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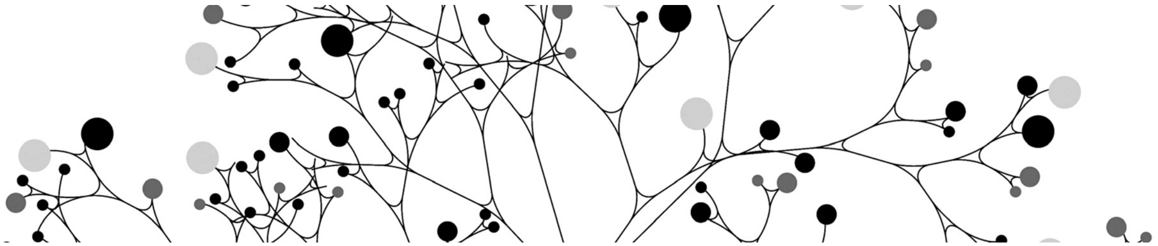
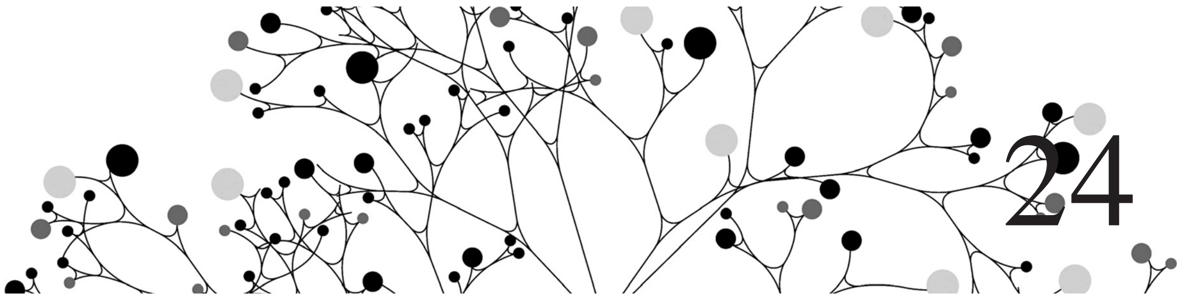
PART IV

Participation, Rights and Diversity





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Supporting (Super)Diversity in Early Childhood Settings

Michel Vandenbroeck

INTRODUCTION: A NOTE ON DIVERSITIES AND THE HEGEMONY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Let us first acknowledge that writing in English about diversity, while respecting a diversity of approaches, is a difficult enterprise, especially in a European context. In contemporary Europe, English is the most widely spread language in academic literature, and it also represents a particular way of speaking about diversity. To give but one example, the terms *race* and *ethnicity*, so common in English-language discourse on diversity in education, are impossible to use in The Netherlands, France or Belgium, for instance, as they would unavoidably refer to a history of organising people in racial groups under Nazi occupation. Equally, the term *community* that has a positive connotation in English (as in 'we need to relate to children's families and to their communities') may bear a negative meaning for many French authors (e.g. *communautarisme*, as a way of dividing people; see, for instance, Dupraz, 2012), yet certainly not for all (see, for instance, Mony, 2011). Dupraz (2012, p. 457) fears what she believes to be 'a differentialist approach from anglo-saxon inspiration' that threatens the French nation state and its 'laïcité', while the separation of the private and the public in her view warrants the values of equality and individual freedom (and, as a result, wearing a veil is – according to Durpaz – unthinkable for an early childhood professional). Mony (2011), in turn, criticises this narrow concept of *laïcité* that excludes religion and thus also culture from public life, and therefore disables France to work with the given diversity in early childhood education or in programs for parents. The narrow interpretation of *laïcité* also makes it very hard to have an open discussion on issues such as the veil or multilingualism. Another example is the German concept of Bildung that is so much broader than the English terms 'education' and 'pedagogy' and includes how the child shapes her

relation to the world, and thus cannot be thought of without thinking of diversity. While diversity is a separate dimension in dominant English language quality measurements (e.g. Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2003), this is unthinkable for the Berlin early childhood provision as it is an inseparable part of *all* quality dimensions (Preissing, 2004). In sum, it would be rather paradoxical to think that the issue of diversity can be discussed without acknowledging how it is embedded in specific histories, geographies and identity policies and that what is considered good practice in one part of the world may be quite different in another. The hegemony of English as an academic language has the disadvantage of masking those diversities and putting forward certain concepts (e.g. 'anti-bias education') as universally valid (for a critical discussion, see also Vandenbroeck, 2007). It is, therefore, important to acknowledge this monolingual nature of the academic debate as a handicap, even when one is not capable of changing it. The least one should do is acknowledge the point of view from which one explores the issue. In my case, this is a Belgian point of view, that undoubtedly is Eurocentric. It is from that perspective that I explore how heterogeneity has been – and continues to be – constructed as a problem to overcome in two distinct but interrelated educational fields: early childhood education and social support programs for parents.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL HINDSIGHT

