Bonding in Newcomer Education:
An Empirical Exploration

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Abstract. Armed conflicts in the Middle East since 2015 have led to an increase of refugee children in Dutch society and Dutch schools. This article describes an exploratory qualitative study into how primary school teachers promote bonding in classrooms and schools with newcomer students. Following research in worldview and citizenship education, we identify three interrelated ways in which bonding can be promoted in (newcomer) education: by fostering a) exchange, b) a feeling of being listened to, and c) the co-creation of a shared cultural world. We then present the results of a multiple-case study which examined teacher practices and challenges in two schools in this regard. Thematic analysis of the data revealed how the teachers experience their work as highly meaningful, despite the challenges that stem from the super-diverse character of newcomer classes and a lack of suitable materials. The teachers offer various playful learning activities to advance exchange and a feeling of being listened to. Moreover, they employ creative, playful and imaginative learning strategies to stimulate the co-creation of a shared cultural world. Overall, our study introduces a conceptual vocabulary and provides insights into how to foster a shared space in newcomer classrooms and schools.

Keywords: newcomer students; super-diversity; bonding; shared space; teacher competences.

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1. Introduction

Armed conflicts in the Middle East since 2015 have led to an increase of refugee children in many EU countries. In the Netherlands, for example, where this study is situated, there are currently 88,000 people with a Syrian background, most of whom arrived in the past four years. With the influx of refugee people as well as an increase in the expat population (CBS, 2018), more schools in the Netherlands are becoming involved in teaching immigrant children. A large majority of these children settle in the Netherlands with their parents and attend regular primary schools. In the Netherlands, education for these 'newcomer students' is organized at the district level. Some districts offer so-called 'language schools' that educate all newcomer children: both those who live at Asylum centers and those who have started building a new life in society. Other districts have arranged newcomer classes within regular schools, or a combination of the two solutions. Research and advisory reports on teaching newcomer students in the Netherlands so far focus on strengths and weaknesses of current education trajectories for this student group, the development of effective tools, methods and materials to teach and assess second language learning ('NT2' in Dutch) and social-emotional learning, and the identification of key competences for teaching newcomer students (e.g. Onderwijsraad, 2017; Van Vijfeijken, & Van Schilt-Mol, 2012). Also in other counties, to our knowledge, attention for the educational and social needs of newcomer students in primary education is prevalent (e.g. Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity, & Byrne, 2009). Research has shown, among other things, that mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in early childhood and early primary school years is beneficial to immigrant children's academic success (e.g. Ball, 2010). Scholars have also stressed the need to attend to power issues related to second language learning (e.g. Bartolome, 2010).

Inspired by the work of scholars in worldview and citizenship education (Carretero, Haste, & Bermudez, 2015; Egan, 2005, Gudson, 2015; Van Oers, Leeman, & Volman, 2009), we argue that (newcomer) education also needs to support meaning-making processes and the development of a shared space (Van den Berg, 2014; De Groot, 2017a, 2017b). Essential for a shared space is that people *bond* with one another in diversity, without neutralizing tension or struggle (Castoriadis, 1987; Taylor, 2004; Dieleman, & De Beer, 2010). A shared space is both visible and material (e.g. signified by the board that says welcome in the languages of all the students in the hall of the school) and a 'social imaginary': a shared virtual space that is created by people, in effect the students in the classroom, in order to temporarily share and transform cultural meanings stemming from different cultural traditions (Taylor, 2004; Adams, Blokker, Doyle, Krummel, & Smith, 2015; Alma, & Vanheeswijck, 2018). Shared meaning-making and the development of a shared space in classrooms and schools at large can be envisioned as key components of *bonding*. By focusing on bonding, our study moves beyond the prevalent attention to socio-emotional, language and cognitive competences of individual students in (newcomer) education research, and beyond research on the sense of belonging among specific minority groups.

To gain preliminary insights into bonding in newcomer schools, our study sets off to explore how primary school teachers promote bonding in classrooms and schools with newcomer students. With this study, we aim to contribute to research that resonates with teacher aspirations to be responsive to the existential, educational, social and existential needs of newcomer students. We also aim to provide teachers, school leaders and NGOs with a conceptual vocabulary and tools to advance shared meaning-making and the development of a shared space in their (newcomer) classrooms and schools.

2. Theoretical background

Bonding, understood as a sense of interconnectedness with one's environment, is regarded as a basic psychological and existential need: one that needs to be fulfilled in order to experience meaning in life (e.g. Smaling, & Alma, 2006; Baumeister, & Leary, 1995; Ryan, & Deci, 2000). Bonding has also been identified as an important social mechanism for societies to flourish. In his analysis of social change in the US, Robert Putnam (2000) has pointed to the importance of the bonding and bridging activities pursued by people who participate in civil organizations, e.g. the church and the bowling team. Bonding, in his work, signifies the development of social capital and social networks *within* social and cultural groups. Bridging, on the other hand, refers to the development of social capital and social networks *across* social and cultural groups. In the context of pluralist schools, where students from different cultural and social backgrounds learn and play together, students and teachers are constantly involved in both activities: they try to bond with (other) students and staff members and build bridges that enable them to learn, play and work together. Rather than distinguishing between activities within an in-group and activities with others, we use the term bonding to signify all educational activities that stem from the urge to create an environment where people can live and learn together. In the following, we explain how bonding is also envisioned as a key value and activity in worldview and citizenship education research. We then identify three interrelated ways in which the value and practice of bonding can be advanced: by fostering a) exchange, b) a feeling of being listened to, and c) the co-creation of a shared cultural world that can be conceptualized and analyzed either as a material or an imaginary space (see our introduction above), and identify key teacher competences for organizing and steering bonding-related practices.

