



## **SUMMARY REPORT OF THE FOURTH SESSION IN BRUSSELS ON 15 MAY OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD**

Fourth session: **‘The Child: his / her Networks and Neighbourhood’** .  
Based on the work of the well known Dutch psychologist René Diekstra.

*Learning to live together requires from the schools a different approach*

Mr **Christopher Clouder**, Board Member of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, mentions that the learning of children is not only about the development of their own potential, but also to learn to live with others. This is very important for the following reasons:

- To create a harmonious society and to avoid the horrendous conflicts of the past;
- For the overall well-being of children and adults it is important for them to have learnt to have healthy relationships with other people;
- The massive migration flows today makes it even more necessary for people to learn to live together with people with a different background and cultures in order to avoid conflicts and tensions.

These new challenges require a new role for the schools and require the school to function alongside networks with other organisations that can also play a constructive part in this domain.

*The child: his / her networks and neighbourhood, and what we can do to create, improve and / or strengthen them’.*

René Diekstra has worked for many years with central and local governmental organisations and his presentation about the subject is given from this perspective. He addresses the question: what can a local government do with regards to networks around children and the quality of the neighbourhood in which they live.

René Diekstra assesses that the environment for raising children has changed in a profound way in the past 50 years. The main actors are: the Parents, the Teachers, and the Neighbourhood.

René Diekstra presents his two Principal Laws for Raising children:

- ‘We have to be the change we wish to see’ (Mahatma Gandhi)
- The more children are raised in a culture of connectedness, the more they become connected to others and society at large, both in childhood as well as in adulthood.

The core message of René Diekstra is:

- It is good for the development of the child when activities of the three main actors are attuned with each other;
- Local government can play a role in ensuring that:

- attuning takes place;
- that there is consistency in the approach of the three main actors;
- that minimum levels of quality are attained.

Furthermore René Diekstra stresses the following:

- If you train the parent, you train the child, but also
- If you train the teacher (in pedagogical / social-emotional skills), you train the child.

René Diekstra furthermore briefed the group that local government can have an influence on the quality of a neighbourhood:

- by setting a.o. standards for the spatial planning;
- by enhancing the ‘collective self-efficacy’ of a neighbourhood;
- by introducing a ‘Street Etiquette’ program.

René Diekstra concludes his presentation by presenting his ‘Constitution for Raising Children’.



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Fourth session: **‘The Child: his / her Networks and Neighbourhood’** .

Based on the work of the well known Dutch psychologist René Diekstra

The session was prepared in collaboration with the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group.

### **1. OPENING**

**Mrs Karin Resetarits** welcomes the participants and opens the meeting and invites the persons attending to present themselves. Next she explains that Mrs Diekstra, the key-note speaker for this afternoon could unfortunately not make it. However he sent his PowerPoint presentation, which was translated into English by Michiel Matthes, Secretary General of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, who will also present it.

### **2. PERSPECTIVES OF THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD**

*Learning to live together requires from the schools a different approach*

**Mr Christopher Clouder**, Board Member of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, mentions that the learning of children is not only about the development of their own potential, but also to learn to live with others. In this context he refers to the report ‘Learning the Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century’ under the chairmanship of Jacques Delors. If we want a better and more harmonious society, and if we don’t want to end up with the horrendous conflicts of the past, it is more and more understood, that society should make an investment to this end and help children to learn to live together. Policy makers are becoming aware that the role of education should change in this respect and that it should not only focus on teaching children and adolescents intellectual knowledge, but also to let them acquire social abilities, and to let them learn to have relationships with other people. In this context the term social capital is used.

Mr Christopher Clouder remarks that it is understood that the task of conveying these abilities and attitudes to children cannot only be the task of the parents, or the schools or the day care attendants etc. It is a task of society at large.

To learn to live together becomes even more important in view of the huge numbers of people migrating from one country to another. At present in some schools in London 65 different languages are spoken. There is a need for networks of organisations to help children develop their mental, physical and social abilities. These new challenges change also the role of the educators. We need new insights in order to address these new challenges.

**Mrs Karin Resetarits** comments that the new insights and the new approach regarding these challenges is not only a task for the experts in the area of children, but at the same time also for the politicians, who have to find a response in their sphere of activity.

