in their stories. In relation to the moral task of education and the multicultural society, teachers mention *justice, respect for school and the teacher, democracy, personal autonomy, diversity and communality*. Teachers name these values as ideal educational outcomes but also as conditions for decent and proper learning processes and developing a good school culture. When these values are under pressure or do not cohere in a specific situation, teachers speak of an intercultural dilemma or a stressful intercultural situation. I will give a few examples from the interviews of the values mentioned.

For teachers, *justice* is mainly an issue when assessing pupils' work and in sanctions to correct pupils' behaviour. Teachers are confronted with what they see as unjustified accusations of discrimination by pupils from ethnic-minority groups. Some teachers are more able to deal with this than others. Social justice in relation to structural characteristics of education does not come to the fore in the interviews.

*Respect for the school and the teacher* is an important value for all teachers and especially under pressure for teachers in the vocational track at schools with predominantly immigrant pupils. This is linked, according to teachers, to the lack of prospects for pupils in the lower vocational streams, to the demotivating practice of transfer to a lower level of education and to the lack of facilities for schools and teachers to build up a personal relationship with the pupils. A teacher in the vocational track stated: 'As teacher-counsellor, it was possible in the past to make a home visit. That benefited the personal relationship with the pupil. This is now impossible due to lack of time. It concerns me and gets me down.' Regardless of the type of school, teachers say that Moroccan pupils in particular have problems with respect for the school and teachers. They quickly feel that they are being dealt with differently and react by behaving less respectfully. Such considerations on the part of the teachers have elements of both a culturalistic and an interactive explanation of the ethnic-cultural identity of young people. The reaction of Moroccan young people is partly understood in the interactive explanation as a reaction to the negative image of Moroccans and Islam in Dutch society. Several teachers mention

the lack of respect for women teachers by boys of Moroccan origin. A female teacher in a large combined school with about 40% immigrant pupils experienced the following: 'Pupils were standing talking in a group and blocking the way. I wanted to pass but it was difficult because I was carrying a cup of coffee, bag and pile of papers. The pupils didn't budge an inch. The predominantly Moroccan pupils are difficult to correct in such a situation. Standing your ground can quickly lead to escalation. According to her, distrust is part of Moroccan youngsters' self-image. She said: 'It often takes teachers a lot of trouble to get them to do something whereas a comment like ''Clear up that mess'' is sufficient for Dutch pupils.' Another teacher, himself of Moroccan origin and working in another large combined school with about 30% immigrant pupils, has a comparable story. According to him, Moroccans continually have the feeling of not being accepted in Dutch society. Girls in particular refuse to accept that the behaviour and comments of the Dutch teachers are often well meant. 'We are not accepted' appears to be a part of their identity. An example: ''After school some Moroccan children were sitting in the hall. They were laughing and chatting and making a mess. The caretaker commented on their behaviour. They should be quieter and not make a mess. The reaction of the youngsters was: 'Why are you picking on us? We've got a right to be sitting here! We talk loudly, that's our culture.'''

*Personal autonomy* is for teachers an important value. Most of them actively propagate it. In personal contacts with pupils, for example about participating in out-of school activities or about becoming engaged, marrying or continuing their education, teachers are aware that some pupils balance personal autonomy and group loyalty differently to themselves. This prompts them to reflect or concerns them. It is difficult for them to understand that one could choose to accept less personal autonomy like accepting to marry at an early age without finishing school for the sake of loyalty to one's family. Several teachers mentioned problems regarding teaching politically sensitive topics like the Middle East, World War II or religious education. Emotions can run high in such subjects. In their opinion tensions between a personal critical stance and group loyalty play a role here. They state that in those situations, established rules for a structured discussion do not help.

