Social inclusion in Dutch early childhood education and care

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education is a challenging task for early child education and care (ECEC). UNESCO IBE (2008) interpret inclusive education as "an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination" (UNESCO IBE, 2008, p.18). A systematic approach to inclusion focuses on providing high quality education in mainstream schools that effectively meets the academic and social learning needs of all the learners in the local community, including children and students with migrant background, a multi- and/or minority language background, gifted students, and students with disabilities. The definition of social inclusion – or conversely, social exclusion – has an interface with the 'three P's' from the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child: provision, protection and participation. Provision is 'the right to possess, receive or have access to certain resources and services', including ECEC. Participation, the field of social opportunities, is 'the right to do things, express oneself and have an effective voice, both individually and collectively'. Finally, protection includes the right to parental and professional care, and the right to be shielded from certain acts and practices. Seen from this perspective, inclusion in the early years is related to provision, protection and participation of young children and their parents or other primary caregivers.

A strong interest in inclusion in the context began to flag in the '80s when children from the first immigrant families with different cultural backgrounds entered into ECEC in different European countries. The concept of inclusion was then primarily focused on ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. Whereas economic motives played a major role for immigration in the 80's, Europe is currently facing a new challenge of including immigrants who come from war zones surrounding Europe. Worldwide there is an impressive estimated number of 5 million refugees below 18 year with a history of war and also Europe faces the challenge to include families with young children with sometimes posttraumatic problem behavior (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). For example, an estimated number of 2500 toddlers and kindergarten, partially from Syria and Eritrea, have recently been included in Dutch centers (PO-raad & MOgroep).

Further, in many West-European countries there is no longer a small number of relatively homogeneous minorities. First, the number of minorities has significantly grown, particularly in urban regions. Cities like Amsterdam, Antwerpen and London have become majority-minority cities, where there is no longer one majority group and where everyone is member of a minority group. Further, the second and third generation started new careers and their socio-economic status, cultural habits and language abilities rapidly diverged and minorities are now a extremely heterogeneous group. This diversification of diversity, as Vertovec (2006) has put it, has blurred strong differences between members from the 'same' minority group and have strengthened similarities with other groups. The demographic changes, which typify western European cities,

require a re-definition and a new understanding of theoretical concepts. This context changes concepts like assimilation and integration and, in fact, may even render them meaningless from a theoretical point of view (Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2013). The multicultural education (see Banks, 2004) and anti-bias curricula from the '90s with their assumption of strong differences between clear-cut groups (Vandenbroeck, 2007) does not fit in with this new context. However, it should be noted that recent demographic changes and superdiversity may be different and European cities from different countries may show significant differences in demographic contexts, current policies and competency frameworks. ECEC may show highly contextualized practices in different European cities as a result of significant demographic differences and ECEC traditions.

Related to the growing diversity in current western societies, also the concept of inclusion itself has changed and comprises become broader. UNESCO IBE (2008) emphasizes, for example, that a systemic approach to inclusion is needed that 'focuses on providing high quality education in mainstream schools that effectively meets the academic and social learning needs of all the learners in the local community, including children and students with migrant background or a multi- and/or minority language background, gifted students, and students with disabilities' (p. 18). Hence, inclusion is not only related to children and parents from disadvantaged backgrounds but also comprises the inclusion of gifted students with different needs. Other groups may be identified as well, like LGBT families, different socio-economic status, children with handicaps and families with different life styles. In sum, the concept of inclusion is has broadened and comprises not only cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic and socio-economic diversity, but also children's disabilities, differences in academic level, families with different sexual orientations(GBLTQ). In addition, also the perspective on inclusion has changes. Several authors discussed ways how to include families with young children in ECEC, varying from assimilating to integrating new families, and from neglecting differences to celebrating diversity (zie Bouwer & Vedder, 1995; McNaughton, 2006). However, the current ECEC practices in different European regions require a new theoretical definition of inclusion and its practical implications for ECEC practitioners.

