Partners in parenting

A study on shared childrearing responsibilities between parents and nonparental adults

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A study on shared childrearing responsibilities between parents and nonparental adults

Allemaal opvoeders

Een studie naar gedeelde opvoedingsverantwoordelijkheden tussen ouders en medeopvoeders (met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Chapter 1

General introduction

This dissertation focuses on a contextual approach to childrearing[1]: the *pedagogische civil society*, henceforward referred to as the *educative civil society* (ECS). The term ECS was introduced by De Winter (2008) and can be described as the joint activities of citizens in the upbringing of children and adolescents. ECS in itself is a relatively new term, but has its roots in various scientific approaches and theoretical concepts such as the ecological-transactional model of childrearing, positive psychology, and empowerment. The ECS approach can be considered as promoting a new interest in empowering the members of society by giving them the opportunity to strengthen mutual childrearing responsibilities. The fact that many Western governments are taking a step back in the social domain is leading to a growing focus on the active role of civil society in childrearing. In this light, it becomes increasingly important to identify how that role can be operationalized. This study aims to contribute to this quest.

In recent years, various initiatives based on the concept of the ECS have been developed in the Netherlands. One of these is the program *Allemaal opvoeders* (Alop – *Partners in parenting*) in which eleven pilot municipalities, between 2009 and 2011, organized activities to promote greater involvement of civil society in the upbringing of children and adolescents. The idea behind this program is that shared responsibility for childrearing can improve family[2] functioning and can obviate unnecessary demands on more specialized forms of youth care (De Winter, 2012). In this dissertation, the Alop program will be scrutinized in order to explore whether there is evidence for it being effective.

This first chapter begins with a discussion of the substantive arguments underlying the case for why it is important to invest in the ECS. We will then give a short overview of the developments in Dutch youth and family policy that have served as a breeding ground for the ECS approach, followed by a description of the Alop program. The chapter ends by providing the aims and the outline of this dissertation.

The educative civil society as a contextual approach to childrearing

The ECS approach starts from the idea that although parents are the primary caregivers, a family does not exist in a social vacuum. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) provides a conceptual framework for this idea. According to this theory, a nuclear family is nested in multiple systems "each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). Garbarino and Sherman (1980) have noted that the continuous interaction among these multiple systems – the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosytem – may strengthen or weaken family functioning and that "the richness of a parent's social environment is a significant influence on

[1] In English speaking countries different terms are used to refer to the upbringing of children and adolescents. In this dissertation we use the term *childrearing* in its broad continental meaning, i.e., the process of taking care of and raising children, either by parents as primary caregivers or by other, secondary, related or unrelated caregivers.

[2] In this dissertation we define *family* as "Every household of one or more adults who are responsible for the care and upbringing of one or more children" (Netherlands Youth Institute, 2009, p. 2).

the adequacy of the child rearing that parent provides" (p. 188). Related to Bronfenbrenner's ecological orientation is the notion that it takes a village to raise a child: the upbringing of children and adolescents is a communal effort (Clinton, 1996). In line with this African proverb, in the concept of the ECS the presence of other supportive caregivers – for example, family members, neighbors, teachers, and sports coaches, henceforward referred to as nonparental adults (NPAs)[3] – is thought to make a positive contribution to the well-being of young people and their families.

There are different substantive arguments for investing in the ECS. A first argument is that supportive social networks in childrearing are valuable for both children and parents. Children tend to be more resilient if they find support outside of their family. In her well-known longitudinal study of the developmental paths of high-risk children, Werner (1993) found that children who formed bonds with caring NPAs turned out to be more resilient. These bonds seem to function as a buffer against risk factors. Parents who have access to social networks in childrearing seem to experience childrearing as less stressful (Garbarino & Sherman, 1980) and more often use the authoritative parenting style (Marshall, Noonan, McCartney, Marx, & Keefe, 2001). This parenting style is characterized by setting limits, reasoning with children and being responsive to their needs, and is associated with positive child outcomes such as self-assertiveness and academic success (Baumrind, 1966).

The importance of social support in childrearing is evident. However, the Western childrearing ideology may discourage people from sharing responsibilities (Scales et al., 2001 ; Van Daalen, 2010). In Western societies, there seems to be a trend toward viewing childrearing as a private concern inherent in the nuclear family, where – in the event of questions or problems – support is provided by professionals. This notion brings us to the second substantive argument for investing in the ECS: it can provide a counterbalance to the privatization of childrearing. According to Brinkgreve (2008) childrearing has turned into a private worry instead of a public issue, i.e., an issue of common concern and attention. The ECS approach aims to promote the balance between the primary responsibility of parents and the support provided by secondary, nonparental caregivers.

A third substantive argument for investing in the ECS is that it can provide a potential alternative approach to the prevailing problematization of childrearing issues, i.e., the unnecessary labeling of childrearing issues as pathological. A pathological focus on childrearing issues appears to be a typical feature of the current childrearing discourse of postmodern Western societies (Hermanns, 2009). An example can be found in the "diagnostic inflation" of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and other mental disorders (Batstra & Frances, 2012, p. 474). In 2014, the Health Council of the Netherlands concluded that neither Dutch nor international research provided evidence of an increase in the prevalence of ADHD, while

[3] See Chapter 2 for the definition of NPAs we use throughout this dissertation.

the request for help and various forms of care have increased significantly (Gezondheidsraad, 2014). Batstra and Frances (2012) warn of the risk of overdiagnosis and plead for a normalizing approach wherein problems are taken seriously but "(re)formulated as expectable responses to the inevitable stressors in life" (p. 477). In the same vein, the ECS approach recognizes that the upbringing of children and adolescents can be challenging, but that these challenges are inextricably linked with childrearing. The ECS approach counterbalances the pathological focus on childrearing issues by placing more emphasis on the creation of a positive childrearing climate in which NPAs are interested and involved in the upbringing of children and adolescents (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling (RMO) – Dutch Council for Social Development, 2009).

Breeding ground for the educative civil society approach

Many Western societies are in transition – or recently made a transition – toward placing a greater emphasis on the active role of civil society in the social domain. A characteristic of this shift is that solutions for societal questions and problems are no longer sought from the government only, but also in society itself. An example can be found in the UK, where the government introduced the Big Society agenda with the intention of stimulating community development initiatives (Fisher & Gruescu, 2011). Although the transition process might be driven by rising welfare costs, the need for change is not nourished exclusively by austerity measures. The existing youth and family policy reached its limits as a result of the increased reliance on professional care (Hermanns, 2009). This increase not only had financial implications. "Excessive government care" may also have paved the way for civic passivity and may have (unintentionally) undermined the initiatives of citizens (Van Arum, Uyterlinde, & Sprinkhuizen, 2009, p. 5). In the last few years, there has been a call for "unburdening" and "normalization" (RMO, 2012, p. 13). The principle of unburdening is aimed at placing a greater emphasis on prevention and on families' own possibilities and those of their social network. The principle of normalization is directed at the avoidance of unnecessary problematizing and labeling of issues in childrearing (Batstra & Frances, 2012; Gezondheidsraad, 2014). The transition process in the social domain can thus not only serve to achieve legal and financial shifts, but can also be considered a transformation in order to achieve a parallel process of renewing content.

In light of the transformation process within youth and family policy, it becomes increasingly important for families to create their own safety nets and form childrearing partnerships with NPAs. Several programs have been developed in recent years to foster the formation of these childrearing partnerships. Alop is an example of such a program, aimed at "a mobilization of public will, power, capacity, and commitment, creating a normative culture in which all residents are expected to contribute to young people's healthy development" (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Sesma, 2004, p. 10). Before we give a description of the Alop program, we will give a short

overview of the recent developments in Dutch youth and family policy that have served as a breeding ground for the ECS approach. The Dutch government has, over the past ten years, made a set of changes to youth and family policy with the aim of increasing people's own strengths. In this policy context, funds for initiatives that promote greater involvement of civil society in the upbringing of children and adolescents, such as Alop, were released.

Developments in Dutch youth and family policy

In 2004, the Dutch national government commissioned for *Operatie Jong* (*Operation Young*), a partnership between seven ministries. The main objective of this partnership was to bring about more coherence in the field of youth and family policy, so that young people and their parents would get the right support at the right time (Van Eijck, 2006). *Operatie Jong* resulted in a number of recommendations, such as the establishment of the Centra voor Jeugd en Gezin (CJG – Youth and Family Centers) – easily accessible local primary care centers where parents and other caregivers could turn to for information, advice, and support. In addition to their duties in the field of prevention and early intervention, the centers were also intended to function as a focal point with respect to the referral of children and youth to specialist care (Van Eijck, 2006). The CJG were seen as an important tool in reducing the fragmentation of youth and family care.

In 2007 a new national government took office. During its reign (2007-2010), the government placed great emphasis on improving youth and family care by establishing a ministry with special responsibility for youth and families. This Ministry for Youth and Families took the insights from *Operatie Jong* as an important basis for its policy program named *Alle kansen voor alle kinderen* (*All chances for all children*). This policy program aimed at overcoming two bottlenecks in youth and family care. The first bottleneck was that too many families with relatively minor childrearing issues sought specialized care, while families with major problems, who could strongly benefit from this care, found it difficult or impossible to gain access to these services. The second bottleneck was the previously mentioned problematization trend, reflected, for example, in the increase in the number of diagnoses of disorders such as ADHD (Bates & Frances, 2012; Gezondheidsraad, 2014; Hermanns, 2009). The Ministry for Youth and Families wanted to address these bottlenecks by stimulating families' own strengths, making them, with help of their social networks, again primarily responsible for the upbringing of their children. The basic thought was that specialized youth care will then remain available to those who need it most and unnecessary problematization would be prevented. Following the recommendations of *Operatie Jong*, the Ministry for Youth and Families gave every local government the mission to open a CJG by 2008. The CJG were thought to play an important role in stimulating families' own strengths, by fostering, for example, the mutual contact and support between parents and NPAs (Rouvoet, 2009).

In 2007 the national government also introduced a new Social Support Act (Wmo – Wet

maatschappelijke ondersteuning). This act – which is consistent with the concept of the ECS – was designed to help generate a paradigm shift that is based on powerful citizenship and the power of local communities (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2009). In the following years, this paradigm shift was further elaborated in the Transitie Jeugdzorg (Transition Youth Care). This transition process does not comprise only a *transition*, i.e., an administrative and financial transfer of responsibilities to municipalities, but also a *transformation*, i.e., a shift in the content of youth and family care. This shift implies an alteration from the *exclusion* of young people to specialized youth care facilities, to the *inclusion* of young people by strengthening the upbringing in their own social environment (Van Yperen & Van Woudenberg, 2011). The transformation of youth care thus requires an intensification of the coping strengths and the co-responsibility of civil society.

The *Allemaal opvoeders* program

In 2009, the Ministry for Youth and Families fortified its ambition to encourage families' own strengths by making 18 million euros available for the three-year national program *Vrijwillige Inzet voor en door Jeugd en Gezin* (*Voluntary commitment for and by Youth and Family*). Alop was part of this program and had a duration of two years (2009-2011). Alop closely followed the principles of the policy program *Alle kansen voor alle kinderen*: a reinforcement of the inherent strengths of families and of the support available in their social networks, combined with a better utilization of easily accessible formal childrearing support services may contribute to reduced reliance on specialized care and a decreased problematization of childrearing issues (Van Yperen & Stam, 2010).

In the Alop program, in line with the Transition Youth Care, eleven pilot municipalities – Eindhoven, Enschede, Groningen, Haarlemmermeer, Houten, Loon op Zand, Maastricht, Sittard-Geleen, Tilburg, Utrecht, and Zaanstad – explored ways through which the active role played by civil society in the upbringing of young people could be advanced. When Alop began in 2009, there were few interventions in the field of the ECS and the program adopted a bottom-up approach: the pilot municipalities themselves were asked to operationalize the main objective of the program – the strengthening of the ECS – through concrete activities, thus creating an experimental field with ample room for diversity. In organizing the activities, the pilot municipalities were supported by the Netherlands Youth Institute (NJi – Nederlands Jeugdinstituut). Utrecht University conducted an evaluation study on the effectiveness of the activities and studied the ECS that functioned as the underlying theoretical concept (both studies are elaborated on in this dissertation).

Aims and outline of this dissertation

This dissertation has two aims. The first aim is to contribute to further theoretical exploration of the ECS as a contextual approach to childrearing. Despite the substantive

arguments underlying the importance of investing in the ECS – as previously explicated in this general introduction – thorough theoretical knowledge of and empirical support for the concept are largely lacking. The chapters that address the first aim are Chapter 2 (literature review), 3 (program theory), 4 (quantitative study) and 5 (focus group study). The second aim is to gain insight into the results of the activities conducted through the Alop program. The chapters that address this aim are Chapter 3 (program theory) and 6 (evaluation study).

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the international literature on shared childrearing responsibilities between parents and NPAs. The chapter starts with a definition of NPAs that is used throughout this dissertation. Possible explanations for parents' and NPAs' perspectives toward shared childrearing are discussed. In addition, childrearing roles are further explored by providing an analysis of the existing evidence on the actual division of childrearing responsibilities.

Chapter 3 describes the program theory of Alop, which served as the theoretical framework of this dissertation. Following Rossi and colleagues, we divide the program theory into the impact- and the process theory. The impact theory covers the theoretical underpinning of the program activities within Alop and describes the intended outcomes of the program. The process theory describes the necessary preconditions (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). Thus, the program theory exposes the conceptual structure behind the program. On the one hand, this allows for an elaboration of the ECS, the central concept of the program. On the other hand, it lays the foundation for the summative part of the study, which is the evaluation study presented in Chapter 6. The third chapter starts with defining the ECS, after which a four-step social contact ladder is introduced. This ladder can be used as an instrument to categorize the program activities within Alop (further elaborated in Chapter 6). Based on the literature, the expected working mechanisms of each step of the ladder are described. The third chapter also elaborates on the role of professionals and moderators, who can foster and undermine these working mechanisms respectively.

Chapter 4 describes the results of a quantitative study into parents' attitudes toward NPAs' involvement in the upbringing and nurturing of children. Parents' attitudes are operationalized as two dependent variables: parents' willingness to share childrearing responsibilities and parents' interest in participating in parenting activities with other parents/NPAs. The study explored parents' attitudes with descriptive statistics. In addition, structural equation modeling was used to examine how the variance in these attitudes is predicted by background characteristics, neighborhood social climate, and parenting support. Data were collected through a quantitative survey with 1,090 parents from 17 Dutch neighborhoods.

Chapter 5 builds on the quantitative study presented in Chapter 4. It reports on the findings of a focus group study on parents' willingness to form childrearing partnerships within their own social networks. The study explored where parents draw the line between their own and

other people's roles and responsibilities in different domains of childrearing. Furthermore, the study explored in depth whether five factors – identified on the basis of the findings from the quantitative study – actually represent parents' considerations whether or not to involve NPAs in childrearing. The implications of the findings for practice, policy, and future research are discussed.

Chapter 6 reports on the findings of the effect evaluation of the activities included in the Alop program. To gain insight into the results of the program activities, the chapter first describes through which activities the pilot municipalities have attempted to embody the idea behind the Alop program. Furthermore, it describes to what extent the operational goals of these activities were attained.

Finally, **Chapter 7** provides an overall discussion of the findings described in Chapter 2 to 6, as well as the strengths and limitations of the research, and the implications and directions for future research and practice.

Chapter 2

Partners in parenting: An overview of the literature on parents' and nonparental adults' perspectives on shared responsibilities in childrearing

This chapter has been published as:

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[4] Authors' contributions: M.K. and M.D.W. designed research; S.L. and M.K. performed literature search and performed data analysis; M.K., M.D.W., and T.V.Y. wrote the paper.

Abstract

The involvement of nonparental adults (NPAs) in the upbringing of children is widely considered to be important for the well-being of both children and parents. However, there has been no systematic overview of parental and nonparental perspectives toward this involvement. This study presents an overview of the international literature on sharing responsibility between parents and NPAs. A structured search resulted in the inclusion of 49 relevant publications. Limitations of the extant research notwithstanding, some generalizations about shared childrearing can be made. However, many issues relating the taboo of shared childrearing responsibilities remain poorly understood. To break the taboo, future research should further explore the underlying sensitivities.

Introduction

Although parents are arguably the primary caregivers, bringing up children by definition takes place in a social environment consisting of several co-socialization agents such as family members, neighbors, sports coaches and teachers. The quality of the social environment appears to play a very important role in the development of problems such as child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency (De Winter, 2012; Garbarino & Sherman, 1980). A study by Garbarino and Kostelny (1992) demonstrated that a stronger social fabric was associated with lower rates of child maltreatment, i.e., communities with lower rates of child maltreatment had strong informal and formal support networks, whereas communities with higher rates of child maltreatment were characterized by social disorganization and low levels of social cohesion. Despite empirical evidence for social and environmental effects on family functioning, scientific research as well as policy and practice appear to be dominated by the "at-risk model" according to which "dysfunction [...] is mainly seen as the outcome of individual risk factors and pathologies" (De Winter, 2012, p. 25). The risk assessment instruments and interventions that have been developed within this framework tend to focus on the micro-level of the family and on increasing professional efforts to identify and solve problems at an early stage. The dominance of the at-risk model may have hindered the development of other potentially effective approaches aimed at increasing families' well-being (De Winter, 2012).

The Dutch national program *Allemaal opvoeders* (Alop – *Everybody a child-raiser*[5]), aims to broaden the narrow at-risk perspective by focusing on the role of civil society in the upbringing of children and adolescents. The program endorses the view that individual risk factors affect family functioning, but is also based on the hypothesis – supported by empirical evidence – that a strong social fabric is equally important (De Winter, 2012). The current study, which is part of

[5] During the program period, the English translation of *Allemaal opvoeders* was changed into: *Partners in parenting.*

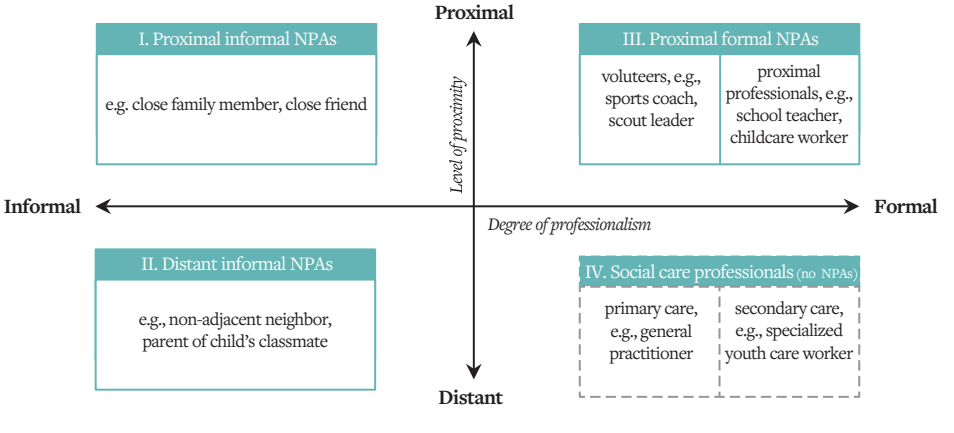
the Alop program, aimed to contribute to a better understanding of civil society's involvement in the upbringing of children and adolescents by providing an overview of the literature on shared childrearing responsibilities between parents and other caregivers, henceforward referred to as nonparental adults (NPAs).

Nonparental adults

The literature consistently indicates that supportive NPAs can contribute to the well-being of both children and parents (e.g., Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Werner, 1993). The term NPAs refers to what these caregivers are *not* – parents – but does not in itself clarify which individuals may fulfill a supportive childrearing role. Some authors use other similar terms such as significant adults (Galbo, 1984), natural mentors (Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992) or VIPs (very important persons) (Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998). All of these terms are umbrella terms describing a wide range of supportive individuals (Sterrett, Jones, McKee, & Kincaid, 2011), from members of the extended family to unrelated adults such as neighbors and teachers (Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush, & Dong, 2003; Scales & Gibbons, 1996). In this overview of the literature on shared responsibilities in the upbringing of children and adolescents we distinguish three categories of supportive NPAs, as shown in Figure 2.1. This distinction is based on the level of proximity (vertical axis) and degree of professionalism (horizontal axis).

The first category are the proximal informal NPAs. NPAs in this category are closely connected to the child and his or her parents through a nonprofessional bond, for example, grandparents and friends. The second category are the distant informal NPAs. NPAs in this category are nonprofessionals who are more loosely connected to the family than the proximal

Figure 2.1. Schematic diagram of the three categories of supportive nonparental adults included in this study.



informal NPAs. Examples of NPAs in this second category are neighbors and the child's classmates' parents. NPAs in the third category – proximal formal NPAs – have some sort of formal status; they are connected to the family by virtue of their specific function or profession. This formal status can be both voluntarily, for example, scout leaders and sports coaches, and professional, for example, teachers and childcare workers.

Figure 2.1 also presents a fourth category of individuals: the social care professionals. We do not reckon these individuals among NPAs and this category falls outside the scope of this study. There is an important difference between the professionals in the third category and the professionals in the fourth category. Despite their formal status, professionals in the third category are naturally part of the family's social environment; because of their proximal relationships, all parents and children have frequent contact with professionals such as teachers and childcare workers (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling (RMO) – Dutch Council for Social Development, 2012). Professionals in the fourth category, on the contrary, are not naturally part of the family's social environment and their relationship with families is more distant. Contact with these professionals may sometimes be necessary and may be an important source of support for a child and his or her parents, but – for most families – it is fair to say that contact with social care professionals is neither inevitable nor frequent (RMO, 2012).

The inclusion of (proximal) professionals in a study that is part of a program on enhancing civil society involvement in bringing up children may seem peculiar. Had we followed the common definition of civil society, we would have restricted our study to voluntary relationships, i.e., the division of responsibilities between parents and informal NPAs. However, we decided to include proximal professionals in this study, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on the willingness to share responsibilities in the upbringing of children and adolescents. The inclusion of proximal professionals was based on the assumption that they can fulfill an important supportive childrearing role, both directly, by taking the role of supportive NPAs themselves, and indirectly, by creating opportunities for parents to meet and exchange experiences with other parents and NPAs (Fisher & Gruescu, 2011). It should be noted, however, that this implies that proximal professionals assume a role that extends beyond their primary (professional) responsibility. Teachers, for example, whose primary responsibility is to teach academic skills, may only be able to fulfill a direct and indirect supportive childrearing role when they consider themselves as true partners in nonacademic aspects of childrearing as well (RMO, 2012).

In summary, this study will focus on the international literature on parents' and NPAs' perspectives on sharing responsibilities for childrearing, using the following definition of NPAs: *supportive related or unrelated individuals with informal or formal status who are naturally part of the family's social environment*. Which individuals fall into each of the three categories of supportive NPAs, may differ from family to family. For example, for some families, neighbors may fulfill a

more important supportive childrearing role than family members; in these families, neighbors might fall into the first category, whereas family members might fall into the second category or might not even be part of the family's supportive network at all.

This study

Despite the empirical evidence for the benefits of NPAs' involvement in childrearing, some literature suggests that it is taboo for parents and NPAs to share childrearing responsibilities (Scales et al., 2001, 2004). To date there has been no systematic overview of international evidence on the sensitivities underlying this taboo. Although a review by Scales and Gibbons (1996) provided insight into the differences between parental and nonparental childrearing roles, it did not explore parental and nonparental perspectives on childrearing roles. The current study aimed to improve understanding of parents' and NPAs' perspectives on shared childrearing by focusing on two objectives. First, we aimed to present an overview of the international literature on possible explanations for parents' and NPAs' perspectives toward shared childrearing. Second, we aimed to explore childrearing roles further by providing an analysis of the existing evidence on the division of childrearing responsibilities.

The topic of this study is closely linked to studies on parenting support. There has been considerable research in this field, for example, on (informal) parenting support as a protective factor, on availability of parenting support and on satisfaction with parenting support. However, it is important to note that the focus of this study was more specific. Rather than focusing on parenting support, we explored parents' and NPAs' attitudes to receiving and giving support in childrearing. This is relevant to the ongoing debate about enhancing civil society's involvement in bringing up children and the development of parenting support activities.

