In the pursuit of social inclusion

Social workers fostering social inclusion of people with mild intellectual disabilities

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This thesis draws upon co-authored articles that are peer reviewed and published:

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Chapter 4
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1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. General introduction

Let me briefly return to the year 2003. My professional journey began in the field of social work, even though it was not recognized as such in the Netherlands at the time. Prior to my professional career, I spent two enriching months volunteering at a summer camp ‘for physically and mentally disabled campers’ in the United States. This experience was a revelation, opening my eyes to the diversity in human kind. Our team, a mix of volunteers from around the globe, was entrusted with the mission of ensuring that people with various disabilities could have a memorable and enjoyable vacation week. The experience could be summed up in the words: amazement, excitement, challenging, joyful, playful, strenuous, and filled with responsibility. Upon returning to the Netherlands, I embarked on a study abroad trip to Australia for a year, only to find myself back in the Netherlands. In 2003, I seized an opportunity to work with Stichting IJlanden, an Amsterdam-based service provider later renamed Cordaan, specializing in supporting people with intellectual disabilities. Lacking relevant prior training, I began my tenure as an assistant support worker. This role was an on-call position, requiring me to serve across Amsterdam at any time of day - morning, afternoon, evening, or night, wherever there was a need. After a year of this dynamic and demanding role, I transitioned to a position as a support worker at a facility providing permanent residential care and support. This marked the next chapter in my journey in the field of social work.

While my approach was not strictly care-oriented, I was certainly caring. Rather than adhering rigidly to set daily schedules, I was drawn to the potential of opportunities that extended beyond such structures. My philosophy was simple: prioritize living, then caring, instead of the other way around. This led me to seek and find flexibility within and beyond the day programs, always in collaboration with the service users. This approach became a defining characteristic of my role as a support worker. At that time, the concept of social inclusion was unfamiliar to me, let alone its profound implications. However, years later, after transitioning my career towards higher education and applied research, my perspective broadened significantly. This was largely due to numerous enriching encounters with students, fellow educators and researchers, service users, experts by experience, social workers at various service providers, both domestically and internationally, and a wealth of literature that deepened my knowledge and reflective capacity. I came to realize that I had been advocating for social inclusion all along. Furthermore, I recognized that my social work was essentially a human rights profession. Yet, this realization was not widely shared among my colleagues in disability care and support, nor among my peers at the university, the students, or the service providers I visited in my role as a supervisor assessing students' professional growth. This brings us to the crux of this study: the intersection of social work in intellectual disability care and support, social inclusion, and human rights. Intellectual disability is defined as a condition characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, with onset before the age of 22 (AAIDD, 2021). Given the stages and tasks of life, adults with mild intellectual disabilities face significant challenges. Mild intellectual disabilities are often invisible, which leads to the risk of individuals being overestimated and overburdened by the community due to the discrepancy between their emotional and intellectual levels of development (Morisse et al., 2013). Living with a mild intellectual disability adds the additional life task of accepting one's disability (Wissink et al., 2022). Adults with mild intellectual disabilities are keenly aware of the stigma surrounding their condition, and they often experience differential or negative treatment by others in society. This complicates their ability to actively participate in society and affects their sense of being accepted and valued (Giesbers et al., 2020).

This study aims to explore the interconnections presented in the subject matter: social work in intellectual disability care and support, social inclusion, and human rights. The initial chapter provides a context, thereby establishing a foundation for the subsequent chapters of this dissertation. The latter half of this chapter delineates the methodology employed in our inclusive action and social design research. This includes a discussion on the relevance of the research, its intended purpose, the questions it seeks to answer, and its ethical justification. To conclude the chapter, a succinct reading guide is provided to assist in navigating this thesis' content.

1.1 A first glance at social work, human rights, and social inclusion

Any individual is considered to be born with a fundamentally equal dignity that deserves flourishing and protection. In parallel, it is held that every person possesses moral autonomy and should have the capability to shape self-fulfillment. In this endeavor, it is crucial to acknowledge that these considerations are not solely individual and idealistic concerns. They are framed in a socio-political and moral conviction grounded in globally accepted societal values such as inherent dignity, personal autonomy, and social justice (De Wit, 2020).

Human rights provide a moral framework where fundamental values preside. In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)(2006), ratified by the Netherlands in 2016, these values are found in the general principles, accompanied by values such as participation, inclusion, recognition of human diversity, accessibility, and the evolving capacities of persons with (intellectual) disabilities. To a greater or lesser extent, these fundamental values are incorporated into domestic legislation and policy, which affects the daily lives of citizens. This is exemplified by legislation and policy influenced by the UNCRPD, such as the Social Support Act (Wmo), Participation Act, amendments to the Act on Equal Treatment on the Grounds of Disability or Chronic Illness (WGBH/cz), and the Digital Government Act (Wdo), as well as the local inclusion agendas that municipalities are required to develop and implement. All of these affect the lives of many citizens. Social work, which is characterized by its proximity to the daily lives of citizens, often occurs within their immediate environments (Spierts et al., 2017; Wilken & Den Hollander, 2019). Social workers routinely engage in the lifeworld of citizens, particularly those with intellectual disabilities. The core actions of social workers can be encapsulated as understanding, connecting, strengthening, and ensuring, all geared towards supporting and enhancing quality of life (Wilken & Den Hollander, 2019). Social workers operate within the system world; their practice intersects with legislation, and where a duty is imposed by law, social workers must carry it out. Consequently, social work in the Netherlands is also governed by national legislation and policies that affect the perceptions and actions of social workers. The contemporary dominant view is effectively embodied by the motto 'de mens centraal' (the individual concerns at the centre of policies), which emphasizes the prioritization of individuals over regulatory frameworks, the adoption of a holistic approach, and the humanization of care and welfare interactions. Yet, this vision often encounters challenges when applied in everyday social work practice. Kampen (2019) notes that this unfairly portrays social workers as emissaries of a system world that has lost human contact. In social work in the Netherlands, policies from the Long-Term Care Act (WLZ), the Support Act (Wmo), the Participation Act and Youth Act, inter alia, evoke this image. The policies set conflicting expectations which makes the work of social workers awkward, as they have to flesh out those expectations (Kampen, 2019). Hence, social workers are pushed to navigate between both worlds and have to deal with the tension inherent in the double-edged role of citizen agent and state agent (Veldboer, 2019; Thompson, 2021). Of interest is how the CRPD filters into the social work performance, especially since this Convention emphasizes the responsibility, or rather, the obligation of the state parties to ensure and promote the rights of people with disabilities. Stated simplistically, the system world and lifeworld do not interact as extensions of each other, as interwoven and mutually informing, but as opposites, whereas in principle they are not (Mensink, 2015). Beside provisions that accommodate all kinds of citizen needs, the system world has become incomprehensible to many, in some cases has grown into a source of frustration, and more seriously, has fueled distrust among citizens (Van Wonderen & Peeters, 2022). This is equally valid for persons with intellectual disabilities. The needs concern basic human needs contained in the social construct of human rights. More precisely, human rights are a politically normative social construct. First, because human rights are a set of basic human values created by humans that evolved over time and are converted into explicit expectations, norms and obligations. Secondly, because human rights cannot simply be enforced and sustainably safeguarded at all times and all places. Third, recognizing the non-universality of human rights, the dissensus in human rights and the limited enforceability, is part of the power dynamics unfolding at every level in society (Gregg, 2012; Ife, 2009; Rancière, 2004). While social work engages in the system world and lifeworld, it has to relate to both realities in a flexible, creative and critical manner. Flexible and creative, because policy and the firm expectations it imposes on citizens and social workers may clash with the needs of citizens and the ethical code of social work. It demands a search for avenues and "solutions" that satisfy the concerns of stakeholders in both realms. This transforms them into social workers who have mastered strategies identified as *gymnastics of the sel*f and *gymnastics of the client* (Trappenburg et al., 2022). Taking a critical stance is imperative when basic needs are compromised or violated. This is what one may assume of social work especially since social justice and human rights are its central principles. It leads to the understanding that social work may be conceived as a social justice or human rights profession (Hubeau, 2018; Reynaert et al., 2023). This conception can be envisioned as an action framework consisting of five building blocks (Nachtergaele et al., 2017; Reynaert et al., 2023). In the complex dynamics in which social work operates, there is both systemworld-oriented action, lifeworld-oriented action, participatory action, joined-up action, and politicizing action (Reynaert et al., 2022; Reynaert et al., 2023). In a nutshell, the systemworld encompasses all the institutionalized societal resources required for the fulfillment of human rights. Lifeworld-oriented action involves social workers establishing connections with people's everyday lifeworld experiences. The emphasis lies less on institutionalized resources and more on the strategies individuals develop to cope with daily injustices and human rights violations. Participatory action involves engagement, connection, and reciprocity between social workers and citizens. Here, social workers prioritize the relational aspect of the practice of participation. Joined-up action aims to counteract structures and logics that obstruct the realization of human rights in social work. The over-organized professional landscape of social work often leads to fragmentation or compartmentalization. And lastly, politicizing action presumes questioning and challenging power dynamics. Social work is seen as a means to collectivize individual experiences of human rights violations and bring them into the public debate. It should be noted that the extent to which social work performance takes place will not always be concurrent and equal in each of the building blocks. Human rights, human rights violations, social exclusion, and social inclusion are closely interrelated notions. Human rights are pertinent both in combating social exclusion and, in doing so, in ensuring and advancing social inclusion.

1.2 Social exclusion

Irrespective of the disability, people with disabilities experience high risk of social exclusion due to physical, legal-political, social and cultural and economic barriers from society that they encounter in their everyday life (Rohwerder, 2015; Temple et al., 2020; Eurostat, 2022). Social exclusion is understood in the way Levitas et al (2007, p.25) have defined it as "a complex and multi-dimensional process [which] involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society […]." Social exclusion is also the result of a process leading to a rupture from society and its social bonds, which is particularly experienced by marginalized groups or individuals who lack power and prestige (Link & Phelan, 2001; Buckmaster & Thomas, 2009). Persons with intellectual disability are more likely to be deprived (Hall, 2010;

Ditchman et al., 2013). Given their awareness of the stigma associated with their condition, adults with mild intellectual disabilities frequently face societal discrimination, which significantly impairs their ability to fully participate in society and diminishes their sense of acceptance and belonging (Giesbers et al., 2020; Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey, 2020).

The causes of social exclusion are varied and manifest across several life domains, including interpersonal relationships, community integration and participation, rights, material conditions, physical and emotional well-being, and personal development. These factors can lead to multiple disadvantages and have a profound impact on an individual's perceived quality of life (Schalock et al., 2002; Verdugo et al., 2012). With respect to interpersonal relations, community integration and participation, and rights (legal rights, equality, accessibility), obstacles are discerned in environmental factors, such as the physical surroundings. Barriers pertain to the availability, adequacy, and accessibility of facilities and resources in communities and are key factors influencing the social participation of people with intellectual disabilities (Bossink et al. 2017; Jacinto et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2022).

Regarding rights, attention must be given to their full realization, particularly in the realm of political participation. The United Nations Development Programme identifies several challenges that prevent individuals with intellectual disabilities from effectively engaging in political life (UNDP, 2021). One significant hindrance is the legal framework, which often restricts persons with mild intellectual disabilities from voting or standing for election. This is compounded by the inaccessibility of electoral systems, facilities, and materials. For instance, individuals with intellectual disabilities may encounter informational challenges, such as the lack of plain language or Easy Read materials, as well as poorly structured electoral processes and facilities. Additionally, guardianship systems often deprive individuals of the legal authority to make decisions in various areas of their lives (FRA, 2010).

In terms of life domains such as well-being (material, physical, emotional) and personal development, the majority of people with mild intellectual disabilities find themselves on the fringes of the labor market, potentially missing out on the many benefits that work has to offer (Garrels & Høybråten Sigstad, 2021). In neoliberal politics, which has dominated the Netherlands since the 1990s, economic participation is generally measured by having employment, preferably with remuneration. In that regard, it is worth noting that the employment rate of people with intellectual disabilities is among the lowest compared to other groups in the population. If they hold paid positions, they are predominantly situated within the lowest income brackets, resulting in an overrepresentation in poverty statistics (Schuurman et al., 2013; Lysaght et al., 2015; Vijlbrief & Van Mourik, 2020). A regular job, preferably paid, gives status and purpose to an individual's existence, allows for learning new skills, promotes social interaction with others in society, and provides opportunities for financial autonomy (Ellenkamp et al., 2016).
Employment is said to be one of the central arenas for self-actualization in adult life, and the role of worker can be said to be a primary life role function (Lysaght & Cobigo, 2014). Employment serves as an important means of structuring daily life and a source of pride and fulfillment for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Lysaght et al., 2009). Research has shown positive correlations between employment and mental health, and more broadly a positive correlation between employment and quality of life (Jahoda et al., 2008; Dean et al., 2018).
Also in the social and cultural domains of life persons with mild intellectual disabilities experience social exclusion. It covers a wide range of facilities and activities involving productive and consumptive use of the opportunities of art, culture and sports. Despite the well-documented benefits of arts, culture, and sports, which include improvements in physical health, social and emotional well-being (such as fostering friendships and boosting self-confidence), and cognitive development, individuals with mild intellectual disabilities often find themselves falling behind in participating in mainstream activities (Gratton, 2020; Merrells et

al., 2018; McConkey, 2016). If there is participation, it is mostly considered therapeutic or as activities offered by day activity centers. Again, negative attitudes, lack of accessibility of services and transportation, and lack of effective or adequate laws, regulations and policies are prominent barriers to participation in arts, culture and sports for people with mild intellectual disabilities. In addition, Leahy and Ferri (2022) classify lack of funding and adequate services and lack of consultation with, and involvement of, persons with disabilities in cultural organizations as a barrier to participation. Attitudinal challenges are found in persistent stereotypes and false assumptions about intellectual disability that are often a major obstacle to participation (UNDP, 2021). Such attitudes, fueled and perpetuated by stereotypes and preconceptions, are not limited to a single domain of life; rather, they span all areas of life (Pelleboer-Gunnink, 2020).

1.3 Social inclusion

Numerous advantages come from actively seeking social inclusion. Compiling a list of these contributions requires little effort. It contributes to personal development, to the creation of inclusive and equal bonds, it helps building alliances within local communities, it promotes positive perceptions and positive community attitudes (McConkey et al., 2013), it creates better opportunities to engage in social interactions and improve social skills (Louw et al., 2020), it fosters positive personal outcomes such as growing independence and confidence based on personal achievement, it promotes opportunities for autonomy and to make choices (Verdonschot et al., 2008), it secures valued social roles (Boland & Guerin, 2022; Merrells et al., 2018), it encourages and opens ways to naturally occurring friendships (Van Asselt et al., 2015), it combats poverty, promotes career maintenance and career advancement for employees with intellectual disability (Emerson, 2007; Carlson et al., 2020), and social inclusion is linked to enhanced quality of life, mental and physical health and economic security (Bacon et al., 2011).

1.3.1 Defining social inclusion

Although social inclusion seems worth pursuing, the concept is surrounded by many differences in meaning and interpretation. Ample efforts have been made to capture the notion of social inclusion which has led to a terminological maze (Amado et al., 2013; Simplican et al., 2015; Bigby et al., 2017). By and large, this conceptual labyrinth encompasses three main threads, which include components and life domains, barriers and facilitators, and meaning and measurement. First, components of social inclusion cover sense of belonging, being accepted as an individual and uniqueness, having meaningful and reciprocal relationships with non-disabled community members, having voice and choice, feeling competent, having service provider support and natural support (Amado et al., 2013; Cobigo et al., 2016; Hall, 2009; Jansen et al., 2014). These components intersect with life domains such as work, housing, recreation, leisure, and a multitude of barriers and facilitators identified in accomplishing the social inclusion objective. Furthermore, barriers and facilitators vary in contextual factors (physical accessibility, communication, social spaces, professional and community attitudes, local social infrastructure, economic expectations and facilities, legislation and policies) and personal factors such as intrinsic motivation, goal setting, level of functioning, and self-esteem (Hall, 2005; Krober, 2008; Cobigo et al., 2012; Bredewold, 2014; Moonen, 2015; Simplican et al., 2015; Brummel, 2017; Overmars-Marx et al., 2017). Thirdly, complexity to the inclusion discourse is added with the question of measurability. On the one hand a subjective meaning of inclusion is centered on the individual experience and connecting life stories (Cobigo et al., 2016; Meininger, 2010), and on the other hand, there is a desire to gauge inclusion in terms of quantities (Amado et al., 2013; Asunta et al., 2021; Jansen et al., 2014) as the argument persists that social inclusion is too important not to measure (Coombs et al., 2013). Martin and Cobigo (2011), however, cautioned that the nature of the measure used has a significant impact on the outcome of inclusion. Understanding and measuring social inclusion as a comprehensive concept is strongly impacted by the indicators selected. They furthermore note that objective measures yield higher rates than subjective measures. Consequently, when the person's subjective experience is measured, achieving social inclusion seems further away than counting participation in, for instance, social or leisure activities, work or receiving support from an informal helper.

Despite the conceptual maze, there are definitions of social inclusion that can provide guidance for research, policy-making and social work practice. Looking at abovementioned three threads it is possible to roughly identify a division of social inclusion definitions. On one hand, there are those that align with a system world orientation, while on the other hand, there are those that explicitly address the life world. A compelling example of a definition that targets the system world concerns that of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In General Comment No. 4 they state that "inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, […] methods, approaches, structures and strategies […] to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all persons […] with an equitable and participatory […] experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences." (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, p. 4). This definition is contextualized in inclusive education (Article 24), but is equally applicable to other areas of life. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs employs a comparable definition, albeit without contextualizing it within a single life domain. It underscores the social disadvantage in the light of one or more social categorizations: "social inclusion is defined as the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights." (2016, p. 20).

Both definitions are fundamental, strategic, and strongly aimed at the macro level. Conversely, definitions that prioritize individuals' immediate subjective experiences can be characterized as adopting a lifeworld orientation. O'Brien (1989), for instance, asserts that social inclusion is facilitated by the achievement of five interdependent dimensions of human experience that assist adults with intellectual disabilities to:

- grow in their relationships via community participation
- exercise choice and control
- experience dignity in occupying valued social roles,
- share ordinary places through community presence,
- contribute to community through the discovery and/or expression of their gifts and/or capacities.

Cobigo et al. (2012) seek a combination where inclusion can be witnessed in the life world and system world. They define social inclusion as a series of complex interactions between environmental factors and personal characteristics that provide the following:

- opportunities to access public goods and services;
- valued and expected social roles of one's choosing based on his/her age, gender and culture;
- recognition as a competent individual and trusted person to perform social roles in the community;
- opportunities to belong to a social network within which one receives and contributes support.

In short, despite the fact that social inclusion lacks an unequivocal definition, the various proposals provide guidance for research, policy-making and practice. For social workers, it can provide a guide to clarify and substantiate their actions and initiatives - however small - aimed at social inclusion. It can also serve as a framework for making promoting inclusion a tangible reality, while helping social workers recognize the central role of social work in promoting inclusion. In less problematic terms, the array of definitions affords social workers options that best fit their practice. This opens the door to different approaches in advancing social inclusion.

1.3.2 Approaches to social inclusion

In the pursuit of social inclusion several approaches are put forward. With distinct angles, proposed strategies, and differing focal points, each approach possesses its own merits. A multi-perspective approach encompassing bottom-up, middle and top-down strategies is proposed by Kröber (2016). When applied concurrently, these strategies are most effective. The various actors involved - persons with intellectual disabilities, service providers and their employees, regular stakeholders, and the government - each have their own logic (interests, goals, and language). The challenge lies in harmonizing these sometimes conflicting logics to optimally stimulate and facilitate inclusion practices (Kröber, 2016). Moreover, in an earlier study Kröber (2008) highlights “entry strategies” which amount to an implementation strategy that deals with how to introduce and execute a new vision and mission focused on the promotion of social inclusion. Even though it considers the socio-political environment, the organization, the employees and the people with disabilities including their informal network, this approach begins with the perspective of service providers, recognizing their pivotal role in fostering the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities. It emphasizes addressing the administrative responsibilities inherent in this process while acknowledging the necessity of organizational transformation.

Another approach places socially valued roles at the center to promote social inclusion, underscoring the dynamic interaction between individual traits and abilities and environmental factors (Cobigo et al., 2016). The performance of social roles hinges upon the interplay of personal and environmental factors. For individuals, a role holds significance when it resonates with their personal expectations, choices, and needs, while for a collective, it gains meaning when it fulfills communal expectations, choices, and needs (Cobigo et al., 2016**)**. Possessing socially valued roles bolsters self-perceived competence, reinforces the experiences of being valued by others and nourishes mutual satisfaction. This fosters trust, reciprocity and the sense of belonging (Cobigo et al., 2016, Thomas & Wolfensberger, 2006). In the framework, the authors place a variety of tools between the personal and environmental factors that can increase social inclusion. These tools include legislation and policies, community supports and services, anti-stigma and antidiscrimination initiatives, and system monitoring and evaluation.

An alternative of the aforementioned approaches highlights two interrelated and overlapping life domains, namely interpersonal relationships and community participation. Together with a set of elements that shape pathways to and from social inclusion grouped into individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and socio-political clusters, Simplican et al. (2015) frame this as an ecological model. The first life domain, interpersonal relationships, comprises category, structure and function. Category refers to social connections that range from intimate relationships to superficial encounters. Structure relates to social networks and covers duration of relationships, frequency and intensity of encounters, reciprocity and location. Function indicates relationships that fulfill emotional or instrumental needs. The second domain, community participation, is distinguished in a similar threefold manner. Category signifies activities in the community (leisure, political, religious, cultural activities, productive and consumptive activities). Structure points to settings that either can be segregated from mainstream society, semi-segregated and non-segregated (mainstream or integrated). Level refers to being engaged in - activities in - the community and can be described in terms of participation ladders focused on labor participation or political participation (Arnstein, 1969; Divosa, 2011), or interaction patterns between people with and without a disability (Bredewold, 2014; Bredewold & Slendebroek-Meints, 2013). The ecological model appears comprehensive given its applicability to any domain of life accounting for factors that can be either conducive or impeding at different levels in society. It does not provide a tool for measuring social inclusion either objectively or subjectively, but rather provides starting points for developing and evaluating research, policies and programs. Simplican et al. (2015) argue that the ecological model is an appropriate guide for future research questions and approaches that can move social inclusion forward. As yet, one empirical evaluation of this model is available. With the aim of validating the model, Meys et al. (2021) confirm that the ecological model helps in obtaining an overview of enabling and impeding conditions, and conclude that some factors on the individual and interpersonal level require further detail such as adding personality traits as a factor affecting social inclusion and a division between formal social networks and informal social networks. They furthermore add dynamics as a dimension that covers each level of factors. Dynamics - both over time and between enabling and hindering factors - would provide more insight into the evolution of social inclusion.

All of the approaches discussed could reasonably adopt the prefix 'ecological,' provided it is understood in a broad, multiperspectival sense—encompassing diverse forms of knowledge such as experiential, practical, and scientific knowledge, as well as varied strategies. Additionally, these approaches are often multilevel (spanning micro, mezzo, and macro levels), multifactorial, and interconnected. Some approaches highlight this ecological perspective more than others, as Simplican et al. (2015) did, for example, by explicitly incorporating the word 'ecological' in the name of the model. The various approaches, captured in models, serve as frameworks for research, policy and practice. However, critical evaluations of the application of these approaches are scarce. This study aims to gain valuable insights by delving deeper into the practical applications of the ecological approaches.

1.3.3 Social workers promoting social inclusion

Guided by the possible practical applications of approaches on social inclusion, the follow-up question is how social work, particularly in the context of supporting people with intellectual disabilities, can contribute to social inclusion. Since the implementation of the UNCRPD presents challenges for all actors concerned, including government and businesses, some have called for a reorientation of social work vision and practice labelling it as a new professionalism (Kröber, 2009; Kröber & van Dongen, 2011; Kröber & Verdonschot, 2012). New professionalism is defined by principles such as relinquishing control, prioritizing 'ensuring that' rather than caring for, collaboratively solving problems, and leveraging experiential expertise. This results in a distinct appeal to professionals. Empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities involves granting them greater autonomy, collaborating with their support network to pursue their aspirations, offering tailored assistance within society, and fostering social connections. This entails different competencies and approaches prompted by a paradigm shift from institutional thinking to support thinking. The first paradigm focuses on the disability, concerns a value orientation that views disability as a deviation that requires normalization, maintains segregation between people with and without (intellectual) disabilities as the leading mindset, puts the social worker in charge and fulfills the role of expert, and puts the focus on special facilities and group homes. The support paradigm (Gomez et al., 2021; Kröber & Verdonschot, 2012) is dedicated to valuing and fostering equality, diversity, and inclusion in the community. The capabilities of the person are the focal point, not their disabilities. Control lies with the person and his network, experiential knowledge is recognized and occupies a pivotal place. What matters is the person who participates in society and utilizes mainstream facilities. However, the idealistic content of the support paradigm is reaching its limits; practical implementation is challenging and little progress has been made with the complex process of social integration, in which people with an intellectual disability connect with other people in order to shape an environment that is viable and meaningful to them (Reerink et al., 2017). Reerink et al. (2017) therefore advocate a reappraisal of the role of the social worker in the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities. They propose the dignity paradigm as an alternative that builds on the prevailing support paradigm towards persons with intellectual disabilities. The difference with the support paradigm is best described in the following key words (see table 1.1): people with desires and experiences rather than people with rights and obligations, the notion of human beings seeing persons with intellectual disabilities as fellow human beings rather than citizens, empathizing with and stimulating rather than organizing support, living in a vital network within or outside a care facility rather than putting emphasis on using mainstream facilities, and expectant acceptance, which holds acceptance of the disability and remaining optimistic towards the person's possibilities rather than integration and inclusion.

Paradigm	**Institutional**	**Support**	**Dignity**
	Emphasizes the disability rather than the individual.	Emphasis on people with rights and obligations. Rightsholder.	Emphasis on people with desires and experiences.
	Views disability as a deviation that requires normalization	Views persons with disabilities as citizens.	Views persons with disabilities as fellow human beings
	Maintains segregation between people with and without disabilities as the leading mindset.	Organizing support utlizing a wide range of resources and strategies in mitigating disability challenges, fostering growth etc.	Empathizing with and assisting in discovering enriching experiences and reason of being.
	Puts the social worker in charge and fulfills the role of expert.	Putting emphasis on using mainstream facilities. Experiential knowledge takes on a central role.	Living in a vital network within or outside care facility.
	Focus on special facilities and group homes.	Integration and inclusion.	Expectant acceptance.

Table 1.1: Paradigms in the field of intellectual disabilities.

New professionalism, as articulated by Kröber and Van Dongen (2011) and Kröber and Verdonschot (2012) aims at competencies and approaches that are in line with the support paradigm and ties in with the promotion of social inclusion. The later-introduced dignity paradigm

(Reerink et al., 2017; Reerink, 2021) also connects with new professionalism, albeit with a different emphasis - namely, a relational and lifeworld orientation where priority is given to connection and meaningfulness - whereas the support paradigm is chiefly focused on modifying the systemic framework and endeavors to achieve inclusion through engagement with mainstream facilities. To date, studies have provided general answers about which competences and approaches there are, how, and to what extent they contribute to social inclusion (Verdoolaege & Onderwater, 2015; Kröber & Verdonschot, 2011; Van Vulpen & Verdoorn, 2011; Krober, 2008; Kröber & Verdonschot, 2012; Wilken & Knevel, 2016; Moonen, 2015). By and large, the answers remain well intended presumptions.

To grasp what contributes to the promotion of social inclusion more is needed than solely understanding what competences and approaches are instrumental to that goal. Social workers operate in a dynamic practice that involves a great deal of variables at different levels that facilitate, but can also hinder pathways to social inclusion (Simplican et al., 2015). Within the literature little consideration is given to the interplay between these variables, noting that interconnectedness merely informs about the connection between factors whereas interplay explicitly addresses the interaction between multiple subjects, objects or events to produce effect or impact (Blom & Morén, 2011; Mingers, 2014; Bool et al., 2019). The interplay of multiple variables inherently constitutes social work practices. As previously outlined, social work can be viewed as a profession rooted in human rights principles. The UN Convention seems to act as a driving force, shifting the perception of social inclusion from a mere aspiration or benevolent act to an inherent human entitlement. Despite the CRPD's emphasis on state parties' obligations, social workers also bear significant responsibility in bringing this vision to fruition. In relation to social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities, Knevel and Wilken (2016) underscore the significance of two distinct perspectives in social work: inclusion-focused social work and inclusive social work. Inclusion-focused social work entails collective endeavors aimed at attaining desired inclusion targets or fostering inclusivity within diverse settings such as neighborhoods, community centers, or sports clubs. Inclusive social work, on the other hand, emphasizes establishing cooperation on an equitable basis from the outset, grounded in an understanding of the individual's lifeworld. Both perspectives advocate for the active involvement of persons with intellectual disabilities. Involvement through participation holds recognition of experiential knowledge, deeming persons with intellectual disabilities active agents that exert their influence in social work practice, policymaking and research. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that individuals with intellectual disabilities play an active part in this research.

1.4 Research aim and questions

1.4.1 Aim

This research delves into the social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities and explores the ways in which social workers can facilitate this process. In doing so, this research intends to deepen and nuance conceptual and professional knowledge (of social workers) on how to promote social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. To achieve this, insight is required into the conditions that foster social inclusion. These conditions encompass approaches in social work, social workers' competencies, and key aspects of practices that affect their pursuit of social inclusion.

1.4.2 Research question

Key question: Informed by a human rights perspective, how can social workers foster the social inclusion of persons with mild intellectual disabilities?

Sub questions

1. What practices are conducive to social work seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities?
2. Which competencies are instrumental to social work fostering social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities?
3. What aspects ought to be met by an ecological approach in social work to facilitate the social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities?
4. How can adults with mild intellectual disabilities be included in research and practice to enhance social work efforts toward their social inclusion?

1.5 Scientific contribution and practical significance

Incited by the United Nations adoption (2006) and ratification in The Netherlands (2016) of the UNCRPD, social work practice – that includes the national social work association, service providers, social workers, and advocacy - needs to put an inclusion focused approach to the forefront (Krober, 2008; Kröber & Verdonschot, 2011; Kröber & Verdonschot, 2012; Moonen, 2015; Van Vulpen & Verdoorn, 2011; Wilken & Knevel, 2016). An inclusion focused approach calls for specific insights into knowledge, skills, interventions and practices that advance social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. The contributions to the body of knowledge hoped for in this study consist of a more nuanced understanding of inclusion-focused practices in the field of social work through increasing the empirical evidence reported in the literature. This should lead to (1) enhancing the comprehension of social work as an inclusion-focused profession to be achieved by bolstering the body of knowledge aligned with its core tenets of human rights and social justice and (2) insights into the practices that generate social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities. This entails knowledge about who fulfills which roles, what prerequisites are essential, what actions a social worker undertakes, and how these elements interconnect; (3) a framework for inclusion-focused social work that can be employed in research (developing the research question, the research design, the process of evaluating and interpreting data), and policy-making processes.

Practical relevance lies in the bottom-up approach and in collaboratively finding and assessing answers. Practice plays a significant role in articulating the research questions and identifying what is beneficial for application. The research will result in insights into the actions of social workers that can hinder as well as enhance social inclusion, and it will result in practical tools that can be utilized in practice to advance social inclusion. In doing so, participation in this research promotes practical expertise. The answers and expected solutions are designed by the participants of the community of development and are implemented in their social work practice. Implementation consists in testing and refining of the answers and expected solutions. This research approach thus contributes to the development of competencies of social workers and may affect social work practice itself.

In sum, the relevance of this research primarily lies with service providers, social workers, and experts by experience. Additionally, it is significant for educational institutions that train social workers, as they can benefit from the insights gained. Finally, the research is relevant for researchers and policymakers, who can utilize the findings for analysis and guidance in policy development.

1.6 Research design and methodology

Embedded in the Disability Studies tradition, our research design adheres to the guiding principle of 'nothing about us, without us, for us’, and more specifically it is informed by what is known as second generation inclusive research approaches (Nind, 2016; Strnadová & Walmsley, 2018; Walmsley et al., 2018). In the field of scientific research, this movement has resulted in a wide variety of participative and inclusive research designs (Frankena et al., 2015; Nind & Vinha, 2014; Strnadová et al., 2016; Walmsley & Johnson, 2003). Walmsley and Johnson (2003) introduced the term “Inclusive Research” with respect to emerging research practices with and by people with intellectual disabilities, which encompasses three principles upon which inclusive research is based:

1. The research must address issues that really matter to people with intellectual disabilities that ultimately leads to their improved lives;
2. The research must access and represent the views and experiences of people with intellectual disabilities;
3. People with intellectual disabilities need to be treated with respect by the research community.

Inclusive research embraces participatory and emancipatory approaches to research (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003). Action research, typically associated with the adjective participatory, lends itself well to emancipatory processes and goals. It emphasizes people's lived experiences, individual and social change and the co-construction of knowledge. The aim of this research was to bring about changes that contribute to a more inclusive social work practice.

The present research is informed by a human rights agenda (UNCRPD) and approaches this agenda from a constructivist perspective. In doing so, it embraces a critical-emancipatory and, what Mertens (2007) calls, a transformative research paradigm. On the one hand, in close collaboration with the stakeholders, the research aims at structural social change in practice that is emancipatory for both social workers and adults with mild intellectual disabilities. The research participants assume responsibility for shaping and conducting the research, including finding potential solutions to real-world issues. Hence, they bear co-responsibility in making it work in practice. As a consequence, this leads to a reversal in conventional knowledge production hierarchies, where the sole responsibility does not lie with the researcher. On the other hand, the research concurrently aims at the enhancement of social justice and furtherance of human rights as fundamental principles of the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2007). In sum, this study interfaces with several research paradigms and research designs, as visualized in figure 1.1.

