



Graduate School of Development Studies

**Dealing with Ethnic Diversity in Early Childhood Care
and Education:
Policy and Practice in Portugal and the Netherlands**

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	6
List of Acronyms	7
Chapter 1 Introduction	8
1.1 Identification of the problem	9
1.2 Research objectives and questions	10
1.2.1 Research questions	10
1.3 Methodology	11
1.4 Limitations	12
1.5 Chapter outline	13
Chapter 2 Early childhood and diversity: conceptual framework	14
Chapter 3 Background: Diversity and Early Childhood Care and Education in Portugal and the Netherlands	18
3.1 Background information	18
3.1.1 Portugal	18
3.1.2 The Netherlands	19
3.2 Demographics	20
3.3 Day Care Centres in the Education System	22
3.3.1 Background information about childcare education and education system	22
3.3.2 Teacher training	23
Chapter 4 Dealing with ethnic diversity: policies, programmes and strategies	25
4.1 Existing Policy Framework	25
4.1.1 Portugal	25
4.1.2 The Netherlands	28
4.2 Implemented programmes and/or strategies	29
4.2.1 Portugal	29
4.2.2 The Netherlands	33
4.2.3 At the European level	36
Chapter 5 Analysis of the reality of ethnic diversity in Early Childhood Care and Education	39
Chapter 6 Conclusion and recommendations	47

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Foreign Population living in Portugal – 2005	20
Figure 2 – Foreign Population living in the Netherlands – 2005	21
Figure 3 – Foreign Population living in Portugal from 0 to 4 years old by origin – 2005	21
Figure 4 – Foreign Population living in the Netherlands from 0 to 4 years old by origin – 2005	22

List of Acronyms

ACIDI – Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Intercultural (High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue)

APEI – Associação de Profissionais de Educação de Infância (Association of Professionals of Childhood Education)

EC – Early Childhood

ECCE – Early Childhood Care and Education

ECD – Early Childhood Development

ECED – Early Childhood Education and Development

EFECOT - European Federation for the Education of the Occupational Travellers

DECET – Diversity in Early Childhood Education and training

IPSS – Instituição Particular de Solidariedade Social (Private Institution of the Social Solidarity Network)

Chapter 1

Introduction

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.” Nelson Mandela at his Inauguration as president of South Africa, 1994(Brown 1999: 11)

One can say that the history of a country has a lot to say about its Present. In this paper the history of two countries - Portugal and The Netherlands - both being ex-coloniser countries, will be used as common ground. Hence we will be able to see commonalities and differences that may have possibly led to different approaches on how to deal with ethnic diversity resulting from a multicultural society (currently a reality worldwide resulting from different causes).

Since some decades ago and up until now, countries like Portugal and The Netherlands have increasing numbers of incoming migrants. This group often faces a problem of acceptance in the host country as they are perceived as a low status community that comes from lower status countries as well. Usually the policies of the host countries do not specifically address the younger age group of these families; both the children and they all are likely to face problems of acceptance in an educational setting. The starting point for this study lies in the question whether, in these two countries, there exists any specific policies or programmes in this field aimed at this specific age group.

The choice of the topic results from personal experience teaching children ageing between zero and five years old. While teaching in early childhood in Portugal (my country of origin) one realises the problems of getting guidance on ethnic diversity matters. Usually the educational practices are based on one's personal common sense and on general objectives designed at a national or school level, but there is barely any support from specially designed policies, programmes or strategies addressing these kinds of matters. A good base support to ethnic minorities' children and families still depends on the good will of teachers, directors or local government initiatives. It is also important to think of the “host country's” children and parents that eventually need guidance and support, as they may be insensitive on welcoming new cultures and communities.

Despite the existence of other forms of diversity such as gender, disabilities or others I will be focusing on policies and programmes that have in consideration ethnic and cultural diversity in the Early Childhood context and childcare centres setting.

1.1 Identification of the problem

Schools, including childcare centres, are places where issues such as racism, inequalities and conflict may arise if no attention is paid to the differences within the group of children which interact daily in the same space. It is important to address these differences from a perspective where they are valued and they can be used to improve the development of the children and their relationships with each other.

The period of Early Childhood (0 to 5/6 years old) is an important phase in a child's emerging awareness of differences among other children. Not disregarding the important role of the family, Keulen observes: "for many young children today, the childcare centre is the place of transition from family to society. It is here, in this transitional space, that they are confronted for the first time with the complexity and diversity of society; that they obtain and insight for the first time into how society appreciates them or fails to do so. For the first time they experience exclusion and discrimination."(Keulen 2004b: 3)

Regarding the age range "it has been shown that children aged between 2 and 7 express negative reactions towards members of other cultures."(Keulen 2004b: 10) It is especially in the early years that "children begin recognising and are curious about differences related to gender, skin colour, hair texture, apparent physical disabilities, and language"(Keulen 2004b: 16). "Numerous studies do in fact suggest that racial attitudes are learned during the preschool years" (Porter 1971: 2).

Considering this, the age range which will be addressed in this paper stands between 2/3 and 5/6 which covers the ages of children that attend the Childcare centres in The Netherlands and Portugal.

To address diversity different views can be adopted: Assimilation, integration or acculturation. The *assimilation* view presents itself when "the ethnic minority group is expected to melt into the dominant culture entirely and to give up its own (cultural) values" (Kruif 2003: 7). The *integration* view means the "process in which the minority group is allowed to keep its cultural identity, but will have to participate in all other respects in the receiving society." (Kruif 2003: 7). Finally the *acculturation* view is the only one where "something is expected from the receiving society as well. This view is (for the time being) an ideal. The point is to get to know, to accept and to respect each other, and to appreciate each other's cultures or elements thereof. This is not an easy process." (Kruif 2003: 8).

Usually in these processes of being, on one hand, in a foreign country or, in the other hand, hosting foreign people, ethnic minorities and the 'majority' Dutch as well as the Portuguese experience an environment of suspicion towards each other. Very often the social environment on the host country is highly influenced by the leading parties which can promote on friendlier minority policies or not.

In the educational sphere, more specifically in ECE, it is considered important to think on the "host country's" children and parents as agents

needing guidance and support as it is important to understand how to deal with new cultures and communities.

This research it's focused on the relations between children from ethnic minorities (whether they were born in the host \country or not), and the ones considered "native" Portuguese or Dutch. These concepts will be further analysed as relevant for the research. Further on in the study, differences will be pinpointed regarding ethnic minorities' children's access, limitations and possibilities in the educational system. However, firstly focus will be given on policies and whether they contemplate or omit the existence of such diversity.

This topic arose from the struggle that teachers in early childhood education have getting guidance on these specific matters. Teachers are limited to rely on common sense and on general objectives designed at a national or Childcare centre level, but barely have any support of specially designed policies for this kind of matter.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

This study aims to identify present problems, strategies and materials (or the lack of them) to deal with ethnic and cultural diverse contexts in Childcare Centres and after identifying both problems and achievements of these countries a comparative analysis will be made.

More specifically an analysis of both countries will be done in order to figure out whether special and specific strategies and/or programmes are being used with children from ethnic minorities and relationships between them and the 'native' children.

Specific Objectives of the proposed study are:

- To discover if in these countries the national educational policies have special considerations and guidelines for children from ethnic minorities and dealing with diversity in childcare centres.
- To identify which strategies or programmes that deal with diversity are being used in the centres if any.
- To know if the care givers (staff) are aware of any strategies, policies or programmes that deal with diversity in Childcare Centres and how they can use them.
- To know how the care givers experience such environment and the implemented strategies and/or programmes.

1.2.1 Research questions

- Do Portugal and The Netherlands have in consideration issues of ethnic diversity when designing their educational policies at a national and at the childcare centre level?
- What is the view of care givers about having a multicultural group?
- How do care givers experience the existing programmes and strategies?

1.3 Methodology

A variety of resources were used for this research. They included policies and personal statements from other professionals on the field of ECE. These professionals were approached according to contacts that I had. I gave preference to the ones that work or worked in centres with an ethnic diverse composition, though that was not a must.

Regarding the policies of both countries they were found on the internet and through contacts with other professionals. Concerning the primary data, interviews with professionals from the ECE field were carried on in each country after making contacts and appointments with the interviewees. They were mainly used as highlights to the main ideas presented on the paper, while the main basis for the research was the secondary data. From the secondary data Eurydice documents were extensively used. These are produced for each country by Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission more specifically Eurydice which is an “institutional network for gathering, monitoring, processing and circulating reliable and readily comparable information on education systems and policies throughout Europe” (Eurydice 2008).

The interviews were used because, as noted by Laws (2003: 286) “you are able to rely on information from a fairly small number of respondents”, which fits in our lack of time to interview a big number of educators. According to the same author (Laws 2003: 286) the interview creates also a more comfortable atmosphere to feel free to talk if they want to express a sensitive issue as well as it translates better the information the interviewee has to give than on a questionnaire.

I interviewed experts in the field such as Dr. Elly Singer which is the Head of the team designing the National Curricula for ECE in The Netherlands and Dr. Teresa Vasconcelos who designed the National Curriculum for ECE in 1997 for Portugal. I also interviewed a staff member of ACIDI that has knowledge of both systems in the Netherlands and Portugal and works with ethnic minorities.

The use of a comparative analysis was chosen because it is considered helpful as a simultaneous way of looking at the reality of this topic on the chosen countries. It also brings a clearer way of understanding where these countries are standing in this field. If in the case of one country we find a specific characteristic then it will be easier to compare if the other country is in the same position or not. This allows us to make a better analysis of the reality of these countries and also to identify which lessons each country can learn from each other.

a. Primary Data

The interviews with leading questions were made with care-givers of both countries. Preferably they were chosen according to their setting, i.e. if they work in a school with an ethnic and cultural diverse group of children. Though, it was not essential as it is also valuable to know the perspective of educators with ethnic homogeneous groups. The choice of the interviewees

was done according to my network of contacts and their willingness and availability to participate. Regarding the number of interviewees it was possible to interview four in each country.

In Portugal it was not possible to perform direct observation in care centres due to the academic year holidays and lack of time so the primary data of this country will be based on the interviews to the care givers/teachers and the previous experience of the interviewer as teacher in the country. In The Netherlands besides the interviews was also possible to do some observation. Though, more extensive observation was done previously for other purposes in this country and it will be used as well.

b. Secondary Data

Concerning the secondary data this served as the base to the paper and included the following:

- Books, articles and other documents from Institute of Social Studies' library
- Books, articles and other documents from specialized libraries (specially Bernard Van Leer's Resource Centre).
- Constitution of both countries.
- Analysis of the Childcare Centres' Curriculas, guidelines and other documents used to regulate in childcare centres.
- Educational policies and documents at international, national or local level that are related to Early Childhood Care Centres education and diversity.
- Data related with migrants and demography.
- Data related with ethnic composition of the population in both countries.

