



ONE AND A HALF PAGE SUMMARY OF THE REPORT OF THE SECOND SESSION IN BRUSSELS ON 9 JANUARY 2007 OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT.

Chairman: Karin Resetarits, MEP for Alde

Title of the session: 'Really Improving the Education in the European Union requires Systemic Changes'

1. How can we bring about systemic change and the possible role in this respect of the European Parliament

Mr Matthes points out that if we want to improve the Quality of Childhood then we should look at the whole environment of a child, i.e. all age categories (even before birth) until 24 years old, and the different spheres: at home, at school and the spare time situation.

At this moment many governmental organisations work for the sake of children, but often their activities go against each other, because they have a different perception of what is a child, and they have different goals of what they want to attain with the child. The Working Group on the Quality of Childhood can be helpful in finding the right direction for the EU Member States and the EU Institutions with regards to:

- the formulation of a new perception of what is a child.
- the formulation of goals, that we want to strive for and an exploration of what we mean by 'Quality of Childhood.'

2. Perspectives from the Alliance for Childhood: PISA Study spreads a stressful testing culture

Mr Clouder draws the attention to the PISA Study of the OECD. He points out that the PISA Study provides many interesting statistics about the performance of children of 15 years old. However the statistics are shown in the form of league tables. Because of this a competitive element is brought into the exercise and countries and schools start to compete with each other for a higher place in the PISA League Table. The result: a narrowing of the curriculum and overemphasis on three subjects (mathematics, native language, science) and a spreading of a stressful testing culture. These side effects of the PISA Study could be harmful for children and deteriorate the Quality of Childhood. His conclusion: we should learn to handle participation in the PISA Study in a better and more thoughtful way.

3. How to create a pedagogical climate in schools that give full scope to the children to develop and to blossom

Emeritus Professor Dr. Luc Stevens, University of Utrecht and currently Director of the Netherlands Institute for Education and Childhood (NIVOZ), reports about a research project which his institute undertook regarding the mismatch between supply and demand in 5 primary and 9 secondary schools in the Netherlands. The conclusion of the survey: students and schools suffer from an '**under-achievement syndrome**', because of the following:

- There are permanent problems in the match between the curriculum and the demands of the students;

- Regarding autonomy and responsibility there is a great discrepancy between what the students could be expected to desire on the one hand, and on the other hand what the teachers think that the students are able to handle and consequently the room for manoeuvre that the teachers dare to give to the students. This is a main point of conflict.
- teachers find it difficult in the work situation to really grasp the perspective of the student; students experience that it is difficult to reach their teachers in the work situation.

Recommendation: If we only would abandon the strict time schedule in our schools and give the students more freedom in this respect, it would already mean a major change.

The closing words of Luc Stevens are: *there is not one reason to keep this current school system as it is today.*

5. The Experiential Education Project and its approach to improve the quality in the educational setting: quality at the level of context and outcome: what it is and how to get it?

Professor Ferre Laevers, Catholic University of Leuven and Director of the Experiential Education Project, explains, that when we talk about the Quality of Education we distinguish three elements:

1. The **context**, in which the education takes place
2. The **output** of the education (objectives, outcome)
3. The **Process** to bring us from (1) to (2).

The Experiential Education Project has a consistent approach to enhance the **context**. With regards to the **Output** Mr Laevers pleads for a paradigm shift: it is not important what the child learns, but how he or she uses what was learnt. Furthermore he advocates deep-level learning, including intuitive intelligence.

With regards to the **Process** Mr Laevers explains that we should not look whether students have learned something, but we should look instead at their well-being and their level of involvement.



REPORT OF THE SECOND SESSION IN BRUSSELS ON 9 JANUARY 2007 OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT.

Second meeting: **‘Really Improving the Education in the European Union requires Systemic Changes’** with Professor Luc Stevens and Professor Ferre Laevers

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

1. OPENING

Mrs Karin Resetarits is Member of the European Parliament for Alde. She took the initiative with Christopher Clouder to create this Working Group on the Quality of Childhood and she chaired the meeting.

Mrs Resetarits opened the meeting with the following:

When children are young they are eager to go to school and they are eager to learn. After some months or sometimes years the enthusiasm fades away and children go to school with aversion and don't learn as much as would be possible. For this reason we have chosen for today the subject : Really Improving the Education in the European Union requires Systemic Changes’.

Next Mrs Resetarits asked all persons present to present themselves shortly. The list of participants is attached as annex 1.

