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Opinions differ on the desirability of paying attention to intercultural education in schools and on the opportunities to do this. Theoretical agreement and conceptual clarity on the concept are hard to find. The theoretical debate on intercultural education is far removed from daily practice in the classroom. Ideally, experience-related ideas and the insights of teachers should form part of the debate. In this article we present an example of measuring teachers' opinions on the concept of intercultural education. The research was carried out in The Netherlands with the help of a written questionnaire. Seventy-four teachers participated. The researchers differentiated four accents in intercultural education, based on the literature. This differentiation was not reflected in the teachers' answers. They had a slight preference for a general pluralistic interpretation of intercultural education and, hence, for a particular pedagogical approach. We will explore this finding further in the discussion.

Introduction

The objectives and content of intercultural education are theoretically linked to questions of inequality, discrimination, ethnic/cultural diversity and citizenship (Banks & McGee-Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Figueroa, 1999; May, 1999; Banks *et al.*, 2001; Leeman, 2003). There is an overwhelming lack of clarity and agreement on the perspectives, target groups, boundaries and key concepts of intercultural education. The importance attached to intercultural education varies and is closely linked to visions on equity, ethnic/cultural identity, the multicultural society and to opinions on the role of the school in these. The practical design of intercultural education and its theoretical development follow different paths. In the theoretical realm we see, for example, the 'critique from above', a critical account of educational practices that sheds light on the socio-reproductive nature of much of the work done in schools. This critical analysis is far removed from the daily tensions and dilemmas

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of teachers who, often working in a context without much support, try to develop practices that take notions of equity and cultural diversity into account (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2003). In schools in Western Europe we see a corps of predominantly white teachers struggling to teach in an ethnically diverse context, increasingly acquainted with social/ethnic differences and trying to bridge the gap between the outside world and school. Teachers develop intercultural practices in their classrooms, probably without the theoretical baggage to move beyond the dominant discourse of cultural difference and the facilities to develop anything but pragmatic solutions to the dilemmas they are confronted with. They do their work in a political context that does not celebrate multiculturality and in schools that operate in an educational marketplace where results in the basic skills count and parents are free to choose the best school. To be able to develop a more practice-informed theory on intercultural education, theoretical concepts need to be linked to the contextual knowledge and experience of in-service teachers.

Here we will present the results of a study on the opinions of teachers teaching in The Netherlands on intercultural education. This was commissioned by the special policy project group on intercultural education (Projectgroep Intercultureel Onderwijs) and was part of an evaluation of a national innovation project on intercultural education (Leeman & Ledoux, 2003). It involved teachers from different sectors of education working together on developing examples of intercultural education. The description of the research and a presentation of the results follow after a sketch of the Dutch situation.

Intercultural education in The Netherlands

Immigration since World War II has been the trigger in West European countries, like The Netherlands, for intercultural education. The various groups that came to The Netherlands as political refugees or within the framework of the process of decolonization and labour migration currently form about 9% of the population. Educational policy measures to deal with the consequences of immigration were first initiated at the end of the 1960s. An important goal was to stimulate, through 'intercultural education', the socialization of young people for citizenship in a multicultural society. According to the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, young people should gain 'knowledge about each other's ethnic/cultural background, circumstances and culture in order to further mutual understanding and to combat prejudice, discrimination and racism'. Intercultural education was made compulsory for all schools. Another central goal of the policies was equal educational opportunities for all. Apart from temporary measures for the initial reception of newcomers, the issue of equal opportunities for immigrants has from the beginning been integrated into the general policy on disadvantaged pupils. A policy was developed in The Netherlands, aimed at specific groups and areas, that allocated schools extra funding to finance, for example, an integral language policy in classes with multi-lingual pupils. On the whole, schools are free to use this money as they wish.

