

*With the support of the Jean Monnet Programme of the European Union*

**INVITATION FOR ALL WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

hosted by

**MEP Evelyn Regner**

**MEP Karin Kadenbach**

**MEP Judith Merkies**

**MEP Corina Cretu**

**MEP Lívia Járóka**

**MEP Gerald Häfner**

**MEP Edward McMillan-Scott**

**This session will be hosted by**

**MEP Liisa Jaakonsaari**

(S&D, Finland)

**Working Group on the Quality of Childhood at the European Parliament (QoC)**

40th session:

**'Finland has the best literacy score in the European Union.**

**What are the main elements of its strategy and to what extent can it be copied by other countries?**

The presentation will be given by **Professor Heikki Lyytinen** from the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, one of the driving forces behind the Finnish success.

**Time**: Tuesday April 9, 2013 from 13.00 until 15.00 hours.

**Location:** European Parliament, Rue Wiertzstraat 60, Brussels, Room JAN4Q2.

**Entrance**: we will gather at the Entrance at Place Luxembourg at 12.30 hours and enter together into the building.

**1. EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy**

The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, which was set up by the European Commission, published its Final Report in September 2012 with the title 'Act Now!' In the press release at this occasion was said:

*The European Union needs to overhaul its approach to improving literacy standards, according to the* [*high-level group of experts*](http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/literacy_en.pdf) *set up by European Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou to address the issue. One in five 15 year olds, as well as nearly 75 million adults, lack basic reading and writing skills, which makes it hard for them to get a job and increases their risk of poverty and social exclusion. The expert group's chair, HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, a long-time campaigner in the field, describes the report as a "wake-up call about the crisis that affects every country in Europe". The 80-page report includes a raft of recommendations, ranging from advice for parents on creating a culture of reading for pleasure with their children, to siting libraries in unconventional settings like shopping centres and the need to attract more male teachers to act as role models for boys, who read much less than girls. It also makes age-specific recommendations, calling for free, high-quality early childhood education and care for all, more specialist reading teachers in primary schools, a change of mind-set on dyslexia, arguing that almost every child can learn to read with the right support, and for more varied learning opportunities for adults, especially in the workplace.*

*Princess Laurentien, who was the Chair of the Group, added: "Reading and writing are much more than a technique or a skill. Literacy is about people’s self-esteem and ability to function and flourish in society as private individuals, active citizens, employees, or parents. We need clear, coordinated national strategies and much better awareness across Europe, not only in policy and educational circles, but also in hospitals, workplaces and especially in families. It is time for Europe to raise its level of ambition and ensure literacy for all."*

**2. The Final Report of the High Level Group cited that Finland is the country with the best score of Low Achievers in Reading**

Finland is the country that does best with regards to the PISA Study, but also with regards to the percentage of low achievers in reading. In 2009 the score was 8.1% of 15-year olds, while the EU average was 19.6%. For this reason the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood was very much interested to understand how Finland managed to get such good results.

**3. Professor Heikki Lyytinen is in Finland one of the driving forces behind this success**

We are therefore very happy that we have found Professor Heikki Lyytinen from Finland, who is the champion in his country in the area of acquiring literacy skills to give a presentation about his life time work.

The main elements of Professor Lyytinen's approach are as follows:

*Early detection of risk for dyslexia*

Research has shown that dyslexia runs in certain families and for this reason children in these families, run a higher risk of having difficulties to learn to read and write. It is important to identify these children at an early stage, and also other children, that may have the same difficulties. Research has shown that soon after birth this vulnerability can already be detected.

*Giving the children extra support in primary school*

Heikki Lyytinen's research showed that 45% of children struggling to learn to read and write overcame their difficulties with remediation during the first three years in primary school, and another 30% overcame their difficulties in the subsequent two years.

*There are languages that are easier to learn for children than other languages*

Professor Lyytinen explains the effects of transparent writing systems and non-transparent writing systems on literacy skills. A language with a transparent writing system has straightforward connections between sounds and letters independent on the context of writing. This stands in marked contrast to the situation of non-transparent writing systems such as English where none of the letters have the same sound in all written contexts. Teaching children to learn to read and write of a non-transparent writing system requires a different strategy to that of a transparent writing system. One consequence can be that it is to be recommended in regard with immigrant children to teach these children first in their mother tongue to read and write and thereafter in for instance English.