2. HOW CAN WE BRING ABOUT SYSTEMIC CHANGE AND THE POSSIBLE ROLE IN THIS RESPECT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Mr Michiel Matthes, Secretary General of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, presents this subject.

In the first place Mr Matthes presents in a schematic way a diagram for the whole system of the child. The arrows connect incidents of cause and effect with each other. They could even go outside the diagram, thus illustrating the cause of an incident, that took place in a previous generation, and its effect in this generation. The diagram clearly shows that these relationships cross the usual boundaries of specific scientific disciplines such as psychology, pedagogy, education and the different spheres of the life of a child. The diagram tries to illuminate the whole picture of the environment of the child and the interconnectedness of the various influences.

The Whole System of the Child.

Age categories	Time spent at home	Time spent at school/work	Free/recreation time
25 and older		(1)	(4)
19-24			(4)
15-18	(2)		
13-14		(3)	(4)
6-12		(1)	(5)
4-5			
0-3			
Pregnancy and birth			
Period from e.g.. 3 years before birth	(2)		

The diagram can also be used to look at the organisational setting, which has been set up in our societies for the sake of children. In every 'box' and in the three columns or the nine rows of the diagram there are many organisations and actors working for the sake of children.

With regards to these organisations we can observe the following:

- An organisation that works in a certain 'box' can never really be successful because it only addresses a certain aspect of the child, and we all know that the child is influenced by many factors, which are not addressed by the actor in question;
- Often these organisations are not aware of each other's existence and they don't know each other, even if they work in the same 'box';
- in many instances they will have a different perception of what is a child;
- they will have different objectives of what they want to attain with regards to the child;
- they have activities which go sometimes against the activities of other organisations.

If you want to attain that various actors work together fruitfully the following is necessary:

- The actors should develop together a new perception of what is a 'child'.
- They should formulate together the objectives they want to attain with regards to children.

It is observed, that:

- In many countries governments realise now that there is no consistency in the efforts of the various governmental agencies working with and for children.
- Each government of the EU member states tries to find its way in this respect.
- The same is true for the EU institutions themselves.

The Working Group on the Quality of Childhood can be helpful in finding the right direction for the EU Member States and the EU Institutions with regards to:

- To formulate a new perception of what is a child.
- To formulate new universal goals, that we want to strive for and an exploration of what means Quality of Childhood.

Much work has been done already in this respect, and we make reference in this context to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Communication of the European Commission entitled 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child' of 4 July 2006. However much work is still to be done and the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood can play an important role in this respect. When a good foundation is laid down, all other things will fall in place.

3. PERSPECTIVES FROM THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD

Christopher Clouder, Board Member of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, briefs the group about current developments in the area of the Quality of Childhood.

PISA Study incites a stressful testing culture

In the first place Christopher Clouder refers to an article in Die Zeit of some weeks ago about the PISA study of the OECD and in particular the testing cultures that it champions (Learning for Tomorrow's World, First Results from PISA 2003 by the OECD). Christopher Clouder starts his presentation with a sentence in the article that 'no social reformer would dare to question the authority and the approach of the PISA Study', but continues then that he himself and many others questions the soundness of the PISA Study. He quoted a journalist who could find no-one at the Institute of Education, London University, who supports the testing regime on educational grounds. The PISA Study shows interesting league tables in the same way as we have league tables for football. It reveals interesting elements of the lives of children such as social exclusion in certain parts of France and Germany that would otherwise not be made visible. The question is though : what is the impact of the PISA League Table on the lives of our children. It shows statistics of aspects of the life of a child that are measurable, but it does not show statistics on things that are not measurable and we all know that these are also important.

The PISA statistics have however a tremendous impact on the policy making process in the various countries. Many countries are going through a continuous process of changing their educational legal framework such as the UK, where during the past eight years nine educational bills have been passed through Parliament with a profound impact on the lives of children. The PISA Study promotes a culture of continuous testing.

A stressful testing culture is harmful for children

As Alliance for Childhood we ask ourselves the question: what is the impact of a rather stressful testing regime on the well-being of children, and what is the impact on the teachers? Christopher Clouder remarks that there is a growing consensus among academics that continuous standardized testing has no or only a limited educational value. Why has it become then so important in the daily practice of our schools?

