The Interplay Between Diversity Climate and Multiculturalism Policy: How Diversity Contexts Shape Student Collective Voice

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Abstract

Existing research has largely acknowledged the importance of context in facilitating voice in culturally diverse institutions. However, most research has been situated empirically at the individual- rather than collective or context-level. In the present research, multilevel modelling was used to examine the effect of school diversity context on students' perceived collective voice. Based on data from 4,690 students within 69 schools in Flanders, Belgium, we examined how multiculturalism *policies* as well as collectively perceived school *climates* of respect for diverse cultural groups may facilitate or hinder native and immigrant-origin students' perceived collective voice. Results showed that diversity climates of respect were related to greater perceived collective voice among all students, while multiculturalism policies had no effect. Nevertheless, an interplay between policy and climate showed that multiculturalism policy narrowed the gap in perceived collective voice between schools with stronger or weaker diversity climates. These results were robust to alternate indicators of climate and across minority/majority status groups. They raise the question of whether critical consciousness of unequal respect may be a first step in establishing socially just schools where multiculturalism policies value cultural identities and where *all* students can feel they have a collective voice. Future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: Collective Voice, Context, Multiculturalism Policy, Diversity Climate, Student Empowerment, Multilevel Modelling

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"Schools are powerful settings that can either liberate or maintain systems of oppression"

(Freire, 1970)

Collective voice is a crucial component of social justice in culturally diverse societies and institutions. Reflecting a form of empowerment, collective voice implies the general sense among (future) citizens that they are listened to and heard by decision makers; that they can truly contribute to society and thrive. Along these lines, classic research concerning diversity suggests culturally diverse schools are at risk of disempowering students, enabling discriminatory processes, "inculcating shame" among those who deviate from an assimilationist norm, "constricting identities and minds, and leaving students spiritually numb rather than vibrant" (Cummins, 2000). Multiculturalism is a common, contextual policy response to cultural diversity that prescribes value in cultural differences, making cultural identities salient rather than ignored or devalued, and that aims to offset these risks. Nevertheless, existing research on multiculturalism policies yields conflicting evidence in this regard, suggesting such policies are also at risk of segregating, essentialising, and silencing students in culturally diverse environments (e.g., Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018; Wilton et al., 2019).

Bringing together literature from social, educational, and community psychology, in the present research, we examine the impact of school diversity context on student perceived collective voice in Flanders, Belgium. To conceptualize diversity context, we distinguish between (1) the descriptive *presence* of diverse cultural groups in schools (ethnic composition), (2) a school *policy* prescribing value in cultural differences and identities (multiculturalism policy), and (3) a perceived school *climate* of collectively perceived respect for diverse cultural groups (diversity climate). First, we argue that a climate of collectively

perceived respect for diverse cultural groups should be fundamental in nurturing student collective voice. This is consistent with a basic endeavour to treat all students "equally", without discrimination, in culturally diverse schools (Baysu et al., 2023). Second, while one may assume a multiculturalism policy prescribing value in cultural differences and identities would be conductive to shaping such a climate (Guimond et al., 2014; Leslie & Flynn, 2022; Ward et al., 2018) as well as nurturing student collective voice (see e.g., Vorauer & Quesnel, 2017b), we argue that such a policy could remain rather distant, far-removed from the shared social reality of students, and that its impact may also be contingent on the extent to which students are, instead, critically aware of disrespect and discrimination as social justice concerns. In this way, third, we argue that the *interplay* between contextual characteristics should be crucial. For example, perceiving a diversity climate of *lack of* respect for diverse cultural groups may paradoxically be a first step in enabling multiculturalism as a policy prescribing value in cultural differences to nurture student collective voice.

In the following sections, we first outline the importance of student collective voice and its meaning for social justice in culturally diverse schools. We then describe how contextual climates and policies have been shown to impact a host of outcomes in social and educational psychology research on diversity, often with results revealing similar effects. Nevertheless, we also point out some paradoxical effects, leading us to describe a possible interplay between the two on student perceived collective voice.

Collective Voice and Empowerment

Collective voice reflects empowerment among those in a subordinate position in the social hierarchy (see e.g., Maton, 2008). Indeed, social psychologists have long been concerned with intergroup processes and the power dynamics at play between groups in any society or institution. When examined from the perspective of advantaged or dominant groups, the concept of *power* is often classically conceptualized as having control or

influence over others (Fiske, 1993). In the context of schools, teachers and administrators are in an institutional authority role (French & Raven, 1959), characterizing the 'group' in power, with students the targets of influence. Nevertheless, this reflects what is known as "transformational power" (see Pratto, 2016), in which one group ideally offers their agency toward another group's growth, well-being, and participation, resulting in equality and voice for both groups (Kirk et al., 2016). In this sense, *em*power*ment* reflects students' (collective) ability to truly contribute something, determined by the extent to which the environment or context (in part shaped by teachers and administrators, but also by the school community more generally, including students themselves; Cohen et al., 2009) supports this capacity. Empowerment is, indeed, crucial for social change and an overall reduction in marginalization not only in the school but also in society more broadly (Maton, 2008).

