Attitudes towards immigrants among the youth: Intergroup contact interventions and the

reduction of prejudice in the school context

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Abstract

In recent years in our increasingly globalized world in many countries we have seen the rise of

anti-immigrant feelings among the youth. This has resulted in both discrimination against

immigrants and negative psychological outcomes which harm both the individual and hinder

social integration within society. In this article we highlight how psychological research can play

an important role in informing the design and conduct of educational interventions based in

intergroup contact theory that are aimed at reducing prejudice towards immigrants. We review

recent research showing anti-immigrant attitudes among the youth across the globe, and how

these attitudes are related to parental and peer relationships. Research indicates that a color-blind

approach to prejudice reduction among youth is not helpful and, in contrast, it suggests a more

effective approach could be a multicultural approach to diversity, which celebrates both group

differences and similarities while promoting social integration through quality contact between

different social groups. Recent psychological research shows that this contact can take many

forms, ranging from direct contact (i.e., cross-ethnic friendships), to extended contact (i.e.,

reading a book in which someone from your groups has a positive interaction with someone from

another group) and even imagined contact (i.e., engaging in imagined play involving characters

from different groups having positive relations). The findings of this research demonstrate that it

is possible to challenge anti-immigrant attitudes when and where they develop in young people.

Attitudes towards immigrants among the youth: Contact interventions to reduce

prejudice in the school context

Children and adolescents in Europe are growing up in an increasingly culturally diverse

school context, with a higher level of immigration into and across Europe in the last twenty or so

years. For example, between 1993 and 2015 the number of foreign-born immigrants in the

United Kingdom (UK) almost doubled from 7% to 13.5% of the population (Rienzo & Vargas-

Silva, 2017). At the same time, in the USA there has also been rapidly changing demographics,

largely fueled by immigration. In 2015, a total of 1 1,051,031immigrants became legal

permanent residents of the United States, (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Governments, until recent

times, have recognized the benefits of diversity brought by immigrants, but at the same time

have consistently sought to restrict their numbers due to concerns about public opinion and social

cohesion (Home Office, 2015).

Indeed in recent years, in many parts of Europe and the USA, an anti-immigration socio-

political climate and controversial rhetoric around immigration has developed in the media and

schools (Moore & Ramsay, 2017; Taylor, 2015). Research in the US has shown that while

children are explicitly taught about their nation being founded upon immigration, in everyday

settings are consistently exposed to anti-immigration sentiments (Brown, 2011). In spite of these

conflicting messages, research suggests intergroup contact (i.e., interaction between social

groups) may be beneficial for young people since it improves social relations, and reduces

prejudice between individuals from different ethnic groups, including immigrants (e.g., Feddes,

Noack, & Rutland, 2009; Bagci, Rutland Kumashiro, Smith, & Blumberg 2014). In this regard,

research shows that reading in a book that someone from your group has a friendship with

someone from another group (i.e., extended contact) is enough to improve young people's

attitudes towards those with an immigrant background (see Cameron, Rutland, Brown & Douch,

2006). Such interventions have much promise but has research truly shown that such

interventions – or indeed any school-based intervention - can change behavior towards

immigrants? In this paper, we review evidence for interventions grounded in intergroup contact

theory that purport to reduce prejudice and thereby promote the social inclusion of immigrant

youth. We consider how far such interventions may be considered effective in this mission.

Immigration and Attitudes Among Youth

In recent times we have seen significant increases in anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe

(Ciupijus, 2011; Gniewosz & Noack, 2015). For example, this was evident when the National

Police Chiefs' Council (2016) in the UK recorded a 42% increase in racist hate crime in the

month following the UK referendum vote to leave the European Union. Relatedly, in the U.K.

the Youth Select Committee (2016) gave evidence that interracial prejudice is becoming

normalized in schools, with a Ditch the Label report (2015) stating that 8% of their sample had

had negative racial identity-based comments directed at them. Concurrently, research has found

high levels social isolation amongst adolescent immigrants, with 1 in 5 reporting they feel that

they do not belong to or are accepted by society (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2012).