Nation states, as we now know them in Europe, are a rather recent phenomenon, as many were created in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century after long years of bloodshed. These politically fragile nation states were in need of an imagined community (Anderson, 1991), consisting of an alleged homogeneous population, speaking one language, adhering to one culture and sharing a single history as a selection of self-chosen victories and forgotten defeats. Colonisation by European nations contributed to this construction of national identities. Confrontation with the 'primitive' other (or othered other) served as a mirror, constructing the own, dominant identity as civilised and educated (Smith, 2001). In so doing, the heterogeneity of the population (e.g. local languages, cultures, religions) had to be denied and where diversity was acknowledged, it was in order to frame specific groups that needed to be civilised (Elias, 1998). That was obvious when related to cultural and ethnic diversity; for example, the stolen generation of Australian aboriginal children who were taken away from their families to enrol them in border schools in order to 'civilise' them, an outrage that was also the case in many other 'first nations'. In more subtle yet still pervasive ways, this was also the case when it was about heterogeneity of class. The very origins of day care have been analysed as a salient example of an attempt to overcome class heterogeneity by civilising the poor. It was indeed an explicit mission of the first childcare centre in Paris (Marbeau, 1845), and later also of childcare elsewhere in Europe (Vandenbroeck, 2003), to civilise the labour-class mothers in the bourgeois morale. Among the most powerful machinery to create the civilisation of those who were considered to be too different and to maintain the illusion of homogeneity was the educational system and the introduction of compulsory schooling.

After the Second World War, this illusion of homogeneity was seriously challenged. Civil rights movements (of black citizens, of women) claimed the right to be different, yet equal; and minorities claimed their right to their language, culture or land (e.g. Inuit and Saami in Northern Europe, Basque in Spain, Breton in France and Gaelic in Ireland, all claimed the acknowledgement of their heritage in literature, in public service and in the educational system). In addition, several Western European nation states imported labour force from the Mediterranean countries and, one decade later, from Turkey and North

Africa. This import of 'foreigners' as a cheap labour force coincided with the immigration of people from the former colonies in the post-war period of decolonisation. By the end of the twentieth century, it could not be denied anymore that we lived in what was then called 'multicultural societies'. An international study on the beliefs of staff in early childhood education on how to deal with this 'multiculturalism', revealed that four different models prevailed (Vedder, Bouwer & Pels, 1996). The *submersion* model proclaimed 'same goals, same approach and same processes for all children', who eventually will adapt to the dominant culture. The English-only policy in relation to multilingualism is an example of this approach. The approach assumes – both from a policy and from a practice perspective – that submersion in a monocultural and monolingual environment is the most efficient way to 'assimilate' or 'integrate' ethnic minority children and to give them a fair start in life. The *transition* model aimed at the same end result (assimilation), but pleaded for intermediate transitional adaptations (e.g. more intensive language courses, meetings with parents in early childhood education to explain 'our values' and 'our ways of doing things'). While the submersion and transition models may differ in the means to an end, the end (a monocultural society) is common to both. The *contact* model aimed at cultural enrichment by having children learning from various cultures. This model includes attempts to provide bilingual education for all children, bringing children into contact with artefacts from different cultures (e.g. music, play materials, food) in order to teach tolerance to diversity. The *cultural change* model focused on the prevention of prejudice and emphasised solidarity, respect and interactions, to – eventually – come to some sort of melting pot that would take the best of both (cultural) worlds. It embraces an anti-bias education that actively goes against early signs of prejudice, it attempts to construct commonality in diversity and will, therefore, not only stress what is different, but also what is shared.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first century was marked by profound changes in how the issue of diversity is presented to us. We just briefly sketch three important evolutions. A first game changer is the deep and recurrent economic crisis that hit affluent nations in the 1980s and was renewed with the banking crisis of 2008 and subsequent years. These subsequent economic crises came with rising unemployment, budgetary deficits and, subsequently, criticisms of the welfare state; in sum, with 'a new social question' (Giddens, 1998; Rosanvallon, 1995). These profound changes in the conceptualisation of the welfare state have questioned the unconditionality of allowances and other rights. 'No rights without duties' is now the slogan. The focus on economy and employment (Finn, 2003) further contributed to the contractualisation of the welfare state (Crawford, 2003). Social welfare has consequently been reconstructed as an expense of the state that needs to be avoided as much as possible, and thus early childhood education in particular is constructed as a social investment. Its aim today is to reduce later expenditure of the social investment state and its meaning is reduced to economic prosperity (see, for instance, Barnett, 2011; Heckman, 2006). As a result, early childhood education is reconstructed as a means to compensate for the failure of the family, leaving little place for reciprocal dialogue in contexts of diversity (Vandenbroeck, Coussée & Bradt, 2010).