### 3. THE CHILD: HIS / HER NETWORKS AND NEIGHBOURHOOD, AND WHAT WE CAN DO TO CREATE, IMPROVE AND / OR STRENGTHEN THEM

Mrs Resetarits introduces the next agenda item of the session. She states, that René Diekstra who is connected with the Center for Youth and Development of the University for Professional Education in The Hague and the Roosevelt Academy in Middelburg, is the key-note speaker for this session. Unfortunately he could not make it. He sent his PowerPoint presentation to Michiel Matthes, who translated it from Dutch into English, and who presents it on his behalf.

#### *Introductory remarks*

The title of René Diekstra's presentation is *'The child: his / her networks and neighbourhood, and what we can do to create, improve and / or strengthen them'*. René Diekstra has worked for many years with central and local governmental organisations and his presentation about the subject is given from this perspective. He addresses the question: what can a local government do with regards to networks around children and the quality of the neighbourhood in which they live.

#### *The roles of the main actors vis-à-vis children have changed*

Mr Matthes remarks, that during the past 150 years our societies have been shaping the environment for raising children whereby, explicitly or tacitly, roles were assigned to the main actors:

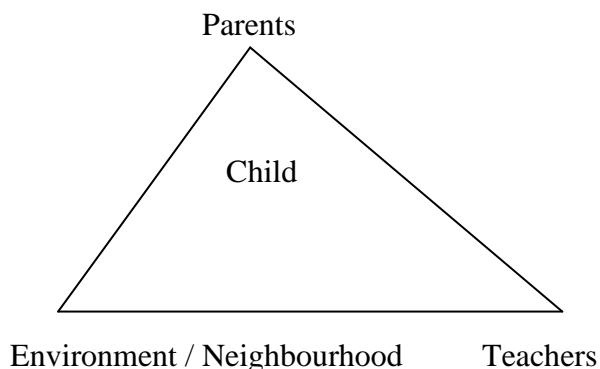
- the Parents
- the School
- other Actors (Neighbours, Neighbourhood workers, Police, Youth counsellors, etc)

The position and the role of these actors vis-à-vis children has greatly changed during the past 50 years. Each actor pursued its own objectives, trying to produce 'more' with a higher efficiency. When did people ask themselves the question:

- What is the impact of these changes on the Quality of Childhood?
- Are these changes beneficial or harmful for the development of our children?

René Diekstra has done much research about the influence of the various actors on the quality of raising children. His findings are presented today in this session.

#### *The Main Actors*



René Diekstra's two Principal Laws for Raising Children are:

- 'We have to be the change we wish to see', Mahatma Gandhi
- The more children are raised in a culture of connectedness, the more they become connected to others and society at large, both in childhood as well as in adulthood.

*Attunement between school and parents has a positive impact on the children*

It has been proved that the level of attunement between the parents and the school and the involvement of the parents in the school and vice versa have a positive influence on:

- the social-emotional development
- school achievement
- educational and vocational development

of the child in question.

It has also been found that the success of parents in raising children is (also) depending on the behaviour of other parents in the neighbourhood. The more parents that are involved in the school the bigger the effect on the children (learning / behaviour/development).

The more the parents are involved in the school the more the children are involved.

*Conclusion:*

If you involve the parent(s) in the school you involve the child in the school.

The involvement of parents in the school: what is it and from where does it come:

- The parents talk (regularly) with the child about school;
- The parents help the child (regularly) with school work;
- The parents go (regularly) to school;
- The parents speak (regularly) with other parents about school;
- The parents speak (regularly) with teachers;
- The parents do now and then volunteer work in the school;
- The parents participate in school committees.
- The school has an influence on it, but other factors also play a role, such as the composition of the family, ethnical background, socio-economic position of the family, the quality of the relationship between the parents.
- But! In general the following statement is true: the more the school communicates with the parent the more the parent communicates with the school.

Next Mr Matthes tells the audience, that René Diekstra's developed a 'Four F's Model' to get a deeper understanding of the relationship between the school and the parent:

- **Feelings:** how do the parents feel about the school and vice versa;
- **Functions:** does the parent understand the functioning of the school and does the parent understand what the school expects from him/her and vice versa.
- **Futures:** is it clear for the parent to what extent the relationship between the parent and the school impacts the future of the child? Is the same true for the school?
- **Faults:** do both parties give each other enough space to make mistakes and to learn in a constructive way from these mistakes?