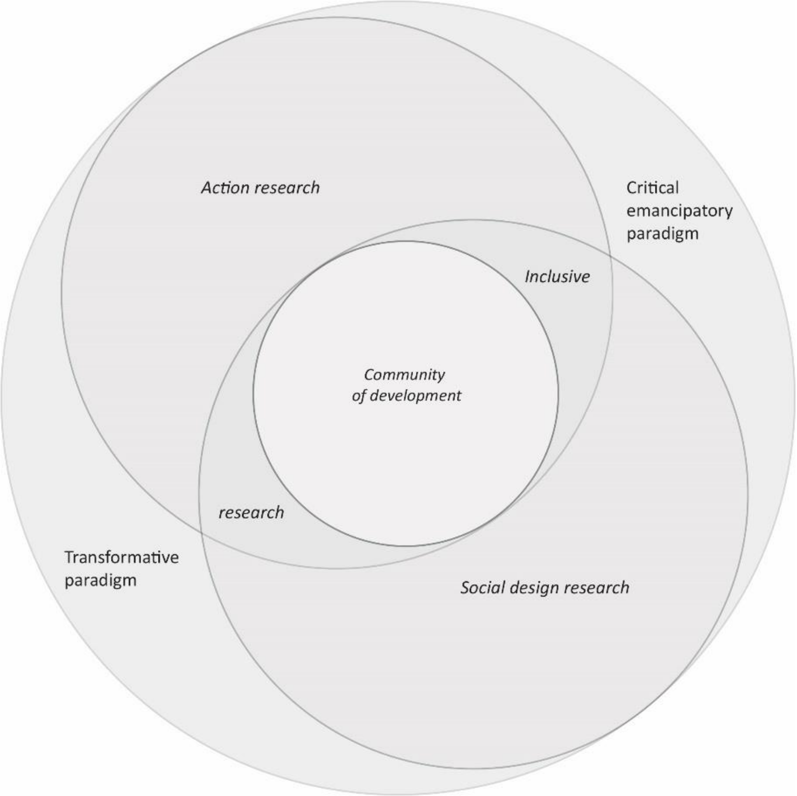

Figure 1.1: Model of interfacing research paradigms, research designs and the position of a community of development.

Elaborating on the study's interfacing research paradigms and designs, the project emphasizes participation, inclusion, and dignity in interactions between participants and the researcher. It recognizes equality in three sources of knowledge—scientific, practical, and experiential—pursuing social justice as epistemic justice. This has ensured the choice of a methodology that accommodates these values, guiding the organizational form - in this case, the community of development - and the selection of research participants. The project presupposes dialogue between participants, and participants and the researcher, it requires a democratic process, and it must bring about emancipatory change both in the (involved) person and in practice through action. The project is in alignment with Guba and Lincoln's (1989) argument for constructivist responsive evaluation which points to the centrality of the hermeneutic process and authenticity criteria, that are relevant to this research, particularly catalytic authenticity. In their footsteps, Anderson and Herr (2015) grouped the quality guidelines into five validities, namely democratic, dialogic, process, catalytic, and outcome validity. These were adopted as quality standards for this study.

1.6.1 Community of development

The study's critical-emancipatory and transformative nature calls for combining participatory action research with social design research (Joore et al., 2018, 2021; Margolin & Margolin, 2002; Nind, 2014). In this project, we utilized a model termed the Community of Development (CoD) (Wilken et al., 2021), which enables integration of participatory action research and social design research. This CoD model draws inspiration from Wenger's (2010) concept of a community of practice (CoP). Essentially, a CoP operates as a social learning system within a specific social setting, fostering a collaborative process of sense-making. This duality consists of participation and reification. The first involves active involvement in activities, conversations and reflections. The latter involves producing physical and conceptual artifacts such as words, tools, concepts and methods. The CoD includes both participation and reification, linking this dual process to the goals of participatory action and social design research: producing knowledge, designing solutions, bringing about (social) change, and fostering the personal and collective professionalization of the participants (Beest et al., 2017). For this study two separate CoD's were established, each located in a different region (Wageningen and Amsterdam). In Wageningen, social workers set up a sheltered employment project named The Football Workshop, which is accommodated at the local football club. Adults with mild intellectual disabilities, called ‘football workers,’ support the volunteers who perform maintenance work at the club. The social workers and football workers organize training sessions and play weekly home and away football matches against teams from the local community and beyond. The Amsterdam context concerns a metropolitan area where adults with mild intellectual disabilities receive ambulatory support.

In a CoD, one of the principles is that all relevant stakeholders are represented. In the case of this study, adults with a mild intellectual disability and social workers were the key participants. Cod’s are supported by a researcher and a facilitator. The researcher focuses on the research process (data collection), the facilitator is responsible for managing the group dynamics; both prepare the CoD meetings together, attend the meetings, provide (visual) reports of each meeting to participants and reflect on the meetings with each other as well as with the participants.

1.6.2 Selecting participants

Selection of the settings of the communities of development was based on: (1) the service providers are specialized and focused on providing services to people with intellectual disabilities, (2) the service provider holds a vision and mission statement on inclusion and inclusion-focused social work, (3) geographic distribution, i.e. both urban and rural environment, (4) variation in type of service, that is, both community social work and day-care services.

Selection criteria for the recruitment of adults with mild intellectual disabilities included being interested in the subject matter of social inclusion, being motivated to participate in the project, willingness to and being capable of sharing life experiences and being prepared to act as a “critical friend” to the other participants (Embregts et al., 2018). To define intellectual disability, the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD, 2021; Schalock et al., 2021) employs three criteria comprising cognitive functioning, adaptive behavior and age of onset: “a condition characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior that originates before the age of 22.” Alongside intellectual functioning such as learning, reasoning, and problem-solving, adaptive behavior is crucial in identifying intellectual disability. Adaptive behavior encompasses the conceptual, social, and practical skills that individuals acquire and use in their everyday lives. In the Dutch context, it is common to interpret the severity of intellectual disability across different levels, with mild intellectual disability defined as an IQ score ranging from 50 to 85, alongside the two additional criteria that form part of the definition (Douma & Ter Avest-Elema, 2022). The adults with mild intellectual disabilities who participated in the study were capable of engaging in the CoD meetings, contributing to discussions, asking and answering questions, providing suggestions, and sharing their own experiences. The researchers and social workers demonstrated their ability to meet the functional and communicative needs of the adults with mild intellectual disabilities by making information accessible through careful partitioning and repetition, as well as utilizing both verbal and nonverbal communication (Embregts et al., 2018). These skills were taken into account in advance when determining how to work together as a collective during the meetings. As far as the social workers were concerned, selection criteria for the recruitment were: (a) being employed as a social worker working with people with mild intellectual disabilities, (b) having an interest in the subject matter “inclusion” and (c) motivation to bring about change in the social work field aimed at promoting inclusion.

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1.6.3 Data collection, analysis, sharing and interpretation

Data collection occurred on two tracks: first through literature research, and second through the community of development. The literature review offered a comprehensive understanding of the overarching research subject and facilitated the identification of fundamental concepts within the research area (Knevel et al., 2023). Moreover, it served as a basis for both evaluating and interpreting the empirical data collected from the communities of development.

Data collection through community of development

The two communities of development served as the basis for collecting data. Both communities separately ran for two years with a frequency of gathering in each 6 to 8 weeks. Data collection consisted of audio recordings of all CoD meetings, visual records of each meeting - each time these were shared with the participants for verification - and all tangible results produced in the meetings such as photos of activities during the meetings, photos of notes on white boards, empathy maps, mind maps, brainstorm papers, sketches and analyses. The visual reports also contained a limited amount of written language, which succinctly explained the observations of the researcher and facilitator.

Analysis, sharing and interpretation

Analysis was carried out in several ways. Initially, a thematic analysis was performed on data obtained from audio recordings of the CoD meetings. This analysis adhered to the conventional steps of open, axial, and selective coding. Secondly, with help of the CIMO framework (Context, Intervention, Mechanism, Outcome) a descriptive analysis was made of each CoD. This twofold approach to data collection and sharing supports the hermeneutical process, the ownership of those involved, and democratic validity (Anderson & Herr, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The thematic analysis was principally aimed at answering a research sub question on the competencies and behaviors of social workers that fit inclusion-focused performance. The second analysis contained a comprehensive description of the collaborative process of designing solutions and what conditions facilitated inclusion-focused social work utilizing the designed solutions; this was sent to the participants for reading and discussion in physical meetings. The purpose of this approach was to supplement, refine and verify the analysis. Additionally, the use of the CIMO framework enabled the identification of generative practices that promote the social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. A third analysis comprised the prototyping and testing of the designed solution. Each round of prototype testing yielded data that were evaluated with the CoD participants in order to make adjustments for the next round of testing.

1.6.4 Ethics

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study in four ways: (1) physical meetings to explain the project and to discover the motivations and potential contributions of the participants. These meetings were one to one, sometimes with two potential participants and on occasion a coach accompanied the persons with an intellectual disability. (2) a visual representation for people with intellectual disabilities concerning information of the research project, the roles and responsibilities. The visualization needed to comply with accessible language criteria and was discussed with the participants to be recruited. (3) signing of a general cooperation agreement with the partner organizations containing topics such as purpose of cooperation, project management, and rights to project results. (4) informed consent was recorded with voice recorder. Oral informed consent was chosen rather than written consent.

All subjects involved cannot be identified. Privacy by default was applied in this research project. This means that the research adopted the highest possible privacy settings. In this study, this amounts to anonymity where no characteristics of research participants were recorded.

The research proposal was submitted for ethical review at the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (ECO-SD, reference number: 2022-6) and at the Ethical Review Committee (ETC) of the University of Humanistic Studies. Taking into account the laws and regulations regarding scientific research, it was advised to continue the research. As explanatory commentary and advice on the research proposal, it was requested that attention be paid to and kept in mind the possible risks for the participants (ECO-SD). In addition, there were concerns about the combination of four forms of informed consent (ECT), particularly that group informed consent via a voice recorder would not suffice.

1.7 Reading guide

The first chapter provides an introduction to the key subjects of this dissertation: human rights, social exclusion, social inclusion, and strategies to promote social inclusion. Furthermore, it outlines the research methodology. Chapters two through five delve into the sub-questions. Table 1.2 concisely displays the sub-questions, the chapters they address, and the corresponding publications.

Research sub-questions	**Chapter**	**Article**
What practices are conducive to social work seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities?	2	Social Workers and Generative Practices for the Inclusion of People with Intellectual Disabilities. Published in *Journal of Social Work (2025).*
Which competencies are instrumental to social work seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities?	3	Social Workers Putting into Practice the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Published in *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work (2023).*
What aspects ought to be met by an ecological approach in social work to facilitate the social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities?	4	Towards inclusive social work – putting an ecological approach into practice. Published in *Relational Social Work (2024).*
How can voices of adults with mild intellectual disabilities be incorporated in research and practice so as to advance social work practice seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities?	5	Experiences of Inclusive Action and Social Design Research with Social Workers and People with Intellectual Disabilities. Published in *Social Sciences (2022).*

Table 1.2: Overview of research sub-questions related to the thesis' chapters, and resulting publications.

In chapter two we identify social work practices that appear conducive to seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. We refer to the practices as generative and are grouped into three broad umbrella terms: agency, advocacy, and intrapreneurship. This chapter has been accepted for publication as an article in the *Journal of Social Work*. The naming of the generative practices reveals a connection with social work and human rights-based practices. This theme is explored in the third chapter. It entails a comparison of social work competencies within the United States, England, and the Netherlands, detailing their role in advancing the social inclusion of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities. It analyzes and evaluates the competency profiles and code of ethics that apply in the three countries and are related to the UN CRPD. It provides some insight into the role of human rights accorded to social work in different countries. This chapter was published as an article in the *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*. Chapter four revolves around approaches to pursuing social inclusion. It is inspired by the ecological approach put forward by Simplican et al. (2015), yet it offers some valuable additions and reframes the approach as dynamics comprising dynamics of change, dynamics of enabling and impeding variables at different levels, dynamics of participation and influence, and dynamics of intersectionality. This chapter was published as an article in the journal *Relational Social Work*. Chapter five highlights the methodology of inclusive research, action research, and social design research, with an emphasis on lessons learned in conducting a combined inclusive action research and social design research project. This chapter was published as an article in a special issue of *Social Sciences*. The final chapter reflects on the main findings of the study. It devotes considerable attention to the research process reflecting on research quality along five dimensions known as democratic, dialogic, catalytic, process and result quality. In doing so, it also discusses implications and provides some ideas for how the findings can be applied in social work education, practice, and research.

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2

CHAPTER

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Social Workers and Generative Practices for the Inclusion of People with Intellectual Disabilities

Abstract

Incited by the United Nations adoption and ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, social workers are prompted to increasingly pursue an inclusion-focused approach. Our research was carried out in the Netherlands and sought to identify social work practices conducive to fostering social inclusion, in this case with respect to adults with mild intellectual disabilities.

For 2½ years, a responsive methodology was employed in a combined action and social design research. Sixteen social workers and five people with intellectual disabilities were involved. The study was conducted in three different settings across the Netherlands, both rural and urban.

Three social work practices were captured that generate social inclusion: agency, advocacy, and intrapreneurship.

Identification of generative practices provides guidance to social workers in shaping the promotion of social inclusion. It provides guidance in reflecting on past and current inclusion-focused social work performance, it may encourage social workers to adopt inclusion-focused pathways inspired by agency, advocacy and intrapreneurship, and knowledge of generative practices toward social inclusion can help to specify social workers' competencies.

2.1 Background

Spurred by the United Nations adoption (2006) and the relatively recent ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in The Netherlands (2016), social work practice - service providers, social workers, and advocacy - is facing a demand to professional transformation towards an inclusion focused approach. The CRPD contains innovative components such as a new understanding of equality, that is, transformative equality, an extended notion of discrimination, and a further conceptualization of disability deeming disabled people as rights holders and human rights subjects (Degener 2016).

Implementation and realization of the convention requires changes in legislation, policy, and practice thus also presenting major challenges for social work supporting adults with mild intellectual disabilities (Schippers et al., 2018; Schuurman, 2018). In the realm of social work, it calls for what is termed as a 'new professionalism', encompassing a value orientation towards equivalence, a positive interpretation of human difference, an optimistic view of human capabilities and community resources, and being equipped with person-centered and community-centered approaches (Kröber & Verdonschot, 2012).

However, research on such reorientation has revealed discrepancies between theory, policy, and practice, which impede the realization of social inclusion in the practice of supporting people with mild intellectual disabilities (Wilken & Knevel, 2016). Examples are found in social workers' personal and professional orientation and contextual frameworks. In the field of intellectual disability, studies point at individual factors such as the social workers' adherence to institutional thinking, social workers' doubts about their role and competence in promoting inclusion, how they deal with bureaucracy and new service models, and the ability to see and dare to use discretionary space (Boland & Guerin, 2023; Davelaar et al., 2018; Kröber 2008; Overmars-Marx, 2011; Kröber & Verdonschot, 2012). Contextual factors encompass behaviors of community members such as unwittingly identifying people with intellectual disabilities with the role of client rather than neighborhood resident or citizen, negative personal experiences in the living environment such as being ignored on the street or facing negative expressions, and the (limited) availability of facilities (Bigby & Wiesel, 2019; Bredewold, 2014; Davelaar et al., 2018; Moonen, 2015; Novak Amado et al., 2013; Overmars-Marx et al., 2014; Pelleboer-Gunnink, 2020). Brummel and Smits (2021; Brummel 2017) draw attention to social infrastructure, that is, how social spaces shape the establishment of social connections, asserting that the neighborhood itself can act as a barrier to achieving social inclusion.

To date, most research has been concerned with identifying individual and contextual factors (Cobigo et al., 2012; Meys et al., 2021; Moonen, 2015; Simplican et al., 2015). This usually remains with the identification of distinct factors. This is remarkable, as it is the interplay between the factors that particularly affect the pursuit of inclusion. In that case, reference is typically made to generative mechanisms (Blom & Morén, 2011; Mingers, 2014). In this study, we sought mechanisms that foster the social inclusion of people with mild intellectual disabilities and to understand the conditions needed.

2.1.1 Generative mechanisms or generative practices

In social sciences, the concept of mechanism is much disputed and amounts to its ontology and epistemology (Delgado, 2022; Moghadam-Saman, 2019). Definitions of mechanisms are formed based on different premises and encompass varieties of causality claims - causal chains, causal packages, intersections of causal chains - implicit and explicit constant conjunctions, patterns, the ensemble of powers, structures and relation, capacities, social regularities, constitutive rules, or tendencies (Befani, 2012; Bhaskar, 1975; Danermark et al., 2019; Iannacci & Resca, 2021; Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

Examples of generative mechanisms are countless. In the literature, generative mechanisms are exemplified such as attention, heedful interrelation of actions, mindfulness, sense-making, self-fulfilling prophecy, outcompeting mechanism, double benefit mechanism, and so on (Denyer et al., 2008).

An elucidating yet simplified social work relevant example of a mechanism is provided by Bool et al (2019) focusing on reducing discrimination: personal story (sharing); appeals to empathy for the other; leads to empathy for the other; results in less discrimination. A similar example of a mechanism to effectively reduce discrimination is presented: seeing or hearing that others disapprove of discrimination; leads to a change in perception of what the social norm is; and leads to trying to discriminate less.

Both examples highlight features of a mechanism such as the process that generates social events, social interactions, and causal actions. However, the critical realist objection is not countered, that is, the premise of sequentiality leading to an intended outcome. Moreover, the consideration of unseen or invisible powers such as motives and choices is missing. Critical realism is averse to looking for causal chains and laws. It champions a perspective on mechanisms underlying the occurrence of and the processes that generate social events (Mingers, 2014). It posits that there are real, unseen mechanisms in the social world (Houston, 2010). Stressing that one cannot escape thinking of social interaction as part of (social) mechanisms, Blom and Morén (2011)) put forward a helpful definition for social work practice and social work research, saying that mechanisms relate to 'powers consisting of causes, motives, considerations, choices, and social interaction’. This should lead to a desired outcome, for instance, the promotion of social inclusion (Blom & Morén, 2011). Despite attempts to capture generative mechanisms in a conclusive definition, its comprehensiveness and relative elusiveness remain, resulting in such abstraction that it risks being dissociated from the concrete activities and meaning of social work. In fact, what matters is what happens in practice and how the interplay of powers and tendencies contributes to achieving the desired goal. Besides, social work practice itself is equally comprehensive, at times elusive, and where many powers intertwine. For our study, the notion of generative mechanism has provided crucial impetus, which we have turned into practical relevance. Rather than using a terminology that conveys mechanistic connotations, and in that respect is detached from social work practice, we refer to practices that are inclusion-focused and, in that pursuit, appear generative.

2.1.2 Research aim

Our research intends to deepen and nuance conceptual and professional knowledge (of social workers) on how to promote the social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Our study focused on practices conducive to fostering this endeavor and to the understanding of conditions needed. Hence, the question centered on what constitutes generative practices in social work seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities.

2.2 Methods

For two and a half years (2018-2021) a responsive methodology was employed in a combined action and social design research conducted in three Dutch cities: Amsterdam, Amersfoort, and Wageningen (Knevel et al., 2022). In each setting, a community of development, which is equivalent to a community of practice, but adds a research component (Wilken et al., 2021), was set up. The first author acted as participatory action researcher. The rationale behind combined action and social design research consists of the emancipatory nature of the subject matter, its context, and practice (Anderson & Herr, 2015). In addition to (scientific) knowledge validation, action research aims to improve (social work) practice through the active involvement of those sharing concerns. Integrating social design research into action research is prompted by the design objective, namely collectively designing solutions (Van Aken &

Andriessen, 2011; Joore et al., 2021; Knevel et al., 2022; Margolin & Margolin, 2002).

A responsive approach to evaluation was integrated into the action and social design research.

Instead of seeking for alleged objective reality, responsive methodologies embrace constructivism holding the idea that reality can be known only as socially constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Key concepts of responsive methodology include collecting and articulating shared issues, co-creation and co-learning with stakeholders, emergent design, and a hermeneutic process (Abma, 2006; Abma et al., 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Each community of development was composed of approximately six to ten social workers and adults with mild intellectual disabilities who were educated experts by experience. Selection of the settings of the communities of development was based on: (1) the service providers are specialized and focused on providing services to people with intellectual disabilities, (2) the service provider holds a vision and mission statement on inclusion and inclusion-focused social work, (3) geographic distribution, i.e. both urban and rural environment, (4) variation in the type of service, that is, both community social work and day-care services. The selection criteria for the recruitment of service users and experts by experience included being interested in the subject matter of social inclusion, being motivated to participate in the project, willingness to and capable of sharing life experiences, and being prepared to act as a "critical friend" to the other participants. As far as the social workers were concerned, selection criteria for the recruitment were: (a) being employed as a social worker working with people with mild intellectual disability, (b) having an interest in the subject matter "inclusion" and (c) motivation to bring about change in the social work field aimed at promoting inclusion. Snowball sampling was used for participant enrollment. We were able to draw on a broad regional network of social workers and people with moderate-to-mild intellectual disabilities, including people trained as experts by experience. The researcher arranged physical meetings with key figures, that is, social workers and experts by experience to explain the project and discover the motivations and potential contributions of the participants. These meetings were one-on-one, sometimes with two potential participants, and on occasion, a social worker accompanied persons with an intellectual disability. A visual representation was designed based on information from the research project and discussed with the participants to be recruited.

In total, 47 meetings were held with the communities of development, of which 28 were audio recorded. To answer the research sub-question on generative practices, not all audio recordings delivered the relevant data. For example, the initial phase of the project focused on getting to know each other and creating a safe group atmosphere. These activities are imperative to the participatory research process but do not directly collect data to answer the research sub-question that is central to this article.

CoD	**Meetings**	**Meetings audio recorded**	**Participants (social workers)**	**Participants (service users)**
Wageningen	15	10	5	2
Amsterdam Noord	14	10	7	2
Amersfoort Vathorst	18	8	4	2

Table 2.1: Participation in the Communities of Development.

The community of development process was evaluated by the participants on several occasions. At the request of the experts by experience, additional support was facilitated to enhance their participation in the community of development meetings. In addition to the community of development meetings, sounding board meetings were organized to collect feedback for further improvement of the developed answers (prototypes). These sounding board groups were composed of experts by experience who did not participate in the community of development meetings.

Content, design and proceedings of our research project were largely shaped by the participants and was achieved in the preparations and execution of the project. Preparations entailed recruitment of participants by personally meeting (getting acquainted, learning each other's motivations, discussing mutual expectations) and collection of issues around inclusion and exclusion raised by them. The meetings were conducted with social workers performing their roles and responsibilities in micro-practices, management staff concerned with decisions at tactical and operational level and experts by experience. In some cases, experts by experience wished the support of a social worker in these meetings. In the community of development meetings, the issues were further explored and clarified collectively. This enhanced the articulation and support of the research question.

Both action research and social design research lend themselves to emergent processes, rather it is characteristic, and for responsive methodology the imperative of emergence is equally valid. Such process implies a plurality of visions, experiences, and perspectives from stakeholders as well as ownership by the participants of the content and depth found, the process of the research project (steps to be followed, direction and pace, safeguarding the collective interest and undertaking) and finding answers. Emergence was interwoven with a hermeneutic and dialogical process where induction and deduction alternated. Personal experiences were shared and reflected upon; meaning was made collectively. Both the experiences and meanings were assembled and clustered into more general concepts. Occasionally theoretical constructs were inserted to interpret the unique personal experiences in order to gain new insights for the participants as well as the researcher. In this process, we found tendencies recognizable in the social work practices that seem to be conducive to social change. In the incremental process of identifying tendencies, we consulted theoretical concepts and sought connections to stakeholders' own experiences. The emergent process that occurred involved intermediate and retrospective interpretation by the researcher and participants.

2.2.1 Data collection and analysis

The communities of development separately ran for two and a half years with a meeting cadence of six to eight weeks. Besides recordings and AI-generated transcriptions of the meetings, data collection consisted of a variety of materials such as drawings, drafts, brainstorms, prototypes, field notes produced during the community of development meetings, and visual reports of each meeting, which also served as member-check. The aforementioned materials prompted the sharing of experiences, sparked discussion on issues brought up by the stakeholders, and aided to meaning making of social inclusion and related topics such as discrimination, stigma and dignity. All data collected were thus compiled and provided an initial rough structure of main themes. These were presented to the community of development participants and discussed.

In addition to the audio-recordings, transcriptions and materials, a comprehensive case description of the local social work practices was produced. The descriptions were based on the experiences shared in the community of development meetings. Subsequently the descriptions were presented to the participants and discussed in the meetings. The purpose of this approach was to supplement, refine and verify the description. Its focus was on whether participants recognize the findings from the experiences that have been shared, the meanings that have been given, and the actions in practice. This resulted in minor adjustments and confirmation from the participants with regard to recognizability of what was discussed in the meetings and what the experiences were in social work practice.

The audio recordings and AI-generated transcriptions were subjected to open, axial, and selective coding. From this analysis, we inductively discovered key labels that characterize generative practices. Key labels described social workers' behaviors, knowledge of factors that either

promote or hinder inclusion, skills needed to achieve inclusion, and values that drive social workers to engage in inclusion-oriented work. These core themes were confirmed as highly prevalent in social work practice.
In addition to this thematic analysis, comprehensive case descriptions were produced. After a member check, these descriptions were analyzed using the CIMO framework in which the data were organized and connections were sought between the various variables. The CIMO framework stands for context, intervention, mechanism, and outcome (Denyer et al., 2008). Context included an account of the local community of development setting, micro, meso, and macro factors that made up and affected the context, interventions included social worker actions performed to promote social inclusion, mechanisms comprised interrelated powers and tendencies, and outcomes included tangible results, empirical data and impact from the process (Pain et al., 2016). A cross-analysis was then applied between the thematic analysis and CIMO analysis. This resulted in a clustering of overall insights converted into meaningful categories. We report these in the findings section.

2.3 Findings

We now describe inclusion-focused practices in the social work field that we were able to qualify as generative, that is, conducive to the social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Generative practices are in keeping with the notion of generative mechanisms. Since a multitude of factors (such as social workers' competencies, organisational conditions, laws, and policies) will influence practice, we capture generative practices in umbrella terms.

2.3.1 Practicing agency

A first social work practice observed centers around agency and is explained as "the ability to take action […] to achieve the result [he or she] desires or aims for. A productive actor is one who achieves this" (Gewirth, 1996: 132-133). Action here means voluntary, uncoerced and

purposeful behavior that is fueled by our knowledge of the relevant circumstances. Agency is about being the person who develops and deploys one's own resources - personal, political and environmental resources - such as skills, funds, status, authority, rules, protocols, and social network. This results in personal responsibility (Gewirth, 1996).
In our research, we identified two dimensions of agency in the social work practice: professional agency and empowering agency. The former addresses the agency of the social worker and focuses on the social workers' own work performance. The latter is aimed at supporting and, if appropriate, enhancing the agency of the person with mild intellectual disability.

Professional agency

Professional agency is demonstrated in reflective behaviors such as being aware of social workers' own biases toward people with intellectual disabilities and the community's presumed attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities. This was echoed by social workers with the perception that people with intellectual disabilities perform tasks slower and deliver lower quality. Professional agency further concerns awareness of one's own routines and the ability to detach from them. In the relationship with the service user the social worker builds up patterns that in time may have adverse impact to the service user's wellbeing. From the social worker this requires vigilance not to get caught in routines and the ability to convert routines into effective support. In understanding professional agency, it was quoted, that *"you do not act from your own frame of reference (P2)"* and that *"you ask yourself critical questions such as, does the service user need this support or do I think he needs the support (P3)"* and *"do I think it should be this way or are there alternatives? (P4)"*

Empowering agency

Empowering agency targets executive functioning of people with intellectual disabilities, encompasses social and emotional well-being and stresses the value of interactions between the social worker and service users. Fostering executive functioning such as task initiation consists of mobilizing a person through invitation and encouragement to participate in local community activities, utilizing the social and cultural infrastructure of the neighbourhood, such as clubs for leisure or recreation, venues for socializing such as community centres, churches, mosques and so on. This requires knowing what motivates the person with an intellectual disability.

Inspired by the Solution Focused Approach, the not-knowing stance by the social worker and the *"don't do it for, but let it be done by (P1)"* stance are conducive in strengthening agency as it allows space for having choice, being one of the essential components of social inclusion. With a not-knowing attitude the social worker allows room to the person with intellectual disability to engage in finding an answer to simple or more complex everyday issues that arise. For example, this may take the form of not speaking for a while and not reciting the solution. In doing so, their knowledge is addressed, the service user is involved, and there is room for people with intellectual disabilities to solve issues by themselves or collaboratively instead of the social workers. Social workers exemplified this with experiences of encouraging service users to initiate and perform actions themselves, and having the social worker seemingly stand back and take a following stance: *"then you see that the seed has been planted and is growing, then I'm not helping solve everything myself. (P2)"* Such supportive relationships nurture the agency of the persons with an intellectual disability.

It was stressed not to convey a sense of obligation, an underlying *"you have to (female social worker)"* message, as this conflicts with intrinsic motivation and deprives the autonomy of having choices. Social workers repeatedly indicated that they must be aware that people with mild intellectual disabilities *"also think, if I participate in it [e.g. political café, community barbecue], what's in it for me. (P16)"* Social work practices that recognize such approaches foster social recognition.

Pivotal in supporting and strengthening agency is the consideration for identification matters. Generally, people with mild intellectual disabilities are aware of society's stereotypical, biased, often negative, unflattering image of people with intellectual disabilities. First, they do not identify themselves as such, and second, they do not want to be associated with that image, but rather with people who exude competence and authority. An inclusive approach takes this into account and is part of connecting with people's perceptions and providing cues to match a person's motivation. An inclusive approach takes into account such sensitivity in identification issues. It is part of connecting with the individual’s and collective perceptions and provides cues to match a person's motivation.

2.3.2 Practicing advocacy

The essence of advocacy in social work practices comes down to a process of working towards social justice, in particular epistemic justice in the endeavor to safeguard recognition (cultural) and interests (political). It is taking action “to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services they need” (NDTI (National Development Team For Inclusion), 2016:4). Advocacy can be either individual or collective, shaped in self-advocacy and partnership with the people that are supported, but always take their side. In the social work field, advocacy as a process promotes social inclusion by definition (Bigby & Frawley, 2010). In the research, we discovered a variety of aspects that are part of an advocacy practice performed by social workers.

First, the community's perception of people with intellectual disability and interaction with the community is occasionally referred to as the *"outside world. (P3, P15)"*. Social workers and people with intellectual disabilities regularly encounter behavior of community members - including members of profit and non-profit organizations, and government officials - that is fueled by stereotypes and prejudice, and could be marked as dignity breaches. Ignorance about people with intellectual disabilities causes, both intentionally and unintentionally, paternalistic and exclusionary behavior. Participants who were involved in the research pointed out that counteracting such perceptions and behaviors was crucial to social work remit. Raising public awareness through information campaigns was not deemed a primary social workers strategy, however, participants argued for actions in their micro and mezzo practice particularly *"through encounters (P9, P10)"* with the community, be it individual or in small groups, be it a one-time encounter, a convivial or organized encounter, occasional, or more sequential.

This requires social workers to keep awareness raising on the agenda in their contacts with society. In this way, the image can be edited toward more realistic, less stereotyped, and biased images. In the reflective dialogue, a social worker coined the term "destigmatizer (P5)" and destigmatizing work as if it were part of inclusion-focused social work. Social work frequently has to deal with the rigidity of agencies that adhere to bureaucratic inaccessible procedures and the tendency of officials to address the supervising social worker instead of the person with an intellectual disability. In such instances, the social worker has to stand up for the person with an intellectual disability, for example by saying "have you asked him yet? (P5)".

Advocacy here lies in the vigilance of the social worker to avoid ignoring the person with an intellectual disability. The social worker is initially there as a "backup (P4)" in case the person with an intellectual disability fails to get things arranged, such as registration. Promoting some understanding and flexibility from service providers, for instance, with regard to inaccessible procedures, towards service users with an intellectual disability is part of a social worker's advocacy. In that respect, the advocacy work of the social worker includes tasks such as being an observer, a "signaller (P3)" and an advisor to the community thus giving a voice against exclusion.

Awareness raising works successfully where social work induces collective expressions and actively finds connections with the community by focusing on what connects people and stressing that “we are all a neighborhood after all. (P10)” It is the appeal to the common interests of a neighborhood and relegates the differences between people to the background.
This was referred to as “mainstreaming the relationships between neighborhood residents with and without intellectual disabilities (P3)” and avoiding “making the intellectual disability special or less (P8)”. In doing so, social work “facilitates new encounters and relationships by letting them experience it [and] giving space to sharing and demonstrating competences. (P9)” This is achieved by playing football matches against teams from local profit and non-profit companies and government agencies. This occurred at the community of development in Wageningen, a community-based daycare setting at a local football club. The social workers and adults with mild intellectual disabilities market themselves as the Football Workshop and perform the role of ‘Football Worker’. It was noted that in facilitating encounters and establishing connections between the community and people with disabilities it should go beyond charity.

Language has the vigorous potential to have a discriminatory and oppressive impact on people, and to a large extent determines and perpetuates stereotyped and biased images among the community as well as among people with disabilities (Charlton, 2000; Thompson, 2021). There is a latent cultural injustice in language because it can govern a difference unfriendly world. Part of social workers' advocacy actions, therefore, is knowing ‘injustice language’, demonstrating sensitivity to how social work and community communicate about people with intellectual disabilities.

It was recognized that among social workers this requires particular attention and a collective search for how to speak about people with intellectual disabilities in the organization and in public. Research participants repeatedly affirmed the importance of language and expressed a desire to use inclusive language, to find a *"targetless (P1)"* language, as one social worker suggested, that does not differentiate people into target groups. Instead of a person with an intellectual disability and terms such as client, caretaker, or care recipient, the suggestion was put forward by a social worker, and endorsed by other social workers and experts by experience to replace such labels with "people with instructions for use (P2)" with the argument that being human is universal and consequently every person needs instructions for use.

2.3.3 Practicing intrapreneurship

A third inclusion-promoting practice that we have been able to identify in the social work field concerns intrapreneurship. It can be defined as entrepreneurship within an existing organization where the intentions and behavior of the organization and employees are such that there are ambitions and room to deviate from the usual (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003). In our context, it entails all kinds of social work-related innovative activities and orientations such as the development of new or renewed products, services, methods, ways of thinking, events, and strategies. Practicing intrapreneurship includes behaviors such as goal orientation, initiative, and related behaviors such as proactivity, creativity (problem-solving ability), actions aimed at social networking and leveraging existing social networks, and negotiating with internal and external actors to achieve the intended goal.