Collective voice – students participating, having a say, and being heard in decision-making – is thus a fundamental component of procedural justice (Tyler, 1989) in schools. This is just as important for students as a group, broadly, as it is specifically for students as members of minoritized groups in the context of culturally diverse schools (e.g., students of immigrant-origin, who often experience disproportionate disadvantage; Phalet et al., 2007; Pomianowicz, 2023). Nevertheless, existing research on student voice remains in its infancy and has been situated largely at the 'intrapersonal' level, reflecting the extent to which students believe they, as individuals, have the power to make a difference on how things are done in schools (Kirk et al., 2016). This research has shown positive *consequences* of 'intrapersonal' voice in terms of achievement, future aspirations, and positive engagement in the school community (e.g., via extracurricular activities), and has shown positive individual-level *antecedents* such as perceived trust, understanding, and approachability with teachers as well as perceived sense of inclusion in the school. Such antecedents may reflect perceived school climates, as the authors suggest (see also Kirk et al., 2017), but empirically, they are

measured on the individual rather than contextual (i.e., school) level (see also Schwarzenthal et al., 2023). To our knowledge, no research has examined the role of climates assessed as a *collectively* perceived, *contextual* factor on this important outcome reflecting social justice; an outcome that we examine, also importantly, as a perceived *collective* form of empowerment among students rather than an individual, intrapersonal experience. In the present study, we thus examine context-level, diversity-related antecedents of student perceived collective voice.

Context-Level (Diversity) Climate

Over recent years, social psychological research has widely shown the benefits of positive, inclusionary climates for marginalized groups (Christ et al., 2015; Just & Anderson, 2014; Kauff et al., 2016). These climates reflect norms, shared forms of thinking, and comprise aggregated individual opinions or perceptions within a given context (see also Green et al., 2018). While much of this research on the effects of such climates has been conducted when comparing large geographical units such as countries, some researchers have begun to examine smaller units like organization or *school* climates in this way, too (e.g., Baysu et al., 2016; Baysu et al., 2023; Schwarzenthal et al, 2023; see also Leslie & Flynn, 2022; Plaut et al., 2009). In conducting a systematic review of the literature on school climates, Cohen et al. (2009) conclude that (*individually perceived*) positive school climates predict a host of behavioural and academic outcomes among students. Baysu et al. (2016) confirm that *collectively perceived* school climates where equality of treatment across students is widely endorsed (i.e., measured at the school-level) can buffer the negative consequences of discrimination and stereotype threat. In a large-scale study on over 16,000 students across 60 countries, Baysu et al. (2023) also found that school climates characterized by the opposite, discriminatory climates (i.e., aggregated student perceptions of teachers' discriminatory beliefs and behaviours in schools) were associated with weaker achievement

and sense of belonging among all students, regardless of their origins (see also Schachner et al., 2021).

Importantly, no research has examined the impact of such climates on student collective voice. In the present research, we argue that a positive school diversity climate, characterized by a general sense of antidiscrimination and where students feel they are treated with respect regardless of their origins, should also be conducive to student collective voice in culturally diverse schools, among all students.

Multiculturalism Policy

Nevertheless, we also examine the role of the school (contextual) *policy*; with a specific focus on multiculturalism policy that should, in principle, be conducive to a positive diversity climate (e.g., Guimond et al., 2014; Leslie & Flynn, 2022; Ward et al., 2018) but that, according to existing research in schools, may sometimes be disconnected (Cohen et al., 2009). Multiculturalism policies comprise official documents prescribing the values that should be respected within a given institution: specifically, value in cultural differences. Such values are designed to offset more traditional, homogenizing or assimilationist approaches used in schools (Cummins, 2000) and are congruent with broad notions of appreciating cultural diversity and "cultural pluralism" from social psychology research (Apfelbaum et al., 2016; Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018; Vorauer & Quesnel, 2017a, 2017b; Wilton et al., 2019). In this way, they prescribe (group-based) equality by embracing recognition of differences between cultural identities. As policies, they are also distinct from multicultural practices (from educational psychology research, like fighting against racism; see Celeste et al., 2019), and climates, insomuch as they are further removed from the reality of students: Rather than describing students' (collectively perceived) shared environment, they instead prescribe what that climate should ideally resemble. For this reason, we assume multiculturalism policies

may have an impact on student collective voice, but not to the same extent as the diversity climate.