A second change is the rise of far-right, racist political parties in several European member states and the concurrent changes in policies towards the former migrant labour force. While these parties have seldom gained direct political power, they certainly impacted on other parties' policies and the general public opinion, with national and European policies of return migration as but one salient example (Lietaert, 2016), or a renewed focus on learning the dominant language in preschool years as an alleged condition for further school success (e.g. Vandenbroucke, 2004).

Thirdly, over the last few years, European countries have faced an increase of migration from Eastern European countries as well as from the Middle East. More than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015, a majority being from Syria and Afghanistan, but also from Kosovo and Albania (Eurostat, 2016). The demographic changes since the broadening of the European Union, and even more so with the recent arrivals of refugees, have profoundly changed the nature of ethnic and cultural diversities in most major European cities. While diversity was traditionally presented as the presence of rather large, well-organised 'minorities' (e.g. African-Caribbean and South Asian in the UK; Turkish in Germany; Turkish and Moroccan in Belgium and The Netherlands; Tunisian and Algerian in France), we live today in what is labelled as super-diversity. Super-diversity is characterised by 'a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified' populations (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1024). In most European cities, there is no majority, as the (various) minorities are the majority. In Brussels, Europe's capital, for instance, the number of frequently spoken languages has risen to 104 and 50% of Brussels' families are multilingual (Janssens, 2016). In stark contrast with these societal evolutions, educational and social policies and practices still seem to continue considering heterogeneity as a problem to overcome, rather than as a given or a pedagogical condition that can enrich classrooms, rather than hinder them. As a salient example, we could mention the recent coercive policies in the Belgian-Flemish community towards parents (especially those from migrant backgrounds) who do not send their children to preschool often enough (Vandenbroeck, De Stercke & Gobeyn, 2013), as it is believed that the diversity (of languages, of backgrounds) needs to be smoothed out in order for primary school to be able to do its educational job. In the following sections this is explored for education and early childhood education in particular, as well as for its counterpart: parent support programmes and especially those which have focused on social support.

THE MYTH OF HOMOGENEITY IN EDUCATION

Homogeneity has historically and internationally been considered an ideal for teaching. There are many examples illustrating how homogeneity continues to be considered as a condition for teaching (and learning). A most obvious one is age segregation. It is generally assumed in educational systems that children of the same age ought to be together in one room and separate from children of different ages. There are notable exceptions, such as Japanese preschools, where it is considered an educational value that the older toddlers take up caring tasks for the youngest (Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009). It is as if one can assume that children of the same age share similar learning dispositions, have similar needs, and as if children from different age groups have little to learn from each other. This age separation has been legitimised by the developmental psychologist colonisation of education with its developmental phases and developmentally appropriate practices, without much evidence to base these assumptions on (Burman, 1994; Canella, 1997). Despite historical educational pioneers such as Celestin Freinet, who was opposed to what he called the *école caserne* (military base school, a metaphor for its compartmentalisation) and favoured the *classe unique* (single classroom) with mixed-age groups as beneficial for learning (Devos, 2013), the dominant practice seems to remain that homogeneity is considered a condition for group-based learning. A consequence of this pursuit of homogeneity is not only the organisation of children by age within primary schools, but also the