Intercultural education has been a compulsory part of the curriculum in all sectors of education since the mid 1980s. The content and pedagogical approach, however, have not been defined in detail. It is the task of schools, teachers and teacher educators to develop forms of intercultural education and integrate them into the curriculum. This approach is related to the policy on the curriculum in The Netherlands. Partly due to the pillarization of Dutch society along religious lines, there is no clearly defined national curriculum, as there is, for example, in England and Wales. There are, however, broadly formulated targets, which schools must follow, and standard tests and examination requirements are reflected in the education content. Schools and teachers in The Netherlands have a relatively free hand in determining the content and design of the curriculum.

Although politicians made intercultural education compulsory, they did little to facilitate its implementation. Some progress was made in schools with an ethnically mixed pupil population, but little attention was paid to it in white schools. It remained a marginal subject in teacher education (Homan, 1999) and it was mostly in the form of add-on sections to the curriculum. We base this statement on inventory research on intercultural education, an initiative of a special policy project group (Projectgroep Intercultureel Onderwijs, 1995), and on research carried out by the Education Inspectorate. This research does, however, have its limitations. The definition of intercultural education used in the research was based on explicit parts of the curriculum. This meant that informal and everyday forms of intercultural educational activities could not be included in the inventories. It is therefore possible that more forms of intercultural education do in fact exist than those included in the inventories.

The trend in the literature internationally is towards a broad definition of intercultural education, which includes not only the curriculum content but other factors, such as teaching methods, everyday pedagogical agency, contact with parents and elements from the 'hidden curriculum' (Banks & McGee Banks, 1995; Figueroa, 1999; Banks *et al.*, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Leeman, 2003). To gain more insight into this, we need to know more about what teachers think intercultural education actually is. It is their opinions that after all determine, consciously or not, their didactic and pedagogical agency and (in the Dutch situation) the themes they choose to include in their lessons.

Structure and organization of the research

One of the objectives of the research was to determine how teachers thought about intercultural education at the outset of the project and how they operationalized intercultural education in their classrooms during the 1 year project. Four networks of teachers were set up in the project, as designed by Projectgroep Intercultureel Onderwijs, each network representing a different educational sector, namely primary education, secondary education, vocational education and teacher education. There were 10–14 teachers in each network, who were from different schools and courses. Our research focused on these teachers and on a second group of teachers who were

from the same schools but were not active in the network. In total, 74 teachers participated in the research, 44 network participants and 30 non-participants. Most of them were experienced teachers, fairly equally divided by gender, who generally held both a teaching position as well as one or more coordinating positions in their own school. Virtually all of them were of Dutch origin.

Owing to the number of teachers and the limited time available, we decided to use a written questionnaire with predominantly closed questions to measure the ideas of the teachers on intercultural education at the start of the project. This meant that the concept of intercultural education had first to be operationalized and in such a way that various visions of the concept could be differentiated. The objective of the project was not only to ascertain teachers' definitions of intercultural education but also whether different visions existed. We used the theoretically and practically oriented literature available in The Netherlands as the basis for developing the questionnaire. (The Anglo-Saxon discussion on intercultural education has been widely covered in this literature.)

Questionnaire

We were careful to pay attention to the aspects of diversity, inequality and discrimination. With regard to diversity, we used two approaches from the literature on intercultural communication. The first is the differentiation approach, which focuses on cultural differences and communication problems or culturally linked conflicts that can arise from these differences. A common strategy in this approach is to provide more insight into the cultural background of different groups. This can, however, very easily lead to stereotyping. In the second approach the emphasis is not so much on the cultural characteristics associated with ethnic origin but on pluriformity in all sorts of domains. This involves developing a sensitivity to differences of all kinds, taking these differences seriously and developing the skills to deal with them. Thinking in dichotomies (them and us) is inadmissible in this approach. Individuals are seen as the bearers of different identities, which, moreover, are not fixed indefinitely but are constantly subject to change.