Importantly, existing research on multiculturalism policies at the national level suggest that countries with such policies show moderately increased levels of belongingness (with lower levels of discrimination), for example, among immigrant-origin members of society, but show rather mixed effects among natives (for reviews, see Bloemraad & Wright, 2014; Ward et al., 2018). When examining schools, multiculturalism policies have similarly been shown to reduce the gap in sense of belonging between native and immigrant-origin students, without reducing sense of belonging among natives (Celeste et al., 2019).

But how might multiculturalism policies impact perceived collective voice as a form of collective student empowerment? Existing research in organizational contexts suggests that the salience of a multiculturalism policy (or thinking about multiculturalism prescribing salient identities more broadly) may be empowering especially for minorities, leading them to more easily associate strength, assertiveness, and confidence with their self-concept (Vorauer & Quesnel, 2017b). Similarly, this salience may even lead minorities to adopt strategies that lead them to convince majorities of their views more successfully (Vorauer & Quesnel, 2017a). Nevertheless, this research is situated at the individual (rather than collective) level, much like existing research on voice and empowerment more generally. Furthermore, still in organizational contexts, awareness of an institution's multiculturalism policy has also been shown to paradoxically undermine claims of discrimination, leading both minorities and majorities to perceive their organization as *already fair* and thus delegitimizing such claims (Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018; Kaiser et al., 2013). In this way, multiculturalism policies are also at risk of silencing students. The effect of multiculturalism policies on voice thus remains rather unclear, and may depend on an interplay with the current (collectively perceived) diversity climate.

Interplay between Policy and Climate

Our hypothesis concerning the interplay between multiculturalism policy and (collectively perceived) diversity climate is anchored in two basic premises described above. Firstly, a stronger diversity climate involves the collective perception that a given institution is already fair (e.g., Leslie & Flynn, 2022; Plaut et al., 2009). Secondly, a multiculturalism policy involves the risk that members of an institution may trivialize discrimination claims (Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018; Kaiser et al., 2013). Therefore, an important precondition for an effective multiculturalism policy may be, somewhat paradoxically, that discrimination is already acknowledged as a problem within a given institution. In other words, multiculturalism policies may be conducive to student (perceived) collective voice specifically when the diversity climate is weak. As such, a system of oppression may need to be widely acknowledged for multiculturalism to foster student collective voice.

To summarize, our hypotheses are as follows. First, we expect that a school climate of respect for diverse cultural groups will be associated with increased student (perceived) collective voice (H1). Second, while a school multiculturalism policy prescribing value in cultural differences and identities may be conductive to student collective voice (H2a), we pose competing hypotheses for this contextual indicator, suggesting it may also undermine student collective voice (H2b), for reasons stated above. Along these lines, finally, we expect an interplay between policy and climate, such that the efficacy of a multiculturalism policy may, in fact, be contingent on a weak diversity climate, which may instead imply a generalized awareness of discrimination in the school (H3). To test these hypotheses, we use multilevel modelling with data from students in schools across Flanders, Belgium. We include school ethnic composition as a covariate and potential moderator, to see if the effects apply specifically in schools with larger proportions of students with an immigration background, or if they are consistent across schools varying in their degree of (demographic)

cultural diversity or homogeneity. Indeed, the larger the proportion of students with an immigration background in the school, the more easily we can assume the collective identity of students as a group is diverse.

Method

Participants

Participants were comprised of 5,336 students in 70 secondary schools in Flanders, Belgium (CILS-BE; Phalet et al., 2018). After excluding 646 participants who were missing essential individual- or school-level data, the final sample comprised 4,690 students in 69 schools. The sample was relatively evenly divided in terms of gender (n = 2,425 boys, n = 2,265 girls), age ranged from 12 to 22 years old (M = 14.84, SD = 1.20), and students were relatively evenly divided across years of secondary school (gradually increasing in numbers; n = 1,327 in first year, n = 1,481 in second year, and n = 1,882 in third year). More students were coded as having an immigration background (n = 2,810; with one or both foreign-born parents and/or grandparents) in comparison to natives (n = 1,880; everyone else). Data were collected during the first wave of a large-scale longitudinal study in randomly sampled secondary schools. Classes were randomly sampled within schools that had varying levels of ethnic composition, with 26.9% of students in schools with less than 10% students speaking foreign languages at home, 24.5% in schools having between 10% and 30%, 26.3% in schools having between 30% and 60%, and 22.4% in schools having more than 60% students speaking foreign languages at home.