*Communality and diversity* are very important to the teachers. They would prefer to work in a democratic way, i.e. through dialogue and the participation of all pupils, on the school climate and on solving problems. However, there are pupils who feel so detached from the school that they are not prepared to search for solutions as a community, according to teachers. Some have noticed that it is difficult for them to intervene in arguments between immigrant pupils and have had the experience of being excluded: 'As teacher, you ask about what has happened. The answer is, ''You wouldn't understand. Sorry that I lost it.''' The teachers would really like to create a sense of community. The balance in communality and diversity is a subject of concern to teachers. There are pupils and colleagues who distance themselves from diversity and refuse to take into account the sensitivities linked with ethnic-cultural diversity, such as style of clothing, religious-based rules about food and fasting, and

the emotional sensitivity and diversity of viewpoints associated with burning political issues. All of the teachers mentioned during the interviews that the communality at school was under pressure. They gave examples of intercultural dilemmas that are witness to their sense of responsibility for social cohesion and respect for ethnic diversity. They think about new emphases in the lesson content, such as attention to multi-perspectivity, extra attention for sex education and for dealing with discrimination. Teachers are generally troubled by the fact that pupils and colleagues do not take mutual sensitivities into account. A sensitive subject is eating and drinking during Ramadan. Clothing is another tricky issue. Pupils can upset each other's sensitivities with the issue of covering your head or not. Teachers pointed out that African and Surinamese pupils can be irritated by the 'boring clothes' of Islamic pupils, who in turn are irritated by tight-fitting clothes emphasizing body shape. Teachers say, however, that pupils generally do not take offence on these matters. The pupils emphasize the liberal value of freedom of expression and behaviour with the standard comment: 'it's up to the person concerned.'

Swearing at each other, family feuds, political differences of opinion etc. can put the communality between pupils of similar origin under intense pressure. There are sometimes different interpretations of Islamic rules in one class. An example from a teacher of Moluccan origin working at a combined school with predominantly immigrant pupils: ''A Turkish girl in Year 4 of the highest academic track decided to wear a headscarf and at the same time make herself immaculate. When asked about this, she said: 'I feel safer wearing a headscarf.' (She means, I'm less interesting to Dutch boys.) Other Moslem girls in the class do not agree with her. According to them, the headscarf is a symbol of camouflaging sexuality. You degrade the headscarf by using it as protection from a specific group, whilst simultaneously emphasizing your sexuality to others.'' An example from another teacher: 'a Moslem pupil was eating hamkas (a ham and cheese snack). The reaction of another Moslem pupil was: ''Is that halal what you're eating?''' It is difficult for teachers when immigrant pupils prevent the teacher intervening in such frictions when this is necessary for the lesson to continue. This is a critical dilemma for many teachers that I have spoken to. They want to balance diversity and communality and be treated with respect.

*Comparing*: The teachers in 1996 emphasized respect as a value under pressure. They emphasized problems related to cultural differences between pupils such as open conflicts (e.g. arguments about mixed relationships and discrimination), lack of respect for cultural difference and mutual exclusion through group formation along ethnic lines. Here they are talking about relations between Dutch and immigrant pupils. The teachers interviewed in 2002 placed far less emphasis on conflicts between these groups. For example they are not alarmed by groups forming along ethnic lines. They say that pupils have grown up with each other, so they know where they stand in relation to each other. It concerns them that political events can accentuate the differences. What was new in the interviews was the concern about communality inside the school and about negative forms of contact between themselves and immigrant pupils and the limited influence of the teacher to do anything about this.

**Considerations about intercultural dilemmas: differences between pupils**

Teachers mentioned a broad range of considerations about the dilemmas they experience. It is not possible to go into this in detail in this article. I will limit myself to the impressions about the similarities and differences between pupils, which are closely related to the vision on co-existing well in a multi-ethnic society. At the same time it is a topic that came up in the interviews with the teachers spontaneously, frequently and in depth.

The teachers in the interview study did not have a uniform picture of pupils. Generally speaking, the teachers do see cultural-ethnic differences but emphasize similarities. They clearly distance themselves from the negative image forming in society about immigrants. They do mention characteristics such as the materialism and rude behaviour of the youth today which trouble them as the older generation. Some teachers emphasize that the second generation of pupils from ethic-minority groups at their school, like the Dutch pupils from the majority population, embrace liberal values. One teacher at a school exclusively for pre-university education only encounters immigrant pupils who have consciously chosen that school for its liberal climate. Another at a black combined school (offering theoretical pre-vocational secondary education, senior general secondary education and pre-university education) said: 'The second generation has become much more Dutch than many people think.' She added that a typical comment from pupils is: 'We live in a democratic country. Everybody can make their own choices.' It is striking that the teachers in the interview study are very careful about labelling a particular group of pupils as a problem group. Their solutions do not follow the current trend of stricter rules and transfer of the desired norms and values but focus on understanding, dialogue and the development of a pedagogical and personal relationship with pupils.

