

## Ethnic school context and the national and sub-national identifications of pupils

Agirdag, Orhan; Houtte, Mieke van; Avermaet, Piet van

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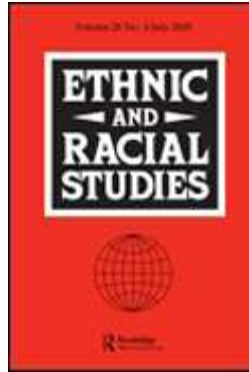
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**Ethnic school context and the national and sub-national identifications of pupils**

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## Ethnic school context and the national and sub-national identifications of pupils

### Abstract

In various European countries, policymakers strive for educational desegregation to enhance pupils' national identifications. Since little empirical evidence supports such a policy and social identity theorists emphasize the importance of context, this article examines the impact of ethnic school composition—measured by the proportion of non-natives and ethnic heterogeneity—on the national (Belgian) and sub-national (Flemish) identifications of pupils. Multilevel data analyses by surveying 2,845 pupils (aged ten to twelve) in sixty-eight Flemish primary schools reveal differential effects for natives and non-natives. While the proportion of non-natives at school is negatively associated with non-native pupils' identifications, it is positively related to native pupils' identifications. In general, the ethnic heterogeneity of the school is negatively associated with pupils' national and sub-national identifications. Our findings indicate that the relation between ethnic school composition and pupils' identifications is mediated by the latter's interethnic friendships. The consequences of these findings for educational policy are discussed.

**Keywords:** national identification, sub-national identification, educational segregation, ethnic school composition, school diversity

## Introduction

A growing concern about ethnic school segregation is evident in many European countries. Such separation is considered not only unfavourable for educational achievement but also an obstruction for the social integration of immigrant and minority pupils (*Belgium*: Jacobs, Rea and Teney 2009; Van Houtte and Stevens 2009; *for England*: Burgess, Wilson and Lupton 2005; *France*: Felouzis 2005; *Germany*: Kristen 2005; *the Netherlands*: Westerbeek 1999; Karsten *et al.* 2006; and *Sweden*: Szulkin and Jonsson 2006). For example, in the aftermath of the 2001 riots in the UK, the ever-growing absence of social cohesion was linked to educational and residential ethnic segregation. Policy makers argued that desegregation is a requisite for the cultivation of a sense of citizenship, in particular a stronger national identification, i.e. Britishness, and sub-national identification, i.e. Englishness (Cantle 2001; Ouseley 2001; Maxwell 2009). Similar evolutions took place in France. Although the topic of social integration there is commonly linked to the issue of residential segregation (*les banlieues*), educational segregation is seen as one of the most essential obstacles in attaining a stronger French national identification (Payet 1998; Felouzis 2005). In other words, policy makers in different countries generally work towards the dispersal of minority/immigrant pupils (we call these groups non-natives), as they believe that the mixing of ethnicities in schools will enhance the academic achievement and national identification, particularly with respect to non-native pupils (Mahieu 2002; Burgess *et al.* 2005).

However, these policies lack a firm evidential foundation, since little empirical research has been conducted into the determinants of national identifications among children and young adolescents (e.g. Carrington and Short 1995; Verkuyten 2001; Barrett 2002; Reizábal, Valencia and Barrett 2004; Lam and Smith 2009). Moreover,

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2  
3 although theorists of identity insist that social identifications are strongly dependent on  
4 contextual factors (Oakes, Turner and Haslam 1994), the impact of school attendance  
5 in segregated or integrated contexts on the national identifications of native and non-  
6 native pupils is obscure. While research has been primarily conducted into the effect  
7 of ethnic school segregation on educational achievement, interethnic friendship, and  
8 racial attitudes (for reviews Schofield 1991; Braddock and Eitle 2004), studies linking  
9 school segregation to social identifications have focused mostly on *ethnic* identity and  
10 in-group/out-group evaluations (Kinket and Verkuyten 1999; Umaña-Taylor 2004).  
11 Hence, the relation between de facto school segregation and the national  
12 identifications of pupils remains generally unknown, and consequently, the above-  
13 stated political beliefs concerning the negative impact of ethnic school context on the  
14 development of national identifications are not based on empirical observations.  
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32 The main aim of this study is to address this lacuna. More specifically, we  
33 investigate the impact of ethnic school context—in terms of ethnic concentration and  
34 the ethnic heterogeneity/diversity of the student body—on national identifications of  
35 2,845 pupils in sixty-eight elementary schools in Flanders. Flanders, which is the  
36 Dutch-speaking regional state of Belgium, is a unique context, since as an autonomous  
37 state it is responsible for almost every aspect of educational policy. Therefore, besides  
38 the Belgian national identification, we also investigate the determinants of sub-  
39 national, that is, Flemish identification of pupils.  
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### 56 **National identification**