Measures

Student Perceived Collective Voice was the outcome variable and was measured by combining the following two items: “In my school, attention is paid to the wishes of the students,” and “In my school, students can really contribute something” (r = .47). The items were coded on a 5-point scale (1=“*Strongly disagree*”, 5=“*Strongly agree*”). They reflected

opportunities for students to participate actively in decision-making and norm setting in schools; an important aspect of students' sense of social justice and community in their school (see Battistisch et al., 1997).

School Perceived Diversity Climate was a school-level predictor and was measured by aggregating the following four items among all students at the school level, then combining them: "In my school…" "different cultures and religions are treated with respect," "they take strong action against racism and discrimination," "teachers treat all students equally regardless of their religion or descent," "teachers say that you shouldn't discriminate students with another culture or origin" ($\alpha = .81$). The items were coded on a 5-point scale (1="*Strongly disagree*", 5="*Strongly agree*"). Aggregate scores across schools were generally reasonably high and ranged from 3.44 to 4.51 ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.21$), suggesting that overall, schools were characterized by climates that were perceived as rather respectful of diverse cultural groups and favourable to antidiscrimination. The measure was grand-mean centred for analyses.

School Discrimination Climate was a second, alternative school-level climate predictor, measured by aggregating the following item specifically among students with an immigration background: "How often are you discriminated against, treated unfairly or with hostility in school?" The item was coded on a 4-point scale (1="Never", 4="Almost always"). Aggregate scores across schools were generally very low and ranged from 1.00 to 1.67 ($M = 1.35$, $SD = 0.17$), suggesting that overall, students with an immigration background reported rather few (personal) experiences of discrimination. This variable was used to verify robustness of the hypothesized model with an alternate context-level indicator of school collectively perceived diversity climate, and was grand-mean centred for analyses.

School Multiculturalism Policy was taken from Celeste et al. (2019) and reflected multiculturalism as a school-level approach for managing diversity, coded by content-

analysing school policy documents. Each of the schools' rules (i.e., explicit regulations) and mission and vision statements (i.e., values and principles) were coded according to the extent to which they explicitly recognized and prescribed value in cultural differences in general, in learning, and in the curriculum (e.g., ensuring diversity and learning about different cultures and identities was included in the curriculum). The coding drew on vocabulary commonly used in European and American discourse on cultural diversity and multiculturalism (e.g., Stevens et al., 2008; Verkuyten, 2005) as well as the common, scientifically validated conceptual emphasis on valuing cultural group affiliations (salient identities) inherent to multiculturalism as a policy approach to managing diversity (Guimond et al., 2014). For more information on the coding and extensive validation of this policy indicator, see Celeste et al. (2019). Raw scores across schools ranged from 1.00 to 12.00 (M = 1.26, SD = 1.98; prior to z-scoring for analyses, as done by Celeste et al., 2019).

School Ethnic Composition was assessed by comparing those that were **Native-Majority Schools** (<30% of students speaking foreign languages as home) versus the rest, and those that were **Immigrant-Majority Schools** (>60% of students speaking foreign languages at home) versus the rest (two dummy codes with 30%-60% as the reference category).

Student-level control variables included age (centred), gender (coded -1 for girls, 1 for boys), and year of school (centred), as well as student native/immigration background (coded -1 for students with an immigration background, 1 for native students) when analyses were conducted on the full sample.

Analytical Approach

Data were prepared and descriptive statistics were verified using SPSS version 28. Hypothesis-testing analyses were conducted using Mplus version 8.9 (Muthen & Muthen, 2012-2022). Multilevel modelling (Hox, 2010) was appropriate because students (individual-

level) were nested within schools (context-level), and because the purpose of this research was to examine the effect of diversity climate and multiculturalism policy, both at the school-level, on perceived collective voice among students within those schools. Analyses were conducted in consecutive steps starting with the Null Model (Model 0), then adding student-level covariates (Model 1), subsequently adding school-level main effects (testing H1, H2a and H2b; Model 2), and finally incorporating school-level interactions (testing H3; Models 3 and 4). All models were estimated with robust standard errors. A codebook, the data, and syntax files used in this research are available at https://osf.io/62kjf/?view_only=a3d2fd750b3f41088ad48d5485a65c47

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Tables 1 and 2 show descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables in the present study, by student- (Table 1) and school- (Table 2) levels, separately. Descriptive statistics for variables at the individual-level are also provided separately for native students versus for students with an immigration background.

Means and correlations were rather similar for both native students and those with an immigration background. Generally, perceived collective voice was significantly stronger among younger students, as well as among native students although this effect size was negligent. Perceived collective voice did not seem to differ according to gender. Importantly, among all students in general, perceived collective voice was relatively moderate, just above the midpoint of the scale.