separation between preschool and compulsory school and – in many countries – between childcare and preschool (Kaga, Bennett & Moss, 2010). Again, these separations are based on remarkable assumptions: the assumption, for instance, that preschoolers need more education and less care than the younger toddlers and infants do (and the assumption indeed that care and education are separate entities), while these assumptions are increasingly unveiled as invalid (Moss, 2013; Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2016). Consequently, early childhood education is all too often framed as the preparation for compulsory schooling (Moss, 2013). The mission of the preschool (as the term 'preschool' eloquently illustrates) is reduced to delivering school-ready children, meaning an alleged homogeneous group of children, matching the conditions that the compulsory school sets to consider children as teachable pupils. In other words, the issue of diversity needs to be tackled *before* children enter school. This means that the primary (or broader: the compulsory) school is believed to need 'teachable' children who do not differ too much from each other (in language, in competences) in order to do its job. In other words, this seems to indicate that the school is resigning from its mission to strive for equal opportunities and social mobility as it accepts that school is 'too late to do so'. The point here is not that the educational system is now less well achieving its educational mission than before. As several authors have claimed in the 1970s (e.g. Bernstein, 1970; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) as well as in recent years (e.g. Downey & Condron, 2016), the educational system tends to reproduce social inequalities. Rather, the issue is that it claims to be able to fulfil this mission in contexts of diversity only when the diversity is smoothed out before proper schooling begins and, therefore, ignoring that there may be diverse ways of learning and ignoring the diversity of cultural repertoires (e.g. Rogoff, 2003).

Another much-debated aspect of the pursuit of the myth of homogeneity concerns the language policies in early childhood education. Multilingualism in children is encouraged when it is about French, German, English or Spanish, as bilingual childcare centres appear in different places (see, for instance, www.kindertreff.fr for a French example). Yet, for immigrant minority children, multilingualism is considered a barrier to academic success (Van Avermaet, 2009). Despite the growing awareness among specialists that multilingualism is an added value for *all* children, practice and policy are still very much based on the myth of homogeneity, meaning, in this case, monolingual beliefs (Pulinx & Van Avermaet, 2014). This is reinforced by the PISA studies, showing that children with another than the dominant language at school seem to be less successful than their monolingual peers (OECD, 2014). It needs to be noticed that this is a misinterpretation or at least a false simplification of PISA results, as OECD itself warns us that it is not so much the home language but the strong correlation with socio-economic status, and the concentration of children from low socio-economic status in particular schools that explain the difference in achievement (see, for instance, OECD, 2012a). In addition, standardised testing of diverse pupils, as a one size for all, can of course also be criticised for contributing to the myth of homogeneity (Meyer & Benavot, 2013; Moss et al., 2016). As a result, for many years, monolingual submersion models have prevailed and bilingual education has remained a controversial subject as teachers and policymakers continue to think that home languages are an obstacle to learning the school language (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). Even in many European projects of bilingual education, the eventual aim is to facilitate monolingualism, as these projects are aimed at facilitating the transition to the dominant language, rather than at facilitating real multilingualism for all children (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). After all, the political conflict between the *English only* movement in the United States and the supporters of bilingual education (Köbben, 2003)

has been and still is an ideological rather than a scientific debate. Moreover, the bilingual educational models are hopelessly outdated as they implicitly assume that a classroom is composed of two (or three) internally homogeneous language groups. In our present-day super-diverse cities that is definitely something of the past. Studies that take real multilingualism (or should we say super-multilingualism to distinguish it from the outdated bilingual support models?) for all children into account are only beginning to emerge (Hélot et al., 2017). As a result, we still know little about how *functional multilingualism* (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014; see also García & Flores, 2012) may serve all children (rather than keeping on searching for how migrant children should be remediated).

We come back to this issue in the concluding section. But, for now, let us turn to the other side of the educational coin: the parents. Indeed, the educational gap has historically and internationally always included programs for parents with a focus on those parents who deviate from the norm. In that vein, programs that aim at providing social support seem to have gained importance over the last few decades, yet they tend to reinforce the myth of homogeneity.