Because the PISA Study focuses on three subjects (namely English, mathematics and science) most of the time is now devoted to these three subjects, so that the pupils will achieve higher scores and there is a growing tendency of ‘teaching to test’, especially when financial support is linked to the scores. The same picture emerges in Finland and Singapore, the two countries scoring highest in the PISA Tables. The creative subjects are deleted from the school programs and as Alliance for Childhood we are concerned about this development. Educating children to grow up in a holistic way is becoming much more difficult in this way. The PISA Study is useful, but we must treat it in an appropriate way.

4. HOW TO CREATE A PEDAGOGICAL CLIMATE IN SCHOOLS THAT GIVE FULL SCOPE TO THE CHILDREN TO DEVELOP AND TO BLOSSOM

Emeritus Professor Dr. Luc Stevens, University of Utrecht and currently Director of the Netherlands Institute for Education and Childhood (NIVOZ), starts his presentation by stating that he will develop some new insights on the subject at hand by presenting a recent survey made in the Netherlands among 5 primary schools and 9 secondary schools. Both students and teachers were interviewed:

- The students about their well-being and their vision on their work and the educational process;
- The teachers were asked three questions:
 - What are your ambitions
 - What are your competencies
 - In which way is the school an obstacle for you to attain (1) and (2), or in other words: what is wrong with the school.

Paradigm shift: the position of the student changes from object to subject

The survey was done in the framework of a bigger project called ‘School Ethos’. In this project participate a number of schools, both primary and secondary, that have the intention to reach a higher level with regards to its ethical standards and they want to put the student in the centre of their activities. Said otherwise: they want to shift from a position, where the student is an **object** to a position, where the student is a **subject**.

The global outcome of the research is as follows:

- Most of the students do not find the class-room and the school unpleasant;
- However there is a mismatch between on the one hand the cognitive wishes of the students and, on the other hand, the services, supplied by the school;

Next Mr Stevens explains the main findings of the research:

Space for Personal initiative and activity:

Students want:	Teachers want:
Desire for more choice and self-regulation	Is ambivalent to the needs and wishes of the students
Want a teacher who is available for challenge and help	to be in control
Does not want a teacher who talks less	
Has a need for more responsibility	

Working and learning in the class-room

Students want:	Teachers want:
appreciate in general the atmosphere in the class	a good atmosphere is most important
the program is very often unsuitable	to contribute to the development of children as human beings
teachers should not explain everything, but assist if required	to take into account the large differences between children, but the rigid school systems is not very helpful in this respect.
	to give students more responsibility, but they do not do this, because of the rigid program, which they have to implement.

Peace and quietness in the classroom

Students want:	Teachers want:
a good atmosphere in the classroom	strictness and consistency with children
dislike fuss and angry teachers	
teachers who trust students and who are fair	

The student-teacher relationship

Students want:	Teachers want:
a teacher who is happy, makes jokes and is fair	Teachers do not trust themselves to give the students more room to manoeuvre and the students are asking for this
appreciates the efforts of the teacher for the student; the teacher should be available	attention for informal contacts
for older students: a teacher with who you can have a short talk	that children feel safe and trust their teacher
at work teachers do not always understand you	children that are honest

The student-student relationship:

Students want:	Teachers want:
Friendship with other students	Are ambivalent with respect to the wish of the students to work together
A good ambiance	
Cooperation and helping of each other	

Conclusions of the survey:

- There are permanent problems in the match between the curriculum and the demands of the students;
- Regarding autonomy and responsibility there is a great discrepancy between what the students could be expected to desire on the one hand, and on the other hand what the teachers think that the students are able to handle and consequently the room of manoeuvre, that the teachers dare to give to the students. This is a main point of conflict.
- Despite the fact that teachers are interested in their students, the research showed that teachers find it difficult in the work situation to really grasp the perspective of the student; students experience that it is difficult to reach their teachers in the work situation.

Summary: the rigid supply structure of schools leads to the under-achievement syndrome

The development of the students that we interviewed and the role of the teacher as their guide is strongly dominated by the supply, the curriculum and its standardised performance expectations. The supply is fully standardised with regards the following:

- the time schedule
- the space
- the content / the curriculum
- the goals
- the norms and the results
- the relationships between teachers and students and among students.

There is no room for individual differences and there is no room for a dialogue between students and teachers and the school.

The students challenge the teachers and the schools to give them more space, more flexibility and more dialogue about what to do and how to do it.

Our research has shown, that the students are prepared to do the work, but they want more freedom in the way to do it.

Research in the USA and Europe shows that there is a serious and structural underachievement in our schools, because of the mismatch between supply and demand. The Americans use the term the '**under-achievement syndrome**' of our schools for this .

The closing words of Luc Stevens are: there is not one reason to keep this current school system as it is today.