Table 1

Bivariate Correlations between Student-Level Variables

Variable	*M (SD)*	2.	3.	4.	5.
Full sample (N = 4,690)					
1. PerceivedCollectiveVoice	3.24 (0.84)	.02	-.14***	-.13***	.04*
2. Gender	48.3%		-.00	.01	.01
3. Age	14.84 (1.20)			.74***	-.18***
4. EducationYear	2.12 (0.82)				.06***
5. ImmigrationBackground	59.9%				
Native students (n = 1,880)					
1. PerceivedCollectiveVoice	3.28 (0.81)	.02	-.11***	-.11***	
2. Gender	49.0%		.01	.02	
3. Age	14.57 (1.05)			.74***	
4. EducationYear	2.18 (0.81)				
Students immig background (n = 2,180)					
1. PerceivedCollectiveVoice	3.22 (0.86)	.04	-.20***	-.17***	
2. Gender	47.8%		-.01	-.02	
3. Age	15.02 (1.27)			.84***	
4. EducationYear	2.08 (0.82)				

Note. ***$p < .001$. ImmigrationBackground: Native coded 1, immigration background coded -1. Gender: Boy coded -1, Girl coded 1. Percentages presented for dichotomous variables rather than means (immigration background; girls).

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations between School-Level Variables (N = 69)

Variable	*M (SD)*	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. MulticulturalismPolicy	1.26 (1.98)	-.10	.09	-.15	-.03
2. PerceivedDiversityClimate	3.86 (0.21)		-.28*	.29*	.06
3. DiscriminationClimate	1.35 (0.17)			.01	-.13
4. NativeMajoritySchools	50.7%				-.49***
5. ImmigrantMajoritySchools	18.8%				

Note. *$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$. MulticulturalismPolicy was z-scored for hypothesis testing (see Celeste et al., 2019). This measure was skewed (97% of schools had a score between 0 and 5; with the remaining excluded, conclusions were the same). NativeMajoritySchools=schools with fewer than 30% students speaking foreign languages at home (coded 1) vs. all others (coded 0). ImmigrantMajoritySchools=schools with more than 60% students speaking foreign languages at home (coded 1) vs. all others (coded 0). Percentages presented for dummy-coded variables rather than means.

Across schools, there was no significant association between multiculturalism policy and school diversity climate (nor school discrimination climate), suggesting prescriptive policies do not necessarily reflect how the school diversity climate is perceived (nor

experienced) by students in the schools. There was also no significant association between multiculturalism policy and school ethnic composition (neither for native-majority schools nor for immigrant-majority schools), suggesting the prescriptive policies do not necessarily reflect (nor respond to) the descriptive presence of diversity in schools, either. Native-majority schools were, however, significantly associated with school perceived diversity climate, suggesting that schools composed of primarily native students were generally perceived to be *more* respectful of diverse cultural groups, which may reflect *weak* levels of critical consciousness in such schools relative to those with larger proportions of students with an immigration background. Native-majority schools were indeed *not* associated with school discrimination climate, suggesting such schools were *not characterized by generally less experiences of discrimination* among students with an immigration background and thus that the comparatively respectful diversity climate was indeed collectively *perceived*. Importantly, school discrimination climate, to be used as a robustness check, was negatively correlated with school diversity climate, as expected.

Hypothesis Testing

Multilevel models are summarized in Table 3, conducted on the full final sample. The same models were conducted separately among native students and among those with an immigration background, as well as with the second wave of data (all reported in supplementary materials) and all results were consistent with those reported here. First, the null model (intercept-only; Model 0) confirmed that both student- and school-level factors contribute to student perceived collective voice. The Intraclass Correlation indicated that 7% of the variance in student perceived collective voice was at the school-level.

Model 2 shows that perceived diversity climate was the only significant school-level predictor of student perceived collective voice, suggesting that students in schools characterized by a collectively perceived climate of respect for diverse cultural groups

generally report more empowerment and opportunities for students to participate actively in decision-making and norm setting in these schools. This is consistent with H1. School multiculturalism policy, however, did not have a significant effect on student perceived collective voice, counter to H2 (both H2a and H2b thus unconfirmed). It is noteworthy that school ethnic composition (both dummy codes) did not have a significant effect on student perceived collective voice, either.