The psychological consequences of discrimination are well-documented, and include

deleterious effects on young people's academic performance, self-esteem, and prosocial behavior

(Leary, 1990; Twenge & Baumeister, 2005). Relatedly, Motti-Stefanidi and Asendorpf (2017)

report that an immigrant youth cohort, dealing with significantly greater effects of discrimination

since an economic recession in Greece, had worse outcomes on markers of well-being than their

non-immigrant counterparts. Other research suggests that adolescent immigrants may be

particularly sensitive to anxiety and depression arising from intergroup prejudice (McKenney, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006; Strohmeier, Kärnä, & Salmivalli, 2011). Moreover, when negative discrimination is directed toward an individual because of their race or ethnicity, the psychological impact on the target may be greater, as an immigrant identity is internal, stable, and uncontrollable (McKenney et al., 2006). Increasingly, social-developmental psychological theories have highlighted the role of social contexts, in particular parents, peers, teachers, and intergroup friendships (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) to explain the development of anti-immigrant attitudes that lead to incidents of intergroup discrimination.

Research on adults shows that they often hold negative attitudes towards those from an immigrant background and that they make a strong distinction between legal versus illegal immigrants holding considerably more negative views of the latter compared to the former (Lee & Fiske 2006; Short 2004). Yet we know little about the attitudes of children and adolescents toward immigrants and whether they distinguish between legal versus illegal immigrants. Recent research suggests that young people often do hold negative attitudes towards immigrant youth in schools settings (British Youth Council, 2016; Brown & Lee, 2015; Gniewosz & Noack, 2015). For example, Brown (2011) examined European American children's attitudes towards immigrants and found the while a majority of children were relatively positive about legal immigrants they also believed illegal immigrants should be imprisoned.

Developmental research has shown that important social-cognitive, normative and moral processes underlie the development of intergroup attitudes through childhood into adolescents (Killen & Rutland, 2011; Raabe & Beelmann, 2011; Rutland, Killen, & Abrams, 2010). In particular, research focusing on socialization of ethnic and racial prejudice has indicated a significant, moderate parent–child concordance (for review, see Degner & Dalege, 2013).

Beyond this, Jugert, Eckstein, Beelmann & Noack, (2015) examined moderators of the parent-child transmission of intergroup attitudes, whilst the strength of intergenerational transmission has been shown to be moderated by relationship quality, that is, the better the relation the stronger the parental influence (Miklikowska, 2016). Therefore, unsurprisingly, research suggests that young people's attitudes towards immigrants are related to parental attitudes (Enesco, Navarro, Paradela, & Guerrero 2005; Gniewosz & Noack, 2015). For example, Gniewosz & Noack (2015) conducted a longitudinal five-wave cohort-sequential multi-informant survey study on attitudes towards immigrants among German adolescents and their parents. They found that attitudes among adolescents were predicted over time by maternal and parental attitudes, especially from early adolescence until the age of 16 years. This result suggests that early adolescence is a sensitive developmental period for the emergence of negative attitudes towards immigrants.

Teachers are also influential adults in children's attitudes towards immigrants. In particular the relationship between teacher and student might be key to youth attitudes. For example, Thijs and Verkuyten (2012) found that ethnic minority students who shared a closer relationship with their ethnic majority teacher had more positive attitudes towards the ethnic majority group in general. Geerling, Thijs and Verkuyten (2017) used data from native Dutch children (8–13 years) to assess the importance of student-teacher relationships on attitudes to ethnic minorities. Their research showed that student-teacher relationships were associated with more positive outgroup attitudes, and that this association is mediated through students' desire for intercultural openness. Consequently, when considering the influences of schools on students' attitudes, ethnically diverse classsrooms and forms of multicultural education are important, but

the relationships that teachers develop with their students also matter for the development of

positive ethnic outgroup attitudes.

In schools, peer influence also contributes to youth attitudes in important ways.

Longitudinal studies (e.g., Van Zalk, Van Zalk, Kerr, & Stattin, 2013) have shown the effect of

peers' anti-immigrant attitudes on changes in adolescents' prejudice over time, whilst Blanchard,

Crandall, Brigham, and Vaugn (1994) and Sinclair, Lowery, Hardin, and Colangelo (2005)

experimentally showed an effect of peers' opinions on adolescents' interracial attitudes.