These two approaches are also referred to as 'culturalism' and 'pluralism' (Leeman *et al.*, 1996). With this differentiation in mind, we tried to identify the different definitions of intercultural education in the publications available about the emphasis teachers and school heads in practice place on the design of intercultural education. We then categorized these definitions within the two approaches. During this process it became apparent that a further subdivision within the pluralism approach was advisable, namely a differentiation between a vision in which ethnic diversity in combination with combating prejudice and discrimination are central and a vision which is only about diversity in general.

We also found it advisable to differentiate an approach in which intercultural education is related to inequality and interpreted as combating disadvantage. Although combating disadvantage is a separate issue to intercultural education in Dutch educational policy, in practice it is not uncommon to interpret intercultural

education as activities specifically needed by children from an ethnic minority background. These activities are aimed at reducing the learning disadvantages of these children and providing extra support during their school careers. In the discussions on Dutch educational policy, intercultural education features in two domains: the domain for combating educational disadvantage and promoting the participation of people from an ethnic minority background and the cultural–political domain, which deals with cultural diversity in society (Leeman, 2002).

Ultimately, the following differentiation was made for measuring opinions on intercultural education.

- Culturalism. A vision of intercultural education with the emphasis on culturally linked differences and 'being different': 'different' cultures and 'different' origins. The emphasis on 'different' implies thinking in terms of them and us; 'Dutch' is positioned antithetically to 'non-Dutch' and differences are seen as cultural in nature and typical of entire groups.
- Ethnic pluralism. A vision of intercultural education with the emphasis on ethnic diversity but without the antithesis between them and us. This vision pays attention to diversity within ethnic minority groups and within the majority group as well as to conflicts and group processes with an ethnic component.
- General pluralism. A vision of intercultural education in which the emphasis is on diversity in general without any explicit reference to ethnic relations. It involves working on good relations within and between groups in general terms and also pays attention to all kinds of differences between people, other than ethnic differences.
- Equal opportunities approach. A vision of intercultural education in which the emphasis is on pupils from ethnic minority groups and their educational opportunities. Intercultural education is seen as a means of combating the educational disadvantages of pupils from an ethnic minority background and not as a form of education for all pupils.

We chose to operationalize the four approaches by focusing on the agency of teachers in the classroom. Analogous to the emphasis in the practically oriented literature we studied, we decided to operationalize the approaches mainly in terms of learning objectives and to a lesser extent in terms of pedagogical approach. This involved the usual division between knowledge, skills and attitudes in learning objectives. We endeavoured to produce a matrix in which each vision could be subdivided into knowledge, attitudes and skill. The realization of this matrix was only partly successful. It proved to be simpler to formulate knowledge objectives than attitude objectives for the culturalism approach, while attitude objectives proved to be easier for general pluralism. This was already an indication of the general direction inherent in the different visions: general pluralism was positioned more in the pedagogical domain, culturalism more in the domain of direct transfer of knowledge and value orientation.

The starting point for choosing the descriptions for learning objectives was to formulate them so that they represented the visions as accurately as possible. The criterion for this was not theoretical unambiguity or 'correctness' but that the teachers would

recognize them. We wanted to get to know more about the actual opinions of teachers. A consequence of this is that prejudices or theoretically based counterproductive ideas had to be represented too. We also wanted to differentiate the different visions as clearly as possible. This automatically results in an imbalance when the visions are considered individually. This was not a problem for the objective of this research. We did not expect to find teachers who completely supported one vision or another but different accents within the range of current opinions on intercultural education.

In the general sense, we tried to find descriptions for 'culturalism' in which the words 'different', 'other', 'cultural differences', 'cultural customs' and such like were used. Examples are:

- show the differences between Dutch culture and other cultures;
- pay attention to non-Dutch holidays and festivals;
- teach pupils to accept the values, beliefs, behaviour, clothing, etc. of other cultures;
- foster understanding of the customs of Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and other groups living in The Netherlands;
- teach pupils to associate with children who have a very different lifestyle to their own.

