

CHAPTER 1

by Michiel Matthes

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD IN EUROPE VOLUME 6 INTRODUCTION

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Editors: Michiel Matthes, Lea Pulkkinen, Belinda Heys, Christopher Clouder, Luis Manuel Pinto

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INTRODUCTION

by Michiel Matthes

This publication is the sixth in the series *'Improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe'*. The editorial team has chosen to follow the Bronfenbrenner approach in deciding on the order of the chapters in the book: starting with the chapters that relate to subjects regarding the life of the child and the family in a close circle around them and following on with the chapters which address themes that are a bit further away, and we end with a chapter that reflects on courses of action for the Alliance for Childhood itself.

CHAPTER 2 CULTIVATING CAPACITIES: A DESCRIPTION OF THE LEARNING FOR WELL-BEING APPROACH TO CORE PRACTICES

by Linda O'Toole

This chapter is written by Linda O'Toole (USA). The vision of the Learning for Well-being (L4WB) Community is one of inclusive and supportive societies where children, young people and adults respect each other as competent partners and learn how to realize their unique potential throughout their lives. L4WB is a collective initiative of the Universal Education Foundation, engaging with communities of practitioners, partners, and collaborators in order to cultivate expressions of wholeness in individuals and groups. L4WB defines well-being as "realizing one's unique potential through physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development in relation to self, others, and the environment." The purpose of the community is to inspire, engage and enable people to make all environments more conducive to Learning for Well-being for children and young people.

In this chapter Linda O'Toole describes her personal journey regarding her insights in this respect. The L4WB Community has reflected on how to help individuals, but also on how to help communities and organisations to enhance their progress towards well-being, as defined above. In this context the L4WB

Community has identified nine core capacities that are considered helpful to achieving well-being. The nine core capacities are: relaxing, observing, listening, enquiring, reflecting, subtle sensing, empathizing, enriching sensory awareness and discerning patterns. In the chapter Linda O'Toole takes us on a journey examining the physical, emotional and mental aspects of these core capacities and allows us to reflect on how to integrate them into our daily lives.

CHAPTER 3 THE THREADS OF CREATIVITY

by Christopher Clouder

Christopher Clouder (UK) encourages us to reflect on the spiritual aspect of human life in general and of childhood in particular. He considers the essence of creativity: creativity has always been part of human life, but what changes is the way we think about the capacity we have for creativity and how we make it conscious. Our lives increasingly require that we have the ability to deal with conflicting messages, to make judgments in the absence of rule, to cope with ambiguity, and to frame imaginative solutions to the problems we face. He contends that in the longer term the real disruptive technologies are actually the arts. Human creativity is a complex continuum of activity, relationships and inner change. There is no creativity without movement.

Why did we include this chapter in our book? What does it have to do with improving the Quality of Childhood? Christopher Clouder was the person who initiated the QoC Talks and still contributes to them. He has the ability to encourage us to reflect about the spiritual aspect of human life in general and of childhood in particular. In his chapter he advances the subject of improving the Quality of Childhood from the angle of the arts, creativity and spirituality.

CHAPTER 4 THE STABILITY AND QUALITY OF THE PARENTS' PARTNERSHIP AS A CONTEXT FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

by Sabine Walper

This chapter is written by Sabine Walper (Germany). Policy and practice should pay more attention to children's needs in conflicted family contexts and should improve conditions for children's healthy development. She approaches the subject of improving the Quality of Childhood from the point of view of the relationship of the parents and care-givers of the child to one another. It has long been recognised that the parents' partnership is an important factor that influences children's development, be it as a resource or a risk factor. There is little doubt that children thrive when two mutually committed and loving parents jointly care for and invest in their offspring. However, the likelihood of these conditions occurring is changing. The divorce rate is increasing, both in the USA and in the European Union, and the percentage of children born out of wedlock is also increasing. Thus, it is not only the instability of parents' marriages but also the instability of unmarried unions which has become an issue for children's well-being.

The chapter by Sabine Walper focuses on interparental conflict as a risk factor, which undermines children's well-being. In this context she reviews soon to be available support services and prevention programmes for separated families in Germany and concludes that policy and practice should pay more attention to children's needs in conflicted family contexts and should improve conditions for children's healthy development.