2.1. Bonding in worldview and citizenship education

Interreligious education in pluralist societies like the Netherlands typically aim to challenge students to learn *from* religions and worldviews, enabling students to apply and personalize what they learn about religions and worldviews to their own lives and experiences (Grimmitt, 2000; Engebretson, 2009). Developing a shared space in which students and teachers are familiarized with a variety of religious artefacts and engage in a critical dialogue is highly valued in forms of interreligious education in which worldviews and religions present themselves as a gift to the child (Hull, 1996). Likewise, 'creative worldview education' (Van den Berg, Ter Avest, & Kopmels, 2013) aims to link students' life themes and life questions to appealing resources from different and diverse religious and non-religious cultural traditions, enabling students to internalize the symbolic
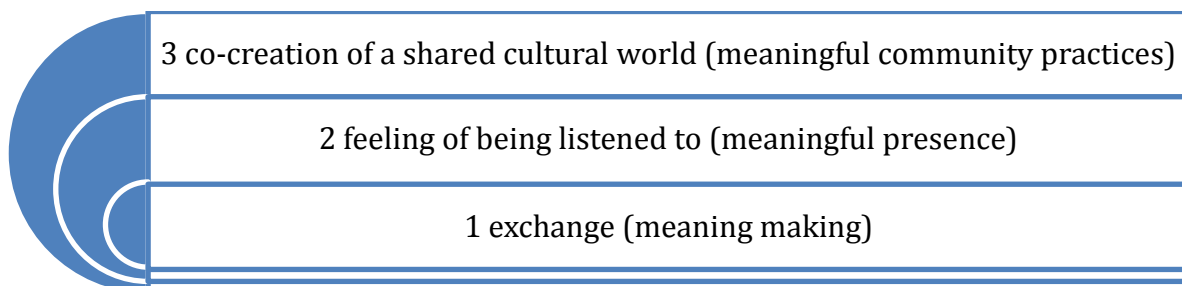
language of these resources and so to become world-wise. In doing so, creative worldview education supports meaning-making in relation to different life themes and life questions, and the construction of students' life view, lifestyle and life stance (Van den Berg, 2014). It also supports the development of a shared educational space for dialogue, imagination, play and association.

In addition to this interreligious motivation to develop a shared space, scholars in critical democratic citizenship education argue that attention for bonding and related practices (e.g. dialogue, social commitment and empowerment) should be paramount in the curriculum and in the school culture, for example by recognizing the danger of reproducing unjust structures and by cultivating a space where marginalized opinions and ideas can also be heard (Aloni, 2016; De Groot 2017a, 2017b; Leijgraaf, 2016; Veugelers, De Groot, & Stolk, 2017; Veugelers, 2011).

2.2. Three ways to foster bonding in schools
We argue that there are (at least) three ways in which teachers can foster shared meaning-making and the construction of a shared (imaginary) space in schools. A first way is through organizing conversations in which students (and teachers and parents alike) can share their experiences, feelings and thoughts. If teachers explicitly organize conversations in order to stimulate shared meaning-making, we refer to them as 'dialogues' (e.g. Wegerif, 2013; Aloni, 2016). If these efforts take a more casual form, we speak of organizing opportunities for *exchange*. Teachers may organize student exchange for different reasons (e.g. to stimulate the development of friendships, or to let off steam in order to increase student engagement during class). Regardless of why student exchange is organized, it can foster students' awareness of each other's realities, ideas, feelings and needs; their ability to share experiences and feelings; and meaning-making at the interpersonal level (see also Figure 1).

A second way to foster bonding is by cultivating *a feeling of being listened to*. Exchange can be envisioned as one strategy to foster this feeling among students. However, there are many more strategies that teachers can apply to foster this feeling in students: e.g. by organizing a ritual so that students can stop to dwell on an existential event, and adapting classroom practices to the needs and stories of specific students. Key to this second way of fostering bonding is that it generates a sense among students that they are valued, that their presence in the school is meaningful.

3 co-creation of a shared cultural world (meaningful community practices)

2 feeling of being listened to (meaningful presence)

1 exchange (meaning making)

Figure 1: three dimensions of bonding in (newcomer) education

A third way to foster bonding is to offer opportunities for students to *co-create a shared cultural world*. A shared cultural world can function at a material or an imaginary level, and emerges when students are introduced to a shared cultural activity (e.g. a national celebration), or engage in a shared celebration of a specific religious festivity (e.g. the Indian Holi festival). A shared cultural world also emerges when languages, cultures and experiences of students, teachers and parents are made visible in the classroom or school (e.g. with photos, drawings), and when new, shared symbols and cultural practices and narratives are created (e.g. the narrative of what the school means for teachers and students). Teachers can also create opportunities for exchange as a part of organizing such activities. These activities may also contribute to a sense of being seen and heard. Distinctive for this third way of fostering bonding is that activities are explicitly organized to cultivate a real and imagined shared space. We thus identify three ways in which a shared space in the classroom and in schools can be created: by fostering a) exchange, b) a feeling of being listened to, and c) the co-creation of a shared cultural world.