Being goal-oriented implies knowing clearly what you want, which way you want to go, and being able to communicate the message clearly to others. In relationships with stakeholders such as local government officials and funding agencies, a results-oriented approach is needed, where planned work goes hand in hand with spontaneity and serendipity, in the sense of creating or exploiting unexpected opportunities. An example of this in the social work field was provided by the Football Workshop where unplanned meetings led to ideas to organize football matches against teams from the police or a local political party; a snowball effect of *"positive meetings create new meetings. (P9, P11)"* Goal-oriented behavior entails the belief in the contribution to social inclusion, persistence in the mission, and an understanding that social change is incremental.

Associated with being goal-oriented is proactivity, which covers behaviors such as reaching out to and establishing connections with community members, local agencies, neighborhood initiatives, commercial organizations and exploring how mutual engagement can be generated, and thus harnessing collective assets. In the social work practices we investigated, this was exemplified by setting up meetings between local residents, participating in a neighborhood committee, and jointly organizing neighborhood projects such as a collective barbecue or an outdoor games afternoon in the park or on the square. Being proactive includes the ability to discover small niches and seize the opportunities to create something new or not previously common or provided for, be it an event, activity, a service, or product.

Pivotal in intrapreneurship appears to be social networking. It was illustrated by social workers being able to find and meet actors with wide social networks, and the ability to build relationships so that at some point other social networks become accessible and to engage in. Networking further includes joining neighborhood apps where local people and organizations can find matches of shared interests and concerns. These do not have to be self-developed apps but rather using such infrastructures that already exist. Networking proves to be essential to create support within the organization as well, and therefore it ought to be aimed at both internal networks and external networks.

In this respect, intrapreneurship entails being mindful of bridging and linking social capital and the different interests involved. It was indicated by social workers that knowing about SROI (Social Return On Investment) and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) for example, can contribute greatly to successfully engaging with external profit and nonprofit parties. It gives insight into the motivations of such actors and nourishes the social worker in how to engage in collaborations. An illustrative quote by a social worker is *"prioritizing care over collaboration with companies is disastrous" (P9)*, implying that community and civil society are assigned a secondary, insignificant role. Inclusion-focused social work calls for an understanding of the interests and motivations of parties external to care and support, but that also play a role in bringing about social inclusion. A social worker referred to this as achieving mutual win-win outcomes which demands negotiation skills and *"having mental muscles" (P9)*, that is the ability to cope with the challenges intrapreneurial social workers face in networking in the community.

2.4 Discussion

In our study, we investigated social work practices that foster social inclusion of people with mild intellectual disabilities. Our participants discussed concrete experiences of being included and excluded. These were not just feelings, but also real events. Participants with mild intellectual disabilities were able to share stories of exclusion and thus clearly put the notion and importance of social inclusion on the agenda. Social workers too shared their experiences about how colleagues (often do not) think about the social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities and what responsibility social work has in fostering social inclusion. This approach was adopted to tackle epistemic injustice in scientific knowledge creation (Dübgen, 2020, Fricker, 2007). It revolves around the unjust exclusion or distrust of forms of knowledge, in this case, knowledge of social workers and persons with mild intellectual disabilities, by which individuals or groups are sidelined because their knowledge would not matter. Therefore, an attempt was made to make the research process democratic and inclusive.

The participants in this study often appear to be front runners who are interested in the subject of social inclusion and see the importance of changing the current situation in their micro and mezzo practices where

exclusion persists. In doing so, we have involved a selected group of social workers with whom we consciously allow a bias in the research. This raises the question of what happens in social work practices where there is less, little earnest and sustained, or even no attention to the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.
The qualities displayed by the social workers demonstrated agency, advocacy, and intrapreneurship, albeit to varying degrees. This abstract terminology was not readily recognizable to those involved, but its concrete interpretation and explanation, on the other hand, was. The behaviors, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions taking place in the social work practices and especially their interplay made the concepts recognizable as practices that could be labeled ‘generative’. During the research, which had a collective content due to the research form, namely the community of development, these qualities were further fueled and enhanced. Participants mutually inspired and encouraged each other in the conversation about social inclusion, its pursuit or promotion, and how to do so as social workers. The research design facilitated cross-pollination of knowledge, ideas, and understandings and acted as a catalyst. It thus contributed to the advancement of social work practices as well as the professional development of the social workers and persons with mild intellectual disabilities involved. This is precisely one of the goals of a responsive methodology in the shape of combined action and social design research (Anderson & Herr, 2015, Van Aken & Andriessen, 2011).

By and large, research, policy, and practice are keen to learn about the effectiveness of interventions. However, the effectiveness of social work interventions comes in degrees (Hoekman, 2013; Veerman & Van Yperen, 2008). In the past decades, scholarly discussion on the idea of mechanisms in the social world and what makes them generative has led to a distancing from the positivist approach and introduced the term generative as an adjective to mechanisms to replace and avoid the pretension of effectiveness. Our study started with the belief that we were able to determine generative mechanisms. Soon the complexity of this notion became clear containing a variety of definitions replete with abstractions such as "ensembles of powers, structures, and relations", implicit and explicit constant conjunctions, social regularities, and tendencies. Added to this, the elusiveness and invisibility of these abstractions, the multi-layering and conjunction of multiple mechanisms and sub-mechanisms merely amplify vagueness.

Another concern is the identification of the mechanism and whether it is generative. There are a multitude of fluctuating, inconsistent factors that make up a mechanism, which raises uncertainties as to how it should be identified, as some stable consistent entity, and how to deal with the many varieties of a certain mechanism, which in turn can be defined as submechanisms, the impracticality, and imminent futility of establishing a single exclusive social generative mechanism given the complexity and fluidity of social reality. The question is on what basis can be concluded that a mechanism is generative? By mere narratives, observation, or measurable data? May we consider a mechanism generative when someone or something has changed or appears to have changed in a single person, or should a positive change be occurring in multiple people? Or when positive change has occurred for one person but not for the other even though both were involved in same the study. Validity is at stake here.

Even though unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral causality in social phenomena is unlikely to be established without bias, powers, and tendencies are perceptible in myriad manifestations, some observable, some unobservable. For research on social work practice and complex social reality, it is recommended to align with the social constructivist concept, abolish the notion of mechanisms, and concentrate on rich practices through observation, questioning, and description. This also brings about valuable insights into how social work can contribute to the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. Although such practices are context-dependent and therefore not generally applicable, research findings are recognizable in and transferable to other social work practices, and thus inspiring to learn from.

2.4.1 Implications for practice and research

Promoting social inclusion and human rights are core tasks of social work (Mapp et al., 2019; Reichert, 2011; Reynaert et al., 2022, 2023). This implies emphatic and sustained commitment to fostering professional and empowering agency, embracing advocacy in its broadest sense, and exercising intrapreneurship. The practices investigated all demonstrate a focus on achieving rights and entitlements as enshrined in the CRPD.

To grasp these comprehensive practices and the contribution to social inclusion and quality of life an obvious approach is to provide training to (future) social workers as well as to people with intellectual disabilities, government officials, and service providers' management staff. Such training aims at accomplishing generative practices where its components provide practical guidance.

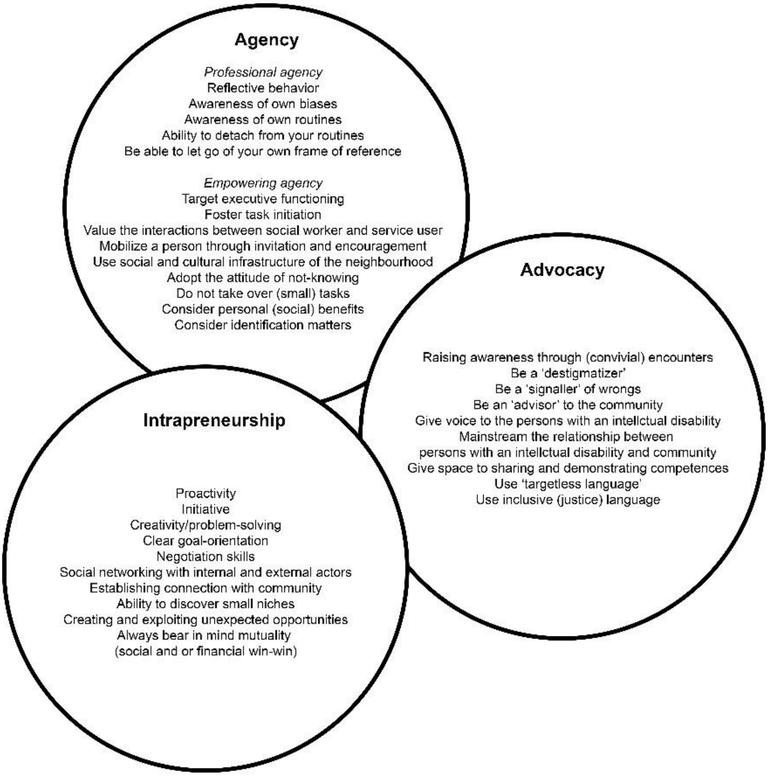

Figure 2.1: Generative practices: Key points.

It additionally implies that government and service providers must be willing to accommodate risk – induced by failing initiatives - and share power with social workers and people with an intellectual disability allowing substantive input and accepting significant adjustments to policy. It requires flexibility in handling procedures, less rigid policies, and financial structuring of money flows.

The comprehensive dynamic arising from a complex of interactions appeals to the competencies of the relevant agents such as the social worker and supporting management staff, which is marked by adaptability, versatility, awareness of the causes of and perpetuating mechanisms of social inequality, and the position and responsibility of the social worker (Reynaert et al., 2023; Staub-Bernasconi, 2011, 2016). This calls for a social work that not only centers on individual professional agency but also on collective agency, that is, social workers standing up for injustice together and striving for social inclusion, which is in line with the international definition of social work.

2.4.2 Limitations of the study

To value our research findings, some limitations must be considered. The first limitation concerns the context where the research was undertaken; three local social work practices, in a Western, high-income country with a fairly well-organized and resourced social work system - The Netherlands. Nonetheless, the generative practices that we identified may have global relevance. This leads to a second limitation of the research. The findings merely comprise shared experiences, which provide qualitative evidence and can be construed as qualitative measurability. Third, the sample size was relatively small, compromising generalizability. Nevertheless, the findings do provide identifiable and transferable knowledge that deserves further substantiation and elaboration. In addition, there was an imbalance in the ratio of research participants. The majority were social workers. People with mild intellectual disabilities were underrepresented in terms of numbers. Despite the involvement and extra support of people with mild intellectual disabilities, we should take into account that their voices may still be obscured compared to the voices of the social workers who participated.

2.5 Conclusion

This study attempted to identify generative social mechanisms that advance the inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Since such mechanisms comprise of many intersecting observable and invisible sub-mechanisms and lack evident causality, the study shifted its focus to generative practices. As such, it provides insights into what conditions and behaviors contribute to translating human rights set forth in the CRPD into the social work field. These practices are broadly defined and placed under the umbrella of interrelated concepts of agency, advocacy, and intrapreneurship. Each of these concepts proves a potential to facilitate the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities, provided that these concepts are converted into actions and so become practices. It is of great importance to accept that each of these concepts cannot be cast in one particular mould, but must be understood as constantly changing socially constructed constellations.

The identification of generative practices provides guidance to social workers in shaping the promotion of social inclusion. First, it helps reflect on past and current inclusion-focused social work performance. Second, it may encourage social workers to adopt inclusion-focused pathways inspired by agency, advocacy, and intrapreneurship. Third, knowledge of generative practices toward social inclusion can help to specify social workers' competencies. Social work education can draw from this by, for example, tailoring curricula accordingly and social work agencies may be urged to pursue inclusion-focused practices and better facilitate social workers in doing so. Nonetheless, describing practices and discovering linkages and efficacious elements requires further research.

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3

CHAPTER

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Social workers putting into practice the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Abstract

For social work with adults with mild intellectual disabilities, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) provides a framework for putting the principles of social justice and human rights into practice. This article focuses on social workers' knowledge, values, and skills, which may contribute to the protection of the rights of adults with mild intellectual disabilities.

A scoping review found no documented effective competencies for realizing human rights and social inclusion for adults with mild intellectual disabilities. As a result, a narrative review was conducted focusing on codes of ethics and competency profiles in the USA, UK, and Netherlands.

The codes of ethics were found to align with the values of social justice, human dignity, integrity, competence/expertise, and relationship building. Differences between the codes of ethics and competency profiles were found in the human rights underpinning and weight given to advocacy, racism, dimensions of justice, and intersectionality. Six clusters of competencies were identified as aligning with CRPD aspirations: assessment, engagement, advancement, empowerment, intervention, and professionalism.

We conclude that with regard to skills and knowledge, social work is profiled as a human rights profession in the USA and UK more explicitly than in NL. Regardless of the codes of ethics and competency profiles, convincing evidence that performing the competencies contributes to human rights realization is lacking. Further investigation of social work knowledge and skills that may be effective in the protection and promotion of human rights is recommended.

3.1 Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is committed to a vision and ambition of 'wide inclusion' containing civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights (United Nations, 2006). It intends to protect and promote the human rights of people with disabilities, thereby bringing about profound changes and social development in many areas of society such as schools, workplace environments, public transportation and sports, recreation, and leisure. This is reflected in the preamble, stating that recognizing “full participation by persons with disabilities will result in an enhanced sense of belonging and in significant advances in the human, social, and economic development of society.” In addition, the CRPD may have both domestic and extra-territorial effects in guiding the design and implementation of foreign assistance development programs (Stein & Lord, 2010).

The CRPD represents a modern human rights treaty with innovative components (Bielefeldt, 2009; Degener, 2016; Stein & Lord, 2010). Among the innovative potential, it provides for a new understanding of equality, that is, transformative equality (Goldschmidt, 2017) and an extended notion of discrimination (Goldschmidt, 2012; Graumann, 2012), and pursues a further conceptualization of disability, that is, a human rights model deeming disabled people as rights holders and human rights subjects (Degener, 2016). Anderson and Philips (2012) asserted that the CRPD constitutes a milestone that prompts a paradigm shift in the conceptions of disability and human rights. This expands and deepens our understanding of the scope of human rights (Harnacke & Graumann, 2012).

The realization of the CRPD presents challenges for government institutions, civil society, and citizens. In the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, social workers constitute a vital interface through which the CRPD is translated into practical action. The question of concern is how they shape and pursue the rights set forth in the CRPD in their professional work. Therefore, reflection on this practice is needed. In the literature, we find several human rights-based approaches to social work practices that can be helpful in this respect (Androff, 2016; Hermans et al., 2019; Reynaert et al., 2023). These human rights frameworks have a general application to social work practice but fail to specify applications to social work with respect to residential care and community support for people with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, there is extensive research on the conceptualization and effectuation of social inclusion (Bigby, 2012; Cobigo et al., 2012, 2016; Overmars-Marx et al., 2017; Simplican et al., 2015); however, the role of social workers' knowledge, values, and skills has been overlooked. This article addresses these gaps and explores the potential of a human rights-based approach that places the knowledge, values, and skills of social workers at the center stage. This account proceeds from a literature search of human rights theory; social inclusion conceptualization; and social workers' values, knowledge, and skills in translating and practicing human rights spelled out in the CRPD.

This study's focus on the lives of people with intellectual disabilities was motivated by their persistent marginalized position in society. Even though the CRPD intends to promote the rights of all people with disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities still appear to be among the most excluded, induced by deprived socioeconomic positions and limited prospects of overcoming them (Inclusion International, 2020; Schuurman et al., 2013). This negatively affects other spheres of life, such as health (Cooper et al., 2011), access to public spaces and information, cultural and recreational opportunities (United Nations, 2016), and political participation and influence (College voor de Rechten van de Mens, 2020; MacQuarrie & Laurin-Bowie, 2014). In addition to the accumulation of disadvantages, the voices of people with intellectual disabilities often remain unheard, thus amplifying epistemic injustice (Catala, 2020; Schippers, 2021).

3.1.1 Human rights

Human rights and their codification into treaties have played a powerful role in societies worldwide since the drafting and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 1948. Human rights have always been fraught with conceptual and practical problems. Fundamentally, there is disagreement about the definition of human rights across the political, legal, and philosophical spectrums (Beitz, 2013; Griffin, 2013; Ife, 2009; Orend, 2002). For instance, people with intellectual disabilities have long been ignored in the human concept, which is partly explained by the origin and evolution of the social contract (Nussbaum, 2007). Classically, a social contract refers to society as a contract for mutual advantage for all members, assuming that human agents are equal in capacity and capable of productive economic activity (Nussbaum, 2007). People with disabilities are still being stigmatized and excluded from political power, economic activity, and cultural participation. Controversy further extends to discord on the functioning and status of human rights, the foundations of human rights, and its core principles universality, indivisibility, inalienability and inabrogability (Gregg, 2012; Ignatieff, 2001; Ife, 2009; Frezzo 2017).

Entwined with these controversies is the discourse on human rights, which is typically divided into three traditions: social constructivist, legal positivist, and natural law. Understanding these traditions is vital and should be acknowledged by social workers, since human rights are not self-evident and cannot be fulfilled solely through promises of enforceable law. However, the social constructivist argument provides social work with keys to practice and protect human rights in the local community as well as to further shape human rights. Despite the limitations of enforceable laws, the legal view is equally important. An embrace between the social constructivist and legalist views of social work practice would be most effective, as both serve as moral compasses and are subject to construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction (Reynaert et al., 2023). This is where social work practices play an explicit role. The social constructivist perspective lends itself well to an inclusive social work practice in which, in conjunction with service users, human rights are persistently placed on the agenda. For social workers putting into action the CRPD, awareness of problems in the human rights concept and related controversies in political arguments is needed because they may encounter practical implications of these controversies and traditions in the social work field. Consequently, social workers should be able to respond adequately to challenges in the realization of the CRPD. After all, they form a vital interface for translating human rights into practical actions.

3.1.2 Social inclusion

Like human rights, the notion of social inclusion has many interpretations and is subject to criticism. Thus, the concept of social inclusion remains unclear. Terms, such as participation and inclusion, are easily employed interchangeably. Indeed, the CRPD references both terms alike, and does not provide a distinctive definition between participation and inclusion. In general comment No. 4, however, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016) defines inclusion with reference to article 24 (right to inclusive education) saying that "Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, […] methods, approaches, structures and strategies […] to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all persons […] with an equitable and participatory […] experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences."

In scholarly literature, definitions of social inclusion vary considerably (Bigby et al., 2018; Cobigo et al., 2012, 2016; Schuurman & Nass, 2015; Simplican et al., 2015). In essence, inclusion is an act of anti-discrimination that is reflected in a fight against oppression and exclusion; a claim to the fulfillment of basic civil, political, economic, social, and cultural needs; and a fundamental social recognition of the person in whatever capacity.

It is of utmost importance to point out that inclusion goes beyond defining it as merely a need or a "special need.” Saying so dismisses inclusion as applying solely to certain people who, for whatever reason, are unable to fully participate in society. However, inclusion concerns the basic needs of every human being that require protection. The idea of inclusion is nourished and shaped by several fundamental values; in fact, we can conceive of inclusion as a conglomerate of values, such as dignity, equality, freedom, and self-determination. For a good reason, countless pleas assert that these values are essential to human rights or underlying human rights. The significance of inclusion lies in answering the question of whether we wish for a life of partial or complete, long-term, or permanent exclusion in terms of economic, cultural, social, political, civil rights, environmental, spiritual, and survival rights. In so doing, it is important to bear in mind that deprivation is filled with unequal distribution and degrading treatment.

3.1.3 The CRPD in relation to the social model and human rights model of disability

The CRPD is based on longstanding human rights principles, such as non-discrimination, equality, equal opportunity, and inherent dignity. However, it has fundamentally changed the human rights framework by extending it to include disability rights (Degener, 2016; Quinn, 2009; Van Weele, 2012). The CRPD supports the social model of disability that was created to explain the exclusion of people with disabilities from society (Sabatello & Schulze, 2014). The social model asserts that society’s social and economic structure produces disabilities, and is responsible for the exclusion of people with disabilities from full participation in mainstream activities. Therefore, this goes beyond the argument that disability is merely a product of bodily pathology (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2012). One critique is that the social model does not seek moral principles or values as a foundation for a disability policy. However, the CRPD expressly strives for this (Degener & Begg, 2017). Degener (2016) champions an understanding of the CRPD that extends beyond the social model, and codifies the human rights model of disability. This new understanding of disability signifies that people with disabilities are not subjects excluded from society but are rights holders and human rights subjects, which is essential for the notion of social inclusion. As Peter Mittler (2003) puts it: "the principle of inclusion follows naturally from the self-advocacy and advocacy for human rights. People with intellectual disabilities are demanding the right and the necessary support to participate fully in society." Gerhard Quinn (2009) compares the CRPD with a mirror placed before society revealing the large gap that exists between the 'myth system' of our values (e.g. autonomy, equality, dignity) and the 'operations system' of how these values are being respected, but in fact, are still breached in daily practice. Evidently, the implementation of the CRPD poses considerable challenges to governments and civil society, and equally affects the work of social workers. The CRPD amalgamates the social and human rights models. The former supports anti-discrimination policy and civil rights reforms, while the latter is more comprehensive, encompassing both sets of human rights, civil and political, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights (Degener & Begg, 2017).

3.1.4 Human rights conversion into social work

Translating human rights into practice requires an inclusion-focused approach (Knevel & Wilken, 2015; Wilken & Knevel, 2016). They pursue inclusion in places where exclusion is unabated and inclusion is jeopardy. Given the complexity of human rights, it raises questions about how to acknowledge problems while embracing and fostering the operation and vigor of human rights. Considering human rights a "lingua franca of moral thought" (Ignatieff, 2001, p. 53), the CRPD serves as a moral compass for social actors providing an articulation of grievances related to basic human needs.

Many arguments have been put forward for social work to be understood as a human rights profession or one that strives for social justice for people in vulnerable and deprived social positions (Androff, 2016; Reynaert et al., 2023; Reichert, 2011; Staub-Bernasconi, 2011, 2016). It is essentially a question of the profession's identity and mission, rendering it consistent with the global definition of social work, stating that principles of human rights are central to social work (IFSW, 2014). In its policy position, the International Federation of Social Work highlights its support for people with disabilities by endorsing the CRPD and affirming the core commitment of the social work profession to human rights (IFSW, 2010). It promises to promote full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society.

With the CRPD in mind, numerous challenges have emerged from the pursuit of social inclusion. In our study, we approach the CRPD as a social work action framework that encompasses values, knowledge, and skills and relates to both the codified law and social constructivist perspective. We maintain that practicing human rights is contingent on social workers' values, knowledge, and skills.

3.2 Method

To attain an understanding of what social workers' values, knowledge, and skills are effective, a two-stage literature review was conducted. First, a scoping review was conducted, followed by a narrative review.

3.2.1 Scoping review

Between December 2021 and February 2022, a scoping review was conducted in accordance with the Joanna Briggs Protocol (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015). The rationale behind this approach is to provide an overview of a broad topic and to map key concepts underpinning our research area: social workers' knowledge, skills, and values pertinent to promoting social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities departing from the CRPD as a human rights framework. Furthermore, a scoping review allowed for a more general question and exploration of the literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peterson et al., 2017). Our scoping review was intended to be exploratory in nature. The Embase, Eric, CINAHL, and ASC databases were searched.

The Joanna Briggs Protocol (2015) suggests using the PCC mnemonic to define inclusion criteria, and stands for Population, Concept, and Context. Population included social workers who supported adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Concept covered knowledge, skills, and values of social workers. Knowledge, skills, and values are aggregated into the notion of competency. Context entailed social work practice, providing both ambulatory support and day activities to adults with mild intellectual disabilities.

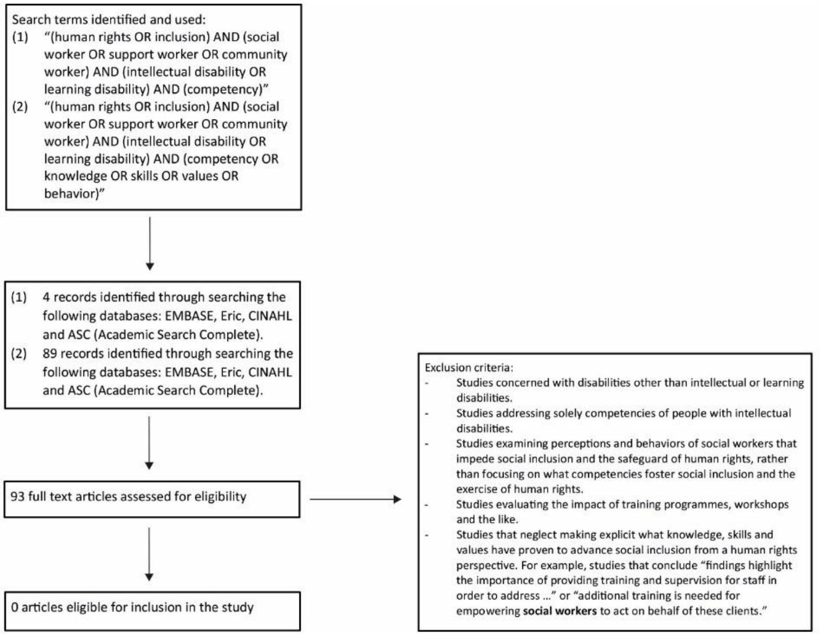
The search strategy comprised a Boolean search and no expanders such as "apply related words" or "fuzzy search" were applied. Sources encompassed books, book chapters, reports, peer-reviewed, and non-peer-reviewed articles published in English between January 1, 2000, and December 31, 2021. In addition to the keywords human rights, social work, intellectual disability, and competency, the search string contained related keywords including inclusion, support worker, community worker, learning disability, knowledge, skills, values, and behavior. The search string was designed in collaboration with a second researcher and information scientist. After determining the search strings, the information specialist repeated the same search procedure independently from the researcher. Striking differences in the first run prompted the search strategy to be rerun. The protocol was followed more closely and all choices and steps were consistently and accurately noted. The second run revealed no significant differences in the search results.

Three studies were retrieved using the search string "(human rights) AND (social worker) AND (intellectual disability) AND (competency)". Adding

AND operators with related key terms, knowledge, skills, values, and behavior, yielded zero results. To broaden the search, the Boolean operator OR was used, which included the aforementioned related keywords. Using the search string "(human rights OR inclusion) AND (social worker OR support worker OR community worker) AND (intellectual disability OR learning disability) AND (competency)" four studies were retrieved. Using the search string "(human rights OR inclusion) AND (social worker OR support worker OR community worker) AND (intellectual disability OR learning disability) AND (competency OR knowledge OR skills OR values OR behavior)" retrieved 89 studies. Selection of pertinent studies found with the two last-mentioned search strings was performed in three steps: first, titles were screened, then abstracts were screened, and finally, full-text articles were screened. The exclusion criteria were as follows.

a) Studies concerned with disabilities other than intellectual or learning disabilities.
b) Studies solely addressing the competencies of people with intellectual disabilities.
c) Studies examining perceptions and behaviors of social workers that impede social inclusion and the safeguarding of human rights rather than focusing on what competencies foster social inclusion and the exercise of human rights.
d) Studies evaluating the impact of training programs, workshops, etc..
e) Studies that neglect making explicit what knowledge, skills and values have proven to promote social inclusion from a human rights perspective. For example, studies that conclude "findings highlight the importance of providing training and supervision for staff in order to address …" or "additional training is needed for empowering social workers to act on behalf of these clients."

Applying all exclusion criteria, we found no studies that were eligible for inclusion in the study. Some studies touched upon a single element of the competencies of social workers (knowledge, skills, or values), but they were not elaborated. Not being able to answer the question with evidence of what social workers' knowledge, values, and skills contribute to the realization of the human rights set forth in the CRPD led us to adopt a different approach, choosing a narrative review.



Search terms identified and used:
(1) "(human rights OR inclusion) AND (social worker OR support worker OR community worker) AND (intellectual disability OR learning disability) AND (competency)"
(2) "(human rights OR inclusion) AND (social worker OR support worker OR community worker) AND (intellectual disability OR learning disability) AND (competency OR knowledge OR skills OR values OR behavior)"

(1) 4 records identified through searching the following databases: EMBASE, Eric, CINAHL and ASC (Academic Search Complete).
(2) 89 records identified through searching the following databases: EMBASE, Eric, CINAHL and ASC (Academic Search Complete).

93 full text articles assessed for eligibility

0 articles eligible for inclusion in the study

Exclusion criteria:
- Studies concerned with disabilities other than intellectual or learning disabilities.
- Studies addressing solely competencies of people with intellectual disabilities.
- Studies examining perceptions and behaviors of social workers that impede social inclusion and the safeguard of human rights, rather than focusing on what competencies foster social inclusion and the exercise of human rights.
- Studies evaluating the impact of training programmes, workshops and the like.
- Studies that neglect making explicit what knowledge, skills and values have proven to advance social inclusion from a human rights perspective. For example, studies that conclude "findings highlight the importance of providing training and supervision for staff in order to address ..." or "additional training is needed for empowering **social workers** to act on behalf of these clients."

Figure 3.1: Flow chart scoping review.

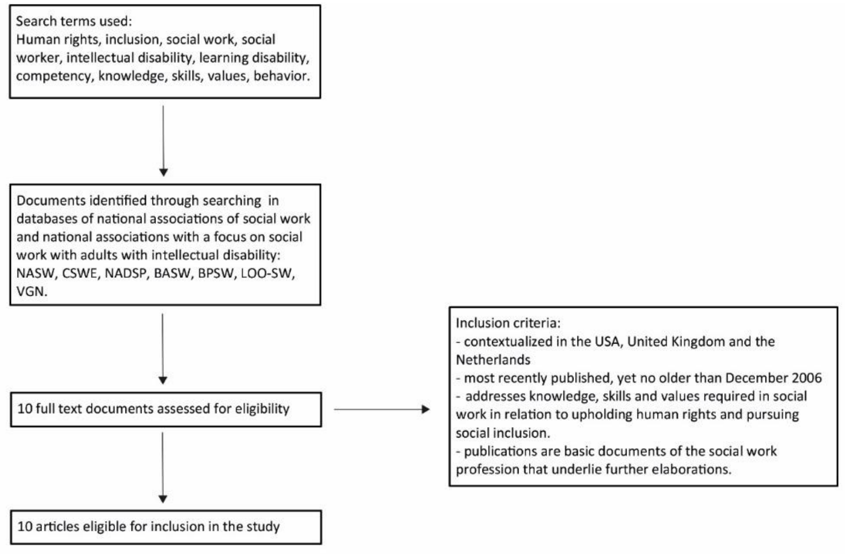
3.2.2 Narrative review

In switching from scoping to narrative review, the search strategy for the scoping review identified sources that remained useful for the narrative review. This enabled us to synthesize the findings of the literature retrieved from the scoping review and hand searches. The narrative review was guided by the Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (SANRA) (Baethge et al., 2019). SANRA comprises six items: (1)

justification of the article’s importance for readership, (2) statement of concrete aims or formulation of questions, (3) description of the literature search, (4) referencing, (5) scientific reasoning, and (6) appropriate presentation of data. The rationale for the literature review remained unchanged. The objectives and questions were revised. We dispensed the criteria of competencies that have been proven to promote social inclusion. The objective was modified to competencies considered relevant in accomplishing the inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. The literature search was confined to social work documents addressing social work values, knowledge, and skills published by national associations of social work and national associations, with a focus on intellectual disability in the USA, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, most recently published. To remain close to our focus on social work core values with respect to human rights, we studied codes of ethics (hereafter referred to as CoEs) because these are suited to translate values into professional standards. Hence, the documents included were geared towards principle documents such as CoEs, professional capabilities frameworks, and educational competencies. This criterion excludes elaborations that occur in large quantities and many variations such as news reports, blogs, comments, statements, signature letters, and policy updates. Due to the diversity of design and search functions in national association databases, a consistent search strategy could not be applied.

With this narrowed scope, our review took the following sources as a guideline (see figure) and attempted to find a synthesis between these sources and literature found through hand searching, mainly handbooks for social workers and students social work aimed at professional support for adults with mild intellectual disabilities (Hopewell et al., 2007).
Our rationale for selecting the USA, the UK, and the Netherlands is grounded in two similar and impactful developments that have largely determined the playing field of social work in the three states. The first is the marketization of social welfare systems, and the second is the decentralization of social welfare programs. In the USA, the UK, and the

Netherlands, both developments have become distinctive features of national social welfare policy. However, in the USA, these developments have a longer history; in the UK, they proceeded in waves (1970s/80s and the 1990s), whereas in the Netherlands, both processes commenced late in the first decade of the 20th century. Additionally, the three states have a long history of social work that supports human rights, which sparked our interest in locating how human rights in general, and the CRPD in particular, are reflected in professional standards.



Search terms used:
Human rights, inclusion, social work, social worker, intellectual disability, learning disability, competency, knowledge, skills, values, behavior.

Documents identified through searching in databases of national associations of social work and national associations with a focus on social work with adults with intellectual disability: NASW, CSWE, NADSP, BASW, BPSW, LOO-SW, VGN.

10 full text documents assessed for eligibility

Inclusion criteria:
- contextualized in the USA, United Kingdom and the Netherlands
- most recently published, yet no older than December 2006
- addresses knowledge, skills and values required in social work in relation to upholding human rights and pursuing social inclusion.
- publications are basic documents of the social work profession that underlie further elaborations.

10 articles eligible for inclusion in the study

*NASW (National Association of Social Workers, USA)
**CSWE (Council on Social Work Education, USA)
***NDASP (National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals, USA)
****BASW (British Association of Social Workers)
*****BPSW (National Association of Social Work, The Netherlands)
******LOO-SW (Council on Social Work Education, The Netherlands)
*******VGN (National Association of Professional Service Providers in Disability Care, The Netherlands)

Figure 3.2: Fow chart narrative review.

3.3 Results

The documents identified variably refer to values, knowledge, skills, behavior, demeanor, capabilities, qualifications, or competences. Although each of these concepts is defined in the literature, their use involves a degree of arbitrariness due to interrelatedness and overlap. Competencies are context-bound, indivisible, and cover clusters of skills, knowledge, attitudes, traits, and insights fueled by values. Moreover, there are various definitions of competence in circulation worldwide (Van Merriënboer et al., 2002). This complicates its use as an independent and an isolated variable. Therefore, we have chosen to narrow the scope to values, as these constitute a principal inspiration for human rights and social work. Despite the indeterminateness that surrounds notions of values, it can be defined as a belief in what people consider valuable and worth pursuing (Banks, 2012). Widely held values are reflected in competency profiles and codes of ethics, and operate as principles that steer behavior. In the literature on human rights and social work, we find numerous treatises on and references to values that lie at the core of human rights. Essentially, these fundamental values amount to dignity, freedom (autonomy), and equality. Since social work can be perceived as a human rights profession that seeks social justice, we can assume that it embraces values that inspire human rights ideology and human rights realization. Below, we present the results in two clusters: values, and knowledge and skills.