*Heikki Lyytinen developed with his colleagues GraphoGame in the early 2000’s.*

GraphoGame is a computer and Internet based game for children to play with letter sound correspondences which are the building blocks of reading skill. In this way GraphoGame is like an additional teacher who helps the child to learn to read. Moreover learning to read with GraphoGame is fun and easy, so that the child is able to play it alone.

GraphoGame was originally developed as a research tool for reading acquisition, but its potential for prevention of reading difficulties was quickly recognised.

**4. Professor Lyytinen founded the GraphoWorld Network of Excellence**

The success of GraphoGame in Finland was so convincing that Professor Lyytinen and his colleagues decided to invite other universities in the world to the GraphoWorld Network of Excellence, that was set up in 2010 in Helsinki. On the website the following information can be found:

*The Mission of the Network is to provide technology-enhanced support of spoken and written language development among typical and atypical learners. This includes both research and implementation of new knowledge and technology providing the support.*

*The Vision is a network among universities with the most well informed experts of spoken and written language acquisition to accomplish the Mission.*

*The objective of the GraphoWorld NoE is to provide non-commercial technology enhanced support as widely as possible to all learners globally, however, with a special emphasis on countries where access to literacy education is limited.*

*Literacy is vital for individuals’ quality of life, their education, career choices, and thus to the world economy and the development of democracy. Yet, globally, 744 million illiterate individuals over 15 years of age and millions of children urgently need help in learning to read due to learning disorders and other challenges.*

*Now we propose to look for a sustainable way to export the already proven Finnish delivery model. The new business model is created around an Entity that is aiming to reach hundreds of millions of people worldwide. The delivery model is based both on country specific and global activities.*

*The main goal of the project is to design and implement an Entity, which will make possible reaching our ambitious goal: globally scalable and localised support service to help millions of children to read.*

**5. Professor Heikki Lyytinen's Dream: to have the opportunity to help all children in need to be able to acquire reading skills as their classmates**

Professor Heikki Lyytinen tells us that his dream would be to have the opportunity to help all children in need to be able to acquire reading skill as their classmates. His group has now been able to make this possible in Finland where all children (and their teachers and parents) have a free access to the training game and to science-based knowledge adults need for supporting children to learn to read (see [www.lukimat.fi](http://www.lukimat.fi) or an English description: grapholearn.info). Hundreds of thousands of Finnish children have used the Graphogame during the last ten years in Finland. The automation of the service has reached such a completion that the provision of the support to more than 200 0000 Finnish users only requires two coordinators. Thus it would be quite realistic to provide a comparable support in all European countries and of course first of all in developing countries where the needs are hugely larger as shown by his research in Zambia.

**6. Our request to Professor Heikki Lyytinen:**

* Summarise for our Working Group what you have learned in the past 30 years how to help children to learn to read and write.
* What elements of Finland's strategy can be copied by other member states?
* What could be the role of the European institutions in this respect?
* What could the European institutions do with regards to children in the developing countries?

**7. Overall 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 'Finland has the best literacy score in the European Union. What are the main elements of its strategy and to what extent can it be copied by other countries?'
* To think about the role that the European institutions could play to improve the situation.
* To get to grips with the principles and approaches that could lead to improvements for children.
* To form an effective working group and to get a sense of how to move on.

We take pleasure in inviting you for the 40th session on 9 April 2013. We believe that we as members of the European Parliament working together with like-minded public interest advocacy groups and committed individuals can and should play an important role in this area.