2.3. Bonding-related teacher competences in newcomer education

Many teachers foster bonding in these three ways in daily life in schools. Teachers are not always aware, however, of how and where they stimulate bonding among students. Part of their expertise in this regard can be envisioned as tacit knowledge (e.g. Polanyi, & Sen, 2009): the implicit knowledge that people have and display in their pedagogical actions. In classes with newcomer students, it can be quite challenging for teachers to co-create a healthy social and learning climate and to support students' wellbeing. Language barriers make it more difficult, for example, to share ideas, knowledge and experiences. Likewise, processes of playing together and connecting with others are, more than in regular classes, impacted by language barriers and differences in how students have learned to express and cope with emotions. Furthermore, developing a sense of interconnectedness with one's environment may be more difficult to achieve for students who grew up in a different environment, and for students who learn and live together in a 'super-diverse' context (Vertovec, 2007): a place where multiple social, cultural, historical and economic worlds meet.

Given the challenges mentioned above, it is very important for teachers in newcomer education to be sensitive and responsive to the existential, social and learning needs of their students. Key characteristics of teacher sensitivity and responsiveness as defined in the literature are: a) being alert to signals from students (Scharmer, 2007), b) knowing how to read these signals (Tirri, & Nokelainen, 2011), c) being able to emphasize with students (Tirri, & Nokelainen, 2011), and d) being able to respond in a timely and suitable manner to their students' questions or needs (Van Manen, 1991, Deci, & Ryan, 2000). In our study, we have explored teacher sensitivity and responsiveness to the educational, social and existential needs of newcomer students.

3. Method

To explore how primary school teachers promote bonding in classrooms and schools with newcomer students, we decided to conduct a multiple-case study. This research method is typically utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of a certain practice (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2015). The main research question became: *How do primary school teachers promote the three types of bonding in classrooms and schools with newcomer students?* Three sub-questions were defined to guide our data collection and analysis:

1. What characterizes the newcomer classes in the two schools, and what challenges do teachers identify in teaching newcomer students?
2. What teacher sensitivity and responsiveness informs and steers bonding-related teacher practices?
3. How do teachers promote bonding by a) organizing exchange; b) contributing to students' feeling that they are listened to; and c) organizing opportunities for students to co-create a shared cultural world?

Classroom and school characteristics that were explored are student population, number of classes, teaching staff (number; diversity in age, cultural background and expertise), the classroom and school atmosphere and relations with the neighborhood. To gain insight into teacher practices, we collected information on teacher strategies as well as more spontaneous incidents of bonding (e.g. adjusting the program in order to give room to spontaneous student exchange). In the following, we describe the research population, data collection instruments and the analysis process.

3.1 Research population
As our study focuses on the development of a shared space in primary education, we selected schools that teach both newcomer and regular students from a public available database, developed by the Dutch NGO for Newcomer Education (www.lowan.nl). School leaders were contacted by email and phone. Initial correspondence revealed that high work pressure and the high percentage in sick leave among primary school teachers had a negative impact on the willingness of schools to participate. Other constraining factors mentioned were changes in staff and other priorities (e.g. the implementation of the International Primary Curriculum). We therefore decided to drop additional criteria: that schools have two or more newcomer classes and that we could collect data in grade 7 (10-11 year olds). Three schools in different regions in the Netherlands agreed to participate. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the third school had to withdraw. We thus continued our study with two schools, which we refer to as the Parnassusschool and the Bloomberg. These two schools can be considered complementary, as they exemplify the different ways in which newcomer education is organized in Dutch schools. The Parnassusschool is situated in a large city in the mid-west of the Netherlands. The school began a class for newcomer students in 2016/17. One teacher participated in the study: the teacher who initiated, organizes and teaches this class. The Bloomberg school is situated in a mid-size city in the mid-east of the Netherlands. This school has a

long history of teaching both newcomer and regular students. Four teachers, the school director and the concierge participated in this study. In the following, we use the term 'teachers' to refer to both teachers and other staff.

3.2 Data-collection:
For triangulation purposes we used the following methods of data-collection: collection of relevant school documents, semi-structured interviews, lesson observations, participatory observations of a jointly developed project, and video-portraits of the teachers. Table 1 shows which instruments were used to answer the three sub-questions.

Table 1: Data collection strategy

Sub-question	Themes	Instruments
1	Classroom and school characteristics	Document analysis (e.g. school website) Introduction meeting Teacher interview Lesson observations
2 & 3	Teacher sensitivity & responsiveness Teaching practices	Teacher interviews Lesson observations Participatory observations of a project Video portraits of teachers

Prior to the data-collection process, participating teachers received information about the study, procedures for data management and privacy protection, and teachers and parents were asked for consent. Data segments that can be traced back to individual participants by people familiar with the participating schools were included only after these participants' consent.