This emphasis on similarities does not change the fact that all teachers give examples of ethnic differences that they have experienced in teaching ethnically heterogeneous classes. They are concerned about some differences. They mention differences in the thinking about and emotional involvement in subjects like the position of man and woman, homosexuality, certain political issues and religion. An example from a teacher at a combined school with 40% immigrant children: ''It is the task of the school to educate children for Dutch society. Co-operative learning serves that purpose. This method of working sometimes causes problems if you allocate different roles to pupils. Moroccan boys in particular can display genderized behaviour. They want the girls to do clerical tasks and take on the leadership task themselves. The girls don't comply just like that. The boys try to continue their manipulation until they get their way. Their comments to the teacher about this include: 'Yeah, but, I did that task last year.' 'That's what I'm really good at.' ' She's not very good at that.' 'If she does that, we'll get a low mark.'''

When teachers talked about immigrant pupils in the interviews they quickly started referring to Moroccan pupils. According to the teachers, this is due to the pupils themselves: 'they're different,' 'they communicate differently' and 'they're not

co-operative and shut themselves off.' 'It's a group of pupils who do not accept the authority of women teachers.' 'A group who openly display distrust of the Dutch (as part of their identity).' As well as essentialist explanations for the differences they encounter, teachers use interactive explanations. A history teacher: 'Their behaviour is a reaction to the negative image of them in society, a reaction to poverty and the lack of prospects for their group. They don't feel understood at home or at school and have experienced that an aggressive, challenging approach has success. Passers-by are scared. After such behaviour at school, just another test, you're not sent out, the mark doesn't count anymore, etc.' The teacher of Moroccan origin expresses it as follows: "There are no fundamental differences in norms and values. There are feelings of insecurity in combination with teachers' prejudices. Most Moroccan children lack communication skills and have little trust in Dutch teachers. The children don't want to see the good intentions of the teachers and, as part of their identity, have developed the feeling, 'We are not accepted in the Netherlands.' 'My colleagues do want to educate them but at the same time are cautious, as they want to accept Moroccans as they are. Their behaviour is based on ignorance and insecurity.'

*Comparing*: In 1996 the majority of the teachers emphasized the ethnic-cultural differences between pupils. The teachers mentioned open conflicts and milder forms of ignorance linked to an inadequate command of Dutch and to different manners. A lack of understanding is mainly experienced as temporary and attributed to cultural differences. This concerns, after all, newcomers who are not familiar with Dutch society and the Dutch who for their part have to get used to the 'new Dutch'. Extra information and a good chat can solve a lot. But there are some teachers who have a different approach. This concerns differences that cannot be solved easily. These include questions of principle regarding religious beliefs that sometimes appear, in the eyes of the teacher, to be too fanatical, such as wearing headscarves in gym lessons and not participating in out-of-school activities. One of the teachers (in junior general secondary education with 60% immigrant pupils) said: 'I've noticed that some children put up a barrier (as if to say, you are not going to get to know me) and act aloofly. Sometimes I notice that if I say anything about Islam, they take it personally and it's not my business (although I have my doubts about their interpretation of Islam).'

In the interviews most teachers did not really talk in general terms about ethnic-cultural characteristics of immigrant pupils. Rather, they emphasized the problematic situation in which interethnic contact must take shape. They make a critical analysis of the social environment, education and the attitude of colleagues and show that the behaviour of immigrant pupils is closely linked to the interaction with their environment. In their opinion, immigrant pupils are no longer newcomers but part of society and interact with that society. Moroccan pupils were seen as difficult. While the trend is to keep a tight rein on Moroccan boys and quickly reprimand them, teachers do not favour a harder approach as a matter of course. They also see the responsibility of the school and ask for attention to be paid to solutions in the field of relationships.