Method

Search procedure

Four search strategies were used to identify relevant publications. First, a search of three electronic databases was performed: ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), PsycINFO and Scopus (subject area: Social Sciences & Humanities). Second, the reference list from each publication already included in this study was examined to uncover other potentially relevant publications. Third, in an effort to identify relevant "gray literature" an Internet search was conducted. Finally, experts from youth institutes in Flanders (Flemish Center for Expertise on Parenting Support; EXPOO), Germany (Deutsches Jugendinstitut) and France (Institut National de la Jeunesse et de l'Éducation Populaire) were contacted by email to identify publications which might have been missed by the other search strategies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Publications in English and Dutch from 1970 until September 2013 were eligible for inclusion in the study. A wide range of search terms was used, including: exclusive parenting, shared responsibility, childrearing ideology, significant adults, natural mentors, village, authoritative community, collective socialization and collaborative childrearing. Various types of publications were retrieved in the search procedure such as articles, reports, books, and dissertations. We included both empirical and non-empirical publications. The latter type of publications is potentially an important source of insight into possible accounts of perspectives on shared childrearing, for example, explanations related to childrearing policy or to cultural aspects of childrearing ideology. For the same reason, we did not limit our search to publications on childrearing in Western societies, but also included relevant publications on childrearing in non-Western societies or on childrearing in migrant families living in Western countries.

Selection criteria

Publications had to meet the following content criteria to be included in the study. First, publications had to be focused on possible explanations for parental and nonparental perspectives on shared childrearing or on the division of childrearing responsibilities between parents and NPAs. We excluded publications that focused only on the supportive role of NPAs in the upbringing of children without explicitly addressing factors related to shared childrearing responsibility. Second, publications had to include parent or NPA perspectives not just child or adolescent perspectives.

Results

Our search of the three electronic databases yielded 60 potentially relevant publications. After further reading 39 of these publications were included in the study. Examination of the reference lists of these publications resulted in the inclusion of an additional 3 relevant publications. Our Internet search yielded another 7 publications and email communication with foreign youth institutes resulted in the identification of one potentially relevant book. We excluded this publication after scanning the table of contents and reading an online book review, because it did not meet the inclusion criteria. Altogether, 49 publications – 39 empirical and 10 non-empirical – were included in the current study (see Figure 2.2).

This results section is structured according to our two study objectives. First, we present existing research on possible explanations for parents' and NPAs' perspectives on shared childrearing. Second, we explore parental and nonparental roles in more detail by presenting what has already been written about the division of childrearing responsibilities. Table 2.1 (see Appendix A) provides a summary of the main characteristics of the publications included in the current study, presented in alphabetical order.

Explanations for parental and nonparental perspectives on shared childrearing

The search resulted in the identification of 25 publications on possible explanations for parents' and NPAs' attitudes toward sharing childrearing responsibilities. We divided the explanatory factors mentioned in these publications into two categories: cultural explanations and contextual explanations.

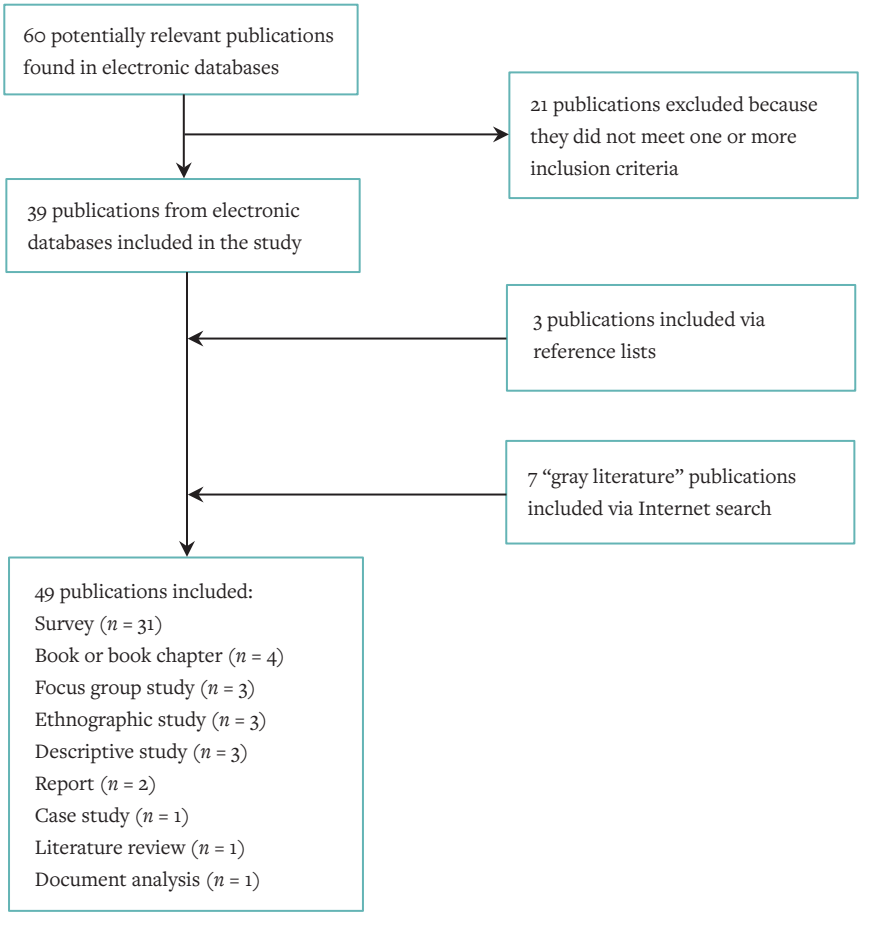
Cultural explanations

The publications within this category were divided into two subcategories: first, publications focused on explanations related to childrearing ideology in specific societies and regions and second, publications focused on the possible influence of cultural background.

Childrearing ideology. A descriptive study by Van Daalen (2010) provided an historical overview of childrearing ideology in the Netherlands. Van Daalen suggested that although the male breadwinner model seems to have been at least partly replaced by a dual-earner model, the historic Dutch tradition of the nuclear family taking sole responsibility for childrearing may still be "anchored both in the institutions of the welfare state and in the mentality of the people" (p. 351). This may have hindered the partial transfer of childrearing responsibilities to other caregivers (Van Daalen, 2010). Three publications by Scales and colleagues (2001, 2003, 2004) seem to be consistent with Van Daalen's conclusions. Like Van Daalen (2010), Scales and colleagues found that the Western ideology – in which the nuclear family is dominant – discouraged people from sharing responsibilities. Although many American adults appear to believe that it is important to be involved in the upbringing of other people's children, "the social permission and expectation more commonly experienced in a true village" seem to be absent (Scales et al., 2001, p. 711). Similarly, an older book chapter by McCartney and Phillips (1988) argued that Western childrearing ideology dominated childrearing practice. According to these authors the sensitivities surrounding shared childrearing are "a cultural byproduct that reflects and in turn promotes current American values" (p. 158).

A study by Feldman and Yirmiya (1986) demonstrated that the prevailing childrearing ideology may affect mothers' ideas on parental and nonparental roles and responsibilities. Their results showed that mothers in Israeli kibbutzim, where there is an ideology of shared childrearing, perceived NPAs to be as influential as mothers, although they believed in some role division. Mothers in kibbutzim believed their role was mainly nurturing and that the role of other caregivers was mainly didactic. Town-dwelling Israeli mothers, with an ideology of sole childrearing responsibility, believed that overall, mothers have more influence than NPAs (Feldman & Yirmiya, 1986). A study by Maital and Bornstein (2003) drew similar conclusions. These authors suggested that the nurturer-teacher division may be characteristic not only of the childrearing ideology in kibbutzim, but of every setting where mothers and NPAs share childrearing responsibilities.

Figure 2.2. Flow chart for the structured literature search.



Donner (1999) and Bowden Templeton and colleagues (2008) studied childrearing in societies with an ideology of shared childrearing. Donner (1999) studied the family system in a Polynesian society and compared it to the Western family system, showing that most Polynesian adults – both parents and nonparents – are involved in the upbringing of other people's children. Polynesian adults viewed the Western ideal of sole parental responsibility as a "lack [of] compassion" for other people's children (p. 703). According to the author, current Western policy – with its focus on the nuclear family – may be partly responsible for the maintenance of this ideal (see *Policy influences*). The author pleaded for a broader policy taking into account the influence of nonparental caregivers (Donner, 1999). Bowden Templeton and

colleagues (2008) studied the childrearing ideas and practices of parents in the Appalachia, a U.S. region. All respondents – parents, adolescents and NPAs – believed that childrearing was a community responsibility and thought that all adults in the community could contribute to adolescents' well-being. These ideas seem to be put into practice; the interviews revealed that community members provided childrearing support for each other, for example, babysitting and transporting children. According to the respondents, "living in a small community" combined with "having known each other for such a long time" (p. 61) contributed to their beliefs and practices on collective childrearing responsibilities (Bowden Templeton, Bush, Lash, Robinson, & Gale, 2008).

Cultural background. As well as studies looking at childrearing ideology as a possible explanatory factor, other studies have explored whether parents' and NPAs' cultural background is associated with ideas about sharing childrearing responsibility. Gordon, Nichter and Henriksen (2013) conducted interviews with a small sample of black fathers ($N = 7$) living in the U.S. The fathers were positive about the idea that "it takes a village to raise a child", because most of them had benefited from childhood relationships with NPAs such as extended family members and the church. The fathers explained that NPAs provided them with "additional role models and a broader, more solid foundation" (p. 157).

A study of Caribbean immigrant families living in Britain showed that sharing responsibilities with extended family members was a reflection of cultural beliefs rather than economic necessity. Grandmothers, in particular, appeared to support their adult children by providing – mainly practical – childcare, mostly from a personal desire to be engaged in the upbringing of their grandchildren (Chamberlain, 2003). Another study focusing on immigrant perceptions of shared childrearing was conducted by Obeng (2007). This study demonstrated that although most African immigrant parents in the U.S. preferred informal over formal childcare, the majority took their children to a daycare center. The interviews revealed that parents perceived daycare centers – where multiple childcare workers took care of their child – as a form of childcare that corresponded to their tradition of shared childrearing (Obeng, 2007).

Cultural background as possible explanatory factor was also highlighted in a study of childcare arrangements in urban black and white American families which explored how parents shared specific childcare and parenting responsibilities (child management, setting rules, discipline, and providing children with emotional support). Both black and white families reported sharing these responsibilities with others, often with the other parent or stepparent or grandmother, but also with people outside the household. Black families were more likely to share responsibilities with extended family members and people from outside the household. It is important to note, however, that this result may be partly explained by differences in family structure as well. In this sample black caregivers were more likely than white caregivers to be

single-parent families; the authors stated, "Black caregivers to some degree may be creating parenting systems that fill some of the gaps due to parental absence" (Hunter, Pearson, Ialongo, & Kellam, 1998, p. 349). Another study of informal support networks for different groups of American parents showed that European Americans had more neighbors involved in practical support, whereas African Americans relied more heavily on family for practical support. There were no significant differences with respect to emotional support. According to the authors, these patterns of support may be related to cultural background, but also to social class and the availability of support, for example, how nearby the family's relatives live (Marshall, Noonan, McCartney, Marx, & Keefe, 2001).

Kurrien and Vo (2004) studied the concept of coparenting in a sample of ethnic minority parents in the U.S., specifically parents with an Asian background. A study by Jones and colleagues (2007) focused on coparenting in a sample of parents with an African American background. The authors of both studies argued for a re-conceptualization of the concept of coparenting on the ground that a narrow definition of coparenting as the division of childrearing responsibilities between parents in intact or divorced families fails to account for the supportive role played by NPAs in immigrant families. According to Jones and colleagues (2007), it would be worthwhile to "broaden the definition of 'family' to include the other adults and family members who may be involved in parenting" (p. 679). This may increase recognition of the potential influences of NPAs on children raised in families with an immigrant background (Jones, Zalot, Foster, Sterrett, & Chester, 2007; Kurrien & Vo, 2004).

Finally, a study by Kakinuma (1993), which examined parenting magazines, revealed differences in the parenting attitudes of Japanese and American mothers. Japanese mothers appeared to use the magazines as a platform for exchange with other parents, whereas American mothers appeared to use the magazines as a source of information. More than half of the articles in Japanese magazines were based on mothers' input; the comparison figure for U.S. magazines was less than 10%. According to the author, the differences in parental attitudes may "reflect differences in the childrearing traditions of both countries. Japanese childrearing is more communally oriented and sharing plays an important role. American childrearing, however, is a more private affair, where parents are responsible for gathering proper information" (Kakinuma, 1993, p. 235).

Contextual explanations

Publications in this second category of possible explanations for parental and nonparental perspectives on shared childrearing responsibilities were divided into three subcategories: neighborhood characteristics, societal influences and policy influences. Two reports by the RMO (2008 I, 2009) focused on both societal and policy influences and will therefore be discussed in both subcategories.

Neighborhood characteristics. Kegler and colleagues (2005) explored the link between U.S. parents' perceptions of neighborhood characteristics and various developmental assets, including the availability of an NPA role model. The results showed that neighborhood safety and informal social control were related to the existence of NPA role models. The authors explained this as follows: "if neighborhoods are perceived as safe, youth may spend more time outside the home and, as a result, have increased opportunities to form positive relationships with peer and nonparental adult role models" (p. 393).

A study by Burchinal and colleagues (2008) also pointed out the importance of neighborhood characteristics as a predictor of parents' willingness to share childrearing responsibilities. Their results demonstrated that in U.S. neighborhoods with higher sense of collective efficacy – where neighbors share values and trust each other – parents were more likely to choose day center care or informal childcare by non-relatives rather than relying exclusively on parental care or childcare by relatives (Burchinal, Nelson, Carlson, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008).

Finally, Bould (2003) explored the existence of "caring neighborhoods" – neighborhoods with a sense of shared responsibility for childrearing – in the U.S. Neighborhoods were classified as caring if neighbors reported that they could talk about problems with the neighborhood youth, would know about child neglect or abuse, and would try to do something about this other than calling the police. The study revealed that caring neighborhoods do exist in modern suburbs. Three background factors appeared to be important for the development and maintenance of caring neighborhoods. First, in terms of socio-economic status and family structure caring neighborhoods appeared to be inhabited by white, middle-class, male-breadwinner families. Second, caring neighborhoods attached little value to privacy. Third, caring neighborhoods had high residential stability (Bould, 2003).

Societal influences. Two reports by the RMO (2008 I, 2009) provided possible societal explanations for the diminishing of childrearing networks around nuclear families. Societal developments such as the disappearance of neighborhood facilities and greater distance between living and workplace environments have meant that nuclear families are less embedded in supportive social networks, and family and friends appear to have become less obvious co-socialization agents. According to the RMO, this may have contributed to Dutch parents' increased reliance on formal parenting support. Similar conclusions were drawn by Benson (2006) who concluded that societal developments such as age segregation and "the breakdown of trust" may be partly responsible for the gap between nonparental "belief and action" with respect to involvement with other people's children (p. 212).

Johnson Frankenberg, Holmqvist, and Rubenson (2013) also studied the influence of societal developments such as urbanization and globalization. Their study focused specifically on Tanzanian caregivers' – parents and grandparents – perspectives on shared childrearing

responsibilities. Focus group discussions revealed that the ideal for childrearing seems to have shifted from communal responsibility to parents as primary caregivers. However, the results suggested that communal influences on children persist in environments where houses are built close together. The authors stated that although there appeared to be newly formed boundaries between parental and communal responsibilities, these seemed rather "fluid" (p. 9), and that due to globalization and media influences members of a community may not share the same values, making collective childrearing "a delicate issue" (Johnson Frankenberg et al., 2013, p. 10).

Policy influences. Two previously mentioned reports (RMO, 2008 I, 2009) described how Dutch national and local government policy may have contributed to the maintenance of the diminished childrearing networks around nuclear families. According to the RMO, governments try to fill the gap created by the declining capacity of the social environment. However, they may not be able to compensate for the loss of social embeddedness and the more they try to, the less NPAs and parents may actively try to share responsibilities (RMO, 2008 I, 2009).

A study by Kyriacou and colleagues (2013) provided insight into the possible influence of current Western education policy on teachers' ability and willingness to take a more active role in childrearing. The authors studied the perspective of English and Norwegian prospective teachers on the roles of parents, schools and other professional youth organizations in dealing with pupils' problems. The results revealed that prospective teachers thought that schools should take first responsibility for some areas of personal and social concern, namely bullying and pupil misbehavior. However, the authors also speculated about barriers to schools taking responsibility in more non-academic areas; in the current policy climate schools are expected to focus on pupils' development in literacy and numeracy skills and form partnerships with professional organizations to deal with pupils' problems. This overreliance on experts may discourage schools from taking a leading role in more areas of non-academic childrearing – or relieve them of responsibility in this area (Kyriacou, Avramidis, Stephens, & Werler, 2013). Bakker and Van Oenen (2007) also discussed the impact of Western education policy and came to similar conclusions. Schools may be wary of broadening their non-academic functions, because they fear this might come at the expense of their core responsibility: pupils' development in literacy and numeracy skills (Bakker & Van Oenen, 2007). In summary, an already crowded curriculum, combined with the current emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills and overdependence on (care) professionals might explain teachers' restraint in taking a more active role as secondary caregivers.

Division of childrearing responsibilities between parents and NPAs

The search retrieved 24 publications on the division of childrearing responsibilities between parents and NPAs. A few of these publications were fairly general, but the majority focused on the division of responsibilities between parents and specific categories of informal or formal

NPAs, for example, grandparents or teachers. Some of the publications explored the parent perspective, some the NPA perspective, and others looked at both parent and NPA perspectives.

Shared responsibility between parents and NPAs

In a survey of 1090 Dutch parents[6], we found ambivalence about sharing responsibilities for childrearing (Kesselring, De Winter, Horjus, Van de Schoot, & Van Yperen, 2012). On the one hand, a majority of parents reported that they expected NPAs not to interfere in the upbringing of their children. On the other hand, a majority of parents also believed that NPAs can help out with childrearing. The results suggested that parents accept NPAs' involvement, but draw a line between "helping out" and "interfering". To explore the contradictions raised by the quantitative data, 100 parents were asked to explain their answers in more detail. These qualitative data revealed that most parents thought NPAs' main role should be correcting children's bad or dangerous behavior. We concluded that more research was needed to specify how parents draw the line between their own and other people's responsibilities. As we stated: "Through focus group interviews[7], we hope to gain a more detailed understanding of how parents define childrearing, which NPAs they perceive as significant partners in parenting, and how they expect these NPAs to support them" (Kesselring et al., 2012, p. 934).

Ambivalence about shared responsibility for childrearing was also evident in a study by Market Response (2010). Market Response was commissioned by the former Dutch Ministry for Youth and Families to conduct a survey on the attitudes of nearly 800 adult respondents – parents and nonparents – toward civil society's involvement in childrearing. A majority of the respondents found it acceptable and desirable to reprimand or compliment other people's children. However, the respondents seemed reluctant to reprimand other people's children for fear of attracting a negative reaction from the parents or being thought to implicitly accusing the parents of negligence. Although a majority of the parents indicated that they would appreciate it if NPAs were to reprimand their children, they believed "actual childrearing tasks" (not further specified) were parents' responsibility. In addition, most parents indicated that although they appreciate it, they do not *expect* NPAs to take an active role in bringing up their children. Respondents' reflections on vignettes suggested that both parents and nonparents took their role in bringing up other people's children seriously. Almost all respondents reported that they would correct children's dangerous or annoying behavior. However, there were situations, for example, a neighbor child seemed to be unhappy or was bullied by other neighborhood children, where the majority of the respondents said they would not step in. The results also showed that respondents believed it was important to be a good role model, for example, wait until the traffic lights have changed to green. In summary, the results of the Market Response study were consistent with our study (Kesselring et al., 2012), suggesting that the involvement of NPAs is

[6] See chapter 4.

[7] The focus group study is described in Chapter 5.

thought desirable, but comes with conditions.

Conditions in which shared childrearing was acceptable and desirable were also found in a study by Uttal (1996), who interviewed employed U.S. mothers about the meaning of childcare, provided by informal babysitters such as relatives, or professionals such as daycare workers. In interviews mothers talked about "what they expect their childcare providers to do for their children and what they defined as the boundaries of that care" (p. 298). Three different ways of viewing childcare were identified from the interviews: as custodial care, surrogate care or coordinated care. Mothers who took a *custodial care* perspective saw themselves as primary socialization agents and believed childcare providers' role should be limited to supervising their children and meeting their direct physical and emotional needs. These mothers (9 out of 31) thought that childcare providers did not have a role as substitute parents and should only have limited influence on the social and moral development of their children. Mothers who viewed childcare as custodial wanted to stay in control, even if they were at work, for example, by giving instructions by telephone. Only a few mothers (3 out of 31) believed childcare to be *surrogate care*. These mothers saw their child's caregivers as primary caregivers and thought of childcare and childrearing as similar activities, or – more emphatically – felt that childcare could be a substitute for mothering. A majority of the mothers (19 out of 31) adhered to the *coordinated care* view. These mothers felt that responsibility for childrearing was shared between them and their child's caregivers. These mothers perceived childcare "as an extension of home, and vice versa" (p. 305); good communication with childcare providers and shared childrearing philosophy, values and practice appeared to be especially important to them (Uttal, 1996). In summary, in line with our own study and the Market Response study, Uttal's study showed that mothers tend to view childrearing as a shared responsibility, but most of them set conditions, for example, with respect to communication and agreed practice. It is important to note that the three views that emerged from the interviews do not necessarily represent mothers' preferred division of childcare responsibilities, rather they correspond to their understanding of how they share responsibility for childrearing in practice (Uttal, 1996).

Edwards and Gillies (2004) studied U.K. parents' norms about sources of various types of parenting support. They found that although parents may have been receiving less informal support than in the past (for various reasons, for example, families are less close-knit nowadays, divorce is more prevalent, and extended families are more geographically dispersed), parents nevertheless identified relatives and friends as the main source of emotional support and advice on children's behavior. In addition, there appeared to be consensus amongst the respondents that relatives were the most appropriate source of practical support. The parents seemed to regard professionals as secondary or additional source of practical support and advice on health and education (Edwards & Gillies, 2004). Although this study did not focus directly on parents' attitudes toward sharing responsibilities, it demonstrated that parents rely on informal and

formal NPAs for different types of support. In a qualitative follow-up study by Gillies (2004), a majority of the parents interviewed indicated they were both recipients and providers of parenting support from and to family, friends and neighbors. This reciprocal support tended to be mainly practical, for example, picking up children from school. In line with the results of the earlier quantitative study, parents were most likely to turn to family and close friends for emotional support. Although emotional support was much appreciated, "advice was more generally mistrusted and associated with interference" (p. 255). This may have been especially true of formal advice as many parents indicated that "they had gained useful tips through sharing experiences with other parents" (p. 256).

Childrearing roles and responsibilities of specific groups of NPAs

Grandparents. Mason, May and Clarke (2007) studied the meaning of contemporary grandparenthood from the perspective of grandparents in the U.K. Like some of the studies discussed above, this study found evidence of ambivalence. There was high degree of consensus amongst the respondents about the importance of two contradictory norms: "not interfering" and "being there" (p. 701). Grandparents mentioned two reasons for the importance of the no interference norm. First, they believed that it was not good for children to have their grandparents openly question their parents' authority or provide inconsistent messages. Second, grandparents stated that they associated interference with bad parenting of their adult children; they felt that a good parent should allow his or her adult children to choose their own life, implying a freedom "to bring up their own children in their own way" (p. 691). However, in practice, recognition of their adult children's parental authority was sometimes in conflict with the other norm of good grandparenting, "being there", which seemed to be strongly related to love, interest and a feeling of responsibility for grandchildren. The results suggested that grandparents were constantly trying to find a balance between the two norms; they tried to refrain from interfering too much whilst at the same time trying to be a constant, supportive presence (Mason et al., 2007).

Budini Gattai and Musatti (1999) also wrote about grandparental involvement in childcare. The study, based on a sample of 30 Italian grandmothers, reported that grandmothers believed that parents had final responsibility for their children's upbringing. Grandmothers seemed to play the role of substitute parents if the parents were absent, but as soon as the parents returned, grandmothers "can return to a purely affective relationship" (p. 38). Some grandmothers described their role as "being left with the more enjoyable part" of childrearing (p. 38). Although most grandmothers saw their limited responsibility – compared to the experience of being a mother – as a relief, this role division may put them in a vulnerable position, because parents may decide to delegate their authority to the grandmothers temporarily, but they may also withdraw it. Some grandmothers indicated that this makes them hesitant to discuss their doubts and feelings about their children's methods and style of childrearing. Nevertheless,

some grandmothers reported conflicts with their adult children about the upbringing of their grandchildren, for example, some adult children were frustrated with the grandmother's indulgent attitude toward the grandchildren, whereas some grandmothers were ambivalent about the greater familiarity between parents and children in contemporary society (Budini Gattai & Musatti, 1999).

Mentors. Spencer and colleagues (2011) studied parents' hopes and expectations of formally organized youth-mentor relationships. The study, based on a small ethnically diverse sample ($N = 13$) of American parents, showed that parents wanted mentors to be positive role models and confidants for their children. They also wanted mentors to provide children with experiences and opportunities different from those they and other NPAs in the child's network could offer. Parents thought it was important that mentors respected their parental guidelines. This seems to contribute to parental trust in the mentor relationship (Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, & Lewis, 2011). On the basis of this study, we may tentatively conclude that parents appreciate specific aspects of the mentor's role that are mainly seen as additional to the parent's role.