Yours sincerely,

Evelyn Regner

Karin Kadenbach

Judith Merkies

Corina Cretu

Lívia Járóka

Gerald Häfner

Edward McMillan-Scott

Members of the European Parliament

**Programme Outline for Tuesday April 9 2013**

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| Time | Subject | Speaker / facilitator |
| 13.00 | Opening | Michiel Matthes, Secretary of the Working Group |
| 13.05 | Finland has the best literacy score in the European Union. What are the main elements of its strategy and to what extent can it be copied by other countries? | Professor Heikki Lyytinen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. |
| 14.30 | Discussion |  |
| 14.50 | Announcement: 'The Unfolding Conference: Creating a culture that allows each and every child to unfold their unique potential and to engage in society', to be held in Brussels, 23-26 October 2013. | Daniel Kropf, Founding Chair and Executive Director of the Universal Education Foundation |
| 15.00 | Closure |  |

Disclaimer:

The organiser organises this session on a best effort basis. However changes in parts of the programme or in the entire programme may occur due to unforeseen circumstances and the organiser cannot be held liable for that.

**Secretariat for this session:**

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

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| ARGE-Erziehungsberatung, Austria Dr. Martina Leibovici  The Linkedness Project, Belgium Heidi Defever  Experiential Education Project, Belgium Professor Dr. Ferre Laevers  Flemish Institute for Family Sciences, Belgium Professor Dr. Hans van Crombrugge  Saharan & North African Toy and Play Cultures,  Belgium Dr. Jean-Pierre Rossie  Centre for Relational Competence, Denmark Claes Solborg Pedersen  University of Jyväskylä, Finland Professor Emerita Dr. Lea Pulkkinen  Le Furet, France Marie-Nicole Rubio  European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants  (EFCNI) Silke Mader  Legambiente, Italy Vanessa Pallucchi  Stichting Universele Ontwikkeling (NL) Marijke Sluijter  Janusz Korczak International Society Arie de Bruin  Center for Youth and Development, The Hague  University for Professional Education, The Hague  Roosevelt Academy, Middelburg (NL) Professor Dr. René Diekstra  NIVOZ (NL) Professor Dr. Luc Stevens / Nickel van der  Vorm / Gabrielle Taus  Beweeg.nl Elise Sijthoff  Verein mit Kindern Wachsen, Germany Lienhard Valentin  Sabine Heggemann  Fundación Botín, Spain Fátima Sánchez Santiago and Christopher  Clouder  International Association for Steiner / Waldorf  Early Childhood Education (Sweden) Clara Aerts  Familylab International, Switzerland Jesper Juul  The Educational Volunteers Foundation  of Turkey Nurdan Sahin  Universal Education Foundation, Brussels Daniel Kropf  European Council for Steiner  Waldorf Education, Brussels Kamiel van Herp  ELIANT, Brussels Michaela Sieh  Secretariat of the Group, Brussels Michiel Matthes |
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This programme is organised with the support of the following organisations:

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**The sessions held / to be held by the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood at the European Parliament in the period 2006-2013:**

