

Inclusive practice and quality of education and care in the Dutch hybrid early childhood education and care system ^[1]

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Excerpted from abstract

The present study examined how in the context of the hybrid, privatized and marketized Dutch early education and care system (ECEC), childcare organizations respond to the public task of supporting inclusion and equity in an increasingly diverse society. Applying cluster analysis on the organizational characteristics of a nationally representative sample of 117 centers providing education and care for 0- to 4-year-old children, three types of organizations were identified that differed strongly on cultural inclusion and observed quality in the classroom. Socially engaged (for-profit and not-for-profit) professional organizations served proportionally more children from low-SES and immigrant families, provided higher quality to these children, and were culturally more inclusive than both market-orientated and traditional professional-bureaucratic organizations. The findings are discussed with regard to the question how hybrid ECEC systems can be governed to optimally serve the public goals of inclusion and equity.

Excerpted from introduction

Diversity in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture, religion and language has grown rapidly in Western societies (Crul et al. 2013; Vertovec, 2007). Related to this, the divides between the rich and the poor, between the high and low-educated, and between main stream and cultural minority communities have become more visible and pervasive (Borgna and Contini 2014; Putnam 2015; Reardon 2011; Riederer and Verwiebe 2015; Rözer and Van de Werfhorst 2017). Traditional inequalities in educational and social opportunities between the lower and higher social classes have remained and are nowadays in some cases outflanked by new disparities relating to the cultural and linguistic background of ethnic minorities and newcomers to society. The Netherlands, despite a long tradition of social equity, tolerance, and cultural and religious pluralism, is not an exception to this (Driessen 2012; Kremer et al. 2014).

In the past decades, many countries, including the Netherlands, have initiated policies to combat educational inequality and to support the integration of immigrants and cultural minorities, focusing in particular on early childhood education and care (ECEC). This is based on the increasing evidence that use of high-quality ECEC reduces early developmental gaps (Leseman et al. 2017; Melhuish et al. 2015; Yoshikawa et al. 2013) and can have long-term economic benefits for society (Heckman 2011; Reynolds et al. 2011; Van Huizen et al. 2019).

There are, however, two complications. Concerns about the integration of immigrants and cultural minorities have in recent years led to a shift in the national integration policies of many countries, including the Netherlands, towards a stronger emphasis on assimilation, putting the national language and cultural customs, norms and values in the foreground in education in general and in ECEC in particular. This may jeopardize the sense of belonging of minority communities and their willingness to participate (Celeste et al. 2019; Malik 2015; Penninx 2008; Slot et al. 2018c; Ünver 2019). The second complication relates to the progressive privatization and marketization of national ECEC systems in the past decades. In many countries, including the Netherlands, ECEC systems are nowadays complex hybrid markets with a mix of for-profit and not-for-profit organizations providing care and education to young children. The question arises whether system hybridity is compatible with the values of equity and inclusion (Ball 2009; Kaga et al. 2010; Knijn and Lewis 2017; Lloyd 2020; Penn 2011; Vandenbroeck 2017).

In this study we take the Dutch hybrid, privatized and marketized ECEC system as a case in point. We examine how in the context of this system organizations providing care and education to young children deal with the complications of diversity and respond to the public task of supporting equity and inclusion. In the Netherlands, 24.4% of the total population has an immigrant background, both Western (10.5%), being mostly immigrants from member states of the European Union, and Non-Western (13.9%), being mostly immigrants from former Dutch colonies in the Caribbean and from labor migration countries such as Morocco and Turkey (Statistics Netherlands 2020a; b). Adopting an organizational-sociological approach, we evaluate to what extent ECEC organizations succeed in providing a culturally inclusive climate of high quality that may support diverse children's sense of belonging, development, and educational opportunities.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: inclusion ^[4]

diversity ^[5]

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