Playground workers. Konijn (2008) studied Dutch playground workers' opinions about the function of playgrounds in preventing problems in children and young people. The results suggested that playground workers shy away from questions about the preventive role of playground activities. Respondents indicated that they saw the playground as a safe place for all children to play, and as a meeting place, not as a place for education or as an important place to signalize problems (Konijn, 2008). It appears that playground workers did not feel they had a direct role in childrearing, but they were perhaps comfortable fulfilling an indirect role by creating the conditions in which parents and NPAs can meet.

Teachers. Most of the publications on the division of responsibilities between parents and teachers focused on shared responsibility with respect to a specific childrearing topic, for example, health education, but some focused on shared parent-teacher responsibility in general. An example of the latter is the study by Lindle and Boyd (1991) of childrearing partnerships between U.S. parents and teachers. This study demonstrated that parents "were not willing to relinquish responsibility, but rather were interested in support from the school in meeting those responsibilities" (p. 335). One way schools could provide this support is by organizing social activities that give parents the opportunity to meet other parents, for example, a parent support group where parents can discuss childrearing issues. This study also revealed that parents were "ambivalent about the complementariness" of the childrearing roles of parents and teachers (p. 334). Parents wanted to be supported in their parenting role, yet they experienced some of the teachers' childrearing actions as an intrusion on their parental territory, for example,

a teacher disciplining a child without informing the parents. This study showed that teachers faced a challenge: to support parents without encroaching their territory (Lindle & Boyd, 1991). Another study of parent-teacher partnerships in the U.S. – although it was based on a small sample – showed that both parents and teachers believed teachers to be the "education and child development experts" and expected them to take the *advice givers* role (Cheatham & Otrosky, 2011, p. 29). Parents mostly took the role of *advice recipients* and parent-to-teacher advice was rare. The authors concluded that due to this hierarchy, parents' expertise remained unrecognized. Forsberg (2007) also reported on the expert roles of parents and teachers, but in contrast to the study by Cheatham and Otrosky (2011), Forsberg argued that the division of responsibilities is "negotiated in terms of expertise" (p. 286). From interviews with Swedish parents and analysis of correspondence (school letters) between school and caregivers, Forsberg concluded that in educational matters both parents and teachers saw teachers as the experts, but when it came to childrearing issues, including children's behavior in school, the roles changed and parents were recognized as the experts. This nurturer-teacher division is somewhat similar to the pattern described by Maital and Bornstein (2003) in their study of shared childrearing in kibbutzim.

Åman-Back and Björkqvist (2007) studied Finnish parents' and teachers' perspectives on shared responsibility for a variety of skills. Both parents and teachers indicated that they shared responsibility for teaching socio-emotional skills (e.g., conflict resolution and sense of justice) and for sexual health education and drug education. Fathers were more likely than mothers to agree that teachers had greater responsibility in these domains. A study of a sample of Swedish parents had a more specific focus: parental perspectives on parents' and teachers' roles in various aspects of health education. Parents considered some health topics to be solely or mainly their responsibility (e.g., appropriate clothing, and adequate sleep and rest), but other topics were regarded as a joint responsibility, shared between parents and schools (e.g., bullying and tobacco use). Parents from rural areas and younger parents were more likely to think that responsibility for a health education issue should be shared equally between parents and teachers (Sormunen, Tossavainen, & Turunen, 2012). One Canadian and two Australian studies dealt specifically with sexual health education. The results of these studies suggested that parents believed that responsibility for sexual health education was shared between parents and teachers; nonetheless, parents appeared to see themselves primarily responsible and thought the teacher's role was supplementary. Parents expected teachers to inform them about the curriculum, to involve them and to provide them with information about communication strategies they could use in sexual education at home (Berne et al., 2000; Dyson & Smith, 2012; Weaver, Byers, Sears, Cohen, & Randall, 2002).

A study by Wyman, Price, Jordan, Dake, and Telljohann (2006) demonstrated that U.S. parents thought another health-related topic, smoking prevention, was also a joint responsibility of parents and teachers. Again, parents wanted to be involved and informed. In contrast to

Åman-Back and Björkqvist's (2007) findings, mothers were more likely than fathers to agree that teachers should have a role in the prevention of smoking.

Finally, an Irish study on discussing death and grief with children, showed that parents were positive about programs discussing death and grief in schools. A majority of the teachers (62%) and half the parents thought that discussing death and grief was best done by parents; a minority of both respondent groups thought that work by teachers on this topic could potentially interfere with parental responsibility (McGovern & Berry, 2000).

Childcare workers. A descriptive study by Verzaro-Lawrence (1981) shed light on potential stressors in the relationship between mothers and childcare workers such as parental anxiety about childcare workers' judgment of their parenting skills. As a more recent study by Fothergill (2013) confirmed, mothers seem to struggle with feelings of anxiety. In addition, Fothergill's study showed that mothers' feelings about childcare centers may be influenced by messages about formal childcare such as relatives', friends' and media (dis)approval of abdicating of parental responsibilities. Furthermore, Fothergill showed that the "intensive mothering" (p. 25) ideology, which holds that the best childcare is provided by mothers, seems to influence mothers' feelings about formal childcare. To comply with this ideology, mothers appeared to spend a great amount of time and effort, including calling references, on finding a good quality daycare center for their child (Fothergill, 2013).

Singer (1992) studied Dutch parents' perspectives on their relationships with childcare workers. Parents reported that it was very important to build a relationship of mutual trust with childcare workers. Most parents in the study never received feedback from childcare workers, although they gave feedback to childcare workers. A possible explanation for this is that parents are regarded as primary caregivers who are only delegating a part of their responsibility to childcare workers. Parents may feel that their parental responsibility includes making sure that childcare workers take good care of their children (Singer, 1992).

In a study of Hungarian parents' perspectives on what children should learn at home and in daycare centers, parents indicated that parents and childcare workers had different responsibilities. Parents perceived both roles "as different, but complementary" (p. 277). Parents believed it was their responsibility to teach their children good manners and other values, but that cognitive and social skills should be learned in daycare centers (Brayfield & Korintus, 2011).

Discussion

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to present an overview of the international literature on parents' and NPAs' willingness to share responsibility for the upbringing of children. This study had two objectives. First, presenting existing explanatory accounts of parental and

nonparental attitudes to shared childrearing. Second, exploring the childrearing roles of parents and NPAs by analyzing existing literature on the division of responsibilities. Forty-nine relevant publications were identified in a structured search of the international literature. However, methodological problems limit the strength of our conclusions. Nearly half the empirical studies included in this study were based on a small sample (see Table 2.1). In addition, use of different data gathering methods affects the comparability of the empirical studies included.

Our study has highlighted some limitations of the existing research. A considerable number of studies focused on "proximal formal NPAs" (third category in Figure 2.1), especially on teachers (see Table 2.1). Only a relatively small number of studies investigated the role of informal NPAs, particularly the NPAs we classified as "informal distant" (second category in Figure 2.1) such as neighbors and parents of the child's classmates. Future research should investigate the role of this category of NPAs because it is at the heart of civil society. These NPAs are not connected to parents and children by familial or other close ties, or by a specific role or function. On the contrary, the involvement of this group of informal distant NPAs reflects the voluntary associations that are so characteristic of civil society. Programs that aim to enhance civil society's involvement in bringing up children will only take root if we gain a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities assumed by "ordinary citizens".

Despite the methodological weaknesses and limitations of the existing research, some generalizations about shared childrearing can be made. Some of the publications relevant to our first study objective suggested that the sensitivities surrounding shared childrearing in Western societies may stem from the prevailing cultural ideology (McCartney & Phillips, 1988; Scales et al., 2001, 2003, 2004; Van Daalen, 2010). In Western societies there appears to be a historical tradition that childrearing is solely the responsibility of the nuclear family; this tradition may be embedded not only in the mentality of citizens – parents and nonparents – but also in youth and family policy. Nevertheless, the concept of shared responsibility is definitely acknowledged. However, the concept of shared responsibility seems mainly to be reflected in people's *beliefs* rather than their *actions* (Scales et al., 2001, 2004). Encouraging public debate – amongst parents and NPAs, and policy makers and professionals – on norms and expectations related to shared childrearing might help to align beliefs and actions. Such a debate may contribute to our understanding of factors hindering the partial transfer of parental childrearing responsibilities to NPAs and to the breakdown of barriers to shared childrearing.

Although limited in scope, the data presented here indicated that some neighborhood characteristics may be related to citizens' willingness to commit themselves to being part of the neighborhood children's lives (Bould, 2003; Burchinal et al., 2008; Kegler et al., 2005). It appears to be important that neighbors have some sense of collective efficacy for children, i.e., "shared expectations and mutual engagement by adults in the active support and social control of children" (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999, p. 635). Neighborhood activities may help to foster a neighborhood climate favorable to developing collective efficacy for children (Kesselring, De

Winter, Horjus, & Van Yperen, 2013). If neighbors participate in collective activities, they get to know each other better. It is conceivable that this increase in public familiarity (Blokland, 2008) lowers the threshold for keeping an eye on each other's children and speaking out about expectations. Proximal professionals can play a role in organizing neighborhood activities, for example, by making a room in a school or Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin (CJG – Youth and Family Center) available for people to meet as a group. In line with the findings of Lindle and Boyd (1991), this type of facilitative activity may provide parents with childrearing support without requiring that they relinquish their parental responsibility. As described in the introduction of this chapter, proximal professionals' willingness to fulfill a supportive childrearing role – whether direct or indirect – is linked to their perception of their role (RMO, 2012). For some, an adjustment to the way they think about their role may be required. However, proximal professionals may only be able to make this adjustment if governments and managers of professional organizations give them license to assume a role in childrearing that goes beyond their primary responsibilities.

Our second study objective was to explore parental and nonparental roles in childrearing by focusing on research into the division of childrearing responsibilities. This is clearly a sensitive issue; nevertheless, multiple studies have demonstrated that both parents and NPAs are willing to share responsibilities. Parents and NPAs appear to believe that sharing responsibility can be worthwhile. NPAs seem to take their role as secondary caregivers seriously; they also seem to be aware of the danger of seeming to intrude. For parents staying in control appears to be important. Parents place great importance on communication and shared values and practice in childrearing; they expect NPAs to inform and involve them in their childrearing actions. Furthermore, some of the studies provided evidence for the existence of separate "territories of responsibility", for example, teachers may be the experts in the educational domain whilst parents are the experts in the childrearing domain.

Some limitations of this study must be acknowledged. Our search in the electronic databases may not have identified all relevant publications for various reasons. First, our search was limited to publications written in English or Dutch. Second, given the breadth of our study we cannot guarantee that all relevant publications were identified, although we used a wide range of search terms. However, by using additional search strategies – examination of reference lists, a "gray literature" search and email communication with experts in international youth institutes – we may have compensated for these potential problems with the search of the electronic databases. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study has provided insight into parental and nonparental perspectives on shared childrearing and on the division of roles between parents and NPAs. However, many aspects of the taboo on sharing childrearing responsibilities remain poorly understood. To break this taboo, future research is needed to improve understanding of the underlying sensitivities.

Appendix A

Table 2.1. Summary of the characteristics of the publications included in the study (*N* = 49, in alphabetical order).

Reference	Content area	Publication type	Sample	Main conclusion
Åman-Back et al. (2007)	School involvement in non-academic childrearing	Questionnaires	1.107 parents and 123 teachers from Finland	Respondents agreed they share responsibility for teaching a variety of non-academic skills
Bakker et al. (2007)	School involvement in non-academic childrearing	Book chapter	-	Current education policy creates barriers that hold teachers back from non-academic topics
Benson (2006)	Approach for community involvement in childrearing	Book	-	Author makes recommendations for shift toward an "all kids are our kids" norm
Berne et al. (2000)	School involvement in sexual health education	Focus groups (FG)	19 FG with 6-12 parents of secondary students in Australia (exact N unknown)	Parents appreciate teachers' involvement, it makes sexual education at home easier
Bould (2003)	Characteristics of caring neighborhoods	Interviews	141 parents from 47 U.S. neighborhoods (3 per neighborhood, living in different households)	Caring neighborhoods have specific characteristics, e.g., privacy is little valued
Bowden T. et al. (2008)	Childrearing in a specific region (Appalachia)	Interviews	46 adolescents, parents and NPAs living in the Appalachia (U.S. region)	Community characteristics may influence beliefs & practices on collective childrearing
Brayfield et al. (2011)	Childrearing role of childcare workers	Questionnaires	494 Hungarian parents; 89% mothers, rest mainly fathers, few grandmothers & guardians	Respondents see roles of childcare workers as "different, but complementary" (p. 277)

Reference	Content area	Publication type	Sample	Main conclusion
Budini Gattai et al. (1999)	Childrearing role of grandmothers	Interviews	30 Italian grandmothers	Grandparental involvement is valuable for all parties, but surrounded with sensitivities
Burchinal et al. (2008)	Neighborhood characteristics and types of childcare	Questionnaires	1121 ethnically diverse U.S. mothers of toddlers and/or preschoolers	Neighborhood collective efficacy is related to day center care and childcare by nonrelatives
Chamberlain et al. (2003)	Childrearing role of extended family members	Case study	Two case studies drawn from sample of 60 three-generation Caribbean families in the U.K.	Grandparental support reflects cultural beliefs rather than economic necessity
Cheatham et al. (2011)	Expert roles of parents and teachers	Interviews	8 U.S. parents of child aged 4-5 years considered at-risk and 2 teachers	Teachers take expert role in parent-teacher conferences, parents' expertise unrecognized
Donner (1999)	Childrearing in a specific region (Polynesian society)	Ethnographic study	Unknown amount of participant observation and interviews	Western policy may be partly responsible for maintaining an ideology of sole responsibility
Dyson et al. (2012)	School involvement in sexual health education	Focus groups (FG)	31 Australian parents in 4 FG; majority were Australian-born mothers	Parents want to be informed about content of curriculum and teachers' qualifications
Edwards et al. (2004)	Parental norms about sources of parenting support	Questionnaires	1.112 U.K. parents; majority were working class mothers	Family and friends are regarded as the people to turn to for most types of support
Feldman et al. (1986)	Childrearing in a specific region (kibbutzim)	Questionnaires	88 Israeli town and kibbutz mothers	Nurturer-teacher role division may be specific to childrearing ideology of kibbutzim

Reference	Content area	Publication type	Sample	Main conclusion
Forsberg (2007)	Expert roles of parents and teachers	Ethnographic study	Interviews with 8 Swedish parent couples & document analysis (N = 32 school letters)	Parents' and teachers' responsibilities are "negotiated in terms of expertise" (p. 286)
Fothergill (2013)	Childrearing role of childcare workers	Ethnographic study	FG and interviews with 35 U.S. mothers, 27 childcare workers, and 6 administrators	Mothers' attitude to childcare is influenced by messages, feelings of quilt, care quality
Gillies (2004)	Families' childrearing networks	Interviews	35 U.K. parents from 24 working class and middle class households	Parents are (still) embedded in reciprocal networks, providing mainly practical support
Gordon et al. (2013)	Black fathers' perspectives on shared childrearing	Interviews	7 black fathers living in the U.S.	Black fathers endorse the proverb that "it takes a village to raise a child"
Hunter et al. (1998)	Childcare in black and white urban families	Interviews	757 self-identified caregivers from urban U.S. families; 581 black, 176 white	Black families more often share care with extended family and people outside household
Johnson F. et al. (2013)	Childrearing in a specific region (Tanzania)	Focus groups (FG)	10 FG with Tanzanian parents & grandparents (6-12 participants per FG, exact N unknown)	Boundaries between parental and communal childrearing responsibilities seem fluid
Jones et al. (2007)	Childrearing in African American single-mother families	Literature review	-	Re-conceptualization of coparenting is needed: inclusion of NPAs
Kakinuma (1993)	Childrearing attitudes of Japanese and U.S. mothers	Document analysis	-	Differences in parental attitudes may reflect differences in childrearing traditions

Reference	Content area	Publication type	Sample	Main conclusion
Kegler et al. (2005)	Neighborhood characteristics and youth assets	Interviews (paired interviews)	1350 ethnically diverse adolescents and parents from inner-city U.S. households	Neighborhood safety and social control are related to existence of NPA role models
Kesselring et al. (2012)	Parents' attitudes toward shared childrearing	Questionnaires	1090 parents from 17 Dutch neighborhoods	Parents are ambivalent about involving others in childrearing
Konijn (2008)	Childrearing role of playground employees	Questionnaires	35 Dutch playground employees	Playground employees do not see explicit childrearing role for themselves
Kurrien et al. (2004)	Coparenting in Asian families	Interviews	45 Hindu mothers living in India and 5 intact Vietnamese families living in the U.S.	Re-conceptualization of the concept of coparenting is needed: inclusion of NPAs
Kyriacou et al. (2013)	Student teacher attitudes toward social pedagogical role of schools	Questionnaires	542 student teachers from England and Norway	Current education policy creates barriers that hold teachers back from non-academic topics
Lindle et al. (1991)	Teachers' role in childrearing	Interviews	45 U.S. parents (majority white mothers) and 12 teachers	Parents do not relinquish responsibility, but are interested in teachers' support
Maital et al. (2003)	Childrearing in a specific region (kibbutzim)	Descriptive study	-	Role differentiation between mother and metapelet: nurturer-teacher division
Market Response (2010)	(Non)parents' attitudes toward childrearing role of NPAs	Questionnaires	795 Dutch adults; 394 parents and 401 nonparents	NPAs' involvement is desirable, but comes with conditions
Marshall et al. (2001)	Families' childrearing networks	Interviews	206 ethnically diverse U.S. children and their mothers	African, European, and Hispanic American parents differ in their social support networks

Reference	Content area	Publication type	Sample	Main conclusion
Mason et al. (2007)	Grandparents' role in childrearing	Interviews	46 grandparents living in the U.K.	Grandparents continually try to balance "not interfering" and "being there" (p. 701)
McCartney et al. (1988)	Mothers' attitudes on childcare	Book chapter	-	Western childrearing ideology may "reflect and in turn promote" current values (p. 158)
McGovern et al. (2000)	School involvement in discussing death and grief	Questionnaires	119 Irish parents and 142 teachers of primary school children	Parents are positive about school programs discussing death and grief
Obeng (2007)	Immigrant families' child care preferences	Interviews	18 African immigrant parents living in the U.S.	Daycare is a form of childcare that matches immigrants' culture of shared childrearing
RMO (2008 I)	Families' childrearing networks	Report	-	Families are less socially embedded due to societal and policy influences
RMO (2009)	Families' childrearing networks	Report	-	Families are less socially embedded due to societal and policy influences
Scales et al. (2001)	(Non)parents' attitudes toward childrearing role of NPAs	Interviews	1425 ethnically diverse U.S. parents and nonparents	Dominance of nuclear family ideology constrains sharing of responsibility in West
Scales et al. (2003)	(Non)parents' attitudes toward childrearing role of NPAs	Book	Same sample as Scales et al. 2001	Dominance of nuclear family ideology constrains sharing of responsibility in West
Scales et al. (2004)	(Non)parents' attitudes toward childrearing role of NPAs	Interviews	Same sample as Scales et al. 2001	Dominance of nuclear family ideology constrains sharing of responsibility in West
Singer (1991)	Childrearing role of childcare workers	Interviews	144 Dutch parents; 101 mothers, 43 fathers, majority were highly educated	Parents only delegate some of their responsibilities to childcare workers

Reference	Content area	Publication type	Sample	Main conclusion
Sormunen et al. (2012)	School involvement in health education	Questionnaires	184 Finnish parents of 10-11-year-old children	Parents see some topics as solely their responsibility, others as joint responsibility
Spencer et al. (2011)	Childrearing role of mentors	Interviews	13 ethnically diverse U.S. parents of child participating in mentoring program	Parents believe mentors fulfill an additional role, e.g., role model and confidant
Uttal (1996)	Employed mothers' attitudes on childcare	Interviews	31 ethnically diverse employed U.S. mothers of preschoolers, toddlers or infants	Mothers report sharing responsibility but set conditions, e.g., childcare philosophy
Van Daalen (2010)	Historical overview of childrearing in the Netherlands	Descriptive study	-	Strong cultural ideal may have hindered partial transfer of responsibilities to NPAs
Verzaro-Lawrence (1981)	Mothers' attitudes to childcare	Descriptive study	-	There appear to be several stressors in the mother-childcare worker relationship
Weaver et al. (2002)	School involvement in sexual health education	Questionnaires	4206 Canadian parents; 89% mothers	Parents want to be involved/ informed and provided with communication strategies
Wyman et al. (2006)	School involvement in smoking prevention	Questionnaires	456 U.S. parents; 51% fathers, 94% white	Parents appreciate schools' involvement, but want to be involved and informed

Chapter 3

Allemaal opvoeders in the educative civil society. Toward a theoretical framework of an alternative paradigm for childrearing

The Dutch version of this chapter was published as:

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[8] Authors' contributions: M.K., M.D.W., B.H., and T.V.Y. developed the program theory; M.K. wrote the paper.

Abstract

Families' own strengths, supported by social networks, is an important theme in both research and practice. In the Netherlands this theme was put back on the agenda with the introduction of the *educative civil society* (ECS). This contextual approach to childrearing is, for example, operationalized in *Allemaal opvoeders* (Alop). In this program eleven municipalities explore how civil society involvement in the upbringing of children and adolescents could be enhanced. This study presents the program theory of Alop. This program theory serves as a basis for the evaluation study of Alop. Furthermore, it makes a contribution to the development of the ECS as an alternative paradigm within youth and family policy.

Introduction

Although international research indicates that the majority of Dutch children and adolescents are doing well and the number and seriousness of their problems are not growing (UNICEF Office of Research, 2013), there has been an increasing demand for professional care mainly due to an "overconsumption" of families with comparatively minor childrearing issues (Hermanns, 2009, p. 15). An explanation for this increase may be that youth and family policy is nowadays dominated by the "at-risk" model. In this approach, childrearing questions are considered individual family problems that are best solved by social care professionals (De Winter, 2008, p. 153). This tendency to problematize leads to a quick referral to specialized youth care (De Winter, 2012).

According to a relatively new – or better: a renewed – insight, an investment in families' own strengths and in their social support networks, combined with a better utilization and reinforcement by free accessible professional support services, may prevent an unnecessary appeal to specialized support (Van Yperen & Stam, 2010). This insight is the central focus of *Allemaal opvoeders* (Alop –*Everybody a child-raiser*[9]), a program that is part of an overarching national program in the Netherlands on enhancing civil society involvement with young people and families. The underlying thought of Alop is in line with the idea that it takes a village to raise a child (Clinton, 1996): caring for children is a cooperation between parents and nonparental adults (NPAs). Together they form the *pedagogische civil society*, henceforward referred to as the *educative civil society* (ECS) (De Winter, 2008, p. 160).

The program *Allemaal opvoeders*

Eleven Dutch municipalities participate in Alop. By developing new or intensify existing activities, each municipality explores how the ECS could be enhanced. To give indications of

[9] During the program period, the English translation of *Allemaal opvoeders* was changed into: *Partners in parenting.*

the effectiveness of the program activities, we will perform an evaluation study. As starting point of this evaluation, the current study describes the program theory of Alop: "the logic that connects its activities to the intended outcomes, and the rationale for why it does what it does" (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, p. 44). The program theory can be divided into the impact- and the process theory. The impact theory covers a theoretical underpinning of the program activities and describes the intended outcomes. The process theory describes the necessary preconditions (Rossi et al., 2004). Thus, the program theory exposes the conceptual structure behind the program. On the one hand, this may lead to an elaboration of the ECS, the central concept of the program. On the other hand, it lays the foundation for the summative part of the study, which is the evaluation study.

The evaluation study of Alop can be considered a practice-based study that may lead to descriptive, theoretical, indicative or causal evidence (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). The current study focuses on the first two levels of evidential value with the aim of answering the following question: *What are the expected working mechanisms of the program activities that may lead to an enhancement of the ECS and how can professionals foster these working mechanisms?* In the second part of the study, the summative evaluation, we will examine to what extent the intended outcomes are achieved. The summative evaluation can be found on the level of indicative evidence and may lead to "practice-based evidence" (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008, p. 29).

Maybe even more than a program, Alop could be considered a view on childrearing, based on the thought that families can benefit from the involvement of supportive NPAs. This thought is supported by empirical evidence (e.g., Scales et al., 2001; Werner, 1993). However, Alop also stands for a normative conception, namely, as De Winter (2012) states, that "some forms of society are more enjoyable and more durable than others, or, for example, are more consonant with the ideal of a democracy" (p. 53).