Concerning the last two kinds of data mentioned they were retrieved from the Statistics website from each country. They were not exactly equal as each country as different ways to treat the data. It was also hard to find data with breakdown of ages, specially such early ages as until 5/6 years old. On the process to find it, data was found which was based on the children registered on the centres or schools but it was not used as it does not reflect the reality of all children.

1.4 Limitations

The limitations felt were mainly related to the language on the Dutch childcare centres as my Dutch language skills are basic and so I mostly have been interacting in English. This problem also arose when I had to access certain materials in the Dutch language or search on Dutch websites.

Secondly the other limitation had to do with time constraints. By the time I went for field work in Portugal it was very hard to find Childcare Centres

open as I went during the summer vacation period. As the time is not much I had to give up of some steps such as getting feedback from parents through interviews or do intensive observation.

1.5 Chapter outline

The subsequent chapters are organised as follows:

To explain basic concepts that are needed to understand the topic and analyse it, the *second chapter* provides an outline of the key concepts and contrasting visions on social diversity.

The *third chapter* provides some basic information on the context of the chosen countries, focusing specifically on migrants, their origin and the demography of the population, as well as the education systems (including ECE) in both countries.

Subsequently, in the *fourth chapter* the findings will be presented. Here policies and programmes implemented on both countries are compared as well as certain characteristics that will help us to identify differences or similarities, limitations or potentials for the ethnic minority or 'native' children within the educational system of each country. In this chapter there will be given answers to questions whether there are any policies, programmes or strategies to deal with ethnic diversity.

In *Chapter five* is presented an analysis of the reality of ethnic diversity in Early Childhood taking under consideration what was disclosed in the previous chapter. This analysis will be based on the interviews to the caregivers in both countries.

On *Chapter six* conclusions will be drawn from the previous chapters and also reflect on the chosen topic. After this *Recommendations* that may contribute for further interventions are presented.

Chapter 2

Early childhood and diversity: conceptual framework

As explained in chapter 1, the research paper will make use of diverse concepts related to ethnic diversity at the specific stage of early childhood. More specifically it will be focusing at the age range of 2/3 to 5/6 years old. At early ages “children begin recognising and are curious about differences related to gender, skin colour, hair texture, apparent physical disabilities, and language”(Keulen 2004b: 16). “The research on this field from the last 50 years have proved that children are not only conscious about racial and ethnical differences but they also internalize the norms of society associated to the social status of the different ethnic groups (Goodman, 1946, Horowitz, 1939; Katz, 1987; Lasker, 1929; Minard, 1931; Ramsey & Myers, 1990; Spencer, 1982)(Spodek 2002: 528)”. Due to the importance of this age range in relation to ethnic differences this was the chosen group to be analysed.

Children ageing two years old start gaining autonomy and being more self-centred while understanding themselves as a unique individual in the world. Is at this stage, as well, that they start making choices at the play time and on daily activities, such as: choosing when to go to the bathroom, using words like: “I don’t go”, “I don’t want” or “I don’t like”. At this phase children can already talk and express themselves more clearly to others. Also according to Brown (1999: 14) “between the ages of three and six, most children have developed a deeper understanding of themselves and their world. They are curious about differences and begin using prevailing negative stereotypes about people, including themselves, to express their thoughts and guide their actions.” As mentioned before, children start making choices and are building their identity thus they also “may tease or refuse to play with children whose skin colour is darker than theirs, who speak languages different from theirs, dress differently or who have physical disabilities.” (Brown 1999: 14)

Along with the first months of life up to the first years, this period is very rich and there are noticeable changes in the life of a child. It is very common that at this age children start interacting with other children in Childcare centres. It is in the childcare centres that children deal with new situations that arise from the dynamics of spending time with a larger group of people with different characteristics. Therefore the focus of the study will be in this setting as I consider it is a platform for relations not only among children but also between children and adults (teachers, other staff, parents, etc).

According to the guidelines of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All Programme (European Commission 2006: 3), **diversity** includes: religion or beliefs, ethnicity, disabilities, age, gender, sexual orientation. Among the different dimensions of diversity that can arise in a heterogeneous group we are focusing on ethnicity. According to Silva (2008: 22) the concept “multicultural” can designate both an ideology or a cultural situation of a society and also the relation that the different cultures have inside the same society (osmosis, exchange or solely juxtaposition). It is important to mention such diversity which is so present in our contemporary societies. ”When diversity issues are not addressed they can create barriers to learning for

children and adults and can contribute to personal difficulties for children on both a daily and on a long-term basis”(O’Doherty 2001: 42,43).

Diversity is about the relations between different people, with focus not only on the differences, but on the similarities as well. Usually individuals tend to focus on the differences that are constructed historically and culturally, like for example: in an ex-coloniser country like Portugal there is still the association of black African people of being from a lower hierarchical group. Usually people do not frontally assume this but they do it through low expectations to this group such as being surprised when there is a lawyer or doctor from this group. To address the issue of diversity, specifically ethnicity, it’s vital to address such perspectives that in some way are still alive.

“Because symbolic borders between groups are constructed in historical and cultural contexts, you can be categorized as belonging to a different "ethnic group" in one area or country, and another if you move. **Ethnic groups** must be understood in relation to other ethnic groups (Eriksen 1993). (Kinchington 2003: 21)”. A person belongs to an ethnic group “because of nationality, ‘race’, culture, values, religion etc. Members share a common ancestry, culture, history, traditions and sense of belonging.”(O’Doherty 2001: 40). Besides these characteristics “every culture defines patterns of appropriate behaviour between adults and children and even within children. From culture to culture the form and intensity varies of how the positive or negative emotions should be expressed in the daily life of social relations”. (Formosinho 2005: 20) For example “cooperation, competition and obedience are some of the values that some cultures emphasize more than others”. (Formosinho 2005: 20) It is then important that particularly teachers that spend the day supporting children’s interaction are aware of these emotions.

In a setting with different ethnic groups, attitudes like prejudice and stereotyping usually take place. The Programme Handbook for Equality defines the concepts of prejudice and stereotype as follows (European Commission 2006: 18,19). **Prejudice** “refers to unfairly or unreasonably formed negative opinions, assumptions and/or feelings towards a group of people. These assumptions, opinions and emotions typically represent faulty or incorrect generalisations or rigid and inflexible attitudes.” **Stereotype** is “standardised mental pictures held in common by members of a group about another group or phenomenon. Stereotypes represent typically oversimplified or over generalised opinion: the perceived group characteristics are assumed to apply to each member of the group. Stereotypes can originate from the culture in which people are socialised, from real inter-group differences (e.g. cultural and socio-economic differences) and also from a cognitive bias resulting from the very process of categorical differentiation between groups of people” (European Commission 2006: 18,19).

In short prejudice is “a preconceived idea (...) without adequate prior knowledge (...) against any person, group or sex” (O’Doherty 2001: 41) and stereotype is “an over-simplified generalisation about a particular group, race, or sex, which usually carries derogatory implications”. (O’Doherty 2001: 41) As mentioned before this age range was chosen because “research indicates that the beginning of the development of a biased and stereotyped knowledge

happens certainly in the middle of the pre-school period”(Siraj-Blatchford 2005: 118).

It is interesting to reflect on the feelings of the recipients or targets of prejudice and stereotyping, who according to Brown (1999: 30) “usually feel angry, frustrated, alienated, hurt, ashamed, humiliated and insulted. One response is for adults and children to internalize these negative beliefs, i.e. to believe that these misconceptions are in fact true and that they apply to themselves. On the other hand, they might respond by withdrawing or behaving aggressively.”

As a result of this prejudice and stereotypes **racism** can arise, characterised by “a specific form of discrimination usually associated with skin colour or ethnicity. (...) It also involves an abuse of power by one group over another group. (...) When prejudice is combined with unequal power, it enables more powerful groups to threaten others in racist ways by denying them access to opportunities, resources and decision making processes”(O’Doherty 2001: 17). Racism is an important issue at early ages as they “can develop positive and negative feelings about racial groups at an early age, and it has been suggested that children as young as three can demonstrate an awareness of racial hierarchy in line with current adult prejudices”(O’Doherty 2001: 46). Racism often leads to **discrimination** between people from different groups or even through institutionalised documents like for example migration policies. Discrimination can be defined by “policies, practices or behaviour which lead to the unfair treatment of individuals or groups because of their identity or they perceived identity; discrimination may be direct or indirect.”(O’Doherty 2001: 39). Along with discrimination **inequalities** in the way individuals are treated is a reality and this means that there is a lack of respect for the identity of that group. To clarify this definition we can look at the antonym equality. It means “equitable treatment such that all individuals can participate in society the best of their ability, is the outcome to be achieved” (O’Doherty 2001: 39).

I consider important to refer to such concepts as they are an eminent reality for the children.

Because policies can transmit or aggravate inequalities indirectly I consider that looking at those is one way of assessing where the Portuguese and Dutch society stands. Regarding **integration** this means the “process in which the minority group is allowed to keep its cultural identity, but will have to participate in all other respects in the receiving society. An example is the suffrage and eligibility at a local level, which is possible when people have lived in The Netherlands for at least 5 years” (Kruif 2003: 8). **Assimilation** is when the “ethnic minority group is expected to melt into the dominant culture entirely and to give up its own (cultural) values. This can go pretty far. It was only in 1986 that the Bulgarian government ordered all Turks living in that country to take a Bulgarian name” (Kruif 2003: 8). The same view is sometimes adopted by people in The Netherlands when talking about ethnic minorities they often say “that they should have to behave like the Dutch, or go elsewhere instead”(Kruif 2003: 8).

Regarding **acculturation** this is the only view that expects something from the host society as “the point is to get to know, to accept and to respect

each other, and to appreciate each other's cultures or elements thereof' (Kruif 2003: 8). This view is not seen as an easy process as the ethnic minority groups can also create some resistance due to previous negative experiences in the host country.

The presented concepts are considered to be relevant for the analysis of the reality of both countries in what concerns dealing with ethnic diversity. These concepts will be mentioned when analysing policies and programmes implemented in the countries.

Chapter 3

Background: Diversity and Early Childhood Care and Education in Portugal and the Netherlands

3.1 Background information

In order to provide an overview of the past and present ethnic panorama of these countries a brief characterization of the chosen countries for this research will be presented in this chapter. It shall be important to bear in mind that the common feature of both countries as former colonisers may be one of the contributing factors for the present realities. In late years both countries have become hosts not only to the communities that they once colonised but also other communities from other countries.