Among the six measures which are recommended the implementation of successfully evaluated prevention programmes is particularly emphasized. Focusing children's needs, such programmes should strengthen mothers' and fathers' parenting competencies; they should reach out to heterogeneous target groups and should be adjusted to the needs of families with a high recurrence of legal conflict. Furthermore, issues of building and maintaining a strong

partnership should more systematically be included in parenting programmes.

Sabine Walper has based her chapter on the German situation, and many other European countries can learn from her observations in this respect.

CHAPTER 5 AN INSPIRING SCHOOL DAY: AN EFFORT TO TRANSFORM RESEARCH FINDINGS INTO POLICY

by Lea Pulkkinen

The significance to student well-being of activities organized at school outside the actual lessons has been unreservedly positive from the perspective of academic success, the students' personal development and the community. When pondering about ways and means to improve the Quality of Childhood a myriad of approaches can be considered. In all the countries in Europe people are busy in one way or another with the question of how to move society forward with regard to the Quality of Childhood. We are therefore most thankful to Lea Pulkkinen (Finland), who shares her story and struggle in Finland with us. For many years she has focused on this topic both in research and in policymaking, and she has witnessed the process of two steps forward and one step backward many times. Today Finland is again about to take two steps forward since the Minister of Education became aware that one should not only look at what happens at school, but also at the entire school day, i.e. from the time that a child leaves the home until the time that the parent(s) come home from work and join their children again.

In the winter of 2015 Lea Pulkkinen was asked by the above mentioned Minister to write a report on this topic, and that is what she did. The chapter in our book is a summary of the report. She reports that research results concerning the significance to student well-being of activities organized at school outside the actual lessons have been unreservedly positive. The present Minister of Education and Culture is aiming to include more cultural activities and physical exercise into the school day.

CHAPTER 6 DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE SYSTEMS ACROSS THE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECTORS FOR EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING PREVENTION

by Paul Downes

Paul Downes (Ireland) writes about education in Europe and how to make it more inclusive, more caring, more respectful and how to start to really listen to children's voices in particular with regards to early school leaving. In short, he describes what needs to happen to bring about a system change. He contends that it is necessary to go beyond Bronfenbrenner's focus on systems in developmental psychology, to scrutinize system blockages and the inertia hindering inclusive systems. He encourages the reader to reflect more deeply about how we have shaped the various systems and how we operate within them. In this context the first sentence of his text sets the tone: 'There is *still* a silence, a silence of exclusion, an avoidable silence, at the heart of many schools across Europe today. This silence is in relation to students' voices. This silence still exists despite Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which declares: 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.

Next he writes about system blockage, alienation and displacement and refers to his book on these subjects 'Access to education in Europe: A framework and agenda for system change'. He concludes the chapter with recommendations to the EU institutions.

CHAPTER 7 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICIES AT THE EU LEVEL

by Michiel Matthes

This chapter is based on a presentation by Jeroen Jutte, who speaks about the Youth Employment Package. When thinking about improving the Quality of Childhood we will all

agree that youth unemployment is a scourge on our societies and if we can do something in this area it would be welcomed by everybody. For this reason we invited Jeroen Jutte (The Netherlands) to speak on this subject. He did not have the opportunity to write the chapter, but he kindly gave us his material to use, on the basis of which I have written the chapter. Jutte outlines that in 2014 youth unemployment was twice as high as the average unemployment rate in the Member States of the European Union, ranging from 8% in Germany to some 58% in Greece. At the request of the Member States the European Commission launched the Youth Employment Package. The core element of this package was the recommendation to the Member States to introduce the Youth Guarantee to ensure that all young people in the EU up to the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of a job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. At the same time a monitoring system was put in place by incorporating this issue into the existing monitoring arrangement, which is called the European Semester / Country Specific Recommendations.

The approach of the European Commission is always intriguing since it normally looks at the whole picture with regards to a particular issue and then develops a strategy to benefit all concerned.

CHAPTER 8 CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH IN EUROPE: THE CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

by Ulrike Ravens-Sieberer &
Veronika Ottová-Jordan

The prevention of mental health and well-being of children and adolescents should be the overarching goal of health interventions. We all know that today the mental health of children and young people is an issue in all our societies. But it is not that easy to gain a clear picture of the size of the problem and the impacts that this is having and that is why the organisers of the QoC Talks decided

to take up this subject. We were pleased to find Ulrike Ravens-Sieberer, Head of Research and Professor for Child Public Health at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf to speak about this topic. She, together with her colleague Veronika Ottová-Jordan (both from Germany), came to speak about the subject in question and to contribute to our book. In their chapter they explain how widespread mental health challenges are among children and young people, citing studies by the World Health Organisation and others. They point out that the average prevalence of mental health problems among children and young people is 17,6% in Europe.