THE MYTH OF HOMOGENEITY IN PARENT SUPPORT

Early childhood education in general, and childcare in particular, bear the historical weight of their patronising attitude towards the parents they serve, both in Europe (Hendrick, 1997) and beyond (Cunningham, 1995). Indeed, until the women's liberation movements of the 1970s, childcare was predominantly perceived as a necessary evil (Vandenbroeck, 2003). *Necessary* because female employment could not be denied (and was beneficial to employers, considering women's lower wages). But *evil* as the bourgeois family model condemned female labour. The rise of attachment theory after the Second World War reinforced the 'home as heaven' ideology and the blame on working mothers (Burman, 1994; Singer, 1993). Today, we can still find many examples of sedimentations of the distrust of parents in early childhood educational services and this distrust is gaining new momentum with the rise of parenting policies, 'targeting parental behaviour as deficient and also parenting as a joyless task or job to be conducted under the watchful gaze of experts' (Lee, 2014, p. 8). The distrust of parents is, of course, especially directed at parents who are in some way different, with a focus on ethnic minority parents and parents living in poverty. It seems as if parenting policies came to replace previous social policies, as Lee (2014, p. 16) claims:

> In conditions where ideas about how to effect wider social change are elusive, change is envisaged only where it seems possible to enact it, for example, in the management of the small-scale relations between individuals, especially those between parent and child.

A salient illustration of this 'turn to parenting' (Hopman & Knijn, 2015) is the change of tone in the OECD reports on early childhood education. While the second Starting Strong report (OECD, 2006) considered parental involvement as 'a two-way process of knowledge and information flowing freely both ways', the third issue (OECD, 2012b) reduced parents to beings that are instrumental in their child's outcomes since parent involvement serves the home learning environment that matters for healthy child development and learning. We can speculate as to why this is the case and it is probably not a coincidence that the change of tone comes with restricting social welfare states as social investment states. In today's social investment state, parents are increasingly framed as being responsible for their child's development (and thus academic achievement as a predictor of later involvement in the labour market) as well as being responsible towards society (as a reduction of future welfare spending). In that sense, there is a growing concern for those parents who are believed not to be up to this double

responsibility and are, therefore, labelled as 'at risk'. This is particularly salient in the early years and is reinforced by the scientific claims that early childhood education has more positive effects on children from poor families (Engle et al., 2011). In sum, there is a renewed attention for parent support in which parents are believed to be in need of expert knowledge. This is particularly the case in relation to poverty, as poor parents are often associated with poor parenting (Georges, 2010).

In this vein, social support benefits from a growing interest. Social support is the (rather informal) way in which parents support each other materially (by helping each other), knowledgeably (by sharing information) and emotionally. While social networks have been documented to also be a potential source of stress, social support is generally believed to be a buffer to parental stress and to be preventive of depression, child maltreatment and general parent and child well-being (e.g. Jack, 2000; Sarason, Sarason & Pierce, 1990; Weiss, 2002). In contrast with the growing awareness that social support may be a more universal form of parent support, a study of the dominant literature on this subject shows a remarkable tendency to be blind to diversity in parent support groups (see Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2014 for a more general discussion). The main focus in the academic literature is on parents 'at risk', and studies on the effectiveness of social support are mostly limited to alleged homogeneous at-risk groups: parents of a child with a disability (e.g. Horton & Wallander, 2001; Ow, Tan & Goh, 2004); teenage parents (e.g. McLeod, Baker & Black, 2006); low-income parents (e.g. Castillo & Fenzl-Crossman, 2010; Green & Rogers, 2001); single parents (e.g. Winkworth, McArthur, Layton & Thompson, 2010); ethnic minorities (e.g. Crowley & Curenton, 2011); homeless parents (e.g. Tischler, Rademeyer & Vostanis, 2007); or parents with a mental illness (Sheppard, 2004), to name but a few. It seems to be taken for granted that parent support in general and social support in particular can only occur in groups that are at least homogeneous in one important aspect, that is defined according to criteria set by experts.

There are many reasons to be sceptical about the assumptions of homogeneity as a condition for support. We briefly list four objections, yet there may be others. First, this is in tension with population studies on the need for support. To give but one example, a large-scale survey on a representative sample of 1219 parents in Belgium (Bradt et al., 2015) showed that parental worries, expectations of support or perceived support are hardly moulded by traditional characteristics, including ethnicity, socio-economic status, marital status, employment status or a combination of these. While there certainly are differences in expectations and needs, these are much more individual matters than can be sociologically defined.

Second, the pursuit of homogeneity in parent support is also in tension with the findings that bonding and bridging are both important when supporting parents (Putnam, 2007). Bonding can indeed be supportive when parents share a similar experience (e.g. being a teenage mother, or having left your country to ensure a better future for your child). Yet, bridging – connecting with parents of different origins, different socio-economic status, different neighbourhoods, etc. – matters equally to build social capital and facilitate social leverage. The organisation of parent groups, based on specific characteristics, assumes a homogeneity that is supposed to facilitate bonding. The extent to which this may be the case will depend on how parents experience the labelling that goes with it. It is not all that obvious that, let's say, poor parents expect to identify with the criteria that experts or social workers have set to create the alleged homogeneity. What these groups certainly also do is jeopardise the bridging possibilities with other socio-economic or cultural groups, or explore what may connect the targeted parents with other parents who do not match the eligibility criteria.