Focus of this brief paper

More than three decades after the first major demographic changes in ECEC and, related to this, the theoretical debate, significant changes in society pose new challenges for current ECEC professionals. A significantly large number of minorities, increasing heterogeneity between and among minorities, and a broader definition of identities of parents and children have widened the horizon and shape current and future ECEC practice. The challenge to provide provision, protection and participation in inclusive education requires a new theoretical understanding and a clear relationship with ECEC staff competencies.

In this paper we explore the concept of inclusion needs a new understanding and a clear connection with ECEC staff competencies for pre- and in-service education. Further, the different types of diversity do not only need a clear definition but also a clear connection with ECEC professionals' competencies. It is important, therefore, to analyze the inclusive concept of inclusion at conceptual level and to relate them to professional competencies of ECEC staff. The central question is twofold:

1. Which theoretical profiles are identified in recent ECEC publications for inclusive education?
2. Which professional competencies of ECEC staff are identified to tackle social exclusion and to promote social inclusion?

We discuss these questions based on a systematic literature review from 21st century literature from four different European countries with a focus on urban ECEC in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Ljubljana and Ghent. These four cities, which share an urban, diverse context and a tradition of inclusive ECEC, allow a critical comparison at theoretical and practical level at European level. In this paper, we discuss the Dutch context, based on a systematic review of (only) Dutch 21st century publications, searching for Dutch publications in the Dutch PiCarta database and Web of Science database with key words that were related to social inclusion (in Dutch: sociale inclusie, sociale uitsluiting), interprofessional work (in Dutch: interprofessioneel, interdisciplinair, multidisiciplinair, geïntegreerd) and the professional domain of ECEC (in Dutch: kindeorpvang, peuterspeelzaal, voor- en vroegschoolse educatie).

2. Dutch perspectives on inclusion in the ECEC context

In the Dutch context, concepts like 'social inclusion', 'social support', 'social integration', and 'embedding' crop up in various publications. Also various terms equivalent to 'social exclusion' are used, like 'marginalisation', 'social isolation', 'social deprivation', 'social poverty' and sometimes standing on the proverbial 'margins of society' (see, for example, Schulze, 2000). Within this traditional focus on inclusion, we see in recent publications a relatively broad definition of inclusion with a focus on more different social groups (a), and, partially related to this, an increasing complexity by combining different dimensions (b); and different domains of participation.

Inclusion: including many different people

The definition or focus on inclusion may vary between publications. Some publications may emphasize the cultural dimension of diversity, fitting in with the increasing cultural diversity after the first immigrant families entered the Dutch educational system. Related to this, inclusion was mostly focused on ethnic, cultural and

linguistic diversity (see Dutch Youth Institute, 2010; Huijbregts, Leseman, & Tavecchio, 2009). Other publications have focused on 'passend onderwijs' with a clear emphasis on children with different learning needs and needs for support. More recent studies show a broad definition of inclusion. Instead of only focusing on differences in culture or on differences in physical and cognitive abilities, diversity is increasingly seen as a broad concept comprising all kinds of differences. Van Keulen and Singer (2012), for example, consider diversity as all differences between people in preferences, talents, temper, cultural background, parenting-style, gender, religion, social environment, employment, education and physical and cognitive abilities. Also diversity of families with regard to their composition (e.g., extended families, blended families or gay-parent families) and parenting style are part of this diversity. Consequently, their definition includes children with different cultural backgrounds as well as children with special needs. Inclusive childcare should, in their view, be a place where all children, with or without specific needs, are welcome.

Recently, Vertovec's concept of superdiversity has become popular in Dutch publications as well. With the third and fourth generation of the immigrants in the 80's growing up in the Netherlands, heterogeneous minorities and Amsterdam and Rotterdam as minority-majority cities, superdiversity is a significant characteristic of urban regions in NL. According to Crul, Uslu and Lelie (2016) a situation is superdiverse when the following three criteria are met: first, the traditional majority should no longer be the majority; second, not just two or three but many different minority groups have to live, work and go to school together; and, finally, there is significant variation in characteristics among members of these groups. Not only groups of people differ from each other, also individuals within these groups increasingly differ. When the population of children and parents within urban cities is superdiverse, different competences of professionals are needed. Also the concept of intersectionality, that originated from the U.S.A, is recently being mentioned in Dutch publications as well (NJi, 2010; Wekker, 2014). According to this concept an individual's position within society is determined by a combination of several factors like for example gender, age, cultural background and nationality. In addition, the combination (or intersection) of different factors influence each other (for example, a person can be discriminated or suppressed multiple times because of different characteristics and their combination). Because of this complexity it is important to not look at characteristics separately, but in a holistic way (Wekker, 2014).