Data collection at Parnassusschool (see also Appendix A table A.2) started with an introductory meeting with the newcomer class teacher, which was developed into a thick description because of the richness of the conversation. We then conducted the first individual interview on the pedagogy of bonding followed by observations of two lessons, including short reflection interviews afterwards. During observations, practices were categorized as fostering 'exchange', when students were given an assignment in which they were invited to exchange experiences or ideas. They were categorized as supporting a 'feeling of being listened to' when a practice was adapted to the signals that the teacher received from a student (group), e.g. by using a story from one of the students in a drama exercise. Practices were categorized as 'fostering co-creation of a shared cultural world' when students were invited to participate in a cultural practice that is not necessarily their own (e.g. Valentine's Day), or contribute to the development of new practices (e.g. visit student's homes). Next, we participated in the design and piloting of a project 'School in the 19th century" (see also 4.3). Finally, we conducted a last interview with the teacher in which we checked preliminary interpretations of the data, and explored which insights the teacher had gained in the process. Data collection at the Bloomberg followed the same pattern. It started with introduction meetings and individual interviews with three teachers, a drama-teacher, and the concierge. The researchers then observed four lessons and researchers participated in the design and piloting of a

neighborhood picnic (see also 4.3). Each project was followed by reflection interviews. In addition, three video-portraits were made of participating teachers.

3.3. Data analysis

Audio and video recordings of the interviews, lessons and Parnassus school-project and field notes of the observations were processed to develop written and anonymized transcripts and thick descriptions. With the help of computer analysis software (Atlas-ti), a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted. In our analysis we focused on findings per school, and commonalities and differences between the two schools. Since we only collected data in two schools, we cannot draw conclusions on common challenges, or on the prevalence of certain teacher views, methods and tools in newcomer education in general. However, our study does enable us to develop hypotheses on practices and challenges that may typify schools at different ends of the spectrum: schools that just started offering newcomer education, and schools with a longer history of doing so.

A thematic analysis was conducted (Joffe, 2012). We first identified relevant data segments and categorized them in line with the main themes under study: challenges; the three types of bonding (exchange/feeling listened to/shared cultural world); teacher competences; and school and teacher characteristics. Next, we identified relevant additional themes within and between the three types of bonding, and restructured these additional themes into a final code-list. As it is not the type of teacher activity but the intention with which an activity is organized that is decisive for attributing a code to a certain category, we constructed similar subcategories per main category (see Appendix A table A.1). Because data segments were placed under the category that resides with the intention of a particular practice, the categories 'feeling listened to' and 'shared cultural world' were coded more frequently than the category 'exchange'. In the data from the Parnassusschool, for example, the category 'exchange' was attributed to 6 segments, the category 'Being listened to' to 22 segments, and the category 'shared cultural world' to 23 segments. For inter-reliability purposes, the research team first discussed and defined the sensitizing concepts. The team then compared the preliminary coding of several interviews to control for differences in the data segments that were coded and the codes that were attributed to each case. This procedure was repeated at several stages during the analysis. Where necessary, the code list and coding procedure was modified.

4. Results

In the following, we first report on the first research question: What are key characteristics of the newcomer classes and what challenges do the teachers identify? Our findings on research questions 2 and 3 are reported in tandem, as teacher sensitivity and responsiveness (RQ3) gives direction to the three types of bonding practices (RQ3).

4.1 Characteristics of the newcomer classes and key challenges
The Parnassusschool is a school with approximately 300 students. About thirty teachers work at the school (mostly part-time), and staff is diverse in terms of gender and age. The teacher of the school's newcomer class has been teaching 10-12 year olds in this school since 2008. The school started teaching newcomer students in 2016-17. The newcomer class that we visited had 15 students: one whose parents are refugees, and 14 whose parents are expats from different parts of the world (e.g. the United States, the Middle East and Russia). Students were 6 to nearly 12 years old and some of them were siblings. The teacher is very positive about the classroom climate: "the older children usually take care of the young ones. I also stress that the older ones should set a good example. Of course there is the occasional quarrel, but on the whole they are very nice students and they treat each other nicely."

The Bloomberg is a school with about 150 students, divided over 11 classes. When we conducted the study, one-third of the students were regular students. The other students received education in a separate newcomer, or preparatory class ('schakelklas'). About 16 teachers work at the school. Since 2018/19, the school offers newcomer education only. Participating teachers were very positive about the school climate: staff members are attentive to students when they enter the room or share something that they are proud of, and when a student misbehaves the concierge tries to turn this into something positive by initiating a joint activity.

4.1.1 Common challenges
Based on an analysis of the challenges mentioned, we identified two types of challenges faced by both schools. The first type concerns *organizing personalized education* in a classroom with students who differ significantly in terms of age, educational background, Dutch language proficiency, social-emotional background and personal history. The Parnassusschool teacher mentioned that there is always more to do than she can handle. The logistics, for example, are quite difficult to organize: there are always students who need to go somewhere for a personal instruction of a learning/social activity with peers from the same age group. She also needs to master the curriculum for all student levels. At the Bloomberg, teachers explain how in grade 5 (ages 8/9), some children are able to work on simple assignments after a short time, while others take much longer. Some of the children from South Africa and children who grew up in war zones, for example, had never attended school before. By experimenting with variations in group sizes, teachers from the Bloomberg learned that to offer personalized education, classes should have 15 students maximum. Related issues that the teachers encounter are finding education materials that match the maturity and interests of the children, and offering high quality education in super-diverse classes. Regarding the lack of interesting materials for the older children, the teacher explains how she cannot use children's books for ages 4-5 with the older kids: "The books are not fun for them to read, while they are the ones who need to practice reading a lot." In a similar vein, books for students with dyslexia do not use the simple words that second-language learners need to master. In conversations with colleagues from other schools, the teacher has noted that her colleagues also struggle with this issue. With regard to offering

high quality education, she continuously tries strike a balance between the student's education level (by letting students participate in a regular English class), their social needs (by letting them participate in a regular gym class), and ensuring effective learning time in her own class: "I hardly ever have the whole group during morning hours. This means that I cannot use these hours for plenary instruction, and sometimes I find myself just keeping them busy."