Working definition of the educative civil society

In this study we define the ECS on the basis of three a's: actors, attitude and actions.

The *actors* within the ECS are parents and NPAs who share a childrearing partnership through (mutual) support and shared responsibility. We define NPAs as: *supportive related or unrelated individuals with informal or formal status who are naturally part of the family's social environment* (see Chapter 2).

The *attitude* of the actors within the ECS is characterized by the willingness to share childrearing responsibilities. However, sharing responsibilities may not be an obvious social norm in contemporary Western societies, wherein the ideology of childrearing as exclusive responsibility of the nuclear family appears to have been anchored in the mentality of both citizens and institutions (Van Daalen, 2010). In addition, the welfare state may have caused a tendency to fall back on public facilities. A switch in thinking may be required to turn self-reliance from "take care of yourself by utilizing the right public facilities" to "take care of yourself

by knowing how to organize the right support within your own social network" (Vreugdenhil, 2012, p. 130).

The *actions* refer to the role that actors within the ECS could play. NPAs may play a *direct* childrearing role by being a supportive secondary caregiver (Scales et al., 2001; Werner, 1993). In addition, NPAs may play an *indirect* childrearing role by supporting parents in fulfilling their role as primary caregivers (Hanna, Edgecombe, Jackson, & Newman, 2002). This support can be distinguished into different types. First, parents/NPAs could support each other emotionally (Barrera, 2000), which may increase parents' self-confidence and could make it easier to handle childrearing issues. Second, parents/NPAs could support each other instrumentally, for example, by taking children to school (Roehlkepartain, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2002), which may provide parents with a bit of relief (Andresen & Telleen, 1992). Third, parents/NPAs can give each other informational support in the form of advice, information exchange and feedback (Barrera, 2000). This type of support can strengthen parents' coping skills (Andresen & Telleen, 1992). Research indicates that parenting support functions as a protective factor. The availability of a supportive social network is positively associated with resilience and may reduce the negative effects of stress and adversities (Rutter, 1990). Next to support, informal social control is an action of actors within the ECS. Examples are the monitoring of playing children, prevention of negative behavior and correction of children or young people who are misbehaving (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Based on the previous description, we use the following working definition of a well-functioning ECS: "*the readiness of citizens to share the responsibility for the upbringing of children and adolescents within their own social networks and in the public domain, in the form of mutual support and informal social control*". We added "well-functioning" because the ECS could basically also function negatively or may even form a "toxic environment" (Garbarino, 1995, p. 4), for example, when antisocial behavior is perceived as normal and children are exposed to undesirable role models. A well-functioning ECS may serve as a basic support level that precedes prevention interventions (Van der Klein, Mak, Van der Gaag, & Steketee, 2011). In addition, the ECS may serve as a protective level; a buffer against risk factors. Seen from these two levels, the ECS could have both an additional and a compensatory role and may be of relevance for "normal" as well as high-risk families (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002).

Theoretical foundations of the program activities

All activities within the Alop program aim to strengthen the ECS and mainly distinguish themselves from each other by the intensity of contact among parents/NPAs. To categorize the activities, we use a four-step social contact ladder (see Figure 3.1), based on an instrument that Snel and Boonstra (2005) developed in their study on activities that promote interethnic

contact. The four steps on our ladder are: meeting, dialogue, working together for a positive educative neighborhood climate, and network formation. Rising up the ladder stands for a greater intensity of contact among parents/NPAs. Incidental contact is not a guarantee of structural contact, but appears to be an essential condition. Not until parents/NPAs meet will the dialogue about childrearing come about. This could subsequently lead to (arrangements for) a positive educative neighborhood climate. Eventually, supportive networks may emerge.

Figure 3.1. Four-step social contact ladder.

The program activities aim at individual as well as collective outcomes. While individual outcomes focus on the personal usefulness (what are the benefits on the level of individual caregivers and their children?), collective outcomes focus on the social usefulness (what are the benefits on the level of society?) (Van Yperen, 2003).

In the next section we describe the rationale of each step of the ladder: the theoretical underpinnings of the expected effectiveness of the activities and the specific individual and collective outcomes that are being served.

Meeting

The first step encloses activities that encourage meetings among parents/NPAs. Most of the time those meetings take place in specially equipped meeting places, for example, a parent room in a school, a living room in a Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin (CJG – Youth and Family Center), or postnatal groups for new mothers and their babies (see Chapter 6 for a description

of all program activities). At those meeting places the focus is on "free confrontation", which may occur through observation – thus, there does not always have to be a verbal dialogue – and the exchange of experiences. This confrontation with different styles of parenting and different parenting values can incite parents/NPAs to think about their own parenting practices and help them to handle the upbringing (Van Leeuwen, 2010, p. 10). Professionals, who work at locations where parents/NPAs gather, can elicit free confrontation by making the meeting places suitable for observation. Additionally, they can hold back from giving advice themselves and facilitate mutual exchange among parents/NPAs. Considering their expertise, it may be difficult for professionals to exercise restraint. Rather than specific competencies, this facilitating role may require a different attitude toward parenting support (Van Leeuwen, 2010).

Research shows that parents/NPAs mention different reasons – both for themselves and for their children – to visit a meeting place. Adult-focused reasons are: social contact, a moment of rest and relaxation, the opportunity to ask questions (Van Leeuwen, 2010), "to get out of the house" (Scott, Brady, & Glynn, 2001, p. 28) and to exchange mutual experiences (Guest & Keatinge, 2009). Child-focused reasons are: preparation for school and language development, offering children an environment where they can play with peers and discovery learning toys, and helping children feel more secure and less clingy (Van Leeuwen, 2010).

In addition to an individual value, meeting may, at a collective level, lead to public familiarity: parents/NPAs recognize and get to know each other. This can contribute to a sense of belonging and safety (Blokland, 2008). Public familiarity also forms the basis of social identification: because someone gets acquainted with others, he/she can assess their actions. This does not automatically lead to trust, since there is a possibility that getting to know someone better may result in distrust. However, social identification enables people to decide whether they want to identify with or dissociate themselves from others (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling (RMO) – Dutch Council for Social Development, 2005, p. 34). Finally, in the long term, public familiarity offers opportunities for the creation of social networks from which parents/NPAs can derive social capital, i.e., sources of support that enable them to achieve goals that in the absence of the social networks would not have been achieved (Coleman, 1988). Meeting does not guarantee the emergence of social networks, but it appears to be an important condition: if there is no meeting, enduring contact and support relations will probably not develop (Blokland, 2008). In other words, public familiarity appears to be a "crucial building block" in social relationships (RMO, 2005, p.10).

Dialogue

At meeting places parents/NPAs will often fall into conversation with each other. However, on the first step of the ladder, having conversations is not an explicit goal. Getting together is the main objective and the atmosphere is informal with little or no conditions. This also means that the attendant parents/NPAs do not have to talk if they do not want to. This distinguishes

the first from the second step, because within the latter all activities explicitly aim to stimulate verbal dialogue on childrearing. Some of these activities focus on mutual conversations among small groups of parents/NPAs, such as the *childrearing party*: a parent/an NPA – the host(ess) – invites friends and acquaintances into his or her home where they hold a conversation on a specific childrearing issue (see Chapter 6). Other activities aim to start a broad discussion such as a door-to-door paper on sharing childrearing responsibilities.

On the individual level, mutual conversations on childrearing may lead to recognition and confirmation and may help parents/NPAs to put their parenting questions into perspective (Guest & Keatinge, 2009). On a collective level, mutual conversations may contribute to removing parents'/NPAs' hesitation to give, to accept and to ask for help. As described in the introduction of this chapter, sharing childrearing responsibilities and helping each other out in the upbringing may not occur naturally. Research on neighbor support shows that people are often willing to help. However, they may be restrained because they do not want to intrude or fear a negative reaction. This hesitation creates an "unused reservoir of willingness to give help" (Linders, 2010, p. 10). Not only on the supply side, but also on the demand side there appear to be barriers. People may find it hard to accept informal support, because they fear becoming vulnerable and dependent (Linders, 2010). Asking for support may be even more difficult. Possible barriers may be the fear of being seen as incompetent, not wanting to be a burden and the fear of rejection (DePaulo, 1982). Unfamiliarity may also be a barrier (Linders, 2010), which emphasizes the necessity to invest in public familiarity.

Professionals can play a role in removing the hesitation to give, to accept and to ask for help (Van der Lans, 2010). Professionals can foster the dialogue among parents/NPAs, which may lead to the awareness that the questions they have are recognizable and normal, and that support can be reciprocal. This puts parents/NPAs in the role of help-seeker *and* helper. According to Linders (2010) the challenge for professionals is to assist parents/NPAs to ask their questions without violating their need for independence.

Working together for a positive educative neighborhood climate

On the third step of the ladder, contact is a tool to get to a positive educative neighborhood climate. Neighbors participate in collective activities and get to know each other and each other's children (better). This stimulates the involvement with and the efforts for the upbringing of the neighborhood children. Examples are a neighbor day, a children's holiday week and a neighborhood volunteer day (see Chapter 6).

According to Coleman (1988) the social capital of parents/NPAs is partly determined by "intergenerational closure", i.e., the parents' friends are the parents of their children's friends" (p. 106). If adults in a neighborhood know each other they "can discuss their children's activities and come to some consensus about standards and about sanctions" (p. 107). Children and adolescents may also directly benefit from intergenerational relationships with NPAs in their

neighborhood, for example, adult neighbors could be important role models (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998).

Activities on this step may have collective value as well. As with meetings, neighborhood activities may lead to public familiarity. If NPAs are familiar with the neighborhood children and adolescents, they will be more inclined to keep an eye on them. Public familiarity may also lower the threshold for correcting negative behavior. Children and adolescents in turn will be more inclined to adjust their behavior if asked by an trusted NPA. Thus, familiarity may facilitate social control and may lead to more constructive conversations. Those conversations can encourage neighborhood "politeness", because adults and youngsters express their wishes and interests to one another (RMO, 2008 II, p. 52). This may lead to mutual understanding and collective arrangements, for example, about social manners (Snel & Boonstra, 2005). An investment in politeness may also be an investment in participation and active citizenship. If there is neighborhood politeness, adults and youngsters will be more willing to participate in shared (neighborhood) activities. According to the RMO (2005), residents will also be less inclined to make a complaint to the local authority or the police, because with more politeness in the public space, the chance of solving conflicting interests and small incidents together increases. Participation and active citizenship can strengthen the sense of control, an important aspect of empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000). Additionally, participation can increase the sense of being useful and responsible and can decrease "feelings of alienation and anonymity" (Wandersman & Florin, 2000, p. 247).

Professionals can play a role in fostering a positive educative neighborhood climate. They can make parents/NPAs aware of the contribution they can make to the upbringing of other people's children. In neighborhoods with (perceived) inconvenience, annoyances and little mutual understanding, contact will most probably not be initiated by residents. Professionals can mobilize them, for example, by looking for a few "pacesetters" – active residents who can enthuse others (Snel & Boonstra, 2005) – or by organizing gatherings and stimulate adults and young people to speak out about their expectations of each other.

Network formation

The fourth step of the ladder includes activities that are directed toward network formation through permanent groups of parents/NPAs who assemble on a structural basis – generally once a week – such as a mothers' committee (see Chapter 6). These groups often started from the same goals as the activities in step 1. Because the same parents/NPAs repeatedly meet, the incidental contact may convert to social networks with mutual support relations. Scott and colleagues (2001) examined the extent to which first-time parent groups in Australia became self-sustaining social networks. Their research indicates that after two years 16 out of 24 groups continued to meet. Even within the groups that did not meet anymore, there appeared to be sustainable contacts among mothers, classified by the researchers as mutual aid friendships,

social-activity-based frienships and acquaintance relationships. A large majority, 80%, had formed at least one mutual aid friendship. These mothers supported each other, for example, by looking after each others' children and being confidantes. Mothers who formed a social-activity-based friendship did not share personal issues, but participated in shared activities, e.g., clothing exchange parties and spending evenings together without children. Although mothers who formed acquaintance relationships did not develop profound mutual support relationships, some of them reported that attending the group "gave them a sense of familiarity with others in their community" (Scott et al., 2001, p. 28).

Social networks can provide emotional, instrumental and informational support, and can increase parents'/NPAs' social capital. Social capital is often distinguished into three types. The first type is bonding social capital, characteristic of closed, homogeneous social networks. This homogeneity provides parents/NPAs with useful connections for reciprocity and solidarity (Putnam, 2000). However, as Fisher and Gruescu (2011) state, closed groups "can perpetuate disadvantage" (p. 17) because they "can hold members of the group back and from achieving more" (p. 5). The second type is bridging social capital, characteristic of open, heterogeneous networks that connect people from different communities. This heterogeneity may enable parents/NPAs to move forward (Putnam, 2000). The last type is linking social capital, which produces social links, i.e., connections between parents/NPAs and voluntary or professional organizations (Woolcock, 1998). While social bonds and bridges are horizontal, social links are vertical and may enable parents/NPAs "to get resources, ideas and information from institutions within and beyond the community" (Fisher & Gruescu, 2011, p. 17). According to Fisher and Gruescu (2011), the three types are complementary: "Bridging social capital can overcome the exclusiveness of groups with strong bonding capital. Linking social capital can help groups who seem self-sufficient to access new information and services" (p. 18). Ideally a combination of bonding, bridging and linking capital is present in the ECS.

On a collective level, supportive social networks may in the long run lead to a reduced unnecessary appeal for specialized youth care. Supportive social networks may also lead to the emergence of communities. Just as meeting and dialogue are conditions for the emergence of networks, networks are a condition for the development of communities (Flap & Völker, 2004). A community could be described as a circle of reciprocal relations, wherein people show consideration for each other and support each other if necessary (De Vos, 2004). Communities can be organized, such as a sports association, or unorganized, such as a group of hang-around youths. In a community, parents/NPAs may easily form multiplex relationships. An advantage of this multiplexity is that resignation of a membership, for example, at the local soccer club, does not automatically lead to the ending of the supportive relationship between parents/NPAs. After all, other connections, such as being neighbors, still exist (De Vos, 2004). Research indicates a shift from traditional communities with strong ties to "light" communities with weak ties.

Weak ties make it easier to participate in several communities at the same time. Due to the emergence of social media, communities may no longer be delimited by geographical or physical boundaries (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp, 2004, p. 219).

Professionals could play a role in establishing the preconditions for network formation, for example, by facilitating repeated gatherings by organizing a meeting place. A professional can also be an important "linking pin", connecting parents/NPAs, moving beyond just creating meeting opportunities. Professionals can search for connections that may lead to bonding – help parents/NPAs to uncover potential social capital within their own social networks; bridging – help parents/NPAs to strengthen their networks by broaching new capital (Van der Lans, 2010); and linking – help parents/NPAs to find connections with and resources from voluntary and professional organizations.

Preconditions

For every step of the ladder we briefly examined the role of professionals in fostering the ECS. They facilitate the contact among parents/NPAs and therefore play an important role in achieving the intended outcomes. For program success, there are also a few preconditions that professionals and policy makers may need to take into account.

A first precondition is that meeting places comply with three criteria: casualness (organized at locations that parents/NPAs naturally visit); multifunctionality (organized at locations that parents/NPAs visit for other reasons than just meeting up); and course of life durability (organized for parents/NPAs at the same stage of life with similar questions) (RMO, 2005). A second precondition is that meeting places are characterized by an informal atmosphere with little or no conditions. Exactly this easy approachableness – anonymity, being free to come and go – appears to be highly appreciated by parents/NPAs (Van Leeuwen, 2010). A third precondition refers to the location and design of meeting places: a meeting place is easy to reach, offers a challenging play area for children and at the same time invites parents/NPAs to meet (Van Leeuwen, 2010). A last precondition, which holds for all steps on the ladder, is the attendance and commitment of parents/NPAs. There are different methods to increase participation in parenting activities, such as an advertisement in a local newspaper. However, word-of-mouth advertising appears to be the most effective, wherein parents/NPAs may be the best ambassadors (Peterson Miller & Hudson, 1994).

Professionals in the educative civil society: a paradox?

The possible role of professionals in fostering the ECS may seem paradoxical. After all, civil society is "the domain of social organization within which voluntary associative relations are

dominant. This definition identifies civil society by contrasting it to domains organized by the state or the market [...]" (Warren, 1999, p. 14). However, as described in the introduction of this chapter, a switch in social norms may be required to enhance civil society involvement in childrearing. (Local) governments and professionals can contribute to the realization of new social norms through inciting citizens' willingness to share childrearing responsibilities and creating opportunities for informal support. Schools and infant welfare centers, for example, could systematically facilitate contact among parents, children and NPAs, for example, by offering group meetings instead of individual sessions (Fisher & Gruescu, 2011).

To build new social norms, "co-production" appears to be an important starting point. Professionals – with best intentions – tend to fix things themselves rather than enable parents/NPAs to do so (Fisher & Gruescu, 2011, p. 6). In the co-production approach, parents/NPAs are not clients, but partners, and professionals are not experts, but "collaborators" who think along with parents/NPAs (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 44). Hilhorst (2011) describes this professional role as the mobilization of social resilience: professionals do not create solutions themselves, but facilitate social networks in helping families out. Therefore, professionals need to make themselves subservient and supportive to citizens' strengths. That parents/NPAs take more responsibility themselves does not mean that professionals could do less. The efforts of both citizens and professionals are necessary to strengthen the ECS. As Van der Lans (2010) states, "involved and active citizenship requires active professionalism" (p. 134).

Moderators

The intended outcomes are not only determined by the working mechanisms as described in the theoretical foundations. As well as these so-called mediators there are also moderators, i.e., factors that are of influence, but cannot be influenced by the program activities. The program outcomes are determined by the effect of the activities on the mediators minus the effect of the moderators (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). The most important moderators within Alop are the physical neighborhood characteristics and the policy choices of the (local and national) government.

Physical neighborhood characteristics may impact on the ECS, because the features of the built environment could to a greater or lesser degree offer meeting opportunities. Within Alop, small-scale meeting places are developed, but spontaneous meet-ups can also occur in the public space. The chance of spontaneous meet-ups – and with that of the occurrence of public familiarity – increases if there are, for example, benches in the neighborhood, and if a public garden is not only a nice place to spend time but also the fastest way to get from point A to point B (RMO, 2005). Physical neighborhood characteristics often stay unaltered for many years. Therefore, it is important that governments are aware of the impact of the built environment on

meeting opportunities and on the occurrence of public familiarity.

The policy choices of the (local and national) government are a second important moderator within the program. Governments can choose to pursue a determined policy on fostering the ECS, for example, by encouraging professional organizations such as schools and CJG to form a "crystallization point" in the residential environment, where citizens' initiatives are elicited and facilitated. Professionals can be the "engines" who establish the necessary preconditions and function as "shepherds" of sustainability: keep initiatives going, for example, by making meeting places available and by drawing potential participants' attention to an existing initiative. At the same time, governments should practice some moderation, because governmental efforts that are basically within the scope of civil society could make civil society less active and could even undermine its functioning (Fukuyama, 2001). Complaints offices are such an example. At a complaints office, citizens report a problem and the government will try to solve it for them. Van Stokkom and Toenders (2009) define the social policy of the Dutch government as "ambiguous" (p. 202): the policy is characterized by *keeping distance* – give the initiatives to citizens – but because of "the present culture of results agreements and quantitative effects obligations, and the call for harsher penalties" (p. 204), also by *interference*. Due to this, citizens are not stimulated to solve problems together and initiatives are – unintentionally – discouraged. As long as children's safety is not under threat, the policy focus could shift from intervening to facilitating, whereby the government keeps as much distance to parents/NPAs as possible and citizens' own strengths and social network support will be better utilized.

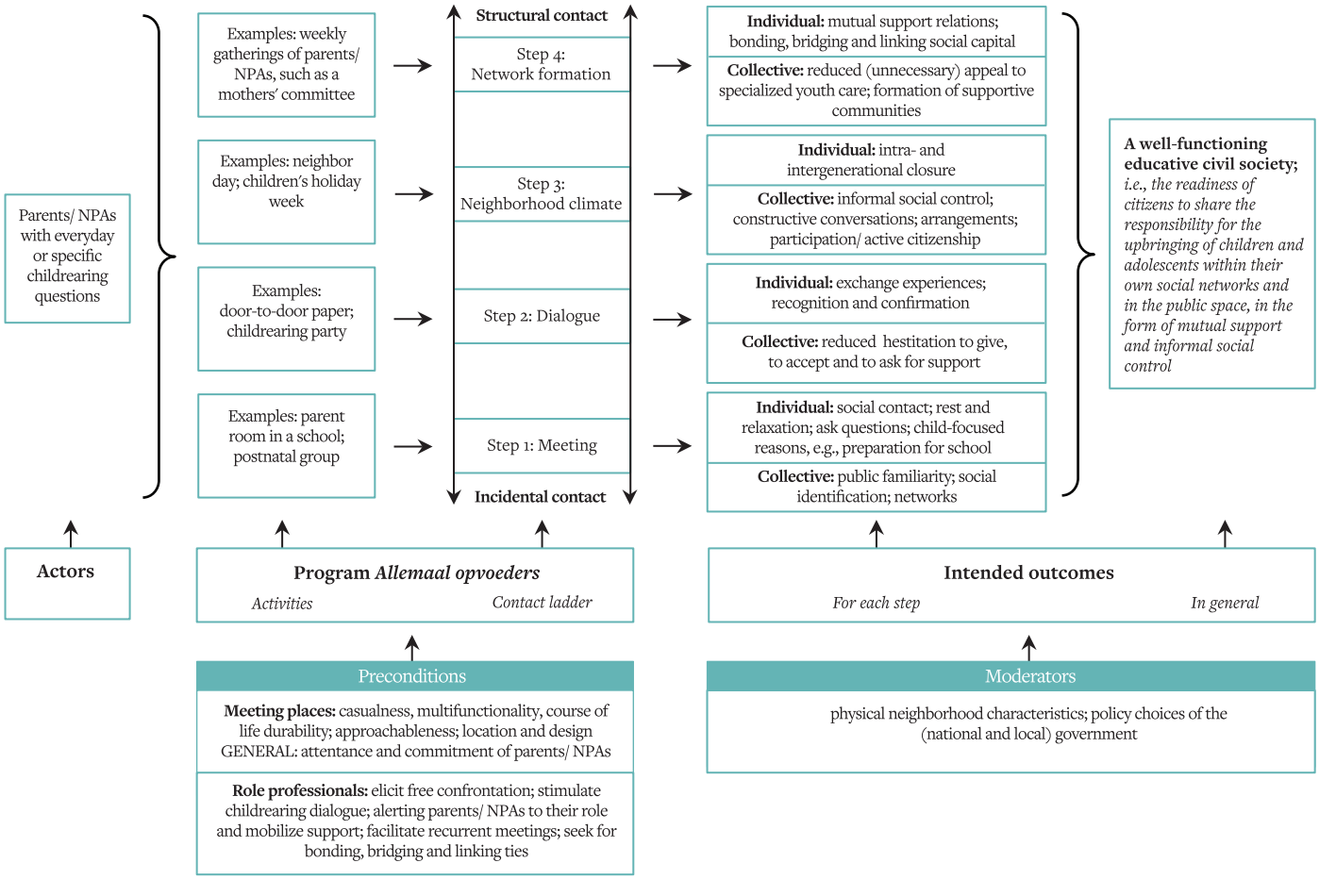
Conclusion

This study focused on the program theory of Alop, a program that aims to enhance civil society involvement with young people and families. After defining the underlying concept – the ECS – we introduced a four-step social contact ladder as an instrument to categorize the program activities. Based on literature, we described the expected working mechanisms of each step of the ladder and we described how professionals and moderators could respectively foster and undermine these mechanisms. A schematic summary of the program theory is shown in Figure 3.2.

The ECS starts from the idea that although parents are the primary caregivers, a family does not exist in a social vacuum. In line with the proverb that it takes a village to raise a child, the presence of supportive NPAs is thought to make a positive contribution to the well-being of young people and families. The activities within Alop try to uncover the potential of neighborhoods and communities to form childrearing partnerships. However, we have argued that turning shared responsibilities and mutual support into social norms may not occur naturally. This may require a paradigm shift in both (non)parental and professional attitudes

toward childrearing. In the summative evaluation we will therefore not only try to gain insight into the effect of the program activities on the intended outcomes (see Chapter 6), we will also conduct questionnaires (see Chapter 4) and focus group interviews (see Chapter 5) to explore these attitudes. In combination with the program theory elaborated in this study, this may lead to further underpinnings of the ECS as a contextual approach to childrearing.

Figure 3.2. Schematic summary of the program theory of *Allemaal opvoeders*.