Nonetheless, the long-term relations between peer influence and youth attitudes at different

stages of development are unclear. It has been suggested that the influence of parents might

diminish in middle and late adolescence, compared to earlier periods, given that adolescents

spend more time with their peers. Conversely, it has been suggested that the effects of peers

might decrease between ages 14 and 18 years, when the resistance to peer influences increases

(Steinberg & Monahan, 2007).

Recent longitudinal research in Sweden has shown significant effects of parents' attitudes,

peers' attitudes, and intergroup friendships, on changes over time in anti-immigrant attitudes

among adolescents (Miklikowska, 2017). This research also showed that adolescents with

immigrant friends are less affected by parents' and peers' prejudice than youth without

immigrant friends, and that this effect was mediated by adolescents' empathy. These finding fit

with the proposed link between development of empathy, peer relationships and intergroup

attitudes, with empathy theorized to mediate the effects of intergroup friendships on adolescents'

intergroup attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). That is, intergroup friendships lead to increases

in empathy, and in turn, to decreases in prejudice. In this regard, empathy may moderate the

effects of humanitarian concern on immigrant policies (Newman, Hartman, Lown, & Feldman, 2013) and the effects of ingroup norms on outgroup liking (Nesdale, Griffiths, Durkin, & Maass, 2005). In line with this reasoning, the attitudes of highly empathic adolescents might be less affected by their parents or peers' prejudice, or alternatively, heightened by their positive attitudes towards immigrants. Previous research conducted in the United Kingdom, also supporting the importance of empathy and intergroup friendships in reducing anti-immigrant biases, suggests that children are more likely to challenge intergroup bias towards immigrants if they have high levels of empathy (Abbott & Cameron, 2014).

Another factor that has been shown to bear upon intergroup attitudes are what adolescents and children think their peer groups expect them to say about those from other groups. These group norms have the potential to influence the altitudes youth hold towards immigrants. Developmental research shows that from middle childhood youth are highly sensitive to group norms about forming intragroup and intergroup relationships (Abrams, Rutland, & Cameron, 2003; Castelli, De Amicis, & Sherman, 2007; Nesdale, Maass, Durkin, & Griffiths, 2005; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005; Jugert, Noack, & Rutland, 2011; Tropp, O'Brien, & Migacheva, 2014). Therefore, children being told about a cross-ethnic friendship are more likely to interpret group members' actions as representative of the ingroup and outgroup peer norms and respond in a manner reflective of their prescribed ingroup norm. In this vein, Cameron, Rutland, Hossain, and Petley (2011) showed that among older children, attitudes towards ethnic outgroups are affected by ingroup norms surrounding inclusion. Future research should examine the role of ingroup and outgroup peer group norms in determining the development of anti-immigrant attitudes in youth.

How can anti-immigrant attitudes be reduced in youth?

Surprisingly, despite increasing research on intergroup attitudes in children and adolescents, interventions to reduce prejudice towards immigrants in childhood and adolescence are not widespread and are rarely informed by developmental science (Killen, Rutland, & Martin, 2011). A recent review of over 900 studies (Paluck & Green, 2009) included only a few child-focused interventions, and these programs focused specifically on the use of reading materials for children and media-based intervention programs such as *Sesame Street* (Cole et al., 2003; Cole & Dollard, 2017). Moreover, the review did not address the developmental factors that contribute to prejudice. In contrast, an earlier report on prejudice reduction in school settings in the United States focused specifically on children and adolescents (Pfeifer, Brown, & Juvonen, 2007). The authors, who are developmental scientists, reviewed school-based curricula such as cooperative learning and multicultural curricula. These programs produced modest gains in positive attitudes and were supported by several empirical studies. The authors pointed out, however, that some of the evaluations of these programs overlooked the social context. The report demonstrated the ways that these programs helped to make desegregation a positive learning environment (Pfeifer, Spears Brown, et al., 2007).