DISCUSSION

Mrs Resetarits opens the discussion with the question: if there is not one reason to keep this current school system as it is today, what could then be the alternative? What could we do in a concrete way?

Abandoning the strict time schedule would already mean a major change

Mr Stevens replies that there are many alternative approaches. In this respect he mentions also Prof. Ferre Laevers, the director of the Experiential Education Project. Next he mentions that the current school system is fully standardized on the basis of a time schedule. If we only would abandon the strict time schedule and give the students more freedom in this respect, it would already mean a major change. Everything would already be different. Some students need more time for a certain task, and certain others less time. When the time standard has been set free both types of students can move ahead in their own speed. This does not mean

that a student can choose at any given moment anything he/she wants to do. There is freedom, but within a certain framework.

Planning of the own time enhances the motivation

Students won't waste their time in this way. In this way they can find their own way of doing things, they can choose with who they want to work and because of these freedoms they become motivated.

Furthermore students could be given some freedom to make choices regarding the space. According to Mr Stevens this is less essential.

NIVOZ works at present with two large school networks to make the transition from a school based on supply to a school, based on the demand of the students. The schools that are in transition are characterized by the following:

- It is more quiet in the school
- The students use their time more efficiently
- There is more achievement, and the achievements are attained faster;
- disappearance of behaviour difficulties (experience of NIVOZ in the 45 primary and secondary schools with which they currently do the project)
- better school climate
- better motivation of the children.

In schools for children with learning disabilities and handicapped children the transition to the new approach is also characterized by higher achievement of the students, because the children are more challenged than in the former situation.

Class size and homogenous age groups are less important parameters

Mrs Resetarits: does it make sense to put children of the same age together? Mr Stevens: in a standardized system it does, but in a not standardized system it does not.

Mrs Resetarits: what is the impact of class size. Mr Stevens: the class size can be between 10 and 30, and the exact number in this range does not matter that much. What is important is that the children feel responsible for their own work and for the quality of the class-room climate.

5. THE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PROJECT AND ITS APPROACH TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY IN THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING: QUALITY AT THE LEVEL OF CONTEXT AND OUTCOME: WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO GET IT?

Professor Ferre Laevers, Catholic University of Leuven and Director of the Experiential Education Project

When we talk about the Quality of Education we distinguish three elements:

4. The **Context**, in which the education takes place
5. The **Output** of the education (objectives, outcome)
6. The **Process** to bring us from (1) to (2).

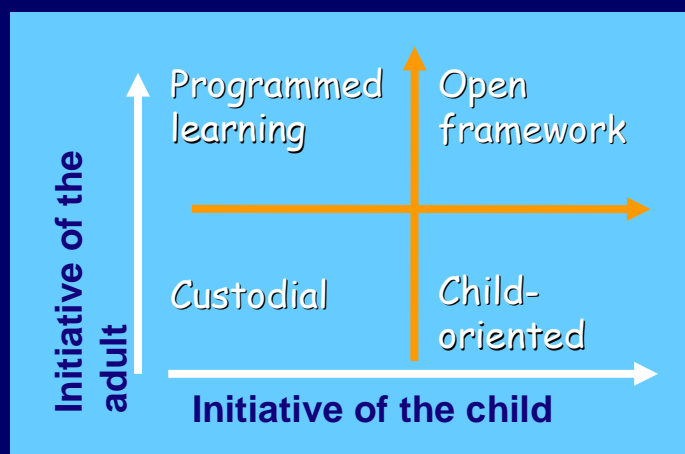
Furthermore Mr Laevers explains, that it is not just making some changes in the educational framework, but that we will have to look at education, and the three components mentioned above, in a new way. In this way we are talking about a paradigm shift.

1. What kind of context should we create?

The basic qualities of the context should be:

- Respect for the child. This means the emancipation of the child. With this the child will also start to look at himself in a different way. This process goes in the same way as the emancipation of women in the 20th century.
- A rich environment, with many things to discover and lots of challenges. Some schools have such a poor environment. I dream of a tool which I can use to measure the richness of an environment of the school in a similar way that you use a Geiger-measuring instrument.
- An open framework approach (see slide below). This is the educational program of the future, where the educational process is the result of the interaction between the teacher and the student. Both the adult and the teacher learn, you can't even tell who is learning most.
- Representation. Part of the learning process is the process of having an impression, internalizing this impression and developing mental symbols of it and finally to express it again. This is called the impression-expression cycle. Mr Laevers refers in this respect to the Reggio Emilia approach for children of 0 to 7 years old, where artists work with the children and where the children are encouraged to express themselves in the form of pieces of art. The famous book on the subject is appropriately entitled 'The hundred languages of children'. It is in the act of expression that the child really makes the subject his or her own and really creates a mental expression for himself. Otherwise said: to express is to impress.
- Communication, cooperative learning, inclusion, dialogue. When children learn in a heterogeneous group all students learn more.
- Observation. Sufficient observation is part of the open-framework approach.