They discuss what kind of reports are available, how to collect the data and subsequently how to incorporate the research findings into public health policies. For example, they cite the RICHE Report (Research into Child Health in Europe) that states: „that the prevention of mental health and well-being of children and adolescents should be the overarching goal of health interventions’. One of the other main messages in this report was to enhance and establish early detection (screening), monitoring systems, age- and culturally-appropriate instruments and to place a stronger focus on younger age groups.

CHAPTER 9 REFLECTIONS ON RECENT EU DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD OF CHILDREN’S RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING

by Agata D’Addato

Many supra-national organisations work hard on the Rights of the Child and the results are better than one might imagine. When we strive to improve the Quality of Childhood and children’s well-being it is useful to ask ourselves: ‘what is happening in Brussels in this respect?’ Agata D’Addato (Italy) of Eurochild was kind enough to brief us on this topic. She first puts the issue into context, informing the reader that one in four children in the European Union is at risk of poverty and social exclusion. She describes the various European Commission programmes which

address this issue, but notes that with the new Jean-Claude Juncker Commission the focus is more on economic growth and job creation and less on the theme of child poverty.

The developments in the European Parliament regarding the policy agenda for children are, however, more uplifting. Agata D’Addato signals that in the Sustainable Development Goals, that were adopted in September 2015 by the UN, the paragraph regarding children is ambitious. She also outlines the aspirations of the Human Rights Council of the UN and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, based in Geneva. According to Agata D’Addato the overall picture of developments on the supra-national levels is a mixed one.

I think that it is good to include this theme in each of our books in the ‘Improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe’ series, because ultimately the decisions of these supra-national bodies will have an impact on the daily lives of children.

CHAPTER 10 THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD AT 25: THEORY, REALITY, IDEOLOGY, OPPORTUNITY – A TRIO REVIEW

by Jan Willems

25 years of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: How are Theory, Reality, Ideology and Opportunity (TRIO) evolving? The editors of this book decided to invite Jan Willems (The Netherlands) to contribute a chapter to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which took place in November 2014. Our question to Jan Willems was: ‘can you write a chapter on the CRC at 25: What has been achieved over the past 25 years, and what steps forward can you envisage?’

Jan Willems takes an in-depth approach in his chapter. In the first place he looks at the basic emotional developmental needs of children. Secondly he raises the question as to what extent these basic needs are being met for all children in Europe, and if not, what

are the consequences of this? Thereafter he translates these emotional needs of children into requirements that must be met by their parents and care-givers, and, as a person with a legal background, he concludes that it is the right of every human being to have competent caregivers at one's cradle. In this context he advocates for more support for families regarding the raising of their children where this is needed.

On the macro level he gives us an overview of how the CRC has evolved in the world over the last 25 years. Then he describes how ideas have evolved with regards to children's rights and what opportunities there are to take the matter of children's rights a step forward.

CHAPTER 11

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD: WHAT IS WANTING TO EMERGE?

by Michiel Matthes

In this chapter I look at the Alliance for Childhood from a sociological viewpoint and then examine the implications of this for the movement. The title of the last chapter is 'Improving the Quality of Childhood: What is wanting to emerge?' which was inspired by the book by Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer (2013) entitled 'Leading from the Emerging Future, From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies'. In this chapter I look at the theme of 'Improving the Quality of Childhood' through the lenses developed by Scharmer and Kaufer. Firstly I give a brief description of Scharmer and Kaufer's worldview and then apply this to the case of children and childhood. In this context I address the question 'From what inner place do I operate?' An important element in the thinking of both authors is the notion of mental models and in this context I explain that the Alliance for Childhood has approached this subject slightly differently by concluding that each individual and each organisation has an image of the child and will act in accordance therewith. In the next part I present a table with the various mental models that are currently dominant in our societies and I describe the impacts of these on government policies and

families. I conclude with the implications of the above mental models for the movement that strives to Improve the Quality of Childhood in Europe.