3.3.1 Values in the convention and codes of ethics

No striking differences were found in the CoEs in the three countries studied. The international definition of social work serves as a fundamental reference point, and the CoEs are in keeping with the global social work statement of ethical principles (IFSW, 2018). Contrary to the American and Dutch National Association of Social Work (NASW and BPSW respectively), the British CoEs has incorporated these principles in full, which is reflected in the presentation of core values, ethical principles, and standards. The Dutch (BPSW, 2021), British (BASW, 2021), and

American (NSWE, 2022) social work CoEs established five, three, and six core values, respectively, of which social justice, human rights, and respect for human dignity and autonomy were the same. The remaining core values cannot be copied one-to-one, but have considerable overlap despite the different terminologies. This concerns commitment and willingness to assist people, reliability, integrity, expertise, and exercise of care in the Dutch CoEs, which equals professional integrity in the British CoEs, and the importance of human relationships, integrity, competence, and service in the American CoEs.

The CoEs also showed similarities in their purposes and amounts to transparency and accountability of social work (NL and USA, respectively), a touchstone or assessment tool for engaging in unethical conduct (NL and USA), and guidance and support for identifying relevant ethical considerations (NL and USA, respectively). The British Association of Social Work (BASW) does not explicitly list the purposes of the CoEs, but reflects the same goals, encapsulated in "to ensure as far as possible that its members act ethically." In this respect, the British CoEs summarizes the values and aspirations that characterize social work in the UK, which serves as a guideline and touchstone. Transparency and accountability are expressed by social workers having "a responsibility […] to work to the Code of Ethics in carrying out their obligations to people who use social work services, to one another, to their employers, to colleagues in other disciplines and to society."

In addition, the three CoEs agree on the mission of social work. However, the role of social work in bringing about social change differs among the three countries. The BASW and NASW portray social work as change agents who exert their influence at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. The NASW, for instance, prescribes that "social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients" and the BASW puts it as "social workers are change agents in social and civil society as well as in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve". In the Netherlands, this ambition remains limited to micro-level practices and is exemplified by the sole mention that "professionals strive to address and increase individuals' capacity for change and self-actualization."

The latter seems to be at odds with the plea of the CRPD that argues for transformative equality, which challenges dominant social and institutional structures that create barriers to equal participation, and advocates removing the causes of entrenched forms of discrimination (Biholar, 2014; Goldschmidt, 2017b). On the other hand, British and American CoEs concur that social work must be vigilant of social development and policies that may lead to injustice and inequality. Under its core value of social justice, the BASW proclaims that social workers have a responsibility to challenge oppression on any basis including disability, and declares most clearly in its fourth principle that social workers "are expected to bring to the attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where resources are inadequate, and/or where distribution of resources, policies and practice are oppressive, discriminatory or otherwise unfair, harmful or illegal." In ethical standard 6 of the NASW CoEs, social and political action is outlined as a social workers' ethical responsibility to the broader society and encompasses all efforts "to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources" and that social workers are "awareness of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice." The Dutch code of ethics avoids terms such as oppression and marginalization, though it mentions discrimination once: social workers "recognize and value diversity and stand up against discrimination" which is aimed at "promoting equal access for all to information, services [...] In doing so, they contribute to an inclusive society, social justice and equal dignity." Social and political action is only hinted as a responsibility for ethical practice when ethical principles are under pressure: "the social worker is bound to signal this to the organization, policy makers, the public and politics."

This difference in emphasis marks the double-edged nature of social work, consisting of elements of care and control that can either lead to empowerment or oppression. Moreover, it indicates a tension in the positioning of social work perceived as state agency on the one hand and citizen agency on the other, that is, social work complying with government-established regulations and the position of taking the community as a departure point to identify the wishes and needs of (vulnerable) citizens and groups in society in search of emancipation (Thompson, 2020; Veldboer, 2019). In this respect, the Dutch CoEs tends towards an individual approach and the implementation of government policy. The CoEs must relate to the CRPD that stresses the state's obligation to protect and promote human rights while simultaneously encouraging social workers to question injustices and take social and political action. British and American CoEs seem more persuasive in having social work engage in this dynamic of human rights realization.

CRPD general principles	**Core values alignment in CoEs**	**BASW (UK)**	**NASW (USA)**	**BPSW (NL)**
Dignity (art.3a,h) Autonomy (art.3a) Non-discrimination (art.3b) Participation and inclusion (art.3c) Diversity (art.3d) Equality (art.3e,g) Accessibility (3f)	Dignity	0	1	1
	Social justice	1	1	1
	Human rights	1	0	1
	Integrity	1	1	1
	Competence	0	1	1
	Service	0	1	1

0 signifies value is not mentioned as core value, but is attached to a different core value
1 signifies value is mentioned literally and explicitly in the code of ethics as a core value

Table 3.1: CRPD general principles and CoEs core values.

3.3.2 Knowledge and skills

Notwithstanding the diversity of formulations and classifications in the documents studied, we found a strong alignment in the required social work competencies in the USA, UK, and the Netherlands. These were condensed into six clusters: engagement, assessment, intervention, empowerment, advancement, and professionalism.

Skills for engagement encompass responsiveness to the person with intellectual disability and the family, which is manifested in showing empathy, being tolerant, respecting wishes and feelings, and being alert to service users' needs (Mantell, 2013). In accordance with CRPD Articles 2, 3f, and 9, which address accessibility, it demands communication skills and knowledge of the different ways people with lived experiences communicate, the types of communication and language aids, and approaches available (BASW, 2019:13).

Assessment primarily serves the purpose of determining what support is needed to lead a desired quality of life and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights. This can be understood in light of the quality of life framework associated with the CRPD ((Schalock 2004, Verdugo et al., 2012). Promoting and sustaining a person's quality of life is affected in partnership with adults with a mild intellectual disability. Social workers use their knowledge and skills and employ methods to map out present capacities, wishes, and needs to co-develop personalized support plans. This applies to all human rights as contained in the CRPD, in particular, all substantive rights (Art.10-30) and most articles of general application (Art.5-9). For example art. 26 (habilitation and rehabilitation) addresses appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to achieve and maintain maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and occupational competence, and full integration and participation in all aspects of life. It is a social worker's remit to support the development of this ability. In social work habilitation and rehabilitation programs are based on the multidisciplinary assessment of individual needs and strengths so as to support participation and inclusion in the community. Next to this, assessment involves identifying the risks of human rights violations induced by policies and social work practices. In this case, assessment holds keeping a sharp lookout for policies and practices that may infringe on people's rights and affect their quality of life. Social workers need to be knowledgeable about legislation and understand its (adverse) impact.

Intervention covers actions taken to improve a condition or situation (e.g., disorder, housing, employment, discrimination, and oppression) and involves interference by a social worker in the client's affairs. Interventions include a hugely varied palette of actions in what is delivered, in terms of intensity and frequency, and the effectiveness of interventions is contingent on the person who intervenes. In view of human rights practice and the CRPD, we can discern two ways in which social work interventions relate to the human rights framework. First, so-called negative rights interventions ensure protection from all kinds of abuse, such as mechanical restraint (fixation), forced medication, limitation of freedom of movement, and protection against many forms of abuse. Second, a positive rights intervention aims at securing the wellbeing and personal growth of people with intellectual disability and revolves around education, employment, housing, food, accessibility, and personal mobility. Such interventions impose the duty to help sustain and enhance the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities. Social work methods and interventions such as the solution-focused approach, social role valorization, and personal future planning are available to contribute to social inclusion.

Van Regenmortel (2009) defines empowerment as a process of strengthening individuals, organizations and communities to grasp their own situation and their environment, by gaining control, sharpening critical awareness, and stimulating participation. Hence, harnessing self-advocacy constitutes a key aspect of empowerment (Goodley, 2005). Defining empowerment in this manner illustrates the relationship between human rights and the role of social work. At the forefront are competences geared towards supporting adults with mild intellectual disabilities in learning to develop a critical reflection on their own position in society, in supporting them to gain or increase control over matters that concern them, and in speaking up for themselves. In doing so, the social worker adheres to the convention's intent as set out in the general principles, by contributing to respect for (personal) dignity and individual autonomy and the "full and effective participation in society.”

Advancement can be understood in two ways: (a) protecting the human rights of people with intellectual disabilities and (b) promoting personal growth. The first matches advocacy and presupposes negotiation skills to reach some form of agreement or understanding in situations of tension or conflict, where inclusion is being thwarted or human rights are being violated. The CRPD targets the state's obligation to uphold human rights. The CoEs and competency profiles are inspired by human rights and take its protection and promotion as a co-responsibility of social work. It requires staying informed of laws, regulations, and policies, and being keen on opportunities as well as threats. For social work practice, the state obligations view is inadequate as it misses sharing community responsibility. Advocacy functions to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct human rights by speaking out for and with those who are vulnerable, at-risk, or marginalized (Bigby & Frawley 2010). Experiential knowledge of people with intellectual disabilities is crucial in advocacy since it constitutes a primary source of information about how policy is put into practice. Social workers and life experts who train the community (art. 8 Awareness-raising) can be an excellent part of that advocacy work. The second understanding of advancement entails what Beernink-Wissink (2015) referred to as “to flourish.” In collaboration with people with intellectual disabilities, social work seeks a balance between feeling at home, feeling comfortable, feeling safe and secure, which ultimately produces well-being and personal growth. The final cluster of social work competencies prominent in the American, British, and Dutch competency profiles involves professionalism. It spans a wide range of knowledge, skills, and behaviors essential to the translation of the CRPD and covers sociopolitical, community, organization, professional, and individual factors. Professionalism should be conceived as a cluster of cross-cutting competencies needed to champion human rights. Social workers must remain alert to practices that breach human rights and policies that put human rights under pressure. To do so, social workers need the ability to signal and raise the issue of injustice, initiate action, enter into dialogue with the actors concerned so as to seek a solution, and, if dialogue remains unsuccessful, file a complaint with a human rights institution. It helps if a social worker is knowledgeable about the content of the CRPD and has an insight into the rationale of matters, such as reasonable accommodation, universal design, and accessibility issues (Art. 2).

Because human rights can mutually conflict and are surrounded by dissensus, social workers face the challenge of dealing with this complexity (Mouffe, 2004; Reynaert et al., 2023). The dissensus unfolds amid social work practice, and in the line of argument of human rights conceived as social construction, social work is instrumental in this process of human rights construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction (Ife, 2009; Reynaert et al., 2023). In such a sociopolitical and community arena, professionalism is called for as a mixture of accountability, reflection, leadership, communication skills, self-representation, resilience, creative thinking, perseverance, etc.

3.3.3 Differences

Although the ethical codes and competency profiles in all three countries consider the international definition of social work as their point of departure, striking differences appear in their national translations. The differences occur mainly between the competency profiles.

3.3.3.1 Framework and terminology

First, the countries studied utilize a different framework and apply different terminologies that determine what we perceive and do not perceive, and what is given more or less attention and value. Thus, it has implications for professional orientation and performance, which may not necessarily be consistent with the international definition and objectives of social work.

The American Council on Social Work Education (CSWE 2022) has adopted a competency-based education framework containing nine competencies, and “recognizes a holistic view of competence.” It articulates the “demonstration of competence that is informed by knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that include the social worker’s critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment in regard to unique practice situations.” The BASW is inspired by a Professional Capabilities Framework containing super domains and nine domain descriptors. Each domain is described in terms of its behavior. In the Netherlands, it is structured by three social work core tasks subdivided into qualifications containing an integration of knowledge, skills, values, and behavior. The core tasks and qualifications consistently target 'social functioning' and 'social quality, ’ which translate to people's participation in social life and to the space and opportunities that social life offers people to participate (LOO-SW 2017:11). Interestingly, the separate, most extensive chapter is devoted to the knowledge required in social work, which negates the integrative approach.

3.3.3.2 Embedding human rights and advocacy

Second, the connection with human rights and the embedding of human rights in the competence profiles as well as the role of advocacy is, unlike in Dutch social work, strongly profiled in the American and British social work competency profiles. Human rights were not mentioned in the Dutch Social Work Competence profile. On one occasion, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was referenced. The BASW has drawn up a human rights policy stressing that practice is based on the code of ethics and underpinned by a human rights-based approach in social work, and references the International Bill of Human Rights and all conventions (BASW, 2015). In addition, it provides a practical guide for social work and human rights (2019). In the Netherlands, no policy has been established by the National Social Work Association, the National Association of Schools of Social Work (LOO-SW) or the

National Association for Care and Support for People with Intellectual Disabilities (VGN, 2015, 2019).

In the USA, social work and human rights are thoroughly linked, as evidenced by the various references and firm positions that they have acquired. For example, the purpose of social work is “actualized through its quest for social, racial, economic, and environmental justice” and “the creation of conditions that facilitate the realization of human rights” (CSWE 2022:14). Furthermore, a special focus on advancing human rights and the dimensions of justice was provided (Competencies 2 and 5). Human rights are an explicit part of the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards; a Committee on Human Rights was established to promote awareness of human rights within social work education, advocacy for and assisting with the integration of human rights in social work educational curricula, and developing opportunities to combine human rights and social justice perspectives in social work education (CSWE 2023). In the Netherlands, there is no such entity related to social work education. A third difference can be discerned in the role of advocacy in social work, which is most prominent in the British and American social work competency profiles. A telling example, "social workers advocate for and engage in strategies to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social resources, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, economic, social, and cultural human rights are protected." (CSWE 2022:9). Social work is explicitly mandated to engage in and advocate for antiracist and anti-oppressive practices. In the UK, advocacy is repeatedly addressed as a practice of social work and is related to the advancement of human rights and promotion of social justice. It considers both knowledge and the development of skills to understand and apply social and rights-based models and approaches to advocating for social justice, inclusion, rights, and resources (BASW 2019:15). Reference is made to anti-oppressive principles and particularly focused on ensuring accessible and appropriate services. For example the Professional Capabilities Framework for the social worker expresses that the social worker “recognise[s] discriminatory practices and inequality and develop[s] a range of approaches to appropriately challenge service users, colleagues and senior staff.“ (BASW 2018:4).

Macro-level advocacy is most strongly articulated in the Impact super domain of the Professional Capabilities Framework, which deals with how social workers can bring about change through their practice by seeking ways to influence policy at the local and national levels (BASW 2019:23). In the Netherlands, advocacy as a social work competency has received little attention. It is occasionally formulated as "having knowledge of" formal and informal entities such as volunteer organizations, client organizations, advocacy organizations (LOO-SW 2017:42). Advocacy is almost exclusively related to the micro-practices of individuals, families, and professionals (guardians), how to take into account the interests of the youth and parents, and how to deal with tensions. In one case, advocacy transcends micro-practices and is associated with promoting people's social participation; however, no explicit underpinnings or relationships are made with human rights and social justice (LOO-SW 2017:55).

3.3.3.3 Structural issues with society

A number of subjects matters received particular attention in their competency profiles. These differences are particularly evident in justice, racism, and notions of diversity, superdiversity, and intersectionality. All social work associations pay considerable attention to economic and social justice. However, the CSWE embraces several dimensions of justice that are not expressed in British and Dutch social work competency profiles, namely, racial and environmental justice. In this regard, nothing concrete was stated in the Netherlands. The British Association of Social Work has kept it at a minimum in its underpinning human rights policy saying that the “BASW Code of Ethics describes a broad view of values and principles, extending even to non-human animals and the natural environment." (BASW 2021:9). In addition, there is one discrete reference to the right to a clean environment (BASW 2021:14).

Notable differences were observed in diversity, superdiversity, and intersectionality. In the US competency profile, intersectionality is prominent (Competency 3). In the UK, the BASW mentions "intersectionality" of (social) categories only once and relates it to discriminatory and oppressive practices. In the Netherlands, the social work association does not mention or refer to intersectionality. It maintains the concepts of diversity and superdiversity. In relation to these notions, and in contrast to the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, racism and anti-racism are convincingly highlighted in the CSWE documents. In the British Professional Capabilities Framework, race is mentioned once when explaining diversity as a multidimensional concept. In the underpinning Human Rights Policy and Practical Guide to Social Work and Human Rights, it is referred to indirectly. In the Dutch profile, neither racism nor anti-racism is mentioned, nor is the presence of oppression and marginalization explicitly expressed. Additionally, unlike the CSWE, neither British nor Dutch social work competency profiles cite white privilege and white supremacy. This is rather striking given the history of colonization and slavery and the importance of understanding the historical roots of profound and structural contemporary social and racial injustices.

3.4 Conclusion

The CRPD, as a codification of the human rights model of disability, is a promising instrument for promoting and protecting the basic human needs of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. The codes of ethics translate the human rights set forth in the CRPD into values and principles that inform social workers' actions. Since the international definition of social work serves as a fundamental reference point, and CoEs are in keeping with the global social work statement of ethical principles, no striking differences were found. They pursue the same fundamental values. However, the social work profiles differed significantly.

In contrast to the Dutch social work context, British and American CoEs seem more persuasive in having social work engage in questioning macro-injustices and taking social and political action to advocate for human rights. Social workers are presented as agents of social change.

The Code of Ethics are related to competence profiles. At first glance, there were no major differences between the three countries studied. They stated that social work is related to engagement, assessment, intervention, empowerment, advancement, and professionalism. From this perspective, we argue that these clusters of competencies are applicable to social work as a human rights profession.

Notwithstanding this alignment of competencies, we note striking differences in the importance attached to advocacy, in the human rights underpinnings of social work, and how human rights are embedded in social work, CoEs, and competency profiles. In this regard, social work associations in the USA and UK present the profession more emphatically as one that has human rights as its foundation and holds human rights as a moral compass to achieve social justice. In the elaboration of the competency profiles, we found even stronger differences in social issues, where social work was assigned a crucial role. While social work in the USA receives full attention for anti-racist practices and intersectionality, for social work in the UK and NL, this seems hardly an issue, although such issues are also a concern in these countries.

The CoEs and competency profiles mirror national consciousness and the recognition of inequalities and injustices. Social work must hold that mirror up to itself and society. The consequences of translating core values and human rights into national CoEs and competency profiles are not innocuous. Social work that pays little or no attention to injustices in its CoEs and competency profiles, identifies few or no concrete social issues, does not take an outspoken critical position, and denies its origins and mission. Social work then becomes more of a state agent and loses sight of its remit as a human and citizen-rights agent. If this happens, pleas for social work as a human rights profession risk become mere rhetoric.

Social work could benefit from formulating national CoEs and competency profiles internationally, supported by the critical assistance from international social work. International comparison can help uncover blind spots, raise awareness of the underexposure of relevant social issues, and thus enable adjustments so that social work in a national context better reflects the origins and goals of social work.

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CHAPTER 4

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Towards inclusive social work – putting an ecological approach into practice

Abstract

Support for an ecological approach appears to predominate in models geared towards inclusive policies and practices. As such, ecological approaches are in keeping with the social model of disability and a relational understanding of (intellectual) disability. For this study, the ecological model put forward by Simplican et al. (2015) served as a framework in two research projects carried out in the Netherlands between 2016-2021.

In both projects adults with intellectual disabilities, social workers and educators participated in workshops and focus group meetings. Based on data from these projects the model was evaluated for its practical value to social work. This led to four propositions rendering the ecological model more dynamic: adding a focus to change agency and change processes, refining levels of facilitating and impeding variables, adding a focus to participation and influence, and incorporating an intersectionality lens. The ecological model provides good guidance for policies and practice, however, it does more justice to changing and complex practices if we conceive of it in terms of four core dynamics.

4.1 Introduction

Considerable effort and research have been devoted to formulating conceptual definitions of social inclusion. This has led to a terminological forest that is sustained rather than clarified (Amado & McBride, 2013; Simplican et al., 2015; Bigby et al., 2017). By and large, the conceptual maze encompasses three main strands, consisting of components and life domains, barriers and facilitators, and meaning and measurement. Components of social inclusion cover sense of belonging, being accepted as an individual and uniqueness, having meaningful and reciprocal relationships with nondisabled community members, having voice and choice, feeling competent, having service provider support and natural support (Hall, 2009; Amado & McBride, 2013; Jansen et al., 2014; Cobigo et al., 2016). These components intersect with life domains such as work, housing, recreation, leisure, and a multitude of barriers and facilitators identified in accomplishing the social inclusion objective. Barriers and facilitators vary in contextual factors (physical accessibility, communication, social spaces, professional and community attitudes, local social infrastructure, economic expectations and facilities, legislation and policies) and personal factors such as intrinsic motivation, goal setting, level of functioning, and self-esteem (Hall, 2005; Kröber, 2008; Cobigo et al., 2012; Bredewold, 2014; Moonen, 2015; Simplican et al., 2015; Brummel, 2017; Overmars-Marx et al., 2017).

Complexity to the inclusion discourse is added with the question of measurability. On the one hand a subjective meaning of inclusion is centered on the individual experience and connecting life stories (Meininger, 2010; Cobigo et al., 2016), and on the other hand, there is a desire to gauge inclusion in terms of quantities (Amado & McBride, 2013; Jansen et al., 2014; Asunta et al., 2021) as the argument persists that social inclusion is too important not to measure (Coombs et al., 2013). Martin and Cobigo (Martin & Cobigo, 2011), however, cautioned that the nature of the measure used has a significant impact on the outcome of inclusion. Understanding and measuring social inclusion as a comprehensive concept is strongly impacted by the indicators selected. They furthermore note that objective measures yield higher rates than subjective measures. Consequently, when the person's subjective experience is measured, achieving social inclusion seems further away than counting participation in, for instance, social or leisure activities, work or receiving support from an informal helper.

In the pursuit of social inclusion several approaches are put forward that incorporate these strands. Kröber (2016) champions a simultaneous and multi-perspective approach encompassing bottom-up, middle and top-down strategies. Moreover, in an earlier study Kröber (2008) highlights “entry strategies” which amount to an implementation strategy that deals with how to introduce and execute a new vision and mission across all levels of an organization. This approach considers the socio-political environment, the organization, the employees and the people with disabilities including their informal network. Cobigo et al. (2016) suggest a framework stressing the dynamic process between personal characteristics and skills, and environmental factors, in which socially valued roles have a pivotal function. Simplican et al. (2015) proposed an ecological model of social inclusion consisting of two overlapping life domains: interpersonal relationships and community participation. The first comprises category, structure and function. Category refers to social connections that range from intimate relationships to superficial encounters. Structure relates to social networks and covers duration of relationships, frequency and intensity of encounters, reciprocity and location. Function indicates relationships that fulfill emotional or instrumental needs. Community participation is distinguished in a similar threefold manner. Category signifies activities in the community (leisure, political, religious, cultural activities, productive and consumptive activities). Structure points to settings that either can be segregated from mainstream society, semi-segregated and non-segregated (mainstream or integrated). Level refers to being engaged in - activities in - the community and can be described in terms of participation ladders focused on labor participation or political participation (Arnstein, 1969; Bosselaar, 2011), or interaction patterns between people with and without a disability (Bredewold & Slendebroek-Meints, 2013; Bredewold, 2014). Furthermore, they include a set of elements that shape pathways to and from social inclusion grouped into individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and socio-political clusters. Both domains and the set of facilitating and impeding variables clearly underline the features inherent to relational social work (Folgheraiter & Raineri, 2012; Driessens, 2022).

The ecological model appears comprehensive given its applicability to any domain of life accounting for factors that can be either conductive or impeding at different levels in society. It does not provide a tool for measuring social inclusion either objectively or subjectively, but rather provides starting points for developing and evaluating research, policies and programs. Simplican et al. (2015) argue that the ecological model is an appropriate guide for future research questions and approaches that can move social inclusion forward. As yet, one empirical evaluation of this model is available. With the aim of validating the model, Meys et al (Meys et al., 2021) confirm that the ecological model helps in obtaining an overview of enabling and impeding conditions. They conclude that some factors on the individual and interpersonal level require further detail such as adding personality traits as a factor affecting social inclusion and a division between formal social networks and informal social networks. They furthermore add dynamics as a dimension that covers each level of factors. Dynamics - both over time and between enabling and disabling factors - would provide more insight into the evolution of social inclusion.

In the period 2016-2021 we carried out two projects where the ecological model served as a framework. Drawing on the experiences we evaluated the model for its practical value to social work. As such, this study further contributes to the validation of the ecological model.

4.2 Method

The two projects we ran between 2016-2021 were named 'Inclusive Campus Life' and 'Towards Inclusion'. The objective of the Erasmus+ co-funded project Inclusive Campus Life was to promote and support inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities in university campuses (IC Life, 2016). To achieve this, four schools of social work in Europe collaborated for three years (2016-2019) in so called work packages that revolved around accessibility, buddy systems, learning and teaching activities by students with mild intellectual disabilities, curriculum development, and workplacement. Universities involved were Thomas More University of Applied Sciences (Belgium), Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands), Palacký University (Czech Republic) and Lapland University of Applied Sciences (Finland). In addition, the international advocacy organization Inclusion Europe was engaged in the project.

The project Towards Inclusion was aimed at deepening and nuancing conceptual and professional social work related knowledge on how to advance the social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities in the community (Knevel et al., 2022). This involved a 2-year collaboration between 2019-2021 with social workers and adults with mild intellectual disabilities in two cities of the Netherlands, Wageningen and Amsterdam. In both projects the ecological model was evaluated during workshops and focus group meetings.

Informed consent was obtained verbally – audio-recorded - from all participants involved in the study.

Workshops and focus group IC Life project

During the Inclusive Campus Life project four workshops with international partners (Geel 2017 and 2018, Utrecht 2019, Brussels 2019) were organized that were attended by management staff, educators, life experts, researchers and students from the partnering schools of social work, and advocacy organizations (see table 1). On one occasion educators and management staff from the Ukrainian Catholic University

(Lviv) attended. Beside the workshops, four focus group meetings were organized (Geel 2017, Kemi 2018, Olomouc 2018, Utrecht 2019) and solely attended by the educators and management staff that formed the core team of the IC Life project. These meetings took place at the universities involved in this project. At the workshops and focus groups experiences were collected with regard to advancing social inclusion at the university, an ecological approach was discussed, and suggestions were made for redesigning it. Workshops and focus groups were held every four to six months. After completion and closure of the IC Life project, the assessment and redevelopment of an ecological approach continued in the project Towards Inclusion.

Focus groups Towards Inclusion

In this project we gathered in two separate focus groups called Communities of Development (CoD) which derives from the idea of community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 2010; Wilken et al., 2021). Wenger (2010) describes a community of practice as a social learning system in a social context where a dual process of meaning making materializes. This duality consists of participation and reification. The first involves active involvement in activities, conversations and reflections. The latter involves producing physical and conceptual artifacts such as words, tools, concepts and methods. The community of development includes both participation and reification, but links this dual process to four goals, namely, producing knowledge, designing a solution, bringing about (social) change and personal and collective professionalization of the participants (Van Beest et al., 2017). The CoD further distinguishes itself from the CoP by the emphasis on collectively designing solutions and by substantiating the process and results—artifacts—with research.

A total of nineteen meetings were held over a period of two years, at intervals of seven to eight weeks (see table 1). Ten meetings with the CoD Wageningen and nine meetings with de CoD Amsterdam. The CoD Amsterdam and the CoD Wageningen were composed of social workers and adults with mild intellectual disabilities. The CoD Amsterdam and the

CoD Wageningen comprised eight and four participants respectively. The CoD Amsterdam contained two experts by experience. The CoD Wageningen started with two experts by experience, but as the project progressed one withdrew for practical reasons (moving to another city) and the other due to the subject matter which was deemed too abstract.

	Workshops	**Focus groups**	**Participants workshops**	**Participants focus groups**
IC Life	4	4	27* (5, 10, 4, 8)	8**
Towards Inclusion	X	19	X	12*** (8+4)

Table 4.1: Research participation.

* Twenty-two social work educators, three life experts with mild intellectual disability, two managers/staff members
** Seven social work educators, one manager.
*** Two experts by experience with mild intellectual disability, two managers/staff members, eight social workers.

The evaluation process followed a cyclical and incremental route that consisted of group discussions, notes of these discussions, producing drafts and prototypes, which were field tested - testing instructions were provided - and discussed and adjusted in subsequent meetings. The evaluation items covered:

1) Language (what language is used in the ecological approach towards inclusion).
2) Structure (the ecological approach is captured in what kind of structure).
3) Practice-focused (to what extent is the ecological approach consistent with experiences in practice).
4) Purpose (evaluation instrument for change, advancement towards inclusion, measuring quantities).
5) Operationalization (sensitizing concepts incorporated such as inclusion, participation, involvement, change).

6) Focus on transforming the current situation into a more inclusive one.
7) Comprehensiveness (what content is relevant and how is this incorporated in an ecological approach).
8) Consideration of context (to what extent is the ecological approach fit for international use taking into account history, socio-politics, community cultures, organizational culture etcetera).

The collected data consisted of handwritten notes taken during the meetings, reports (written and visualized) made of the meetings, audio recordings of the meetings using a voice recorder, and all tangible material created during the meetings such as written results from brainstorming sessions, empathy maps, sketches, drawings, and prototypes. The handwritten notes and reports were shared with the participants during the whole research process and provided input for further discussion at each succeeding meeting. The tangible materials served as tools to collect data, for instance to use as a means for conversation. Audio-recordings were transcribed and analysis was caried out in the last stages of both research projects. Results from the analysis were shared and discussed with the participants for validation.

Ethics

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study in four ways: (1) physical meetings to explain the project and discover the motivations and potential contributions of the participants, and (2) a visual representation for persons with intellectual disabilities concerning information about the research project, roles, and responsibilities. The visualization complied with accessible language criteria, (3) signing of a general cooperation agreement with partner organizations, and (4) informed consent was recorded with a voice recorder. Oral informed consent was obtained rather than written consent. Privacy by default was used in this study. This means that this research adopted the highest possible privacy settings.

The research proposal was submitted for ethical review to the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (ECO-SD) and the Ethical Review Committee (ETC) of the University of Humanistic Studies. An explanatory commentary and advice on the research proposal requested that attention be paid to and the possible risks for the participants be kept in mind (ECO-SD).

4.3 Findings

The group discussions and evaluations converged into four themes: change agency and change processes, finer grained levels covering enabling and impeding variables, participation and influence, and intersectionality. The four themes are in keeping with the relational understanding of (intellectual) disability, which assumes, (a) a mismatch between the person and the environment that needs redressing, (b) that (intellectual) disability is a situational or contextual phenomenon, and (c) that (intellectual) disability is a relative social construct (Goodley, 2017). Relational understanding highlights the empowering and disempowering contributions of services and practitioners, to include social workers. It implies a moral stance that deems exclusion from communities and social work practices as morally unacceptable. The four themes described align with the relational model since both aim at systemic change, normalization and inclusive community living (Folgheraiter & Raineri 2012; Wolfensberger, 2013; Ingram & Smith, 2018).

4.3.1 Change agency and change processes

Most conceptualizations of social inclusion highlight a process signifying change. However, in the ecological model, little detail is given to change agency and change processes. The research projects confirm that inclusion requires a change agency and that advancing inclusion benefits from the understanding that it demands a multi-stage change process. Here, change is understood in terms of how Folgheraiter and Raineri (2012, 476-477) phrased it: as an 'associated (social) action... a joint will to attain a desired improvement.'

Broadly speaking, social workers demonstrated change agency in two ways. First, behavior that shows initiative, proactivity, networking and building relationships with the organization's management and staff, and with the community, and setting and achieving feasible goals. Educators and social workers gave evidence of this in the many activities they undertook in their practice, either in promoting an inclusive campus for higher education through workplacement, in collaborating with people with intellectual disabilities in teaching and training activities at the university, or in facilitating encounters between people with intellectual disabilities and community members with no intellectual disability through inclusive and competitive sports events such as football and volleyball.

A second behavior featuring change agency is the advocacy of persons with intellectual disabilities in which ingrained and outdated stereotypes and prejudices within the community are combated (actively seeking to alter perceptions). A striking example was given by a social worker in calling herself a "destigmatizer" when she came to the realization that she is practically continually reminding staff of various organizations (health services, social service providers, community organizations such as sports clubs and so on) of their stigmatizing utterances and conduct. Both behaviors are complementary and fit in the endeavour of inclusion-focused social work that seeks change for the benefit of the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities. Both behaviors were demonstrated in the practices involved in the research projects. Although the degree of project-based work in both research projects differed greatly, we nevertheless recognized different stages that are necessary to bring about change.

In addition to change agency, change processes were identified in five recurring stages, with the last stage expressly deemed desirable by the participants. It concerns absence, agenda setting, analysis, action, and (inclusive) evaluation. Absence is to be conceived of as a stage zero. This holds that inclusion in general terms or specified as a single topic is not being addressed. For instance, it is not on the agenda of the organization's board, management and staff, politics, policy makers, executives, social workers or any other relevant actor. A subsequent stage is agenda-setting. Inclusion in general or a specific topic pertaining to inclusion is being discussed by the organization's board, management and staff, politics, policy makers and so on. Intentions to address the topic are expressed. In this stage agents consider to endeavor for inclusion with regards to a preferred topic. Agenda-setting is followed by analysis. Inclusion in general or a specific topic has been taken on the agenda. Staff is assigned to conduct an analysis on topics such as accessibility (physical, social, information and communication), involvement in activities at school or participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport, workplacement (employment opportunities). The analysis provides a picture of the situation at the local setting that is chosen to pursue inclusion of persons with a mild intellectual disability. Stemming from the analysis it is determined on which topics action is taken. An action plan is drawn up containing goals and performance indicators. Now intentions are being turned into actions.