For 'ethnic pluralism' we tried to formulate descriptions that teachers would associate with ethnic diversity but without an emphasis on 'them' and 'us'. Examples are:

- inform pupils about the origin and development of social phenomena like migration, racism, ethnic identity;
- show pupils the differences in ideas and lifestyle within ethnic groups;
- help pupils to understand the origin, function and effect of prejudices;
- teach pupils not to feel 'better' or 'worse' because of their origin or colour;
- encourage pupils to oppose racism;
- teach pupils to solve ethnic conflicts in the classroom.

For 'general pluralism' we looked for descriptions that refer to diversity in general and to general pedagogical objectives. Examples are:

- encourage pupils to think about their own identity;
- show pupils that norms and values are historically determined;
- help pupils to understand the different elements in their self-image;
- make sure pupils feel responsible for each other;
- develop an active, inquisitive attitude to learning in pupils;
- teach pupils to empathize with the thoughts and feelings of others.

For the 'equal opportunities approach' we looked for descriptions that specify pupils from an ethnic minority background as the target group. For example:

- take into account that Dutch is the second language of pupils from an ethnic minority background;
- give pupils from an ethnic minority background more guidance in making choices (school, higher education, profession);

- choose topics which are not too abstract or too removed from pupils from an ethnic minority background;
- give pupils from an ethnic minority background extra help with the subject matter;
- improve the general development of pupils from an ethnic minority background who receive less help at home.

In total, 41 of these descriptions were drawn up and categorized in the four different approaches. This was no simple task. There was a lot of discussion in the research team on the choice of descriptions, their formulation and categorization. Complete unambiguity proved difficult to realize. This was partly due to the fact that some descriptions are multi-interpretable and not about specific agency in the classroom. It is highly possible, for example, that an item like 'show pupils the differences in ideas and lifestyles within ethnic groups', which we categorized in the ethnic pluralism vision, is given a more culturalistic dimension in practice. This would be the case when these differences in opinion are handled in a strongly stereotyped way or when a lot of emphasis is placed on cognitive learning and work (transfer of knowledge) and not on dialogue and exploratory learning. It became increasingly clear to us that for the operationalization of different visions of intercultural education, not only are the intentions of teachers important (what are their objectives) but also the pedagogical and didactic choices that are made when they are put into practice. Intercultural education is not only about what teachers do or present but also, or perhaps more, about how they do it. 'How', or the characteristics of the pedagogical/didactic agency, is also part of the concept, perhaps even an essential part. Nevertheless, we decided to keep to our decision to measure the visions of intercultural education with the help of items in the form of learning objectives. This seemed to be the most practical way, given the necessity for a written questionnaire on teachers' opinions.

The 41 items were submitted to the teachers as a questionnaire at the beginning of the project. For each description they were asked to indicate whether it fitted in with their opinions on intercultural education by choosing a number on a seven point scale, ranging from 'absolutely not' to 'completely'. The respondents could supplement this list of descriptions with aspects of intercultural education that were not on the list (open question) and, if they wanted to, give additional information on their answers. Lastly, they were asked to choose a maximum of 10 of the descriptions which should be given the highest priority in the project. At the end of the project questions were asked (orally, not written) about whether their opinions on intercultural education had changed in the course of the project. This article does not deal with the results of these questions. We will restrict ourselves here to the results of the analyses of measuring the teachers' visions. The evaluation and outcomes of the project as a whole have been reported elsewhere (Ledoux *et al.*, 2000, 2001; Leeman & Ledoux, 2003).

Results

The following steps were taken in the analysis of the data.

(a) Perusal of the outcomes per item: which items were well/hardly supported?

(b) Homogeneity analysis: do the items in a vision form a reliable scale? If so, do they interrelate?

(c) Factor and correlation analysis of all items: does the pattern of respondents' answers imply that the items belong together, leaving aside our categorization of items in the visions? Does this produce the same or different scales and to what extent do they interrelate?