### Considerations in intercultural dilemmas: professionalism of the teacher

The teachers described how over the years they have developed ways of tackling critical situations, such as deadlocked discussions in which ethnic cultural diversity plays a meaningful role. A history and a philosophy teacher experimented, for example, with teaching material approaching a topic from several points of view and sources. The teacher tried to make the pupils aware of multi-perspectivity and succeeded in defusing the emotional nature of discussions, making them more rational. A Dutch language teacher chose another approach. She has, in line with her expertise, restricted the topics that pupils give a talk on, forbidding talks encompassing political or religious propaganda.

Generally speaking, the teachers I have spoken to show themselves to be interculturally sensitive. In this respect, they are critical of colleagues. The two main problems they mention are the one-sided emphasis on personal autonomy and the lack of sensitivity to diversity. Compare this with a Moroccan teacher: 'A large number of teachers accept immigrant pupils but they are too passive. They don't actively, as a kind of diplomat, look for solutions to problems they encounter. My colleagues sometimes react too emotionally, for example to the reluctance of Moroccan boys to accept the authority of women teachers. They only interpret their behaviour in a culturalist way and don't see the adolescent side of it.' A Moluccan teacher working at a combined school with almost exclusively immigrant pupils said: 'Many of my colleagues generalize and have difficulty in seeing the pupil as an individual. They don't make enough effort to create a relationship of trust with pupils. They feel a distance between them and their Moroccan pupils and make fools of them. Those teachers experience such things as being spat at in the face, pupils not accepting the authority of women teachers, and pupils putting themselves at a distance. They exaggerate incidents out of all proportion.' He finds this difficult and it bothers him that the school does not take responsibility for the upbringing of the pupils: 'The children don't know where they belong. The children need coaching. When Dutch teachers see that Moroccan and Turkish pupils opt for their 'own autonomy', that is often sufficient reason for them not to bother about the relationship with parents. But the joint responsibility of the school *and* the parents is important. The school must take the relationship with the parents seriously. When parents do not give a child enough freedom to go on school trips or travel back independently, a teacher should contact the parents. If there is already a relationship with the parents, this is then easier. You cannot leave pupils out in the cold at such times and leave them to sort out the problem alone.'

Teachers have not only developed individually; at some schools this has been done collectively and has been formalized. An example of a teacher working at a school with many immigrants: 'During out-of-school activities, we regularly have troublesome incidents that are offensive to pupils. A new element in the preparations for out-of-school activities is the bus driver. Give him coffee, tell him something about the pupils and address the bus-load of children yourself at first to prevent the wrong tone being set (too hard and intolerant in the sense of 'this isn't allowed, that's not allowed').' An example from a teacher at a school with mainly immigrant

pupils: 'Previously, before we became a 'black' school, we had lots of school-project weeks and a trip abroad. This stopped at a certain point and now, for the last three years, the youngest class goes away for three days somewhere in the Netherlands. Last year about half of the pupils went. Reasons for not going were not daring to be away from home or not being allowed to. Sometimes it's a question of money. We keep the cost of our school trips down. Many parents only live on social security. Our attitude has changed over the years. A school trip didn't go ahead before unless 80% went, now it takes place regardless; 35%, for example, is fine. We've also changed over to 24-hour trips and sleep in the bus, leaving at 6 a.m. With a bit of luck, you're in Paris by noon. Then the bus departs again at 12 midnight. Sometimes pupils say, 'My parents can't accept that yet.' Those pupils and pupils whose parents can't afford it don't go. Pupils know exactly what the priorities are at home regarding money. They choose very carefully what is important to them, frequently demonstrating very adult behaviour on this point.' In short, thinking from the perspective of differences and taking them (and communality) into account is the norm for the majority of the teachers interviewed. One teacher said that she had noticed that other schools with less experience of ethnic diversity find this peculiar.

*Comparing*: the teachers in 1996 thought in terms of newcomers and temporary friction. They did not need any additional help or thought they had sufficient help with information about the cultural backgrounds of newcomers. The teachers interviewed said that sometimes they did not know what action to take and when they could think of a solution were not able to take the necessary action to implement it. They noticed that colleagues had the same problem. By a process of trial and error, some individual teachers and schools have developed adequate ways of dealing with this.