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58 As with gender or religious identifications, national identification can be regarded as a  
59 part of the individual's social identity (Barrett 2002). Tajfel (1981, p.255) defines  
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3 social identity as ‘that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his  
4 knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value  
5 and emotional significance attached to that membership’. Drawing upon this  
6 definition, national identification can be considered as the self-identification and  
7 emotive meaning that an individual derives from membership in a national group.  
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16 In contrast to the large number of studies on ethnic and gender identity,  
17 relatively little research has been conducted on the national identity of children and  
18 young adolescents. Early studies have examined the time span of the national  
19 identification process in children. These studies reveal that children begin to  
20 categorize themselves as members of a national group by ages five or six. At this  
21 moment, however, children’s gender and age identities seem to be more salient than  
22 their national identity. Nevertheless, national identity tends to increase in importance  
23 until the age of eleven or twelve. By the age of ten, youngsters are able to describe the  
24 characteristics of their national group (for reviews see Barrett 2002; Reizábal *et. al*  
25 2004).  
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40 More recently, different authors have focused on the impact of national  
41 identification on children’s in-group favouritism. For example, Barrett (2002) reports  
42 that youngsters who categorized themselves as ‘quite British’ or ‘very British’ were  
43 more likely to link British people with positive adjectives, such as ‘friendly’, ‘nice’,  
44 ‘clean’. Studies of children and young adolescents in the Netherlands (Kinket and  
45 Verkuyten 1999) and in the Basque country (Reizábal *et. al* 2004) reveal similar  
46 results.  
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57 Qualitatively oriented research has focused on the negotiation of national  
58 identity by children and young adolescents, concentrating on the meaning derived by  
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3 them in 'belonging' to a nation-state and the construction of their national  
4 identifications through the education system (*for Australia*: Howard and Gill 2001; *for*  
5 *Greek-Cyprus*: Philippou 2005; *for Ireland*: Tormey 2006; *for Scotland* Carrington  
6 and Short 1995). These studies underline the importance of the national context in  
7 which national identities are formed and negotiated. For example, Philippou (2005)  
8 shows that the importance placed on national identity by Greek-Cypriot pupils was  
9 related to the highly politicized context of Cyprus, namely, the presence of a 'national  
10 enemy' on the island. In contrast, Howard and Gill (2001) indicate that Australian  
11 children were mostly uninterested and unconcerned about being Australian.  
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### 28 **National identification and ethnic minorities**

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32 When we take ethnic differences into account, this picture becomes more complex.  
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34 For years, the one-dimensional assimilation model was the dominant framework. The  
35 theories based on it suggested that national identification and ethnic identification are  
36 antipodal, implying that the strength of the ethnic identify of non-natives determines  
37 the degree of their national identity (Phinney 1990). By contrast, current scholars  
38 argue for a bi-dimensional model. They have pointed out that ethnic identification  
39 does not necessarily compete with national identification, since people can combine  
40 multiple identities (Hutnik 1991; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind and Vedder 2001).  
41 For example, a Turkish immigrant in Flanders may perceive himself as 'very  
42 *Belgian*'(national identification) and simultaneously as 'very Flemish' (sub-national  
43 identification) and 'very *Turkish*' (ethnic identification). This is the notion of the  
44 hyphenated or multiple identities (Geartner and Dovidio 2000; Verkuyten 2004;  
45 Modood 2005).  
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3 Previous empirical studies on national identifications of immigrants and ethnic  
4 minorities have generally shown that these non-native groups identify less with the  
5 national category than natives do (for studies of Belgium see Phalet and Swyngedouw  
6 2002; Van Craen, Vancluysen and Ackaert 2007). Research on children and young  
7 adolescents reveals similar results (Carrington and Short 1995; Barrett 2002; Lam and  
8 Smith 2009). Barrett (2002) indicates that white-English children have a higher level  
9 of both 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' than children from ethnic minority groups. A  
10 study conducted by Carrington and Short (1995) with eight to eleven years-old  
11 children demonstrates that more than 90 per cent of native children answered 'British'  
12 when responding to the question 'Are you British or something else'. By contrast, only  
13 38 per cent of non-native children said they were 'British', while a fifth claimed a  
14 specific ethnic identity, such as 'Chinese' or 'Jamaican'. In line with the idea of  
15 'hyphenated identities', 25 per cent of non-natives described themselves as having  
16 both ethnic and national identity.  
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37 For the purpose of the present study, it is important to note that various authors  
38 have argued that national identification is partly determined by the social context. For  
39 instance, Vadhvani and Barrett (2009) show that the British identity of Indian and  
40 Pakistani is different in private and public spheres. These authors suggest that at public  
41 level (e.g. at school) the British identity is more dominant than it is at the private level  
42 (e.g. at home). In their discussion, Lam and Smith (2009) argue that the ethnic school  
43 context may be an important determinant of national identifications; but unfortunately,  
44 they do not provide empirical evidence to test this hypothesis.  
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### **Identification and ethnic school composition**



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3 Children and young adolescents spend almost half of their waking hours in a school  
4 context. Most theories on identity, self-categorisation theory in particular, emphasize  
5 that social identities are strongly dependent on context (Tajfel 1981; Oakes *et. al*  
6 1994), and empirical evidence supports this point (Hopkins and Murdoch 1999). It is,  
7 then, surprising that the relation between the school context and the national  
8 identifications of pupils is widely neglected. Therefore, our primary goal in this paper  
9 is to examine the manner in which pupils' national (Belgian) and sub-national  
10 (Flemish) identifications are influenced by contextual school factors, especially the  
11 ethnic composition of the student body, as measured by the proportion of non-native  
12 pupils (i.e. ethnic minority concentration), and the ethnic diversity/heterogeneity at  
13 school (see Variables section).  
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### 33 *Reference group theory*