The need to take such social factors into account is illustrated in one intervention commonly used in UK schools, and promoted by an organization called Philosophy4Children, for tackling ethnic prejudice, based on a color-blind ideology (see Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2015). This approach argues that everyone should be treated equally, and attempts at differential treatment by ethnicity should be disregarded and dismantled (see http://www.philosophy4children.co.uk/). However, if teachers use this strategy, are they implicitly telling children not to talk about ethnicity? Indeed, a recent study by Cameron, Brady,

and Abbott (2013) suggests such a color-blind perspective is common among children. They tested a group of children using a version of the children's game, 'Guess Who?'. The game was contrived, so that asking about the ethnicity of your opponent's character would enable winning more quickly than not asking about it. Yet, rarely would children ask this question – and they were even less likely to do so in ethnically diverse classrooms. In other words, children would rather lose a game, than mention ethnicity. This tendency to ignore ethnicity or race in schools makes explicitly challenging negative attitudes towards immigrants difficult since any contact between immigrants and non-immigrants is not likely to be perceived as representative of inter-ethnic or cultural contact (Cameron et al, 2006; Hewstone & Brown, 2005).

Books typically used in school often do not explicitly mention ethnicity or race. Indeed, Chetty (2014) argued that two books, *Elmer's Special Day* and *Tusk Tusk*, both by David McKee, and both recommended by Philosophy4Children practitioners as starting points for philosophical enquiry into ethnic prejudice, multiculturalism and diversity, do not truly allow for an open discussion. Rather, in line with the above findings, he argues, 'animal stories' separate racism from its temporal and spatial context, limiting opportunities for engaging philosophically with the topic – and maybe even contributing, paradoxically, to the taboo (however, in their review of polyculturalism, Morris, Chiu, & Liu (2015) point out that, depending on the particular area and outcome assessed, multicultural education need not necessarily be always better than colorblind approaches). Research in the US also shows that European American mothers adopted 'colormute' and 'colorblind' approaches to socialization around inter-ethnic relations, as demonstrated by examining how they read story books to their children (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). This study, contrary to the color-blind ideology, showed that such an approach is not related to low levels of ethnic bias among children even though their parents showed positive

explicit ethnic attitudes. In light of the problematic taboo around ethnic origin, which lies in

heart of the color-blind ideology, and the findings of previous research, there is good reason, to

look further towards developmental-social psychological theory to inform educational

interventions aimed at reducing bias and prejudice towards immigrants.

Intergroup contact and the reduction of anti-immigrant attitudes in youth

One such line of theory that might helpfully be applied to reduce prejudice towards

immigrant youth in a school context is intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew &

Tropp, 2006. It is based on the idea that positive contact (meeting Allport's optimal conditions of

co-operation, common goals, equal social status, and institutional support) between a member of

one's own group and another group can improve intergroup attitudes. In this vein , Zagefka et al.

(2015) conducted two surveys in Chile with indigenous Mapuche participants, finding that

intergroup contact with the non-indigenous immigrants reduces prejudice. However, such direct

contact is difficult to set up, and can be costly (Crisp & Turner, 2014), in the segregated societies

in which many youths live. Moreover, Wright et al. (1997) contend that attitude change does not

necessarily require a direct contact in another group; mere knowledge of ingroup members

having close relationships with outgroup members can result in more positive intergroup

attitudes. This is known as the *extended contact hypothesis*.

Studies among children, adolescents, and adults have now shown extended friendship to

be associated with more positive intergroup attitudes (e.g., Turner, Hewstone, Voci, & Vonofakou,

2008; Wright et al., 1997). Liebkind and McAlister (1999) conducted a field experiment on the

effect of contact among 1480 Finnish students (ages 13-15 years). In experimental schools,

printed stories of ingroup members' close friendship with members of outgroups were presented

as examples of successful intergroup contact. Intergroup attitudes were measured before and

after the experimental intervention. In experimental schools, intergroup acceptance improved,

while attitudes worsened or stayed the same in the control schools. Relatedly, Liebkind,

Mähönen, Solares, Solheim, and Jasinskaja-Lahti, (2014) looked at relations between non-

immigrants and immigrants in culturally diverse schools. Both groups showed a tendency to

perceive future intergroup contact as more important after an intergroup contact intervention.