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| 5 December 2006 | 1. ‘The Toxic Childhood Syndrome and the Quality of Childhood’ with Christopher Clouder (UK) and Professor Hans van Crombrugge (Belgium). Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| 9 January 2007 | 2. ‘Really Improving the Education in the European Union requires Systemic Changes’ with professor Luc Stevens (Netherlands) and Professor Ferre Laevers (Belgium). Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| 6 March 2007 | 3. ‘The Quality of Child-Adult Relationships in Families and School’ with Jesper Juul (Denmark). Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| 15 May 2007 | 4. ‘The Child: his/her Networks and Neighbourhood’ with René Diekstra. Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| September 20  2007 | 5. ‘How can we improve in the European Union the Early Childhood Educational Systems’ with John Bennett, the author of the OECD Study Starting Strong. Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| November 6  2007 | 6. ‘How to let children and adolescents acquire key competences for the world of the 21st century? with Dr. Martina Leibovici-Mühlberger from Austria and Geseke Lundgren from Sweden. Host: MEP Karin Resetarits |
| January 8,  2008 | 7. ‘Attachment, what it is, why it is important and what we can do about it to help young children acquire a secure attachment? with Sir Richard Bowlby. Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| March 4, 2008 | 8. ‘A vision on children and childhood in the European Union’ by Michiel Matthes. Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| May 14, 2008 | 9. Professor René Diekstra about ‘The Changing Face of Adolescence. Accounting for changes in adolescent development and their effects on education and social policies’. Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| July 1, 2008 | 10. Professor Steen Hildebrandt (University of Aarhus, Denmark) about the ‘Multiple intelligences in the knowledge-based society’. Host: MEP Rovana Plumb. |
| September 16, 2008 | 11. Presentation of the report of the Fundación Marcelino Botín entitled ‘Social and Emotional Education, An International Analysis’ by Mr Christopher Clouder and Fátima Sánchez Santiago. Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| November 12, 2008 | 12. Professor Boris Cyrulnik from France: what measures can we take to improve the quality of childhood in the European Union? Host: MEP Rovana Plumb. |
| November 17, 2008 | 13. Organisation of a Symposium in Bucharest, Romania at the request of MEP Mrs Rovana Plumb: ‘A European Policy Agenda for the Quality of Childhood with special emphasis on the case of the children of Romanian migrant workers’. |
| January 27, 2009 | 14. Dr. Michel Vandenbroeck (University of Ghent, Belgium) about Diversity and Equity in Early Childhood Services. Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| March 3, 2009 | 15. ‘Taking stock of what has been achieved with the Working Group since December 2006 and looking forward’ with Michiel Matthes, Secretary-General of the Alliance for Childhood European Network. Host: MEP Karin Resetarits. |
| April 28, 2009 | 16. Professor Peter Moss (University of London) about young children and their services: developing a European approach. Host: MEP Rovana Plumb. |
| September 8, 2009 | 17. Continuing to work on improving the Quality of Childhood in the European Union during the present economic downturn with Professor Emeritus Richard Wilkinson, co-author of the book ‘The Spirit Level, Why More Equal Societies Almost Always do Better’. Host: MEP Rovana Plumb. |
| November 17, 2009 | 18. The Technical University of Dortmund won the tender issued by the European Commission to execute a Research Project to identify the key research questions regarding families and family policies. The leader of this project, Professor Dr. Uwe Uhlendorff gave a briefing on this Project and spoke about ‘Developing a European Research Agenda for Families and Family Policies’. Host: MEP Lívia Járóka. |
| December 8, 2009 | 19. Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain, and the policy requirements in this respect with Sue Gerhardt, author of the book with the similar title. Host: MEP Evelyn Regner. |
| January 12, 2010 | 20. The PISA Study and lessons learned regarding the Quality of Childhood with Andreas Schleicher, Head of the Indicators and Analysis Division of the OECD Directorate for Education. Host: MEP Evelyn Regner. |
| March 2, 2010 | 21. ‘Improving the Quality of Childhood in the European Union: the Case of Roma Children' with Ivan Ivanov, Executive Director of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) and Bernard Rorke, Director of the Roma Initiative Programs of the Open Society Institute (OSI). Host: MEP Gerald Häfner. |
| April 13, 2010 | 22. Improving the Quality of Childhood in the European Union: the Aspect of Parental Leave Policies by Professor Peter Moss of the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. Host: MEP Gerald Häfner. |