34 The reference group theory (Kelley 1952; Merton 1968; Hyman and Singer 1968) is a  
35 suitable starting point to investigate the association between ethnic minority  
36 concentration and the national and sub-national identifications of pupils. According to  
37 this theory, a group, in a given context, might constitute either a *normative* reference  
38 or a *comparative* reference group for individuals. When the group functions as the  
39 former, it sets and enforces standards for individuals. This means that when the  
40 normative reference group tends to exhibit high national identifications, the individual  
41 will also be inclined to have a higher national identification. On the other hand, when  
42 the group functions as a comparative reference group, it does not function as the norm,  
43 but as a benchmark against which individuals compare and judge themselves. In this  
44 case, the contrast between the individual and the group is highlighted, which might  
45 enlarge the differences between them (Kelley, 1952).  
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3 According to Merton (1968), individuals initially tend to choose their own  
4 group as their reference group. However, individuals might also choose groups to  
5 which they do not belong (e.g. a non-native pupil considering the native group as the  
6 point of reference). Because the relative size of a group in a given context (school)  
7 may increase or decrease the probability that it is chosen as a reference group, the  
8 proportion of natives or non-natives at school will be related to the likelihood that such  
9 groups will be chosen as the point of reference by individuals. As such, when  
10 *normative* reference group processes prevail and the proportion of native pupils at  
11 school increases (lower ethnic minority concentration), native pupils are more likely to  
12 be the normative reference group for both native and non-native individuals at school.  
13 This implies that the standards of natives (i.e. high national identification, see above)  
14 will be the norm for non-native individuals and might increase the latter's low national  
15 identifications. However, we do not expect that native individuals will be affected by  
16 the native reference group, since they already have high national identifications. In  
17 sum, the normative reference group theory generates the following hypothesis:

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41 *H1*: An increasing proportion of native pupils at school (lower ethnic minority  
42 concentration) will be related to higher levels of national and sub national  
43 identifications for non-native pupils.  
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51 However, as stated above, *comparative* reference group processes might prevail as  
52 well. In this case, when the proportion of natives increases (lower ethnic minority  
53 concentration), the native groups' high-national identification becomes a benchmark  
54 against which non-native individuals will compare themselves, which might further  
55 decrease their national identifications. On the other hand, an increasing ethnic  
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3 minority concentration implies that the low national identifications of the non-native  
4 group will be the yardstick for native pupils. This contrast between the low  
5 identification of the non-native reference group and the high identifications of native  
6 individuals can be expected to further increase the national identifications of native  
7 pupils. Hence, drawing upon the comparative reference group framework following  
8 hypotheses can be formulated. Note that Hypothesis 2 is in conflict with above-  
9 mentioned Hypothesis 1.

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22 *H2*: An increasing proportion of native pupils at school (lower ethnic minority  
23 concentration) will be related to lower levels of national and sub national  
24 identifications for non-native pupils.

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32 *H3*: An increasing proportion of non-native pupils at school (higher ethnic  
33 minority concentration) will be related to higher levels of national and sub  
34 national identifications for native pupils.

### 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 *Constrict theory*

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46 The above stated reference group theory is related to ethnic minority concentration,  
47 that is, the proportion of non-native pupils at school. In the literature, minority  
48 concentration is often confused with *ethnic diversity/heterogeneity*. However, these  
49 are two distinct concepts and two distinct measurements of ethnic composition (see  
50 Putnam 2007; Van Houtte and Stevens 2009). Ethnic diversity or heterogeneity refers  
51 to the degree of ethnic difference in a given context. For example, a school in England  
52 with Pakistani children only is less diverse than a school in which all the children are

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3 from different ethnic groups. To conceptualise the impact of ethnic  
4 diversity/heterogeneity at school level, we consider the ‘constrict theory’ as described  
5 in Putnam (2007).  
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11 According to the constrict theory the degree of ethnic diversity in a given  
12 context triggers social anomie or social isolation. In ethnically diverse environments,  
13 both natives and non-natives will be less engaged in collective actions and will have  
14 fewer close friends. It should be noted that Putnam states that this tendency applies  
15 only to the short run; in the long term, wider benefits of ethnic diversity are evident.  
16 However, in the short-term, ethnic diverse settings can be expected to be associated  
17 with a decrease in collectivity: ‘People living in ethnically diverse settings appear to  
18 “hunker down”– that is, to pull in like a turtle’ (Putnam 2007, p.149). The original  
19 constrict theory takes neighbourhoods as units of contextual analysis, while we will  
20 test this hypothesis in the school context. Similarly, the original constrict theory does  
21 not link ethnic diversity/heterogeneity *directly* to national identifications, but to  
22 collectivity. However, we consider pupils’ national and sub-national identifications as  
23 an utterance of such collectivity. After all, both native and non-natives are expected to  
24 share these collective identities. Flanders, for instance, witnesses a growing tendency  
25 of addressing the non-natives as ‘new-Belgians’ or ‘new-Flemings’, whereas in the  
26 past, they were primarily called ‘immigrants’ or ‘allochtones’. In sum, the following  
27 hypothesis can be formulated by drawing upon the constrict theory:  
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52 *H4*: Increasing ethnic diversity at school level will be associated with a  
53 decrease in national and sub-national identification for both native and non-  
54 native pupils.  
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*Interethnic friendship as mediator*

The school-effects literature underlines the importance of intermediate relations, that is, of mediator variables that clarify the relationship between structural school features and the dependent variable (for reviews see Teddlie and Reynolds 2000; Van Houtte 2005). Therefore, the impact of ethnic school composition on the identifications of pupils should not be understood as a mechanical one, but rather as a mediating process. With regard to social identification, the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM; Gartner and Dovidio 2000) points at the importance of interethnic contact and friendships. According to the CIIM, when extended contact takes place between individuals from different social groups, these individuals will show a greater propensity to re-categorize their social identities towards those that connect both groups. For non-natives, this implies that increasing contact and friendship with natives might result in increasing national and sub-national identification (see Van Craen *et. al* 2007; Maxwell 2009). For natives, on the other hand, increasing contact and friendship with non-natives might temper their national and sub national identifications, this, to minimize the social distance between them.