□ An 'open framework' [High Scope]



2. What kind of output should we get?

Mr Laevers explains that within the educational field a new paradigm is emerging. This new paradigm consists of two new approaches to learning:

- competency based learning
- deep-level learning.

Competency based learning is characterized by:

- Competences are life skills. In the dictionary: competency = the sufficiency of means for living.
 - Not the learning is the point, but how to use it;
- Integration of skills, insights, attitudes, practice
- Bloom's taxonomy revisited: the old way: start with reproductive learning and finish with problem-solving and evaluation. The new practice: let learning take place at all levels all the time.
- The concept of implicit learning and 'stealth education'. A stealth fighter plane is a plane that cannot be seen on the radar. If we use this metaphor we want to make the following comparison: the flying of the pilot with the stealth plane is the learning process of the student, while the teacher tries to evaluate the performance of the student with his radar equipment. As we know the teacher does not see anything on his radar screen and therefore concludes: learning does not take place. But in reality a lot of learning takes place.

The concept of deep-level-learning is characterised by the following:

- A holistic approach
 - Far from a checklist of isolated skills;
 - Grasping the essence
 - Speaks to the imagination and gives a sense of direction.
- Valuing the intuitive intelligence
 - The best engineers in the US: farmers' sons. Other example: let children first play in kindergarten with a tunnel of one meter in length, then they will learn intuitively what is a meter;
 - Abstract logical thought + intuition
- Captured by basic schemes
 - The concept of 'schema'
 - For each of the *developmental domains* (see box below)
 - Linked with the multiple intelligences

Developmental domains:

- Gross motor development
- Fine motor development
- Expression through visual arts
- Expression through language
- Understanding the world of objects, including technology
- Understanding the world of people, including social competence
- Logical mathematical competence
- Self-organisation and entrepreneurship

3. How to upgrade the educational system, so that we attain the desired outcomes

In the third part of his presentation Mr Laevers focuses on the theme of the process of moving from one phase to another.

Mr Laevers states that the Quality of the Process depends on two areas:

- The well-being of the students and the teachers
- The involvement of the students.

Well-being:

When children and adults:

- feel at ease
- act spontaneously
- are open to the world and accessible
- express inner rest and relaxation
- show vitality and self-confidence
- are in touch with their feelings and emotions
- enjoy life

we know that their mental health is secured.

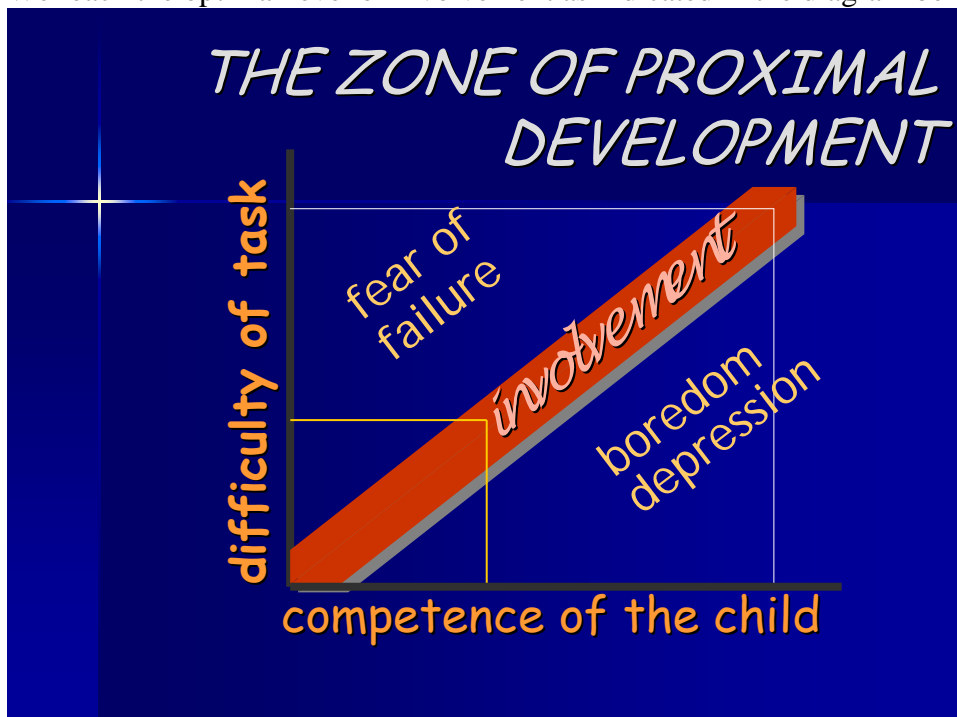
Involvement:

When children and adults are:

- concentrated and focused
- interested, motivated, fascinated
- mentally active
- fully experiencing sensations and meanings
- enjoying the satisfaction of the exploratory drive
- operating at the very limits of their capabilities

we know that deep level learning is taking place.

We reach the optimal level of involvement as indicated in the diagram below:



Next Mr Laevers explains, what he calls the Leuven Involvement Scale (from low to high):

1. no activity (lowest level of involvement)
2. interrupted activity
3. activity without intensity
4. activity with intense moments
5. continuous intense activity.

Monitoring well-being and involvement gives good results

The Experiential Education Project has developed questionnaires to monitor every few months during 2 minutes the well-being and the involvement of children (see the presentation of professor Laevers). In this way you can gather data on the level of the child, the class and the school and in this way you know whether to take any action.

Observations regarding the monitoring:

- It contains key information to improve the quality
 - It is equally a measure for the power of the learning environment
 - It provides immediate feedback and it is the shortest way to interventions
- It is a conclusive tool to detect risk of stagnation
 - It tells who is (not) taking advantage from our efforts
- The survey is universal:
 - It is not connected with any educational model or innovation
 - It offers a common point of reference for the whole of the educational system.

Our aim is: the true emancipation of children

Next Mr Laevers explains, that we are in fact talking about the emancipation of children. The process of the emancipation of children is the same as the process of the emancipation of women. When society started to perceive women in another way, the women started to perceive themselves differently and started to act differently. The same is now true for children. It cannot be too early to tell children, that they must be respected and that certain boundaries cannot be violated.

Mr Laevers concludes with an appeal to the European Institutions:

Give Europe a Future:

- Install a process-oriented monitoring system:
 - use well-being and involvement as key-indicators
 - quality improvement through undelayed action
 - from babies up to adults in professional training
- Select key-targets for critical outcomes:
 - emotional health
 - social competence
 - self-organisation and entrepreneurship
 - intuitive intelligence and creativity
 - the basic attitudes of linkedness
- Support the development of new instruments:
 - re: for the context, the process and the outcomes
- Stimulate a specified kind of research:
 - about good practice
 - with a pre- and post test design

- Help to create fair funding:
 - why is there an unbalance between the human and the positive sciences? If we really want to have an impact on the improvement process of our societies, a bigger research effort is necessary in the human sciences.
 - regulations can be simplified without losing control.

5. DISCUSSION

Mrs Resetarits thanks Mr Laevers for his presentation and opens the floor for discussion.

Home School movement in the US gains momentum

Mrs. Kathy Sinnott makes the following remarks:

- 80% of the mothers work and have too little time for their children, and we all know that children need relationships for growing up;
- in the US the Home School Movement is gaining momentum and universities are nowadays preferring to take up students, who did home schooling. These students do very well.

Home School Movement because parents are unhappy about the current system

Mr Clouder states, that there is a fundamental consciousness among people that things have to change and the Home School Movement can be seen in this light. There is a homogenisation of education, a narrowing of the curriculum and an increase of the testing regime. The question is: how can we translate the unhappiness of parents and children with the current educational regimes into political action.

Austrian Chancellor in favour of abolishing marks

Mrs Resetarits remarks that in Austria a new government has just been formed with Mr Gusenbauer as the new Prime Minister. Two years ago he suggested to get rid of marks in schools. However, he got many negative reactions from many persons in the sector, but also from parents. I think, that the Home School Movement in the US is still a small phenomenon, because parents expect from schools that they educate their children.