3.1.1 Portugal

Since the 15th century up to 1999 when Portugal handed over Macau to China, Portugal had as colonies territories such as Mozambique, Angola, East Timor, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, India's Goa, Daman & Diu, and Brazil. Up until the 70's, those countries fought for independence and finally the turning point came in 1974 with the "Carnation Revolution". Countries like Mozambique and Angola got their definite independence at this time and the dictatorship that lasted since the First World War with António de Oliveira Salazar ended as well.

Regarding the political features of Portugal, it has been a Republic since 1910 and a Democracy since the Revolution in 1974. In what concerns religion the vast majority of the population has catholic beliefs and usually follows the respective rituals like baptism, communion and marriage, and celebrates catholic holidays like Christmas, Easter or Carnival.

After the revolution, emigration once performed by the Portuguese to countries like France, Germany, Venezuela, the United States or Brazil were substituted with immigration flow coming from the ex-colonies. Along with this population the Portuguese that once lived in the colonies returned to Portugal and are still called "retornados" (the returnees). In the beginning, most immigrants came from African countries but nowadays beside that continuous immigration, we can see an increasing flow of immigrants coming from Brazil and Ukraine. The present phase is a consequence from belonging to the European Union and Portugal being part of the Schengen Agreement which leads to a great immigration flow coming from Eastern Europe countries.

These communities often are not able to get official recognition or equivalence to their professional qualifications, and if they do not come to study in Portugal, they are likely to perform low skilled jobs such as cleaning,

working in construction or be waiters in restaurants. The living conditions in the early years are usually limited as they share houses with other families in order to reduce costs and save money to send to their families. Subsequently, for some, there is improvement specially after they get their legalisation process completed and move into employment with better conditions (monetary, health and safety, a proper work contract).

Presently, there is a general feeling of discontent in regard to all levels of education up until high school level and early childhood education, which is the main focus of this study, is no exception. The current debates are related to the general conditions in public schools, the availability of resources for teachers and children, the low wages, the long hours of work, the lack of specialized support for cases requiring special needs or psychological support, among others. More specifically in regard to ethnic diversity, there is also the problem of the lack of support and training to deal with cases of children that arrive without knowing the language spoken in the host country.

3.1.2 The Netherlands

The Netherlands have also been a coloniser country, in overseas regions which are presently countries like Indonesia, Suriname, Aruba and other Caribbean Islands as well as South Africa.

Regarding political and religious features The Netherlands are constituted by a multi-party system, such as Portugal. The Netherlands are a Parliamentary Monarchy, as the Queen is the Head of State. Regarding religion you can find two big groups which are composed by Catholics and Protestants, mainly Calvinist, which does not mean there are not other big groups such as Muslims due to the presence of immigrants or descendents from Islamic countries such as Morocco, Turkey and Indonesia.

Regarding immigration according to Kruif (2003: 3) there were four different phases that started around 1945 whereby the main migrant groups came from Indonesia, Moluccas and even from Surinam, Turkey and Morocco. There was also an emigration phase to Australia, Canada and New Zealand around 1945 until 1961 (Kruif 2003: 3).

As in Portugal and due to being part of the Schengen Agreement, the “government has been taking more and more measures to close the borders” (Kruif 2003: 3) and to avoid immigration from the Balkans.

“A new law on immigration, especially meant for refugees was followed by a sharp decline of the numbers of refugees allowed to stay in The Netherlands. (...) The grip on migration streams is becoming an European issue and has less and less to do with national politics.” (Kruif 2003: 3)

In The Netherlands there is a specific term used to characterise the immigrants which is *allochtoon* and is usually used for people with low paid jobs. This word “is used to indicate a person belonging to an ethnic minority group. *Autochtoons* are people who have been enculturated in this country” (Kruif

2003: 80) or natives ; for example if the person suddenly gets a higher position at work the word *allochtoon* wont be used anymore. For the ones that were already born in The Netherlands from immigrant parents, the name second generation is usually used.

In regard to education it is public that children since early childhood have to go through tests of development which help to determine which level of secondary or further education they may be admitted to. These tests continue throughout their educational path. The image this system reflects is that they sort out the students considered good enough to proceed to a university level from the ones to pursue a more technical level of studies. The latter one is usually understood as being where ethnic minorities come to fit more often and the first group has a bigger incidence of native Dutch students.

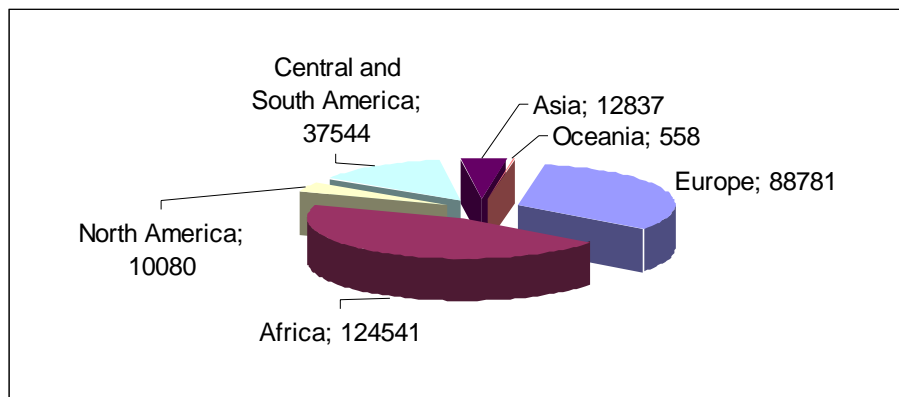
In concern with the composition of schools, in the past there used to exist the so-called “black schools” which would mainly accommodated ethnic minority groups and not that much ‘native’ Dutch children. Nowadays teachers consider that a bigger mix among all the groups provides a more fruitful environment for everyone, though according to them it may still be found Childcare centres with two or three major ethnic groups.

3.2 Demographics

The following section will show graphics concerning foreign population and the main groups in Portugal and in the Netherlands.

Presently The Netherlands has a population of 16,6 million (Indexmundi 2008a) and Portugal of 10,7 million (Indexmundi 2008b).

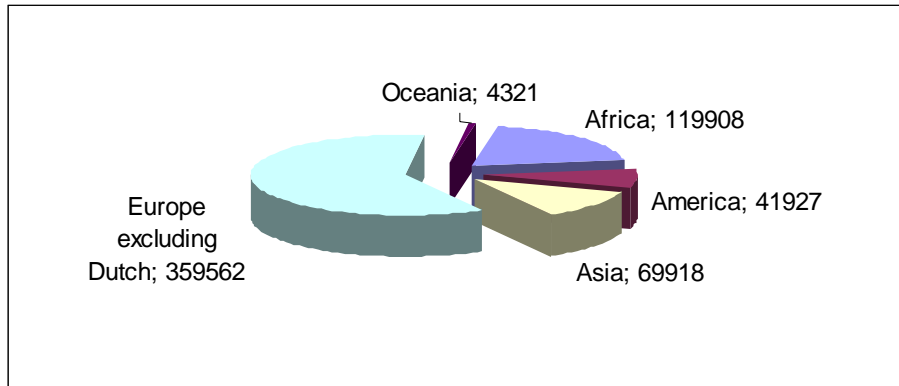
Figure 1 - Foreign Population living in Portugal – 2005



Source: Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras - Portugal (Fronteiras 2005)

In graphic 1 we can see that the main foreign population is original from Africa, followed by Europe, then Central and South America, Asia, North America and finally Oceania.

Figure 2 – Foreign Population living in the Netherlands - 2005



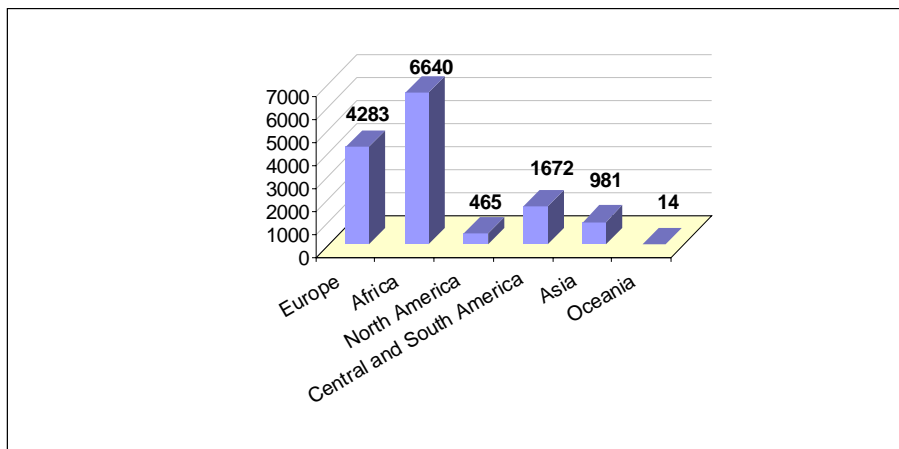
Source: CBS Statistics Netherlands (S. Netherlands 2008)

In this graphic we see that the main foreign population is original from mostly European countries excluding the Dutch, followed by Africa, then Asia, America and Oceania.

In The Netherlands the flow of immigration was very high in previous years and is now decreasing due to new migration policies. On the other hand, in the case of Portugal the immigration flow is still slightly increasing.

The presented statistics, however, do not capture the group which is the focus of this research paper. To better illustrate the reality at early ages you can consult figure 3 and 4 for each country.

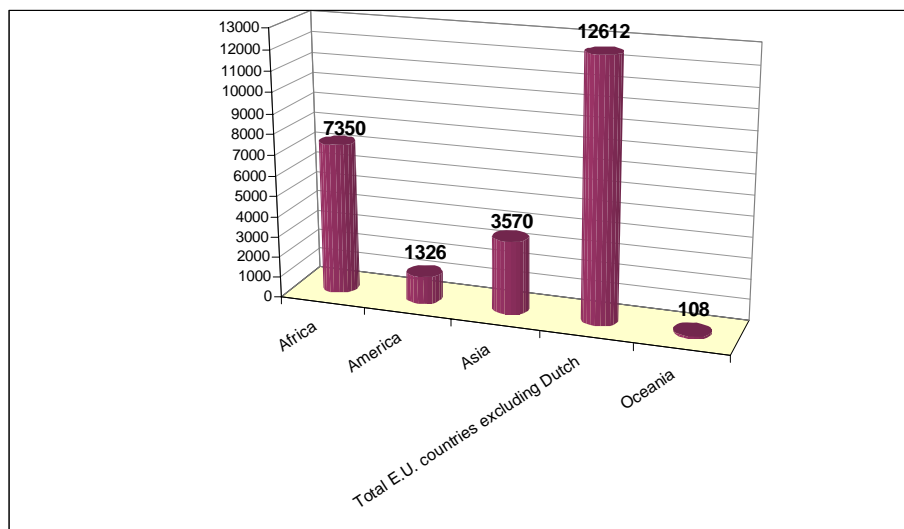
Figure 3 – Foreign Population living in Portugal from 0 to 4 years old by origin - 2005



Source: Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras - Portugal (Fronteiras 2005)

In graphic 3 we can see the number of children living in Portugal original from the presented regions between the ages of 0 to 4. The biggest groups are from Africa, followed by Europe and Central and South America.