For pupils, these interethnic friendships, in turn, are partly determined by the ethnic composition of the school, since several studies have shown that in schools with higher ethnic heterogeneity, pupils are more engage in interethnic friendships (Goldsmith 2004; Van Houtte and Stevens 2009). Hence, a mediational model can be formulated, which states that given the expected association between ethnic school composition and interethnic friendship and the relationship between interethnic friendship and national identification, the following hypothesis emerges:

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3 *H5*: The impact of the ethnic school composition on pupils' national and sub-  
4 national identifications (H1, H2, H3, and H4) will be mediated by the amount  
5 of their interethnic friendships.  
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## 10 11 12 13 14 **Methods**

### 15 16 17 *Sample*

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20 We used data gathered in 2008–2009 from 2,845 pupils (mean age 11.61) in a sample  
21 of sixty-eight primary schools in Flanders as part of the *Segregation in Primary*  
22 *Education in Flanders* (SIPEF) project. Multistage sampling was conducted. In the  
23 first instance, in order to encompass the entire range of ethnic composition, we  
24 selected three cities in Flanders with ethnically diverse populations. Second, using  
25 data gathered from the Flemish Educational Department, 116 primary schools within  
26 these selected cities were asked to participate; this yielded a positive response of 54  
27 per cent. This relatively high non-response of schools is because Flemish schools are  
28 commonly swamped with such requests from investigators, generally resulting in a  
29 'first come, first served' outcome. As such, the participating schools did not differ  
30 from those that opted out in terms of school sector (i.e. private and public schools) or  
31 ethnic composition (as measured by the proportion of non-native pupils). The schools  
32 in this dataset encompass the entire range of ethnic composition, from schools having  
33 almost no non-native pupils to pure-minority-concentrated schools having 100 per cent  
34 non-native pupils. Within these schools, our research team asked all fifth-grade pupils  
35 present at school during our visit to fill out a written questionnaire. If the number of  
36 fifth-grade pupils was less than thirty, we surveyed all the sixth-grade pupils as well.  
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The pupils completed the questionnaires in class in the presence of one or two

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3 researchers and a teacher. The questionnaires were anonymous and were analyzed in  
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5 complete confidentiality.  
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### 10 11 *Research design*

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15 Given that we are dealing with a clustered sample of pupils nested within schools and  
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17 with data at different levels, namely, variables of ethnic school composition as the  
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19 main determinants at the school level and national and sub-national identifications as  
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21 outcome at pupil level, the use of hierarchical linear modelling is most appropriate  
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23 (HLM6, Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). As is common in multilevel analyses, we start  
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25 by estimating unconditional models to determine the amount of variance that occurs  
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27 among schools regarding national and sub-national identifications. Then, we add the  
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29 main determinants to the model, controlling systematically for school features (size  
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31 and sector) and pupil features [gender, grade, socioeconomic status (SES)]. In the  
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33 second model, we add ethnic heterogeneity/diversity at school level, and in the third  
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35 model interethnic friendship at pupil level. HLM only provides unstandardized gamma  
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37 coefficients; to evaluate the strength of the associations, we standardize these  
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39 coefficients. We carry out each analysis separately for native and non-native pupils,  
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41 since the association between ethnic school composition and national/sub-national  
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43 identification is hypothesized to be different for both groups.  
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### 55 *Variables*

#### 56 57 58 *Ethnic origin*

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3 Since all of the analyses are performed separately for native and immigrant pupils, it is  
4 important to explain how we have made the distinction between them. The principal  
5 criterion was the birthplace of the pupils' grandmothers. If these data were missing,  
6 we considered their mothers and fathers' birthplaces, as most non-native pupils in  
7 Flanders are second- or third-generation immigrants. We consider eleven broad ethnic  
8 groups: (1) Native Belgians (46.7 per cent), (2) West-Europeans including pupils of  
9 Dutch, French, or German origin (5.6 per cent), (3) South-Europeans, including pupils  
10 of Italian or Spanish origin (6.6 per cent), (4) Turks (13.0 per cent), (5) Moroccans  
11 (15.6 per cent), (6) Other North-Africans (1.0 per cent), (7) East-Europeans (5.8 per  
12 cent), (8) Sub-Sahara Africans (1.8 per cent), (9) Middle-Easterners (1.2 per cent),  
13 (10) South-East Asians (1.7 per cent), and (11) others (1.1 per cent). As is common  
14 practice, and in line with the official Flemish definition of non-native groups, only  
15 West European origins (groups 1 and 2) were considered as producing native descent  
16 (see Van Houtte and Stevens 2009). As such, we created a dichotomous variable  
17 (0= native, 1= non-native).

### Outcomes

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43 To assess national (Belgian) and sub-national (Flemish) identification, we used a scale  
44 based on five items from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale twice (Luhtanen and  
45 Crocker 1992). Similar items were successfully used with same aged children in  
46 previous studies in the Netherlands (Verkuyten 2001). The items are as follows: 'I  
47 consider myself as a Belgian/Fleming'; 'I often regret that I am Belgian/Flemish'  
48 (reverse scored); 'I am glad to be a Belgian/Fleming'; 'I often feel that  
49 Belgium/Flanders is worthless' (reverse scored); 'I feel good about Belgium/Flanders'.  
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3 There are five answer categories, ranging from *absolutely do not agree* (1) to  
4  
5 *completely agree* (5). Responses to these five items were averaged. An exploratory  
6  
7 factor analysis revealed that there was one underlying identity dimension for both  
8  
9 scales. For the Belgian identification scale, the lowest loading is .62, with an  
10  
11 Eigenvalue of 2.76 (explaining 55.26 per cent of variance) and Cronbach's alpha of  
12  
13 .80. For the Flemish identification scale, the lowest loading is .66, with an Eigenvalue  
14  
15 of 2.95 (explaining 58.52 per cent of variance) and Cronbach's alpha of .82. Table 1  
16  
17 demonstrates that, on average, native pupils have a significantly stronger Belgian  
18  
19 identification ( $M=4.38$ ,  $SD=0.69$ ) and Flemish identification ( $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=0.83$ ) than  
20  
21 non-native pupils, respectively ( $M=3.18$ ,  $SD=0.89$ ,  $t=37.99$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and ( $M=3.13$ ,  
22  
23  $SD=0.92$ ;  $t=31.10$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

#### 30 *School-level variables*

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33 As stated above, the school *ethnic composition* is measured by two indicators. First,  
34  
35 we consider *ethnic minority concentration*, that is, the proportion of non-native  
36  
37 respondents in a school in our database. On average, the proportion of non-native  
38  
39 pupils is 51.50 per cent ( $SD = 34.16$ ; Table 1). The minority concentration ranges from  
40  
41 2.63 per cent to 100 per cent non-native pupils.