The second challenge that both schools face concerns the *social and emotional wellbeing of older students*. The Parnassusschool teacher finds this the biggest challenge: "The oldest should not spend this much time in the newcomer class. They should be able to learn history and geography with their peers." In her view, the whole teacher team is responsible for providing education materials that match the students' social and cognitive development, and for organizing opportunities for newcomer students to hang out and learn with peers from the same age group. Teachers at the Bloomberg talked about the transition to regular primary or secondary education. On more than one occasion, they find that children are not yet ready for this transition after 10 months. They also point to the uncertainties that many students face in the transition process, and the limited opportunities that teachers have to guide them. Related issues mentioned by teachers from the Bloomberg are the continuous change in group composition (because students move to, or from, another city) and disparities between cultural norms, values and languages spoken. Teachers try to mitigate the loss and unrest related to changes in the group composition with specific strategies (see also paragraph 4.3). They also assist students in mediating disparities between the rules and cultural practices in the school and the rules and cultural practices at home. When a certain language is spoken by many of the children, for example, they introduce classroom rules that promote an inclusive play and learning culture. Furthermore, they help students make sense of cultural practices that are (in some cases) new to them, or considered unacceptable, e.g. same-sex relations.

4.1.2 School specific challenges
We also identified two school-specific challenges. The Parnassusschool teacher experienced how difficult it can be for a newly established newcomer class to become an integral part of the school. While the school values the initiative, she noticed that, in practice, her colleagues had limited attention for the newcomer students because of their preoccupation with their own teaching and other projects (e.g. introducing inquiry-based learning). Furthermore, she found that colleagues sometimes forget to invite her for meetings: "last week, my colleagues had a meeting for the inquiry-based learning project. When I met one of them afterwards, he said 'Oh, sorry, we totally forgot to ask you'. That felt really bad." In the same vein, the school forgot to order supplies for the newcomer class and to allocate budget for school trips.

At the Bloomberg, teachers face challenges regarding the image of the school in the neighborhood. The dominant image in the media as well as in the neighborhood is that the education quality is lower in schools with a predominantly immigrant student population, and that there are more incidents.

To address this negative image, the school has organized an event with and for people from the neighborhood, staff, children and their parents. Overall, these challenges illustrate how support by the school director and colleagues and a good work atmosphere alone are insufficient to make newcomer education work. It also requires substantial teacher collaboration and adjustments at the organization level.

4.1.3 Challenge or strength?
Apart from the (additional) challenges that they experience when guiding educational and social processes in newcomer classes, the teachers also highlighted the strength and unique dynamic of newcomer schools. This unique dynamic stems from the fact that it is often unclear what students know, what skills they have, and what experiences, wisdom and talents they bring into the class. These circumstances make the newcomer school a place where teachers and students continuously learn from each other, and where they have lots of opportunities to wonder, to surprise others, and to experience the unexpected. Due to the lack of ready-made and 'effective' methods, tools and materials for this student group, teachers can also experiment with a variety of methods and tools, more than in regular schools. If students do not speak any Dutch, for example, teachers use objects to illustrate what they mean, or they have students perform an action that signifies the word that is learned. As such, the newcomer class offers a true educational playground.

4.2 Bonding through exchange
To better understand the opportunities for exchange among students and between students, teachers and parents, we explored the opportunities that teachers offer (more or less planned) for student conversations about their personal experiences, the meaning that they attribute to these experiences and to the world.

Analysis of the teacher sensitivity and responsiveness (RQ2) revealed how, at the Parnassusschool and the Bloomberg, teachers gave different reasons for organizing exchange. The Parnassusschool teacher mainly fosters exchange as a means to advance language proficiency. In her view, attending to students' socio-emotional, existential and educational needs precedes language learning. A first need that she mentioned in this regard is the significant burden that students carry: her students have to learn a new language and new content and find ways to play and collaborate with classmates in a language that they have not yet mastered. The teacher understands that living and learning in a new language is not always fun, and that in order to remain motivated, it is important that students can experience school as a fun place to be. By creating opportunities for students to share something that is meaningful for them, and to actively relate to the topic at hand, she tries to lure students into improving their language skills. She also fosters exchange at the end of the school day, as a means to recapitulate what students have learned throughout the day.

At the Bloomberg, teachers also organize exchange in order to advance students' ability to emphasize with others, i.e. 'to put themselves in another person's shoes'. The idea is that, as students come to understand each other better, they

are also able to help each other understand the curriculum content. Exchange is also stimulated because it can help students become more outward oriented. By encouraging newly arrived students, who are sometimes self-occupied, to (learn to) listen to their peers, they hope to create a shared educational and social space.