Figure 4 – Foreign Population living in the Netherlands from 0 to 4 years old by origin - 2005



Source: CBS Statistics Netherlands (S. Netherlands 2008)

In this graphic we can see the number of children living in the Netherlands original from the presented regions between the ages of 0 to 4. The biggest groups are European countries excluding Netherlands, followed by Africa and finally Asia.

3.3 Day Care Centres in the Education System

This section gives a general overview of the pre-school education of each country. Furthermore, reference will also be made to the way training is done in these countries as the educators are one of the most important actors in the educational sphere. Details on the Curriculum are not given in this part as these will be provided in Chapter 4 of this paper.

3.3.1 Background information about childcare education and education system

Both in Portugal and in The Netherlands ECE is not compulsory until 4 or 5 years old. This means that the government is not obliged to provide childcare facilities.

In Portugal in the early months children can be sent to nursery schools which usually are private institutions as the public provision is almost imperceptible at this level. From age one to two children can go to a crèche in

a private or public system. In the private system families have to pay but in the public they do not. When they reach the age of three, children may go to a public or private kindergarten up until they are 5 years old, even though it is optional the majority of the families need this support as usually both parents work. This may also be replaced by the care given by family members in order to save money as it is hard to get a placement in the public system (low number of facilities to cover all the young population).

At the last part of age 5 to 6 children go to primary schools which sometimes are combined in the same facilities as the kindergarten or in separate schools.

In The Netherlands there is also public and private provision but the payment is equal for both, i.e., government and parents both have to pay a part and both types of provision are considered part of the system functioning as equal options for parents.

Regarding the ages the system in The Netherlands differs from the Portuguese one, as “up to the age of four, children can attend day care centres or playgroups. Primary education starts at the age of 4, and is compulsory from the age of 5 onwards. Almost all four-year-olds (99%) attend primary education. (Kinchington 2003: 120).”

Finally, it is important to mention that both countries have an Education Act (called Childcare Act in The Netherlands) that stipulates the principles and objectives of childcare.

3.3.2 Teacher training

Portugal

In order to be able and fill the requirements to take care of children in the Portuguese system, especially in childcare centres or pre-schools, caregivers have to go through specific training. Pre-school teachers are trained with scientific and pedagogic knowledge that are necessary to acquire specific professional qualifications and for this they complete a higher education course pursuant a licentiate degree (“Licenciatura” - 4 years) (Eurydice 2007a: 177)

It is important to stress that “the education act recognises the right of all teachers to on-going training, intended to complement and update their knowledge and skills and to help with their career mobility and progress.”(Eurydice 2007a: 192) This is positive in the sense that according to the context teachers can receive specific updated training.

The Netherlands

In The Netherlands there are courses in the HBO level (institutions of higher professional education) to become a primary school teacher. This allows

undergraduates to become teachers for 4 to 6 year-olds or teachers trained by the Pedagogische Academie to work with 6 to 12 year-olds (D. Eurydice 2007b: 102). In order to teach children under 4 years old students attend the MBO level 4 Education (Senior Secondary Vocational Education).

After getting familiarized with the context of both countries it will be presented another section of this paper. On the following chapter we will know what the present policies are or programmes that deal with ethnic diversity in the ECCE.

Chapter 4

Dealing with ethnic diversity: policies, programmes and strategies

Being aware, at this point, of the features of both countries in what concerns main ethnic groups and the education system, attention must now be drawn to specific characteristics about dealing with ethnic diversity in ECCE.

In this Chapter the legislative framework, the objectives of childcare and pre-school education, the admission (access) and financial support and finally the curriculum for childcare for each country will be exposed.

In each part solely the points that are related to the issue of ethnic diversity at this specific level of education will be highlighted and further along analysed.

4.1 Existing Policy Framework

4.1.1 Portugal

Legislative Framework

Article 13 of the 1976 **Constitution of Portugal** last revised in 2005 (Portugal 2005) regarding the principle of equality, states: “Every citizen shall possess the same social dignity and shall be equal before the law; no one shall be privileged, favoured, prejudiced, deprived of any right or exempted from any duty on the basis of ancestry, sex, race, language, place of origin, religion, political or ideological beliefs, education, economic situation, social circumstances or sexual orientation.

Also Article 41 (Portugal 2005) guarantees the freedom of conscience, religion and worship which gives space for the teaching and practice of any religion and states that religion should be independent from the state. I would like to point that according to the mentioned article we notice an open system that seems to allow any kind of education framework in what concern religious or cultural features to avoid any discrimination. It is important to keep this article in mind as further on in this section (4.2.1- Flexibility of schedules) I will see that there is a contradiction.

Furthermore, Article 69 (Portugal 2005) which addresses Childhood states that “with a view to their integral development, children shall possess the right to protection by society and the state, especially from all forms of abandonment, discrimination and oppression and from the abusive exercise of authority in the family or any other institution”. This translates into the fact that every child should, once again, be able to attend educational facilities disregarding any difference they may have.

Regarding Early Childhood Education, currently the **Ministry of Education** has a new structure and among the main objectives it states the following: “the consolidation of pre-school education.” (Eurydice 2007a: 11). This aims at a better provision for every child. It is also important to notice how the school system works and what the main documents are. Every school or school clusters (organisation unit with schools within the same region of different levels, for example: preschool, primary school, etc) has a certain level of autonomy. “The educational project, internal rules of procedure and the annual activities plan are the instruments for school autonomy.” (Eurydice 2007a: 19)

The educational project is set by the administration and management bodies and is approved by the school assembly for a period of three years. This document “defines the educational orientation of the school, or school Clusters. It lays out the principles, values, goals and strategies which the school, or school clusters aims to achieve.” (Eurydice 2007a: 19) Regarding the participation of parents they are part of the assembly and take part when it comes to approve the Educational Project.

The internal rules of procedure are specific for each school or school cluster. These sets of rules are in force for one year, after which they should be revised and changed if needed. This document concerns the functions of management and administration bodies, educational monitoring and support services. It also defines “all the rights and duties of the members of the school community.” (Eurydice 2007a: 19)

The annual activities plan “is the planning document that, based on the educational project, defines objectives, organisation and programming of activities, and estimates the necessary resources required.” (Eurydice 2007a: 19)

The relevance of these processes for our study is that they appear to make it possible to the activities and plans for each school to be oriented towards specific needs of that community (possibly multicultural). It is also important to highlight that parents participate in the process of defining the plans which also contributes for a more adequate approach with children. Though, from previous experience schools not always are happy to involve parents in decision making process so they may prefer not to tell them about their right to participate. In my view they should be part of the process as they can help shaping the documents to better serve their children’s needs.

Objectives of Childcare and pre-school education

“Pre-school education is complementary and/or supplementary to education received at home. Attendance is not compulsory as the family plays a crucial role in the education of children between the age of three and entry to ensino

básico” (Eurydice 2007a: 13). As mentioned before, this enables the state to stay away as a provider of childcare services.

Among the different objectives for pre-school education highlight will be given to those related to this research as follows: “encouraging the personal and social development of the child based on experiences of democratic life, with a view to education for citizenship; promoting the inclusion of children in a variety of social groups, with respect for different cultures, encouraging a gradual awareness of their role as members of society; encouraging the global development of each child, respecting individual characteristics, promoting behaviour to help significant, diversified learning; encouraging families to participate in the educational process and to form an effective relationship in collaboration with the community.”(Eurydice 2007a: 40) Apart from that, attention should also be drawn to the aim of pre-school related to our topic, which is: “promoting their (children) balanced integration in the life of society.” (Eurydice 2007a: 40). It is also important to stress that “all children living in Portugal, without exception, may benefit from pre-school education.” (Eurydice 2007a: 40)

Admission and financial support

In what concerns to the access by immigrant children or ethnic minorities to the school system, it must be said that “all children regardless of their legal situation in the host country, have the right to education and, therefore, the right to go to school.”(Eurydice 2007a: 246) However, “No school, where parents are resident, can refuse to enrol a child unless there are no vacancies.” This creates some space for schools or childcare centres to say they do not have vacancies in case they don’t want to accept a specific child.

Regarding financial support the state is the main agent financing and allocating budget to municipalities who will perform the maintenance work of the pre-school buildings. (Eurydice 2007a: 31) Families can also be asked to pay some enrolment fees in the beginning of the school year. In the private network parents pay monthly fees that vary according to each centre or nursery. There is also a private solidarity network (IPSS) in where the State supports a share for the payment of costs of the educational component and quality of the services. (Eurydice 2007a: 43)

¹ Ensino básico – Basic/Primary School where children complete 6 years old in the first year.

4.1.2 The Netherlands

Legislative Framework

According to the first article of the Constitution of The Netherlands (G.o.T. Netherlands 2002) it is given great stress on equality matters, and reads as follows: “All persons in The Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted.”

Regarding more specifically the educational system, in 2005 “the Childcare Act entered into force (...), giving the childcare its own statutory framework. The Act safeguards the quality and supervision of childcare, and regulates the way it is funded.” (D. Eurydice 2007b: 28)

Among other specific requirements of the Childcare Act the following guidelines are specifically relevant: “Dutch must, in principle, be the language of communication in day nurseries”; “providers must inform parents about their policies”; “except in the case of communal crèches set up by groups of parents, providers must set up a parents’ committee to advise on matters such as safety, opening times and prices”; “childcare provision must be laid down in a written agreement between parents and provider” (D. Eurydice 2007b: 28). By the last guidelines we can see a strong emphasis on the cooperative work with parents.

Objectives of Childcare and pre-school education

Childcare facilities in The Netherlands seek to “offer young children the opportunity and the space to play and develop in the company of children of their own age. The aim is to stimulate children’s social, cognitive and emotional development. Childcare also enables parents to take part in activities outside their home, such as a course, training schemes leading to employment, or paid employment.” (D. Eurydice 2007b: 28)

“The aim of early childhood education is to stimulate the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, of either Dutch or non-Dutch descent, to improve their chances of success at school and a meaningful role in society in the future.” (D. Eurydice 2007b: 28) I would like to highlight the curious identification of the target group as children from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds not considering the rest of the children as if they don’t need stimulation as the mentioned group. I can maybe notice that it has to do with the fact that the ‘advantaged’ group has more stimulation at home differing from the ‘disadvantaged’ one. But what are the criteria for choosing this target group? Is it the monetary condition? I would then say that also the ‘advantaged’ children may need stimulation on social issues such as dealing with a group with diversity.