Chapter 4

Do parents think it takes a village? Parents' attitudes toward nonparental adults' involvement in the upbringing and nurture of children

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[10] Authors' contributions: M.K., R.V.d.S., B.H., and M.D.W. designed research; M.K. and B.H. gathered data; M.K. and R.V.d.S. performed data analysis; M.K., M.D.W., and T.V.Y. wrote the paper.

Abstract

The current study explored parents' attitudes toward nonparental adults' involvement in childrearing practices. Parents' attitudes were operationalized in their willingness to share parenting responsibility and interest to participate in parenting activities. Data were collected through a quantitative survey with 1,090 parents from 17 Dutch neighborhoods. Results suggest that parents are ambivalent about involving others in childrearing practices. Furthermore, parents seem to prefer activities that do not focus explicitly on childrearing, but that do assist them in handling parenting tasks or give them the opportunity to exchange experiences. Fathers, parents with more sources of informal support, and parents who gave support themselves, were more willing to share responsibility, whereas non-Western parents, parents with positive judgments on cohesion and trust in their neighborhood, parents with more sources of formal support, and parents who gave support themselves, were more interested in participating in activities.

Introduction

During the past two decades, there has been increased political and professional interest in parenting support (Furedi, 2001; Gillies, 2004). There is a difference between informal support, given by members of parents' personal social networks, and formal support, provided by professionals. Research, policy and practice are oriented mainly toward the latter form of parenting support, which aims at increasing the emotional strength, knowledge and skills of parents to enable them to guide their children in becoming healthy adults (Bucx, 2011). Risks and problems that may threaten this optimal development are mostly thought of as symptoms of parental failure and, consequently, the nuclear family is both the subject and object of prevention and treatment (Daro & Dodge, 2009; De Winter, 2011).

However, the nuclear family is not isolated (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998). According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, families are embedded in multiple systems and are in continuous, mutual interaction with their social environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Garbarino and Sherman (1980) have noted that "this interactive process can enhance or undermine family functioning" and that the "richness of a parent's social environment is a significant influence on the adequacy of the childrearing that parent provides" (pp. 188-189). Thus, although parents are the primary caregivers – which makes the quality of the parent-child relationship particularly important for a child's healthy development – they may not be solely responsible. Other caring and supportive adults can also contribute to the well-being of children, both directly, for example, by being a positive role model or providing emotional support (e.g., Scales et al., 2001; Werner, 1993), and indirectly, by assisting parents to fulfill their parental tasks (e.g., Hanna, Edgecombe, Jackson, & Newman, 2002; MacPhee, Fritz, & Miller-

Heyl, 1996).

Recently, the tide seems to be turning against an exclusive focus on formal parenting support, and youth and family policy in Western societies is aimed increasingly at facilitating and stimulating informal parenting support (Weissboard, 2000). In 2009, the former Dutch Ministry for Youth and Families made funds available for a national program on enhancing civil society involvement with parents and children. In the current study, which is part of this national program, we examined parents' attitudes toward nonparental adults' (NPAs) involvement in the upbringing and nurture of their children. We explored if parents subscribe to the African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child, drawing on data from a quantitative survey with 1,090 mothers and fathers from 17 Dutch neighborhoods.

The function of nonparental adults in childrearing practices

Rhodes, Ebert, and Fischer (1992) have referred to important NPAs as "natural mentors or nonparent/nonpeer support figures" (p. 445). Other researchers have used the term "significant others" (Blyth, Hill, & Smith Thiel, 1982) or "VIPs" (Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998). In the current study, nonparental adults were defined as all significant adults, other than parents, with familial status (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles) or nonfamilial (e.g., neighbors, friends, sports coaches), who could act as partners in parenting by forming a "private safety net"[11]. Harknett (2006) has used this term to refer to the "potential support from social networks that a family can fall back on in times of need" (p. 172). This potential support can be divided into different types.

First, social networks can provide emotional support, e.g., "active listening and reassurance" (Barrera, 2000, p. 222). This may help parents to put their parenting questions into perspective (Van Egten, Zeijl, De Hoog, Nankoe, & Petronia, 2008). Second, social networks can provide instrumental support; for example, a trusted nonparental adult spends time with children, or takes them to school while the parents are working (Roehlkepartain, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2002). This practical support may provide parents with a bit of space. The third type, informational support or "directive guidance" (Barrera, 2000, p. 221), comprises advice, information, and feedback and can strengthen parents' knowledge and skills. A fourth type could be described as normative support, e.g., establishing behavior norms and modeling. This type of support is associated with lower levels of punitive parenting (MacPhee et al., 1996). These four types of informal support can play an important role in processing and handling the demanding tasks of parenting (Rispens, Hermanns, & Meeus, 1996). For example, parents who can rely on others for parenting support tend to be more authoritative in their childrearing practices (Marshall, Noonan, McCartney, Marx, & Keefe, 2001), while social isolation is associated with

[11] During the program period of *Allemaal opvoeders,* we developed the following definition of nonparental adults: *supportive related or unrelated individuals with informal or formal status who are naturally part of the family's social environment* (see Chapter 2).

an authoritarian parenting style (MacPhee et al., 1996). Informal parenting support can also make parents feel more effective (Marshall et al., 2001) and less vulnerable to stress and child maltreatment (Garbarino & Sherman, 1980; De Winter, 2011).

Apart from these indirect effects of NPAs' involvement on child well-being – mediated by parenting – there is evidence for direct effects. A 30-year study on the developmental paths of high-risk children showed that children with supportive networks of nonparental caregivers were more resilient and more likely to make a successful adaptation to adult life (Werner, 1993). Connectedness to several caregivers may also lead to more empathic and sympathetic behavior (Hrdy, 2006), school success (Putnam, 2000), self-confidence, social competencies (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005) and less antisocial behavior, such as delinquency and substance use (Resnick et al.,1997; Scales et al., 2001).

It is important to note that NPAs could have a compensatory as well as an additional role in the lives of parents and children. Thus, both high-risk and "normal" families may benefit from the involvement and support of NPAs (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002). In addition, informal parenting support is often characterized by reciprocal exchanges. Thus, parents not only *receive* but also *give* support to other parents and caregivers with similar questions and challenges.

Private parenting

The importance of NPAs' involvement in childrearing practices may be undermined by cultural assumptions in contemporary Western societies. According to Weissboard (2000), "the ethic of individualism" is at right angles to the notion that families may benefit from informal support (p. 167). A related assumption is what Weissboard (2000) calls "the deeply ingrained concept that children are solely the responsibility of the family and that government and community should intervene only when families fail" (p. 167). Scales and colleagues (2004) suggest this "long standing norm" restrains NPAs from getting involved, and creates fear "of negative parent reaction if they do get involved" (p. 739). Furthermore, social developments, e.g., the decline in civic engagement and social capital (Putnam, 2000), may even have intensified such that "family life has become separated and privatized" (Roehlkepartain, et al., 2002, p. 39). The question is whether efforts to enhance NPAs' involvement in childrearing will bear fruit if parents insist on exclusive responsibility for their children and NPAs are inhibited from providing support.

The current study

The aim of the current study was to explore parents' attitudes toward NPAs' involvement in childrearing practices. Insight into parents' attitudes could help shed light on the ongoing debate about enhancing civil society involvement with parents and children, and on the future planning of parenting support programs. Parents' attitudes were operationalized in two dependent variables: parents' willingness to share parenting responsibility and parents' interest

in participating in parenting activities with other parents/NPAs. In this study, we explore parents' attitudes with descriptive statistics. In addition, using structural equation modeling, we examine how the variance in these attitudes is predicted by background characteristics, neighborhood social climate and parenting support. We hypothesize that parents will be more willing to share parenting responsibility and will be more interested in participating in shared parenting activities, if the following criteria are fulfilled:

1. Parents are female. Although the traditional gender roles between mothers and fathers continue to change (Perrone, Wright, & Vance Jackson, 2009), the mother is still the primary caregiver in most nuclear families (Bucx, 2011; Mattingly & Sayer, 2006). Therefore, it is expected that mothers will be more willing than fathers to seek parenting support by sharing responsibility and participating in activities.

2. Parents are of non-Western origin. This hypothesis is based on previous research indicating that non-Western parents, who originate from collectivistic cultures, have stronger ties with network members (Chen & West, 2008; MacPhee et al., 1996).

3. Parents have a greater length of residence. Previous research has shown that residential stability, in the specific sense of greater length of residence, is associated positively with neighborhood connectedness and stronger interpersonal ties with neighbors (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999).

4. Parents make a more positive judgment on the quality of their neighborhood social climate. Although parenting support could exceed the neighborhood a family lives in, the neighborhood probably provides important associations with supportive partners in parenting (Benson et al., 1998), e.g., neighbors, parents of the child's classmates, and sometimes also friends and relatives.

5. Parents receive more support from *informal* sources and less from *formal* sources. It is expected that parents who rely more on informal sources will be more positive toward the involvement of NPAs in childrearing, whereas parents who rely more on formal sources will be more oriented toward the knowledge and skills of professionals.

6. Parents report giving parenting support themselves. We expect that parents who assist others in their parenting tasks, will be more open to receive support from others.

Method

Sample and procedure

Participants in the study were 1,090 parents (78.8% mothers and 21.2% fathers) having at least one child under the age of 19 years. A majority of the sample was born in the Netherlands (79.5%). 20.4% of the parents had one child, 50.9%, had two children, 22.0% had three children, and 6.8% had four or more children (M = 2.17, SD = 0.88). Participants lived in 17 different neighborhoods, with a maximum of 16,989 and a minimum of 1,994 inhabitants (M = 6,843, SD = 4,513). All neighborhoods were located in 10 Dutch municipalities participating in the national program on enhancing civil society involvement with parents and children. Data were obtained by means of a questionnaire that was administered by the researchers and their assistants, both in a public space, e.g., shopping center, market, playground (n = 639), and by telephone (n = 96). Participants could also fill in the self-report version of the questionnaire that was distributed by schools, playgroups and day-care centers, both as a paper version (n = 313) and via a weblink (n = 42). The four subsamples did not substantially differ on background characteristics and other variables included in the study and were therefore treated as one group. All questionnaires were treated anonymously and parents were told that their responses were confidential.

Measures

The respondents completed a questionnaire on shared parenting responsibilities and shared parenting activities (dependent variables), as well as on background characteristics, neighborhood social climate and parenting support (predictors).

Shared childrearing responsibilities

Three items were used to measure the attitudes of parents on sharing childrearing responsibility with NPAs; A) "The upbringing of my children is only my concern and, if applicable, that of my partner/spouse"; B) "Not only professionals but also neighbors can help out in the upbringing of children in the neighborhood"; and C) "I think it is important that other adults are involved in the upbringing of my children". All items were rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*). Item A was recoded and a high score for the three items is indicative of a positive attitude on shared parenting responsibility.

Shared parenting activities

Participants were asked if they would be interested in participating in parenting activities with other parents/NPAs. Seven parenting activities were listed, for example, a parent room in school or Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin (CJG – Youth and Family Center) and online parenting advice by other parents/NPAs. Response options for all items were *yes* or *no*. In order to determine how many times *in total* each respondent answered *yes* to the items in the list,

the responses were computed into an aggregate score. A higher score is indicative of a more positive attitude toward participating in shared parenting activities. Imputation was used to deal with missing item responses. All missing scores (n = 76) were converted into 0, meaning "not interested".

Background characteristics

Ethnicity was based on the country of birth of the respondent. According to Statistics Netherlands, someone with a foreign background who is born abroad belongs to the first generation. Someone with a Western background originates from a country in Europe (except for Turkey), North America, Oceania, Indonesia or Japan, while someone with a non-Western background originates from a country in Africa, South America, Asia (except for Indonesia and Japan) or Turkey (Van der Vliet, Ooijevaar, & Boerdam, 2010). Consistent with these definitions, the current study distinguished between parents from a Western (83.2% of the sample) and those from a non-Western ethnic background (16.8% of the sample).

Length of residence was represented by the number of years respondents had been living in their neighborhood (M = 10.51, SD = 9.01).

Neighborhood social climate

An 11-item scale was used to assess parents' perception of the social climate in their neighborhood, i.e., the extent to which neighbors are involved with neighborhood children and support parents in their parenting role. The scale was developed from a variety of instruments (Buckner, 1988; Bucx, 2011; Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1997), and proved to be internally consistent, α = .81. One item, "I have a say about what goes on in my neighborhood", was excluded, because of frequent misinterpretation by participants. Some participants appear to have interpreted "a say" as the *actual* influence they have in their neighborhood, while *perceived* influence was meant. The exclusion of this item lead to an internal consistency of α = .82 for the total scale (10 items).

Based on theory we expected two subscales, and this was confirmed by a confirmatory factor analysis in Mplus 6.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010): comparative fit index [CFI] = .971; Tucker Lewis index [TLI] = .962; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .061. The first subscale, *involvement and control,* comprised four items (α = .69); examples are "Parents in my neighborhood talk about their children" and "The people in my neighborhood reprimand children when they don't show consideration for others". The second subscale, *cohesion and trust,* comprised six items (α = .78); examples are "I think I agree on childrearing with most people in my neighborhood" and "The people in my neighborhood can be trusted". Participants indicated on a 4-point scale the degree to which each statement regarding the social climate of their neighborhood was true or untrue for them personally. The item "Given the opportunity I would like to move out of this neighborhood" was recoded. For both subscales, a higher score is

indicative of a more positive perception of the neighborhood social climate.

Parenting support

Parenting support was defined as any form of practical or non-practical help in the upbringing of children. To stimulate participants' thinking on this topic, examples of three types of parenting support were provided: 1) emotional support (examples: listening and exchanging experiences); 2) instrumental support (examples: taking children to school and babysitting); 3) informational support (examples: tips and advice). The questionnaire contained two questions on parenting support. The first question on this topic was about *receiving* parenting support ("Do you receive parenting support from ...?") and comprised 11 items: four on *informal* support (e.g., relatives, neighbors), and seven on *formal* support (e.g., school, infant welfare center). Participants could answer every item with *yes* or *no*. In order to determine how many times *in total* each respondent answered *yes* to the items in the list, the responses were computed into an aggregate score. A higher score on *informal* support and a lower score on *formal* support was expected to be indicative of a positive attitude toward NPAs' involvement in childrearing practices.

The second question on this topic was about *giving* parenting support. Participants were asked if they had given parenting support themselves in the past six months (*yes* or *no*).

Data analyses

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 was used to describe parents' attitudes toward shared parenting responsibilities and shared parenting activities. Possible differences in attitudes for the background variables gender, ethnicity and length of residence, were analyzed using chi-square tests. To explore parents' attitudes in more detail, structural equation models (SEM) were computed, using Mplus 6.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010). The relationship between attitudes and the predictors was tested in consecutive steps. In the first step, the background characteristics, *gender, ethnicity* and *length of residence,* were included (Model 1). In the second step, the two subscales of neighborhood social climate, *involvement and control* and *cohesion and trust*, were added (Model 2). In the third step, *received informal and formal support* were added (Model 3). In the final step, *given support* was added (Model 4). Several indices were used as criteria to examine model fit. This meant that the chi-square needed to be small and significant, the CFI and the TLI should be large (> .90) and the RMSEA should be small (< .05; Kline, 2010). The weighted least square means and variance (WLSMV) estimator was used to obtain parameter estimates. To obtain a correct chi-square difference test, the DIFFTEST option in Mplus was used to compare each successive model (Muthén & Muthén, 2010, p. 553).

In all models, neighborhood was used as a cluster variable to control for the nested structure of the data using the option TYPE = COMPLEX. Participants with missing values on all items (*n*

= 45) were excluded from the analyses. Their background characteristics did not differ from the participants with complete data. To deal with other missing values full information maximum likelihood (FIML) was used. Loosely formulated, the FIML procedure takes only complete cases into account to compute the parameter estimates, thus ignoring cases with missing cells in the data. To correct for Type I errors, a significance level of $\alpha = .01$ was used in all tests.

Results

Descriptive analyses

Shared parenting responsibility

Parents' attitudes on shared parenting responsibility were measured by three items. As can be seen from Table 4.1, almost 70% of the parents reported that parents are solely responsible for the upbringing of their children (item A). A majority of the parents, 63.9%, reported that it is not important to them that others are involved in the upbringing of their children (item C). However, a total of 78.6% of the parents reported that neighbors could help out with upbringing (item B). Analyses of the data revealed significant differences between fathers and mothers and between Western and non-Western parents. Fathers (42.1%) more often than mothers (29.8%) agreed with item C ($\chi^2 = 20.01$; $df = 3$; $p < .01$), while Western parents (59.1%) more often than non-Western parents (46.4%) disagreed with this statement ($\chi^2 = 22.89$; $df = 3$; $p < .01$).

Table 4.1. Parents' attitudes from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*) on shared childrearing responsibilities (in percentages).

	0	1	2	3	Missing	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Item								
A	1.2	28.1	57.8	11.1	1.8	1070	1.20	0.64
B	1.4	18.6	71.3	7.3	1.4	1075	1.86	0.54
C	8.3	55.6	31.7	2.1	2.4	1064	1.29	0.64

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.
A = The upbringing of my children is only my concern and, if applicable, that of my partner/spouse; B = Not only professionals but also neighbors can help out in the upbringing of children in the neighborhood; C = I think it is important that other adults are involved in the upbringing of my children.

To explore the contradiction in the quantitative response to items A and C and item B, 100 parents were asked to explain their answers further. This resulted in qualitative response that could be divided into two mean categories: *reprimand and supervision* ($n = 49$) and *support and advice* ($n = 20$). Examples are presented in Table 4.2. The other 31 parents were less explicit

about the role of NPAs in childrearing practices, for example, “Involvement is o.k., interference is not”; “Only if necessary and we do not have any problems with our kids, and everything is going fine”; and “Parents are primarily responsible, other adults are allowed to have influence to a certain extent”.

Table 4.2. Qualitative response on shared parenting responsibility.

Reprimand and supervision (n = 49)
Others can keep an eye on children to make sure they are safe
If children do something that is unacceptable, for example, damage public property
Childrearing occurs indoors, but outdoors others could correct children’s negative behavior
Others are allowed to reprimand children and warn parents when their children are misbehaving
In the public space children should be corrected by other adults, but not raised
Correcting behavior yes, but the other childrearing tasks are parents’ responsibility
Support and advice (n = 20)
The very fact that adults serve as role models, makes everyone an educator
On the streets, in the shops; every adult is part of the childrearing system
Parents are primarily responsible, but others could support them in their parenting role
Look after children if necessary
Show consideration for children, for example, drive slowly through the neighborhood
Adults could help out by volunteering in activities for children

Shared parenting activities

Parents’ interest in parenting activities was measured by seven items. Overall, as shown in Table 4.3, joining neighborhood activities was the most popular; 68.2% of all parents reported that they would be interested in “doing fun things” together with other parents/NPAs and children, for example, a cycling tour or an organized dinner. Practical help from other parents/NPAs was also quite popular; 57.5% of all parents reported that they would, for instance, be interested in making arrangements for taking children to school.

Analyses of the data revealed significant differences between fathers and mothers and between Western and non-Western parents. Fathers as well as non-Western parents were significantly more interested than mothers and Western parents in joining neighborhood activities for parents and children (respectively, $\chi^2 = 6.09$; df = 1; $p = .01$ and $\chi^2 = 12.67$; df = 1; $p < .01$). Non-Western parents reported significantly more often than Western parents that they would be interested in a parent room ($\chi^2 = 1.09$; df =1; $p < .01$), parenting theme sessions ($\chi^2 = 33.00$; df = 1; $p < .01$), personal advice ($\chi^2 = 82.12$; df = 1; $p < .01$), and a parenting course ($\chi^2 = 33.08$; df = 1; $p < .01$).

Table 4.3. Parents' interest in shared parenting activities (in percentages).

		All (N = 1090)	Fathers (n = 231)	Mothers (n = 859)	Western (n = 907)	Non-Western (n = 183)
A	Parent room	34.1	35.4	34.4	27.8	68.5
B	Theme sessions	50.3	49.1	51.0	46.9	70.4
C	Personal advice	33.6	36.7	33.1	28.2	63.5
D	Online advice	22.7	22.9	23.1	21.9	27.8
E	Practical support	57.5	62.3	57.2	58.5	57.3
F	Parenting course	36.6	33.3	38.0	33.1	55.9
G	Neighborhood activities	68.2	75.4	66.9	66.4	79.9

Neighborhood social climate

The opinion of parents on the social climate in their neighborhood was measured by 10 items (Table 4.4). Overall, parents were quite positive about the involvement of neighbors with the neighborhood children, and their assistance in childrearing tasks. However, almost 30% of all parents reported that they do not (fully) agree on childrearing with most people in their neighborhood (item VII). A quarter of all parents reported that their neighbors do not help each other when there are difficulties with children (item II). A similar percentage stated that they do not feel connected to their neighborhood (item IX). About a fifth of the parents reported that their neighbors do not reprimand children when they do not show consideration for others (item III). Analyses of the data showed no significant differences for gender and length of residence, but there were two significant differences between Western and non-Western parents. Non-Western parents more often than Western parents stated that their neighborhood is not a good neighborhood for children to grow up in (item V, $\chi^2 = 20.78$; df = 3; $p < .01$). In addition, non-Western parents more often than Western parents reported that, given the opportunity, they would like to move out of their neighborhood (item X, $\chi^2 = 12.52$; df = 3; $p = .01$).

Table 4.4. Parents' opinions from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*) on neighborhood social climate (in percentages).

	Total				Missing	*n*	*M*	*SD*
	0	1	2	3				
Item								
I	2.7	14.9	68.2	11.0	3.3	1054	1.91	0.61
II	2.4	24.1	62.0	5.5	6.0	1025	1.75	0.60
III	1.0	20.1	69.6	4.4	4.9	1037	1.81	0.52
IV	0.6	10.6	76.1	10.1	2.6	1062	1.98	0.49
V	3.0	12.4	64.7	15.8	4.2	1045	1.97	0.65
VI	1.8	12.4	73.9	7.2	4.6	1039	1.91	0.52
VII	3.2	26.4	57.5	1.8	11.0	970	1.65	0.58
VIII	1.4	13.3	73.0	4.8	7.5	1008	1.88	0.49
IX	3.7	22.3	63.5	6.8	3.8	1049	1.76	0.63
X	27.5	52.8	13.4	4.1	2.1	1067	2.01	0.76

Note. M = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.
I = The people in my neighborhood talk about their children; II = The people in my neighborhood help each other when they have difficulties with their children; III = The people in my neighborhood reprimand children when they don't show consideration for others; IV = The people in my neighborhood know the children that are playing outside; V = This is a good neighborhood for children to grow up in; VI = The people in my neighborhood approach children in a positive way; VII = I think I agree on childrearing with most people in my neighborhood; VIII = The people in my neighborhood can be trusted; IX = I feel connected to my neighborhood; X = Given the opportunity I would like to move out of my neighborhood.

Parenting support

The first question on parenting support concerned *received* support, and comprised four items on informal and seven on formal support. Overall, mothers and Western parents had a higher aggregate score for informal support. Thus, mothers and Western parents relied on more informal sources of support than fathers and non-Western parents (respectively, $\chi^2 = 20.58$; df = 4; $p < .01$ and $\chi^2 = 19.21$; df = 4; $p < .01$). All parents most often mentioned their own parents and in-laws as the people they could rely on for informal parenting support and advice (73.6%). Mothers (76.1%) and Western parents (78.5%) turned more often to their parents/in-laws for support than fathers (65.7%) and non-Western parents (50.8%). These differences were significant (respectively, $\chi^2 = 10.15$; df = 1; $p < .01$ and $\chi^2 = 59.92$; df = 1; $p < .01$). Furthermore, mothers (57.6%) more often than fathers (47.6%) relied on other relatives ($\chi^2 = 7.40$; df = 1; $p = .01$). The same holds true for Western parents (57.1%) in comparison to non-Western parents (47.5%), but this difference was not significant ($\chi^2 = 5.61$; df = 1; $p = .02$). Overall, other relatives (55.4%) were a less important source of informal parenting support and advice than friends

and acquaintances (69.4%). Mothers (72.9%) and Western parents (71.5%) more often than fathers (57.6%) and non-Western parents (60.7%) turned to their friends and acquaintances (respectively, $\chi^2 = 20.01$; df = 1; $p < .01$ and $\chi^2 = 8.48$; df = 1; $p = .01$). Finally, all parents noted neighbor support as the least important form of informal parenting support (39.6%). In particular, parents who had been living in their neighborhood for less than a year received little parenting support from their neighbors (10.3%; $\chi^2 = 19.25$; df = 4; $p < .01$).