Inclusion: including different domains

Inclusion of people comprises participation in different societal domains. Four dimensions are distinguished for adults, including parents. The first dimension is *inadequate social participation* and it means a person doesn't participate in social networks (for example in leisure time), doesn't maintain contacts and has a low social involvement. The second dimension, *inadequate normal integration*, means a person doesn't live by the societies norms and values. The third and fourth dimensions, *material deprivation* and *inadequate access to fundamental social*

rights, are forms of social-economical exclusion. *Material deprivation* is about the financial shortcomings some people experience. As a result of this lack of money some children aren't able to get new clothes or participate in sports and activities. The last dimension, *inadequate access to fundamental social rights*, is about the inability of some people to experience sufficient health care, education and living environment (see Dutch Institute for Social Research - SCP, 2010).

At child level, Hermanns identified six areas for child participation (Hermanns, SCOOP project): child care and extra-school care; education, including preparation for school; play and exploration; healthcare (preventive or curative); support in raising children and stimulation to development; help and care; and safety. Social exclusion is, from this perspective, defined as non-participation or marginal participation in public social life, which the above-mentioned fields embrace.

In addition to the abovementioned objective indicators for social inclusion or exclusion, a subjective dimensions is important as well. This subjective dimension is related to the following aspects (Home-Start study of Fukkink & Steketee, 2002): *feelings of equivalence (*the feeling of not being treated as an equal citizen)*; respect and appreciation; self-image (e.g.,* negative self-image, perceived powerlessness)*, trust (*distrust in others, institutions and reasonableness of rules)*, and locus of control (*perceived powerlessness to influence one's future).

3. Inclusive ECEC in Dutch regulation and practice

Since the introduction of the Childcare Act from 2005, it has been mandatory that a childcare centre must comply with four pedagogic objectives as formulated by Riksen-Walraven. The Act states that childcare centres must offer children a safe and caring environment, promoting personal and social competence, as well as passing on norms and values. This latter domain is not further elaborated and inclusion is not included in the law as an important curriculum element. For elementary schools, including the kindergarten grades, inclusive education is incorporated since February 2006, when schools were supposed to encourage active citizenship and social integration.

For elementary and secondary education inclusion became an important theme with the implementation of the Act on Inclusive Education on August 1st, 2014. This act concerns the inclusion of children with special needs and it states that Dutch schools have a duty to care, which means that schools have a responsibility to provide a suitable learning environment for every child. Alliances between mainstream and special needs schools were formed to be able to offer every child a place, either at a mainstream school, if needed with extra support in the classroom, or at a school for children with special needs. These alliances receive a fixed budget for this. Most student with special needs were sent to special needs schools. The goal of the new act is to offer inclusive education for as many students as possible within mainstream schools.

Amsterdam: Combatting inequalities

The last couple of years the municipality of Amsterdam was mainly focused on combatting inequalities between children within ECEC (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015). In 2018 Amsterdam will broaden this view by focusing on stimulating the talent of all Amsterdam children. ECEC should be accessible for every child as every child in the Netherlands has a so-called "right to develop". According to the municipality of Amsterdam it is important for toddlers to play with other toddlers with different backgrounds, because in this way the (super)diversity of the city is reflected in the early years and children meet each other from an early age onwards.

4. Competences of ECEC professionals

Which competences are important for pedagogical professionals in dealing with children and parents with different backgrounds?

For pedagogical professionals who want to work intercultural, four competences are important according to Van Keulen (2000):

a. Awareness of the influence their own culture and background have on the education of children
b. Having knowledge of the differences amongst parents and within the team, like differences in background, lifestyle, parenting style and empathy and being able to communicate with them
c. Learning to recognize preconceptions and discrimination within childcare centers
d. Dare raising the issue of preconceptions and discrimination within childcare centers.