Admission and financial support

Regarding admission “in principle, all children between 2-2 ½ and 4 years of age can get a place at a playgroup”. (D. Eurydice 2007b: 29)

With concern to the financial support, according to the Childcare Act “the costs of childcare must be shared by parents, employers and government” (D. Eurydice 2007b: 29).

Furthermore, “since 2000 the government has provided funding for early childhood education (VVE), a form of education designed to optimise the development opportunities of children aged 2 to 5 from underprivileged backgrounds, who are at risk of educational or language disadvantage. The target group includes indigenous Dutch children with poorly educated parents as well as children from ethnic minorities whose mother tongue is not Dutch” (D. Eurydice 2007b: 27).

4.2 Implemented programmes and/or strategies

4.2.1 Portugal

Strategies

- **Educational Support Service**

This service started in 1997 with the objective of “guaranteeing full integration and educational success for all pupils.” (Eurydice 2007a: 23) This service is to be used in schools with the aim of finding adequate solutions through diversified teaching and special education. Among all general responsibilities of these services I identified interesting points related to this research as follows: “providing all children and adolescents with an equal opportunity of school success; creating favourable conditions in schools for the social and educational integration of children and adolescents with special educational needs co-operating in promoting quality education, particularly in areas of educational guidance, an **intercultural approach**, health and improvement of the educational environment.”(Eurydice 2007a: 23)

- **Support Facilities**

According to Eurydice document (2007a: 48) there exists supportive tools for children coming from minority groups. “For children that belong to emigrant families, ethnic minorities and gypsies there are various intercultural education projects underway, whose objective is to encourage educational initiatives involving these people, as well as the production of pedagogic material.” (Eurydice 2007a: 48) As an example of these projects there is a CD-ROM called “Nós e os Outros” (Us and the Others) that refers to areas set in

the curriculum, such as Expression and Communication to be developed. Also in partnership with EFECOT materials like activity and story books, poetry and riddle books are being produced so that they can be used by itinerant professionals with families and children. (Eurydice 2007a: 48)

- **Personnel with different training**

There are other professionals, known as “Socio-cultural mediators”, which have the duty of helping in “the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities in order to strengthen inter-cultural dialogue and social cohesion and their work depends on a protocol between the State or the local authorities and ethnic or immigrant groups, or via individual work contracts or freelance work.”(Eurydice 2007a: 247)

- **Flexibility of schedules**

In the document that describes the Portuguese educational system (Eurydice 2007a: 41) on the one hand it states that there is a flexibility of schedules which can be positive as it makes possible to accommodate any kind of activity or celebration even if that means changing the daily schedule. However, on the other hand we read that “school holidays are at Christmas, Carnival and Easter” (Eurydice 2007a: 44) which reflects the idea of national and official prevalence given to the catholic holidays over others. This also comes to contradict the constitution that states that education should be dissociated to any specific religion (Portugal 2005: Article 41)

- **Curriculum and other specificities of Childcare**

In Portugal all pre-schools should take into account the general objectives of pre-school education. “Curriculum Guidelines constitute: a group of principles to support the educators in their decisions regarding their practice of leading and developing the educational process with the children; a common reference for all teachers of the National Pre-School Network, for organising the educational component, guaranteeing significant learning; the possibility to justify the different educational options, and consequently the different curricula.”(Eurydice 2007a: 45)

The curriculum contains the following principles: “development of the child and learning are elements that can’t be separated; recognition of the child as a subject in the education process; linked building of learning; giving value to children’s knowledge, as a foundation for new learning; co-ordinated construction of knowledge –which presupposes differentiated pedagogy; the demand to find a solution for every child – which assumes varied teaching, centred on cooperation, in which each child benefits from the educational process developed with the group”.(Educação 1997: 14)

According to the National Pre-School Curriculum (Vasconcelos 1998: 24) the learning areas to be used as reference for planning the educational practice are:

- Personal and social development;

- Creativity/Communication, covering three domains: a) different forms of art - kinetic, dramatic, plastic and musical expression; b) language and literacy an initial approach to writing; c) mathematics,
- Knowledge of the world.

It is in the Personal and social development's domain that guidelines related to deal with diversity in the class can be found, as follows: "promote in children values and attitudes that allow them to become attentive and conscious citizens, capacitating them for the resolution of problems of life" (Educação 1997: 51); "promote attitudes of tolerance, comprehension of the other, respect for the difference" (Educação 1997: 54); "respecting the difference, that values the diversity of the contribution from each child for the enrichment of the group, favours the construction of the identity, self-esteem and the feeling of belonging to a group, facilitating the collective development"(Educação 1997: 54); "the acceptance of the sexual, social and ethnic difference is a facilitator of equal opportunities in the education process that respects different ways of being and knowing, in order to make a relevant acquisition of knowledge and cultures". (Educação 1997: 54)

It is also in the area of Creativity/Communication, in the domain of language and literacy - an initial approach to writing - that guidelines relating to dealing with diversity might be identified, such as: "we cannot forget (...) that the Portuguese is not the mother tongue of all children that attend pre-school. If the respect for languages and cultures of the children is a form of intercultural education, then learning Portuguese becomes essential for the future success in the learning process."(Educação 1997: 66)

It is important that these guidelines are disseminated, although it is not guaranteed that all the educators shall follow them. Another important aspect regarding these guidelines is that they are mainly used to plan activities, which demonstrates individual awareness but forgets the hidden curriculum level. It is still impossible to change attitudes and even if the carers do activities that involve ethnic diversity they will still have to keep that diversity alive in the classroom through other daily materials and strategies.

Concerning the teaching methods the pre-school teachers have autonomy to adopt any methodology whether they belong to the public or private system. "The most frequent methodologies are: Project Pedagogy; Modern School Movement; João de Deus Method; Cognitive Orientation Curriculum; Situation Pedagogy."(Eurydice 2007a: 46)

In regards to special measures put in practice for immigrant children or for ethnic minorities it is applied a principle of **inclusion**. "This consists of adapting and adjusting teaching and learning to the different needs of each pupil and each school context." (Eurydice 2007a: 247) This is as valid when addressing ethnic diversity, as it is for any other kind of diversity issue in this context.

Programmes

- **Entreculturas** (ACIDI 2008)

Entreculturas is a programme released by the ACIDI which has been producing brochures, books, research on the field of ethnic minorities and immigrants, TV shows related to ethnic minorities, materials for teacher's training with videos and on their website they also provide a calendar with celebration dates from different religions to be used in schools. (ACIDI 2008) ACIDI also have other materials like books and DVD's, notwithstanding that most of the materials produced by them address higher aged groups.

Other initiatives

- **APEI**

This association is a platform where educators can look for innovative methods, discuss different issues and attend diverse workshops. They have their own publication (Cadernos de Educação de Infância) and they are part of the network 'Children in Europe'. (APEI 2008) Presently APEI is also working on a proposal of a Code of Good Practices (Ethics) for the professionals working in the ECCE. This code may be a good contribution on what can be ways to deal with the different intervenients of children's lives, including situations related to ethnic diversity.

Resource Centers

In Portugal, the Ministry of Education has a Resource Centre in Lisbon. However, the lack of diversity of materials addressing this issue is noticeable for those who search for answers and new ideas. For example on multimedia I found among dozens of other for basic and secondary school just two CD-ROMs for Childcare centers/pre-school.(DGIDC 2008b) It is also possible to visit ACIDI's documentation centre which has available various books and DVD's related to ethnic diversity in childcare centers and some for primary schools that can be adapted.

Beside the abovementioned, there are also some Faculties of Education which have their own resource centre that can be used for during the teacher's training or even after for any teachers.

4.2.2 The Netherlands

Strategies

- **Curriculum and other specificities of Childcare**

According to Eurydice documents about Dutch Educational System (D. Eurydice 2007b: 30) “there is no prescribed curriculum as such in childcare provision, but the providers are obliged to draw up policy on child development and learning opportunities, in consultation with parents’ committees.” Though, a **National Early Childhood Curriculum** is being developed by Dr. Elly Singer as head of the team. Her team is called Landelijk Pedagogenplatform Kinderopvang (Platform, 01.09.2008) and it has a total of 120 pedagogues and other early childhood professionals who have been working for two years on this curriculum.(Kernan 2008: 37) This curriculum is divided into two main areas, the theoretical and the practical. Similarly to the Portuguese curriculum there are mentioned areas of knowledge to be developed with children such as: social, moral, emotional, motor/sensory, cognitive, communication and creative. On the practical part there its mentioned activities related to the daily routines such as eating and sleeping.(Kinderopvang, 01.09.2008)

Even though questions of ethnic diversity are related to the diverse areas of knowledge of the curriculum (on each part of the curriculum, ethnic diversity is addressed), according to Dr. Elly Singer, a new document is to be released just on diversity in Early Childhood centres. Regarding the approach used to build this curriculum, Dr. Elly said that regarding the issues of diversity they are following a view on the Rights of the Child that should be respected and included. She also mentioned that regarding the language they are following the Dutch covenant (Wet op de Kinderopvang) which says that teachers have to speak Dutch with the children which is considered to be a more assimilative approach.

- Regarding the **language** there is a guideline that refers to an exception for non-Dutch background children where they may be “spoken to for part of the time in their own language to aid comprehension” (D. Eurydice 2007b: 30). This initiative must be perceived as a positive effort which may help children feeling more comfortable and motivated to participate in the activities. However a doubt remains as to the motive behind this initiative, and whether it was designed to address the difficulties felt by ethnic minorities or the ones felt by the group that speaks Frisian in The Netherlands.

For the stimulation of language a strategy started in 2002 and uses components like “interactive reading with the children, oral communication and building up with children’s vocabulary.(...) Since the autumn of 2003, the children’s public television channel **Z@ppelin** has provided support for the strategy through its programming.”(D. Eurydice 2007b: 31) (Omroep.09.2008) This seems as a way to motivate children through the visual forms of communication that are known to be attractive to children.

- Since 1988 there are **home-based** programmes that prepare children to enter the Dutch education system from ethnic minority groups (mainly Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese children) in order to prevent educational disadvantages. The main groups to be addressed are the children under 4 years old and their parents with little schooling or children from 4 to 7 year olds. (D. Eurydice 2007b: 30)

According to Eurydice report (D. Eurydice 2007b: 30) there are also other **centre based** programmes since 1995 (Kaleidoscope and Pyramid). The Kaleidoscope programme aims to improve the quality of provision of the playgroups focusing on training as well.