When it comes to formal parenting support, the day-care center/playgroup/school was most frequently mentioned as a source of support (64.7%), followed by the infant welfare center (52.5%). The latter appears to be a more important source of support for non-Western (61.5%) rather than Western parents (50.8%) ($\chi^2 = 6.97$; df = 1; $p = .01$).

The second question on parenting support concerned *given* support. A majority of the parents (72.6%) reported that they had given parenting support in the last six months. Mothers (74.6%) and Western parents (76.1%) gave more support than fathers (66.2%) and non-Western parents (56.3%). These differences were significant (respectively, $\chi^2 = 6.40$; df = 1; $p = .01$ and $\chi^2 = 30.18$; df = 1; $p < .01$). Mothers (57.0%) and Western parents (56.4%), more often than fathers (42.9%) and non-Western parents (39.6%), reported that they gave emotional support such as listening and exchanging experiences (respectively, $\chi^2 = 9.51$; df = 1; $p = .01$ and $\chi^2 = 10.02$; df = 1; $p = .01$). Analyses of the data showed no significant differences for instrumental and informational support.

Structural equation modeling analyses

To assess how well the predictors can explain the variance in parents' attitudes on shared parenting responsibility (*responsibility*) and in parents' interest in participating in shared parenting activities (*activities*), structural equation modeling analyses were performed. Stepwise inclusion of the predictors resulted in four models. Fit indices of all models are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Fit indices and R^2 for structural equation models predicting shared responsibility and shared activities with background characteristics (gender, ethnicity, length of residence), neighborhood social climate (involvement & control, cohesion & trust), received support (informal and formal), and, given support, controlling for neighborhood (N = 1045).

Model	M1	M2	M3	M4
CFI	.930	.930	.934	.937
TLI	.920	.918	.921	.924
RMSEA	.038	.038	.037	.037
X^2 diff	381.24*	376.90*	358.45*	346.96*
R^2 responsibilities	.042	.074	.099	.143
R^2 activities	.072	.077	.130	.133

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.
*$p < .01$.

Model 1 includes the background characteristics. Gender emerges as a significant and negative predictor of *responsibility*, suggesting that fathers had more positive attitudes toward sharing responsibility with NPAs than mothers. Ethnicity is a significant predictor of both dependent variables. Again, there is a negative correlation, indicating that non-Western parents were more willing to share responsibility and were more interested in activities. The remaining background variable, length of residence, is not significantly predictive of *responsibility* and/or *activities*.

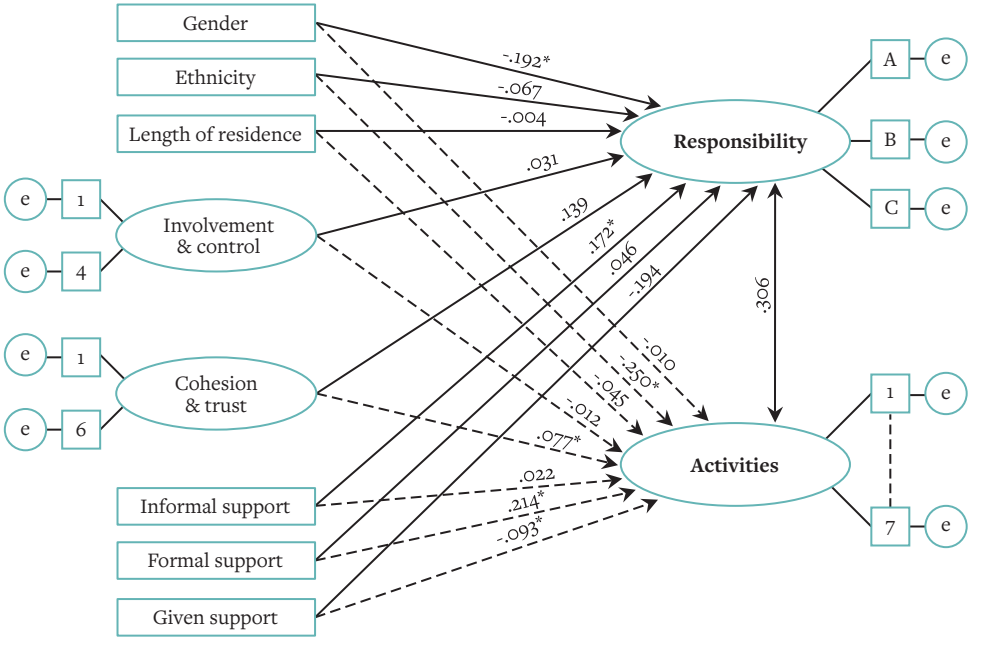
Model 2 adds the two subscales of neighborhood social climate: involvement and control and cohesion and trust. In this model, gender remains a significant predictor of *responsibility* and ethnicity of *activities*, but the influence of ethnicity on *responsibility* diminishes to an insignificant level. The predictor, cohesion and trust, is positively related to *activities*, indicating that parents with a more positive judgment on this aspect of their neighborhood climate were more interested in participating in parenting activities. However, the explained variance increases by only 0.5%, from 7.2% in Model 1 to 7.7% in Model 2, indicating that cohesion and trust is not a strong predictor. The other aspect of neighborhood climate, i.e., involvement and control, is not significantly predictive of *activities*. Although both neighborhood scales are insignificant predictors of *responsibility*, the explained variance for this independent variable increases by 3.2%.

Model 3 adds informal and formal support. Being male remains a significant predictor of *responsibility*, whereas being a non-Western parent and being more positive about neighborhood cohesion and trust remain significant predictors of *activities*. Informal support is positively related to *responsibility* ($\beta = .176$; $p < .01$), whereas formal support is positively related to *activities*

(β = .214; p < .01). Thus, parents with more informal sources of support were more willing to share parenting responsibility whereas parents with more formal sources of support were more interested in participating in parenting activities. Formal support is a stronger predictor of *activities* (R^2 increases by 5.3%) than informal support is of *responsibility* (R^2 increases by 2.5%).

The final model, Model 4, is shown in Figure 4.1. This model adds given support. The influences of the significant predictors of Model 3 remain on a significant level. Given support is negatively related to *responsibility* (β = -.194; p < .01) and *activities* (β = -.093; p < .01), indicating that parents who gave parenting support themselves were more willing to share responsibility and to participate in activities. This predictor is stronger for *responsibility* (R^2 increases by 4.4%) than for *activities* (R^2 increases by 0.3%). The total amount of explained variance in the final model is 14.3% for *responsibility* and 13.3% for *activities*. The correlation between the two dependent variables is moderate, .306. The final model achieved a good fit: χ^2 = 346.96; df = 144; p < .01, CFI = .937, TLI = .924 and RMSEA = .037.

Figure 4.1. Final model correlations between the predictors and the dependent variables.



Note. Neighborhood was used as a cluster variable to control for the nested structure of the data.
*p < .01.

Discussion

The current study explored parents' attitudes toward NPAs' involvement in childrearing practices. Descriptive analyses revealed an inconsistency in parents' responses to the three statements on shared parenting responsibility. The results suggest that most parents wish to keep the upbringing of children to themselves, and think that other adults should not interfere too much. However, parents also reported that others could help out with upbringing. Thus, there appears to be a paradox in parents' attitudes on shared parenting responsibility; parents seem to accept a certain amount of involvement from NPAs, but at the same time they seem to draw a line. Where is the line? Parents may associate the term "upbringing" with the instruction of values and norms, i.e., moral upbringing, and they might be reticent to involve others in this part of upbringing. At the same time, they might be happy to accept practical help or to exchange experiences. Furthermore, there may be a distinction between the public space and the private sphere. Supervision of playing children may not be limited to parents and, based on our qualitative data, most parents think it is acceptable for NPAs to support, warn or reprimand neighborhood children who are playing outside. When parents are present and the child is under their direct supervision, a suggestion or comment from an NPA may be perceived as a judgment. Finally, there may also be a difference between parents' general thoughts on civil society involvement in childrearing practices and the actual involvement they accept. This may also depend on the relationship between the family and the NPA. Thus, parents may subscribe to the proverb that it takes a village to raise a child, but recoil when it comes to their own children, or may at least want to choose who lives in their village. Additional research is needed to specify where parents draw "the line" and what their perspective on the childrearing role of NPAs is.

From the inventory on parents' interests for parenting activities, practical support, together with doing fun things with other parents and children, appear to be the forms of support in which parents are most interested. This may indicate that parents prefer activities that do not focus explicitly on the upbringing of children but that do assist them in handling parenting tasks, or give them the opportunity to exchange parenting experiences in an informal setting. However, the interest in activities with a more explicit childrearing character, such as a parent room and a parenting course, is relatively high among non-Western parents. Therefore, it is important to facilitate these kinds of activities as well.

We began this article with six hypotheses. Contrary to our first hypothesis, mothers were not more likely than fathers to share responsibility and participate in activities. Gender was not a significant predictor of interest in activities, but fathers were significantly more willing than mothers to share responsibility with NPAs. Although we do not have any data on participants' occupational status, previous research has indicated that mothers with low-paying and unsatisfying jobs, attach more value to their maternal role, and feel more irreplaceable (Renk et al., 2003). This may also hold true for stay-at-home mothers. Thus, being the primary caregiver

may have a restraining, rather than a stimulating, influence on mothers to share their childcare responsibilities with others.

Results partly supported our second hypothesis on ethnic differences in attitudes. Although non-Western parents, more often than Western parents, thought it was important that others were involved in the upbringing of their children, ethnicity was not significantly predictive of shared responsibility. However, non-Western parents were significantly more interested in participating in shared activities with other parents/NPAs. The non-Western parents in our research sample were born outside the Netherlands and their relatives may still live in their country of origin. This physical distance may explain why non-Western parents reported less reliance on informal sources of parenting support. The absence of relatives to rely on may increase the importance of a supportive network of unrelated adults.

Parents who had been living in their neighborhood for less than a year received the least support from neighbors, but contrary to our third hypothesis, length of residence was not a significant predictor of parents' attitudes. Although no significant relationships were found, the directions may indicate that parents with a shorter length of residence may be more in need of activities, because participating in activities gives them the opportunity to meet and get to know their neighbors.

Results partly supported our fourth hypothesis regarding the neighborhood social climate. Parents who made a more positive judgment on cohesion and trust in their neighborhood were more interested in participating in activities. Both cohesion and trust and involvement and control were positively but not significantly related to shared responsibility. Contrary to our expectation, the predictor involvement and control was negatively related to parents' interest in activities. Although this relationship was not significant, this may suggest that parents who are dissatisfied with the amount of involvement and control provided by their neighbors are more willing to participate in parenting activities with other parents/NPAs.

Results partly supported our fifth hypothesis on received support. Parents who can rely on more sources of informal support appear to be more willing to share responsibility. The relationship between informal support and parents' interest in activities was also positive, but not significant. Our expectation about formal support was not confirmed. The relationship between formal support and parents' attitudes appears to be in the opposite direction from what we expected. Thus, more reliance on formal sources of support could be associated with a greater willingness to share responsibility and was significantly predictive of greater interest in shared parenting activities. Since professional organizations are often important facilitators of parenting activities, that could be a possible explanation for the latter finding. Professionals may draw parents' attention to parenting activities such as a parent room in a CJG, or the possibility of exchanging parenting tips and sharing experiences on an Internet forum.

Our sixth and final hypothesis, regarding given support, was confirmed. Parents who

gave parenting support themselves appear to be more open to the involvement of others in childrearing practices and more interested in participating in shared parenting activities.

In sum, we found that 14.3% of the variance in shared responsibility and 13.3% of the variance in shared activities could be attributed to the predictors included in this study. More specifically, gender, informal support and given support were significantly predictive of parents' willingness to share responsibility, whereas ethnicity, neighborhood cohesion and trust, formal support and given support were significantly predictive of parent's interest in participating in activities. Given support appears to be the strongest predictor of shared responsibilities, whereas formal support appears to be the strongest predictor of shared activities.

Some limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. First, only a limited number of sociodemographic variables were included. This was owing to the fact that the questionnaire had to be short enough to question parents in a 5- to 10-minute face-to-face interview in a public space. The inclusion of more sociodemographic variables, such as socioeconomic position (education, income, occupation), could increase the insight into the results found. Second, ethnicity was based on the respondent's country of birth. Therefore, the group of non-Western parents comprises parents only from the first generation, i.e., born in a non-Western country. The second generation parents – born in the Netherlands but with one or both parents born in a non-Western country – were included in the Western group. This might have distorted the results of both groups. Third, no information is available on the differences between the respondents and the nonrespondents. However, there are not expected to be major differences because parents were approached in four different ways. We consider this multiple mode approach to be a strong point of our study. The different modes of data collection enabled all parents in the 17 neighborhoods to participate in the study. This may have reduced coverage errors: over- and underrepresentation of specific groups of parents, for example, working parents and infrequent or nonusers of the Internet (Dillman, 2000, p. 9). In addition, each method of data collection may have compensated for the possible weaknesses of the other methods (Dillman, 2000, p. 218). For example, the self-report versions may have compensated for the possible distortion by social desirability in the face-to-face and telephone administration. At the same time, face-to-face and telephone administration may have compensated for the possible distortion by prior inspection of the questionnaire in the self-report groups.

Notwithstanding the limitations, the current study gives insight into the attitudes of parents toward NPAs' involvement in the upbringing and nurture of children. Furthermore, it reveals that there are significant differences in the attitudes of fathers and mothers, and Western and non-Western parents. Research is needed into the underlying mechanisms of these differences.

This study raised questions that we believe merit further research. Through focus group interviews, we hope to gain a more detailed understanding of how parents define childrearing, which NPAs they perceive as significant partners in parenting, and how they expect these NPAs to

support them. Better understanding of these issues may lead to advanced theoretical knowledge of NPAs' involvement in childrearing, and may provide practical information to policy makers and professional organizations on how to stimulate and facilitate supportive relationships.

Chapter 5

Private worry or public issue? A focus group study on parents' perspectives on nonparental adults' roles and responsibilities in childrearing

This chapter has been submitted for publication as:

Kesselring, M., De Winter, M., Horjus, B., & Van Yperen, T. [12] (submitted). Private worry or public issue? A focus group study on parents' perspectives on nonparental adults' roles and responsibilities in childrearing.

[12] Authors' contributions: M.K., B.H. and M.D.W. designed research; M.K. and B.H. gathered data; M.K. performed data analysis; M.K., M.D.W., and T.V.Y. wrote the paper.

Abstract

Many Western societies are in a transition process to considerable changes in the social domain, including youth and family policy. Governments take a step back and youth and family policy is moving toward placing a greater emphasis on the active role of civil society. In line with these changes, parents are more and more expected to form childrearing partnerships within their own social networks. This focus group study explored parents' willingness to form these kind of partnerships. The results suggest that parents believe that they do not have, nor insist on having, the monopoly on childrearing. Parents consider the childrearing roles of other caregivers to be additional and compensatory. However, there appear to be conditions, leading back to the parents' wish for respect of their parental authority and to their wish for consideration of both their child's and their own vulnerability. Implications of these findings for practice, policy and future research are discussed.

Introduction

Many Western societies are in transition to a social policy shift toward a greater emphasis on the active role of civil society. An example can be found in the UK, where the government introduced the Big Society agenda with the intention to stimulate community development initiatives (Fisher & Gruescu, 2011). As part of this shift in social policy, it becomes increasingly important for families to create their own safety nets and form childrearing partnerships with other caregivers, henceforward referred to as nonparental adults (NPAs). The term NPAs is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of support figures (Sterrett, Jones, McKee, & Kincaid, 2011), from extended family members to nonfamilial adults such as neighbors, scout leaders, childcare workers and teachers (Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush, & Dong, 2003; Scales & Gibbons, 1996). In this study we use the term NPAs to refer to *all supportive related or unrelated individuals with informal or formal status who are naturally part of the family's social environment* (see Chapter 2). This focus on naturally occurring relationships or – from the youth perspective – natural mentoring relationships (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014) excludes formal support figures such as youth care workers and general practitioners. Although these professionals could play a valuable and necessary role in supporting parents and children, they only come into play in case of family problems and are not naturally part of the family's social environment (see Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2).

A longitudinal study by Werner (1993) demonstrates that high-risk children who had the opportunity to rely on a network of caring and supportive NPAs were more resilient and more likely to make a successful transition into adulthood. Other studies indicate that close bonds with NPAs may lead to various positive child developmental outcomes, for example, higher self-esteem (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005) and school success (Putnam, 2000).

Supportive NPAs may also indirectly contribute to the well-being of children and adolescents, because of their positive influence on parenting quality. Parents who gain support from NPAs appear to be more self-confident in dealing with parenting questions (Andresen & Telleen, 1992) and more warm and responsive toward their children (Marshall, Noonan, McCartney, Marx, & Keefe, 2001).

Despite these benefits for both children and parents, NPAs' involvement in childrearing appears to be controversial in the Netherlands and other Western societies, where childrearing traditionally is seen as a private issue of the nuclear family (Van Daalen, 2010). This cultural norm may restrain NPAs from involvement with other people's children for fear of negative parent reactions (Scales et al., 2004). Parents, for their part, may be reluctant to involve NPAs for fear of bad intentions. Furedi (2008) attributes this "breakdown in adult solidarity" (p. 29) to contemporary Western societies' parenting culture that could be characterized by a "precautionary approach" (p. 27) and a "tendency to inflate the threats facing childhood" (p. 12). Adult-child encounters – especially every-day public space encounters with strangers – might be one such threat.

In the current focus group study, we explored parents' perspectives on NPAs' involvement in childrearing, with the aim of deepening the understanding of the sensitivities concerning the taboo of sharing childrearing responsibilities. To date, empirical literature describing this topic is sparse (see Chapter 2). A more detailed understanding of the underlying sensitivities may uncover a clearer role division between parents as primary and NPAs as secondary caregivers, and may contribute to the breaking of this taboo. This may be especially relevant in light of the transformation of youth and family policy.

The current study

This study builds on a quantitative survey with 1,090 parents from 17 Dutch neighborhoods participating in the program *Allemaal opvoeders* (Alop – *Partners in parenting*) (Kesselring, De Winter, Horjus, Van de Schoot, & Van Yperen, 2012). This program is part of an overarching national program on enhancing civil society involvement with youth and families. The quantitative study showed that parents have ambivalent feelings on sharing childrearing responsibilities. The results suggest that most parents wish to keep upbringing to themselves, and think that NPAs should not interfere too much. However, a majority of the parents also reported that NPAs could help out with upbringing. This ambivalence was confirmed by an additional qualitative study we conducted, in which we asked 100 parents from the same sample to elaborate on their answers in a short face-to-face interview (Kesselring et al., 2012).

Although our previous study shed light on parents' attitudes toward NPAs' involvement in childrearing, it did not yield clear insight into where parents draw the line between their own and other people's childrearing responsibilities in different domains of childrearing. In addition, our study did not yield clear insight into the factors that might be associated with where this line

is drawn. Building on the findings from that study we identified five possible influencing factors (described below) that form the themes within the focus group interviews. We will explore in depth if, and if so why, these factors actually represent parents' considerations whether or not to involve NPAs in childrearing. This leads to the following research question: *Where do parents draw the line between their own and other people's roles and responsibilities in different domains of childrearing, and which factors are associated with where this line is drawn?*

Identification of focus group themes

Childrearing domains

With the current study we hope to find out if, and if so why, parents label certain childrearing domains as exclusive parental responsibility. Although our study focuses on childrearing, Turiel's social domain theory – in which he describes child developmental domains – provides a useful theoretical framework. This theory distinguishes the moral from the social conventional domain. By age three children seem to be able to make a distinction between both domains because of their participation in social interactions (Turiel, 1983). Morality refers to ethical issues; universal, generally accepted rules about right and wrong that prevail in all social situations and are not established by social consensus, for example, hitting is not allowed. Social convention refers to arbitrary rules that prevail in a specific social context such as school, nuclear family or peer group (Santrock, 2007). For young children these conventional rules initially appear to be universal, but soon they learn that rules that prevail in their own family do not necessarily prevail elsewhere. Examples are that you should raise your hand in class, and that you should eat with knife and fork (Santrock, 2007). The social domain theory also includes a personal domain. This domain refers to personal issues and freedom of choice, for example, the use of leisure and choice of clothes (Santrock, 2007).

Theoretically, parents might be less reticent to involve NPAs in moral education, because moral norms are more universal, whereas the norms within the other domains depend on parents' socially and culturally informed preferences. However, it is just as well imaginable that parents only allow NPAs in the moral domain if they have corresponding childrearing ideas.

Although the social domain theory provides a useful framework for our study, the theory might not cover all childrearing domains that may be delicate in light of sharing parenting responsibilities. In the focus groups the moderator will therefore also suggest – if not mentioned by the participants themselves – three other specific childrearing domains: stimulation of (school) learning (including teaching developmental tasks such as toilet training), religious and sexual upbringing, and setting limits.

The second part of our research question is which factors might influence the line parents draw in sharing responsibilities in these six domains. Based on our previous study, we expect five factors to play a role.

Factor 1: Mutual trust vs. no mutual trust

A first factor that might affect the line between parental and nonparental roles and responsibilities is the nature of the relationship between parents and NPAs. As we suggested in the discussion section of our previous quantitative study (see Chapter 4), parents may subscribe to the proverb that it takes a village to raise a child, but they may want to have authority over who lives in their village (Kesselring et al., 2012). We expect that if parents and NPAs have a relationship based on mutual trust, parents will allow NPAs to be part of their village and to play a more significant role in their children's upbringing.

Factor 2: Parent- vs. child-directed action

Supportive actions of NPAs can be either parent- or child-directed. We expect that parents prefer parent- over child-directed support, following Furedi's (2008) observation of overprotective parenting from a "precautionary approach" (p. 27), which appears to be a common phenomenon in contemporary Western societies. Despite increased labor participation, Dutch parents are spending more time with their children than a generation ago (Bucx, 2011). In itself this may be a positive development. However, the increased energy parents spend on their children may partly stem from their higher ambitions in relation to their role as parents. These higher ambitions may lead to overprotective parenting and a parental desire for the perfect childhood (Furedi, 2008). We expect that parents are reluctant to make use of child-directed support by NPAs out of concern for their children's safety.

Factor 3: Presence vs. absence of parent(s)

A third factor that we distilled from our previous study is presence vs. absence of parent(s). It is conceivable that parents accept and appreciate involvement of NPAs in their absence. This may especially hold true for supervision and correction of children's behavior. Results from our previous study suggest that parents particularly think of NPAs as "supervisors" and "admonishers", for example, when kids are playing outside, an NPA can keep an eye on them to make sure they are safe or warn them – or their parents – if they misbehave (Kesselring et al., 2012). According to Furedi (2008), parental supervision is highly valued in contemporary Western societies. Supervision seems to be synonymous with "responsible parenting" (p. 24). In this light, it seems understandable that if parents are temporarily not able to supervise their children, they devolve this task to other adults.

However, parents may be opposed to NPAs' involvement while they themselves are present, because they do not want to be undermined in their position as primary caregivers. It is conceivable that parents then want to watch, help and reprimand their children themselves, and find it important that NPAs recognize their parental authority.

Factor 4: Public vs. private space

A fourth factor that we expect to be indicative of where parents set boundaries with NPAs is public vs. private space. An NPA could be involved in the public space (for example, the street or the playground), but also in the private sphere (the parents' home). Remarks or advice in the public space might be less appreciated by parents because of shame or loss of face. However, it is just as conceivable that parents consider their own home as their territory where they believe NPAs to have little authority. As one participant in our previous study stated: *"Childrearing occurs indoors, but outdoors others could correct children's negative behavior"* (Kesselring et al., 2012, p. 928).

Factor 5: Mandate vs. no mandate

The last factor that we distilled from our previous study is mandate: the authority NPAs have to act on behalf of the parents in which parents retain the final responsibility. For some NPAs, their childrearing role might be more obvious because of their profession or function (for example, school teachers or sports coaches), whereas this role might be less obvious for others (for example, parents of class- or team mates). It is conceivable that whether or not parents assign authority to an NPA depends not only on the NPA's profession or function, but also on their relationship with the parents and the child (see Factor 1). If an NPA is a trusted person, it might be more likely that he/she receives mandate to fulfill a childrearing role.

Method

Six focus groups were conducted with parents having at least one child under the age of 19 years. The focus groups were held in easily accessible, non-threatening locations in the municipalities participating in the Alop program; day-care center, primary school, Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin (CJG – Youth and Family Center), neighborhood community center, and parents' houses. Recruitment of the participants was achieved by invitation from professionals involved in the program. For the two focus groups organized at parents' houses, a professional invited one mother – the host-parent – who invited the other participants from her own social network.