We will give a summary of the outcomes of each step.

The individual items

The first finding was that the average scores for all items were high to extremely high. The highest value 7, meaning 'this fits in completely with my opinion on intercultural education', occurred very often and the lowest, 1–3, hardly at all. This means that many respondents felt that all or nearly all of the items fitted in with their interpretation of intercultural education. Half of the respondents gave the highest score of 7 for no less than 26 items. These items were in different domains.

Table 1 gives an overview of the items with an average score of higher than 6. This indicates which items teachers felt were extremely compatible with their opinion of intercultural education. The approach in which we categorized the item is given in the last column.

These first analyses of the individual items show two things. First, the generally high average scores and the infrequent rejection of specific items indicate that teachers' visions are scarcely differentiated at all. Apparently, the teachers participating in the research felt that the culturalism vision, the two pluralism visions and the equal

Table 1.   Items with an extremely high (>6) average score

	Vision
Use teaching materials in which the multicultural society is visible	General pluralism
Take care when choosing teaching materials that it is possible for all pupils to identify positively	General pluralism
React consistently to racist remarks by pupils	General pluralism
Make sure that pupils feel safe in the group	General pluralism
Encourage pupils to think about their own identity	General pluralism
Make sure pupils feel responsible for each other	General pluralism
Teach pupils to empathize with the thoughts and feelings of others	General pluralism
Help pupils understand the origin, function and effect of prejudices	Ethnic pluralism
Teach pupils not to feel 'better' or 'worse' because of their origin or colour	Ethnic pluralism
Teach pupils to be open to differences between children	Ethnic pluralism
Teach pupils how to deal with discrimination	Ethnic pluralism
Teach pupils to analyse their own norms and values	Ethnic pluralism
Teach pupils to associate with children who have a very different lifestyle to their own	Culturalism

opportunities approach all belong to the concept of intercultural education. Intercultural education appears to be a container concept. This is a loosely defined concept which can be used for a multitude of purposes. Secondly, the items most strongly regarded as intercultural are mainly derived from the two pluralism visions. A closer look at these items shows that teaching pupils to deal with differences is a central element in teachers' opinions on intercultural education.

The different visions

Homogeneity analyses of the series of items belonging to the different visions show that a scale can be constructed for each vision that is sufficiently homogeneous. We also examined whether a scale could be constructed for the aspects knowledge, skills and attitudes (for all the visions as a whole). We expected that it would also be possible to differentiate between teachers here (teachers with a preference for a knowledge-oriented approach to intercultural education and teachers with a preference for an approach focusing on skills and/or attitudes). Scales for this also proved to be possible. Table 2 shows the data.

The 'ethnic pluralism' and 'attitudes' scales have the highest average scores and the 'equal opportunities' scale the lowest. The differences are not great, however, and the average score for all the scales is on the high side.

All the scores for homogeneity (α) are high. This was to be expected, given the uneven spread of answers for virtually all the items. It is important to look more closely at how the scales interrelate. A high correlation means that they are not independent; they overlap one another instead of measuring a separate interpretation of intercultural education. If they do not correlate or the correlation is low, they are independent variables and indicate that the visions are indeed different.

The correlations between the knowledge, attitudes and skills scales are high (knowledge with attitudes 0.72, knowledge with skills 0.71, attitudes with skills 0.82). We thus cannot consider these to be different emphases in the opinions on intercultural education. It is a somewhat different picture for the culturalism, ethnic pluralism and general pluralism scales. There is a high correlation between general

Table 2. Homogeneity (α), average score (M), minimum and maximum score (min/max) for the scales for vision and for knowledge/skills/attitudes