It was furthermore found that the following school characteristics had an impact on the level of parent involvement:

- The ratio between pupils and teachers
- The number of teachers with a minority background

- School climate and discipline
- The attitude and the morale of the teachers
- General focus of the school, e.g. not solely focused on the PISA score, but also on sustainable Social-Emotional Learning, etc.
- To what extent does the school actively try to get in touch with the parents
- The level of involvement of the school with the social environment and the neighbourhood at large.

#### *The influence of the Amazing Miss A*

In his booklet 'The Constitution of Raising Children' René Diekstra cites the story of a teacher, the Amazing Miss A, in one of the most deprived areas of New York (derived from the Harvard Educational Review, March 19, 2002). One of her former pupils started to research how the various children of his school had done in life and he then discovered that the pupils of one particular teacher, Miss A, had done significantly better than the children, who had not been in her class.

| Social status of adults who attended the first class of Miss A, B, C or another teacher |        |        |        |        |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Social status   | Miss A | Miss B | Miss C | Others |
| High  | 64%    | 31%    | 10%    | 39%    |
| Medium  | 36%    | 38%    | 45%    | 22%    |
| Low   | 0%     | 31%    | 45%    | 39%    |
| Total   | 100%   | 100%   | 100%   | 100%   |
| N   | 14     | 16     | 11     | 18     |
| Average social status   | 7.0    | 4.8    | 4.3    | 4.6    |

Pedersen et al, 1978

He then investigated what made Miss A special:

- She never lost her temper;
- She never hit children or scolded them;
- She showed openly affection to the children;
- If a child forgot his lunch, she shared her lunch with the child;
- She explained the children why school was so important;
- She gave extra lessons to slow pupils and she believed deeply that each child could learn.

One of her former pupils said about her: 'irrespective of the abilities and background of the child, at the end of the first school year Miss A had taught each child to read'.

In line with these findings researchers Archer and Sanders conclude on the basis of a study among thousands of students, that 'Teachers are the single most important influence on student progress, an even greater determining factor than socio-economic status and school location'.

#### *Culturally independent, effective strategies for raising children (OSLC-method)*

Furthermore René Diekstra mentions the OSLC-method of raising children:

- **To structure;** There are rules and routines to which the adult pays attention. If not adhered to the adult reacts directly. The adult explains the rules. There is room for manoeuvre for special situations.
- **To stimulate;**
- **To ignore and to isolate;** Only in very rare situations to punish the child.

- **To communicate** ; To spend regularly time together, whereby the child is given exclusive, positive attention with words and behaviour.

*The Triple O – Model of René Diekstra:*

Mr Diekstra developed a Triple O- Model (based on Dutch words). The three O's stand for:

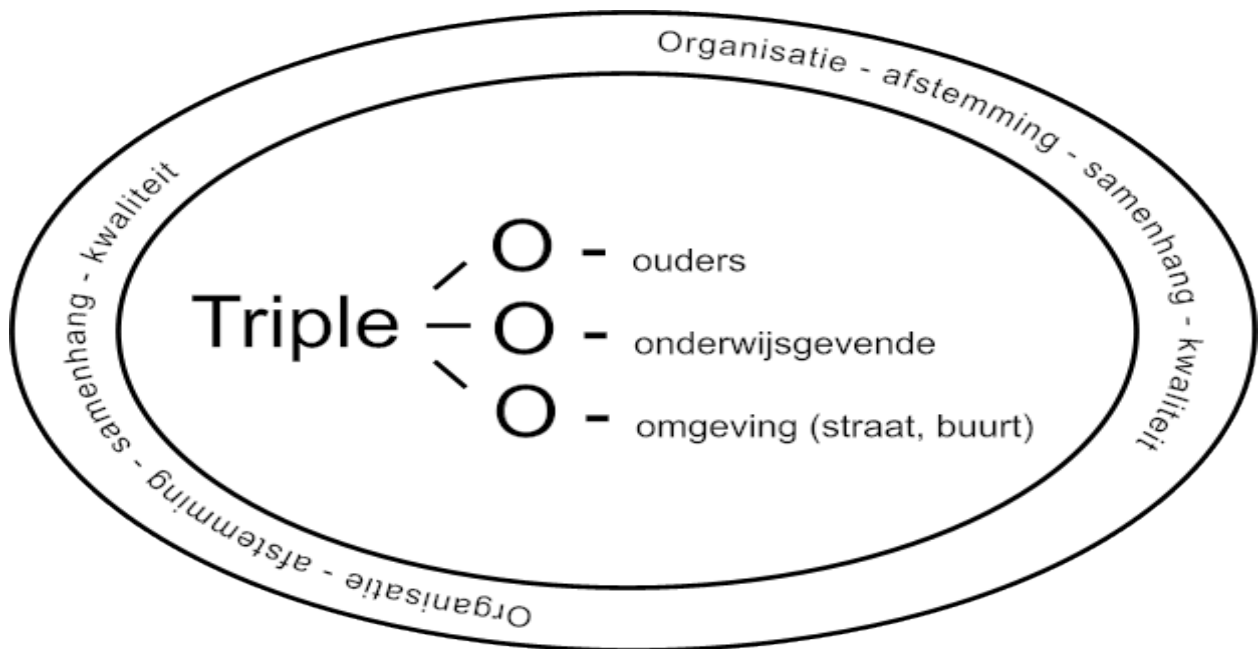
Ouders = Parents

Onderwijsgevende = Teachers and School

Omgeving = Neighbourhood

It is the task of the local government to establish an organisation that has the following task:

- To make sure there is a linkage between the parents, the school and the neighbourhood
- That there is consistency in the approach of the three actors
- To ensure that minimum quality levels are attained.



*René Diekstra's Vulnerability Model for Families:*

René Diekstra furthermore works with a model to analyze the functioning / dysfunctioning of a family and to assess what kind of intervention is helpful. According to René Diekstra the probability of a family to dysfunction depends on the gap between:

- the task and problems, with which the parent(s) are faced, and
- the resources available to the parents.

René Diekstra distinguishes the following types of resources, crucial for the healthy functioning of a family:

- Material and financial resources
- Available social support (emotional/affective, informational, availability of good role models);
- Autonomy to take your own decisions;

- Attitude and skills
- Physical and psychological resilience / vulnerability
- The wider socio-economic and socio cultural situation and the quality of the neighbourhood.

The development of a child depends on the quality of relationships:

- with the parents and between the parents
- with the teachers and between the teachers
- with others persons in the neighbourhood and between these persons in the neighbourhood.

#### *The Process of Raising Children and the Role of the Government*

René Diekstra has done much work with regards to the role of the (local) government vis-à-vis children. In this context he considers, that the quality of childhood is determined by:

- The pedagogical quality of the parents;
- The pedagogical quality of the teachers
- The quality of the environment / neighbourhood, e.g. the social and physical aspects.

The (local) government determines the minimum levels regarding the pedagogical quality of the above mentioned actors and it takes measures to stimulate the attainment of these minimum levels by the persons concerned.

The (local) government is furthermore made responsible for the organisation of the pedagogical attunement between the above mentioned actors.

René Diekstra furthermore states:

*If you train the parent, you train the child, but also*

*If you train the teacher (in pedagogical / social-emotional skills), you train the child*

*What can be done to improve the quality of a neighbourhood?*

- Sociologists invented the term collective self-efficacy, which is a combination of cohesion and informal social control. They found that collective self-efficacy is the single most important determinant of a neighbourhood's violent crime rate (Sampson a.o , 1997)
- Neighbourhood associations have a positive influence on the quality of that neighbourhood.

The city of Rotterdam developed a city-wide program (encompassing 1600 streets) under the title "Residents Make the City", that proved to be effective in:

- increasing sustainable contact, exchange and cooperation between neighbours
- enhancing feelings of mutual trust and safety between neighbours.
- decreasing criminal, antisocial and rule-violating behaviors of children, youth and adults
- create and sustain commitment of neighbours with regard to values and norms for interaction within their streets ('Street-etiquette') (see for a research report, Diekstra 2006)

The presentation is concluded with the presentation of René Diekstra's Constitution for Raising Children.

## **RENÉ DIEKSTRA'S CONSTITUTION FOR RAISING CHILDREN**

*We (the adults) have to be the change we wish to see (in the child)*

### **Article 1**

Children have the right to different treatment in upbringing and education in order to have equal opportunities to develop according to their capabilities and talents.