Along similar lines, Cameron et al. (2006) read stories to British children about other

British children interacting positively with an immigrant refugee child. The results showed that

attitudes toward immigrant refugee children became more positive among children who received

the intervention compared to those in a control group. Additional evidence from Vezzali,

Giovannini and Capozza (2012) examined the effects of extended contact on immigrant attitudes

among Italian primary school children. Their results revealed that extended contact (measured by

the number of immigrant friends of participants' best ingroup friend) was associated with

reduced implicit prejudice, but only among those with fewer immigrant friends of their own.

This finding is compatible with research in the UK which also showed that an extended contact

intervention could significantly reduce explicit biases towards an ethnic minority group of an

immigrant background in a non-diverse location but had little effect in an ethnically

heterogeneous area (Cameron, Rutland, & Hossain, 2011). A longitudinal study of children from

an ethnically diverse community in Germany, asked German and Turkish immigrant (living in

Germany) children who were their best friends and how many friends of these best friends were

German or Turkish, to measure direct and extended contact respectively (Feddes, Noack, &

Rutland, 2009). They found that direct contact but not extended contact amongst German

children predicted positive out-group ethnic attitudes. These studies conducted in three different

European nations together show that direct contact can reduce biases against ethnic minority groups with immigrant backgrounds, but when actual contact between different groups does not happen then extended contact is effective at changing children's attitudes to others of an immigrant background.

A relatively new sister to the extended contact approach is known as *imagined contact.* This is, simply "the mental simulation of a social interaction with a member or members of an outgroup category" (Crisp & Turner, 2009, p. 234), and can improve intergroup attitudes. According to Crisp and Turner (2009) the imagined-contact technique has several key strengths: it can be used where actual or extended contact is impractical, for example, in contexts of physical segregation. Unlike direct and extended contact, imagined contact does not require a child to live in a context where they have contact with outgroup members, where outgroup members are known to anyone from the ingroup or where material is readily available which presents positive extended cross-group contact. Rather, it can be used in low-diversity contexts where contact rarely happens or is discussed, and it is exactly these types of locations where intergroup bias is most likely to form and go unchallenged (e.g., Rutland et al., 2005).

Research suggests that the effect of imagined contact on reduced intergroup biases may be driven by a drop in *intergroup anxiety* (Turner, Crisp, & Lambert, 2007). Intergroup anxiety is the negative emotional reaction that can occur at the prospect of intergroup contact. However, after individuals have had a successful interaction with an outgroup member, their level of intergroup anxiety is likely to be reduced. Consistent with this reasoning, several studies in diverse intergroup settings with adults have found the positive effect of intergroup contact with immigrants on reducing prejudice to be mediated by intergroup anxiety (Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). Less, however, is known about the role of intergroup

anxiety in indirect contact with immigrant youth. Future studies should examine if imagined

contact can reduce anti-immigrant attitudes by hindering intergroup anxiety about immigrants.

Another factor that might underline the power of indirect contact is *empathy*. A

correlational study (Vezzali, Hewstone, Capozza, Trifiletti, & Di Bernardo, 2016) investigated

extended contact between Italian and immigrant primary school children. Results showed that

extended contact was associated with improved intergroup empathy, which, in turn, was

associated with more positive outgroup attitudes, stereotypes and behavioral intentions. As above,

these effects were significant only among participants with a low or moderate level of direct

contact with immigrants. A field study (Vezzali, Giovanni & Capozza, 2010) of 68 Italian

(majority) and 31 immigrant (minority) secondary school students also showed that intergroup

anxiety and empathy mediated the longitudinal effects of quantity of contact on intergroup

attitudes for both Italians and immigrants.

Imagined contact has great potential as a prejudice-reduction technique for use in

education as it can be used with a wide age range of children from diverse backgrounds and

abilities. There are now studies demonstrating that imagined intergroup contact is an effective

strategy for reducing prejudice among youth (e.g., Cameron, Rutland, Turner, Holman-Nicolas,

& Powell, 2011; Stathi, Cameron, Hartley, & Bradford, 2014). Regarding immigrants, Vezzali,

Capozza, Giovannini, et al. (2012) conducted a three-week experimental intervention asking

Italian children to imagine a positive meeting with an unknown immigrant child in different

social situations. Results revealed that, compared to their counterparts in a control condition,

children in the imagined intergroup contact condition had stronger intentions to meet immigrant

children and less implicit prejudice towards them. In adolescents, Turner, West, and Christie

(2013) showed British high school students aged 16–17 years a picture of a same-gendered

immigrant asylum seeker who had recently arrived from Zimbabwe. They were asked to imagine

having a positive interaction with this individual, before writing a detailed outline of the

interaction they imagined. Compared to control participants, students who imagined contact

reported a greater desire to befriend immigrant asylum seekers (e.g., get to know them). Together

these studies suggest that imagined contact may be an effective strategy when trying to reduce

anti-immigrant attitudes in youth.