Succeeding the action stage, evaluation is required and can be conducted in two ways: in a non-inclusive and inclusive manner. We shape this distinction explicitly as too often evaluations of projects aiming at inclusion come about lacking genuine involvement and influence of the people concerned. Tokenism lurks when people with intellectual disabilities are solely deployed to carry out activities and are otherwise excluded from participating in project stages, such as setting goals, thinking along with planning, implementation and evaluation. Doing so, they partially lose their voice. For instance, evaluation in the non-inclusive way is performed by social workers and proxies but not the persons with an intellectual disability themselves. The inclusive manner includes persons with intellectual disability irrespective of whatever position he or she holds. Reciprocity and learning together during the whole process is a prerequisite to fully experience the stage of inclusive evaluation.

Evaluation encompasses a number of items: goals (with regard to what topics did you set goals, which goals do you reckon achieved and which not), pathways (what were major actions undertaken to achieve your goals, in what timeline were major actions undertaken, and by whom), enabling conditions (what conditions facilitated the accomplishment of your goals), impeding conditions (what conditions impeded the accomplishment of your goals), and opportunities (what could you do different in achieving your goals, what impeding condition can you change into opportunities).

4.3.2 Levels of enabling and impeding variables

A micro, mezzo, macro division was perceived as a clear, but too coarse-grained structure. In a more refined division such as clusters of variables at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and socio-political level (Simplican et al., 2015), much overlap and a lack of practical relevance was observed: social workers deemed the classification indiscriminate and could not quite recognize their social work practice in it. This deficiency was overcome by adding two levels: social workers (professionals) and department or team level, which we refer to as unit.

At the level of professionals, we can identify indicators that promote or hinder inclusion. This is reflected in the social workers' value orientation and their professional attitude (Kröber, 2008), the social workers' vision of the social work core remit, and approaches and methods employed in a team (Knevel & Wilken, 2015; Wilken & Knevel, 2016), the social workers' confidence in their personal competences to have an impact (Moonen, 2015), holding stereotypes, prejudices and unwittingly stigmatizing people with intellectual disabilities (Pelleboer-Gunnink, 2020), and social workers acting with disciplinary power that violates human rights and conflicts with ideas of justice (Klaase, 2019).
Unit-level was added after participants' repeated observations that team composition has a strong bearing on whether or not social workers support and implement the corporate vision. In addition, a team that has

an enhanced focus on inclusion may stand out from the organization. Teams or departments can be more ambitious than what the corporate vision dictates. Team cultures and departmental cultures can differ and may even deviate from the corporate culture to such an extent that it the corporate culture and structure constitutes an impeding factor - technology, financial space, laws and regulations. Another observation holds that in teams, one or a few professionals oftentimes fulfill a pioneer's role, whilst other team members distance themselves from the matter and label the frontrunners' work as "that's their job". In doing so, they barely adopt inclusion-focused actions that are based on good experiences. Management and staff are an integral part of the effort to achieve inclusion. Invariably, their behavior serves as an example to inspire confidence in team members and encourage them to perform inclusion focused as well. When this behavior expresses intrinsic belief in inclusion it proofs to be a facilitator. Imposing an inclusion-focused approach on a team is counterproductive.

4.3.3 Participation and influence

An ecological approach to promoting social inclusion presumes the acknowledgment of the voices of persons concerned and thus sharing influence and power. Influence is comprehended as a phenomenon that affects the probability of choices, thereby impacting behavior, beliefs, knowledge, decisions, and policies of the other (Zaaiman, 2020).

Participants repeatedly commented the peculiarity of working on inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities without involving them. The powerful phrase "nothing about us without us for us", should apply in collaborations from beginning to end, so to say covering the stages agenda-setting, contributions to analysis, actions and evaluation. However, we find participation and influence exerted through participation is hardly reflected in the ecological model.

In line with this, the critique was made that participation interlocking with influence was mostly conceived in a vertical and sequential order; the idea of the higher up the ladder the stronger the participation and the more influence. Each step upwards symbolizes a higher degree of influence (Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 1992; Edelenbos et al., 2001). The same principle applies to a variant proposed by Fung (2006) that consists of three dimensions packed into a democracy cube. All possess hierarchical sequence from forms of "no participation" (tokenism, decoration) to forms of "participation" (consultation, partnership, delegated power, citizen control) and devised in three dimensional scales of intensity, inclusiveness and authority. Participation and degree of influence, however, can move both vertically and horizontally (Van Houten & Winsemius, 2010). Van Houten and Winsemius (2010) define horizontal participation as behavior that involves doing something for another person or the immediate living environment, such as volunteering, helping neighbors, membership in a neighborhood committee or action group. Addressing someone for unwanted behavior in the public space or greeting each other in the street are also included. Vertical participation is explained as citizens exerting influence on policy (neighbourhood councils or residents' committees) or on the functioning of services (client councils, participation councils). Both axes must be recognized and should be part of a conceptualization of pathways to social inclusion.

The research projects demonstrated participation and influence in both horizontal and vertical capacities, not contending that more or less intense involvement is congruent with more or less influence, and that intense involvement plus obvious influence is not necessarily best in pursuing social inclusion.

4.3.4 Intersectionality

A fourth criticism was the essentialist approach to people with intellectual disabilities and the underplaying of the persistent power imbalances that perpetuates inequality. In both research projects, the experts by experience with mild intellectual disabilities clearly expressed their awareness of the disadvantaged position they and their peers have in society, mentioning examples of being low educated, having very few opportunities to further education, scarcity of employment that matches the interests of people with intellectual disabilities, being unemployed, having low income jobs or being dependent on social welfare payments. This was repeatedly underscored with the statement “we are more than an intellectual disability”.

In the project Towards Inclusion, especially in the metropolitan environment of Amsterdam, social workers indicated that they observed discrimination, deprivation, and inequality of people with intellectual disabilities, adding that this condition moves beyond intellectual disability, and is amplified by other “social identities” such as ethnic and cultural background, educational level of the person with intellectual disability, and in some cases that of the parents and close family, which relates to language skills and socio-economic status.

This led to adopting an intersectional perspective found pivotal in an ecological approach if inclusion is to be achieved by taking into account the multitude of influences (Barnartt, 2013).

Intersectionality relies on social constructions like race, gender or ability, and many other intersecting categories, but not as a singular point of inequality. The notion of “intersection” demands another, interlocking point of inequality (Collins, 2015). For example, intersectionality critically examines the oppression experienced by a person with an intellectual disability who is a woman of Turkish background, whose highest level of education is secondary school, earns a low income just enough to pay for a small social housing, and appears to have little chance of enhancing her working career. There are plenty of examples of "intersecting categories" that sustain marginalization and powerlessness.

The strength of intersectionality is that it is both an analytical strategy that provides new angles of vision on social phenomena and intersectionality understood as critical praxis that informs social justice projects (Collins, 2015). As Hill Collins (2015, 15) states, intersectionality “makes sense for social justice projects aimed at remedying complex social inequalities and subsequently constitutes an important tool for political engagement". In addition, it is useful to distinguish between different styles of understanding intersectionality in practice (Choo & Ferree, 2010). One way of understanding it is to emphasize placing multiply marginalized groups and their perspectives at the center of the research. A second way is to view intersectionality as a process that highlights power as relational and that sees the interactions among variables as multiplying oppressions at various points of intersection. And lastly, intersectionality understood as shaping the entire social system and so pushing analysis away from associating specific inequalities with unique institutions.

In effect, seeking social inclusion is interwoven with the pursuit of social justice and cannot go without an intersectional lens, as the intersection of intellectual disability and the many other intersecting categories that make up a person and one's life, keep fueling oppression (Watchman, 2019).

4.4 Four core dynamics

Reflection on the above results led us to redesign the ecological framework that is deemed helpful for social work practice and for the analysis and assessment of practices and policies pursuing the social inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities. We depict the redesign as a multidisc turntable (see figure 1). The model of four core dynamics is a means to thoroughly understand and shape inclusion-focused processes. To do so, one needs to take into account factors that influence inclusion at different levels (core dynamic levels of enabling and impeding variables). In order to act effectively awareness of the different stages in the process is required (core dynamic change processes). Advancing social inclusion gains wider support when processes are inclusive, that is, where participation of the people concerned genuinely takes place and where participation is evidently influential, up to the level of having power (core dynamic participation and influence). In its entirety, all actors involved must relinquish essentialism and recognize that oppression and exclusion are entrenched and interwoven in multiple, intersecting, social categories also aptly referred to as double or multiple discrimination (core dynamic intersectionality).

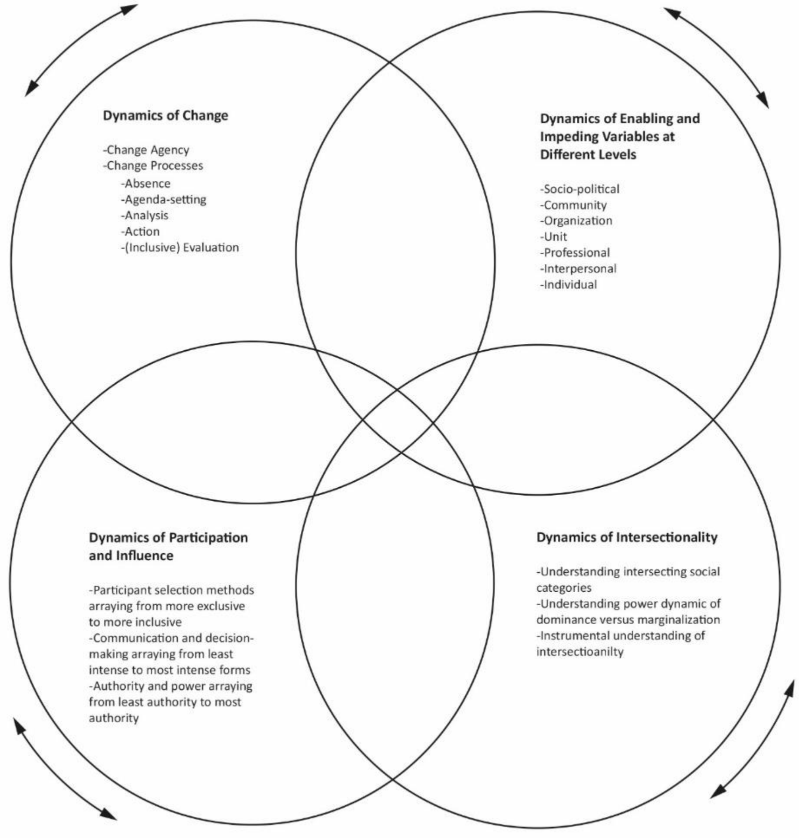

Figure 4.1: Four core dynamics in processes to social inclusion.

We can aggregate our proposed additions into a modified holistic approach best understood as four core dynamics. Drawing on the findings, we can assert that in striving for social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, it is of great importance to consider all four core dynamics. From each core dynamic emerge implications.

4.4.1 Change agency and change processes

A change lens logically derives from one of the key features of social inclusion definitions that points to a crucial role that social workers have in bringing about social inclusion, namely, social innovator or change agent. Caldwell (2003) defines change agent as "an internal or external individual or team responsible for initiating, sponsoring, directing, managing or implementing a specific initiative, project or complete programme". It is about being aware of the broad scope of this concept and avoiding the misconception that change agents are visionary or charismatic individuals or innovation champions, but rather that change agency is about the environment, and that it is inseparable from team orientation and the various layers of an organization. This understanding is helpful in avoiding a single belief that social workers seeking to promote inclusion must act as agents of change, thereby raising expectations that may be far removed from how social workers perceive their practice. Hence change agency should not be inflated into mere groundbreaking initiatives that result in major successes with a claimed high impact, it should also value small change in social work micro-practices and the contribution of social workers involved in it.

Inclusion is not a given, rather, it is fluid and vulnerable. Once inclusion has ostensibly been achieved, it can easily be violated or vanish again. Society retains focus on the mainstream culture, which establishes and imposes the standards of behavior in norms, values, and preferences. Change management should not be taken lightly, as it requires a range of competences. In view of facilitating inclusion, which we relate to human rights, change agency encompasses advocacy and intrapreneurship skills (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003).

4.4.2 Arbitrariness of distinguishing levels

Every model is a reduction of what is observed in the field. Any attempt at conceptualization and modeling risks being somewhat arbitrary. This is, for example, reflected in the typical categorization of social work practice into three interrelated scales micro, mezzo, macro. Reduction is not disturbing as long as the essence is reflected, and thus recognizable and useful for practice and policy evaluation. In our projects, it turned out time and again that existing divisions of different scales were a source of discussion. The tripartite division of micro, mezzo, macro is without doubt the most widely used, and at the same time one that demands a flexible approach in terms of its interpretation. Due to its rough lay-out social workers deem it "too much abstraction and theory". For empirical policy evaluations and research purposes, however, it is useful to connect to classifications that are recognizable in practice.

The additions "unit" and "professionals" interface with descriptions of the mezzo and micro levels. Both additions can be understood at the mezzo scale where unit is seen as a component of an organization performing functions of a bureaucracy and having an internal focus, and where professionals are viewed as a group of representatives of a profession. Both additions can also be understood at the micro scale where social work is perceived as a micro-practice and social work conducting individual and family counseling, clinical social workers providing direct services, interventions, and support to individuals, families, and groups, or helping individuals navigate resources such as social welfare programs from the government or the health care system.

Professionals can equally be said to be part of the mezzo level when social workers' primary focus centers on problem-solving on behalf of groups of clients (mezzo social work). They identify factors that affect the well-being of multiple clients within organizations or within a small community or they collaborate with other client systems and agencies, implementing programs and advocating for services and resources (Forenza & Eckert, 2018; Powell et al., 2020).

Regardless of what division is opted for in a model for analysis or a model for the evaluation of social work practice, we must accept that arbitrariness remains in the form of overlap, interdependence and interrelatedness of variables inside each scale and across scales.

4.4.3 Participation and influence

The issue of participation and influence raises a number of questions. First, the idea of participation posed as normatively imperative. Without some form of participation by relevant groups, efforts at inclusion appear to lose credibility, and get classified as prove of non-participation. It disregards a fundamental principle within social work, specifically relational social work, which is the principle of reciprocity, as articulated by Folgheraiter and Raineri (2012). For participation and influence to occur, a collaborative connection needs to be founded on relational equality (Driessens, 2022). It is reasonable to differentiate between forms of participation, yet is it by definition "not inclusive" when actions are carried out without participation? Jacquet (2017) lists a number of reasons for non-participation that are worth considering, such as giving priority to concentration on the private sphere, self-disqualification because of perceived lack of competence and expertise regarding the discussed topics, generalized rejection of (political) activities with a feeling of powerlessness, participation seen as an elite-driven manipulation or negative evaluation of the mini-public because of the lack of potential outputs in the system.

Another concern bears on the recruitment of participants as such approaches are inherently selective. It consists in recruitment generally taking place using one’s own network and choosing preferred channels and media. In addition, accessibility determines to a large extent to whom the message of the recruitment gets across and what the effect of the procedure is to achieve participation. Selectivity may lead to over-representation of certain groups, including the occurrence of the usual suspects participating in democratic processes that envisage social inclusion. This raises questions of genuine participation, its linkage to influence, and treating non-participation as a form of participation as well. Moreover, participation and influence appear to be based on the assumption that both are fundamentally good. We then enter a discourse where participation and influence have become empty signifiers deployed to signal a commitment to multiple perspectives, but often not carried through in any meaningful way (Cornwall, 2010). Moreover, there is criticism of the underlying structural inequalities that shape the relationships between different stakeholders in project efforts. Reynolds and Sariola (2018) point at participation becoming a self-fulfilling strategy, in which those who are already successfully 'engaged' partake in the process and where modes of engagement are significantly constrained by existing power dynamics.

With regards to our research approach similar observations were made. Although it was practice informed, involvement of persons with intellectual disability remained minimal, which is explained by the fact that rethinking an existing framework is principally an abstract exercise. The mixture of participants entails power imbalances. For instance, risking that the voices of people with intellectual disabilities are overpowered and go unheard. Intertwined with this is the responsibility issue in enhancing the social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities. It is a matter of what Freire (1970) termed, the development of critical consciousness through a mutual process between the "oppressed" and the "oppressors".

The closely related concepts participation and influence are oftentimes situated in citizen participation in policy making and arranged in a hierarchical order following the principle of the higher up the participation ladder, the more influence you have. This reveals a risk of oversimplification, as little account is taken of an aspect of the participatory ideology that appears less tangible, but which ought to be appreciated nonetheless, namely that participation as such can be of value. This explains the addition of horizontal participation without explicitly linking it to any degree of influence granted by inviting bodies (authorities). For example, the silent presence of a person can influence decision-making processes. Likewise, a previous encounter with or comment made by someone who is currently absent from a democratic meeting, can impact decision-making and implementation processes. We can consider this an influence without manifest participation (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). In traditional participation ladders, however, this is filed under types of non-participation or tokenism such as decoration, informing, consultation and placation (Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 1992). In our account of advocating social inclusion, the democratic cube offers some illumination on the complexity of participation and influence (Fung, 2006). It attaches three dimensions to participation and influence: participant selection, communication and decision making, and authority and power. Participant selection methods diverge from more exclusive (recruiting and involving experts administrators, elected representatives) to more inclusive (least restrictive methods of selection that is open to all who wish to attend), communication and decision arraying from least intense to most intense forms interaction and decision making (from being a spectator to deliberation, negotiation and deploying expertise), and the dimension of authority and power arraying from least authority to most authority (someone participates to derive personal benefits or participants exercise direct authority over public decisions and resources). Applying such a three dimensional way enriches and deepens the story of participation and influence.

4.4.4 Intersectionality and the inclusion-exclusion nexus

Intersectionality is narrowly associated with diversity, inclusion and exclusion. Thomas et al. (2021) underline that intersectionality is distinct from diversity as it "challenges the status-quo by taking a holistic approach to human individuality, transitioning siloed views of diversity to a more intrinsic view of identity to achieve inclusivity". Laperrière and Lépinard (2016) put forward a more instrumental understanding of intersectionality by distinguishing intersectionality as a tool for the inclusion of underprivileged populations inside organizations and as a tool used to reveal the political marginalization within organizations. Ultimately, an intersectionality lens has an impact on the political agendas in communities and organizations. Although Laperrière and Lépinard (2016) apply this to migrant women, the principle applies equally to underprivileged minority groups such as people with disabilities. Regardless of whether intersectionality is presented as a holistic approach or as a tool, this lens helps comprehend social-political reality and provides opportunities to explore new courses of action that enhance understanding and encourage inclusivity at the micro, mezzo and macro levels.

Adopting the intersectionality lens necessitates a critical awareness of those involved, both those who enjoy privilege and those who are subject to the dominance axes, and in that sense, get marginalized by oppressive structures. However, this awareness is not evident among both the privileged population and the underprivileged. From both sides, willingness to develop a critical consciousness and daring to show vulnerability are therefore paramount. As Paolo Freire (1970) asserted and elucidated, "liberation is not a gift, not a self-realization, but a mutual process" between the "oppressor" and "the oppressed". Thomas et al. (2021) therefore claim that we no longer can work to a notion of universality or traditional thinking around inclusion and diversity, but instead we must work from a framework of intersectionality built on understanding how the broader context of identity impacts individuals differently, at different times and in different contexts.

Recurring in the inclusion and exclusion literature is the contrasting of both phenomena. In itself an intelligible tendency when inclusion is understood as combating exclusion (Asante, 1997), but this simplicity is not a realistic representation of the comprehensive and complex practice. Authors of discussions of social inclusion commonly use theories and discourses related to exclusion to develop their arguments. This induces confusion and blurring of boundaries between both concepts (Wright & Stickley, 2013). Only a handful of studies critique this dualism and invite nuance (Rawal, 2008; Hunting et al., 2015; Silver, 2015; Mascareño & Carvajal, 2016). Hunting et al. (2015) bring to the fore an intersectionality lens intended to transform current understandings of, and approaches to, social inclusion. They assert that social inclusion and exclusion are dynamic and simultaneous, that experiences of social inclusion and exclusion differ and change across populations, and that social inclusion and exclusion are constituted and shaped by power. Mascareño and Carvajal (Mascareño & Carvajal, 2016) transcend the dualism by identifying five constellations of inclusion and exclusion wherein inclusion and exclusion coexist – self-inclusion/self-exclusion, compensatory inclusion, subinclusion, inclusion in the exclusion, and inclusion by risk/exclusion by danger. In addition, social exclusion is usually condemned as unjust, whereas inclusion has its downsides as well. For example openness to the "other" can jeopardize group ways of life and the feeling of being at home (Rawal, 2008; Silver, 2015). The virtue of intersectionality is that it transcends the false inclusion-exclusion opposition and allows room for other strategies to achieve social inclusion.

4.4.5 Complexity in complexity: four interrelated core dynamics

Social inclusion and the pursuit to achieving it concerns an ecology conceived as a totality of relations between elements and their environment. We have discerned four core dynamics that shape a comprehensive ecology of social inclusion: change management lens, levels of enabling and impeding variables, participation and influence, and the intersectionality lens.

We have not refrained from displaying the immense complexity and comprehensiveness of the idea of social inclusion in our model. Herein lies the pitfall of the inclusion discourse. If we oversimplify it, then virtually every initiative can be labelled as inclusive in one way or another; if we take its complexity seriously, then it risks discouraging micro and mezzo social workers, and will it remain a matter for actors active in (macro) policy making. While promoting inclusion relies heavily on initiatives by the micro social work profession and the subjugated population itself. Our model not only includes different levels of facilitating and impeding forces, it also suggests that working on inclusion is an ongoing process of change, that stakeholder participation and influence is integral to this process and that this needs to be understood from an intersectional perspective. The failure to set up a change management lens and an intersectionality lens is in itself a limiting factor in the pursuit of inclusion.

4.5 Conclusion

We can conclude that the ecological model of social inclusion provides good guidance for policy and practice. Nevertheless, it is a tool that overlooks or undervalues crucial components of social inclusion. To do more justice to the complex reality of social inclusion, it is not sufficient to put into effect policies, and develop and evaluate programs based on impeding and facilitating factors at different levels only. Social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities continues to revolve around a power struggle for recognition, which requires transformative social change. In this regard, it is imperative to invariably include participatory processes where participation and co-decision making is central to an ecological approach as well as the intersectional framework that highlights persistent social power inequalities. In addition to advocating social change, the intersectional lens provides a deeper explanatory basis for the impeding factors and promoting opportunities. By taking social inclusion and exclusion as a social construct, we acknowledge its dynamic nature, rendering it obvious to adopt an ecological approach that is reflective of it in four core dynamics.

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CHAPTER

5

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Experiences of Inclusive Action and Social Design Research with Social Workers and People with Intellectual Disabilities

Abstract

In this study, we report on a two-year experience of inclusive participative action and social design research consisting of intensive collaboration between social workers, people with intellectual disabilities and researchers. Action research and design research are attunable and lend themselves to an inclusive approach aimed at knowledge development and change in practice. Social workers and people with intellectual disabilities were involved in a community of development. They became owners of the subject matter and the answers and solutions they designed. We conclude that an inclusive approach lends itself well to combining or even merging action research and social design research. Inclusive participative action and social design research cannot be standardized since it contains a particularly emergent process. Hence, it requires flexibility and creativity in finding ways to create an inclusive process of co-creation.

5.1 Introduction

In this study, we report on a two-year experience of inclusive action and social design research consisting of intensive collaboration between social workers, people with intellectual disabilities and researchers. The goal of this project was to deepen and nuance the knowledge on how social workers working with individuals with intellectual disability can promote social inclusion. In this article, we present this project as a case study to report on the experiences we gained applying an integration of inclusive research, action research and social design research. First, an elaboration on notions of inclusive research is provided. Then, we describe the research design and the methods we employed to give shape to inclusivity and the road towards desired outcomes.

5.1.1 Inclusive Research, Action and Design Research

Inclusive research is gaining ground in Western countries, including in the Netherlands (Grant and Ramcharan, 2007; Riches and O’Brien, 2017; ZonMw, 2021). Researchers have embraced inclusive research and policy and funding bodies increasingly demand stronger involvement and influence of people with disabilities; this is also influenced by advocacy organizations (“nothing about us without us”) and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCPRD) (Sherlaw & Hudebine, 2015). Adopted on 13 December 2006, the UNCRPD considers ”persons with disabilities should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decision-making processes about policies and programmes, including those directly concerning them” (United Nations 2006). In the Netherlands, this has been laid down in the implementation plan, which holds that people with disabilities in their role as citizens, consumers and stakeholders are actively involved in the formulation and evaluation of policies (VWS 2017, 2018). In the field of scientific research, this movement has resulted in a wide variety of participative and inclusive research designs (Frankena et al., 2015; Nind and Vinha, 2014; Strnadová et al., 2016). Milner and Frawley, 2019 call this a third wave of inclusive research that moves beyond "research on" and "research with" to "research by" people with disability.

Inclusive research is associated with labels such as participatory, collaborative, and interventionist research, co-design, community design and social innovation (Chick, 2012; Joore et al., 2021; Nind, 2014, 2017). Inclusive research, participative research, participative action research and emancipatory research constitute an extensive family of overlapping approaches (Nind, 2014). Walmsley and Johnson (2003, p. 16) introduced the term "Inclusive Research" with respect to people with intellectual disabilities, which encompasses three principles upon which inclusive research is based:

1. The research must address issues that really matter to people with intellectual disabilities and that ultimately lead to improved lives for them.
2. The research must access and represent their views and experiences.
3. People with intellectual disabilities need to be treated with respect by the research community.

From these principles, derive distinguishing characteristics that research is owned, but not necessarily initiated, by people with intellectual disabilities, that research enables people to exercise control over the process and outcomes, that research furthers the interests of people with intellectual disabilities, that it produces accessible outputs, that researchers are on their side and that it is collaborative. Inclusive research embraces participatory and emancipatory approaches to research (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003, p. 64).

Action research lends itself well to emancipatory processes and goals. With its many faces, action research holds inquiry undertaken by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them (Anderson and Herr, 2015). It emphasizes people's lived experiences, individual and social change and the co-construction of knowledge. In doing so, epistemic justice is effectuated (Byskov, 2021). Ultimately, it leads to a more just situation for the stakeholders (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; McIntyre, 2008). In effect, action research presupposes an inclusive approach and, despite a dearth of clarity as to what exactly inclusive research is, much experience has hitherto been gained (Bigby and Frawley, 2010; Frankena et al., 2015; Garcia-Iriarte et al., 2009; Morgan and Moni, 2013). We would like to add social design research to this family of approaches. Design thinking is an iterative methodology that inspires a human-centered approach to design and can be divided into five key steps: empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test. Social design research focuses on the design and testing of generic solutions to problems. It is driven by the desire to solve field problems in collaboration with those concerned. Social design research aims at social change, for instance: improving social work practice by means of designing solutions (Van Beest et al., 2017; Margolin and Margolin, 2002). It does not primarily seek truth, however it endeavors improvement of the social work practice (Van Aken and Andriessen, 2011). Hence, social design research principally departs from the perspective of the stakeholders, for instance that of the social worker and people with intellectual disabilities. Action research is by definition participatory and pursues knowledge development and social change in practice. This implies personal and collective “professionalization” of the participants that is akin to the emancipatory praxis—interaction action and reflection—and critical consciousness (Anderson and Herr, 2015; Freire, 1970; Hammen-Poldermans, 1975). Inclusive research involving people with intellectual disabilities has evolved from a focus on process and ethics to being more concerned with outcomes: first- and second-generation inclusive research (Nind, 2016; Strnadová and Walmsley, 2018; Walmsley et al., 2018). Both foci remain valuable and should be pursued. Process, outcomes and research with and by people with intellectual disability can, and should, concur in action and design research. It is not a matter of research on, research with or research by, but rather a matter of allowing the mixture of and dynamic between each three “waves”, since positionalities of the researcher and the modes of participation may vary during the project (Thomson & Gunter, 2011).

The aim of our research was to bring about changes that contribute to a more inclusive social work practice. For the purpose of this article, we focus on the methodology used and share the experiences of carrying out inclusive action and social design research with people with an intellectual disability and social workers.

5.2 Materials and Methods

5.2.1 Study Design

We conducted a two-year inclusive approach merging participatory action research with social design research and using the theoretical lens of method configuration (Joore et al., 2018, 2021; Margolin and Margolin, 2002; Nind, 2014; Van Turnhout et al., 2017). As for the social design process, we were inspired by design thinking and the closely related double diamond model (Veer et al., 2020).

Participatory action research and social design research are brought together in the model of a Community of Development (CoD) (Wilken et al., 2021) that we applied in this project. The CoD is based on the model of community of practice (CoP) put forward by Wenger (Wenger, 2010). A community of practice can be viewed as a social learning system in a social context in which a dual process of meaning making materializes. This duality consists of participation and reification. The first involves active involvement in activities, conversations and reflections. The latter involves producing physical and conceptual artifacts such as words, tools, concepts and methods. The community of development includes both participation and reification, but links this dual process to four goals, namely, producing knowledge, designing a solution, bringing about (social) change and personal and collective professionalization of the participants (Van Beest et al., 2017). The CoD further distinguishes itself from the CoP by highlighting (social) solution design and by substantiating the process and results—artifacts—with research. That is why the CoD constitutes a vehicle that fits seamlessly into what we call inclusive action and social design research.

In a CoD, one of the principles is that all relevant stakeholders are represented. In the case of this study, people with an intellectual disability and social workers were the key participants. CoDs are supported by a researcher and a facilitator. The researcher focuses on the research process (data collection), the facilitator is responsible for managing the group dynamics; both prepare the CoD meetings together, attend the meetings, provide (visual) reports of each meeting to participants and reflect on the meetings with each other as well as with the participants.

In our research project, we have embraced the idea of method configuration as it lends itself well to intensive participatory action and design research in which planning and emergence or, as Van Turnhout et al., (2017) call it, "spontaneity" coincide. The rationale behind method configuration is that enhancing validity requires more than applying one or a few methods. Woolrych et al. argue that methods consist of "loose incomplete collections of resources which you configure, adapt and complement to match specific project circumstances" (2011, p.940). They explain method configuration by the analogy of culinary dishes: "The method, like a recipe, is at best a guide to action. As with culinary dishes, [action research projects] a focus is needed more on what gets cooked, and how it gets cooked, and not just on how recipes suggest that it could [or should] be cooked" (Woolrych et al., 2011, p. 940). The culinary dish and a recipe's ingredients are a metaphor for the research goals and the resources. The methods we employed consisted of dialogues, unstructured interviewing, focus group sessions, participatory observations plus design thinking and double diamond principles. The resources included paper ball showers, musical chairs, prompting questions, scaling questions, brainstorm techniques, empathy mapping, collective analysis utilizing an ecological model of social inclusion, preliminary conversations with participants with an intellectual disability to support them in preparing for the CoD meeting and their participation, evaluation of group dynamics and the research process with CoD participants, visualizations of each CoD meetings, pitches, et cetera. These resources derived from the design thinking method, the double diamond approach, participatory action and social design research methodology. The deployment of these methods and resources was contingent upon the process in which the CoD found itself.

The double diamond model is a variation on existing divergence and convergence models and is depicted as two tilted squares representing the four stages: discover, define, develop and deliver (Veer et al., 2020). The first diamond depicts the stages discover and define; the second diamond depicts the stages of developing and delivery. Both diamonds represent broadening or expanding possible solutions, defining the friction more precisely and making choices. After the defining stage, a number of directions for solutions are devised, followed by finally developing a solution with the highest potential for ensuring a promising and validated solution. The results section is outlined along the double diamond stages.

5.2.2 Involving People (Phase 1)

The first phase of the study lasted over a year and consisted of forming two separate CoDs, each located in a different region (Amsterdam and Wageningen), where people with intellectual disability, social workers and others involved in the local practice participated.

In Wageningen, social workers set up a sheltered employment project named The Football Workshop, which is accommodated in the local football club. People with intellectual disabilities called "football workers" support the volunteers, who perform maintenance work at the club; they organize training sessions and play weekly football home and away matches against teams from the local community and beyond. The Amsterdam context concerns a metropolitan area, where people with intellectual disabilities receive ambulatory support.

Snowball subject recruitment was used for participant enrollment. We were able to draw on a broad regional network of social workers and people with moderate to mild intellectual disability, including people trained as experts by experience. "An expert by experience is someone who has had direct experience of living with a diagnosis or status, and of receiving care, support and/or treatment as well as the potential exposure to restrictive interventions. As a result of this lived experience, they possess a unique insight and understanding that allows them to think, feel and act in ways that brings an 'added value' to whatever form of partnership working they are engaged in" (Hollins, 2019, p. 3). In addition, we argue that their life experience is enriched by the experiences of others and that they have learned to transcend their individual life experiences. Generally, they have completed training to employ this knowledge, for example, as peer workers, consultants, lecturers or researchers.

Selection criteria for the recruitment of service users and experts by experience included being interested in the subject matter of social inclusion, being motivated to participate in the project, willingness to and being capable of sharing life experiences and being prepared to act as a "critical friend" to the other participants (Embregts et al., 2018). As far as the social workers were concerned, selection criteria for the recruitment were: (a) being employed as a *social worker* working with people with mild intellectual *disability,* (b) having an interest in the subject matter "inclusion" and (c) motivation to bring about change in the social work field aimed at promoting inclusion.

To communicate what the study entails, questions needed to be answered such as: what is the study about and what does a community of development entail, what activities take place in these CoD meetings, where and how often do we meet, who are the other participants, what is my role, what influence do I have, what is expected of me during and in between the CoD meetings and what is in it for me? To answer these questions, we offered a flyer in accessible languages, organized physical meetings—one to one or in small groups—and with the help of the feedback from social workers and people with intellectual disabilities we created a visual representation of the information for people with intellectual disabilities. The visualization needed to comply with accessible language criteria and should not be childish. After several adjustments and the final approval of social workers and experts by experience it was ready for publication.

5.2.3 Execution (Phase 2)

A total of twelve meetings per CoD were held over a period of two years, at intervals of seven to eight weeks. The CoD Amsterdam and the CoD Wageningen were composed of social workers and service users. The CoD Amsterdam and the CoD Wageningen comprised eight and five participants, respectively, each containing two experts by experience. Data collection consisted of audio recordings of all CoD meetings (N = 24), visual records of each meeting—each time these were shared with the participants for verification—and all tangible results produced in the meetings such as photos of activities during the meetings, photos of notes on white boards, empathy maps, mind maps, brainstorm papers, sketches and analyses. The visual reports also contained a limited amount of written language, which succinctly explained the observations of the researcher and facilitator.