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46 The second indicator of school's ethnic composition measures the *ethnic*  
47  
48 *diversity/heterogeneity* within a school, expressed as the total number of different  
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50 groups of non-natives, corrected by their size. We use an index of ethnic diversity,  
51  
52 which is the Herfindahl index as used by Putnam (2007) multiplied by -1, since  
53  
54 Putnam in fact calculated an index of homogeneity, whereas we are interested in  
55  
56 heterogeneity. The used index is calculated as  $(p_{\text{ethnic group 1}})^2 + (p_{\text{ethnic group 2}})^2 + \dots + (p_{\text{ethnic group n}})^2$ . We included the eleven ethnic groups listed above. The index has a range  
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3 of -1 till 0 and a value of -1 implies no diversity at all, that is, only one ethnic group is  
4  
5 enrolled in the school. A value that approaches zero means total diversity: all pupils in  
6  
7 school have a different ethnic origin. In our data, on average, schools have a value of -  
8  
9 0.46 ( $SD = 0.20$ ).

10  
11  
12 We determined the *school size* from the total number of pupils, using data  
13  
14 gathered from the Flemish Educational Department. The number of pupils varies from  
15  
16 ninety-one in the smallest school to 526 in the largest. The schools catered for an  
17  
18 average of 223 pupils ( $SD=104.03$ ; Table 1). Finally, the variable *school sector*  
19  
20 distinguishes between thirty-three public schools (municipal schools and state schools;  
21  
22 score 0) and thirty-five private schools (score 1). It should be noted that in the Flemish  
23  
24 educational system, no distinction is made between public schools and private schools  
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26 with respect to state support.  
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### 32 33 *Individual-level independent variables*

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35 Four individual-level variables were included in the multilevel analysis. Our research  
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37 concentrated on the *fifth- and sixth-grade* pupils. Therefore, most of the respondents  
38  
39 were age eleven (about 49 per cent) or twelve (about 36 per cent) in 2009. It should be  
40  
41 noted that psychological research points out that this period is decisive for developing  
42  
43 a national identity (Barrett, Wilson and Lyons 2003). Given the high multicollinearity  
44  
45 between age and grade (Cramer's  $V=0.64$ ;  $p<0.000$ ), we had to choose between one of  
46  
47 these two variables to enter the model. We opted for grade because the sample was  
48  
49 unbalanced for grade.  
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56 The sample was equally divided with respect to *gender*, with 51.2 per cent of  
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58 the respondents being female (male=0, female=1).  
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3 We measured the *socioeconomic status* (SES) of origin of the pupils by means  
4 of the occupational prestige of the father and mother (Erikson, Goldthorpe and  
5 Portocarero 1979); the higher of the two is used as an indicator of the SES of the  
6 family. The respondents have a mean SES of 4.44 ( $SD=2.22$ ). On average, the non-  
7 native pupils have a significantly lower SES ( $M=3.24$ ,  $SD=1.92$ ) than the native pupils  
8 (mean=5.44,  $SD=1.94$ ; Table 1).  
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18 Finally, to measure pupils' *interethnic friendship* we asked native respondents  
19 to state how many of their friends at school had a non-Belgian origin, and we asked  
20 non-native pupils to state how many of their friends at school had a Belgian origin.  
21 There were five possible answers: nobody (score 1), a few (score 2), half of them  
22 (score 3), most of them (score 4), and all of them (score 5). As can be seen from Table  
23 1, on average native pupils have lower scores on interethnic friendship ( $M=1.95$ ,  
24  $SD=0.84$ ) than non-native pupils do ( $M=2.66$ ,  $SD=1.17$ ,  $t=17.37$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).  
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[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

## 45 Results

### 46 *Unconditional Model*

47  
48 Does the school context matter with respect to pupils' identifications? To provide an  
49 answer to this question, Table 2 presents the variance components from the  
50 unconditional models. We are particularly interested in the explained variance at  
51 school-level, computed as the between-school variance component divided by the sum  
52 of within-school and between-school variance ( $\tau_0 / \sigma^2 + \tau_0$ ). Consistent with other  
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3 school-effect research (Teddlie and Reynolds 2000), most of the variation occurs  
4 within schools, between pupils. Nevertheless, justifying the need for a multilevel  
5 analysis, Table 2 indicates that significant amounts of the variances in pupils'  
6 identifications are explained at school level ( $p < 0.001$ ). It is also clear that the school-  
7 context is more prevalent for non-native pupils than it is for native pupils'  
8 identifications: for non-natives around 12 per cent of the variance in national  
9 identification and 11 per cent variance in sub-national identification are among  
10 schools, whereas the figure for natives is respectively around 3 per cent and 6 per cent  
11 (Table 2).  
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[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