“The aim of these two methods of early childhood education is: to increase the number of target-group pupils benefiting from preschool facilities; to improve quality and content of preschool provision; to eliminate educational disadvantage among target-group pupils; to encourage cooperation between preschool facilities and primary schools, thereby facilitating an uninterrupted line of development; to increase parental involvement and support.” (D. Eurydice 2007b: 30, 31)

Programmes and projects

- Another programme is the **Opstapje**. According to information from the website (Opstapje -03.09.2008), Opstapje (little step) is a programme designed for children from 2 to 4 years old and for parents. This is provided by one organisation called SWW (Working together on welfare (welzijn 2008)) which provides a wide range of services of support for resolution of problems in diverse fields like finances, housing, work, relationships, education, treatment, etc. This special programme consists in promoting a closer relationship between children, parents and school while developing activities and working together. The activities are to be done in school and at home and involve reading books together, play games or sing songs. This way for example parents that feel apart from school because they are not proficient in Dutch, have the opportunity to get closer and even improve their language skills with the school teachers together with their children.

Once again we see the importance of the family for the development of the child and for the process of integration. Here not only the childcare centre is important but also the wider family structure.

- It is a project MEMO - **Stichting Memorabele Momenten** (The Memorable Moments Foundation (MEMO: 06.09.2008)) focuses on children from 3 months to 8 years old from any kind of background. According to Kernan (2008: 67) this project started in 2004 from an individual initiative of Max Brenman but soon it grew to a bigger group with approximately 50 musicians from all over the world. They perform for children and involve them in their performances which allow children to participate actively even if they

cannot speak Dutch. This project might become a national one addressing more cities and in consequence a bigger number of children.

I think that this project shows that ethnic diversity can be present through different kinds of activities. This diversity starts from the group of musicians from all over the world and also through the way they work with children. They communicate through music so speaking Dutch is not decisive.

- **“The power of Picture Books”** is a project by ICDI focusing on children under 6 years old (International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI: 04.09.2008)). This project arises from the importance of the picture books as having “artistic value”, “educational value” and “socio-cultural value” (Aarssen 2008: 2) and to discuss this significance a workshop was held involving Dutch and Turkish authors and illustrators. This kind of initiative is important as the books can be a mean to address issues of ethnic diversity in a daily basis in the childcare centres. For that authors and illustrators have to be aware of the “power” of what they put on it and on how they can contribute for different learning experiences, which can also be related to ethnic diversity.

Other initiatives

- **MUTANT** “is a small independent agency supporting professionals and institutions in early childhood education, welfare and health care through innovative methods, training and consultancy.”(Kernan 2008: 24)

According to Kernan (2008: 25-31) MUTANT’s activity lays on the “training of practitioners and training of trainers, project innovation, conferences and seminars, writing and publishing, advocacy and changing attitudes and research.”

This work is done with teachers so that they can later apply it to their work with children.

It is important to have these programmes of teacher training where it is possible to include different issues, such as ethnic diversity.

- **Childcare International (CCI)** is a “partnership between five individuals in The Netherlands each of who have considerable experience, expertise and networking links in different facets of childcare.”(Kernan 2008: 100) According to Kernan (2008: 104,105) this group works indirectly for children doing study visits to other countries, organising conferences and seminars, editing *Children in Europe* magazine (see section of Programmes at the European level) and advocating and influencing policy making. They focus mainly on equality in childcare access and quality, and promote Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity.

Resource Centers

In The Netherlands there are a range of resources to be used in schools. They are usually developed by private institutions that work with the government. One example is the CED-Groep (Groep 2008) which have developed various materials and programmes that have been used nationally. Examples of that for early childhood are the following (Groep 2008):

- *Ko-totalk*: is a programme for children from 2 ½ to 6 years old that aims to improve their skills in the Dutch language. This programme has been incorporated in the national TV Channel for children.
- *Sociaal Spel*: a programme for enhancing the social-emotional development of children aged between 0-4 years old.

4.2.3 At the European level

- There are initiatives at the European level which aim for an equality on the quality of Childcare provision. One of those initiatives is based on publications in 13 European countries of a magazine *Children in Europe* that “writes about services for young children and their families, and it is for all people and organisations concerned with these services and children’s issues.”(Europe 2008: 1)

Children in Europe mention an ‘European approach’, i.e., “a provisional definition of a relationship between coherence and diversity: this means some common objectives, principles and entitlements but also many differences remaining, both between and within countries.”(Europe 2008: 3)

The proposal from this team is about 10 goals that should be striven for being these: access, affordability, pedagogical approach, participation, coherence, diversity and choice, evaluation, valuing the work, services for young children and compulsory school and cross national partnership. (Europe 2008: 9) Among these I consider the following principles to be relevant for this research being the following: the “*access* is a right of all children”(Europe 2008: 7); the *pedagogical approach* which means “they should adopt a holistic approach to children and multiple purposes, which recognise the multiplicity of possibilities that these services can offer as well as the diversity of children and families” (Europe 2008: 7); the *participation* which “means the active inclusion of the entire community: all young children and adults, including parents, professionals of all kinds working in services, and other citizens”(Europe 2008: 7) and the principle of *diversity and choice* which says that “all services should recognise, respect and positively value diversity in its many dimensions and forms as a fundamental element and value of European culture. They should support diversity of language, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and disability, and challenge stereotypes and discrimination.”(Europe 2008: 8)

This initiative is relevant as it endorses an improvement of the professionals knowledge of what is the broader reality in the matters of Childhood Education while inevitably focusing also on the matters of diversity.

Nevertheless this is a current dialogue among the different countries of Europe.

- **DECET** (Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training) is a European network of organizations and projects with “common goals about valuing diversity in early childhood education and training. The network aims at promoting and studying democratic child care, acknowledging the multiple (cultural and other) identities of children and families. ” (DECET 2008, Training)

In order to be able to accomplish their aims they network with trainers, practitioners, researchers and policy makers throughout Europe; they promote quality in early childhood education services including equity, accessibility and respect for diversity; they develop new knowledge and insights in this field; and they work in collaboration with other networks in and outside Europe. (DECET 2008).

On the website the practitioners can find support manuals and also order a wide range of materials developed by them.

This programme is still not being used in Portugal but the Netherlands is already part of it.

Overview

In this section we can see that in both countries there is a constitution that refers to the ethnic issues such as claiming on avoiding discrimination and being open to the differences. Though, in the Portuguese Constitution it mentions “citizens” differing from the Dutch one that states “all persons”. This may reflect **discrimination** towards the other non-citizens in Portugal.

In Portugal the constitution has an additional article that mentions specifically education which is not the case of the Dutch one.

In both countries we observe a goal on involving parents in the school life. In Portugal this is done through the participation on assemblies that design the plan for the year and in The Netherlands is through parents’ committees. In the Netherlands we see a special programme like Opstapje that aims to deal specifically with parents with low knowledge of the Dutch language.

Also in both countries there is not an obligation to attend childcare or kindergarten until 3/ 4 years old. This gives some space to the state not to improve the childcare network and consequently programmes and policies.

In what concerns to admission both countries claim for the access to all children though the way it is financed is different. In Portugal the state is the main responsible in financing the public network or the parents are responsible if it’s a private centre or finally both pay if it is a centre from the IPSS network. In The Netherlands the expenses are divided by three actors, the parents, the

state and the employer. In case the parents are not employed they have to pay the expenses alone and this may generate inequalities on the access for their children.

More specifically we find a big difference between the two countries in what concerns the existence of an ECE Curriculum. In Portugal there is one since 1997 while in The Netherlands it is still to be released. Both Curriculums address matters of social development, though it is clearer in the Portuguese one that issues of cultural diversity are mentioned as to be important to be worked with the group. The Netherlands' one was not released yet so it cannot be commented on.

Regarding special programmes to deal with ethnic diversity I can see that in Portugal the amount of projects and strategies is smaller and The Netherlands it seems to have more projects related to the teacher training and language learning. This emphasis on language learning reflects an assimilation view.

In Portugal we can see the existence already of some materials and a few resource centres that can be used by the teachers. In The Netherlands we see a stronger structure to support teachers, parents and children through organisations that help in training (for the teachers), in practical issues on how to live in the country (for the parents) or even some projects to work directly with children.

In the following chapter we will see how the teachers see these policies and programmes and to what extend they are effectively present in their daily practices or not.

Chapter 5

Analysis of the reality of ethnic diversity in Early Childhood Care and Education

Having explored the exiting measures (policies, programmes or strategies) to deal with ethnic diversity in the context of early childhood care centres or pre-schools, this reality will be analysed in light of personal experience and reflection as well as on interviews with teachers/care givers. The interviews were made to a small group of teachers from each country with different ages and working in different centres. I had guiding questions related to the following issues: does the centre has an ethnically diverse group composition, what are the centre and national guidelines related to ethnic diversity, if there is any other specific programs for this matter, the relation with staff and parents and the relation among children.

What do care givers say?

Portugal

When teachers start the first day with a new group, the first step is to analyse and assess the context and the children, so as to shape the practices to the specific group of children and to the context where the centre is integrated. Having as base their beliefs and professional pedagogic knowledge they should adapt to a context in order to better serve the acquisition of knowledge by the children that come from specific backgrounds.

I consider this a difficult task that does not depend only on one actor but on a range of diverse actors like the parents, other staff members and even government. Regarding Portuguese teachers I will present their perspective on ethnic diversity in centres in Portugal.

Regarding the question of what they think about an **ethnically diverse group** Marta says that “the issue of diversity is quite complex, especially for the children who belong to minority groups”. She shared a case that often repeats which is when the child doesn’t know any word in Portuguese and she has to find ways to deal with it as there is no current programme in her school for this matter. In her case she said: “I created a dictionary of words in Romanian so that the other children would understand when he would say words in Romanian (as he didn’t know Portuguese yet).” According to Marta this interaction created a sense of mutual interest which helped in the integration of the new child in the group as well as learning Portuguese and the other children learn some words in Romanian. We could say that this reflects an idea of acculturation where both share their cultures.

Another teacher, Inês, affirms that “contexts with diversity are valuable in childcare centres so that children learn how to deal with people from different cultures and respect them. If there is no contact between people, we tend to create stereotypes about people leading to racism or xenophobia.”

Another teacher, Guadalupe, she refers that in her group there is not that much ethnic diversity but the room has materials to play that appeal to ethnic diversity like, for example, puzzles with children from different ethnicities as well as dolls. She also explained that she doesn't know whether this lack of ethnic diversity is accidental or if its product of a detailed selection of who is going to be in the school as it is a private one. Anyway she tries to promote interaction with other staff members from Cape-Verde valuing in this way the differences.