The focus groups ran for 90 to 120 minutes and were conducted in Dutch. All quotes were translated into English. The focus groups consisted of 4 to 9 participants each, with a total of 37 participants: 32 mothers and 5 fathers. Five groups were homogeneous in terms of culture. Three of these groups consisted of parents with a Western background and two of parents with a non-Western background. One group was heterogeneous in terms of culture and consisted of both parents with Western and non-Western background. Cultural background was based on the parents' country of birth according to the definition of Statistics Netherlands. Parents with a Western background originate from a country in Europe (except for Turkey), North America,

Oceania, Indonesia or Japan, while parents with a non-Western background originate from a country in Africa, South America, Asia (except for Indonesia and Japan), or Turkey (Van der Vliet, Ooijevaar, & Boerdam, 2010).

Participants' Socio-Economic Status (SES) was based on education and employment levels – of the participants as well as their partners – and family income. The scores were trichotomized into a low, medium and high SES variable. Two out of three homogeneous Western groups consisted largely of high-SES participants and one of medium-SES participants. One of the two homogeneous non-Western groups consisted largely of medium-SES participants, whereas the other consisted of low-SES participants. Lastly, the heterogeneous group largely consisted of medium-SES participants. Because of an underrepresentation of Western parents of low SES, we conducted a seventh focus group with participants of this specific target group. Although only two of the six invited parents showed up, the obtained data appeared to be relevant and consistent with the data obtained in the former six focus groups (saturation). We therefore decided to include the data in our study, not as a focus group, but as two in-depth focus interviews. For ease of readability, we use the term focus group throughout this chapter to refer to the six focus groups as well as to the in-depth focus interviews. The composition of the focus groups is summarized in Table 5.1.

Each focus group was facilitated by a moderator assisted by a co-moderator. The discussions were digitally recorded – with permission of the participants – and fully transcribed for analysis. The moderator and co-moderator reviewed the transcripts for common themes, and segmented and reassembled the data (Boeije, 2010). Analysis of the data was initially done separately and then discussed together to develop themes.

Participants completed a brief questionnaire prior to the focus groups reporting on their demographic characteristics. These questionnaires as well as the data collected during the focus groups were treated anonymously. In return for their participation, parents received a €5 toy store gift card.

Table 5.1. Group composition

Focus group	Number of participants (*N* = 37)	Male/female	Ethnicity	Location	Children's age range (in years)	SES
I	5	0/5	Western	Parents' house	2-7	Medium
II	4	0/4	Non-Western	School	4-18	Low
III	5	1/4	Heterogeneous	CJG*	2-12	Medium
IV	9	0/9	Non-Western	NBHD center°	1-19	Low
V	7	0/7	Western	Parents' house	3-19	High
VI	5	3/2	Western	Day care center	1-3	High
VII	2	1/1	Western	Parents' house	8-14	Low

*Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin (Youth and Family Center); °Neighborhood center

Question route

The moderator followed a similar protocol in each focus group using a series of open-ended questions to facilitate the discussion (see Appendix B). To prepare the discussion for the main topic of the focus groups – parents' perspectives on NPAs' involvement in childrearing – the moderator used two transition questions. First, the participants were asked what, in their opinion, are the core elements of childrearing. Second, the participants were asked which NPAs are important partners in childrearing. To gain insight into the line parents draw between their own and other people's childrearing roles and responsibilities, both transition questions were combined by letting participants indicate in which childrearing domains NPAs can/cannot take responsibility (key question 1, see Appendix B). To explore if the factors that we distilled from our previous study actually represent parents' considerations as to whether or not to consign responsibilities to NPAs, participants were asked to reflect on six vignettes in which we incorporated one or more factors (key question 2, see Appendix B).

Results

Core elements of childrearing

In accordance with theoretical models on parenting styles (e.g., Maccoby & Martin, 1983), parents indicated *providing a safe and loving environment* combined with *setting boundaries and*

discipline as core elements of childrearing. As can be seen from Table 5.2, both elements were mentioned in all seven focus groups. *Guiding a child toward independence* and *stimulation of social skills* were both mentioned in six focus groups. In one homogeneous group consisting of non-Western parents, independence did not come up, whereas the stimulation of social skills was not mentioned in the heterogeneous group. However, in the identification of childrearing elements, we found no clear pattern of differences in relation to participants' cultural background or SES, nor any differences in relation to how old the participants' children were. Nevertheless, only non-Western parents and parents of low SES indicated *daily care* as a core element of childrearing.

Table 5.2. What are core elements of childrearing according to parents?

Childrearing elements	Focus groups (total *N* = 7)	Examples of participants' phrasing
Provide a safe and loving environment	7	be there, give love, cuddle, give a sense of security
Set boundaries and discipline	7	be consistent, a no is a no, warn, supervise
Set moral and conventional rules	6	norms and values, teach what is allowed and what is not
Guide child to independence	6	teach decision making, make yourself 'dispensable'
Stimulate social skills	6	teach child to share/take turns/respect others
Stimulate (school) learning	6	stimulate child's talents, school choice advice
Stimulate identity formation	5	teach child to reflect, arouse child's curiosity
Be a role model	4	give good example, be role model
Daily care	4	care, health, hygiene

NPAs as childrearing partners

In all seven focus groups, parents indicated informal as well as formal childrearing partners. As can be seen from Table 5.3, family/in-laws appear to be important informal partners. However, some parents underlined that differences in parenting ideas sometimes create friction between them and their parents(-in-law), for example, about the degree to which a child is allowed to eat sweets between meals. This intergenerational friction seems to be even more obvious for non-Western parents, because of cultural differences with family/in-laws still living in the country of origin. As one non-Western mother stated: "*My family lives in Iran. They don't understand Dutch culture*".

Neighbors and strangers, such as people on the street, on the bus or in shops, also appear to be important informal partners. However, not all parents indicated strangers as actual co-socialization agents, as illustrated by the following interview excerpt: "[...] *I would not define that* [encounter with a stranger] *as childrearing. I think that is just a contact or a societal experience, experiences outside the nuclear family.* [...] *I do think society in itself has a form of education. I mean, if you don't give up your bus seat, someone will say: 'You should give up your seat for that old lady'. Then my daughter or son could feel educated, like: 'Hey, I take that as a lesson'. But well, for me it is not that I actually indicate them as educators around or next to me*". Some parents had similar thoughts on the childrearing roles of neighbors: "*Yeah indeed it depends on how you define childrearing.* [Name own daughter] *plays at our neighbors' house quite often and I don't think that my neighbor should raise her. But I do think that, if I'm not around, and* [name own daughter] *is playing there, and she does something that is not allowed or if she hits the neighbor's kid, I expect her* [the neighbor] *to reprimand her* [own daughter] *for that behavior*".

When it comes to formal partners, school teachers were mentioned as co-socialization agents in all seven focus groups. For parents of preschoolers, daycare center/playgroup teachers appear to be just as important.

Table 5.3. Who do parents indicate as significant childrearing partners?

Informal	**Focus groups (total *N* = 7)**	Examples of participants' phrasing
Family and in-laws	7	grandparents, aunts/uncles, family members
Neighbors	7	people in my neighborhood, neighbors
Strangers	6	people on the street/on the bus/in shops
Friends	5	friends
Other kids	4	siblings, children's friends, other kids
Parents of child's friends	4	parents of child's friends/classmates
Baby-sitter	4	baby-sitter
Social media	2	computer, smartphone, television
Formal		
School	7	school, teachers
Professionals	5	nurse infant welfare center, police officer
(Sports) club	5	coaches, sports trainer, group scout leader
Daycare center/playgroup	4	(group leader) daycare/afterschool/playgroup
Religious institution	1	community of faith

Exclusive vs. non-exclusive parental childrearing responsibilities

The results of the focus group discussions on key question 1 – *where do parents draw the line between their own and other people's roles and responsibilities in different domains of childrearing?* – could be clustered in six domains of childrearing: socialization in the moral domain, socialization in the social-conventional domain, socialization in the personal domain, stimulation of (school) learning, religious and sexual upbringing, and setting limits. The main results within each domain are summarized below.

Socialization in the moral domain

The transmission of norms and values turned out to be an important topic in the discussions on roles and responsibilities. Parents seem to be unanimous in believing that they should decide *which* norms and values are being transmitted. Parents stated that if NPAs fall into line with them, they can positively contribute as moral educators. In addition, parents indicated that if a child breaks a moral rule, for example, harms another child, a reprimand from an NPA is accepted. Indeed, most parents stated that they *expect* NPAs to correct their child for such behavior, because as adults, NPAs have to provide safety. This is true for both the public and the private space.

Socialization in the social-conventional domain

Most parents appear to be more flexible on NPAs' childrearing roles in the social-conventional domain: if children are in an NPA's house, they have to conform to the rules and manners that prevail there. Parents believed this conformation has a learning function. One mother, for example, stated: "*Well, to be quite honest, in my house they* [her children] *don't have to use fork and knife. But if they are at a friend's house, for example, and they are going to eat with fork and knife there, I say, well then you've* [her children] *learned that anyhow*". The confrontation with other rules and manners may not only be enriching for children, but may also broaden the parents' own view. One mother explained that the way her friend approaches her teenage daughter made her see that she could give her own twelve-year-old more freedom, for example, allowing her to go to the mall with her friends.

The results indicate that parents lay two boundaries toward NPAs' contribution in the social-conventional domain. First, parents thought that NPAs should not attempt to impose their rules and manners on a child. One mother explained that if her brother encourages her two-year old son to eat his bread crusts – something she normally does not – it is only to be applauded, but "*he* [her brother] *should not force him* [her son] *or, well, he could try a little, but he should not let him stay at the table as long as it takes to finish his bread crusts*". Second, parents thought that NPAs should not recurrently confront their children with rules that do not match their own rules. Therefore, parents thought it was more important to align rules with NPAs who regularly come into contact with their children. As one mother explained: "[...] *my mother babysits my daughter*

once a week, whereas [name husband]*'s mother lives in Hungary, so* [name daughter] *hardly ever sees her* [...]. *I think it's less important* [to be on same wavelength with mother in-law] *because the contact is only sporadic, than with my mother who babysits every week".*

Socialization in the personal domain

Reflecting on the personal domain, parents stated that NPAs can contribute by sharing experiences, giving advice and striking up a conversation. Parents identified the tone of the advice or conversation as crucial to a positive contribution. Parents explained that, to be enriching, an NPAs' tone of voice should not be disapproving, condemning or insinuating. As one mother stated: *"I think it's awful if someone condemns my child's activities, but I would not mind if someone offers options.* [...] *thus eye-openers are fine. I think it's very good if someone broadens my child's view, but I would mind if someone else tells what is good for my child and what is not* [...]. *I would applaud if someone says 'Are you still playing football as well?' instead of saying, 'You spend a lot of time on the computer!' That someone passes a judgment on my child, I think that's provoking".* A majority of the parents indicated that only if their child causes NPAs inconvenience, such as playing music too loudly, a reprimand is accepted.

In sum, looking at the three socialization domains, it appears to be important that in the moral domain, parental and nonparental norms are in line, whereas in the social-conventional and personal domain the learning function allows more room for diversity. However, NPAs seem to cross a line if they try to impose rules, recurrently apply nonmatching rules, or use the wrong tone of voice.

Stimulation of (school) learning

Another topic parents discussed with regard to key question 1 was the stimulation of (school) learning. Parents unanimously stated that they decide *when* a child is ready to learn a certain developmental task such as toilet training. As with moral education, NPAs could contribute by following parents' strategies. Playful, spontaneous learning seems to be accepted. However, if NPAs take the first steps toward teaching the child a new developmental task, they may give parents the feeling that they have failed in their parenting duties: *"Yeah that other people really try to stimulate the development, it sometimes gives you the feeling: Oops I should ... Should I have done that myself? Should I have started with that already?"*

Religious and sexual upbringing

With regard to religious upbringing, a majority of the parents indicated that NPAs are allowed to speak about their faith. Parents explained that this could be enriching, a source of inspiration, and broaden a child's horizon. Non-Western Muslim parents thought it was important that their children learn about Christian traditions and holy days, for example, why Christians celebrate Christmas. Most parents thought that NPAs cross a line if they bring up their faith as the only

truth, recurrently or actively try to convince the child of their ideas, or frighten the child with stories, for example, about hell or the devil.

Regarding sexual upbringing, parents stated that they decide *how* to tell their child about sex and pregnancy and *when* their child is ready for "the talk". Although NPAs should not take the initiative to tell children about the birds and the bees, parents expected them to react to their child's questions. In none of the seven focus groups did parents spontaneously mention any aspects regarding love and relationships. When mooted by the moderator, parents indicated that children learn this by watching how other people cope with feelings and handle relationship issues. Parents stated that NPAs could serve as role models and be of great support by sharing their own experiences, for example, when a child's parents are getting a divorce, the child can be comforted by NPAs who share how they – and their children – felt when they got divorced.

Setting limits

With regard to setting limits on children's behavior, parents identified a reprimand as an accepted disciplining technique for NPAs to apply. Parents unanimously approved an NPA's reprimand if their child shows negative behavior or does something that might be dangerous. Once more, parents identified the NPA's tone of voice as crucial. The use of sanctions caused a great deal of controversy in all seven focus groups. A sanction to prevent dangerous or break negative behavior seems to be accepted by a majority of the parents. For example, if children have already been warned that ball playing inside the house is not allowed, taking away the ball is an accepted sanction. However, NPAs seem not to be allowed to use other – in parents' words *"severe"* or *"harsh"* – sanctions. Parents stated that NPAs definitely cross a line if they give a child a "time-out", i.e., send the child to a separate room and let her or him stay there for a few minutes. Parents identified separation as *"too harsh"* and as a potentially frightening experience for their child. In sum, authoritative control – supportive disciplinary methods – seems to be accepted, whereas authoritarian control – punitive disciplinary methods – seems to be beyond NPAs' responsibilities.

If a child misbehaves during a play date and a warning, reprimand or a suitable, light sanction, such as taking away a toy, is not effective, parents expressed that they expect the NPA to give them a call so they could pick up their child. If that is not an option, for example, if a child stays the night at an NPA's house, parents expected that at the time of pick-up, the NPA tells them about their child's negative behavior and how they acted in an attempt to end this. Parents stated that they always remain ultimately responsible and if possible, they prefer to take over the childrearing role. As one mother stated: "[...] *well it almost sounds as if you relinquish control for a moment, but I never do that myself* [...]. *But they* [supportive NPAs] *contribute, I allow them to contribute, you know?"*

When it comes to setting limits it also appears to be important that NPAs do not thwart the parents' strategy, as illustrated by the following interview excerpt: *"My daughter once asked for*

a slice of sausage at the butcher's shop, because she always got one. But the saleswoman didn't give her the slice and said: 'Children who ask for cookies won't get any'. Well I thought that was ... I was totally ... Because I explicitly taught my children: If you want something, you have to ask for it, because people cannot read your mind. [...] *My child was very shy at that time you know, so she* [the saleswoman] *really thwarted my strategy".*

Parents' reflections on the vignettes

Key question 2 – *which factors are associated with where the line is drawn?* – was explored using six vignettes (see Appendix B). The main results of parents' reflections on these situations are clustered by factor and summarized below.

Factor 1: Mutual trust vs. no mutual trust

Mutual trust appears to stretch the limits when it comes to correcting children's negative behavior. Nevertheless, even if the relationship is based on mutual trust, the interaction *quality* – the way an NPA approaches a child or parent – seems to be more relevant than the interaction *quantity*. Parents once more underlined the importance of using the right tone of voice. According to parents, an NPA's tone of voice should be respectful and non-judging, and express helpfulness.

Discussing this factor, some parents also stated that it is not always possible to appoint the NPAs with whom one's child will come into contact. According to these parents, children – especially from their teenage years onwards – will also learn lessons from contact with strangers. For example, a co-passenger on the bus who tells your child to give up his or her seat for an older person or a saleswoman who gives your child a compliment. These contacts with "anonymous" NPAs are not built on mutual trust and by some parents are not even considered to be true childrearing actions rather societal experiences. However, a majority of the parents thought these societal experiences to be valuable, which appears to legitimize NPAs' involvement and actions irrespective of the existence of a trust relationship, as shown by the following interview excerpt: "*My son paid in a restaurant and he* [the waiter] *said: 'Wow great job!' Well, that made him* [her son] *shine for over a week! Because of that he will do it again, and again, and again".*

Although a mutual trust relationship does not seem necessary for fulfilling a supportive childrearing role, parents underlined that some degree of familiarity accelerates the acceptance of an NPA's authority. As one mother stated: "[...] *I think it's very difficult to let someone take care of my child if I don't even know that person by face*". Parents indicated that, if possible, they assess the situation, for example, become acquainted with the parents of their child's pal on a first play date or introduce themselves to the school lunchtime supervisor.

Factor 2: Parent- vs. child-directed action

Parent-directed action seems a sensitive matter, especially in the presence of children. A

majority of the parents believed this may undermine their authority. As one mother stated: "[...] *You're not gonna tinker with your rules in front of your child* [...]". In the fourth vignette (see Appendix B), most parents interpreted the parent-directed action – "What if your friend tells you that you should teach your child to say 'thank you'?" – as disapproval. As one mother stated: *"This would make me feel bad. Then I would feel like I'm not capable of raising a well-behaved child"*. If the friend uses the child-directed action – "Your child takes the sweets and your friend tells your child: Then what do you say? You say: 'thank you'!" – he/she follows up on the specific situation. Whereas if the friend uses the parent-directed action, he/she generalizes the situation. As one parent stated: *"So you can presume I don't teach her* [own daughter], *because she doesn't say it* ["thank you"] *then, but I know for sure that I did!*" However, parent-directed action seems to be accepted and welcome in mutual conversations wherein the NPA uses a light-hearted, non-didactic tone.

Regarding child-directed support, parents emphasized that their child may benefit greatly from supportive NPAs. Parents explained that NPAs could be a listening ear and provide a safe environment, especially when the child has to deal with something difficult or unpleasant. In these situations, a child may rather turn to an NPA than to one of the parents. One mother illustrated this with the following example: *"Last week we told our children that we decided to let them switch schools. Well after a lot of tears, my daughter said: 'Now I want to tell the neighbor', she fulfills sort of an auntie role, you know. Yeah, I think that's valuable, that she* [her daughter] *turns to another person in such a situation"*. However, discussing child-directed support, parents also emphasized children's vulnerability. Parents stated that if NPAs approach children, they should apply a lenient tone and should not judge or scare them. Furthermore, to prevent any confusion for the child, parents expected NPAs to align their actions with them.

Factor 3: Presence vs. absence of parent(s)

Overall, parents believed that in their presence, NPAs should exercise restraint. Some parents indicated that if an NPA does step in, they would feel undermined in their parental authority or would feel embarrassed. Other parents indicated that they would not so much feel criticized as troubled, as illustrated by the following quotation: *"It's not so much that I would not allow it, but more that I think, I should have done it myself, stupid that I didn't see it* [...]". Parents appear to give an NPA more space in the NPAs' own house. As one father stated: *"Your house, your rules"*. However, most parents stated that also in the NPAs' own house it remains important to use the right tone of voice and to respect parental authority.

Factor 4: Public vs. private space

Reflecting on the fifth vignette (see Appendix B), parents stated that they strongly prefer the exchange of mutual experiences to unsolicited advice. Parents explained that they are willing to learn from other parents and NPAs and that tips and tricks are very welcome, but

only if not didactic, because "[...] *then it's not a tip, but a homily*". Unsolicited advice seems to be even more delicate in public, because it could then discomfit parents. As one mother put it: "[...] *the doctor won't discuss private matters in the waiting room either*". Parents underlined that they prefer to get advice in one-to-one situations. Thus, if not in the private sphere, they want to be taken aside. However, there appear to be other standards if parents gather together to exchange parenting experiences, for example, in parent rooms or during parenting courses. In these situations, parents appear to be more open to receiving tips and feel more comfortable to discuss childrearing issues. As one mother stated: "[...] *At* [name welfare organization] *soon they'll start with 'Super Mom', for single mothers. We'll gather together and start discussions, you know, like 'How do you do this and that?'* [...]. *Well yeah, I really think that is ... I think that is really nice. Yeah, you can give each other tips and gain parenting ideas*".

Factor 5: Mandate vs. no mandate

Reflecting on the sixth vignette (see Appendix B), all parents thought the sports coach's reprimand was appropriate. Two different arguments were put forward. First, parents stated that being late may put the sports coach at inconvenience, because it may cause disruption to his/her training schedule. Second, parents stated that in this situation the sports coach is the authority figure who provides and enforces the rules. If a child does not follow these rules, this should have consequences.

With regard to the role of the teammate's parent, parents seemed to be ambivalent. In the first instance, parents thought that reprimand a child for being late, is the sports coach's responsibility. However, if the child's behavior causes the teammate's parent inconvenience, for example, if it is the teammate's parent's turn to drive the team to a soccer game, a reprimand seems to be accepted. In this situation, the teammate's parent seems to be the authority figure, because it is his/her responsibility to get the team to the soccer game on time.

Parents underlined that they decide who gets the mandate to fulfill a childrearing role. It appears that most of the time parents give a mandate to NPAs with a specific function or profession, because *"they already have a certain role. It's the teacher's task to teach my child, the children, something and that comes with certain rules and my child is familiar with these rules,* [...] *so well yeah, he* [the teacher] *could reprimand my child if disobeying the rules"*. In addition, parents stated that they expect these NPAs to have *"certain childrearing knowledge and expertise"* and that they work in accordance with an educational vision that accounts for all children equally. Equal treatment seems to be an important topic. In reflecting on the third vignette (see Appendix B), most parents believed it was appropriate for the playground volunteer/worker to reprimand their child if he/she keeps playing on the swing after he/she was told to let other children play on the swing as well. Most parents indicated the playground volunteer/worker as a neutral person, who makes a stand in the best interest of all children. As one father stated: "[...] *you don't expect partiality from someone who runs the playground* [...]. *If my son tells me 'That men* [the playground

worker] *took me off the swing', it wouldn't bother me, because I think that men will have a reason for that* [...]". Parents also stated that this playground volunteer/worker is "*a familiar face*", which lowers the threshold to approach him/her and ask what exactly happened. Overall, whether a formal or an informal NPA steps in, parents again defined the way of approaching and the tone of voice as crucial.

Parents underlined that it is important that children know "*who is in charge*". In some situations, this may not be precisely clear because there are two authority figures. Parents underlined that communication between authority figures on aligning actions and responsibilities is very important. One mother recounted a conflict of authority that she had in the schoolyard with the teacher of one of her children: "*But then I thought: this is always a minefield, those transitions, that there are two people with a childrearing role.* [...]. *It's kind of a border clash, you know. I really felt like: 'Wait a minute you've entered my parenting zone, in my time, in my place!' You know? Outside school. 'And now you have to back off!' I know darn well that this man* [the teacher] *has every right to discipline my child till three o'clock* [time school day ends], *but afterwards he has not*". Thus, mandate seems to be defined by time and place. In addition, mandate also seems to be defined by subject; a sports coach seems to be allowed to reprimand a child for being late, because this behavior may disturb the training. However, although the sports coach is an authority figure, his/her mandate does not seem to go beyond the practice of sports. Parents indicated that a sports coach should not recurrently discuss topics that do not influence the child's sporting achievements. One mother stated: "*It would make me feel very suspicious, you know, I would think: 'Why are you* [the trainer] *interfering with these things? Why are you* [the trainer] *interested in talking about these things? You are the sports trainer!' You know? This goes beyond his role actually ... or in my opinion, it exceeds the role division and the relationship he has with my child*".

Not only may the presence of two authority figures lead to awkward situations, but so too may the absence of an obvious authority figure. In the public space, such as a neighborhood square where children play, no one is directly responsible. Parents indicated that in this kind of situation, NPAs should react on vandalism, danger or threatening situations. Parents denoted this as "*civic responsibility*".