	N items	α	M	Min	Max
Culturalism	7	0.83	5.8	3.2	7
Ethnic pluralism	9	0.84	6.0	3.1	7
General pluralism	20	0.92	5.8	3.1	7
Equal opportunities	5	0.82	5.2	1.6	7
Knowledge	11	0.85	5.7	2.5	7
Attitudes	9	0.81	6.0	2.8	7
Skills	8	0.81	5.7	2.6	7

pluralism and ethnic pluralism (0.73). Most of the respondents who had a high score for one of the forms of pluralism also did for the other. The scales do not represent separate concepts and, as expected, do not appear to be antithetical. We had expected an antithesis between culturalism on the one hand and pluralism on the other. This was not confirmed; the culturalism definition and the pluralism definition do interrelate, albeit not so strongly (general pluralism and culturalism 0.37, ethnic pluralism and culturalism 0.55). Here we see that ethnic pluralism is positioned in the middle. The connection between culturalism and general pluralism is much less strong. These last two scales are thus fairly independent.

The equal opportunities scale correlates equally with each of the three opinions: a moderate coherence of about 0.50. It is therefore not the case that a culturalism approach is more closely linked with the approach that equal opportunities should be part of intercultural education, as might have been expected.

These data complement an observation made earlier that intercultural education is a container concept for teachers. Reliable indicators can indeed be made for each vision, but the level of coherence is fairly high, indicating a strong level of overlap. Culturalism on the one hand and general pluralism on the other are the easiest to differentiate. They both overlap with ethnic pluralism. This is also understandable, as ethnic pluralism shares a common interest with culturalism in ethnic differences and with general pluralism, a common interest in group processes and identities. The equal opportunities approach is somewhat removed from this. Ideas on the place of this in intercultural education vary the most (see the minimum and maximum scores), but on average teachers do consider it to be part of the concept.

Factor analysis and correlation analysis

The fact that reliable scales can be constructed for each vision does not necessarily mean that our categorization of the items is the most suitable, given the pattern of answers by respondents. If all the items are closely interrelated, as the high average scores for each separate item would imply, virtually every combination of items produces a scale that is sufficiently homogeneous. To check this, a factor analysis of all 41 items was made. The result was nine factors, the first explaining 33% variation, the second 14% variation and the rest less than 7% each. Without rotation nearly all the items scored positively for factor 1, which is again an indication that all the items together represent one concept. When rotated, the items are spread over about five factors (one large and four small). Each of these factors forms a sufficiently reliable scale, but this does not give us a clear picture.

Homogeneity analysis of all the items, however, shows that they do not all fit into one scale. For this reason we then looked at correlations between all the items. The correlation matrix of all the items did indeed show that not everything interrelates with everything else. By combining items which are extremely significant, with a correlation of more than 0.50, four clusters were formed that could be easily interpreted.

Cluster 1 comprises 14 items of a general nature that do not refer to ethnic relations or cultural differences. Most of these items are from the general pluralism scale, in which the development of an 'enquiring attitude' is central. A few typical items are:

- teach pupils to negotiate;
- teach pupils to empathize with the thoughts and feelings of others;
- teach pupils that general truths do not exist;
- teach pupils to think about their own identity;
- show pupils that norms and values are historically determined;
- develop an active, investigative approach to learning in pupils.

Cluster 2 combines 14 items from ethnic pluralism and culturalism. The items are about the multicultural society, other cultures, racism, inter-ethnic contacts, intercultural teaching materials and non-discrimination, in short, everything to do with ethnic diversity. Attention to 'other cultures' has an important place in this cluster, but it does also include items about combating prejudice and racism. A few characteristic items are:

- react consistently to racist comments by pupils;
- non-discrimination rules in the classroom;
- teach pupils to solve ethnic conflicts;
- foster understanding for the customs of ethnic groups living in The Netherlands;
- create inter-ethnic groups in group assignments;
- show the differences between Dutch culture and other cultures.