Model 3 nevertheless shows a significant interplay between school diversity climate and school multiculturalism policy, as illustrated by the significant interaction between the two (coinciding with H3). Figure 1 shows the decomposition of this interaction, by probing simple effects at -1 and +1 standard deviation on each variable (Preacher at al., 2006). Importantly, the significant effect of school perceived diversity climate was present only when school multiculturalism policy was weak, $p < .001$, and no other simple effects were significant. In this way, multiculturalism policies reduce the gap in perceived collective voice between schools that have stronger and weaker diversity climates. While this significant interaction suggests the effect of school multiculturalism policy differed (and even changed direction) depending on the school diversity climate (see Figure 1; in line with our more detailed hypothesis on this interplay), simple effects were not significant in this regard.

Model 4 shows that this two-way interaction effect did not change depending on the ethnic composition of the school (no significant three-way interactions), and therefore held regardless of school ethnic composition.

When school discrimination climate was placed in the model in lieu of school diversity climate, the two-way interaction with school multiculturalism policy was again significant, $b = 0.43$, $SE = 0.13$, $p = .001$, with simple effects revealing, again, that school discrimination climate was associated with weaker student perceived collective voice only

when school multiculturalism policy was weak, $p < .001$ (no other significant simple effects; see Figure 2).

Table 3

Step-by-Step Coefficients (and Standard Errors) from Null Model to Multilevel Models Predicting Student Perceived Collective Voice

	Model 0 *B (SE)*	Model 1 *B (SE)*	Model 2 *B (SE)*	Model 3 *B (SE)*	Model 4 *B (SE)*
Intercept	3.23*** (0.03)	3.25*** (0.03)	3.26*** (0.04)	3.27*** (0.04)	3.22*** (0.03)
Sex		0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Age		-0.05** (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)
Year of School		-0.07* (0.02)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)
ImmigrationBackground		0.00 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)
DiversityClimate (DC) **H1**			0.59*** (0.13)	0.54*** (0.12)	0.21 (0.14)
Multiculturalism (MC) **H2**			-0.02 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
NativeMajoritySchools (NMS)			-0.03 (0.06)	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.05)
ImmigrantMajoritySchools (IMS)			-0.02 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.05)
*DC * MC* **H3**				-0.42*** (0.11)	-0.21** (0.07)
*DC * NMS*					0.45 (0.27)
*DC * IMS*					-0.08 (0.17)
*MC * NMS*					-0.13* (0.07)
*MC * IMS*					-0.01 (0.03)
*DC * MC * NMS*					-0.43 (0.29)
*DC * MC * IMS*					-0.19 (0.13)
VARIANCE COMPONENTS					
Residuals (student level)	0.67*** (0.02)	0.66*** (0.02)	0.66*** (0.02)	0.66*** (0.02)	0.66*** (0.02)
Residuals (school level)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
ICC	.07	.06	.06	.06	.06
*N*total students	4690	4690	4690	4690	4690
*N*schools	69	69	69	69	69
Average student *n* by school	67.97	67.97	67.97	67.97	67.97
AIC	11519.36	11456.10	11444.19	11437.58	11437.64

Note. ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, $^{t}p < .10$. Four schools had less than 20 student participants to calculate aggregate score of diversity climate; conclusions were identical when these schools were excluded. Conclusions were also identical when ultra-diverse schools with greater than 60% of students with an immigration background were excluded (13 schools less).

Figure 1

Interaction between School Multiculturalism Policy and School Diversity Climate Predicting Student Perceived Collective Voice