To date one research study (Jones, Rutland & Rea, 2017) has examined the effectiveness

of a form of imagined contact with immigrants in reducing anti-immigrant attitudes in young 5-

9-year-old children. This type of imagined contact was specifically designed for young children

to make imagining interaction with an immigrant easier, as the children could simulate their

imagination using 3-D toys. This type of intervention was based upon the premise that imagined

contact will be more effective, when it actively involves the child, as opposed to merely

observing or hearing about intergroup interactions, for example through being passively read a

book or shown a TV program. Developmental research suggests that children will pay more

attention when key features of the world are perceptually salient (Braunerd & Reyna, 1990) and

the social group membership of the individuals during an interaction are also made actively

salient (Cameron, Rutland et al., 2006).

In the study by Jones et al (2017) imagined contact was induced via pretend play –

bringing the imagined contact into a 3-D realm, where children imagined interacting in a

physical space. This study found that British children aged between 5- 9 years from ethnically

and culturally diverse areas, respond in increasingly negative ways towards different groups of

immigrants to their school, with age, but that these negative attitudes were moderated by

imagined contact with an immigrant involving 3-D play. Interestingly, in the sample as a whole,

children's play reflected elements of both concrete reality (e.g., let's play football) and fantasy

play (e.g., let's pretend we can fly), and the imagined contact intervention was equally effective

when both forms of play were shown by children.

These findings fit with extended contact research by Vezzali, Stathi, Giovannini, Capozza,

and Trifiletti (015), who showed that extended contact stories are effective even when the contact

does not involve an ingroup member, or even "real" social groups (i.e., pretend or fantasy

characters). In the study by Vezzali and colleagues Italian elementary school children read

passages once a week for six weeks from fictional J. K. Rowling *Harry Potter* book series,

presenting themes of prejudice followed by a group discussion. They found this fantasy focused

extended contact intervention was effective in promoting positive attitudes towards immigrants.

Given these findings, future research should seek to capitalize on this – to explore the power of

children's imaginative and fantasy play, and how this may be exploited to enhance the positive

influence of imagined contact in anti-immigrant attitudes in youth.

As a note of caution, while the use of imagined contact interventions remains relatively

new, especially in the context of immigration and youth, and there have been several published

replication failures of imagined contact (e.g., Klein et al., 2014; McDonald et al., 2014) in adults.

Along these lines, West and Greenland (2016) conducted two studies with adults and showed that

self-regulatory focus moderates the effectiveness of imagined contact interventions. Their

findings suggest that a prevention self-focus when experiencing imagined contact can limit its

effectiveness. A prevention self-focus involves a lot of attention on being social evaluated and

concerns about social rejection which can produce negative emotions, vigilance motivation, and

ironically a higher attention to stereotypical information. More recently, Hoffarth & Hodson

(2016) have pointed to important moderator variables (e.g., level of previous intergroup contact)

that may determine the effectiveness of imagined intergroup contact. Relatedly, a study by Jones, Rutland & Mariezcurrena (under review) shows that, when it comes to children with disability as an outgroup for children, direct contact accentuates the impact of imagined contact. However, we do not believe that this is a reason for dispensing with imagined contact altogether at this stage, especially in circumstances where direct contact is not possible. Rather, we would argue that future research using imagined contact in youth to reduce anti-immigrant attitudes needs to examine the factors that limit and enhance such interventions. Then we would know more about why and when it can be effective in reducing anti-immigrant attitudes in youth.