5.2.4 Analysis, Sharing and Interpretating Data (Phase 3)

Analysis was carried out in several ways. Firstly, data from audio recordings of the meetings of the CoDs were coded. Secondly, a descriptive analysis was made. This approach to data collection and sharing serves the hermeneutical process and ownership of those involved as well as democratic validity (Anderson and Herr, 2015; Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Due to COVID-19 measures, results from the first analysis were shared visually with the participants of the CoD during a digital meeting. The first analysis indirectly linked to designing a solution. It was principally aimed at answering an associated research sub question on the behavior of social workers that fits inclusion-focused performance of our central research question. However, the solutions designed by the CoD constitute interventions to support the inclusion-focused behavior of social workers. The second analysis contained a comprehensive description of the collaborative process of designing solutions and what conditions facilitated inclusion-focused social work utilizing the designed solutions; this was sent to the participants for reading and discussion in a physical meeting. The purpose of this approach was to supplement, refine and verify the analysis. A third analysis comprised the prototyping and testing of the designed solution. Each round of prototype testing yielded data that were evaluated with the CoD participants in order to make adjustments for the next round of testing.

5.3 Results

Using the stages of Design Thinking and the Double Diamond model, we discuss what has been learned in this project.

5.3.1 Discover and Empathize

Empathizing and discovery helps gain insight into the issue and articulate the questions that are central to the study. For obtaining approval and internal funding from the university, the researchers had to formulate a question prior to having it carefully discussed with social workers and people with intellectual disabilities. Hence, we deliberately formulated a broad research question that offered scope for further specification in collaboration with the social work practice, i.e., the management of service providers, social workers and people with intellectual disabilities. Although the general goal of the project (how can social workers working with individuals with intellectual disabilities promote social inclusion of people with a mild intellectual disability?) was formulated in advance, after the project started the CoD participants in Amsterdam and Wageningen had the opportunity to redetermine the research question. This revolved around questions like: What is the question? Whose question is it? How can we interpret the central question? Can we adapt the question to our own perspectives? Ultimately, the central question remained unchanged as participants felt that it had sufficient scope and that it fitted in with their own experiences. Refining the central research question to the context of social work and people with intellectual disabilities occurred through selfenquiry by the social workers and was discussed with people with intellectual disabilities. In the CoD Amsterdam, this led to questions that were predominantly focused on record keeping and transferring information about the service user: Why is the record keeping and transfer we are carrying out good? What am I reporting and why? Since we are thinking about the form of record keeping and the transfer, how can it be improved? How can we enhance the service users' control over their records? Some life experts with intellectual disability nuanced this concern, saying: "Sometimes a service user does not want to think about his records and transfer. He likes it the way it is. Let him (social worker) do it." (quote from participant CoD meetings Amsterdam).

In this empathize and discovery stage, experiences were shared and assessed as practices and pathways to or from social inclusion (Simplican et al., 2015). In addition, conceptualizations of inclusion, exclusion, stigma, discrimination and equality were explored. This led participants to comment that they found themselves "to be a kind of destigmatizer when (they) consult with a private or government organization on behalf of or with a client." (quote from participant CoD meetings Amsterdam). To support the exploration, we deployed a mix of activities and tools:

1. Practice assessment: having social workers assess their practices pertaining to service user documentation and records. The self-assessment focuses on whether their practice is inclusive or not.
2. Ranking definitions regarding inclusion and based on these rankings conducting a discussion.
3. Musical chairs: playing musical chairs so that participants experience and relive social inclusion and social exclusion.
4. Paper ball shower: a shower of paper balls that ensures active and interactive discussion with equal input from all participants. Participants write down statements, questions, answers, words or make a drawing on a blank piece of paper, then crumple the piece of paper into a ball and throw it randomly in the air all at once.
5. Empathy mapping with the aim of empathizing with those who deal with service user documentation and records.

6. Pitch and sketch: individual pitches or sketches by the participants using one or more objects that symbolize their message. The purpose was to draw up an interim assessment of what the participants had practiced in promoting inclusion.

5.3.2 Define

Using the aforementioned activities and tools, we converged to a point where we formulated the collective concern. This was done by clustering and scoring discussed issues. In addition, the CoD defined the design criteria of the intended solution. These criteria were reconsidered several times. In the CoD Amsterdam the concern was formulated in a design proposition (Denyer et al., 2008): if you believe that service users should have control over their records, then reverse the act of who records and transfers information in the records to others. This was captured in the title "Reverse Records". In the CoD Wageningen, the concern was molded into the design proposition: If you want the football workers—people with intellectual disabilities in sheltered employment at The Football Workshop—to move on to regular workplaces where the football workers feel recognized and valued, then focus on a sustainable cooperation with profit and non-profit organizations so that mutual recognition and trust can grow. For that end have the football workers organize football matches against football teams from profit and non-profit organizations including all preparations and evaluation activities. This was captured in the title "Towards Sustainable Reciprocity".

5.3.3 Develop: Ideate, Prototype and Test

In this stage, the focus was on finding, shaping, reshaping and testing possible solutions. Different techniques were utilized in both CoDs such as: the one second brainstorm, negative brainstorming, role play, organizing a "Goodies Exhibition" and collectively creating a timeline. Additionally, between the CoD meetings the participants collected examples of products that inspired them in the ideation. All these activities and brainstorm techniques were deployed to enhance creative thinking among participants and resulted in:

1. Active and continuous engagement of all participants.
2. Input from all participants.
3. A vast array of ideas ranging from predictable and morally permissible to hilariously ineffective ideas (one second brainstorm and negative brainstorming). The understanding of interactions between social workers and service users and how this relates to feeling ignored or feeling excluded.

The development of the possible solutions was proceeded by an iterative process. By asking "how the Reversed Record Keeping complied with the European Union *General Data Protection Regulation* (EU *GDPR*)," life experts with intellectual disability notified us that we must be alert to privacy concerns (quote from participants CoD Amsterdam and Wageningen). Terminology was adjusted repeatedly until all involved could agree on the words used. The term "client" was rejected by social workers and most notably by people with intellectual disabilities. The following quotes came from participants of the CoD Amsterdam and Wageningen respectively: "We favor the expression Amsterdammer or service user" and "we address each other as football workers. We are all football workers."

5.3.4 Delivery: Testing, Adjusting and Implementing

Through the inclusive process, both CoDs delivered tangible results. The CoD Amsterdam delivered the Reversed Record Keeping Principles comprising:

1. The service user reports, not the social worker.
2. The service user decides what should be in the records.
3. This principle is supplemented with allowing differences of opinion between the social worker and the service user and providing room for that in the records.

4. The social worker verifies with the service user whether what has been recorded is correct.
5. The content in the record is expressed in accessible language.
6. The social worker is evaluated, not solely the service user.

The first three principles are formulated in order from "the action is entirely performed by the service user" to "the action is performed by the social worker", yet maintaining control with the service user as much as possible. The fourth is a basic principle and applies to every other principle. The fifth emphasizes the power relationship between the social worker and the service user. Strictly, service users ought to have personal plans and goals that must be periodically evaluated by the service user and the social worker. This principle seeks to reverse the situation, and thus equalize the power relation, by stating that social workers also have their learning goals to further professionalize. This evaluation is carried out in conjunction with the service user: "You evaluate my learning goals together with me, I evaluate your learning goals together with you." These five principles were designed graphically into a poster.

The testing and fine-tuning of the Principles of Reversed Record Keeping yielded additional results. First, the service users stated greater involvement and control in what goes into their records. Second, service users reported more involvement in how content is added to their records; this was facilitated by applying various forms of communication such as drawing, photography, vlogging and audio recording. Third, the CoD participants gained three insights into the usability of Reversed Recording; it appears suitable in long-term professional relationships and for recording life events. The Principles of Reversed Records require intensive attention for and involvement with the service user and fits best with episodes in life that are of greater significance for a person. The principles seem less suitable for daily reporting as the assumption among CoD participants was that daily reporting should be objective, concise and specific.

The CoD Wageningen delivered a decision chart “Towards Sustainable Reciprocity”. It serves as a tool allowing the football workers—people with mild intellectual disabilities—to co-direct the organization of the football matches and surrounding activities and to assess which organizations offer good opportunities for sustainable reciprocal cooperation.

The decision chart complies with criteria set by the CoD participants. Criteria were:

- Comprehensibility that refers to language structure and design; language includes wording that people with intellectual disabilities recognize, unambiguous words and phrasing such as easy-to-read phrases. Structure holds the routing in the decision chart that should make sense in that it fits in with the way of thinking of the social workers at The Football Workshop and the football workers. Design revolves around layout, color, contrast, fonts, font size and visualizations. Are these appropriate for reading and understanding the decision chart?
- Applicability of the decision chart. Applicability was defined as providing insight and supporting decision making. Providing insight was achieved as the chart helps the social worker and the football workers gain insight into the underlying motives of the organizations and their visiting football team. Proving insight also includes self-reflection, since the chart also supports the social worker and the football workers gaining insight into their own underlying motives: Why do we play against teams from profit and non-profit organizations? What do we invest in the relationship between The Football Workshop and the visiting teams? Why do we invest in this relationship? With the insights, decision making is supported in order to determine which organizations are worth building a long-term reciprocal relationship with.

5.4 Discussion

In all stages of the project, social workers and people with intellectual disability played a crucial role. As a matter of fact, we would assert that they were the lifeblood of the research project. When the blood is thick or flows slowly, the project is at risk of losing support, credibility and emancipatory impact. Challenges that came across in keeping the project vital required continuous alignment with the participants and are briefly discussed below in terms of ownership, power (im)balance, implementation and enhancing emancipatory practice through merging action research and social design research as the vehicles that ride the inclusive road.

5.4.1 Collective Ownership: Establishing a Collective Concern

Since inclusion constitutes a comprehensive notion, in the discovery stage the biggest challenge was to explore inclusion and find agreement on its meanings. The research question, with inclusion as its central concept, was kept fairly open ended in order to give each participant the freedom to give meaning to inclusion from their own perspective. For all those involved, this required careful listening, patience, mutual trust and recognition and power sharing. For the researcher and facilitator, the challenge was to avert abstractions (use of words), too high paced discussions and to ensure that the meetings fit in with the culture of those involved; the latter holds taking into account the organizational culture, wishes of the participants concerning the design of the meetings and preferred learning styles.

Establishing the collective concern is a challenge in itself. With a view to ownership and thus a long-term commitment, it is crucial that every participant fully supports it. For that purpose, we additionally invited the participants to draw up a personal goal that is in line with the collective concern. In sharing knowledge—experience based, professional, scientific—emphasis was put on experiences from people with intellectual disability and social workers partaking in the CoD. In doing so, we attempted to accommodate and safeguard epistemic justice (Byskov, 2021; Geuskens, 2018; Schippers, 2021).

5.4.2 Power (im)Balance: Being in Control

Power dynamics are omnipresent throughout each action research, social design research and inclusive research project (McDonald, 2021; Nind, 2014; Stoudt, 2007). With respect to establishing a collective concern, setting personal goals, ideation and devising the outlines and content of the intended solutions, ownership was maintained with the participants. In the design stage, the challenge centered on who was in the lead concerning the production of the designed solution. Basically, the researchers wanted to keep these steps controlled and carried out by the participants and their network. However, the participants appeared to lack the digital skills—proficiency in Adobe Illustrator and Adobe InDesign—required for graphic design and materialization. This prompted a situation where the researchers, with proficiency in design software, complemented the participants' capacities in the design process. Although in consultation and with the consent of the participants—they even indicated they were happy that the researcher took on this task—the researchers experienced this as a breach in democratic validity since the participants relied too much upon the researchers' skills.

5.4.3 Implementation of the Designed Solution

With regard to delivery, our challenge was to get the intended solution implemented. In testing the intended solution as a CoD, we discovered weaknesses and threats (external factors) that hampered implementation. (Verhagen & Haarsma-den Dekker, 2019) discern three dimensions of implementation: physical, mental and structural. Physical implementation concerns creating, developing and testing the design and winning support, for instance among service users and staff members. Mental implementation refers to informing, accepting and incorporating new ideas and new design. Structural implementation revolves around learning to utilize the design and letting it fit into the social work practice. Physical and mental implementation was accomplished. In particular, the participants disseminated the intended solution in their surrounding professional network; physical implementation and mental implementation effectuated. Structural implementation, however, was not achieved, for it demands harder nuts to be cracked. Structural implementation may have the consequence that a fundamental change in macro practices and macrosystems (for instance the Electronic Health Record systems) is required such as regulations that prescribe rules for keeping records. This moves beyond mere social change as it also demands political debate and amendments in national legislation. Furthermore, it presupposes a wider scope of the project, which, although we as a CoD cherished, was beyond our scope and possibilities.

5.4.4 Merging the Inclusive Approach with Action Research and Social Design Research

Merging action and social design research has led to insights into how to achieve a balanced approach to inclusive research. First, the application of method configuration allows the researcher to accommodate and match the needs and capacities of participants, both social workers and people with intellectual disabilities. As described in this article, we have demonstrated a multitude of methods and resources that have been deployed. Action and reflection processes—and the support of epistemic justice—in inclusive research with people with intellectual disabilities benefit greatly from the employment of a variety of creative and active activities such as drawing, photography and vlogging and kinesthetic activities such as walking, football exercises, musical chairs and so on. However, this is not exclusive to people with intellectual disabilities and social workers and the palette of activities should not be used arbitrarily. It foremost requires careful observation and a feeling for group composition, group culture and group dynamics.

Second, consistent employment of visualizations as an accessible form of communication contributes to understanding the subject matter and the project's progress and facilitates giving voice to each participant. Visual communication is in keeping with (social) design research. Third, ensuring the balance is part of all the research stages where the voices of people with intellectual disabilities invariably come to the fore, from the discovery phase—mutually empathizing with the social worker and the person with intellectual disability who receives services—up to the delivery phase, which includes testing and adjusting the designed solution and implementation. Fourth, maintaining balance lies in closely monitoring the multiple objectives of action and social design research project, namely, to change a social practice, to collectively design an answer and to yield new or validate extant knowledge. Keeping these objectives continuously in mind needs to be a responsibility for both the researchers and the participants, since the project is a shared endeavor. Fifth, the CoD is a place that accommodates both research approaches. Moreover, the CoD appears to be an exquisite place, where the voices of social workers and people with intellectual disabilities are heard and, in fact, predominate.

5.5 Conclusions

The aim of our research was to bring about changes that contribute to a more inclusive social work practice. However, this article was dedicated to the methodology and what we can learn from executing inclusive action and social design research with people with intellectual disability and social workers in order to advance inclusive social work practice.

In the project, types of equal collaboration were explored in order to redress power imbalances between social workers and service users. We outlined the amalgamation of an inclusive approach with action research and social design research, which seems promising in involving people with an intellectual disability in a meaningful and empowering way.

We conclude that inclusive research can and should not be standardized, since it concerns a particularly emergent and iterative process. It requires flexibility and creativity in finding ways to inclusively collaborate with social workers and people with intellectual disabilities. The involvement of service users in all design thinking phases is possible. The performance of activities and the division of tasks can differ per phase.

Working in partnership with social workers and people with intellectual disabilities requires sensitivity to sharing power and the utilization of diverse communication modalities. A researcher should not eschew losing control over the process and allow the design process to generate unexpected or initially unintended outcomes. Furthermore, inclusive cooperation demands a safe and welcoming environment that offers space to think freely and speak up; for that, substantial attention is needed for group dynamics and learning strategies that encourage co-production.
The beauty and the great value of inclusive action and social design research is the cooperative quest you embark on that generates myriads of collective and individual returns along the way: visible, palpable, tangible, measurable and immeasurable. It all counts.

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6

DISCUSSION

6. Discussion

This chapter presents the key findings that answer the central question of how social work can facilitate the practical application of the rights of adults with mild intellectual disabilities, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. After first highlighting the main findings in the order of the sub-questions, these will be reflected upon and followed by a reflection on the research process and methodological considerations. The discussion concludes by considering applications and suggestions for future research, practice, and social work training at institutes of higher education.

6.1 Main findings

This research consequently seeks to establish an understanding of social work from a human rights perspective, especially due to its definition asserting principles of human rights being central to the profession. In Chapter 1 and 3 a social constructivist understanding of human rights proved to be important for a human rights perspective. The social constructivist argument provides social work with keys to practice and protect human rights in the local community as well as to further shape human rights. This signifies that the role of social work in relation to human rights involves recognizing that social work develops practices which help realize human rights in people's everyday lives. It requires a reflective understanding of human rights, wherein individuals actively engage with the concept, contemplating and defining what human rights mean in their specific contexts, rather than uncritically accepting the dominant narrative (Ife, 2009). Social workers are a vital actor in safeguarding and promoting human rights. They are watchdogs in practice who ensure that people with intellectual disabilities can enjoy their rights and have the space to achieve their desired quality of life. To that end, it is helpful to conceive of social work as a human rights profession. This study's findings appeared to align with the human rights action framework for social work, which consists of five building blocks proposed by Nachtergaele et al. (2017) and Reynaert et al. (2023): system world-oriented action, lifeworld-oriented action, participatory action, politicized action, and joined-up action (Reynaert et al., 2023). System world-oriented action includes developing and improving social institutions since they are essential to realizing human rights. Lifeworld-oriented action holds careful consideration and acknowledgment of people's personal life experiences and meanings given to life, taking into account a person's social, cultural, economic, political, and historical context. Politicization revolves around amplifying people's voices and addressing power imbalances. The social worker collects and connects individual stories of injustice and turns private matters into public issues. Participatory practice ensures that citizens (help) define the problem and determine which issues are raised and how rights can be realized. Joint action is about questioning, challenging and breaking through existing boundaries that prevent people's human rights from being realized.

To varying degrees, the participants of the communities of development demonstrated how they related to these building blocks. This took place in micro-practices, where they shaped the lifeworld orientation and participatory practice. Engagement with persons with mild intellectual disability, which life world orientation and participatory practices presuppose, was demonstrated in everyday social work practice and was transferred to the collaboration that emerged in the community of development. Awareness of the systems world in which social workers perform and learn how to deal with it effectively is present. Restrictions that a systems world poses to social workers and persons with mild intellectual disabilities are known, such as bureaucracy in the form of extensive and complex legislation and regulations, and the resulting procedures, protocols, and administration to account for the actions, that is, the services provided. In some cases, they resigned to the fact of the inevitability of bureaucracy; in other cases, they knew how to find and use discretionary space, as long as it was with sound judgment. This sometimes requires defying arbitrary boundaries. For political action, in the sense that action contributes to the public discourse about injustices in society, different strategies exist at different levels (Van Bouchate & Vanderhulst, 2022). The most common is the micro level, where, on a small scale and in daily practice, wrongs classified as social injustice are identified and brought into conversation among social workers, management, and advocates. Dijkstra and Knevel (2019) call this a 'small political action'. In this study, politicizing actions at the micro level were repeatedly observed.

As depicted in the below figure (6.1, next page), to varying degrees, the meanings and contents of the aforementioned building blocks are particularly evident in the generative practices (sub question 1, Chapter 2) and the competencies instrumental in achieving social inclusion (sub question 2, Chapter 3).

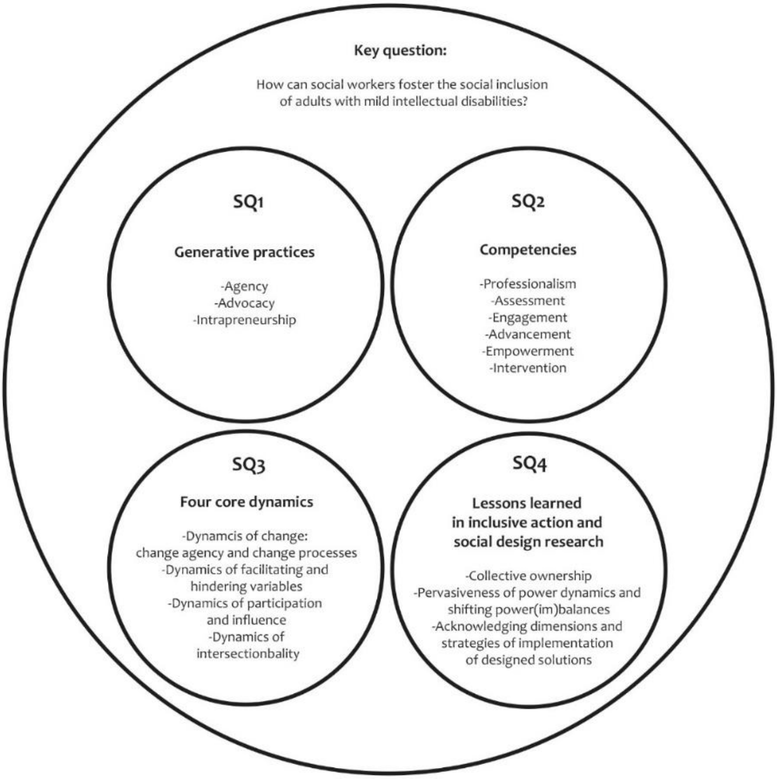

Figure 6.1: Summary of research questions and key findings.

The first sub-question revolved around practices conducive to social work seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. In our study, described in Chapter 2, practices denote the actions and responses of actors - i.e. social workers and persons with mild intellectual disabilities - within professional relationships. These interactions are both process- and goal-oriented, overseen and supported by other actors such as management, policy, and administration. These practices mainly occur within a defined physical and geographic environment, like a building and surrounding area, neighborhood, village, district, or city, but are not confined to these locations. Three social work practices were found that generate social inclusion. The generative practices concept was identified and captured in three notions: agency, advocacy, and intrapreneurship. As to agency, we identified two dimensions of agency: professional agency and empowering agency. The former addresses the agency of the social worker and focuses on the social workers' own work performance. The latter is aimed at supporting and, if appropriate, enhancing the agency of the person with mild intellectual disability. It targets executive functioning of people with intellectual disabilities, encompasses social and emotional well-being and stresses the value of interactions between the social worker and service users.

With respect to advocacy, a variety of aspects are part of an advocacy practice performed by social workers. These aspects concern counteracting stereotypical and prejudiced perceptions, and behaviors. Furthermore, raising public awareness through encounters with the community was the most widely known and recognized method among social workers. Additionally, having knowledge about 'injustice language' and demonstrating sensitivity to how social work and the community communicate about persons with intellectual disabilities constitute part of social workers' advocacy actions. Practicing intrapreneurship includes behaviors such as goal orientation, initiative and related behaviors such as proactivity, creativity (problem-solving ability), actions aimed at social networking and leveraging existing social networks, and negotiating with internal and external actors to achieve the intended goal.

We have sought competencies within social workers' generative practices that are essential for putting the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) into action. This was related to the third sub-question: which competencies are instrumental to social work seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities? What we found were six clusters of competencies each composed of values, knowledge, and skills. The clusters of competencies were identified as aligning with human rights, in particular the CRPD, aspirations: professionalism, assessment, engagement, advancement, empowerment, and intervention.

Professionalism spans a wide range of knowledge, skills, and behaviors essential to championing human rights and the translation of the CRPD into practice. Professionalism is conceived as a cluster of cross-cutting competencies and includes the ability to identify and address injustice, take action and engage in dialogue with the actors involved. Knowledge of what is contained in the CRPD, such as understanding the meaning of matters such as reasonable accommodation, universal design (Article 2), and accessibility (Article 9), is paramount**.** Professionalism is manifested in each of the three generative practices agency, advocacy and intrapreneurship described previously (Chapter 2 and 3). Assessment aims to determine the support needed for attaining a desired quality of life and ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights. Additionally, assessment competencies involve identifying risks of human rights violations resulting from policies and social work practices. Engagement encompasses responsiveness to the person with intellectual disability and the family, which is manifested in showing empathy, being tolerant, respecting wishes and feelings, and being alert to service users' needs. Advancement is to be understood in two ways: (a) protecting the human rights of people with intellectual disabilities and (b) promoting personal growth. The first matches advocacy and presupposes negotiation skills to reach some form of agreement or understanding in situations of tension or conflict, where inclusion is being thwarted or human rights are being violated. The second understanding of advancement entails what is referred to as "to flourish" (Beernink-Wissink, 2015). In collaboration with people with intellectual disabilities, social work seeks a balance between feeling at home, feeling comfortable, feeling safe and secure, which ultimately produces well-being and personal growth. Empowerment exemplifies the relationship between human rights and the role of social work. At the forefront are competences geared towards supporting adults with mild intellectual disabilities in learning to develop a critical reflection on their own position in society, in supporting them to gain or increase control over matters that concern them, and in speaking up for themselves. Intervention covers actions taken to improve a condition or situation (e.g., disorder, housing, employment, discrimination, and oppression) and involves interference by a social worker in the client's affairs. We discerned two approaches by which social work interventions align with the human rights framework. Negative rights interventions provide protection from different kinds of abuse, while positive rights interventions are designed to secure the wellbeing and foster the personal growth of people with intellectual disabilities.

With the fourth sub-question, we attempted to answer how an ecological approach to social inclusion is helpful in social work aimed at achieving the social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Prior studies have emphasized an ecological strategy to enhance social inclusion. Our study drew inspiration from Simplican et al.'s (2015) ecological model to assess its applicability in research and practice. From our study (Chapter 4), we found that to change complex social work practices, it is beneficial to view ecological approaches in terms of dynamics. Our analysis revealed four different types of dynamics. First, the dynamics of change encompass various forms of change agency and change processes. Second, the dynamics of facilitating and hindering variables occur simultaneously and at different levels: at the individual to the socio-political level. Third, the dynamics of participation acknowledge the voices of persons concerned, and thus sharing influence and power. Fourth, the dynamics of intersectionality denounces essentialist conceptions of people, critique the trivialization of persistent power imbalances that perpetuate inequality and obstruct inclusion. In conjunction with the ecological approach and its four dynamics, generative practices and competencies, involving experts by experience is imperative to leveraging experiential knowledge as a valued resource.

The fifth sub-question focused on incorporating the voices of adults with mild intellectual disabilities into research and practice to enhance social work efforts aimed at promoting their social inclusion. In that endeavour several lessons were learned. First, collective ownership was accomplished with establishing a collective concern. Since inclusion constitutes a comprehensive notion, the biggest challenge in our research was to explore inclusion, to find agreement on its meanings and to establish a collective concern. This entails recognizing and acknowledging a common ground in addition to personal interests and aspirations of the participants. That way participants and researcher collectively recognize that issues are not merely individual worries. Concerns were collected thus bolstering support in the change ambition that is characteristic of action research. A second lesson learned relates to power (im)balance; who is in control during the research process. As in any inclusive action research project power dynamics were pervasive in our research (Anderson & Herr, 2015). These dynamics varied by phase of the project and depended in part on the skills available among the researcher and participants, and the time investment that can reasonably be expected. The third lesson learned relates to the implementation of the designed solution. Implementation can be distinguished into three dimensions and strategies, that is, physical, mental and structural (Verhagen & Haarsma-den Dekker, 2019). This research achieved practical and mental implementation on a small scale - level of teams within a service agency. Structural implementation has not been realized.

6.2 Reflection on findings

6.2.1 The human rights perspective in social work practice

The study's aspiration was to discover how social work in the field of intellectual disability support is understood from the perspective of inclusion and human rights. Although both concepts are present in the literature on social work, their interconnectedness is sporadically discussed, especially in the context of literature pertaining to social work support services for people with an intellectual disability (Chapter 3). Our observations revealed that the concept of human rights is not explicitly regarded as a core principle in that field of the profession; instead, it is applied implicitly and arbitrarily. To varying degrees, however, an inclusion-focused and human rights-related vision is included in ethical professional codes and competency profiles, as we have seen in Chapter 3. Social workers in disability care do not seem inclined to consciously recognize issues in practice that touch on human rights or that are undeniably human rights issues. On the other hand, an invitation to reflect on their own social work practice does provide insight and recognition of their work in relation to human rights.

A similar story applies to inclusion. The concept is familiar among social workers. However, its understanding is surrounded by misconceptions and contaminated by connotations and hollow phrases. A more comprehensive understanding of social inclusion in social work practice is lacking. As described in Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4, it is considered primarily a micro-practice, where the social worker contributes to accomplishing a desired quality of life of an individual or an individual context, for example, the family or a residential group. The knowledge and belief that social work can be understood as a human rights practice or human rights profession is particularly prevalent among scholars, opinion leaders and social workers who think and act from a predominant socio-critical view (Donkers, 2017). This occurs less convincingly among social workers in intellectual disability practice, who, in contrast, are more likely to be associated with the person-centered interpretive view (Donkers, 2017).

6.2.2 Practices

Initial efforts were made to investigate what practices are effective in realizing a process toward inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. Practices, as we have conceived (Chapter 2), encompass the set of actions and responses of social workers and persons with mild intellectual disabilities alike within a professional relationship. The actions and responses are both process- and goal-oriented. It is surrounded by actors who steer and support these actions. Some examples include management, policy, and administration. All of this can take place in an open community setting, such as a sports club, a home setting, as in ambulatory support delivered in people's homes, as well as in an institutional setting, such as a group home or therapeutic facility. These practices involve continuous actions. Each action or "non-action" contains a combination of knowledge, skills, and values. It is behavior.

Follow-up questions in our study included the identification of characteristics of these practices, and what makes these practices work. Importantly, it rapidly became clear that in complex social work contexts, making statements about effectiveness or determining indisputable effective elements of practices goes far beyond the reality of open settings in social work. This finding is echoed by the understanding of social work practice being commonly known as eclectic, meaning a mixture of different theories, principles, approaches and methods applied in social work practice (Coady & Lehmann, 2016; Poulter, 2005).

The shift from abandoning an aspiration to measure effectiveness quantitatively to a critical qualitative evaluation of a social work practice was fueled by the constraints imposed by rigid definitions of mechanisms based on premises of causality claims (Befani, 2012; Bhaskar, 1975; Danermark et al., 2019; Iannacci & Resca, 2021; Kuhlmann & Nullmeier, 2022; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The critical realist objection to such premises of sequentiality leading to an intended outcome is not countered. In this research, we ran into a similar line of reasoning. For instance, it constrained observation and description of practice because the consideration of unseen or invisible powers such as motives and choices were missing. This prompted us to look differently at the phenomenon of mechanisms and the meaning of the adverb generative. This research refers to practices, as opposed to distinct mechanisms, which possess specific characteristics that directly contribute to achieving the intended outcome. We termed this as generative practices. With generative practices we move away from the restrictive social technological isolationism of mechanisms and allow for an ecological view that accommodates the complexity and presence of core dynamics. This provides new space to look at practice holistically, to learn from that practice and to value practice in what works without reducing it to rationalistic mechanisms with the pretense of objective measurability. By prioritizing generative practices as the initial focus, we can lay the groundwork for further scientific data collection and qualitative evaluation of their efficacy. Although the generative practices identified are not groundbreaking and are not entirely new, they do, however, provide a different frame. It offers impetus to cast new light on what social work is able to generate in light of social inclusion. It provides a rationale for further developing the profession and giving substance to its central principles. Generative practices such as agency, advocacy and intrapreneurship can now be more purposefully developed and shaped.

6.2.3 Social work competencies

Initially, we conducted a scoping review searching for studies about competencies being empirically proven to contribute to promoting social inclusion. This review did not yield a single fully relevant publication. There appears to be no convincing, unambiguous, reliable evidence for which competencies have been proven to promote social inclusion. Publications exist that posit certain competencies contribute to the promotion of social inclusion (Bigby & Wiesel, 2015; Kröber, 2008; Kröber & Verdonschot, 2012; Overmars-Marx et al., 2017). Yet, in practice, it proves difficult, if not impossible, to unequivocally determine crystal clear competencies effective in the promotion of social inclusion. We found that competencies is a concept that is composed of several elements, each of which has its own dynamics: knowledge, skills, attitude, behavior, values (Chapter 3). In addition, the definition of competencies varies, indicating a lack of consensus. Further, the components of a competency intertwine, overlap and interact. Unraveling and isolating the components of competencies and making statements about what has been proven is unrealistic, and nonsensical. In promoting social inclusion, it is rather a matter of a complex configuration of components of competencies that show to be of great importance. Perhaps that suffices, considering that dissecting competencies into individual parts is highly arbitrary; it results in fragmentation and isolation of elements that are rarely, if ever, seen in isolation within the social work performance.

Based on these insights we decided to collect empirical data on social work competencies instrumental to seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. This resulted in the findings that were described in Chapter 3 on *Social Workers Putting into Practice the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

6.2.4 Ecological approach and four dynamics of social inclusion

The fourth sub-question focused on the pragmatic validity of the ecological model of social inclusion (Simplican et al., 2015). The question was in what manner an ecological approach, and in particular the ecological model of social inclusion is helpful in social work seeking social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. We explored if and how the framework could support social work practices focusing on inclusion. There is sporadic scientific evidence for the model in terms of validity and usability (Meys et al., 2021). In our research, we attempted to contribute to further substantiation of the usefulness of this model for the social work practice. Based on our research, we conclude that the model is primarily a tool for analysis, discussion, evaluation or reflection. It offers social workers a theoretical framework but cannot serve as a practical tool in everyday practice.

In the course of the research, we noticed that the ecological model was missing elements that do have a significant role in the complexity of social work practices. With an adapted model, it comes closer to a social work reality. The theoretical refinement of the ecological model consists of an emphasis on and recognition of social work practice that is conceived as inherently dynamic. This does justice to the concept of social inclusion as a process of change. Social inclusion constitutes a social ecology that is continuously in flux. Hence, it helps to define and understand social inclusion as dynamics, more so, as multiple dynamics at play simultaneously. Moreover, there is an inevitable dynamic in the discourse of inclusion that is easily overlooked and can thwart and tokenize the pursuit of inclusion. By this, we refer to the dynamics of intersectionality (the interconnected nature of social categories like race, gender, and (dis)ability leading to overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage for individuals or groups) and the dynamics of participation and control. Both dynamics are related to power dynamics that must be known and acknowledged in the inclusion discourse. Incorporating a 'dynamics lens' into the understanding of social inclusion better acknowledges the concept's multifaceted nature and complexity, enhancing its application in practice.