### *National identification*

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38 With respect to national (Belgian) identifications of non-native pupils, Model 1b  
39 (Table 3) indicates that non-native pupils attending schools with a higher proportion of  
40 non-native pupils, tend to exhibit lower levels of national identity ( $\gamma = -3.20$ ;  
41  $p < 0.001$ ), controlling for school characteristics (size and sector) and pupil-level  
42 control variables (grade, gender and SES). The addition of ethnic heterogeneity in the  
43 Model 2b does not change this picture, and ethnic heterogeneity is initially not  
44 significantly associated with Belgian identification of non-native pupils ( $\gamma = -0.066$ ;  $p$   
45  $= 0.158$ ; Table 3). However, as we consider interethnic friendship in Model 3b, the  
46 relation between both the ethnic composition variables and national identification  
47 changes considerably. Firstly, entering interethnic friendship reduces the effect of  
48 minority concentration, which is no longer significant. Interethnic friendship, in turn,  
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3 is positively related to non-native pupils' Belgian identifications ( $\gamma = 0.298$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).  
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5 Secondly, ethnic diversity/heterogeneity becomes negatively related to national  
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7 identifications of non-native pupils (Model 3b, Table 3). These findings are in line  
8  
9 with the hypotheses which we derived from normative reference group theory (H1),  
10  
11 constrict theory (H4) and Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM, H5) and disconfirm  
12  
13 the hypothesis drawn from comparative reference group theory (H2): for non-native  
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15 pupils ethnic minority concentration has a negative effect on their national  
16  
17 identifications, which can be explained by the number of their interethnic friendships.  
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19 The negative impact of ethnic diversity/heterogeneity is suppressed by interethnic  
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21 friendship.  
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28 Considering the effects on native pupils, ethnic school composition variables  
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30 are initially not significantly associated with their national identifications (Model 1a-  
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32 2a, Table 3). However, in Model 3a, it becomes clear that there is a suppression effect  
33  
34 caused by interethnic friendship. After the addition of interethnic friendship, ethnic  
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36 minority concentration became significantly positively related to the national  
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38 identifications of native pupils, while interethnic friendship is negatively related to  
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40 their national identifications (Model 3a, Table 3). This means that the increasing  
41  
42 presence of non-native pupils at school positively impacts this group's national  
43  
44 identification, while interethnic friendship tempers their national identification.  
45  
46 Secondly, when interethnic friendship is hold constant, ethnic diversity/heterogeneity  
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48 is negatively related to native pupils' Belgian identification, even though this effect is  
49  
50 borderline ( $\gamma = -0.119$ ;  $p < 0.065$ ). These findings are in line with the hypotheses,  
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52 which we derived from comparative reference group theory (H3), constrict theory  
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54 (H4), and CIIM (H5).  
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3 Finally, while the individual level influences are not the primary concern of  
4 this article, it is worth mentioning that SES is only positively related to native pupils'  
5 national identifications (a stronger Belgian identification for pupils with higher SES)  
6 and that non-native girls exhibit higher level of Belgian identity than non-native boys.  
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8 Grade is not associated to Belgian identification (Table 3). When we enter age instead  
9 of grade (not shown here), there was no substantial difference with respect to the  
10 results.  
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24 [TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]  
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### 30 *Sub-national identification*

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33 Considering sub-national (Flemish) identifications of non-native pupils, the results are  
34 similar to those of their Belgian identifications (Table 4; Model 1b-3b): the strong  
35 negative impact of minority concentration in the first two models disappears in the  
36 third model, after controlling for interethnic friendship, while a relatively small, but  
37 significant negative effect of ethnic heterogeneity appears after the addition of  
38 interethnic friendship ( $\gamma = -0.080$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This means that non-native pupils tend to  
39 exhibit higher levels of both national and sub-national identity in schools with a lower  
40 proportion of non-native pupils, and this finding can be explained by the increasing  
41 opportunities of interethnic friendship in such schools. In addition, in schools with a  
42 higher ethnic diversity/heterogeneity, non-native pupils have lower Flemish  
43 identifications, when their interethnic friendships are held constant. Analogous to the  
44 effects on Belgian identification, non-native pupils tend to have higher Flemish  
45 identification when they have more native friends, and non-native girls are more likely  
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3 to have higher sub-national identifications than non-native boys (Model 1b-3b; Table  
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5 4). Again, these findings are in line with H1, H4 and H5, while disconfirming H2.  
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9 With respect to native pupils' sub-national identifications, however, Table 4  
10 indicates that there is no school-level variable significantly associated with native  
11 pupils' sub-national identifications. Hence, with respect to Flemish identification of  
12 native pupils, we could not find support for any of our hypotheses. The individual  
13 level effects were similar to those on Belgian identification: a higher SES is positively  
14 related to native pupils' Flemish identifications, and increasing inter-ethnic friendships  
15 is associated with decreasing Flemish identification. (Table 4; Model 1a-3a)  
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29 [TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]  
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### 36 **Discussion and conclusion**

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39 In different European countries, policy makers strive for the dispersal of non-native  
40 pupils, believing that the mixing of pupils of different ethnic groups will enhance the  
41 social integration and national identifications of youngsters. Given the lack of research  
42 supporting such policy practices and because theorists of identity emphasize the  
43 importance of contexts, the aim of this study was to explore the association between  
44 ethnic school composition and pupils' national and sub-national (Belgian and Flemish)  
45 identifications.  
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56 The results of this inquiry indeed indicate that the ethnic school composition is  
57 significantly related to national identifications and partly related to sub-national  
58 identifications of native and non-native pupils. Firstly, ethnic minority concentration,  
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3 as measured by the proportion of non-native pupils at school, has a negative impact on  
4 non-native pupils' Belgian and Flemish identifications, while it has a positive impact  
5 on native pupils' Belgian identifications. In other words, normative and comparative  
6 reference group processes prevail respectively for non-natives and for natives. An  
7 explanation of this differential effect could be derived from the general reference  
8 group theory, as it insists that normative reference processes are more likely to occur  
9 when individuals are striving for acceptance by the reference group (Merton 1968).  
10 Given the socially dominant position of natives within Flemish society, we assume  
11 that non-natives are striving to obtain recognition from the native group. This might  
12 explain why normative reference processes prevailed for non-natives. Furthermore,  
13 this study lends support to the prediction that we derived from the constrict theory: as  
14 ethnic heterogeneity/diversity rises at school level, the national identifications of  
15 native and non-native pupils' decrease.