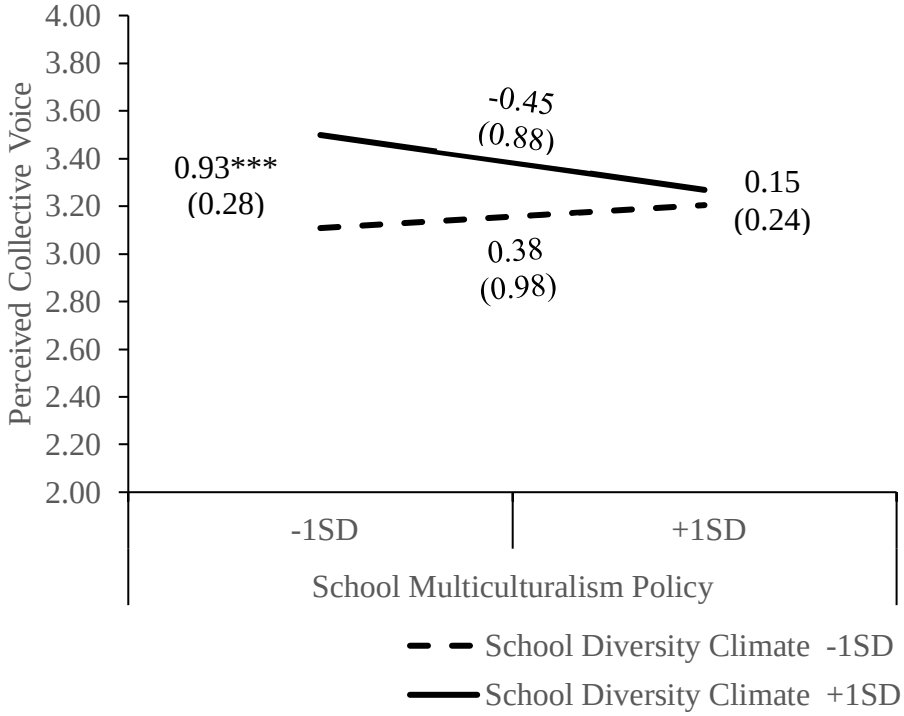
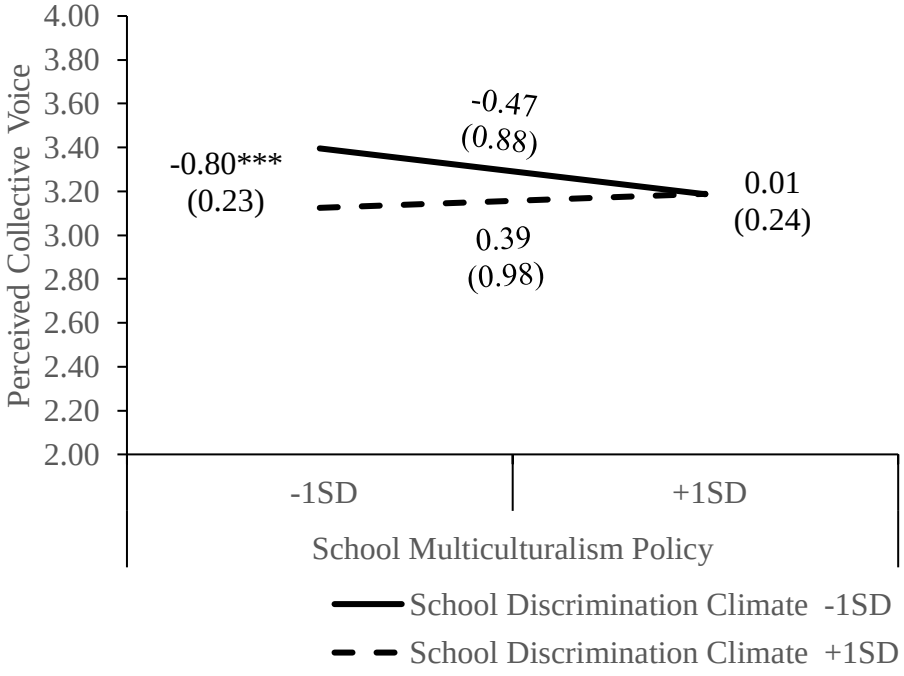


Figure 2

Interaction between School Multiculturalism Policy and School Discrimination Climate Predicting Student Perceived Collective Voice



Discussion

The present study sought to examine how school-level diversity climates and multiculturalism policies may foster or dissuade student perceived collective voice; a form of collective empowerment crucial for social justice in culturally diverse schools. Using multilevel modelling with large-scale data from students and schools in Flanders, Belgium, we found that, first, a collectively perceived school climate of respect for diverse cultural groups was associated with increased perceived collective voice. This result was in line with our first, basic hypothesis, and shows that when students collectively perceive that they are treated equally regardless of their origins, this seems to foster a sense of collective student empowerment.

Second, as a more distant contextual school factor, further removed from the shared social reality of an institution and seeking to make cultural identities salient, we found no effect of school multiculturalism policy on student perceived collective voice. This result disconfirmed our second hypothesis. Nevertheless, because our predictions concerning multiculturalism policy involved competing hypotheses consistent with trends in existing research; one proposing an empowering effect (H2a; Vorauer & Quesnel, 2017a, 2017b), and the other proposing an undermining one (H2b; Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018; Kaiser et al., 2013; Wilton et al., 2019), this null main effect was rather unsurprising.