In the European Mutual-project (a Leonardo d Vinci project), in which the Netherlands participated, five key competencies for ECEC staff were distinguished which are relevant for social inclusion:

a. Showing multicultural awarenss
b. Being able to communicate effectively with children with diverse cultural backgrounds
c. Being able to communicate effectively with parents with diverse cultural backgrounds
d. Being able to communicate effectively with colleagues with diverse cultural backgrounds
e. Acknowledging the importanve of external organisations

In recent publications the concept of superdiversity has been linked to professional domains. Severiens (2014) emphasizes that teachers (not just in ECEC, but in general) should focus on language development; (2) pedagogy; (3) social interaction and identity; (4) parental involvement; and (5) schools and community (see http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02619768.2013.845166; Fukkink (2015; Fukkink & Oostdam,

2016). According to Severiens and de Koning (2016), teachers should be skilled in differentiation along educational and pedagogical lines. These publications with a specific focus on diversity and inclusion show that there is an ideological curriculum for inclusion with slightly different, yet related competency profiles.

We do not know exactly whether and how competencies related to inclusion, are part of the formal and operational curriculum in practice of different vocational training institutes. Vocational training is important, because these institutions teach future professionals the knowledge and skills to support them to practice social inclusion with children and parents with different backgrounds and, therefore, they connect theory to practice. A survey in 2010 by the Dutch Youth Institute showed that almost all institutions paid attention towards intercultural competences, although it was often not an explicit part of the curriculum. Child Care International (2012) also suggested stated that Dutch educational institutions should pay more attention towards knowledge and skills regarding diversity and social inclusion. This raises the question whether social inclusion is a vulnerable part of the Dutch vocational curriculum, despite the widespread acknowledgment of its importance among educational institutions in the Netherlands. Possibly, social inclusion is on the educational agenda in practice only when a particular teacher is personally committed to this theme. Further, it is also a question whether inclusive education is incorporated in the curriculum-in-practice if new 'inclusion competencies' are incorporated in existing national frameworks for elementary school teacher education (see Ledoux, van Loon-Dikkers, Smeets, & van den Berg, 2016).

According to Van Keulen (2013) pedagogical professionals should focus on stimulating the feeling of togetherness between children, because when diversity is appreciated, feelings of social dominance and superiority of certain children can be prevented. Solidarity between children can be achieved by professionals by enhancing the self-confidence of children and giving all children the opportunity of being proud of their background.

5. Social inclusion in Dutch ECEC practice

The Dutch interest in diversity is reflected into various practical guides. These books for ECEC practitioners offer the reader several practical tips and, sometimes, actual exercises, multistep plans and checklists. The first publications offered practical insights on cultural diversity of ECEC in a multicultural diverse society. Field publications have emphasized that childcare offers a great opportunity to meet people from different cultures (see Van Keulen & Singer, 2012). Although all these practical books do not, by any means, always avoid the 'difficult' sides of the diversity question in its wider sense – for example, discrimination of and by young children and the social inequality between ethnic groups – the emphasis is nevertheless mainly on the positive aspects. The content of the Dutch publications can, therefore, be characterised as 'celebrating diversity', or, as Gonzalez-Mena (2001: 1) puts it, the "fun side" of diversity'. The Dutch publications emphasize that

dealing with diversity should definitely not be underestimated, but multicultural contacts between children, educators and parents can certainly be improved if everyone approaches the situation with firmness and decision and holds regular discussions based on an 'open' and constructive attitude. This is also important as children need a 'social space' where they can develop the skills of active citizenship (De Winter, 2007; see also Boudry & De Brabandere, 2005). Also the importance of contact between parents and childcare centres is generally acknowledged (Djohani & Maas, 2000; de Graaff, 2006; de Wit, 2006).