Thirdly, the organisation of parent support in previously defined target groups assumes that the supportive functions of the

encounter are harder to fulfil in contexts of diversity and, therefore, artificial homogeneity is to be created. This is in sharp contrast with observations in many places where parents and children come together in the growing field of studies on such meeting places. Meeting places for parents and children together, that do not target specific families, have proliferated in diverse countries, including Italy, France, Belgium and Japan (Hoshi-Watanabe, Musatti, Rayna & Vandenbroeck, 2015; Musatti et al., 2016). They are places staffed by early childhood educators, social workers or volunteers that welcome parents with their young children, offering them a place for social experiences and social support. Many of these places are situated in urban contexts of diversity. As Geens and Vandenbroeck (2013) observe, these places are used by very diverse parents (in ethnicity, language or social status, for instance), yet there are daily examples to observe of how children act as brokers of relations and of how parents of very diverse origins support each other. One of the more salient characteristics of these places that facilitate the effectiveness of social support is *free confrontation*. Parents are undoubtedly confronted with diverse ways of parenting, diverse judgements on what is good enough and diverse ways of *performing* parenthood (Musatti et al., 2016). This confrontation may entail a reflexive attitude on one's own beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Yet the confrontation is free, meaning that the professionals do not serve as educational experts but are experts in warranting that not one single opinion dominates. They are also experts in creating a welcoming atmosphere that facilitates encounters (Musatti et al., 2016). It is precisely this non-judgemental attitude that enables the free confrontation that parents experience as supportive (Geens, 2015). This is in line with the work of Lofland (2009) and others (e.g. Soenen, 2003) who warn us not to judge too lightly the ephemeral contacts or the *light encounters* among parents. It is precisely these light encounters, marked by ambivalence between recognition and strangeness, that create a diverse urban context that is liveable and that helps to create a sense of belonging and citizenship.

Finally, this brings us to a fourth critique. International organisations, including OECD (2012b), the Council of the European Union (2009) and the European Commission (2011) are increasingly stressing the role that education in general and early childhood education in particular has to play in fostering social inclusion and social cohesion. The societal mission of early years provision, therefore, needs to go beyond educational achievements and look at what role they can play in their diverse neighbourhoods. This means that early childhood staff are not merely concerned with their relationship with each individual parent, but also reflect on how they influence the relations among parents. Such an attitude may entail a shift in expertise from not only being an expert in education (and thus giving expert answers to the questions of individual parents) to also being an expert in relations (and thus relating parents with similar questions to each other).

DISCUSSION AND WAYS FORWARD

Over the last few decades, all European countries have faced an increase in diversity. The recent growth of immigration from the Middle East and from Eastern European countries has added to the previously existing diversities. At the same time, social inequalities between and within European countries have increased and the European Union has ceased to be a 'convergence machine' (Vandenbroucke & Rinaldi, 2015). The present (and future) reality in our European cities is one of superdiversity. As a consequence, traditional approaches of multiculturalism and educational policies of bilingual assistants definitely belong to the past. A hypothetical group of 15 toddlers that comprised two or at most three rather homogeneous ethnic and language groups in the 1980s, consists of seven to ten different origins and languages today. Minorities are the majority.

Moreover, these diversities themselves have become more diverse. One can simply not assume anymore that an ethnic group corresponds to a language group, with a specific culture, or a specific social stratus. Identities today are multi-layered (gender, language, ethnicity, socio-economic status, family composition and other markers intersect in various ways), hyphenated (one can perfectly be from Moroccan descent *and* critical to specific aspects of that heritage) and nomadic (one can bring different layers of one's identity to the fore, depending on context and situation) (Vandenbroeck, Roets & Snoeck, 2009). The kaleidoscope of diversities is there to stay. We therefore urgently need to unpack and revise our policies and practices in early childhood education and care, as well as in parent support, since these policies and practices continue to bear the historical sediments of the ideology of homogeneity. In doing so, the policies and practices of early years provision cannot be limited to their educational mission or to focus solely on offering each child the possibility to develop to its full potential, however important and just that is. Society is not merely the addition of individual needs and individual achievements. As Biesta (2011) argues, democracy occurs where private wants are changed into public needs. The educational mission of preschool needs, therefore, to be complemented with issues of belonging, connecting and social cohesion, with bonding *and* bridging.