6.2.5 Inclusive research

The research focused primarily on the social worker, what role s/he has in promoting social inclusion, how s/he fulfills this role, and which competencies are instrumental to this pursuit. Grounded in participatory research (Duea et al., 2022; Van Lieshout et al., 2017), social workers had a leading role in the research and contributed in reflecting on their profession and professional practice. Given the critical-emancipatory nature of the research project, it was paramount that persons with intellectual disabilities also had a significant role in the achievement of inclusion aspirations and the inclusion discourse. Therefore, persons with intellectual disabilities participated in the research and were ensured that their voices were heard. The roles that they fulfilled varied per stage of the research: in the preparatory phase the involvement consisted of being a listener, co-thinker, advisor and partner, in the execution phase the involvement was slightly more influential, namely from listener to co-decision maker, and in the implementation phase the range of roles covered from co-thinker to partner. By co-thinking we mean asking for opinions and sharing our experiences. Advising includes providing solicited and unsolicited advice which is typically informed by the shared experiences. Advising includes providing solicited and unsolicited advice which is typically informed by the shared experiences. It guided the search for desired solutions. Partnership and co-decision-making was, to a lesser extent, accomplished by collaboratively searching for and choosing solutions to be designed. The community of development was conducted in conjunction with social workers, which caused some dilution of decision-making power ultimately leading to shared decision making. Given the varying degrees of involvement and influence at different stages of the research, typical of inclusive research (Nind & Vinha, 2013; Strnadová et al., 2016), it can be concluded that inclusive research has taken place, though there are certainly gains to be made in terms of thoroughness in inclusiveness. This suggests a more substantial representation of adults with mild intellectual disabilities, as well as a more balanced inclusion of both groups of research participants - social workers and adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Additionally, inclusiveness could have been strengthened by ensuring sustained engagement of adults with mild intellectual disabilities throughout the study. Interim absences (such as illness or vacation) and the withdrawal of some adults with mild intellectual disabilities have impeded the full realization of this objective.

In our research, inclusive action research proved valuable in several respects (Chapter 5). It encouraged reflection on what happens in social workers’ own practice, the position of social workers in relation to society, and the position of persons with mild intellectual disabilities in relation to social workers and society. It also raised questions about: what is the core of social work, what is the mandate of social work and how do you fulfill such mandate, what and whom do you depend on to fulfill your work, what is characteristic of the profession, what are the insights into 'what you actually stand for'. Reflection fostered nuanced insights into one's own views, it aided in adjusting or enhancing previous views or beliefs about, for example, inclusion and exclusion. Reflection brought about modest changes in the attitude among social workers, such as understanding that inclusion is also small, close at hand, a daily issue, and that social workers can easily add to the inclusion goals through their daily actions and thoughts (Chapter 2 and 5). The renowned quote stated in 1958 by Eleanor Roosevelt (UN, 2012) unmistakably resonates here: "where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world." To conclude, social inclusion is a human right. Social work and human rights are equally large and equally small, equally abstract and equally concrete. Both address basic needs translated into rights and duties for governments, businesses and citizens. It is an issue of concern, something that should not be taken for granted.

In addition to reflection, participatory and inclusive action research brings about small change by cycles of iteration (Cornish et al., 2023; Sergeant, 2021): trialing assumed solutions and answers in practice. It stimulates (new or adapted) behavior that moves toward more equal cooperation. We can appreciate the reflection for its inherent value, and also view the outcomes of this reflection as a contribution to practice, thereby leading to a modest improvement in service quality. The comprehensive process of participation, which was initiated and maintained by the research, has stimulated mental implementation (Verhagen & Haarsma-den Dekker, 2019). The concept of participatory or inclusive collaboration is gradually becoming ingrained in the minds, turning into a more commonplace idea, and ultimately translating into action. This is what we call action implementation. The tangible products, such as the Reversed Records Principles, resulting from participatory research may lead to more tailored social work services.

6.3 Methodology: considerations and reflections

Beyond the social constructivist perspective adopted in this study, its values are rooted in the principles of fostering participation and ensuring inclusion. It underscores dignity as the fundamental principle guiding interactions between participants, researchers, and other stakeholders, while acknowledging equality across various forms of knowledge—scientific, practical, and experiential. This approach aligns with the pursuit of social justice, conceived as epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007). This has ensured the choice of a methodology that accommodates these values, guiding the organizational form - in this case, the community of development - and the selection of research participants. It thereby presupposes dialogue between participants, and participants and the researcher, it requires a democratic process, and it must bring about emancipatory change both in the (involved) person and in practice through action. It is in alignment with Guba and Lincoln's (1989) argument for constructivist responsive evaluation which points to the centrality of the hermeneutic process and authenticity criteria, that are relevant to this research, particularly catalytic authenticity. In their footsteps, Anderson and Herr (2015) grouped the quality guidelines into five validities, namely democratic, dialogic, process, catalytic, and outcome validity. Our aim was to conduct an inclusive action research and collaborate intensively with social workers and adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Inspired by the five validities for action research proposed by Gary Anderson and Katherine Herr (2015), we designed the research and repeatedly evaluated it for quality. Since the validities provide guidelines on quality of action research - fitting under the umbrella of the critical emancipatory research paradigm - and to a lesser extent deal with validity as conceptualized in the positivist and interpretive research paradigm, we prefer to speak of quality domains. These were adopted as quality standards for this study.

6.3.1 Democratic quality

Democratic validity exists when consultation takes place with all those involved in the problem. Multiple perspectives - researcher(s), professional(s) from practice, management, policy and governance, clients or patients, family - are taken into account during the research project: from problem analysis and the collaborative articulation of the research question, data generation and analysis to the design and testing of the intended solution (Schuiling & Vermaak, 2017; Van Lieshout et al., 2017; Van Aken & Andriessen, 2011; McDonald, 2021). In parallel, the concept of democratic validity relies on the level of participation achieved by the local community, encompassing both professionals and experts by experience. We wanted to craft the research question in collaboration with various stakeholders – executive management, middle management, policy officers, experts by experience, supervisors of the experts by experience, social workers in residential care, social workers offering ambulatory service, professors and fellow researchers, and reviewers of the PhD-application. Since action research is strengthened by jointly-negotiated agreements that ensure a sharing of power and decision making (Cornish et al., 2023; McDonald, 2021), the challenge was to ensure progress was made and meanwhile avoid excessive power imbalances that disrupt productive and secure collaborations between the participants and researcher. Through repeated adjustments in the formulation of the research aim and central research question, this finally led to a formulation that left ample room for further fleshing out in consultation with practitioners once the research project had started. A downside of such a democratic process, however, is the risk of losing precision in the phrasing of the research aim and research question.

The democratic quality of research has come under pressure in various respects. Firstly, the involvement and substantive contribution of persons with a mild intellectual disability and secondly, the reduced involvement and contribution of all participants in some phases of the research. The involvement and vital contribution of participants (both social workers and persons with an intellectual disability) underwent gradual changes. One of the participants moved to another city making the distance from home to the research venue too far. There were no sufficient and accessible transportation options available. Occasionally, participation in the study was furthermore hindered by participants' work agendas or private circumstances such as doctor visits, health issues (such as fever, corona, dentist appointments), family circumstances and holidays. For one participant, the topic proved too abstract, despite attempts of her coach to make it concrete, and the relevance to her own life experiences was not perceived. Drop-out of some participants is a reality that is part of a long-term project (more than 2 years), as well as it is part of group dynamics. The consent forms outlined the right to withdraw from the study, and no conditions were imposed on this withdrawal.

In the course of the project, a core group evolved that invariably participated in every meeting and remained involved in the project, also outside the meetings. Some experts by experience requested additional support for their participation in the CoD. This entailed that, prior to the meeting, the researcher and facilitator convened with the experts by experience to clarify the meeting's objectives and to establish explicit timing for their contributions. Moreover, the democratic nature of the process weakened due to the lack of further substantive coordination with the administrative layer of the involved service provider. Although the research was grounded in a critical-emancipatory paradigm and adopted a grassroots approach, this does not imply that more powerful actors should be ignored or excluded. This may have had consequences for the support for the research results and the implementation opportunities at a structural level.

The democratic quality of the research was compromised at certain points. Firstly, during the prototype development stage, which involved proposed solutions to the research question, the challenge was determining who should take the lead in producing the designed solutions. Basically, the researchers wanted to keep these steps controlled and carried out by the participants and their network. However, the participants appeared to lack the digital skills—proficiency in Adobe Illustrator and Adobe InDesign—required for graphic design and materialization. This prompted a situation where the researchers, with proficiency in design software, complemented the participants' capacities in the design process. Although in consultation and with the consent of the participants—they even indicated they were happy that the researchers took on this task—the researchers experienced this as a breach in democratic quality since the participants relied too much upon the researchers' skills.

There is also potential to enhance the democratic quality of the analysis approach. The analysis was primarily conducted by the researchers and comprised several phases. Coding of the raw data was performed entirely by the researchers. The interim and preliminary results were presented to and discussed with the participants, and adjustments were made based on those conversations. In future research, more effort could be made to give participants a greater role, such as in the coding exercise. Finally, the democratic quality would have been enhanced if the manuscripts had been co-written with participants and not solely written in scientific language for publication in academic journals. Although translations in accessible language and visualizations were produced, the PhD process primarily requires scientific contributions.

6.3.2 Dialogic quality

Dialogic quality concerns the extent to which the research has been critically followed in a systematic manner by others. Dialogue continuously revolves around ontological, epistemological and axiological layers (Van Turnhout et al., 2014). The ontology of the research involves the everyday practice of discriminatory practices where complex concepts such as human rights, inclusion, exclusion and social injustice are key. In parallel with the ontology, the axiology of the critical-emancipatory character of action research reveals its value-laden nature and the type of 'new' knowledge to be developed that is intended. In addition to the scientific contribution, this includes room for making tacit and pragmatic knowledge explicit. That boils down to attempting to change practices considered socially unjust, offering rich opportunities to collect practical knowledge. Achieving this was the epistemological challenge with a wealth of options for data-generation methods available for this study (Van Lieshout et al., 2017; Van Turnhout et al., 2017).

In various ways, we have tried to pursue dialogic quality. Beside a supervisory committee of researchers, a sounding board of peer experts (people with a mild intellectual disability) was enlisted. In addition, unplanned critical friendships were forged, composed of fellow lecturers in social work, undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD-students engaged in (graduate) research and feeling committed to themes of human rights, inclusion, exclusion and (dis)ability. Although, the participants, in the narrow sense of the definition of dialogic quality, would not be considered as "the others" who systematically follow the research - because of their close involvement - we do see in their close involvement an undeniable role in striving for dialogic quality. Not from research methodological expertise, but rather from the position of keeping the methodology appropriate, i.e. in keeping with what may be understood as critical-emancipatory research. In that respect, written and visualized notes of the meetings were shared and discussed with the participants. This concerned both content of the research and the research process. They asked practical questions, as well as questions that forced the researcher to reflect on the methodological choices and analyses made. Finally, we added value to the dialogical quality by means of unprepared as well as prepared oral and written reflections on both methodological choices and situations that occurred in the data collection during the CoD meetings. These reflections were mostly shared with the facilitator involved, sometimes with a participant (the key figures from the different CoDs) and sometimes with the supervisor.

6.3.3 Catalytic quality

In the course of the research, those involved gain a better understanding of social work practice. This may lead to minor revisions in what we (think we) already know, in our beliefs, in our behavior and so in our practice. When people are set in motion, in part due to the research, and when small changes occur, in action research this is referred to as catalytic validity (Anderson & Herr, 2015; Newton & Burgess, 2008). This standard of quality aligns with the critical emancipatory impact sought in this study. It entails enhancing an awareness among social workers and people with intellectual disabilities of everyday practices that can be classified as socially unjust. An impact may be that those involved have developed a keener eye for and awareness of social injustices that can be understood from inclusive and exclusive power structures. This includes an awareness of the social worker's own professional identity, socio-political position and an awareness of social work's remit.

Efforts were made within the communities of development to initiate a catalytic process in various ways. One approach involved sparking discussions about concepts central to the research and prevalent in practice. This was accomplished, for example, by connecting shared lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion to associated notions such as discrimination, stigmatization, equality, and dignity. In discussions during the community of development meetings, participants shared concepts based on their own experiences. This exchange led to mutual cross-pollination. Researchers further facilitated this cross-pollination by occasionally providing input from a broader theoretical or sociopolitical framework, which was connected to the participants' experiences. As a result, participants can now identify forms of inclusion and exclusion more quickly, leading to greater recognition and acknowledgment of this phenomenon and its associated challenges.

Getting a better picture of professional practice presupposes, to some extent, measurement. This can come in degrees of probative and persuasive power (see Veerman & van Yperen, 2008). However, the term measurement can be misleading. In combined action and design research, impact and its mapping are also discussed (Banks et al., 2017; Kok & Schuit, 2012; Pain et al., 2015). Pain et al. (2015) argue for recognition of 'impact from the process' in addition to the one-sided attention to 'impact from the findings'. The former is particularly relevant for a combined action and design research. To map the impact from the process, a tool named the Impact Diamond was developed and deployed in the CoD's. It appeared to be a helpful tool to map the impact from the process and especially the impact in the person, that is, how has the involvement in the research affected you personally and as a social worker? To answer this question, the impact diamond on capacity building provides guidance with the following four pointers: knowledge, behavior, attitude, beliefs, and three connectors insights, skills, values. It should be noted that the distinction between pointers and connectors is arbitrary, due to their close interconnection. Impact on knowledge deals with expanding a person's understanding through enrichment, added nuance, or updated information. This expansion leads to new insights. Knowledge and skills reinforce each other, while values resonate through knowledge. Impact on behavior involves the skills expressed through actions taken to achieve a goal. It includes developing new skills, enhancing existing ones, or diversifying them. Behavior is shaped by skills, insights, and values. Impact on attitude relates to changes influenced by one's knowledge, skills, and beliefs. Attitude, both visible and invisible, is deeply intertwined with these factors and is shaped by the values one holds. It becomes visible in behavior. Impact on beliefs occurs when they shift due to new knowledge, experiences, or skills. Beliefs and values are closely connected; values underpin views and beliefs. In short, impact refers to both small and large changes that a person perceives in themselves. These changes resulting from participation in the study are not predefined in operational terms, but are captured through descriptions recorded by the participants personally.

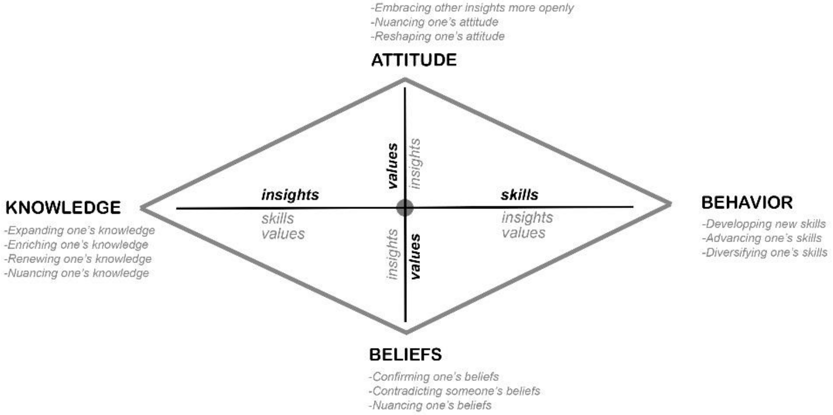

Figure 6.2: The impact diamond on capacity building (Knevel, 2024).

6.3.4 Process quality

Process validity is about the extent to which the approach and solution to problems are recognizable for the participants and organizations involved. This requires the researchers to be familiar with learning preferences and preferred styles in approaching and addressing change among the CoD-participants, the organizational culture (Illeris, 2018; Dewey, 1997; De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2003), and it demands adaptability of the researcher. As a consequence the research process must allow for differentiation and serendipity, accept that enhancing the professional repertoire of actions comes about through an incremental and iterative process (Busch, 2024; Cornish et al., 2023; Sergeant, 2021). For example, in this research an approach in terms of reporting was tailored to the culture of the organizations involved. Firstly, in consultation with the CoD-participants, reporting was achieved in the form of image impressions with a minimum of text in accessible language. In this way, the researchers connected to the social work reality of the CoD-participants, which they themselves characterize as predominantly practical, hectic and "there is little time to read reports, it is mainly quick reading between work." Secondly, the Reversed Records solution in development had been presented to stakeholders, including experts by experience and their coaches, to test whether the problem was widely recognized in the field and whether the proposed solution was realistic, relevant, acceptable, and adequate. Involving experienced experts as co-developers and sounding board members aligned with the vision of the organizations involved: 'nothing about us, without us, for us' (Charlton, 2000).

6.3.5 Result quality

Result quality pertains to the outcome aimed to achieve through the research. It is mainly about the practical usefulness of the developed solutions and what contribution the research has made to bring about these results. During the research project, the search for solutions can take different paths and go in different directions. The proposed solutions underwent adjustments in the test and retest stages, setting aside initial ideas for a solution. Result quality can be ensured by utilizing appropriate design methods, such as design thinking or elements thereof, and a multitude of deployable tools and activities aimed at designing a solution. The challenge was to orchestrate all conditions and resources - that is the participants, activities, content, group atmosphere and moderation (see Van Turnhout et al., 2017) - in a co-creation in such a way that ultimately there is a pragmatically valid result for the questions raised by the participants. After extensive testing, the potential solutions were scored for usability. For this purpose, a usability measure (bruikbaarheidsmeter) was developed. This consisted of a structured list of indicators, each to be scored with a 10-point Likert scale. This measurement was supplemented with explanations from the developers and users, who gave different interpretations to the scored figures than the researcher did. The latter experienced the scores as low and therefore interpreted the usability as poor, whereas the developers and users interpreted the scores much more positively.

With regard to delivery of the results, the challenge was to get the intended solution implemented. In testing the intended solution as a community of development, we discovered weaknesses and threats (external factors) that hampered implementation. Verhagen and Haarsma-den Dekker (2019) discern three dimensions of implementation: physical, mental and structural. Physical implementation concerns creating, developing and testing the design and winning support, for instance among service users and staff members. Mental implementation refers to informing, accepting and incorporating new ideas and new design. Structural implementation revolves around learning to utilize the design and letting it fit into the social work practice. Physical and mental implementation was accomplished. In particular, the participants disseminated the intended solution in their surrounding professional network; physical implementation and mental implementation effectuated. Structural implementation, however, was not achieved, for it demands harder nuts to be cracked. Structural implementation may have the consequence that a fundamental change in macro practices and macrosystems (for instance the Electronic Health Record systems) is required such as regulations that prescribe rules for keeping records. This moves beyond mere social change, as it also demands political debate and amendments to national legislation. Furthermore, it presupposes a broader scope for the project, which, although cherished by us as a CoD, was beyond our capabilities and scope.

6.3.6 Positionality

Evaluating quality of inclusive action and design research inevitably means reflecting on researcher positionality. It covers each of the aforementioned quality domains. Given the collaborative nature of the research and the dynamics involved between researcher and participants, in the initial phase of the trajectory I initiated the drafting of a positionality statement (Holmes, 2020) consisting of various assumptions to make my connection to the research transparent and to initiate the essential reflexivity. The assumptions and elaborations addressed the central theme of the research and the process of finding answers to the research question. The assumptions about collaboration and collaborative learning processes read as follows:

1. Within social work and intellectual disability support, learning and transformation follow emergent and serendipitous paths. This, however, does not imply a lack of structure; rather, it implies the opposite. Facilitating an emergent and serendipitous process requires competence in providing structure, allowing unfolding of learning and transformation, and navigating between both realms.
2. Enhancing the social workers' action repertoire involves an incremental and iterative process. It consists of numerous small steps forward toward the defined goal, interspersed with minor or significant steps backward.
3. Experiential learning best fits the way of learning of social workers performing direct social work practice.

The assumptions regarding learning and change are significantly influenced by my worldview. This perspective includes embracing indecision, doubt, and uncertainty. I accept the idea that answers aren't always necessary or attainable. Furthermore, these assumptions stem from the conviction that conversations should be prevented from being monopolized by scientific propositions. Simultaneously, these assumptions reveal my ontological stance, which closely aligns with an emic perspective. According to this view, scholarly literature was not at the forefront when formulating research questions, collecting and analyzing data. The starting point was in (unraveling) experiential knowledge of social workers and experts, particularly individuals with mild intellectual disabilities.

The assumptions steered my approach from start to finish. Initially an outsider, I engaged with individuals and organizations in social work and services for people with intellectual disabilities. This journey extended to reporting and disseminating the experiences and outcomes. Notably, my familiarity with the practices stemmed from my own past as a social worker in the same sector. One organization that joined the research—Cordaan, partaking in the community of development in Amsterdam Noord—had been my employer approximately eight years prior to the study. Additionally, I had established both formal and informal relationships with the social workers who participated in the community of development Wageningen. These connections were forged over several years, involving supervisory roles for trainees and repeated encounters through soccer matches between the Football Workshop Wageningen (a core component of the community of development) and students, teachers, and researchers from my current employer, Utrecht University of Applied Sciences. Leveraging these existing relationships, we extended invitations to other service providers within the field to participate in the research process.

The entire preliminary phase of the research spans years, encompassing relationship building, relationship management, and the careful negotiation of what each person aims to gain from the research. This time-consuming process inevitably has increased the willingness to cooperate. Additionally, it affected my positionality as a researcher, which can be described as oscillating between 'reciprocal collaboration' and 'outsider in collaboration with insider(s)' (Anderson & Herr, 2015). The former, according to Anderson and Herr (2015), can be understood as insider-outsider teams, and aligns with the chosen methodological design of the community of development (CoD). Both positionalities pursue equitable power relationships and promote (small-scale) organizational learning and community empowerment. The dynamic shifting between the two positionalities was entwined with the various roles I assumed: questioner, inquirer, inspirer, provocateur, observer, analyst, reporter, summarizer, and visualizer (see figure 6.3). The researcher's positionality and roles were associated with the dynamics of the participants' level of participation and influence on the research: listener (receiving information about the project), co-thinker (providing opinions and verifying the relevance and topicality of the research), advisor (giving both solicited and unsolicited advice), partner, decision-maker (Smits et al., 2020).

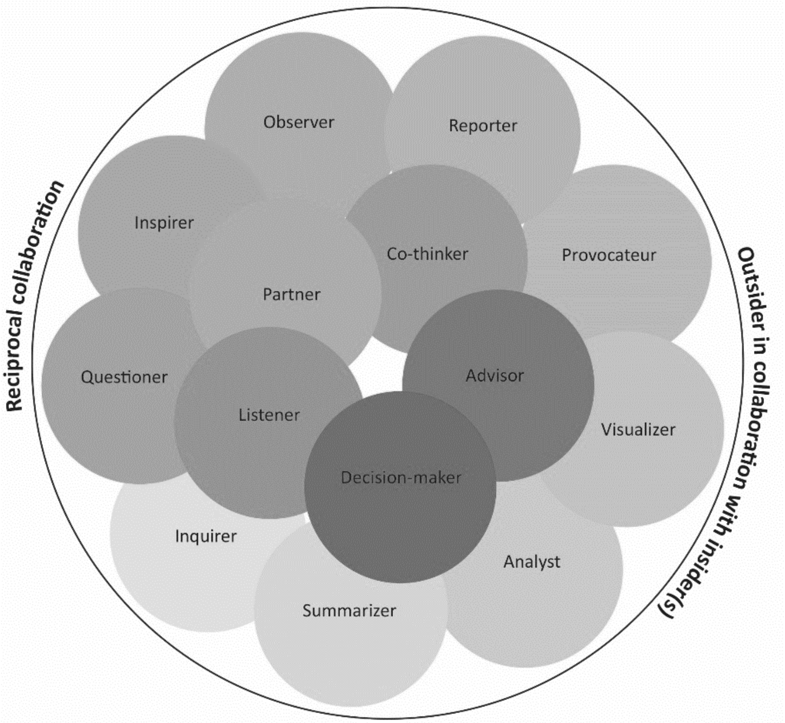

Figure 6.3: Researcher's positionality and roles, and level of participation of research participants.

As a researcher, I did not provide direction on the content, the design challenge, or the collaborative development of the anticipated solution. This was a moment for me to adopt a hands-off attitude. I attempted to influence the process once during the community of development in Wageningen by presenting sketches based on my observations as a potential solution. However, these suggestions were never accepted as such. My input prompted additional reflection and investigation, fostering a deeper exploration and search for solutions; one could say that it led to further deepening and digging. During the implementation phase, when the first prototypes of the hoped-for solutions were tested, the participants consistently took on the roles of co-thinker, advisor, partner, and decision-maker. They tested the prototypes in practice, reported their experiences during the community of development meetings, and collectively came up with recommendations for desired adjustments. The researcher and participants were partners in the design process; the participants provided input – content, material, design - through various activities during the meetings, the researcher created the designs and then presented them to the participants. Assessing the usability of the developed solutions was done in two ways: first, a usability measure was developed by the researcher specifically for the proposed and tested solution. This quantitatively measured the perceived usability for each participant. Averages of the scores were calculated, shared, and collectively interpreted. The participants, rather than the researcher, determined the meaning of the averages (participant as partner and decision-maker). In the analysis phase, the researcher maintained control. However, interim codings were presented to and discussed with the participants, providing material for discussion, which led to modest adjustments to the codings. In this phase, the roles of listener and co-thinker can be ascribed to the participants. The reporting phase—writing articles for publication in scientific journals—was entirely under the control of the researcher, and the participants were not involved in this part of the process.

6.3.7 Further considerations

The study was conducted in three micro-practices, in a specific context, namely a Western, high-income country with relatively high-quality facilities, an environment where many efforts are being made at national and local level by a wide range of actors - education, research, practice, government policy, interest groups, etc. - to advance the aspirations as stated in the UN CRPD. Narrowing the focus to three micro-practices affects the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research (Frambach et al., 2013). This can be overcome by repeated research and by initiating larger-scale and longitudinal research in more varied settings (prolonged engagement in data collection). This would increase the substantiation of the findings from this research. Additionally, it is worth considering what confirmation and additions to the findings of this research might be provided by employing other configurations of data collection methods. Thus, the various possibilities offered by methodological triangulation can be leveraged. Further exploration of this can strengthen the credibility of the current findings (Frambach et al., 2013). Moreover, this approach contributes to the exchange of knowledge regarding inclusion promotion and stimulates critical reflection on knowledge generation and validation.

Another aspect to ponder is the ratio between the number of participating social workers and persons with mild intellectual disabilities. The involvement of persons with mild intellectual disabilities was relatively small compared to the number of social workers. Although their voices were included, they could have been more amplified if the ratio had been reversed. This change would have affected the discussions within the development community, the search for answers, and the design of solutions. It would have been valuable to examine the outcomes if greater emphasis had been placed on investigator triangulation, allowing adults with mild intellectual disabilities to assume a more prominent investigator role.

An additional factor to consider is the selection process for study participation; specifically, they were not randomly selected. We consulted our network of professionals in the social work field and asked key figures to help us connect with other social workers and people with intellectual disabilities. This approach introduces bias, as it brings in participants who already have an interest in the topic and are willing to actively contribute to the research, with the intention of enriching themselves and improving their own professional practice. The participants can be typified as pioneers in their field, as forerunners in their team. Consequently, we

recognize that the applicability of the evidence primarily pertains to practices where persons with mild intellectual disabilities and social workers are pioneers and forerunners (Frambach et al., 2013. They are invaluable, especially since they can set the stage for many others to follow. Drawing a parallel with the marketing theory of innovation adoption, we can consider pioneers and frontrunners as the innovators and early adopters, with the expectation that over time, the early majority, late(r) majority and laggards of social workers and persons with mild intellectual disability will follow. This instantly opens up additional opportunities for data collection and further validation of the findings.
A final consideration pertains to the procedures of data recording and analysis. During the research, we encouraged extensive group discussions and activities, which yielded valuable data. Our meetings were consistently interactive and were occasionally held in diverse settings, both indoors and outdoors (including walking, playing football, and collaborating in groups). Although we recorded all discussions using multiple audio devices, transcribing posed challenges. Automated transcription services struggled to accurately capture the dynamic and sometimes chaotic speech of numerous participants. Manual transcription was deemed impractical for the research objectives. As a result, analysis of the recordings was conducted directly through listening to each audio file. To enhance validity, three audio recordings were randomly selected and independently reviewed and analyzed by three different researchers. The findings were subsequently compared and discussed with researchers and research participant which led to refinements in the final analysis. Although this approach has its limitations in terms of rigor, care has nevertheless been taken to ensure the consistency of the evidence by following an iterative procedure of data collection (i.e. data recording) and data analysis.

The initial aim of the study was to gain insight into the role of social workers in promoting the social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Insights from literature on social work competencies crucial to inclusion promotion, generative practices, core dynamics of social inclusion, and tools such as the Impact Diamond on Capacity Building, provide initial evidence of impact from the process. However, there is still much to be gained from gathering additional evidence of profound, sustainable changes in social work practices.

6.4 Applications and suggestions for teaching, practice and future research

6.4.1 Applications in teaching

The research findings offer ample opportunities for various educational applications that fit into an inclusion-focused social work endeavor. Concurrently, it aligns seamlessly with the central principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity that define social work internationally. The findings captured in simplified models including some derived tools - clusters of competencies, four core dynamics of social inclusion, generative practices, and spin off tools such as the impact diamond on capacity building and an evaluation framework of action research - offer guidance for making social inclusion focused practice teachable. It helps social work teachers appreciate that social inclusion is not an entirely new field that they need to understand, on the contrary, it empowers them with additional tools to further grasp the phenomenon and what the practical application of inclusion-focused social work can look like. An aspect that is highly valued by social work student. Following this, I argue that some of social work's most egalitarian and emancipatory practices - client participation, co-creation, strength-based practice, antidiscriminatory practice, social and political action — are enacting social inclusion principles when they are taught and practiced. The findings fuel thoughts, beliefs and discussion about the social worker's pivotal role in a field where they occupy an ambivalent position of being a state agent on the one hand and being a citizen agent on the other (Thompson, 2021; Veldboer, 2019). For instance, the models and tools can be used for discussion in the classroom, for analysis of social work practices where students are employed or fulfill their internship, for evaluation and reflection on students' own projects and practice. This applies to both undergraduate and postgraduate education, and is especially applicable to indirect social work in micro and mezzo practices. Thus, the models should be integrated into social work teaching, particularly in practice classes.

6.4.2 Applications in practice

Local authorities and service providers have an equally great responsibility in pursuing social inclusion. This mission is generally shared, but its translation into policy and practice still leaves much to be desired. For instance, many local authorities in the Netherlands have yet to establish a local inclusion agenda, despite its mandatory status according to the national implementation plan. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding among these authorities regarding the concept of social inclusion and the obligations imposed by the UNCRPD. Furthermore, service providers could place greater priority on social inclusion, and could provide more support for social workers to engage in inclusion-oriented approaches.

The research approach and research findings can be a source of inspiration and potentially prompt change. It can encourage local authorities and service providers to engage in inclusive and inclusion-focused policies, and it can stimulate social workers and service users to embark on inclusion focused endeavors. The four dynamics of social inclusion and generative practices provide guidance. And although the dynamics are rather abstract, they are primarily useful for indirect social work practices engaged in policies, projects and programs.

The concept of generative practices serves as a valuable tool for self-reflection, enabling individuals to discern ongoing or potential occurrences within their own professional practice. This extends beyond a mere conceptual understanding of inclusion, bringing the everyday realities of social work into focus and making theoretical concepts more applicable. These three generative practices can take the form of verbal or visual prompts, acting as initial stimuli for further exploration through methods like storytelling. Furthermore, the insights gleaned from these practices can inform the development of training programs aimed at enhancing the professionalization of social workers. It is imperative that such initiatives are co-designed in collaboration with service users who bring invaluable expertise through their lived experiences. Ultimately, the accessibility of these programs to both social workers and expert contributors is essential, as both groups play integral roles in shaping generative practices.

Although in this study the emphasis was placed on the generative practices agency, advocacy and intrapreneurship from the position of the social worker, service users play a crucial role in the establishment of such practices. This could be strengthened. To make a start, one could suggest developing inclusive training programs. Furthermore, core competencies in relation to promoting social inclusion could be included in a professionalization plan of employees as well as development plans of persons with intellectual disabilities who are keen to be active in the pursuit of social inclusion.

6.4.3 Applications in research and suggestions for future research

The core competencies, the four core dynamics of social inclusion, the generative practices and the impact diamond on capacity building are proposed as models useful for evaluation and analysis of practice, as well as reflection on the development of one's own competencies. However, the models have not yet been sufficiently evaluated. While the models draw on empirical evidence, the dynamic nature of social work practice, influenced by numerous variables, presents a challenge in achieving a convincing, comprehensive, and unambiguous validity - we would describe this as a form of holistic validity. There is no doubt that the conceptualization of social inclusion is subject to an inescapable ambiguity fueled and represented by different perspectives and interest groups. One could argue that social inclusion is a victim of this ambiguity and diffusion, for it may become a political toy and can be defined to suit everyone's fancy. In addition, we have hypothesized that inclusion-focused practice is a human rights based practice and will produce empowerment, but this assertion deserves further thorough research. Put it this way, there is still much to explore and learn as far as inclusive-focused work is concerned. This research has made a modest contribution to how social work in the field of intellectual disability support can contribute to social inclusion promotion. The results have potential for application in practice, teaching, and research. But more is needed. Some suggestions for research to better inform and build on the current results are:

One, generative practices can be further explored because it is plausible that variations can be found within such practices. By exploring, evaluating and documenting the variants, we enrich the current substance and diversity of generative practices. Such detailing contributes to the further substantiation of generative practices. It could also lead to the identification and expansion of subcategories within generative practices. Moreover, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that further generative practices could be distilled from empirical inductive subsequent research. Two, the subsequent generative practices are also interrelated. This interrelatedness has barely been addressed in the present study. Nevertheless, it deserves further consideration and substantiation. Dynamics unquestionably take place within and between generative practices. However, with the four dynamics from this research, we did not consider how they relate to and operate within generative practices. This could give grounds for another problem statement. Moreover, the dynamics were drawn from the many definitions and conceptualizations of social inclusion and the ecological model of social inclusion (Simplican et al., 2015), and were elaborated based on a relatively small-scale study. Owing to the limited scale of this study, these four dynamics require further empirical validation.

Three, beyond the knowledge that has been gathered and encapsulated in models, which requires additional empirical investigation, there remain potential advancements to be explored within the area of inclusive action and design research. One concern is to strengthen inclusiveness by ensuring the sustained engagement of adults with mild intellectual disabilities throughout the study. Additionally, it is important to anticipate and address the early withdrawal of research participants, whether they are social workers, experts by experience, or adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Related to this, consideration should be given to the occurrence of opportunities and threats to co-optation (Cornwall, 2008; Sinclair et al., 2023). As part of the goals in inclusive action and design research, the structural social change goal and the personal development goal - greater attention may be paid to properly mapping the impact from the process with specific attention to further developing and substantiating how qualitative data of impact in the person can be evaluated and shared in a trackable and insightful manner with the outside world. The Impact Diamond (see fig. 6.2) was a spontaneous initiative to this end, but in that respect requires much more thorough validation.