Furthermore, exchange activities offer opportunities for teachers to respond to signals from the group, and to the needs and feelings of individual students. When watching News for Children, for example, students can become silent, or start sharing bits and pieces of their experiences like "Me also on boat". While avoiding to ask about traumas, the teachers do provide opportunities for students to share their feelings:

> "This boy, Karim, came in with a big smile on his face, saying 'I am so happy today'. I said: 'I can tell!' 'Yeah', he said, 'my mom is coming'. I knew that it had been very uncertain if his mom could join the family, so I said: 'Your dad must be very happy as well'. And then Karim started to cry. And I said to the group: 'do you recognize that: being happy and crying at the same time?' And another girl replied: 'Yeah, you can cry when very happy!' 'Yes', I said. 'You can cry when you see something beautiful, when bad things happen, or when you are happy. Why do you think Karim is crying?' 'Because he is happy of course!', they replied."

Analysis of teacher practices (RQ3) revealed that teachers from both schools use various teaching methods to foster exchange. A first method is (academic) *educational talk*. After writing up words on the classroom screen that are related to Valentine's Day, for example, the Parnassusschool teacher talked with her students about things that they need to know in order to write a letter themselves. She then had students write a letter to a loved one with the words on the classroom screen, and to share their writings with a classmate. This way, she combined 'giving' instructions with language learning. Educational talks were also used to help students exchange about what they have learned, what they did (e.g. had a snowball fight) and what they (dis)liked about it.

A second method is the *peer reading* assignment. One of the Bloomberg teachers, for example, invited peer students from regular classes to engage in a co-reading exercise in which students alternately read one page each. After reading, students were invited to ask each other questions about the book and to exchange ideas, experiences or information relating to the theme of the book (e.g. what their own bedroom looks like). Another teacher invited students to give a joint presentation to their classmates to promote the book.

A third method is *role play*. Following the peer reading exercise, for example, one of the teachers invited students to develop and perform a role play on the book. This method enabled students to share their experiences (e.g. where they got the book), what they liked about a book and what they were excited about. By

sharing experiences, students also learned about additional sources for language learning (e.g. library books, the neighbors).

Teachers from both schools also explained how it can be difficult to organize *exchange with parents*, for instance when they live far from the school, due to language barriers, or because parents do not always have a clear understanding of what is expected from them. When students are ill, for example, they often call in sick themselves, because they speak better Dutch than their parents. Or the school has to phone parents because they are not familiar with the call-in-sick routine. At the Bloomberg, teachers have started to introduce parents to playful, art-based and collaborative learning strategies in order to show parents how they can also support these types of language and social learning. The Parnassusschool teacher sends a weekly app or email with information about what the children have been doing that week. She also organizes parent evenings:

> "What I try to bring across every time, is that one cannot learn a language in school. One needs to become part of a community to learn a language, and parents have a role in this: see to it that your child joins a sport club, that he/she goes to the library, to the shop, and find a reading buddy for your child."

The parent evenings also provide opportunities for parents to share ideas about the guidance that their children need, and to share knowledge and experiences on how to support their children.

4.3 Bonding through fostering students' feeling of being listened to
Analysis of teacher sensitivity and responsiveness (RQ2) revealed how in both schools, teachers find it extremely important that students feel safe in school, and that they feel comfortable. Teachers regularly engage with students (and parents) who are a bit reserved when they first arrive at the school. Some students feel unsafe because of the things that they experienced before and after fleeing their home country, others just do not know what to expect. To help students feel at home and to attend to their socio-emotional needs, teachers try to create a warm and caring atmosphere. In line with strategies for building a 'sustaining climate' (e.g. Narvaez, 2010) they give (and receive) hugs and cuddles, and use touch and holding to offer comfort and support when needed. Teachers have also become alert to happenings that can upset students: "When a jet fighter passes by, we think 'they are practicing again, what a noise." Some students, on the other hand, may take fright and hide under their table." When this happens, teachers reach out to the special education needs mentor to explore what extra help they may need. Furthermore, they have learned to wait for the right moment to make contact, and to be flexible in their responses. When the concierge sees a child who is frustrated because of a reprimand or fight, for example, he tries to use this moment to bond by listening to the child's story. Teachers also attend to the fact that children who have moved home a lot can find it hard to bond with new classmates.

Analysis of teacher practices (RQ3) revealed that in order to attend to the issues that students may face when entering or leaving the newcomer class, teachers organize *rituals* in which students with different levels of language proficiency can easily participate. At the Bloomberg, for example, a teacher said:

> "I organize a lot of mini stage plays, for example, to welcome a new student. For the children who have been in the class for some time this welcome ritual is also important, because it reminds them of the time that they themselves were the new kid.
> The ritual goes as follows: one kid approaches the other and says: 'hi, my name is Sala', and the other replies 'hi, my name is …'. It's really low key, and everyone enjoys it."

Likewise, one of the Bloomberg teachers explained how his class developed the habit of getting up and shaking hands with new students when they arrive. Similar rituals are organized when students leave the school. One teacher, for example, organizes a photobook and a friendship book for every student who leaves. The photobook shows the student's experiences in the school. In the friendship book, all students write down information about themselves and about what they have done together. When it is time to say goodbye, students also explain where they are going, what they have learned, what was meaningful for them, and what they will miss the most.

Another method that teachers at the Bloomberg use to foster a sense of belonging is to assign *buddies* to new students. By connecting students to a peer who speaks the same language or comes from the same area, students are able to find their way into school life more easily (see also: Aloni, 2016). In order to facilitate bonding with and between students, the teachers also make use of *drama, dance, music exercises and sport activities*. One of the teachers, for example explains how she uses drama to help students re-live a fighting situation so that students become aware of their own part in a fight, and to help them develop their listening skills.