Cluster 3 comprises seven items which concern relations between pupils in the group. It includes items from general pluralism, ethnic pluralism and culturalism. The cluster can certainly be interpreted as a separate vision, a vision in which 'care and concern for each other' are central. Some characteristic items are:

- teach pupils to be open to different cultures;
- show pupils why people tend to think in terms of groups;
- make sure pupils feel responsible for each other;
- teach pupils to deal with problems like bullying and exclusion;
- teach pupils to associate with children who have a very different lifestyle to their own.

Lastly, cluster 4 comprises five items which all originate from the equal opportunities scale.

Sufficiently reliable scales can also be made from these four groups of items. Table 3 shows the data.

We also checked to what extent these scales interrelate and thus the level of dependence/independence. The level of interrelation between clusters 1 and 3 and between 2 and 4 is quite strong (0.65 and 0.60, respectively). This means that teachers who think it is important to pay attention to differences in general, without any specific ethnic component, are also inclined to think the same about relations in the group. Teachers who consider ethnic differences to be an important part of intercultural education also tend to think that intercultural education is about equal opportunities

Table 3.   Homogeneity (α), average score (M), minimum and maximum score (min/max) for the general, ethnic differences, care for each other group and equal opportunities clusters

	N items	α	M	Min	Max
General cluster	14	0.93	5.7	1.7	7
Ethnic differences cluster	14	0.91	5.8	3.0	7
Group cluster	7	0.79	6.1	3.3	7
Equal opportunities cluster	5	0.82	5.2	1.6	7

for pupils from an ethnic minority background. The interrelation between clusters 1 and 2 (0.40), 1 and 4 (0.32) and 3 and 4 (0.31) is fairly weak.

Summing up

On the basis of the results of the analyses we can draw the following conclusions.

- Intercultural education is a container concept. Items representing different visions of intercultural education seem to interrelate well in the approaches of the respondents, visions do not seem to have been worked out in detail, everything fits into the concept and is important.
- Specific knowledge-oriented, attitudes-oriented or skills-oriented approaches to intercultural education do not exist.
- The three visions, general pluralism, ethnic pluralism and culturalism, can certainly be differentiated, but for teachers the divisions between them are very fluid, with ethnic pluralism being positioned in the middle of the other two.
- A better classification of the visions would be to differentiate between a 'social relations approach' (a combination of 'general differences' and 'attention to relations in the group'), on the one hand, and 'attention to ethnic differences', on the other.
- The opinion that equal opportunities form part of intercultural education was shared by the teachers in the research, even though the items about equal opportunities have a relatively low score.

Discussion

This article is a report on exploratory work in an area which we consider to be of educational and social importance. Cultural diversity, equality and respect for difference are at stake. Our aim has been to clarify the concept of intercultural education further. Such a concept could serve as a guiding principle for the professionalization of teacher educators. Intercultural education is a somewhat marginalized subject in institutes for teacher education, a situation not unique to The Netherlands. Our goal was a concept that was theoretically and practically sound. In other words, a concept that takes the ideas and experiences of in-service teachers seriously. On the basis of literature research we compiled a written questionnaire with examples of intercultural

education for teachers working in the Dutch education system. The items represented the different approaches to intercultural education found in the literature. On the basis of this literature research we differentiated four approaches, namely: culturalism, ethnic pluralism, general pluralism and the equal opportunities approach.

Reviewing the different visions and the results of the research we can conclude that intercultural education appeared to be a container concept for the teachers. They do not differentiate strongly between culturalism, ethnic pluralism and general pluralism. The equal opportunities approach does form part of the concept, but has relatively little acceptance. This last finding reflects the division made in Dutch educational policy between intercultural education for all pupils and the policy on equal opportunities for disadvantaged children.