Regarding access to extra-curricular activities each centre, has autonomy to make decisions related to this topic. For example Marta that works in Private Solidarity Network pre-school (see 4.1.1- admission, chapter 4) said: "if parents are available to pay an extra activity for children like capoeira (Brazilian dance), swimming or music, the school says it is not allowed. They say this is a school for disadvantaged children so we can not promote the extra-spending of their money. Though Joana, who works in a public centre said that in her area the municipality was providing dancing workshops for children which made them share different ways of expressing through dance and helped on their interactions and knowing each other better. This lead me to think that the way children experience being in the centre or pre-school has a lot to do with who is managing, in which area they are and on how municipalities deal with the diversity and invest on this age range.

I also interviewed another teacher who said "I am two times, I am Olivia the Cape Verdian and Olivia the Portuguese and one complements the other." Regarding having an ethnic diverse context she said that "what is rich is that we are all different and that we have different cultures" and "childcare centres are a converging space of all cultures".

The majority of the interviewed teachers works in a multicultural setting with exception of Guadalupe as it was already mentioned. When asking if they receive special **training** on these questions Marta said that she didn't receive any kind of special training to deal with these situations but last year her pre-school had a workshop about multicultural pre-schools where they shared gastronomic culture (I will come back to this point in the analysis section). Olivia mentioned that she doesn't agree that the issue of multiculturalism should be worked doing for example food fairs. She says that diversity has to be worked daily and is not to be the tourist style approach.

I also asked them to talk about the guidelines they use and if they know about any **special programmes** or national guidelines. Just as the same as Marta the other interviewees said that they don't know about any specific programmes to this age range related to ethnic diversity besides the national curriculum for early childhood. They often answered that there must be something and that they would like to know about it but as far as they are concerned there are no other specific programmes.

According to Guadalupe the method used in her centre is the High/Scope which allows children to play a big part on their own achievements while the role of the adult is to "support and guide the children throughout their adventures and experiences that come along with the learning by doing. (Weikart 2003: 1)"

From Marta's interview it seems that the presence of diversity has to be planned like the gastronomic culture activity. Olivia on the other hand thinks that the issue of multiculturalism should not be worked doing fairs like Marta referred above. She says this diversity has to be worked daily and translates in attitudes like for example the way you treat equally every parent and at the same time you're wise to address any kind of discrimination by them.

My believe is also that the way to deal with diversity is to value it keeping it always alive, in every song, every story, every game, every meal, even if the school doesn't have a great ethnic diversity this should always be present.

When questioning the teachers about why do they do so **few multicultural activities and practices** they answer as follows: Marta "there is a lot of bureaucratic work to be done by the teachers which doesn't leave much time for demanding projects like multicultural ones" and she recognises that failure. This failure was already reported by the staff but she even referred that among them there are disagreements on what its quality in that sense: she refers that "one thing is to respect, other thing is to accept and another thing is to value the difference" so she points out that the room should have multicultural accessories and even the food should be more diversified. Though she expresses the difficulty to intervene in such changes since the catering is often from outside and it can't change their way of providing the food, etc.

About the planning different activities to work issues of diversity with children, Olivia also mentioned that there are all kinds of reports and bureaucratic papers to fill in (for the ministry, for the municipality, etc.) and that leaves almost any space to invest in laborious activities.

Regarding the influence of the institutions on deciding the features of the provision Marta tells us a little more about it: "this year I did a project about religions and it was quite controversial as this pre-school belongs to a catholic institution". She noted that within this network each school has autonomy to use their own strategies which gives some freedom to create but at the same time I think that it can create a disparity on children's experiences depending on the creativity of each centre. Nevertheless Olivia mentioned that one cluster of schools started to implement an approach called Escola Moderna (Modern school) which enforces the perspective of child's autonomy, conflict resolution through dialogue and group decision making, and finally, individual or group activities. She believes that sometimes it is good to have a model to follow instead of having so much autonomy because you can lose sight of some issues that are important to be worked on.

Another thing I enquired about was **work with parents**. Marta referred that it is necessary to include parents' knowledge in the class projects in order to make them feel welcomed. She shared a very interesting case where a Russian mother would barely communicate because of language problems but once they approached her to participate in the project of religions she became more open. In this case they were even filmed for a TV show in Russia.

Concerning the **interaction among children** it tends to be a rich experience and Marta says that the group is very attentive with the achievements of the new children. Guadalupe shared an episode of a child of 2

years and 4 months: this child has been interacting with one adult from the staff for eight months and just after the eight months when Marcelina (the staff member with African origin) cuddle her in the face, the child said “Marcelina has a purple hand (then she looks attentively to the face and..) and the face too.” This makes us think that at a certain point children really start noticing the differences even though they haven’t notice before.

The Netherlands

Regarding this country we had the possibility of interviewing a care-giver with very specific characteristics. Giselda is a Cape Verdian woman that went to Portugal at a very early age and spend her childhood and part of her youth there. When she was 20 years old she came to The Netherlands and is now teaching in a Childcare centre in Rotterdam.

Gilselda works now in a Childcare centre/Pre-school which has children from different countries like Suriname, Cabo Verde, Portugal, Netherlands, Morocco, Turkey, China and other countries besides the children from different ethnicities that were already born here. Regarding having an **ethnically diverse group** Gilselda affirms that in the centre where she works there is barely space to discriminate as all are so different from each other and that promotes itself daily respect.

She considers this environment valuable as “every child has the opportunity to learn other ways of living and they get used to this diversity”. Also Pauline, a Dutch childcare teacher said that having such a diverse group “is the joy of the school” as it is fascinating to see all different cultures and behaviours. Wilma, also a Dutch teacher, explained that the diversity the children live in her centre is the same as they will find in Rotterdam (where they live). She says that schools with low diversity don’t really reflect the reality of the city where they live.

When questioned about the **guidelines** or special programmes Gilselda affirms that in the school “there is a way of living that is applicable to all so everybody has to interact and be treated in the same way diminishing the possibilities for differences”. Though she said that the teachers always have to focus on the uniqueness of each child and help her/him to develop according to their capabilities. If they detect any problem or if the child has difficulties in the language they dedicate more time to that child in order to improve their vocabulary. They count as well on the partnership with professionals specially trained for that purpose. In the room there is also a computer that has programmes specially designed for language development and the school provides other materials like image cards among others. She said “we always consult the parents to know if we are allowed to go further on investigating their problems” and that they always try to communicate with the parents as much as possible. In case the parents don’t speak Dutch well they call an interpreter or speak with simpler words and slower.

Besides these daily strategies and materials there is also a TV Channel for children, Z@ppelin, which they watch once a week together and they also recommend to parents to let children watch some programs at home.

Marco explained that besides a school plan that he has to follow, he also has weekly assignments for each child. According to the stage of development of each child he designs a programme they have to follow with specific activities.

Regarding this issue of guidelines Wilma explained that she has materials available to work with the children one on one in case they have any difficulties. Though, she says that she adapts from those materials because sometimes the themes that they propose are not related to the current activities.

Regarding the use of **national guidelines** Giselda states that most of the childcare centres/pre-schools put special emphasis on the development of the language using constant dialogue and making use of the resources being these special materials or partnerships with trained staff.

Marco referred also the national tests that are made to the children since they get to the childcare centres throughout their academic life. This test serve to see in which stage children are in order to know if they need extra support and also to know how to direct them to the 'best' school.

Still concerning the national level of guidelines Pauline mentioned the different methods that the ministry proposes such as Kaleidoscope or others where the school can chose from.

When talking about the **work with parents** and staff composition Giselda says that where you can find more ethnic diversity is among the teacher assistants. Among the staff there is no tension and their relation to parents is balanced as parents don't express any kind of discrimination. She added that parents trust on the one that they know better and knows better their children and that usually doesn't have to do with ethnicity. She also emphasizes that "the most important thing on The Netherlands' Constitution is that it forbids discrimination." Marco also affirmed that he doesn't feel any kind of tension in the centre and that maybe outside that is stronger. Pauline even said that "parents want the best for their children so they ask about the problems in school." Wilma has another view which is that parents are hard to motivate. She says that in her centre they have someone in charge of dealing with parents issues and she struggles sometimes to get their attention. As this staff member is from Suriname Wilma says that it is probable that some parents from other countries think that she has nothing valuable to say.

About the interaction **among children** and comparing to Portugal Giselda says that in The Netherlands and especially in this age range it is very rare to hear children depreciating other ethnicity children. Actually she shared that when they have the moments of group dialogue they approach the differences between children. She believes that this creates a space where children notice these physical differences and later on they won't feel the need to comment or make depreciative observations to their peers. Marco also referred that among children he observes conflicts but they are not related with ethnicity, "They are part of their social development".

Both Pauline and Wilma also mentioned that children at early ages hardly refer to ethnic differences and they play freely with each other. Pauline also

believes that prejudice and stereotyping comes from the influence of adults and in a higher age such as in primary school.

Analysis

Although the number of respondents was small, we can identify commonalities that help us understanding the daily reality of the practices in childcare centres/pre-schools.

The main points emerging are the following:

In Portugal

- Even though there are guidelines for intercultural approaches, use of special trained staff and special curricula strategies, the voices of teachers tell us a different story. They mentioned they have developed strategies themselves and that they don't have knowledge of these programmes.
- The majority of the teachers follow the national curricula for early childhood but they still see it as a mere tool for activity planning. The use of guidelines related to diversity is seen as something to fit in the schedule and that has to be planned instead of something to be used in the daily practices. We believe these teachers are not ethnic diversity blind but they still feel that approaching this issue is something to be scheduled.

In The Netherlands

- There is a different reality. They don't have yet a national curriculum with guidelines for this matter however there is a diversity of programmes to address ethnic diversity. From the interviews we see that there is a daily work in simple dialogue with children that is not formally planned but it comes as a hidden curricula.
- It is visible that the teachers have a more clear idea of what is available to them and that they have easier access to different materials that support their practices.

Comparing...

- Although in Portugal, there is already a national **curriculum** that includes dealing with Ethnic diversity I see this document as something isolated and as not being enough to deal with this issue in childcare centres. Regarding the lack of knowledge about resources, from my experience this is only used in more extreme cases and not nationwide because probably there is not enough budget to have more staff.

In The Netherlands we could maybe refer to a more bottom-up process where different programmes and practices have been arising from the necessity to deal with the ethnic diversity that later came to result in a more national measure as the National Curriculum. This document is just being produced

now but it does not mean that the professionals don't have other ways of dealing with different ethnicities as we have seen. Dr. Teresa Vasconcelos also referred to the fact that in The Netherlands things emerge on the field and that in Portugal it starts often from the policy level.

Another specificity I founded in the guidelines is that in Portugal we can see some principles such as "encouraging the personal and social development of the child based on experiences of democratic life, with a view to education for citizenship" (Eurydice 2007a: 40) while in The Netherlands 'democratic life' or 'citizenship' is not mentioned.