In addition to the rituals and the drama, dance and music exercises, *positive affirmation* is also used frequently to foster a feeling of being listened to. Teachers make sure to compliment students when they have worked or played together well. They also teach students how to compliment each other, in order to build trusting relationships. In the same vein, teachers create situations where students can help each other. The Parnassusschool teacher explained: "there are a couple of students with strong social-emotional skills who really care for the new students, and make them feel welcome. At the same time, they learn to use and develop this quality in class". Overall, teachers apply the strategies mentioned above to encourage the feeling among students that they care about who students are, that they are interested in their stories and feelings, and that they attend to their education, social and existential needs.

4.4 Bonding through co-creation of a shared cultural world

Analysis of teacher sensitivity and responsiveness (RQ2) revealed that teacher initiatives to support the co-creation of a shared cultural world by students are also linked to teachers' identification of students' educational, socio-emotional and existential needs. The Parnassusschool teacher, for example, referred to the children's basic need for competence to participate in daily life, e.g. by knowing how to write and post a letter, and have a conversation in Dutch about it. She also mentioned students' basic needs for autonomy and belonging, e.g. in the sense that they need to have opportunities to use their mother language when learning new things and a new language.

Analysis of teacher practices (RQ3) revealed that both schools organize *projects in which students together explore a cultural phenomenon or visit places in the neighborhood* to promote learning from each other and to co-create a shared cultural world. One of the projects that the Parnassus teacher organized was to write and post a Valentine's letter (introduced in 4.2). When taking her students out to post the letters, she used significant moments to support language learning: "we are going to….'cross the road'. Repeat after me 'cross'…". Together with the researchers, the Parnassusschool teacher also organized the project 'School in the 19th century', which aimed to create an opportunity for students to use and share the knowledge that they brought from their home country and/or education. The project started with a film on how Dutch students in the 19th century learned to read and write, and displaying old writing materials. The children then paired up to make a presentation about their own educational backgrounds, and shared key words on schooling in their mother language. At the end of the project the older children spontaneously started to teach the younger ones how to use chalk and write on a blackboard.

At the Bloomberg, teachers organized various projects, e.g. 'prepping the teacher's birthday', and a project in which students learned about – and through – the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood. Together with the researchers, teachers also organized a neighborhood picnic where parents and children from the school and neighborhood could meet. For this picnic, students and parents were invited to bring a dish from their home country. The recipes for these dishes were collected in advance, and students made a booklet of the recipes which they handed to participants during the picnic. Teachers also presented a film made by the teachers, students and researchers, which informed people from the neighborhood about how teachers and students learn and live together in the school. This event complemented existing activities that the Bloomberg organizes for parents, to practice and celebrate how they live and learn together.

The teachers also use *play and drama* to stimulate a shared cultural world. One Bloomberg teachers explain how she uses drama to help students engage with their own feelings as well as the feelings of their peers:

> "When one of the students says, for example, 'I do not mind', but becomes restless at the same time... I use drama to talk with students about how they can express certain emotions like anger, sadness or happiness. Students can recognize the emotions in the

> behavior of their peers, and think about what they saw. For example, that a student says one thing, but acts such and so. How come? This is something that play and drama can help do: recognize each other's feelings and discrepancies in what one says and does."

In this example, drama is used to help students use – and develop – their knowledge and empathy in a way that requires limited language proficiency, to connect with each other and to create a space where one is sensitive to each other's feelings. The teacher also uses drama to foster students' abilities to collaborate and create products together (e.g. an artefact or a play), as this excerpt from a thick description exemplifies:

> "In a class on creativity, the teacher picks up an object saying ´this is a microphone´. She then continues saying ´what can it become? An ice-cream'. This way she invites her students to exchange thoughts about what the object could be. She then pairs students who are not friends of one another, to prepare a short play that signifies what the object means."

Overall, the teachers promote multiple forms of co-creation in their teaching: they cultivate shared experiences and products (e.g. a neighborhood picnic), or they organize creative collaboration leading up to a joint product like a play or work of art. They create a world where students can use their mother language, cultural knowledge and experiences to inspire each other, and they create opportunities for students to build shared memories of cultural and social experiences, like Valentine's Day or visiting the homes of their classmates.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this study, we explored how teachers cultivate bonding in two primary schools in the Netherlands that offer education to newcomer students. In particular, we explored a) teacher challenges; b) teacher sensitivity and responsiveness in bonding-related practices; and c) how teachers promote bonding by organizing three types of bonding practices: exchange, contributing to students' feeling that they are listened to, and organizing opportunities for students to co-create a shared cultural world.

Analysis of teacher challenges revealed two common challenges: organizing personalized education and the social emotional wellbeing of older students in super-diverse newcomer classrooms. In addition, the teacher of the newly established newcomer class experienced how difficult it can be to become an integral part of the school. In the school with a long history of teaching newcomer students, teachers face challenges regarding the image of the school in the neighborhood. Our analysis also reveals how participating teachers experience their work as highly meaningful and how, also because of the major challenges involved, they envision the newcomer class an *educational playground:* a place where students and teachers have lots of opportunities to wonder and to experience the unexpected. Follow up research may provide insight into

commonalities and discrepancies between, and within, different types of newcomer schools in this regard.