### **Article 2**

Children have the right to grow up to become socially involved, productive and self-reliant citizens. Their upbringing in the family, in school and in their environment should be attuned to this.

### **Article 3**

The quality of a child's upbringing is determined by the pedagogical quality of the parents and educators and by the social and physical quality of their immediate living environment or neighbourhood.

The government has set out requirements with respect to the pedagogical quality of the said three actors and will take measures, where necessary, to ensure that the individuals and organisations in question comply with those requirements.

The government is also responsible for organising the pedagogical coordination between the said actors.

### **Article 4**

A child's upbringing and development begin long before the child's birth. The requirements and measures for the pedagogical quality of parents, other educators and the environment therefore also include the period between conception and birth.

### **Article 5**

Bringing up children is an art and a skill. To some parents or foster parents, it is almost second nature. Others cannot do it without training or refresher courses, while yet others cannot do it at all and will probably never learn how to do it or can do it only with some children but not with others. The government is taking measures to detect and prevent, as early as possible, the possibility of children's development being damaged as a result of inadequate quality in parenting.

### **Article 6**

Every child has the right to sufficient and safe space out-of-doors in the immediate surroundings of the family home. The government has defined standards for this space. These standards are binding for the spatial planning of neighbourhoods.

### **Article 7**

The raising of children, their education and the quality of neighbourhoods where they live are three individual but inseparable core sectors of governmental policy. Therefore, in its

structure the central government should have a policy ministry in which these sectors are united. These sectors should be clearly expressed in the ministry's name.

Discussion:

**Mrs Geseke Lundren** remarks that it is beneficial for children when their parents relate to other parents in their neighbourhood and take for instance care of each other's houses during holidays. Suddenly the world of the child expands in this way as he / she can go into the garden and the house of other people.

The contact between neighbours is facilitated when people live in houses instead of apartment buildings.

**Mr Joop Berding:** the problem with social cohesion is the circumstance that people are moving so much. In certain sections of for instance Rotterdam 30 to 40% of the people move per year.

**Mr Claes Solberg Pedersen** remarks that he does not agree with the statement of Mr Diekstra that we should strive for a higher pedagogical quality of the parents. Mr Berding responds to this by stating, that Mr Diekstra and Mr Solberg Pedersen probably talk about different things, but this is due to the language differences. In German 'Pedagogik' has also the connotation of 'relationships'. Mr Diekstra uses the verb 'raising a child' ('opvoeden' in Dutch). In the translation it is assumed that the adjective of this verb would be 'pedagogical'. The group agrees that parents should be sensitive to the child and understand the children, and their pedagogical behavior is logically different from the pedagogical behavior of a teacher.

Another question: What does Mr Diekstra mean with his remark that 'the number of teachers with a minority background' has an influence on the quality of the school. Mr Matthes explains, that Mr Diekstra means with this remark that when a school is in a section of the town with many, say, Moroccan or Turkish people it will be beneficial for the performance of the school when there are sufficient teachers with the same type of background.

**Mrs Resetarits** adds to this that in Austria there are many schools with children from other backgrounds (Turkey, Chinese etc), but the teachers are Austrian and only speak German and this poses a problem.

**Mr Clouder** comes back to the remark of Mrs Lundgren. He states, that neighbourhood associations can be beneficial to children, but it would even be more attractive when the theme of the neighbourhood association would be the Quality of Childhood and the caring for the children in the neighbourhood. Elsewhere in Europe this is called the Plaza Concept.

**Mrs Resetarits:** what has just been mentioned sounds very good, but do parents have sufficient time to do all these things? Mrs Lundgren: it is also important to understand how meaningful it is for children when their parent(s) participate(s) in such networks. Mr. Berding: is it not a task of the wider society to help to create such structures, including some professional people?

Mr Matthes: I have been chairman / secretary of such a group in Hilversum, the Netherlands for some 15 years and as a matter of fact it does not take much time once it is established. One meeting per year can do and furthermore people start to organize themselves. Mr Solberg Pedersen confirms this with his own experience of the place where he lived and raised his children. The children in the street could always contact one of the other parents if they had a question.