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35 Four remarks should be added to what has been stated above. First, the relation  
36 between ethnic school composition variables and pupils' national and sub-national  
37 identifications is not a mechanical one, but as expected, it is mediated by interethnic  
38 friendships. In general, interethnic friendship has a positive impact on non-native  
39 pupils' national and sub-national identifications, while it tempers the identifications of  
40 native pupils. Secondly, compared to the impact of ethnic minority concentration, the  
41 size of the effect of ethnic diversity/heterogeneity is much smaller. Thirdly, ethnic  
42 diversity/heterogeneity only decreases pupils' identifications when interethnic  
43 friendship is held constant. In other words, the negative impact of ethnic  
44 diversity/heterogeneity is suppressed by interethnic friendship. This means that ethnic  
45 diversity/heterogeneity *as such* does not affect Flemish and Belgian identifications;  
46 rather it impacts them only if pupils do not engage in interethnic friendship relations.



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3 Fourth, we did not find a significant association between any school-level variable and  
4 native pupils' Flemish identifications. This could be explained by the political  
5 situation in Flanders where Flemish identity is being used by far right-wing and racist  
6 politics. Therefore, native pupils' Flemish identifications are potentially expressed  
7 with a certain restraint to avert an association with racism. However, this post-hoc  
8 explanation should be examined in further research.  
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11 While the individual level influences were not the primary concern of this  
12 article, an interesting finding is that non-native girls have higher Belgian and Flemish  
13 identifications than non-native boys. Maxwell (2009) argues that higher level of  
14 perceived discrimination by the broader society contributes to lower levels of national  
15 identification and research in Belgium shows that non-native men report more  
16 perceived discrimination than non-native women (De Rycke and Swyngedouw 1997).  
17 In other words, while we do not have a conclusive explanation for the gender gap with  
18 respect to national and sub-national identifications, we can hypothesize that perceived  
19 discrimination might explain this gap.  
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40 It is important to keep in mind a few limitations of this study. Firstly, because  
41 the focus of the research project is on the impact of school ethnic composition, we  
42 only considered the influence of school context variables. However, other contexts  
43 (e.g. neighbourhood, country) might also contribute to youth's identifications and the  
44 position of the school on the school market might play a role as well (see Verhoeven,  
45 2002). Secondly, this investigation employs a limited measure of interethnic  
46 friendship. We asked all pupils to state how many of their friends were natives and  
47 how were many non-natives. A more elaborated technique would be to provide pupils  
48 a list with the names of all pupils at school and to ask to indicate their best friends and  
49 friends. However, such a technique was unsuitable not only because the survey would  
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3 have needed a higher time investment but also because it was completely anonymous.  
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6 Thirdly, we made a raw distinction between native and non-native pupils. This  
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8 distinction neglects the ethnic differences *within* the non-native group. However, a  
9  
10 separate analysis for each ethnic minority group would have harmed the reliability of  
11  
12 our analysis, because the individual groups in our data are too small. While  
13  
14 considering non-natives as one category is consistent with most of the previous studies  
15  
16 conducted in Belgium (e.g., Jacobs *et al.*, 2009; Agirdag, 2010), future research  
17  
18 should, if possible, make a distinction within the non-native groups.  
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23 In terms of educational policy, this article finds considerable support for the  
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25 concerns about the negative impact of ethnic school segregation, but most importantly,  
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27 it does also challenges these policies. At the one hand, our findings indicate that  
28  
29 schools with a high minority concentration and high ethnic heterogeneity might indeed  
30  
31 have a negative impact on non-native pupils' national and sub-national identifications.  
32  
33 However, we demonstrate that these effects are mediated by their interethnic  
34  
35 friendships. While the school is an important context in which pupils make friends,  
36  
37 opportunities outside the school for interethnic friendships should not be neglected.  
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39 Hence, besides school desegregation, policy makers should consider stimulating  
40  
41 interethnic contact and friendship opportunities, both inside and outside the school. At  
42  
43 this point, we should also notice that cultivating national identification might not be  
44  
45 considered as a means of assimilation. As noted in our introduction section, national  
46  
47 identities do not necessarily compete with ethnic identities and most people have  
48  
49 multiple or hyphenated identities, which are very important with respect to pupils'  
50  
51 well-being and educational achievement (see Phinney *et al.* 2001; Modood 2005). In  
52  
53 this study, however, it was not feasible to measure all different ethnic identities, due to  
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55 the large scale design of the research. However, we strongly recommend further  
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3 studies that investigate the intersections between the school context and pupils' ethnic  
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5 and national identities and examine the mediating role of interethnic relationships.  
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17 **ORHAN AGIRDAG** is Researcher in Research Group CuDOS, Department of  
18 Sociology at Ghent University.  
19

20 ADDRESS: Korte Meer 5, 9000 Gent, Belgium. Email: orhan.agirdag@ugent.be  
21  
22

23  
24  
25 **MIEKE VAN HOUTTE** is Lecturer in Research Group CuDOS, Department of  
26 Sociology at Ghent University.  
27

28 ADDRESS: Korte Meer 5, 9000 Gent, Belgium. Email: mieke.vanhoutte@ugent.be  
29  
30

31  
32  
33 **PIET VAN AVERMAET** is Director of Centre for Diversity and Learning at Ghent  
34 University.  
35

36 ADDRESS: Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 49, 9000 Gent, Belgium. Email:  
37 piet.vanavermaet@ugent.be  
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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent and Independent Variables: Frequencies, Means, Standard Deviations and Results of t-test comparing native and non-native pupils.