When re-categorizing the results it became apparent that the teachers differentiated and emphasized a 'social relations approach'. Practical arguments may be at the bottom of this. Further analysis of the examples of intercultural education developed by the teachers during the project showed that they chose to maintain peace and harmony in the classroom by means of a relational approach, in order to safeguard the continuation of intercultural education (Leeman & Ledoux, 2003). Topics that would place too much emphasis on individual and group differences in cultural orientation and values can have undesirable effects on the atmosphere in the classroom and the pedagogical climate. In other words, they preferred an indirect strategy to educate pupils for multicultural life by trying to establish a 'good society' inside their classrooms. The choice of a relational approach may also be inspired by pragmatic reasons, by the consideration that the best link with other innovative activities in the school, such as a policy on reducing violence and the introduction of cooperative learning, can be made in this way. Another categorization of the approaches to intercultural education, which includes a further elaborated and differentiated social relations approach, should be possible, as the research showed that elements of this approach do form part of many teachers' opinions.

The teachers did not make a strong differentiation between ethnic pluralism and general pluralism. This differentiation is important for theoretical reasons. Advantages linked to the general pluralism approach include an open receptive attitude, room for diversity and stimulating non-hierarchical thinking. This approach also has advantages for the further integration and acceptance of intercultural education. It does not separate intercultural education into a specific corner of ethnic diversity and, hence, does not attract only the comparatively small group of teachers who were initially interested in it. This approach also fits in better with other developments in education, like the increasing attention to social competence. It is particularly suitable for teachers who are concerned about the well-being of all the children in the class, teachers for whom not only examination results but also the quality of the instructional process and the hidden curriculum are important. Intercultural education based on the general pluralism approach can benefit the well-being of all pupils. However, education and social relations do not develop in a social vacuum. Asymmetrical power relations between groups are typical of daily life in both school and society (Sleeter & Grant, 1991; Apple, 1999; May 1999). If the emphasis in intercultural lessons is placed on individual

differences only, differences between groups and structural power relations between groups will quickly fade into the background, especially in the liberal political climate of The Netherlands. Ethnic diversity can fade into the background or be ignored completely in the framework of general pluralism. A form of intercultural education then develops in which the 'baby is thrown out with the bath water'. We realized that this was no imaginary danger when we analysed the examples of intercultural lessons developed by the teachers participating in the project (Ledoux *et al.*, 2000; Leeman & Ledoux, 2003). To maintain peace and quiet and avoid disrupting lessons, teachers chose examples of diversity that would create little commotion, such as discussing age differences and different tastes in music and lifestyle.

It is possible to conclude that the fine differences between culturalism, ethnic pluralism and general pluralism escaped the teachers. In this respect they need to improve their theoretical background. Teachers need to be provided with a framework that allows a differentiated and dynamic understanding of cultural identity in a specific social context. They lack a view of culture as a process, a view in which individual experiences and cultural orientations are related to broad group categories and to the influence of peers, family and ethnic groups. They are not familiar with a view of intercultural education that helps pupils to find their own position in a pluriform context (Connelly *et al.*, 2003; Jackson, 2004). For the development of such a dialogic and narrative type of intercultural education we need teachers who are sensitive to the experiences of different pupils in the school and who are able to move beyond cultural harmony as the main concept in analysing school life. Studies on intercultural education, social justice and homophobia show that this kind of sensitivity is both crucial and scarce among teachers (Moodley, 1994; Epstein *et al.*, 2003).

We have to conclude that the quest for clear concepts is important, but it is certainly not enough. Clear concepts are of little value in improving educational practice if the critical and cultural sensitivity of teachers is not taken seriously. It is crucial that teachers are able to critically examine the effects of concepts on personal development and society; reflective teachers who can differentiate between the different visions of intercultural education and are alert to the counterproductive effects of an approach (Leeman & Volman, 2001). Equally important is the role research plays in the development of the concept of intercultural education and the professionalization of teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2002). Unfortunately, the roles of the teachers and researchers were strictly segregated in the policy-initiated project discussed here. Collaborative research in the classroom on the nuances and quality of intercultural life, the development of possibilities for attending to the diverse experiential narratives of children and teachers and the development of procedures for intercultural education that take social justice seriously in order to negotiate a curriculum of diversity, might bring us further.

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