Cooperation between teachers, parents and students improves the quality

Mr. Matthes remarks that we should find a new type of cooperation between the teacher/ the school, the parents and the student in such a way that all three develop in a positive way. Mr Matthes refers to the workshops for parents that were developed by Mary Hartzell, director of a Kindergarten in California. Mary Hartzell had found out that when there is something with a child, sometimes it cannot be solved on the level of the child, but should be addressed on the level of the parents. Hence her workshops. This resulted in her book with the brain scientist Daniel Siegel entitled 'Parenting from the Inside Out, How a deeper self-understanding can help you raise children who thrive'.

Mr Laevers agrees: the first aspect of the quality of childhood is: how are our children doing? And of course the parents are invited to participate in this process.

Professor Diekstra: we talk now about the quality of connectedness of the child with his parents and the school and of the parents with the school. In a developed country as the Netherlands one would expect that the linkage between parents and school would be well developed. We have done some research on this topic and it turns out that the quality of this linkage is not very good. Schools have no targets in this respect and they don't have the expertise in this area and also the culture in the schools is often to keep parents out.

We have a project with a group of schools in which we advise the teachers to visit the parents of a student once per quarter, and also to get to know the wider social context of the student, but the teachers resisted to this.

Research in the US and the UK shows that when you improve the culture of connectedness of the various actors with the child, but also with each other, the child develops better socially, cognitively and also morally, both in primary and secondary education.

We could convince schools in our project in The Hague to include this in their mission and even to appoint a liaison officer to take care of this aspect. After some time the schools were really very happy with the changes. In this way we realised systemic changes in the educational setting.

One of the reasons why Home School Children do well is because their connectedness with adults is much better. We should therefore build in this connectedness into the social architecture of our educational system.

It is also very fruitful to create a connectedness between older and younger students. It turns out that both the older and the younger students benefit from this. The older students function then as mentors and they get stronger in a social sense: education for citizenship. This approach is also in line with the plea of the Council of Europe as published in their report 'European Year of Citizenship through Education 2005, Learning and Living Democracy'. The schools, that implemented the recommendations, mentioned in the report, have not only improved the culture in their schools, but have also improved educationally.

Many innovations are in Flanders already implemented

Professor Hans van Crombrugge: we should not be too pessimistic. A lot is already happening in the regular school system. There are small schools with a good connectedness culture. When I was young the teacher of the Kindergarten came to our home before I was enrolled in the school. In Flanders many schools have a tutor system, whereby older pupils are linked to younger students.

The goals of the educational system

Mrs Sinnott raises the point of the goals of the educational system:

- Is it to let the child prosper as a human being? In this case the school and the parent will find common ground;
- Or is it the goal of the school system to shape people, that can take care of our economic growth? In this case schools may be inclined not to involve the parents very much.

In Ireland the suicide rate among young people increases rapidly.

Each school should formulate a mission statement

Mr Diekstra remarks that it is important to formulate a mission for the school system with a.o. the following elements:

- self confidence
- cognitive abilities
- social emotional development
- moral development

The elements should also be part of the monitoring of the schools.

In Sweden there are no formal learning goals before the age of 7

Mrs Geseke Lundgren states that Sweden has a culture of early childhood nurseries, Kindergarten etc. For the young children until 7 there are no formal learning goals, but the

interest of the children is nurtured. When they move on to primary school at the age of 7 they are very motivated to learn.

The Kindergartens have a good relationship with the parents and this continues in the primary school.

I am really interested to get a deeper understanding in the Quality of Childhood:

- the quality in the family situation
- the quality in the institutions

What does it mean to regard and to respect a child? What criteria can we develop?

Mrs Resetarits thanks all for their contribution and informs the group that the next session will be on 6 March.

The report was drafted by Michiel Matthes.

PERSONS PRESENT AT THE SECOND SESSION IN BRUSSELS ON 9 JANUARY 2007 OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD.

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BOOKS MENTIONED BY THE VARIOUS SPEAKERS

Learning for Tomorrow's World, First Results from PISA 2003 by the OECD
The Hundred Languages of Children, The Reggio Emilia Approach, advanced Reflections by Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini, George Forman.
European Year of Citizenship through Education 2005, Learning and Living Democracy by the Council of Europe.
'Parenting from the Inside Out, How a deeper self-understanding can help you raise children who thrive' by Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell.