| June 8, 2010 | 23. ‘The City for the Children’. Key-note speaker: Vanessa Pallucchi, Director for Education of Legambiente, Rome, Italy. Host: MEP Vittorio Prodi and MEP Karin Kadenbach. |
| August 31, 2010 | 24. 'The impact of television and screen media on the Quality of Childhood and what are good policies in this respect on the level of the family, on the level of the country and on the EU level?' with Dr. Aric Sigman, author of the book 'Remotely controlled, how television is damaging our lives'. Host: MEP Karin Kadenbach. |
| November 17, 2010 | 25.‘The proposed research agenda for the European Commission re families and family policies' with Professor Dr. Uwe Uhlendorff of the Technical University Dortmund, Germany. Host: MEP Mr Gerald Häfner |
| January 11, 2011 | 26. 'The Quality of the Physical Environment of the Child, the Current Problems in this area, and what needs to be done?' together with the Health and Environment Alliance and the INCHES Network. Host: MEP Gerald Häfner. |
| March 1, 2011 | 27. 'Educating the Art of Life: Resilience and Creativity in Contemporary Education'withDavid Brierley, Associate Professor at the Rudolf Steiner University College, Oslo Norway. Host: MEP Evelyn Regner. |
| March 29, 2011 | 28. 'A reflection on the European Commission's High Level Group on Literacy' with emeritus Professor Margaret Clark from the UK. Host: MEP Lambert van Nistelrooij. |
| May 31, 2011 | 29. 'Learning to move and moving to learn. Why physical development in the early years supports later learning, behaviour and achievement' with Sally Goddard Blythe, Director of The Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology in the UK. Hosted by MEP Edward McMillan-Scott. |
| September 6, 2011 | 30. Presentation of the report 'Learning for Well-being: a Policy Priority for Children and Youth in Europe, A Movement for Change' by Professor Ilona Kickbusch, Director of the Global Health Programme at the Graduate Institute of International Development Studies in Geneva. Host: MEP Karin Kadenbach. |
| November 8, 2011 | 31. Alcohol Nation, How to protect our children from today's drinking culture' with Dr. Aric Sigman. Host: MEP Gerald Häfner. |
| January 10, 2012 | 32. Presentation of a Proposal to set up a European Academy for Complementary Pedagogy by Jesper Juul. Host: MEP Judith Merkies. |
| March 6, 2012 | 33. ' What Contribution can the Digital Environment make to the Improvement of the Quality of Childhood? with Professor Martine Delfos from the Netherlands and Thibaut Kleiner of the Cabinet of Euro-commissioner Neelie Kroes. Host: MEP Evelyn Regner. |
| April 11, 2012 | 34. 'Improving the Quality of Childhood as a challenge to European institutions: Reflections from the Ombudsmen for Children' with Maria Kaisa Aula, the Finnish Ombudsman for Children. Host: MEP Liisa Jaakonsaari. |
| 5 June 2012 | 35. The State of Affairs of the Child in the City, and What Needs To Be Done? with Dr. Jan van Gils, President and founder of the European Network of Child Friendly Cities and President of the International Council for Children’s Play. Host: MEP Karin Kadenbach |
| 4 September 2012 | 36. '500,000 Preterm Births in Europe Each Year. What are the Dangers, and What are the Main Components of a Successful Strategy to Address this Challenge?' with Professor Luc Zimmermann (Belgium / Netherlands), Professor Dominique Haumont (Belgium) and Silke Mader (Germany), all working with the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI). Host: MEP Peter Liese. |
| 13 November 2012 | 37. 'How can we help children to reach their unique potential and how can we support the parents, caregivers and teachers in their role vis-à-vis children'. Host: MEP Gerald Häfner. |
| 9 January 2013 | 38. 'Children and their connection with nature: why it is important and how can it be stimulated?' with Tim Gill from the UK. Host: MEP Judith Merkies  and MEP Gerald Häfner. |
| 5 March 2013 | 39. 'IFFD's Family Enrichment Courses: the Case Study Method applied to Family Settings. What it is and how to provide it to more families?' with Marina Robben, President of the International Federation For Family Development (IFFD). Host: MEP Anneli Jäätteenmäki and MEP Anna Záborská. |
| 9 April 2013 | 40. Finland has the best literacy score in the European Union. What are the main elements of its strategy and to what extent can it be copied by other countries? with Professor Heikki Lyytinen. Host: MEP Liisa Jaakonsaari. |

**Three yearbooks were published with the reports of these sessions:**

* session 1-16: Improving the Quality of Childhood in the European Union: Current Perspectives. The book can be downloaded from http://www.allianceforchildhood.eu/book-improving-the-quality-of-childhood-in-the-european-union-current-perspectives-2010
* session 17-23: Improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe 2011, Volume 2.
* session 24-30: Improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe 2012, Volume 3.   
  Volume 2 and 3 can be downloaded from: http://www.ecswe.org/publications.php

They can be ordered for €10 each, excluding postage, from Patrice Sullivan Patrice@ecswe.org or Chiara Carones ecswe2@gmail.com.