We look at a few domains where pioneers have begun to show directions of how we can revise early years policies and practices and what may be possible ways forward. These include installing reciprocity in the unequal relations with parents and creating spaces where diverse parents' voices are heard, places that take into account family cultures and other forms of diversity in early childhood education and care, amongst others by embracing functional multilingualism. Dialogical spaces are equally important in parent support programs, as well as in research programs. Of course, rethinking policies and practices that support superdiversity is not limited to these domains. Housing policies, urban development, welfare and employment policies, adult education and many more equally matter and it would be presumptuous to think that early childhood education is the panacea for the new social question. This necessary acknowledgement of humility, however, cannot diverge us from being ambitious by taking up the challenges of social inclusion and social cohesion and from using the opportunities that belong to early years provision and may still be underexploited.

Creating Reciprocity in Unequal Relations

Central in any way forward is the dialogue with parents or the ethics of an encounter, as Dahlberg and Moss (2005) have called this stance. One simply cannot take care of children without taking care of their family. The issue here is not to renew the illusion of having an equal relationship between professionals and parents in a dialogue without power relations. That indeed is just an illusion that will only mask the existing profound inequalities. As Spivak (1988) and, more recently, Tobin (2009) have explained, there are many reasons why some parents (e.g. immigrant parents) cannot and will not speak up for their needs and wants: unfamiliarity with the task and the conventions of discussions with early years professionals; discomfort in the early years setting; language barriers (and the fear of appearing stupid); lack of trust (it might be safer to say nothing); fatalism (whatever I say, it will not make a difference anyway); social isolation and economic stress, making it hard to keep appointments; deference to professionals; and probably many others. Our own qualitative studies with immigrant parents have shown that they may take up any advice from professionals, rather than expressing their own needs (Vandenbroeck et al., 2009). The challenge, therefore, is not to create equal relations, but rather twofold: how to install reciprocity in profoundly unequal relations and how to respond to questions one does not understand. A salient example of the

latter is the *deliberate non-take-up* of early childhood services, as I explain further on.

There is a shared concern among policymakers and researchers about the unequal use of high-quality early childhood education and care services, considering the robust research findings about their beneficial effects in the long term. A first generation of this research has concentrated on parental *choice*, somewhat neglecting the notion that differences in behaviour are, to a large extent, moulded by environmental constraints, rather than the result of choices (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). Second-generation studies focused, therefore, more on accessibility, availability and affordability and unveiled how policies have profound effects on differential use, showing, for instance, that universal services reach more underprivileged parents than targeted services and that markets are quite inefficient when it comes to fairness (e.g. Van Lancker, 2014). Even more recently, it became obvious that even in regions where access, availability and affordability are universal, there is still an unequal use that can hardly be explained by environmental constraints. One example is that in Belgium, preschools for children from 2.5 years onwards are universally available, free of charge, full day, staffed by professional bachelor-degree teachers and quality is centrally monitored. While enrolment reaches almost 100%, there is an increasing inequality in the actual presence of children, children from migrant and poor families being more often absent than their better-off peers. Almost 15% of 3-year-old children from migrant and poor families have attended less than 150 half days of preschool, while this is hardly the case for middle-class children (Department of Education, 2015). This is countered by policymakers with massive campaigns explaining the educational benefits of early learning and by coercive measures including restricting child allowances when a child is absent from school too often (Vandenbroeck et al., 2013; Vlaamse overheid, 2016). However, the deliberate non-take-up of social and educational services can never be understood without a dialogue with those who are concerned, in order to comprehend not only what they consider accessible, affordable and available, but also *desirable* and *useful*. An ongoing research including focus groups with almost 80 parents, many of whom share the sociological characteristics of the parents that are targeted by these policies (Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2016), shows quite a different picture. The participating parents were, without exception, well aware of the educational benefits of the preschool, meaning that the campaigns tried to persuade parents of issues of which they were already persuaded. Yet, they expressed many concerns about care (i.e. food, sleeping habits, potty training and – most importantly – showing love to children) and worried about how care and education are considered as separate entities in our preschool system. They also deeply discussed language issues, yet not merely as a learning issue (children need to learn the dominant language) but also as a care and a social issue (what happens if my child does not understand the instructions or cannot communicate with his peers?).