Also in the Portuguese curriculum there is a guideline which says "respecting the difference, that values the diversity of the contribution from each child for the enrichment of the group, favours the construction of the identity, self-esteem and the feeling of belonging to a group, facilitating the collective development"(Educação 1997: 54). It seems to be based in an acculturation view that values the different present cultures but it is maybe more accurate to say it is an **inclusion** view as it mentions 'contribution' instead of 'exchange' for example. It is not possible to compare to the Dutch situation because the curriculum was not released yet.

- The **resources** such as materials to use with children appear to be relevant. Among the Portuguese interviewees we saw that they have to produce dictionaries and they have themselves to do the work with children concerning the new language. In The Netherlands, some interviewees referred to the existence of a consistent support from trained professionals to deal with language problems as well as specific materials purchased by the school that can be used to improve the vocabulary of the children from ethnic minorities.

Still in this line we see that the Portuguese measures so far are more general and adult oriented as it is hard to find a consistent production of materials and programmes to work directly with children from early ages. While in The Netherlands we see various programmes that aim to work with children such as music, production of books, language materials and a TV channel for children.

- Regarding the **approaches** used by the teachers in Portugal we see that they are mainly centred on the interests of the child, such as in Guadalupe's case, or if they have such context in the group. But in the case of Giselda she says that daily when dialoguing with children they bring up the discussion of differences in order to satisfy maybe a hidden curiosity that arises in this age range.

Still regarding the approaches a common feature of both countries is that there are methods that are mainly used at a national level from where each school can chose from.

- According to Isabel Paes Portugal has a system for **inclusion** while The Netherlands doesn't have. We can see that through the system of testing the children as Marco also referred. She says that these tests are designed for children with Dutch as their mother tongue which makes the standards not inclusive for all children, especially for children from ethnic minorities. This

system inevitably creates a dynamic where the children from ethnic minorities start being directed to school where also mainly children like them are in. We could say that this non-inclusive system can lead to inequalities on the access to the same schools as the 'native' Dutch have. This can be considered as a way to group these children in schools where they are supposed to improve their cognitive skills. Though after a while and when the children gain the skills they are already late to get into the 'normal' system. It would be unfair to say this happen to every child from minority groups however this is a sensitive topic in The Netherlands.

Isabel interviewed young people brought up in The Netherlands and they said they feel some discrimination. They said although they feel the system is generous to help on providing housing and education they say they never felt they really interacted with/were part of the Dutch society.

Concerning Portugal she mentioned some **language** diagnosis strategies already used in the primary education but still for Pre-school education there are not a lot of strategies. As I also have noted, Isabel considered the policies as being well structured but sometimes not so well implemented. In this line she referred projects being done in the language area where schools that have a big Creole community teach Creole language to the other children and also the creoles will have support to learn Portuguese. This shows that there are already attempts to **acculturation** projects where children learn from each other. Isabel says that "when the parents try to adapt the Creole to Portuguese the child gets confused and also loses self-esteem (as he/she thinks their language is not as valuable as Portuguese). It is important to work with parents so that they know when to speak Portuguese and Creole instead of mixing both."

This leads me to reflect on the important role the language has on the life of the child. At the same time in The Netherlands it has been done work in this field and still the minorities' communities feel apart. I wonder if the parallel system of cognitive tests is at the same time 'destroying' and un-motivating the children and also the fact that there is not such emphasis on projects to keep their mother tongue.

Also in Portugal I could say that there are some ways that put these communities together and don't 'allow' them to ever interact with the Portuguese society. I am referring to the system of postcode where you attend the closest centre/school to your house. This often results on places where children interact with the same neighbours and family members as in their everyday life.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and recommendations

“As the 21st century fast approaches, the challenge of ending discrimination of all kinds remains crucial to our world’s healthy survival. (...) We can guide young children’s construction of a strong identity and teach them to value all the varied ways people are and live; or we can allow them to build an unstable self-identity based on ignorance and fear of people different from themselves.” (Brown 1999: 3)

The starting point of this study was the deep belief that early childhood is one of the **most important stages of life**. Recognising the importance of every stage it is important to reaffirm that childhood is when children start to socialise and start having contact with different children. Thus it was considered important to look at this age range and also to the setting where children meet both other children and adults. Actually “pre-primary education has the highest returns (of any other form of education) in terms of the achievement and social adaptation of children” (Europe 2008: 2). An important aspect of this social adaptation is the awareness and (positive) valuating of ethnic diversity.

Childcare centres are a key element in this adaptation, as the place where all the actors meet and can work together on various issues including ethnic diversity. For the children the childcare centres are spaces where they first live experiences of diversity and where they often start preparing for the upcoming challenges of life. However the focus on the childcare centres and teachers in this study should not obscure the importance of family and community.

Concerning the **teachers** it is still hard to expect a neutral behaviour when it comes to ethnic diversity actions as we all struggle daily with prejudice and stereotypes against ourselves. It is difficult to overcome this reality and I believe it is something we have to invest on more and more. “Even though we have started advancing towards a racial acceptance we still have to face our own prejudice in a more open way towards others and ourselves (Sparrow 2004: 342).” Only going through this process we can “establish a new pattern for our children (Sparrow 2004: 342).”

With base on the findings and also on the information from the teachers the research questions will be answered. As to the question related to whether the countries have in consideration ethnic diversity when designing their policies, we can conclude that they have. We’ve seen that the Constitutions, Education Act and other programmes have regards to ethnic diversity. We’ve also seen that these **documents** came up in a different way in each country. In The Netherlands it emerged from a necessity felt on the field level (for example just now a National Curriculum is to be released). In Portugal policies come first and then they are implemented not-effectively (for example the resource support that teachers don’t know about or doesn’t get to every school).

Turning to the question if the teachers value having a multicultural group I can say that in every interview they expressed positive opinions about working in such context. For the last question on how do teachers experience the existing programmes I noticed that in the Netherlands the teachers seem to be more aware of which programmes and strategies exist, and on how to deal with ethnic minorities' children with difficulties. In Portugal teachers seem to 'do what they can' as they are not aware of the resources they may use such as specialized staff. Anyhow they express interest on seeing more measures/programmes/strategies for this issue.

Along with this we see a better implementation of the Dutch programmes such as the TV show for children or language support as well as the use of special materials to be used for these matters. While in Portugal we see that teachers are not aware of different programmes and focus more on the National Curricula or rely on local initiatives such as in the case of Joana.

Regarding the ideologies and attitudes of each teacher I still find this a hard matter to be addressed. Also teachers belong to a group full of diversity and each one has her/his own way of dealing with this issues. This is one of the reasons for the existing policies that try to regulate the childcare system. I consider that these policies are definitely necessary however the other programmes and projects are equally needed as being needed in micro level.

Following it will be presented a section on recommendations that arise from the late chapters and aims to objectively translate our contribution into an improvement of the present reality.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are specially addressed to all teachers and also to the governmental entities or any other entities that work in the field of ECCE.

After this research I can give one main general recommendation which is that awareness and positive valuation of ethnic and cultural diversity should be implicit in the daily practices of care givers and educators. For example the staff should be diverse, the food should be diverse, and the activities and materials should include diversity and influences from different cultures and origins. These practices should be regardless of whether the children are from diverse ethnic backgrounds or not. Though based on my experience and on this research I know that this kind of practices don't come easily and naturally. It usually depends not only on the possibilities that each country gives to the centres and to the professionals but it also depends on the capacities of each professional. Because not every professional sees working with an ethnic diverse group as a natural thing (some see it rather as a special project) a general framework guideline can be helpful in order to create awareness on this matter. Though it is important that this framework is not a rigid model to be followed but also allows flexibility to adopt specific programmes (like we have

seen in the Netherlands for the improvement of language) which can be applied in each centre.

In the case of Portugal there should be more effective and specific programmes that help the professionals to overcome the difficulties of dealing with an ethnic diverse group in the field. I said effective because apparently the ones identified in the education system analysis are not consistent with what the interviewees stated. This is not to depreciate the value of the national and pre-school curricula which if appropriate “can ensure that all children and their families feel included, valued, motivated and empowered (Brown 1999: 25).” However, in practice the utility of this document which is a support for activity planning should also be a facilitator in building awareness in daily practice towards the value of the differences.

Another component of the teacher training should be on how to deal with ethnic diversity. In the Netherlands we have seen programs like for example MUTANT and DECET. In Portugal apart from the normal training I have not seen that there is specific training to deal with diversity in early childhood which should be highly recommended to a country with such ethnic diversity. “We can create early years’ programmes that genuinely practice the basic ethic of our profession – to nurture the fullest development of all children; or we can continue to disempower some groups of children while teaching other groups to maintain privilege for themselves” (Brown 1999: x forward). Also “children can become active, enthusiastic and independent learners if, as their educators, we value their cultures and communities, and understand how racism and other social inequalities influence their lives.”(Brown 1999: 3)

We know that it looks unrealistic to ask every teacher to know about every culture but at least the “conscience that there are variations can help the teacher in interpreting correctly the behaviours, feelings and needs of the child (Formosinho 2005: 20).”

That is why in my belief and looking at what teachers told about their training, more emphasis should be put on how to work with a group with diversity (as a special subject throughout the whole training). Also, while training the teachers, it would be important to make them aware of what is available to them and on how to make the best use of the policies and materials. This requires also the need for regular updating of the awareness of mid-career and older teachers through refresher courses and workshops.

More specifically to be used daily and borrowing from Sparrow (Sparrow 2004: 345) I come to propose some daily forms of helping children to value and accept the differences: Don’t make depreciative comments about other ethnic or socioeconomic groups; Value friends from a vast range of ethnic cultural and social groups; Introduce dolls, stories and games that reflect the variety of nationalities, cultures and ethnicities; Don’t impose your opinions even knowing how important they are; Don’t overprotect children before addressing all feelings in an open way; Establish an environment of tolerance and respect in the group; Try to avoid exaggerate reactions to provocations while expressing the disapproval appropriate to the behaviour.

Still related to the daily practices with the group of children I think the idea of having a code of ethics can be important. As we’ve seen this idea is undergoing in Portugal and I think it can be a good guide for teachers on how

to deal with diverse issues including ethnic diversity. It can be helpful on how to deal not only with children but also with parents and other professionals working in Childcare centres/preschools.

Diversity in any sense of the word is valuable, as mentioned before we should also focus on similarities in diversity and not only of the differences of diversity. It is important to facilitate children an environment where they can grow deconstructing stereotypes and avoiding prejudice that are embedded in society. This work can and should be definitely done during childhood especially on early ages so that we step towards a better and more informed generation.

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