Future Directions

In parallel with our intentions, the furtherance of contact interventions to reduce prejudice towards immigrant youth are limited only by the researchers' imaginations. However, a number of discrete avenues for future research have been brought to light in this review. Many of these studies consider only children belonging to the majority status group. Thus, it is of primary importance to test indirect contact effects among both majority and minority status children. In the case of minority children, a further consideration arises. In many instances, the number of immigrant children in a class is low, which reduces the opportunity for immigrant children to learn about a fellow ingroup member (i.e., another immigrant) who has majority status group member friends. However, immigrant children may well have majority status group friends, and indeed research in Italy has found that minority status members generally do have a higher number of cross-group friends compared with the majority status (Vezzali, Giovannini, & Capozza, 2010). If minority status (immigrant) children have friends in the majority status group, who themselves have immigrant friends, then we should also take into account this form of

extended contact, because it provides children with knowledge of ingroup and outgroup

members engaging in contact (and not just contact; also friendships).

Although the effects of intergroup contact have now been shown by numerous studies,

many of them were either cross-sectional or experimental. One exception to this is Munniksma,

Stark, Verkuyten, Flache, and Veenstra (2013), who studied social networks of Dutch and

immigrant high-school children by asking participants to nominate their five best friends in class.

These social network data also allowed the researchers to identify the friends of a child's friends

by examining their nominations, (in other words; their extended contact). However, the authors

state that these data lacked the power needed to determine the main effect of extended contact.

Another exception is Wölfer, Schmid, Hewstone, & van Zalk (2016) who showed that intergroup

contact predicts the development of attitudes in adolescence, whereas acquired attitudes buffer

against decreasing intergroup contact in adulthood. Future studies might then similarly follow

the model provided by Wölfer, Faber & Hewstone, (2015) which combines self-report with

social network data, in order to look at the effects of imagined contact with immigrant youth.

Reliance on cross-sectional data means that little is known about the long-term relation

between contact and prejudice. In this regard, the effect of imagined contact on anxiety and

attitudes has thus far been demonstrated up to just three months later (e.g., Vezzali, Stathi,

Giovannini, Capozza, & Visintin, 2015). A short-term longitudinal study of Van Laar et al.

(2005) showed weak-to-non-significant effects of friendships in real life, suggesting that their

effects might wear off over time. This might be particularly likely in middle and late adolescence

when intergroup friendships are less stable (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003).

Summary

Today's youth live in increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse societies and attend schools where many more of the students will either be immigrants or of an immigrant background. Such diversity can have many benefits for the individual and society, yet in recent years in our increasingly globalized world in many countries we have seen the rise of anti-immigrant feelings. This has been evidenced among the youth and in the school context, as such feelings has meant many immigrants have experienced pervasive discrimination in school settings (British Youth Council, 2016; Brown & Lee, 2015; Gniewosz & Noack, 2015). Psychological research can play an important role in informing the design and conduct of educational interventions aimed at reducing prejudice towards immigrants. This is important since such prejudice means youth are often social excluded within schools resulting in poor psychological outcomes for individuals and a lack of social integration within societies.

In this article, we have highlighted research showing anti-immigrant attitudes among the youth in various nations is an important issue, and how these attitudes are related to parental, teacher and peer relationships. We have argued that educational interventions aimed at reducing prejudice need to consider the social context in which the youth live (i.e., their relationships with parent, teachers and peers) if they are to be successful. Social group memberships, such as immigrant or non-immigrant, are important in our increasingly diverse societies, and this is why we argue against a colorblind approach to prejudice reduction among the youth. Instead we suggest a multicultural approach to diversipeer ty may be more effective, as it celebrates both group differences and similarities while promoting social integration through quality contact between different social groups.

We have described psychological research which demonstrates that educational interventions based on intergroup contact between individuals from different groups can reduce

prejudice towards immigrants among the youth. This contact can take many forms, ranging from direct contact (i.e., cross-ethnic friendships), to extended contact (i.e., reading a book in which someone from your group has a positive interaction with someone from another group) and even imagined contact (i.e., engaging in imagined play involving characters from different groups having positive relations). There is still much research to be done to extend and evaluate effective educational interventions to reduce prejudice towards immigrants in youth, yet the research to date suggests it is possible to challenge anti-immigrant attitudes when and where they develop in youth today.

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