The social debate on immigrants and the multicultural society has hardened since the late 1990s. This is noticeable in the way the teachers interviewed in 2002 interpret their task. Teachers referred to this hardening of attitudes, emphasizing the importance of communality and diversity and for a personal approach to pupils instead of a strict regime of rules and speedy punitive measures. They choose their own path. Teachers appear to be pedagogically involved, as well as involved in the well-being and development of their pupils. This echoes the conclusion of international comparative studies on the vision of teachers on affective education (Puurula *et al.*, 2001). The pedagogical involvement of teachers with their pupils is probably exactly what prevents them from referring to 'those Moroccans', a standard reaction. They get into difficulties, however, when 'Moroccan pupils' do not trust them. They do know, however, teachers who have a different approach. On this point, there is thus a lack of a shared professional morality.

## Discussion

This article has reported on a study involving 11 secondary-school teachers teaching in ethnically mixed schools. They are experienced teachers with an interest in issues pertaining to ethnic diversity and education. They described critical situations they had encountered in ethnically heterogeneous classes that made them reflect on the

appropriate way to react and on important values under pressure in their daily teaching practice. Most of the dilemmas were experienced in contact with individual pupils, although tensions between pupils and contact with colleagues and people outside the school also resulted in dilemmas. Teachers named dilemmas concerning the values of justice, respect for the school and the teacher, democracy, autonomy, diversity and communality. They are troubled by the hardening of attitudes in education, the lack of prospects for the lower streams of pre-vocational secondary education and the lack of respect for school and teachers connected with this. Teachers are concerned about the school climate in which communality is under pressure. There are pupils (Moroccan pupils are often mentioned) who behave aloofly at school. Most teachers have no answer for this. When there are conflicts between immigrant pupils, it is difficult for teachers to intervene. Respect for the school and the teacher and a good balance in diversity and communality are all threatened. Another frequently mentioned dilemma was the balance between commitment to personal autonomy and respect for a different perspective on autonomy of some immigrant pupils in the personal supervision and guidance of pupils and in lessons about religious and political issues. Many teachers have experienced that a dialogue based on liberal values does not work in those situations. Some have found an answer by trial and error, others are still looking. Insufficient shared professionalism reigns in this field.

The results of the interview study have been compared with those of a survey in 1996. This revealed a shift in emphasis in the dilemmas experienced, new dilemmas that have emerged and the need to question teachers' professionalism in dealing with these dilemmas. The research shows that teachers do experience intercultural dilemmas and that they feel that their possibilities for action are too limited. The participating teachers were all interested in the theme. The question remains, therefore, how does the average teacher experience working in an ethnically heterogeneous class and what considerations determine his or her actions. More large-scale research is necessary to answer this. There is also very little known about the perspective and experiences of pupils in ethnically heterogeneous classes. This knowledge is also important.

Concern about teachers' professionalism and the learning environment in ethnically heterogeneous secondary schools was expressed in particular in the interviews. All of the teachers can be described as pupil-oriented; they uphold the standards of the teaching profession that have developed in the direction of a broad professional identity, an identity that pays attention to the broad development of pupils, not just subject-oriented issues. From this position and care about their pupils, which is stronger in some teachers than others, teachers criticize the current trend of rationalization and the emphasis on testing and performing in secondary education. They said that they do not have the resources to give immigrant pupils in particular the attention they need. Teachers working in the vocational track express this the most strongly.

The teachers interviewed opt for other ways of dealing with problems concerning respect for the school and the teacher than the trend toward strict rules and cameras

in the school. They look for solutions that emphasize personal relationships and the school climate and are concerned about the social space for this approach. The often negative image of immigrant youth and the strong emphasis on integration and no-nonsense in the debate on multiculturalism and integration are difficult to combine with the desired approach. This also applies to the increasing rationalization and selection in education that teachers pointed out. According to them this trend is not good for the educational opportunities and motivation of immigrant pupils in the lowest streams of pre-vocational secondary education and makes the task of their teachers even more difficult. The core of their professional ideology is the calling to contribute to the development of young people. In their opinion the well-being of the pupil is the starting point for good teaching. Competition between schools and the language of efficiency are alien to this view. However, they are key concepts in the trend toward marketization. The teachers in the interview research expressed concern about this trend. Broader research would indicate whether the average teacher places the same emphasis in his or her professional ideology as the teachers in the interview research, an emphasis that is difficult to combine with the current hardening in attitudes on education and integration.