*Preliminary conclusion:*

The spatial planning of a housing area is also a key factor, taking into account the physical and the social requirements of the people, including children, that will live there. This planning should also take into account the role of the school and the various services of the local government directed to the people living there. If these services are located in the same building as the school it becomes in a natural way a social centre for that area.

**Geseke Lundren** mentions the economic aspect. Women cannot be away for three years from their job when they have a child. In that case you are out and it is difficult to get in again.

Next **Mrs Resetarits** mentions the example of the prime minister of Bavaria, Mr Stoiber, who proposed to build nurseries for parents and those parents that did not want to make use of it would receive payment in cash for not having used the services. Mr Matthes refers to the OECD study Starting Strong in this respect, which draws the conclusion that it is best to offer childcare services in kind instead of in the form of a payment. In the latter case the parents will be tempted to buy the service from commercial agencies, and the quality is then often lower.

Next the group discusses the language capabilities of young children. **Mrs Resetarits** asks whether it is beneficial for young children to be taught foreign languages. Mrs Lundgren replies that it depends on the way it is done. **Mr Clouder** adds that middle class children live in an environment where they have heard by the age of four some 46 million words, whereas children from a deprived background only have heard at that age some 13 million words. If you have certain structures in a neighbourhood then young children could benefit from this, especially when parents help each other.

**Mr Clouder** comes back to the main question, which is how to build up neighbourhood networks. In Britain one had good experiences with courses for (single, deprived ) parents, in the community schools - the Sure Start Programme. These courses both helped the child and the parent and the parents helped each other in the process of learning. These courses are economically attractive because crime rates come down etc.

**Mr Solberg Pedersen** mentions that it is beneficial for young immigrant children when they learn to speak, read and write their own mother tongue. This will also help them to learn the language of the country where they live.

#### 4. THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WILL DISCUSS WITH THE GERMAN PRESIDENCY ON 21 JUNE THE RE-LAUNCHING OF THE 'CONSTITUTIONAL TREATY'. WHAT COULD BE THE INPUT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD IN THIS RESPECT?

At the request of Mrs Karin Resetarits several members of the Working Group, i.e. Michiel Matthes, Karin Resetarits, Christopher Clouder and Geseke Lundren, looked into the above mentioned question and suggested to add two extra sentences to Article II-84 (in Italic). With some textual changes this proposal is accepted.

PART II  
THE CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF THE UNION

Article II-84

The rights of the child

*This article is based on the vision that children are fellow human beings who have the right to their own individuality and the right to develop their own inner potential (Preamble to be added).*

1. Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. They may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity.
2. In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration.
3. Every child shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis a personal relationship and direct contact with both his or her parents, unless that is contrary to his or her interests.
4. *The Union shall regularly evaluate the quality of childhood and the well-being of children in the Union (to be added).*

Furthermore Mr Christopher Clouder emphasizes that it is important to maintain Article II-74:

Article II-74 (to be kept as it is in an integral way)

Right to education

1. Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training.
2. This right includes the possibility to receive free compulsory education.
3. The freedom to found educational establishments with due respect for democratic principles and the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions shall be respected, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of such freedom and right.

Remarks:

The persons present agree with the above-mentioned amendments. **Mrs Resetarits** invites those present to support and to promote these amendments and to write to their national governments to advocate these changes.

**Mrs Lundgren** remarks that if the text would be adopted it would be the first time that the term 'Quality of Childhood' is used in an official European text.

Next **Mrs Resetarits** thanks all persons for their contribution and closes the meeting.  
Report by Michiel Matthes.

**PERSONS PRESENT**

| <b>Name</b>            | <b>Function</b>                            | <b>E-mail Address</b>                            |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Mrs Karin Resetarits   | MEP and chairman                           |  |
| Tyson Smith            | Intern in the office of Kathy Sinnott      | tysonsmith@gmail.com                             |
| Wan Sovos              | Stagiaire Robert Schuman foundation        | <a href="mailto:sovosi@cev.hy">sovosi@cev.hy</a> |
| Delia-Maria Iliasa     | Intern in the office of MEP Gant           |  |
| Mrs Geseke Lundgren    | IASWECE, Sweden                            | g.lundgren@iaswece.org                           |
| Claes Solberg Pedersen | Kempler Institute , Denmark                | solborg@get2net.dk                               |
| Mr Joop Berding        | Janusz Korczak Foundation, The Netherlands | jwa.berding@wanadoo.nl                           |
| Christopher Clouder    | Alliance for Childhood / ECSWE             |  |
| Michiel Matthes        | Alliance for Childhood                     | Michiel.matthes@scarlet.be                       |

**BOOKS MENTIONED BY VARIOUS SPEAKERS**

1. Learning the Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century under the chairmanship of Jacques Delors.
2. De Grondwet van de Opvoeding (The Constitution of Raising Children), by René Diekstra.