ECEC practice may offer an implicit curriculum for professionals after their vocational training and also during internships. The ECEC team itself can be seen as a democratic learning environment to get to know, appreciate and use each other's diversity (Van Keulen & Singer, 2012). Dutch and immigrant caregivers working in Dutch day-care centers differ strongly with respect to general ideas on childrearing, despite similar professional training (Huijbregts et al., 2009). Caregivers' childrearing belief systems are in part determined through a prolonged socialization process by the belief systems of their cultural and religious communities. Everything a professional learns from the contact with colleagues with different backgrounds and beliefs, (s)he can use in the contact with parents and children. This means that colleagues should be stimulated to discuss issues as a team and should be willing to reflect on themselves, each other and their practice. Professionals have to become more aware of their own and their colleagues' cultural beliefs so they can learn from each other, broaden their view and work towards shared beliefs (Huijbregts, Leseman, & Tavecchio, 2009; Van Keulen & Singer, 2012).

Diversity in Dutch childcare practice
Cultural and religious diversity was not considered an important part of pedagogic quality by parents, staff and managers and other stakeholders in Dutch childcare in a survey (Fukkink, Tavecchio, de Kruif, Vermeer, & van Zeijl, 2005). A similar result was found in a recent survey by Slot (2016). In line with this, a large scale assessment of Dutch childcare showed that the aspect of ' encouraging the acceptance of diversity', was inadequate, according to the standards of the internationally used ITERS/ECERS measure (Vermeer, van IJzendoorn, de Kruif, Fukkink, Tavecchio, Riksen-Walraven & van Zeijl, 2005).

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6. **Discussion**

In recent Dutch scientific publications diversity is increasingly defined as a broad concept containing all kinds of differences between people and not just cultural backgrounds. There is also an increasing awareness of the complexity of identities and heterogeneity between and within members of a particular group. Theoretically, it makes sense not to categorize or label individual children or parents as unidimensional because simple

generalizations and on-sided perspectives are not helpful for understanding families. Practitioners need to be aware of different dimensions and, possibly, need to tailor their practice to a wide variety of children and parents.

The following dimensions of social inclusion (or, conversely, social exclusion) are mentioned in the Dutch literature:

Dutch definitions of social exclusion/inclusion:
A lack of participation in society, divided into six different fields: play and exploration, education (including preparation for school), childcare and extra-school care; (preventive) healthcare; support in raising children and stimulation to development; help and care; and safety.
The absence of social support on the emotional, social, informative or instrumental plane related to upbringing and development of young children.
Participation in: child care and extra-school care; education, including preparation for school; play and exploration; healthcare (preventive or curative); support in raising children and stimulation to development; help and care
Subjective feelings of equivalence; Respect and appreciation; self-image, trust, and locus of control

The Dutch interest in diversity is reflected into various theoretical publications and also practical guides for practitioners. However, it is an open question whether social inclusion is a prominent theme on the Dutch agenda for children in the early years. Social inclusion is only an implicit theme in the Dutch Childcare Act from 2005 and the Act on Inclusive Education from 2014 for elementary schools defines inclusive education with a strong emphasis on children with special needs only. Social inclusion is not an explicit theme either in vocational training profiles and competency frameworks. Surveys among various ECEC stakeholders and a quality assessment from 2006 showed that diversity was not prioritized and, in fact, wasconsidered to be of minor interest. This (tentative) finding suggest that the relatively definitions of social inclusion from recent theoretical publications have not (yet) been incorporated in vocational training curricula and ECEC practice. Put differently, there seems to be some room between the ideological curriculum and Dutch regulations, curricula and ECEC practice.

Focus on inclusion is characterized by ...		Position of NL
Passive attitude	Active attitude	Mostly passive
Promoting inclusion	Fighting exclusion	Promoting inclusion
narrow definition	broad definition	Broader definition: not only cultural and ethnic diversity, but also other dimensions. However: different scope or focus in different definitions
Inclusion requires special staff	Inclusion should be achieved in regular teams	Regular staff with additional professional development or special staff at some integrated child centres
Implicit in official curriculum	Explicit in official curriculum	Implicit
Assimilation	Integration	Integration – with a changing perspective due to superdiversity
Included by extending current competency frameworks	Included by adding specific competencies	Extending existing frameworks

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