INVITATION

Working Group of the European Parliament on the Quality of Childhood

Second meeting: **‘Really Improving the Education in the European Union requires Systemic Changes’** with Professor Luc Stevens and Professor Ferre Laevers

Time: 9 January 2007 from 13.00 until 14.30 hours

Location: 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	Gie Deboutte
Project Experiential Education, Belgium	Ludo Heylen
The Kempler Institute, Denmark	Annelise Dalsgaard
	Claes Solborg Petersen
Legambiente, Italy	Vittoria Cogliati Dezza
	Lorenzo Vicario
Universal Education Foundation (NL)	Marijke Sluijter
Korczak Foundation, The Netherlands	Theo Cappon
University for Professional Education (NL)	René Diekstra
Verein mit Kindern Wachsen, Germany	Lienhard Valentin
	Sabine Heggemann
University of Cordoba, Spain	Rosario Ortega Ruiz
European Council for Steiner	
Waldorf Education, Brussels	Christopher Clouder
Ecology of the Child, Brussels	Michiel Matthes

Our current school system is still based on the model of the assembly-line of the 19th century factory

Our school-system was developed in the 19th century when everybody was enthralled by the success of industrialization and standardized processes. The industrial-age assumptions about learning can be summarized as follows (derived from Peter Senge et al, 2000):

- Children are deficient and schools fix them
- Learning takes place in the head, not in the body as a whole
- Everyone learns, or should learn, in the same way
- Learning takes place in the class-room, not in the world
- There are smart kids, dumb kids, problem kids etc
- Schools are run by specialists who maintain control
- Knowledge is inherently fragmented
- Schools communicate the truth
- Learning is primarily individualistic and competition accelerates learning.

However, in this way we did not only create an educational system but at the same time a **social system**. In the past decades scientists have found that the characteristics of this social system are hampering the very process of learning itself and all efforts to improve the

effectiveness of the learning process will fail if we maintain the old elements of this social system.

In short the system itself should be changed in order to improve the learning environment. That is the theme of the second session of the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood.

A new system of learning is based on the following:

We should create an educational system, that is characterized by a good pedagogical climate with the following elements:

First component: Create the conditions for development:

- In the first place teacher and student should establish a normal human relationship with each other as one human being to another and respect each other in that way; intuitively we all know this because when the relationship between the teacher and the student is disturbed the learning stops or is highly disrupted. Said in another way: the attitude of the teacher to the student or of that of the student to the teacher influences in a very significant way the quality of the learning process;
- The child develops himself or herself and the teacher should create an environment that is conducive for this process;
- Children are individuals and differ regarding their talents, their tempo and their temperament. The school should accept this as a precondition and not force the children into a rigid framework;
- The three basic psychological requirements should be fulfilled, i.e. the need for relationships, the need to feel competent and the need for autonomy.
- The child is a subject and not an object. The child orchestrates his or her own development.

Second component: ensure the self-reliance of the student and that he or she can take responsibility for his / her own situation and own development.

- If we don't create these conditions it is harder for children to cope with the requirements, which are defined by the teacher and educational policies. Consequently the child may feel helpless and become indifferent, and ultimately decide to drop out all together, not only from school, but also from striving to build a meaningful life.

Third component: support, challenge and emancipate

- The school should on the one hand give the student structures, support, encouragement and motivation and on the other hand challenge the student to explore the subject in question in his/her own autonomous way.

Fourth component: self-confidence, self-reliance and high expectations

- The teacher should communicate high expectations to the child and ensure that the child feels confident and self-reliant because he or she succeeds in meeting the expectations and also experiences real progress. The children should have the experience that it is worthwhile to do one's best.

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, together with X, Y and Z 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 second of which will take place on 9 January 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 education
- 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 a group and to get a sense of how to move on.

I take pleasure in inviting you for the second session of the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood on 9 January 2007. Two leading scientists; namely Emeritus Professor Luc Stevens from Utrecht and Professor Ferre Laevers from Leuven will present to us their 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 9 January 2007

Time	Subject	Speaker / facilitator
13.00	Opening	Karin Resetarits, Member of the European Parliament
13.05	How can we bring about systemic change and the possible role in this respect of the European Parliament	Michiel Matthes, Secretary General of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group
13.10	Perspectives from the Alliance for Childhood	Christopher Clouder, Board Member of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group
13.20	How to create a pedagogical climate in primary schools that give full scope to the children to develop and to blossom	Emeritus Professor Dr. Luc Stevens, University of Utrecht and Director of the Netherlands Institute for Education and Childhood
13.40	The Experiential Education Project and its approach to improve the quality in the educational setting	Professor Ferre Laevers, Catholic University of Leuven and Director of the Experiential Education Project
14.00	Discussion	Karin Resetarits
14.20	Rounding off: each Member of Parliament suggests two or three action points / elements	Karin Resetarits

	that he or she finds important to be addressed by the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood	
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