The experienced teachers interviewed showed sensitivity, knowledge and commitment to give shape to moral dilemmas in their multi-ethnic classrooms. They were able to notice intercultural dilemmas between different actors in their daily practice and had developed knowledge on different perspectives on the world, values and the tension between communality and diversity. In reflecting about these dilemmas they had developed a range of considerations on diversity and schooling and a variety of ways of reacting to dilemmas experienced. They developed these in a process of trial and error and are partly still looking. They evaluate their professionalism as insufficient. In the Netherlands intercultural competence is missing in or forms a marginal part of the curriculum in teacher education. The stories of the teachers interviewed show the urgency of the incorporation of intercultural sensitivity competence in the heart of the profession. The views that the teachers interviewed developed are critical of a narrow type of teacher profession-alism. They emphasize a critical professionalism which values a pedagogical involvement with pupils and balancing diversity and commonality. This critical stance on the profession strongly informed by the practice of experienced teachers should be taken into account seriously.

**Notes on contributor**

Yvonne Leeman is a senior university lecturer and researcher at the Department of Educational Studies and the SCO-Kohnstamm Instituut of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of the Universiteit van Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She combines this with a professorship at the institute for teacher education of Windesheim University, Zwolle, the Netherlands. Her fields of interest include diversity in education, professional identity of teachers, citizenship education.

# References

Anderson, H. (2002) On the limits of liberalism and multiculturalism (Teachers College Record ID Number 11009). Available online at: http://www.tcrecord.org (last accessed 8 January 2003).

Bernstein, B. (1996) *Pedagogy, symbolic control and ideology: theory, research, critique* (Bristol, Taylor & Francis).

Bruner, J. (1996) *The culture of education* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press).

Buzelli, C. & Johnston, B. (2001) Authority, power, and morality in classroom discourse, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(8), 873–884.

Enslin, P., Pendlebury, S. & Tjiatta, M. (2001) Deliberative democracy, diversity and the challenges of citizenship education, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35(1), 115–130.

Hall, S. (1992) 'New ethnicities', in: J. Donald & A. Rattansi (Eds) *'Race', culture and difference* (London, Sage), 252–259.

Hansen, D. T. (2001) Teaching as a moral activity, in: handbook of research on teaching (Washington, American Educational Research Association).

Husu, J. (2002) Representing the practice of teachers' pedagogical knowing (Turku, Finnish Educational Research Association).

Leeman, Y. & Praag, T van. (1996) Leerkrachten over interculturele communicatie [Teachers on intercultural communication] (Amsterdam, SCO-Kohnstamm Instituut).

Leeman, Y. & Reid, C. (2006) Multi/intercultural education in Australia and the Netherlands, *Compare*, 36(1), 57–72.

Mason, J. (2002) *Researching your own practice. The discipline of noticing* (London, New York, Routledge-Falmer).

McCutcheon, G. (1988) *Curriculum and the work of teachers*, In: L. E. Beyer & M. Apple (Eds). The Curriculum (Albany, SUNY Press).

Moore, A. (2004) *The good teacher. Dominant discourses in teaching and teacher education* (London, New York, Routledge-Falmer).

Ogbu, J. U. (1992) Understanding cultural diversity and learning, *Educational Researcher*, 21(8), 5–14.

Paccione, A. V. (2000) Developing a commitment to multicultural education, *Teachers College Record*, 102, 980–1005.

Puurula, A., Neill, S., Vasileiou, L., Husbands, C., Lang, P., Katz, Y. J., Romi, S., Menezes, I. & Vriens, L. (2001) Teacher and student attitudes to affective education: an European collaborative research project, *Compare*, 31(2), 165–186.

Singh, B. R. (2002) Problems and possibilities of dialogue across cultures, *Intercultural Education*, 13(2), 215–227.

Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (2003) Rapportage minderheden 2003. Onderwijs, arbeid en social-culturele integratie. [Minorities report 2003. Education, labour and social-cultural integration] (Den Haag, SCP).

Tirri, K. (1999) Teachers' perceptions of moral dilemmas at school, *Journal of Moral Education*, 28(1), 31–47.

Walker, V. S. & Snarey, J. R. (2004) *Rac-ing moral formation: African American perspectives on care and justice* (New York, Teachers College Press).