Variables	Total		Natives		Non-natives		Mean difference
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
<i>School Level</i>							
% School sector (private)	51.47 (N=68)	50.35	53.23 (N=62)	50.30	51.47 (N=68)	50.35	
School size	222.91 (N=68)	104.03	226.27 (N=62)	107.68	222.91 (N=68)	104.03	
% Non-Native	51.50 (N=68)	34.16	46.80 (N=62)	32.06	51.50 (N=68)	34.16	
Ethnic diversity	-0.46 (N=68)	0.20	-0.44 (N=62)	0.18	-0.46 (N=68)	0.20	
<i>Pupil Level</i>							
% Grade (sixth)	29.98 (N=2845)	45.82	26.83 (N=1487)	44.32	33.43 (N=1358)	47.19	
% Gender (female)	50.53 (N=2827)	49.98	52.12 (N=1479)	49.97	50.89 (N=1348)	50.01	
SES	4.44 (N=2676)	2.22	5.44 (N=1464)	1.94	3.24 (N=1212)	1.92	2.20 t=29.40***
Inter-ethnic friendship	2.28 (N=2561)	1.07	1.95 (N=1371)	0.84	2.66 (N=1190)	1.17	0.71 t=17.37***
National identification	3.82 (N=2621)	0.98	4.38 (N=1409)	0.69	3.18 (N=1212)	0.89	1.20 t=37.99***
Sub-national identification	3.72 (N=2522)	1.03	4.22 (N=1370)	0.83	3.13 (N=1152)	0.92	1.09 t=31.10***

\*p≤0.05, \*\*p≤0.01, \*\*\*p≤0.001

Table 2. Variance components for national (Belgian) and sub-national (Flemish) identification from the unconditional model.

	Natives		Non-natives	
	Belgian identification	Flemish identification	Belgian identification	Flemish identification
Within-school variance $\tau_0$	0.458	0.660	0.712	0.769
Between-school variance $\sigma^2$	0.013	0.039	0.095	0.092
% Variance between school	2.76%***	5.53%***	11.82%***	10.68%***

\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

Table 3 Influences on national (Belgian) identification: results of the multilevel analysis, standardized gamma coefficients with the standard errors in parentheses

	Natives			Non-natives		
	Model 1a	Model 2a	Model 3a	Model 1b	Model 2b	Model 3b
<i>School Level</i>						
School sector	-0.032 (0.048)	-0.041 (0.047)	-0.028 (0.042)	-0.059 (0.076)	-0.055 (0.074)	-0.051 (0.063)
School size	0.018 (0.000)	0.030 (0.000)	0.024 (0.000)	0.019 (0.000)	0.029 (0.000)	0.018 (0.000)
Minority concentration	0.011 (0.084)	0.104 (0.209)	0.247** (0.187)	-0.320*** (0.140)	-0.297*** (0.141)	-0.072 (0.139)
Heterogeneity		-0.078 (0.274)	-0.119° (0.243)		-0.066 (0.207)	-0.082* (0.174)
<i>Pupil Level</i>						
Grade	0.023 (0.063)	0.019 (0.063)	0.017 (0.065)	0.067 (0.076)	0.064 (0.076)	0.084 (0.69)
Gender	-0.022 (0.035)	-0.022 (0.035)	-0.008 (0.036)	0.134*** (0.044)	0.133*** (0.044)	0.123*** (0.044)
SES	0.092** (0.011)	0.093** (0.011)	0.076* (0.011)	0.029 (0.014)	0.029 (0.014)	0.015 (0.014)
Interethnic friendship			-0.156*** (0.028)			0.298*** (0.029)

\*p≤0.05, \*\*p≤0.01, \*\*\*p≤0.001, °p=0.065

Table 4. Influences on sub-national (Flemish) identification: results of the multilevel analysis, standardized gamma coefficients with the standard errors in parentheses

	Natives			Non-natives		
	Model 1a	Model 2a	Model 3a	Model 1b	Model 2b	Model 3b
<i>School Level</i>						
School sector	0.015 (0.056)	0.006 (0.054)	0.011 (0.051)	-0.041 (0.073)	-0.040 (0.072)	-0.049 (0.063)
School size	0.044 (0.000)	0.057 (0.000)	0.043 (0.000)	0.050 (0.000)	0.052 (0.000)	0.017 (0.000)
Minority concentration	-0.075 (0.110)	0.023 (0.229)	0.067 (0.231)	-0.301*** (0.148)	-0.299*** (0.153)	-0.069 (0.139)
Heterogeneity		-0.083 (0.313)	-0.083 (0.308)		-0.008 (0.213)	-0.080* (0.174)
<i>Pupil Level</i>						
Grade	0.051 (0.058)	0.049 (0.059)	0.040 (0.062)	0.130*** (0.075)	0.130*** (0.074)	0.081** (0.069)
Gender	-0.055 (0.042)	-0.055 (0.042)	-0.045 (0.046)	0.080** (0.051)	0.080** (0.051)	0.119*** (0.044)
SES	0.147*** (0.014)	0.150*** (0.014)	0.151*** (0.014)	0.089** (0.015)	0.088** (0.015)	0.015 (0.014)
Interethnic friendship			-0.071* (0.034)			0.288*** (0.029)

\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$