INVITATION FOR ALL WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THE WORLD OF OUR  
YOUNGEST

hosted by  
**MEP Karin Resetarits**

**Working Group of the European Parliament on the Quality of Childhood**

Fourth session: **‘The Child: his / her Networks and Neighbourhood’** with the famous Dutch psychologist René Diekstra

Time: Tuesday, 15 May from 13.00 until 15.00 hours

Location: European Parliament, Rue Wiertzstraat 60, Entrance Spinelli, Room X (room to be reserved).

This program was developed in cooperation with the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, whose members are:

The Linkedness Project, Belgium  
Project Experiential Education, Belgium  
The Kempler Institute, Denmark

Legambiente, Italy

Universal Education Foundation (NL)  
Korczak Foundation, The Netherlands  
Center for Youth and Development, The Hague  
University for Professional Education, The Hague  
Roosevelt Academy, Middelburg (NL)  
Verein mit Kindern Wachsen, Germany

University of Cordoba, Spain  
International Association for Steiner / Waldorf  
Early Childhood Education (Sweden)

European Council for Steiner  
Waldorf Education, Brussels  
Ecology of the Child, Brussels

Gie Deboutte  
Ludo Heylen  
Annelise Dalsgaard  
Claes Solborg Petersen  
Vittoria Cogliati Dezza  
Lorenzo Vicario  
Marijke Sluijter  
Theo Cappon

René Diekstra  
Lienhard Valentin  
Sabine Heggemann  
Rosario Ortega Ruiz

Geseke Lundren  
Oliver Langscheid (Germany)

Christopher Clouder  
Michiel Matthes

During the past 150 years our societies have been gradually shaping the environment for raising our children, whereby a clear distinction was made between:

- The family, whose privacy should be respected and protected;
- The school.

Furthermore it was tacitly agreed that there would be little contact between these two worlds.

During the past decades social scientists have researched the development of children and adolescents and have found:

1. That the example of the adult raising a child is of fundamental importance for the development of that child. In this context René Diekstra cites a saying of Mahatma Gandhi: 'we (= the adults) have to be the change we wish to see (in the child we raise)'. René Diekstra calls this the main law for raising children.
2. That it is beneficial for the development of the child when more than one adult plays a significant role in the development of the child.
3. That it is beneficial for the child when these significant adults work together and attune their activities with each other, thus reinforcing each other's activities. If more parents in the same neighbourhood share the same approach this tendency is even bolstered more.

René Diekstra will in his presentation explain that a national or local governmental organisation can take many measures to create and / or to strengthen the networks of adults around children and how to improve the quality of neighbourhoods in which children grow up:

#### **The method of the Oregon Social Learning Center in Eugene, Oregon**

Two employees of this center, Mary Forgatch and David DeGarmo, developed a program called 'Parenting through Change'. The content of this program was developed for single mothers with a son younger than 12 years old. These mothers received during 4 months two hours per week a training regarding how to influence the behaviour of their child(ren) and how to handle stress in general. A control group did not receive any training.

The outcome of the intervention was, that the children of the mothers, that received the training, did much better than the control group regarding:

- Less aggressive or delinquent behaviour
- They adapted better to the situation at home and in school
- They had better educational results
- They were less depressed
- They had better relationships with their peers.

For the mothers themselves the outcome was also very positive:

- The incidence of depression was less than with the control group;
- Better performance in their jobs and more pay rises.
- The differences with the control group grew larger in the course of the years.

René Diekstra introduced this program in Rotterdam, where it is used since almost ten years, mainly with immigrant families.