Analysis of teacher sensitivity and responsiveness in fostering bonding, reveals how the participating teachers display characteristics of teacher sensitivity and responsiveness as defined in the literature (Ryan, & Deci 2000); Scharmer, 2007; Tirri, & Nokelainen, 2011; Van Manen, 1991), although a considerable part of the knowledge, insights and experience they develop is still implicit or tacit (Polanyi, & Sen, 2009). In order to give students the feeling that they are listened to, they are alert to signals from students about their social, emotional, cognitive and existential needs, they try to read these signals and seek help in dealing with students' questions and needs in a timely and suitable manner, and they try to empathize with students. By organizing exchange and opportunities for co-creating a shared cultural world word, the teachers create spaces where students have time to share their stories, where teachers can pick up student signals and check their interpretation of these signals, and where students and teachers together can build a 'community classroom': a classroom that fosters empathy for others and compassionate response (Narvaez, 2010). Whereas some researchers argue that providing newcomer education does not require additional competences besides the regular set of interpersonal, pedagogical, didactic, organizational and reflection teacher competences (Van Vijfeijken, & Van Schilt-Mol, 2012), our research indicates that bonding related practices in super-diverse and newcomer classrooms does require a specific skillset. Teachers need to be able to help students bridge the gap between norms, values and habits at home and in school. They need to know how to help students build bridges between the traumas rooted in the past and living in the here and now. They need to be able to use their creativity, knowledge and skills to adjust existing methods and tools, and to develop new ones. Finally, they need to be able to create rituals that help accommodate e.g. the loss of friends and the transition to a new living and learning environment.

Analysis of the three types of bonding practices reveals how exchange activities like educational talks are organized by the teachers as a means to contribute to student engagement, language and empathy development. The teachers offer various playful learning activities (e.g. drama and rituals) to promote exchange and a feeling of being listened to. Moreover, they employ creative, playful and imaginative learning practices (e.g. projects and drama) to stimulate the co-creation of a shared cultural world. These practices are known to be supportive of the language development and academic achievement of immigrant children and of a caring school culture (Ball, 2010; Narvaez, 2010). By shifting the theoretical lens, our study shows how these practices can also (more or less explicitly) contribute to the development of a shared space in school and society.

Our study offers insight into how teachers in newcomer classes and schools in the Netherlands foster bonding, understood as shared meaning-making and the co-creation of a shared cultural world. Further empirical studies are needed to shed light on commonalities and discrepancies in teacher practices and competences within and between countries. A review of studies on bonding-

related practices in newcomer education, intercultural and social justice education may help to identify commonalities and discrepancies between the theoretical lenses used as well as the practices found. Further study is also needed to flesh out how our notion of bonding can be both deepened by and distinguished from theories on classroom and school climate, democratic schools, culturally responsive teaching (e.g. Gay, 2018; Leeman, & Wardekker, 2005; Narvaez, 2010), belonging, space and place (e.g. Buber, & Misrahi, 1968; Vanclay, Higgins, & Blackshaw, 2008).

In the (post) initial teacher training programs of our universities, the findings of this study are used to educate student-teachers. We hope that our scholarly work on the pedagogy of bonding will also inspire a wider group of scholars and professionals who aim to invest in meaningful education and inclusive and sustainable societies, and help build a conceptual vocabulary that teachers can use to discuss how they may use the social dynamics of sharing, imagination and play to cultivate bonding with students, and between students, teachers and parents in super-diverse schools and societies.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A:

Table A.1: Code list

Codes	Code descriptions
Teacher-led exchange	Organized exchange on experiences; welcome/goodbye chat; other
Exchange spontaneous	Exchange on experiences; welcome/goodbye chat; other
Exchange with others	Exchange with parents, colleagues etc. on experiences; welcome/goodbye chat; other
Feeling listened to because of a teacher practice	Organizing activities that foster a feeling of being listened to; other
Feeling listened to spontaneous	Occurrence of incidents where students feel listened to; other
Feeling listened to by others	Feeling listened to by parents, colleagues etc.; welcome/goodbye chat and rituals; other
Teacher-led co-creation	Organizing activities that foster co-creation of a shared cultural practice; learning about each other and the cultural world; other
Co-creation spontaneous	Incident where students themselves initiate a shared cultural practice; other
Co-creation with others	Organizing a shared cultural practice with parents, colleagues etc. by: using humor; setting boundaries and rules; use of mother language; projects and activities in/outside the school; rituals; play/contest; deconstructing misunderstandings; other
Teacher sensitivity and responsiveness	Regarding impact events on individual students and the group; social-cultural and educational needs; tensions between system and needs; other
Context school	Status/image; challenges on school level; vision; other; unique character; student population; school climate; other
Context classroom	Number; background and diversity student population; classroom climate; other
Context teacher	Education background, role; challenges on teacher and team level; other

Table A.2: Data collection per school

Parnassusschool	Bloomberg school
Introduction meeting	3 x Introduction meeting
Interview 1	3 x Interview 1
Observation 1 & 2	Observation 1 & 2
Participatory observations of 1 project activity	3 x Participatory observations of 3 project activities
Reflection interview project activity	3 x Reflection interview project activity
Interview 2	3x Interview 2
	Video portraits