To clarify this null main effect and the potentially diverging implications of such a policy, it appears that the effect of multiculturalism policy prescribing value in cultural differences may be contingent on the collectively perceived diversity climate. Importantly, we did find a robust interplay between multiculturalism policy and diversity climate, *partially* consistent with our third hypothesis. Specifically, across *all* analyses and supplementary analyses, we found that multiculturalism policies reduced the gap in perceived collective voice between schools that had stronger and weaker diversity climates. While this policy

appeared to come at no significant cost or benefit in collective voice only within schools with stronger or weaker diversity climates (reflecting the non-significant simple effects of school multiculturalism policy), one could note the rather weak statistical power in the present study (only 69 school-level units): With more statistical power, perhaps the simple effects of school multiculturalism policy would have reached significance. In this case, one may conclude that multiculturalism policies are conducive to student collective voice only in a generalized school climate of awareness of discrimination as a social justice concern, and that multiculturalism policies may even have a detrimental effect under a generalized assumption that everyone is treated respectfully. While we cannot draw strong conclusion about (contingent) policy effects in different diversity climates due to this limited statistical power, the robustness of the interaction itself (across different samples and measures) clearly establishes a pattern and opens some important avenues for future research.

Indeed, within the context of existing research, this interplay between multiculturalism policy and diversity climate reveals a rather paradoxical effect. Under the assumption that multiculturalism policies are generally conducive to, for example, a positive diversity climate (see e.g., Guimond et al., 2014; Leslie & Flynn, 2022; Ward et al., 2018) and sense of belonging among minority and non-dominant groups (see e.g., Baysu et al., 2023; Bloemraad & Wright, 2014; Celeste et al., 2019; Schachner et al., 2021; Ward et al., 2018), it may seem surprising that their efficacy in favouring student collective voice could be contingent instead on a *weak* collectively perceived climate of respect. This may speak to existing organizational research on the paradoxical effects of multiculturalism policies, which suggest they are empowering for minorities and non-dominant groups (Vorauer & Quesnel, 2017a, 2017b) while at the same time supporting a latent sense that the institution is already fair (Leslie & Flynn, 2022; Plaut et al., 2009) and thus delegitimizing discrimination claims (Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018; Kaiser et al., 2013; Wilton et al., 2019). By bringing these

literatures together, our results suggest multiculturalism policies may be empowering for students specifically when discrimination is more obvious and even normatively discussed. While this kind of critical consciousness (Schwarzenthal et al., 2022) may be challenging to cultivate and openly discuss, it may be a crucial first step in establishing socially just school environments where multiculturalism policies can do their work and support *all* students in feeling they can truly contribute to their learning environment.

The present results may also speak to the unique character of student perceived collective voice as an important collective outcome among students. While existing research on the effects of (perceived) school (or institutional) contexts has often focused on positive outcomes like belongingness, 'engagement' (i.e., doing one's tasks well), and achievement (e.g., Baysu et al., 2016, 2023; Celeste et al., 2019; Plaut et al., 2009; Schachner et al., 2021), empowerment, and collective voice as a form of empowerment, has largely been neglected as an outcome (see Kirk et al., 2016, 2017, for recent work examining empowerment as an *intrapersonal* rather than collective construct). Collective voice is distinct from these outcomes, as, for example, feeling one belongs in a (school) community may not necessarily mean they feel their group (i.e., students in this case) is listened to (e.g., when facing teachers or administrators). This is consistent with social psychological research that has highlighted, for example, some potential pitfalls of harmonious (intergroup) relationships whereby minorities and non-dominant groups can paradoxically be silenced (with weaker collective voice) when they feel they belong in a larger community (and identify less, for example, with a (student) sub-group; Ufkes et al., 2016). Perhaps a sense of frustration is a necessary precondition to facilitate student perceived collective voice in schools where a multiculturalism policy is applied; frustration about unequal and unjust treatment, among students who identify as students as an internally diverse collective (comprising both native and immigrant-origin), in addition to the broader school community (see Dovidio et al.,

2016). Unfortunately, we did not have measures of student (or native/immigrant-origin) identification in the present dataset. Future research should continue to disentangle the (contingent) effects of multiculturalism policy and diversity climate on collective voice as an alternate, crucial outcome reflecting social justice among students in culturally diverse institutions.

An important distinction between the two school-level predictors in the present study was that collectively perceived diversity climate was focused on *equality* and respectful treatment of all students regardless of (ethnic) group membership, while multiculturalism policy was instead focused on *diversity* and making cultural identities salient (see Schwarzenthal et al, 2023). The latter may indeed be more relevant for some outcomes (e.g., belonging) than others (e.g., perceived collective voice). When considering that student perceived collective voice is about defining a collective identity of (diverse) students within the broader school community, rather than distinguishing between subgroups of students (in the present study, no measure was available for perceived collective voice among smaller subgroups), multiculturalism policies which place more emphasis on the importance of these subgroup (cultural) identities may play less central of a role. However, it remains relevant to explore further in future research that multiculturalism policy may be a way of dealing with inequities and exclusions (i.e., in conjunction with a discriminatory climate) to increase student perceived collective voice by making cultural identities salient.

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