#### **The Preventive Parenting Program**

René Diekstra developed this program for the Netherlands and the City of Rotterdam implemented it. It is based on the work of professor Lee N. Robins of Washington University, School of Medicine, in the USA. The intervention according to this method and introduced in Rotterdam is as follows:

Nurses working in the Bureaus for Mother and Child have been given a questionnaire with which they can interview the parents and assess their mental health. On the basis of this a test score is obtained. It was found that one third of the parents with a higher score suffered from a psychological disorder. If the score is higher than a certain figure the parents are offered

psychological counselling. When they were treated there was a substantial improvement both for the parent and for the child.

Currently this program has been rolled out in the whole of Rotterdam and it is very successful. However the approach cannot be replicated so easily in other Dutch cities because the organisational setup in each city is different.

### **The story of the Amazing Miss A.**

In his booklet 'The Constitution of Raising Children' René Diekstra cites the story of a teacher, the Amazing Miss A, in one of the most deprived areas of New York (derived from the Harvard Educational Review, March 19, 2002). One of her former pupils started to research how the various children of his school had done in life and he then discovered that all pupils of one particular teacher, Miss A, had all done significantly better than the children, who had not been in her class. He then investigated what made Miss A special:

- She never lost her temper;
- She never hit children or scolded them;
- She showed openly affection to the children;
- If a child forgot his lunch, she shared her lunch with the child;
- She explained the children why school was so important;
- She gave extra lessons to slow pupils and she believed deeply that each child could learn.

One of her former pupils cited about her: 'irrespective of the abilities and background of the child, at the end of the first school year Miss A had taught each child to read'.

In line with these findings researchers Archer and Sanders conclude on the basis of a study among thousands of students, that 'Teachers are the single most important influence on student progress, an even greater determining factor than socio-economic status and school location'.

### **Collective Resilience**

René Diekstra cites the research of R.J. Sampson, S.W. Raudenbush and F. Earls who studied 343 neighbourhoods in Chicago in order to get an understanding why certain neighbourhoods did much better than others, although the ethnic composition was similar and the income as low as elsewhere. They then discovered that the neighbourhoods doing better scored higher on a scale which the researchers called Collective Resilience (CR).

Neighbourhoods with a high CR-factor were characterized by:

- People in the neighbourhood form together a sort of social network
- They can count on each other when it is necessary to take action with regards to respect, vandalism and violence;
- They work together to retain certain city services in the neighbourhood or to get funding for certain communal elements.

Neighbourhood Associations can play an important role in this respect.

### **Working Group on the Quality of Childhood**

Personally I have been involved for some time in the activities in this area and I am deeply concerned about the quality of childhood in the member states of the European Union. For this reason I have taken the initiative to set up a **Working Group on the Quality of Childhood** within the European Parliament. Together with the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group we are planning a number of sessions, the fourth of which will take place on 15 May 2007.

**Objectives of these meetings:**

- To gain a better understanding of the Quality of Childhood in the EU member states; this time we will focus on the theme of Networks and Neighbourhood
- To think about the role that the European Parliament could play to improve the situation
- To get to grips with the principles and approaches that could lead to a betterment for children
- To form an effective working group and to get a sense of how to move on.

I take pleasure in inviting you for the fourth session of the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood on 15 May 2007. The best selling author from the Netherlands René Diekstra will present to us his views on the above. I believe that we as members of the European Parliament working together with likeminded NGOs and committed individuals can and should play an important role in this area.

Yours sincerely,

Karin Resetarits.  
Member of the European Parliament

**Program Outline for 15 May 2007**

| <b>Time</b> | <b>Subject</b>  | <b>Speaker / facilitator</b>  |
|-------------|---|---|
| 13.00       | Opening   | Karin Resetarits, Member of the European Parliament and Chairman of the Working Group     |
| 13.05       | Perspectives from the Alliance for Childhood  | Christopher Clouder, Board Member of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group    |
| 13.15       | The Child: his / her Networks and Neighbourhood, and what we can do to create, improve and / or strengthen them   | René Diekstra is unable to be present. His presentation was presented by Michiel Matthes. |
| 13.50       | The European Parliament will discuss with the German Presidency on 21 June the re-launching of the 'Constitutional Treaty'. What could be the input of the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood in this respect? | Michiel Matthes, Secretary General of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group   |
| 14.00-15.00 | Discussion  | Karin Resetarits  |