The basis for creating reciprocity is obviously laid before the child arrives at the centre. It is a matter of creating the physical environment that invites parents to enter and stay in the centre, it is about the attitude of the staff who are open to the unexpected and the unconventional, and it is very much about this period of mutual adaptation, when a child is accompanied by her family – often several times – before she attends the centre regularly. This period of mutual adaptation is not the moment to explain 'how we do', yet a privileged moment to hear about the parents' concerns, anxieties and expectations (Vandenbroeck et al., 2009). This is the period in which the staff balance this impossible paradox, eloquently described by Derrida:

> Pure hospitality is welcoming who is arriving, before any conditions are set, before knowing or asking whatsoever, not even a name or an 'identity' paper. But hospitality also supposes that one names him, whilst avoiding that this question becomes a 'condition'. That is a subtle, yet fundamental difference, where politics and ethics are decided. (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 1977, author's translation)

Welcome Disagreement

We learn from Spivak (1988), Tobin (2009) and our own studies that it is not because immigrant parents do not raise questions that they do not have questions. A powerful way to include parents in the discussions on their children is pedagogical documentation (e.g. Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Lazzari, 2011; Rinaldi, 2005). This means that professionals document in many ways what children do and what they, as professionals, do with children. The staff use this documentation (writings, drawings, narratives, footage, etc.) to discuss the *meaning* of what they observed with each other and with parents in order to enhance their professional reflexivity (Lazzari, 2011) as well as the democratic level of their service (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Of course, this will inevitably entail disagreement as it is highly improbable that –when we reflect on what is happening in a classroom – we would all agree on its meaning (Vandenbroeck, 2009). Disagreements will inevitably occur regarding the use of home languages, potty training, meals, control of behaviour, disciplining practices and many more aspects of the daily practice of education. This disagreement is to be welcomed as a basis for reflexive practice (Kunneman, 2005; Peeters, 2008). It is precisely the disagreement – defined as the diversities of parental ethnotheories (Bruner, 1996) and practices – that favours the free confrontation in the meeting places with parents and children. Of course, this free confrontation can only flourish and form a basis for reflective practice (and thus also act as a source of support) in a climate of belonging, confidence and fairness (Geens, 2015). It also demands that we leave too simplistic assumptions behind on how specific groups of parents may have specific (and equal) needs. That would underestimate the power of children as brokers of relations (Geens, 2015).

A FINAL NOTE ON MULTILINGUALISM

How to deal with multilingualism is one of the issues that has profoundly divided practitioners, parents, researchers and policymakers between and among them. While some parents favour an assistant who speaks their child's language, others may consider it to be a discriminating practice not to immerse their child in the dominant language (Tobin, Arzubiaga & Adair, 2013). Researchers have remained divided regarding the long-term effects of different approaches (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014; Van Avermaet, 2009). Rather than continuing the sterile historical battle between bilingual and immersion programs, we may wish to acknowledge that the context of superdiversity is a genuine game changer. In such a context, the dominant language serves not only as a form of cultural capital that is a condition for social mobility, but also as a possible lingua franca. The present-day generation of scholars in this field seem to agree that the knowledge of each language contributes to the learning of an additional language because it enhances language awareness (Young and Hélot, 2007). Therefore, multilingual children are better equipped to learn any additional language such as the school language (Cummins, 2000). Their linguistic repertoire can be a scaffold for learning the language of schooling and, more generally, for acquiring new knowledge (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). This insight forms the basis for functional multilingualism, in which the teacher attempts to support all languages and language awareness, including the languages the teacher does not master himself (Hélot et al., 2017). This may be done by building on the multilingual capacities of some children to assist their monolingual peers, as well as by including parents of different origins in the classroom. As Sierens and Van Avermaet (2014) argue, research into the functional applicability of home languages in the classroom is quite recent but shows promising results (e.g. García & Wei, 2014; Moodley, 2007). Functional multilingualism is still very new and faces resistance by policymakers, as language policies are historically, as well as in the present ideologically, strongly related to identity politics.

In sum, be it in the field of education, multilingualism or parent support, the myth of

homogeneity has always been counterproductive for equity and fairness. Also, today the search for homogeneity blinds us from seeing the social and educational opportunities that diversity (of ages, of origins, of languages, etc.) may present us with.

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