Lastly, this research has addressed the core competencies of the social worker consistent with promoting and protecting human rights as stated in the UNCRPD. This research did not lead to finding new core competencies. However, this research provides an impetus to forge connections between and finding coherence in the core competencies, generative practices and dynamics of working to achieve social inclusion. The core competencies may receive further exploration and clarification based on empirical evidence. In addition, efforts can be made to more precisely map out connections and coherence, thus offering additional evidence for practices conducive to realizing social inclusion for persons with mild intellectual disabilities.

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SUMMARY

Summary

This study seeks to enhance comprehension of how social workers can facilitate social inclusion for adults with mild intellectual disabilities. The key question of the research was: How can social workers foster the social inclusion of persons with mild intellectual disabilities?

General introduction

Chapter one offers a broad overview that sets the stage for the examination of social inclusion and the responsibilities of social workers within intellectual disability care and support, all viewed through the lens of a social constructivist approach to human rights. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was the departure point of this thesis. The convention champions the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. Since social justice and human rights are central principles of social work it leads to the understanding that social work may be conceived as a social justice or human rights profession. The interconnectedness between human rights and social inclusion underlines the relevance of human rights in combating human rights violations and social exclusion of persons with mild intellectual disabilities.

The implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities necessitates a reorientation of social work towards a so-called *new professionalism* emphasizing empowerment and inclusion. To achieve a deeper understanding of how social workers can advance social inclusion insight is required into conditions that are conducive to it. Such conditions encompass social workers' competencies, dynamics in social work to pursue social inclusion and generative practices that affect social workers' performance. The study responds to the UN Convention's call for an inclusion-focused approach, seeking insights into generative social work practices through participatory action and social design research methodologies. The community of development model was employed which fosters collaborative sense-making, involving active participation and artifact creation. Participants include social workers and adults with mild intellectual disabilities. The study included two separate communities of development located in Wageningen and Amsterdam. Data collection occurred through meetings within the community of development, and thematic analysis was conducted in conjunction with descriptive frameworks such as the CIMO. The findings are intended to inform inclusion-focused social work practice and contribute to deepening knowledge on furthering social inclusion.

Generative practices in inclusion-focused social work

Chapter two addresses identifying social work practices conducive to fostering social inclusion. We termed these as generative practices and divided them into three umbrella themes: practicing agency, practicing advocacy, and practicing intrapreneurship. Practicing agency involves both social workers and persons with mild intellectual disabilities. Professional agency, exhibited by social workers, encompasses reflective behaviors aimed at challenging biases and routines that may hinder effective support. Empowering agency focuses on enhancing the executive functioning and social and emotional well-being of persons with mild intellectual disabilities. This includes stimulating their participation in community activities and adopting a solution-focused approach that allows them to explore and address everyday issues independently. Practicing advocacy centers on promoting social justice, particularly epistemic justice, to ensure recognition and representation of the interests of persons with mild intellectual disabilities. Social workers engage in individual and collective advocacy efforts, thus challenging stereotypes, prejudice, stigma, frames within the community and advocating for inclusive practices and policies. They also build awareness and understanding among service providers and advocate accessible and flexible procedures that prioritize the needs and autonomy of persons with intellectual disabilities. Practicing intrapreneurship involves creating an environment within social work organizations where employees can explore innovative ideas and develop new approaches and strategies. This includes setting clear goals, proactively building relationships with stakeholders, and leveraging social networks to create opportunities for collaboration and engagement.

Understanding generative practices helps social workers shape their efforts to promote social inclusion. It guides in reflecting on past and current inclusion-focused social work performance, it may encourage social workers to adopt inclusion-focused pathways inspired by agency, advocacy, and intrapreneurship, and knowledge of generative practices toward social inclusion can help to specify social workers' competencies.

Social work competencies

Chapter three discusses the knowledge, skills and values of social workers that can help realize the rights of adults with mild intellectual disabilities set forth in United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. A narrative review was conducted focusing on codes of ethics and competency profiles in the USA, UK, and Netherlands. These countries were chosen due to similar trends in social welfare: marketization and decentralization. Despite variations in terminology, there were similarities in core values across the Codes of Ethic (CoEs) of the three countries, including social justice, human rights, and respect for human dignity and autonomy. The CoEs underscored transparency, accountability, and the mission of social work, though the emphasis on social change varied. The British and American CoEs highlighted the role of social work in challenging oppression, advocating for policy changes, and promoting social justice, while the Dutch CoEs leaned towards individual approaches and compliance with government policies. Competency profiles across the three countries showed alignment in required social work competencies, including professionalism, engagement, assessment, intervention, empowerment, and advancement. Professionalism involved a range of cross-cutting competencies necessary to champion human rights, including accountability, reflection, and leadership. The focus on empathy, tolerance, and communication was underscored in the context of engagement skills. Assessment aimed to determine support needs and identify risks of human rights violations. Intervention involved actions to improve conditions and protect human rights, with distinctions being made between negative rights interventions (protection from abuse) and positive rights interventions (promoting well-being and personal growth). Empowerment focused on strengthening individuals, organizations, and communities, with an emphasis on self-advocacy and promoting dignity and autonomy. Finally, advancement encompassed protecting human rights, promoting personal growth, and advocating for policy changes to ensure equitable distribution of resources and rights.

Differences were observed among the competency profiles of the three countries. The USA and UK strongly emphasized the connection between social work and human rights, embedding human rights in competency profiles, and promoting advocacy for social justice. In contrast, the Dutch competency profile had less emphasis on human rights and advocacy, with fewer mentions of structural issues like racism and intersectionality. The USA highlighted dimensions of justice such as racial and environmental justice, while the UK and Netherlands had less explicit emphasis on these issues. Notable differences were observed in addressing diversity, superdiversity, and intersectionality, with the USA placing more emphasis on intersectionality, racism and white privilege compared to the UK and the Netherlands.

While all countries emphasized core values such as social justice and human rights, differences were found in the emphasis placed on advocacy and in addressing structural issues that reflected varying national contexts and priorities within the field of social work. We conclude that concerning skills and knowledge, social work is profiled as a human rights profession in the USA and UK more explicitly than in the Netherlands.

Core dynamics in inclusion-focused social work

In *chapter four* an ecological approach to promoting social inclusion of adults with mild intellectual disabilities is discussed. The ecological model to and from social inclusion put forward by Simplican et al (2015) served as a framework and was evaluated for its practical value to social work. This led to four propositions rendering the ecological model more refined and dynamic: change agency and change processes, enabling and impeding variables at finer-grained levels, participation and influence, and intersectionality. Change agency and change processes were identified as crucial for advancing social inclusion. Social workers demonstrated change agency through proactive initiatives such as building relationships, advocating for persons with intellectual disabilities, and combatting stereotypes within communities. We outlined a multi-stage change process, stressing the importance of setting achievable goals, analyzing the situation, taking action, and inclusive evaluation. Enabling and impeding variables were examined at micro, mezzo, and macro levels, with additional attention given to professionals and unit-level factors. Social workers' values, attitudes, and team dynamics were identified as critical factors influencing inclusion efforts. Participation and influence were discussed in terms of horizontal and vertical dimensions, challenging traditional hierarchical models of participation. The importance of meaningful involvement of persons with intellectual disabilities during the entire inclusion process must not be underestimated. By adopting a more inclusive approach to participation, social workers can ensure that the voices of those directly affected are heard and respected. Intersectionality emerged as a critical lens for understanding the intersecting identities and experiences of discrimination of persons with intellectual disabilities. As part of the communities of development, a heightened awareness of additional challenges surfaced for individuals encountering (multiple) discrimination due to factors like disability, gender identity, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. By recognizing these intersecting forms of

discrimination, social workers can develop more effective strategies for promoting social inclusion and addressing systemic inequalities.
In response to these findings, we proposed a modified holistic approach, consisting of four core dynamics. With these four core dynamics, the framework stresses the interconnected nature of factors influencing social inclusion and provides a comprehensive guide for social work practice.

Inclusive action and social design research

Chapter five delves deeper into the research methodology - an integration of inclusive research, action research, and social design research - used and elaborates on the insights that arise from it. The communities of development were the principal settings for carrying out the research. The phasing of the research was linked with the Double Diamond model and design thinking processes.

First insights were gained into the issue of social inclusion for people with mild intellectual disabilities by empathizing with them and learning about their perspectives. A broad research question was developed through collaboration with social workers and persons with mild intellectual disabilities. Various activities and tools were employed to facilitate exploration, and through collaborative efforts a collective concern was defined, leading to the formulation of design propositions. These propositions addressed issues related to record-keeping and facilitating sustainable reciprocal collaboration between for-profit companies, non-profit organizations and the unpaid sheltered employment setting for adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Both communities of development delivered tangible outcomes: the Reversed Record Keeping Principles in Amsterdam and the Decision Chart for Sustainable Reciprocity in Wageningen. Testing and fine-tuning of these solutions led to positive outcomes, such as increased user involvement and slightly greater control over record-keeping processes.

The integral role of social workers and persons with intellectual disabilities in the research project is reviewed, noting their importance in maintaining the vitality of the project. Challenges related to ownership, power dynamics, implementation, and achieving emancipatory practice. Collective ownership is crucial in establishing a shared concern among participants, necessitating careful listening and mutual trust. Power balance issues arise, particularly in decision-making processes and skill disparities such as using software to design the artifacts. Participants shared the proposed solution within their professional networks, executing both physical and mental implementation. The integration of inclusive approaches with action and social design research is challenging and requires methodological flexibility and creativity. The community of development emerges as a platform for amplifying the voices of social workers and individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Discussion

Chapter *six* is devoted to discussing and reflecting on the main findings, research process, and applications of the findings to teaching, practice, and research. Although human rights principles are recognized in professional codes and competency profiles, they are not overtly central to social work practice. However, by reflectively engaging in their practice, including a genuine interest in the life experiences of persons with mild intellectual disabilities, social workers begin to recognize the inherent connection between their work and human rights. Similarly, the concept of inclusion in social work is explored. While social workers are familiar with the concept, its interpretation often lacks depth, focusing primarily on micro-level practices aimed at enhancing individual quality of life. Scholars and a select group of social workers align with a socio-political critical perspective, viewing social work as inherently linked to human rights principles, whereas social workers in intellectual disability care tend to adopt a more person-centered view.

The practical applicability of the ecological model of social inclusion in social work practice was explored. Although the model provides valuable analytical perspectives and encourages critical thinking, its utility as a direct service tool is limited. Moreover, the research examines social work competencies instrumental in promoting social inclusion. Despite the absence of empirical evidence identifying specific competencies, the focus shifts towards recognizing the interconnected nature of competencies within the broader context of social work practice. Rather than isolating individual components, the emphasis is placed on holistic configurations of competencies that contribute to inclusive practice. These configurations are reflected in what we have coined as generative practices. These practices offer a new perspective on what social work can achieve in promoting inclusion, so encouraging further development and refinement of professional principles.

Several applications of the research findings are addressed. In teaching, the findings offer tools and models that can be integrated into social work education to enhance understanding and application of inclusion-focused practices. These tools, such as clusters of competencies and the impact diamond on capacity building, provide guidance for educators to incorporate social inclusion principles into their curriculum and practice classes. In practice, the research highlights the importance of local authorities and service providers in pursuing social inclusion agendas. It emphasizes the need for greater understanding and prioritization of social inclusion concepts and obligations imposed by international frameworks like the UNCRPD. The research findings can inspire policy changes and encourage service providers to adopt inclusion-focused approaches, guided by the identified dynamics of social inclusion and generative practices. For future research, there are several suggestions to further explore and validate the proposed models and concepts. This includes delving deeper into variations and interrelatedness within generative practices, as well as validating the identified dynamics of social inclusion. Additionally, there is a need to examine the coherence between core competencies, generative practices, and dynamics of social inclusion to provide a more comprehensive understanding of effective practices in promoting social inclusion.

SAMENVATTING

Samenvatting

Met deze studie is geprobeerd een groter begrip te ontwikkelen over hoe sociaal werkers de sociale inclusie van volwassenen met een lichte verstandelijke beperking kunnen faciliteren. De centrale vraag van het onderzoek luidt: Hoe kunnen sociaal werkers de sociale inclusie van volwassenen met een lichte verstandelijke beperking bevorderen?

Sociale inclusie kunnen we beschouwen als een funderend principe voor mensenrechten. Als beroep heeft sociaal werk inclusie hoog in het vaandel staan. Zo kunnen we stellen dat sociaal werk op te vatten is als een mensenrechtenberoep waarbij we uitgaan van het sociaal-constructivistisch perspectief. Het VN-verdrag inzake de rechten van personen met een handicap vormde de aanleiding van deze studie. Het verdrag pleit voor de sociale inclusie van personen met een handicap. De implementatie ervan heeft gevolgen voor het sociaal werk waarbij de nadruk ligt op empowerment en inclusie. Om beter te begrijpen hoe sociaal werkers sociale inclusie kunnen bevorderen, is inzicht nodig in de condities die daartoe bevorderlijk zijn. Dit omvat competenties van sociaal werkers, de dynamiek in het sociaal werk om sociale inclusie na te streven en generatieve praktijken die het werk van sociaal werkers beïnvloeden.

In het vinden van antwoorden op de onderzoeksvraag is er gekozen voor een combinatie van inclusiegericht, participatief actie- en ontwerponderzoek. De ontwikkelwerkplaats diende als methode, wat gezamenlijke betekenisgeving rondom thema's als inclusie mogelijk maakt en waar ruimte is om antwoorden ontwikkelen. Deelnemers aan de ontwikkelwerkplaatsen waren sociaal werkers en volwassenen met een lichte verstandelijke beperking. Het onderzoek speelde zich af in twee afzonderlijke ontwikkelwerkplaatsen; één in Wageningen en één in Amsterdam. Dataverzameling vond plaats via bijeenkomsten binnen de ontwikkelwerkplaatsen en thematische analyses werden uitgevoerd in combinatie met beschrijvende kaders zoals het CIMO (Context Interventie, Mechanisme, Opbrengst). Bevindingen van deze studie zijn bedoeld als informatiebron voor inclusiegericht sociaal werk en dragen bij aan het verdiepen van de kennis over het bevorderen van sociale inclusie.

Inclusiegerichte generatieve praktijken

Er is gekeken naar wat sociaal werkers in de praktijk (kunnen) doen dat bijdraagt aan sociale inclusie. We noemden dit generatieve praktijken en verdeelden ze in drie overkoepelende thema's: *agency* (productief actorschap), *advocacy* (belangenbehartiging) en *intrapreneurship* (intrapreneurschap, intern ondernemerschap). Agency bestaat uit twee dimensies: professionele agency en empowering agency. Professionele agency betreft reflectief gedrag van de sociaal werker en is gericht op het uitdagen van de eigen vooroordelen en vanzelfsprekendheden die effectieve ondersteuning in de weg kunnen staan. Empowering agency richt zich op het ontwikkelen en versterken van de executieve functies, en het sociale en emotionele welzijn van mensen met een lichte verstandelijke beperking. Dit gaat over de sociaal werker die gebruikmaking van voorzieningen en deelname aan activiteiten in de samenleving stimuleert. Daarbij zet de sociaal werker bijvoorbeeld een oplossingsgerichte aanpak in teneinde de ander in staat te stellen alledaagse uitdagingen zelfstandig te onderzoeken en aan te gaan. Advocacy richt zich op het bevorderen van sociale rechtvaardigheid, in het bijzonder epistemische rechtvaardigheid, om de erkenning en vertegenwoordiging van de belangen van personen met een lichte verstandelijke beperking te verzekeren. Sociaal werkers houden zich bezig met individuele en collectieve belangenbehartiging, waarbij ze stereotypen, vooroordelen en stigma's binnen de samenleving aan de kaak stellen, en daarmee tegelijkertijd pleiten voor inclusieve praktijken en beleid. Zo vergroten zij het maatschappelijk bewustzijn en pleiten voor toegankelijke procedures die voorrang geven aan de ondersteuningsbehoeften en autonomie van volwassenen met een licht verstandelijke beperking. Bij intrapreneurschap gaat het om het creëren van een omgeving binnen een organisatie waarin werknemers innovatieve ideeën kunnen verkennen en nieuwe werkwijzen, methodes en strategieën kunnen ontwikkelen. Intrapreneurschap bestaat uit het stellen van duidelijke doelen, het proactief opbouwen van relaties met belanghebbenden en het inzetten van sociale netwerken om mogelijkheden voor samenwerking en betrokkenheid te creëren.

Het zien en begrijpen van generatieve praktijken helpt sociaal werkers vorm te geven aan de eigen inspanningen om sociale inclusie te bevorderen. Generatieve praktijken kunnen als inspiratiebron en als leidraad dienen voor het reflecteren op vroegere, huidige en toekomstige inclusiegerichte activiteiten.

Inclusiegerichte competenties

Binnen generatieve praktijken zijn sociaal werkers actief. Zij dragen competenties met zich mee. Middels een narratieve review is getracht inzicht te krijgen in de competenties (kennis, vaardigheden en waarden) van sociaal werkers welke worden verondersteld bij te kunnen dragen aan sociale inclusie. De narratieve review werd uitgevoerd waarbij de focus lag op de beroepscodes en competentieprofielen in de Verenigde Staten (NASW), Groot-Brittannië (BASW) en Nederland (BPSW). Deze landen zijn gekozen vanwege vergelijkbare politiek-economische ontwikkelingen in de zorg en welzijn: vermarkting en decentralisatie. Ondanks verschillen in terminologie waren er overeenkomsten in de kernwaarden van de beroepscodes van de drie landen, waaronder sociale rechtvaardigheid, mensenrechten, respect voor de menselijke waardigheid en autonomie. De beroepscodes onderschrijven transparantie, verantwoordelijkheid en de missie van sociaal werk, terwijl de nadruk op sociale verandering als centraal principe varieerde. De Britse en Amerikaanse beroepscodes benadrukten de rol van sociaal werk bij het bestrijden van onderdrukking, het bepleiten van beleidsveranderingen en het bevorderen van sociale rechtvaardigheid, terwijl de Nederlandse beroepscode sterker neigde naar individuele benaderingen en naleving van het overheidsbeleid. Competentieprofielen in de drie landen lijken in grote lijnen met elkaar in overeenstemming te zijn: professionaliteit, engagement (betrokkenheid, verstaan), assessment (inschatten, beoordeling), interventie, empowerment (groei, versterken) en advancement (bescherming, ontwikkeling). Professionaliteit omvat een reeks overstijgende, generieke competenties die nodig zijn om mensenrechten te beschermen, waaronder verantwoordelijkheid, reflectie en leiderschap. Empathie, tolerantie en inclusieve communicatie (totale communicatie) werden gedeeld als noodzakelijke vaardigheden om echte betrokkenheid te realiseren. Assessment is gericht op het vaststellen van ondersteuningsbehoeften alsook het identificeren van risico's op mensenrechtenschendingen. Interventie behelst acties om de omstandigheden te verbeteren en de mensenrechten te beschermen, waarbij onderscheid is gemaakt tussen interventies op negatieve rechten (bescherming tegen misbruik) en interventies op positieve rechten (het bevorderen van welzijn en persoonlijke groei). Empowerment concentreert zich op het versterken van individuen en gemeenschappen, waarbij de nadruk ligt op belangenbehartiging en het bevorderen van waardigheid en autonomie. Tot slot advancement, hetgeen vertaald is als het beschermen van de mensenrechten, het bevorderen van persoonlijke groei en het bepleiten van beleidsveranderingen om een eerlijke verdeling van middelen en rechten te garanderen.

Naast deze overeenkomsten zijn er verschillen waargenomen tussen de competentieprofielen. De Verenigde Staten en Groot-Brittannië legden sterk de nadruk op het verband tussen sociaal werk en mensenrechten, waarbij mensenrechten en het pleidooi voor sociale rechtvaardigheid werden ingebed in competentieprofielen. In het Nederlandse competentieprofiel lag minder nadruk op mensenrechten en sociale rechtvaardigheid, met minder expliciete verwijzingen naar en verbindingen met structurele kwesties als racisme en intersectionaliteit. De VS benadrukten dimensies van rechtvaardigheid zoals raciale en ecologische rechtvaardigheid, terwijl Groot-Brittannië en Nederland minder expliciete nadruk op deze kwesties legden. Opmerkelijke verschillen zijn waargenomen bij het aanpakken van diversiteit, superdiversiteit en intersectionaliteit, waarbij het sociaal werk in de Verenigde Staten meer nadruk legde op intersectionaliteit, racisme en white privilege vergeleken met Groot-Brittannië en Nederland. Hoewel alle drie landen de kernwaarden sociale rechtvaardigheid en mensenrechten bevestigen, zijn er duidelijke verschillen aangetroffen in de nadruk die wordt gelegd op belangenbehartiging en in het aanpakken van structurele maatschappelijke kwesties. Wat dat betreft is te concluderen dat het sociaal werk in de Verenigde Staten en Groot-Brittannië steviger en explicieter wordt geprofileerd als een mensenrechtenberoep dan in Nederland.

Inclusiegerichte kerndynamieken

Naast generatieve praktijken en inclusiegerichte competenties, is de praktische waarde geëvalueerd van een model dat een ecologische benadering voorstaat bij het bevorderen van de sociale inclusie van volwassenen met licht verstandelijke beperking. Dit leidde tot vier stellingen die het ecologische model verfijnder en dynamischer maakten: (1) verandering, (2) bevorderende en belemmerende variabelen, (3) participatie en invloed, en (4) intersectionaliteit. Verandering is cruciaal voor het bevorderen van sociale inclusie. Sociaal werkers lieten veranderingsvermogen zien door proactief nieuwe relaties met externe actoren aan te gaan, op te komen tegen onrecht door stereotypen en vooroordelen te aan de kaak te stellen. We schetsen een veranderingsproces dat uit meerdere fasen bestaat, waarbij het analyseren van de situatie van belang is evenals het stellen van haalbare doelen, het ondernemen van actie en het houden van een inclusieve evaluatie. Bevorderende en belemmerende variabelen werden onderzocht op meerdere niveaus, waarbij extra aandacht werd besteed aan variabelen in de sociaal werkers alsook variabele die op teamniveau spelen. De waarden en attitudes van sociaal werkers en de teamdynamiek werden geïdentificeerd als kritische factoren die de inclusiegerichte inspanningen gunstig dan wel ongunstig beïnvloeden. Participatie en invloed werden besproken in termen van horizontale en verticale dimensies, waardoor traditionele hiërarchische participatiemodellen werden uitgedaagd. Het belang van een betekenisvolle betrokkenheid van personen met een verstandelijke beperking tijdens het gehele inclusieproces mag niet worden onderschat. Door een meer inclusieve benadering van participatie te hanteren, kunnen sociaal werkers ervoor zorgen dat de stemmen van de direct betrokkenen worden gehoord en gerespecteerd. Intersectionaliteit kwam naar voren als een kritische lens voor het begrijpen van de kruisende identiteiten en ervaringen van (meervoudige) discriminatie van personen met een verstandelijke beperking, bijvoorbeeld vanwege identiteitsaspecten ‘beperking’, genderidentiteit, etniciteit en sociaaleconomische status. Door deze elkaar kruisende vormen van discriminatie te erkennen, kunnen sociaal werkers effectievere strategieën ontwikkelen om sociale inclusie te bevorderen en systemische ongelijkheden aan te kaarten, zo niet aan te pakken. Als reactie op deze bevindingen is een aangepaste holistische benadering voorgesteld, bestaande uit vier inclusiegerichte kerndynamieken. Deze vier kerndynamieken vormen een raamwerk dat de onderling verbonden aard van factoren die sociale inclusie beïnvloeden benadrukt. Het biedt een uitgebreide, enigszins complexe doch kritische houvast voor de praktijk alsook voor beleidsontwikkeling en onderzoek.

Geleerde lessen van een inclusief actie- en ontwerponderzoek

De generatieve praktijken, aan inclusie bijdragende competenties en inclusierelevante dynamieken zijn geïdentificeerd met behulp van een gecombineerd inclusief actie- en ontwerponderzoek. De ontwikkelwerkplaatsen vormden de belangrijkste omgeving voor het uitvoeren van het onderzoek waarbij de fasering van het onderzoek gekoppeld was aan het Double Diamondmodel en de gelijkende design thinking fases. De eerste inzichten in wat social inclusie kan betekenen voor personen met een licht verstandelijke beperking werd verkregen door te leren van hun verhalen en daarmee hun perspectieven. Door samenwerking met sociaal werkers en personen met een licht verstandelijke beperking werd een brede onderzoeksvraag ontwikkeld. Inzet van verschillende activiteiten en hulpmiddelen vergemakkelijkte het collectief verkennen van inclusievraagstukken en maakte het vaststellen van een collectief belang mogelijk, wat hielp tot het formuleren van mogelijke oplossingen. Deze voorstellen gingen in op concrete praktijken zoals de dagelijkse rapportage (dossier) en het realiseren van duurzame wederzijdse samenwerking tussen overheidsdiensten, profitorganisaties, non-profitorganisaties en de dagbesteding voor volwassenen met een licht verstandelijke beperking. Beide ontwikkelwerkplaatsen hebben tastbare resultaten opgeleverd: de Omgekeerde Overdracht principes in Amsterdam en de Beslisschema ten behoeve van duurzame wederkerige samenwerking in Wageningen. Het testen en verfijnen van deze oplossingen leidde tot een grotere betrokkenheid van sociaal werkers bij het bevorderen van inclusieve praktijken, het resulteerde in ervaren sociale erkenning bij betrokken personen met een licht verstandelijke beperking, en was sprake van gevoel van grotere eigen regie over de inhoud en vorm van dagelijkse rapportagepraktijken.

De rol van sociaal werkers en personen met een verstandelijke beperking in het onderzoeksproject is van groot belang om de vitaliteit van het project te behouden. Dit gaat onvermijdelijk gepaard met uitdagingen die gerelateerd zijn aan (collectief) eigenaarschap, machtsdynamiek, implementatie en het bereiken van een emancipatorische praktijk. Eigenaarschap, zowel individueel als collectief, is cruciaal bij het formuleren van een gedeelde zorg – probleemstelling – die onder de participanten leeft. Dat vergt van alle participanten zorgvuldig luisteren en wederzijds vertrouwen. Dat is geen gegeven. Machtsdynamiek speelt impliciet en expliciet en kan voor ongewenste disbalans zorgen als de ambitie draait om inclusiegericht en inclusief werken en onderzoeken. Uitdagingen met de machtsbalans doen zich voor bij besluitvormingsprocessen en wanneer verschillen in vaardigheden naar de oppervlakte komen. Wat betreft implementatie hebben de onderzoeksparticipanten de voorgestelde oplossingen binnen hun professionele netwerken gedeeld (besproken, getest) waarmee stappen zijn gezet in fysieke en mentale implementatie. Van structurele implementatie is echter geen sprake geweest. Een belangrijke geleerde les is dat de integratie van een inclusieve benadering met actie- en ontwerponderzoek een uitdaging is en methodologische flexibiliteit en creativiteit vereist. Verder hebben de ontwikkelwerkplaatsen laten zien een kansrijke, veelbelovende plek te zijn voor het horen en versterken van de stemmen van sociaal werkers en personen met een verstandelijke beperking. Daarmee is het bij uitstek een vorm en plek om kritische emancipatoire onderzoeksambities na te streven.

Discussie

Hoewel mensenrechtenprincipes worden erkend in beroepscodes en competentieprofielen, staan ze niet overtuigend centraal in de praktijk van het sociaal werk. Door reflectief bezig te zijn met hun praktijk, inclusief een oprechte interesse in de levenservaringen van personen met een lichte verstandelijke beperking, onderkennen sociaal werkers echter het inherente verband tussen hun werk en mensenrechten. Op soortgelijke wijze wordt het concept van inclusie in het sociaal werk verkend. Hoewel sociaal werkers bekend zijn met het concept, ontbeert de interpretatie ervan vaak diepgang, waarbij de nadruk vooral ligt op praktijken op microniveau die gericht zijn op het verbeteren van de individuele levenskwaliteit. Een selecte groep onderzoekers, opinieleiders en sociaal werkers sluit zich aan bij een sociaal-politiek kritisch perspectief en beschouwen sociaal werk als inherent verbonden met mensenrechtenprincipes, terwijl sociaal werkers in de verstandelijke gehandicaptenzorg eerder de neiging hebben om een meer persoonsgerichte visie aan te nemen.

De praktische toepasbaarheid van het ecologische model van sociale inclusie in de praktijk is onderzocht. Het model biedt waardevolle analytische perspectieven en moedigt kritisch denken aan. De bruikbaarheid ervan als hulpmiddel voor directe dienstverlening blijft echter beperkt. Daarnaast is stilgestaan bij de competenties op het gebied van sociaal werk die een belangrijke rol spelen bij het bevorderen van sociale inclusie. Door het ontbreken van empirisch bewijs dat specifieke competenties identificeert als effectief, is de focus verschoven naar het erkennen van de onderling verbonden aard van competenties binnen de bredere context van het sociaal werk. In plaats van individuele componenten van competenties te isoleren, hebben we de nadruk gelegd op holistische configuraties van competenties die bijdragen aan een inclusieve praktijk. Deze configuraties worden weerspiegeld in wat wij generatieve praktijken hebben genoemd. Deze praktijken bieden een nieuw perspectief op wat sociaal werk kan bereiken bij het bevorderen van inclusie, wat een verdere ontwikkeling en verfijning van professionele werkwijzen kan stimuleren.

Verschillende toepassingen van de onderzoeksresultaten komen aan bod. In het onderwijs bieden de bevindingen instrumenten die kunnen worden geïntegreerd in het sociaal werkonderwijs ten behoeve van het beter begrijpen wat inclusiegericht werken inhoudt. Deze instrumenten, zoals clusters van competenties en de impactdiamant, bieden docenten richtlijnen om principes van sociale inclusie op te nemen in het curriculum en lessen. Voor de praktijk benadrukt het onderzoek het belang van lokale overheden en zorg- en welzijnsorganisaties bij het nastreven van sociale inclusie agenda's. De onderzoeksresultaten kunnen inspireren tot beleidsveranderingen en kan aanmoedigen om inclusiegerichte werkwijzen te omarmen. Voor toekomstig onderzoek zijn er verschillende suggesties om de voorgestelde modellen en concepten verder te verkennen en te onderbouwen. Dit houdt onder meer in dat er dieper kan worden ingegaan op de variaties binnen en onderlinge verbondenheid tussen de generatieve praktijken. Daarnaast is het nodig om de samenhang tussen kerncompetenties, generatieve praktijken en de dynamiek van sociale inclusie verder te onderzoeken om een exacter inzicht te krijgen in praktijken die (aan)toonbaar bijdragen aan het bevorderen van sociale inclusie.

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I will start with my supervisor Alice Schippers and co-supervisor Jean Pierre Wilken. You have been involved the longest and most intensively. You supported me in a way that suited me, giving me space and freedom in ‘how you do things the way you do them,’ while also keeping me on track and ensuring I met the expectations and requirements of science. Oh, and patience.

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Heerenloo; and in Amersfoort working at Abrona, Amerpoort and Humanitas DMH. These practices ensured that the research was truly participatory action research. Without mentioning names, it is clear that all your contributions were valuable and indispensable for the research project.

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Although I'm not fond of physical massages, I occasionally need them for my mental health. Just to clarify, I'm referring to a mental massage, not a physical one. Fortunately, I have a supportive circle: my paranymphs, Gemma Andriessen and Dorien Claessen. From the start, you showed interest, listened, challenged me, offered perspective, and made the process enjoyable—even through the defense! We will conclude that with an onomatopoeic hííího̧háá!!

DANKWOORD

Dankwoord

Het is zover. Ruim zes jaar. Een promotieonderzoek opzetten, uitvoeren en afronden. Klaar. Dat het niet van een leien dakje ging, het zij zo. Dat hoort bij, zoals ik dat noem, een onomatopeïsche reis. Onomatopeeën zijn stijlfiguren die op fonetische wijze acties, gebeurtenissen, gevoelens en gedachten nabootsen en uitbeelden. Oftewel: Grrrrr, Grmpff@!, Argh!, #Hu*H?!*, Najaah, Goh!, Mwoah, Hèèè? en Hééé!, Wow!, #Boeiuh!, Tssss, Yess! Ik ben een enorme liefhebber van onomatopeeën. En nu sta ik op het punt van Hadsekidee! en Hííhóá! Dat is mede te danken aan eenieder die tijd en aandacht besteedde aan en betrokkenheid had bij het project. Ik bedank dus eenieder die op één of andere manier een bijdrage, groot of klein, direct of indirect, heeft geleverd. Ik ga niet de hele waslijst langs van namen, want zoals mijn brein werkt, ik vergeet altijd wel iets of iemand, per ongeluk, onbedoeld. En dat risico wil ik niet lopen. Toch zal ik enkele personen wel bij naam noemen omdat zij (flink) wat tijd hebben geïnvesteerd in de begeleiding van het promotietraject en inhoudelijke ondersteuning hebben gegeven.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Curriculum vitae

Jeroen Knevel obtained his BSc in Social Work in 2001 at Hogeschool Utrecht. Subsequently, he obtained his MA in Social and Political Inquiry in 2003 at Monash University, Australia. After that, he worked in social services, first as a support worker in homelessness services and then as a disability support worker, providing care and support to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In 2009, he transitioned to higher education (Hogeschool Utrecht), initially as a lecturer and coordinator of various educational components in bachelor's and master's programs. His teaching and research contributions consistently focus on inclusion, human rights, ethics, and investigative and innovative competencies. He fully embraces the opportunity to apply innovative, creative, visual, participative, active, interactive, surprising, and sometimes hilarious teaching methods. Shortly after being employed as a lecturer, he also took on the role of researcher at the Center for Social Innovation. Since 2020, he has been working as a visiting lecturer at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, where he established an international course on Human Rights, Social Inclusion, and (Dis)ability for the Master's program in Social Work and Social Policy. His teaching and research endeavors are consistently complemented by his volunteer work in the field of social work. He started his PhD research in 2019.

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