Discussion

Utilizing focus group research, the current study explored where parents draw the line between their own and other people's roles and responsibilities in different domains of childrearing (key question 1) and which factors are associated with where this line is drawn (key question 2). Gaining insight into parents' perspectives on sharing childrearing responsibilities is relevant, because many Western societies are in transition to a social policy shift toward placing a greater emphasis on the active role of civil society. As part of this shift, it becomes

increasingly important for families to create their own safety nets and form childrearing partnerships with NPAs. The study results put the issue of sharing childrearing responsibilities into a nuanced perspective: parents believe that they do not have, nor insist on having, the monopoly on childrearing. Parents appear to define the childrearing roles of NPAs as additional and compensatory to their own role. In other words, parents are not just willing to share their childrearing responsibilities, they also emphasized the added value of NPAs' involvement, for their children as well as for themselves as primary caregivers. However, there definitely appear to exist sensitivities, as demonstrated by the conditions parents set toward the involvement of NPAs. Parents indicated that in certain settings, such as school or sports club, another adult, such as teacher or sports coach, temporarily assumes their authority. Parents assigned a mandate to these authority figures for different reasons. The most important reason appears to be that parents (in)directly demanded the involvement of these authority figures. Other important reasons are that the concerned authority figure: 1) may experience problems if a child does not follow the rules that prevail in the specific setting; 2) has certain childrearing knowledge and expertise; 3) works according to a childrearing vision that accounts equally for all children; 4) is a familiar face. Nevertheless, parents did not only assign a mandate to professionals or voluntary workers. The results show that "inconvenience" is a qualifying factor in assigning mandate. A teammate's mother should not reprimand a child for being late, unless the child's behavior causes her inconvenience, for example, because it is her turn to drive the team to a soccer game. However, both for formal and informal NPAs, mandate seems to be defined by time, place and subject. NPAs only *temporarily* take over parents' responsibilities and only in *specific settings*. In addition, the proverb "let the cobbler stick to his last" seems to apply here; a sports coach is allowed to reprimand a child for being late, but should not recurrently discuss topics that do not directly influence the child's sporting achievements, for example, the amount of time the child spends playing video games at home. In the public space, and thus in the absence of an obvious authority figure, these time-place-subject boundaries seem to stretch. In dangerous or threatening situations, parents expect NPAs to step in. In these situations, it is not so much about getting a mandate but about taking civic responsibility.

The results also reveal that outlining the childrearing strategy is a parental responsibility: parents were unanimous that they decide *what*, *when* and *how* to teach their children. NPAs can be supportive by following the parents' strategy. This may help a child to understand the universality of certain norms and values, for example, that hitting is not allowed. If NPAs take care of a child on a recurring basis, aligning norms and values seems to be especially important. A grandmother, for example, who babysits once a week should follow the parents' "candy policy", whereas a grandmother who only sees the child now and then is allowed to spoil a bit. Non-recurrent confrontation with other views – provided that NPAs do not mean to be didactic or have the intention to persuade – may have a learning function, both for the child and the parents.

Furthermore, the results suggest that the way of approaching – more specifically, the tone of voice – seems to be a modifying factor for parents whether or not to ascribe responsibility to NPAs. In all seven focus groups, parents recurrently expressed their aversion toward a judging and didactic tone. Parents underlined that an NPA's intention should be complaisant and sincere: I see you and I want the best for you. The importance of using the right tone of voice was recurrently mentioned in combination with children's vulnerability. Parents appear to be very careful in allowing NPAs to discipline their child out of concern for their child's feelings. Parents underlined that they prefer to reprimand their child themselves, because if an NPA steps in, their child might get confused or scared. Whether or not this could be interpreted as overprotective parenting from a "precautionary approach" – in line with Furedi's observation (2008, p. 27) – is subject for debate. Nevertheless, that parents put so much emphasis on their children's vulnerability may be related to the message that is put forward in (popular) parenting literature and other media. Vulnerability appears to be enlarged, whereas the idea of resilience receives little attention.

Some limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. First, we obtained information from a relatively small number of parents and the results cannot be presumed to be representative. Second, a majority of the parents that participated in this study also participated in one or more activities that were part of the Alop program. Possibly, these parents were already more used to the idea of sharing childrearing responsibilities. Thus, again, this may limit the external validity. Third, mothers were overrepresented in the sample; a total of 37 parents participated in the study, only 5 of these participants were fathers (see Table 5.1). Regarding the results of this study it would be fairer to speak of "maternal" instead of "parental" perspectives. Fourth, ethnicity was based on the participants' country of birth. Therefore, the group of non-Western parents comprises parents only from the first generation, i.e., born in a non-Western country. The second generation parents – born in the Netherlands but with one or both parents born in a non-Western country – were included in the Western group. This might have distorted the results of both groups. Fifth, the age range of the participants' children was quite broad and the participants' responses might be related to how old their children were during the time the focus groups were held. However, we may have compensated for this potential problem with the use of six vignettes with children of different ages. By letting the participants reflect on these hypothetical situations, they were challenged to look beyond the upbringing of their own children.

Notwithstanding the limitations, the current study shows that parents allow NPAs to assume the secondary caregivers' role. Indeed, if NPAs abide by "the interaction rules" that parents set, their involvement seems to be highly appreciated. By stimulating the public debate on shared childrearing responsibilities, policy makers and professional organizations can play a role in clarifying these interaction rules. If parents and NPAs are encouraged to speak out about their expectations of each other, the threshold to share responsibilities may be lowered. The current

study also underlines the importance of parenting activities. Although the results confirm the existence of sensitivities in sharing childrearing responsibilities, they also reveal the parents' wish to exchange parenting experiences and their need for tips and tricks. Parenting activities, such as parent rooms in schools and CJG, could meet the conditions of parents regarding mutual exchange in non-threatening locations. At the same time, these activities could contribute to an increase of familiarity among parents and NPAs which could lower the threshold to share responsibilities. Professional organizations, such as schools and infant welfare centers, can contribute to an increase in familiarity by systematically facilitating contact among parents and NPAs. For example, by making a room in a school available for people to meet as a group or by offering group meetings instead of individual sessions.

Some of the study results, such as parents' statements on their children's vulnerability, may be characteristic of contemporary Western societies' parenting culture. Future research could focus on parents from different generations to explore the continuity and discontinuity in parents' attitudes toward sharing childrearing responsibilities. Insights from such a historical analysis could additionally be utilized for conducting intergenerational focus groups. Building on the current study – which mainly deepened horizontal childrearing responsibilities – these intergenerational focus groups could shed light on vertical childrearing responsibilities. In the Netherlands and other Western societies parents are more and more expected to create their own safety nets. Therefore, it could be expected that parents will increasingly share childcare with informal rather than formal NPAs, not least with their own parents(-in-law). Insights from intergenerational focus groups can be used in formulating concrete tools for professionals who want to improve intergenerational childrearing support.

In light of the study results, the antithesis we put forward in the heading of this chapter may become more nuanced: childrearing may be considered both a private worry and a public issue. Policy makers and professionals can play an important role in increasing the enthusiasm for the latter, by creating opportunities for informal exchange and mutual support.

Appendix B

Question route focus groups

Introductory question: Please tell us your first name and an activity you really love to do with your kids.

Transition question 1: What is "childrearing" in your opinion?

Transition question 2: Who, besides parents, are involved in childrearing?

Key question 1: What do you think are childrearing domains that NPAs can/cannot play a role in?

Key question 2: We invite you to reflect on the following situations:

Vignette 1 (**factors 1, 3 & 5***)

Your child plays at a friend's house.

A. The friend's mother reprimands your child for his/her behavior, e.g., hitting is not okay.

B. The friend's mother reprimands your child for his/her manners, e.g., eat with knife and fork.

Does it make a difference if…:

C. this mother is a trusted person?

D. the reprimand is in your presence?

E. the situation takes place at school and this mother is a school lunchtime supervisor?

Vignette 2 (**factors 1, 3 & 5***)

Your child is a teenager.

A. An NPA reprimands your teenager for how he/she spends his/her free time.

Does it make a difference if…:

B. this NPA is a trusted person?

C. the reprimand is in your presence?

D. this NPA is your child's teacher?

Vignette 3 (**factors 1, 3 & 5***)

You took your child to a playground. It is pretty busy and your child is on a swing.

A. After a while an NPA tells your child that he/she should let other children on the swing and explains why, i.e., take turns, play fair.

B. Your child doesn't listen and keeps playing on the swing. What would be acceptable for the NPA to say or do?

Does it make a difference if…:

C. this NPA is a trusted person?

D. this NPA is a playground volunteer/worker?

Vignette 4 (**factor 2***)

A friend gives your child a bag of sweets.

A. Your child takes the sweets and your friend tells your child: "Then what do you say? You say: 'thank you'!"

B. What if your friend tells you that you should teach your child to say "thank you"?

Vignette 5 (**factor 4***)

A friend gives you parenting advice.

A. When he/she is at your place.

B. In public, for example, in the schoolyard or at a birthday party.

Vignette 6 (**factor 5***)

Your child arrives late at sports training.

A. The coach tells your child that he/she should be on time next training.

B. The parent of a teammate tells your child that he/she should be on time.

Ending question: Is there anything else that we should have talked about but did not?

*Factor 1: Mutual trust vs. no mutual trust; Factor 2: Parent- vs. child-directed action; Factor 3: Presence vs. absence of parent(s); Factor 4: Public vs. private space; Factor 5: Mandate vs. no mandate

Chapter 6

The educative civil society in practice: A study on the effects of the activities included in the *Allemaal opvoeders* program

The Dutch version of this chapter was published as:

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[13] Authors' contributions: M.K., B.H., M.D.W., and T.V.Y. designed research; M.K. and B.H. gathered data; M.K. performed data analysis; M.K., M.D.W., and T.V.Y. wrote the paper.

Abstract

The aim of this study was to gain insight into the results of activities conducted under the aegis of the program *Allemaal opvoeders*. In this program, in line with the transition process in the local social domain, eleven pilot municipalities explored ways in which an active role played by civil society in the upbringing of young people can be advanced. Characteristic of these activities was a bottom-up approach: the professionals from the pilot municipalities were asked to develop and execute activities along these lines themselves. Although unable to give a definitive assessment of the effectiveness, this study does show that activities aimed at strengthening contact between parents and other caregivers can provide childrearing support. With the ulterior aim of transforming the youth welfare system, local government authorities and professionals can use the insights derived from this study to develop and strengthen the educative civil society.

Introduction

Major changes are taking place in current Dutch youth and family policy. From 2015 local government authorities have the responsibility for youth and family care. This decentralization is coupled not only with changes to the law and a shift in relations of governance and finance but also with a parallel process of renewing content. There are several distinct aims in this process of transformation. One aim of the new system is that more emphasis should be placed on prevention and on families' own possibilities and their social network. A second aim is "de-medicalizing" problems, including the avoidance of unnecessary problematizing and labeling of issues in childrearing (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2014; Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling (RMO) – Dutch Council for Social Development, 2012). In the run-up to the changes, various initiatives have been developed in recent years at national, regional and local levels giving operational effect to these transformational goals. One example is the program *Allemaal opvoeders* (Alop –*Everybody a child-raiser*), in which eleven pilot municipalities between 2009 and 2011 organized activities to promote the greater involvement of civil society in the upbringing of children and adolescents. The idea behind this is that involvement of other caregivers – for example, family members, neighbors, teachers and sports coaches, henceforward referred to as nonparental adults (NPAs) – has a positive influence on the functioning of families and can obviate unnecessary demands on more specialized care. This chapter, following on from an earlier published program theory (Kesselring, De Winter, Horjus, & Van Yperen, 2013; see Chapter 3), presents the results of an evaluation study of activities within the frame of Alop.

The idea behind *Allemaal opvoeders*

As well as attention to signalling risks and dealing with problems there seems to be more attention paid in research, policy and practice to the positive development and the wellbeing of the young (Ince, Van Yperen, & Valkestijn, 2013). It appears from various studies that NPAs can play a significant role as co-socialization agents. For example, Werner (1993) has shown in a longitudinal study that supportive relationships with NPAs contribute to the resilience of young people and to the prevention of problems in later adulthood. This involvement of NPAs also seems to be valuable for parents. Research shows, for example, that parents who are able to fall back on their social network experience less stress in bringing up their children (Garbarino & Sherman, 1980). These parents also appear more often to employ an authoritative style of parenting in which setting boundaries is combined with providing warmth (Marshall, Noonan, McCartney, Marx, & Keefe, 2001).

When parents and NPAs work together in the interests of raising children, we speak of the *pedagogische civil society* (the *educative civil society* – ECS). This term was introduced in 2008 by De Winter (p. 160) and would seem since to have become widely accepted. The term is often used in policy documents and practical initiatives when the importance of social networks in bringing up children is being discussed. The ECS is also the theoretical concept on which activities within Alop are based and is described by us as: "*the readiness of citizens to share the responsibility for the upbringing of children and adolescents within their own social networks and in the public domain, in the form of mutual support and informal social control*" (Kesselring et al., 2013, p. 8).

Giving form to the idea behind *Allemaal opvoeders*

The main objective of Alop was to strengthen the ECS. To this end, eleven pilot municipalities organized activities to establish contact between parents and NPAs. When the program Alop began in 2009, there were few interventions in the field of the ECS. Alop characteristically adopts a bottom-up approach: the pilot municipalities themselves were asked to operationalize the main objective of the program – the strengthening of the ECS – in concrete activities, thus creating an experimental field with ample room for diversity.

In parallel with the activities themselves, we developed a program theory in which the anticipated operative mechanisms and desired outcomes of the program activities are elaborated (Kesselring et al., 2013). The program theory introduces a four-step social contact ladder, based on an instrument by Snel and Boonstra (2005). The ladder consists of four sequential steps toward more structural contact between parents/NPAs – meeting, dialogue, neighborhood climate and network formation – making it possible to categorize the program activities on the basis of their anticipated operative mechanisms. Activities that are expected to promote low threshold meetings between parents/NPAs are categorized as "meeting activities" (category 1).

Activities expected to be able to stimulate verbal dialogue over childrearing are categorized as "dialogue activities" (category 2). Activities that are expected to have a positive influence on the educative climate of the neighborhood are categorized as "neighborhood activities" (category 3). Finally, activities expected to promote the formation of supportive networks are categorized as "network activities" (category 4). Figure 6.1 shows the four-step social contact ladder and the intended outcomes per step.

Focus of the current study

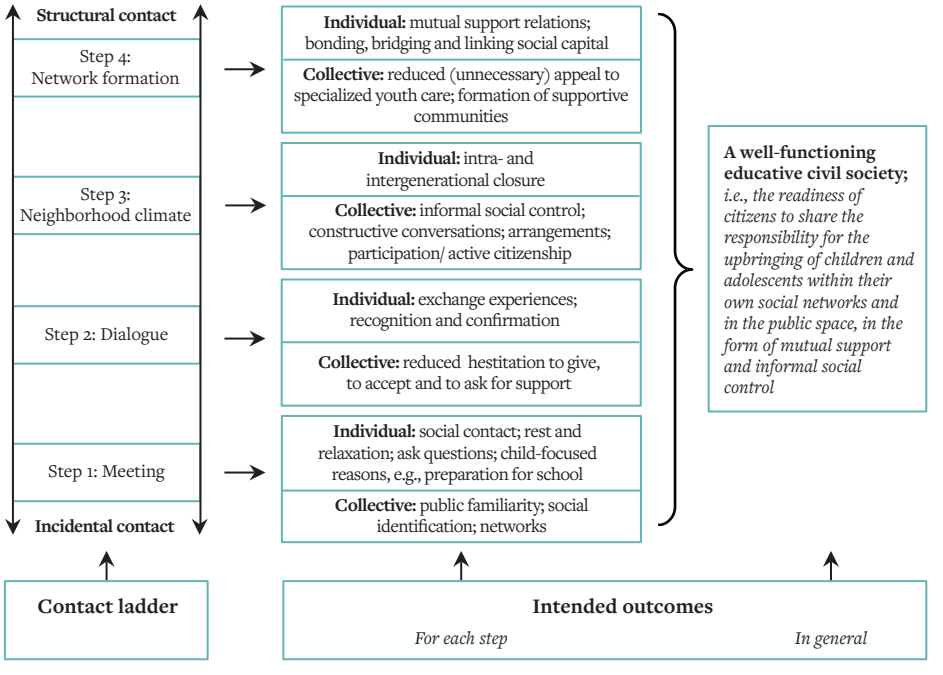
Because the program activities within Alop were not fixed, this study cannot be considered a classical evaluation study. The study adopted a bottom-up approach wherein the pilot municipalities developed and executed their own activities to strengthen the ECS. In this study, two main research questions are posed to gain insight from the results of these program activities:

I. In which activities did the pilot municipalities attempt to embody the idea behind *Allemaal opvoeders* and what were the operational goals of these activities?

II. To what extent were these goals attained?

To get an indication of the effects of these activities, assessments of goal-attainment were recorded from the parents and NPAs participating in the activities. Despite the fact that the data (concerning the attainment of goals) from this study give no definitive answer to the question of the effectiveness of the activities within Alop, they can provide indications. On this basis we can formulate recommendations that local government authorities and professionals can use to strengthen the ECS. Moreover, the data relating to the realization of goals may also suggest ways in which the underlying program theory could be modified. The insights from this evaluation study can at the same time contribute to the further underpinning of the ECS as the context in which young people grow up and are educated. They also provide a basis for further research (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008).

Figure 6.1. Schematic of the four step ladder of social contact from the program theory of *Allemaal opvoeders*.



Methods

Sample and procedure

The research group of this study was formed by the parents/NPAs who participated in one of the activities within Alop. All parents/NPAs who were present when the researchers visited an activity filled in a goal-attainment assessment and thus participated in this study as respondents. The background characteristics of these respondents differed per activity. As a result, the research group is highly diverse. The respondents included both men and women, parents and adults without children. Among those who had children were parents of babies and also of adolescents. Both indigenous and immigrant parents/NPAs were represented in the research group. The background features of the respondents for each activity is given in Appendix C (last column).

Before the researchers visited the activities in order to measure goal-attainment, contact was made with the professionals involved with the activities, either by telephone or face-to-face.

During these conversations the researchers asked the professionals to specify the operational objectives they hoped to achieve through the activities. For each activity the researchers then assessed the goal-attainment on the basis of these objectives.

Measures

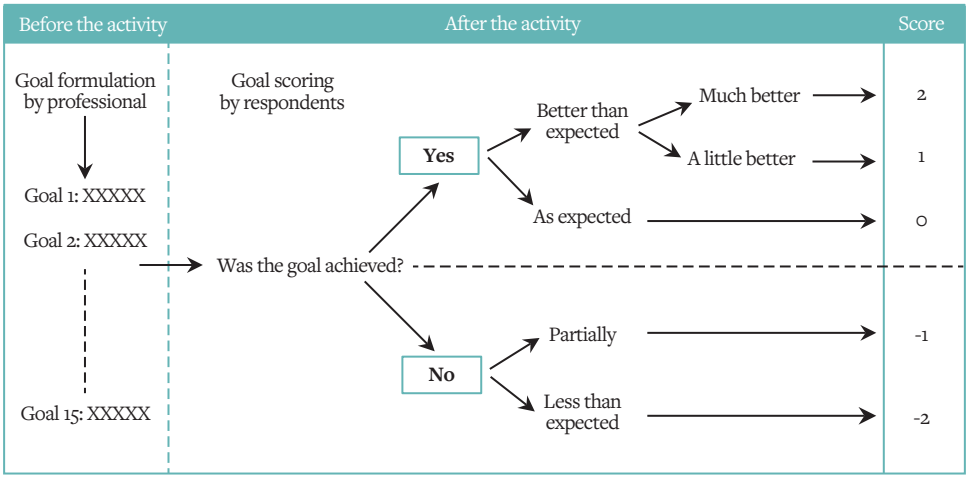
This study records the quantitative assessment, or rating, of goal-attainment in all program activities. This rating was arrived at for each activity on the basis of the operational objectives formulated in advance by the professional concerned, with a minimum of two and a maximum of fifteen objectives per activity. On the day the researcher visited the activity these objectives were rated by the parents/NPAs present using the method of *Goal Attainment Scaling* (GAS). This method – originally developed by Kiresuk and Sherman (1968) – gives a quantification beyond a simple yes/no response to the question whether, or the extent to which an objective has been achieved (Turner-Stokes, 2009). For each objective the respondents indicate the extent to which they personally judge that goal to have been attained. Various scales can be used to score this. In this study a five-point scale was used. When the goal was achieved as anticipated the respondent attributed a 0 score to this goal. When the result exceeded expectation the respondent gave a score of +1 (slightly more) or +2 (much more). When the result was less than anticipated the respondent gave a score of -1 (slightly less) or -2 (much less). Figure 6.2 shows the GAS method as used in this study.

Data analyses

The average GAS-score per goal was obtained by adding up the individual rating of the respondents. An average GAS-score of 0 or higher indicates that a goal was realized, while a score of less than zero indicates that an objective has not been adequately attained. To determine whether the average GAS-scores differed significantly from zero, a two-tailed t-test was conducted.

To give some idea of the gains resulting from the different activities within Alop, the percentage of goals achieved per activity was calculated. These percentages are obtained by first calculating the percentage of respondents within each activity that rated the goal as “attained”. For this, the ratings on the five-point scale are divided into two sets: all -1 and -2 ratings are counted as “not attained” and all 0, +1 and +2 ratings are counted as “attained”. Subsequently the percentages of all “attained” goals are counted and averaged.

Figure 6.2. Schematic of the *Goal Attainment Scaling* method as used in this study (based on Turner-Stokes, 2009).



Results

Giving form to the idea behind *Allemaal opvoeders*

Activities within Allemaal opvoeders

As a consequence of the bottom-up approach a total of 26 activities are developed and carried out over the eleven pilot municipalities. All activities are categorized on the basis of their expected operational mechanisms in one of the four steps of the social contact ladder, resulting in nine meeting-, six dialogue-, seven neighborhood- and four network activities. To give a picture of the program activities, we describe below one activity per category as an example. A summary of the most important characteristics of all 26 program activities is given in Appendix C.

An example of a meeting activity would be the *huiskamer* (*living room*) in the Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin (CJG – Youth and Family Center) in the Vinkhuizen district of Groningen. The living room is open for part of each weekday and the average weekly number of visitors – parents/NPAs and their children – is 25. It is run by women from the neighborhood, while the CJG counsellor is present in the background to answer any questions that might arise. From the living room the parents/NPAs organize theme mornings on childrearing and communal walks. Furthermore, clothes and toys are exchanged.

An example of a dialogue activity is provided by the *childrearing parties* organized by the parents/NPAs in Maastricht. Often a parent/NPA first comes to the CJG with a specific

childrearing question, for example, about difficult behaviour at the toddler stage. The CJG counsellor subsequently helps the parent/NPA with the organization and content of the party. Participants at the party may be friends or acquaintances of the parent/NPA but can equally come as friends of friends. Experience and advice is exchanged during the party, which on average consists of five to eight participants.

An example of a neighborhood activity is *Respect* in the municipality of Sittard-Geleen. In the urban district of Born a specific nuisance was reported of youths hanging out on the streets late at night and racing through the neighborhood in cars. On the other side, the youths found the inhabitants of the neighborhood to be intolerant and lacking in understanding. In 2010 the municipal council decided to abandon repressive measures in favor of investing in the educative quality and initiative of the neighborhood itself. To this end the Respect project was set up, consisting of two stages. In the first stage two neighborhood meetings were arranged where youths and adults could speak to each other under the supervision of a neutral conversation leader about their different perspectives of the neighborhood. In these meetings agreements were reached such as agreeing to greet each other on the street. In the second stage a working group was formed of youths and adults aimed at promoting positive intergenerational contacts. This working group, among other things, organized for inhabitants a tour of different places and facilities frequented by many young people such as "hangouts" and the local town center. A community worker supported the working group from the side-lines. Respect is the sole activity within Alop in which, beside parents/NPAs, youths also completed a goal-attainment assessment – because of their important share in shaping and carrying out the activity.

An example of a network activity is the *Mothers' Committee* in the Vlokhoven district of Eindhoven. The Mothers' Committee meets on a weekly basis on Tuesday afternoons and consists of a permanent group of ten Moroccan (grand)mothers. They largely determine the direction and content of the activity themselves. The women, for example, followed a course of dialogue training, participated in a debate on childrearing and organized a neighborhood picnic for parents/NPAs and children. The group is supported by a welfare worker.

Goals of the activities

With each activity the professionals involved formulated the operational objectives that they hoped to achieve for the parents/NPAs. As shown in Table 6.1, this amounts to a total of 32 objectives. Where objectives of the same essential meaning are given in different formulations, these objectives have been conflated. For example, the objective "I feel that I can tell my own story" (objective 4 in Table 6.1), is essentially a version of what professionals formulated as: "Parents/NPAs find here a listening ear", "Parents/NPAs recognize/validate each other's account" and "Parents/NPAs can tell their story". The objectives are transposed by the researchers into a first-person perspective so that the parents/NPAs, when entering their goal-attainment ratings, could easily find their way around the objectives.

The + and – signs in Table 6.1 indicate for each objective within whichever category (meeting, dialogue, neighborhood climate or network formation) whether this was or was not an operational objective. Based on this, Table 6.1 is divided into three parts. Part A (goal 1 to 9) contains goals that were formulated by professionals for one or more activities within all four categories. Achieving these goals thus seems to be important for many professionals, regardless of the type of activity they were involved with. An example is the goal: "I discuss childrearing with other parents/NPAs" (goal 1 in Table 6.1). According to our program theory this objective should fit within the "dialogue" category (Kesselring et al., 2013). However, professionals involved in the meeting-, neighborhood climate- and network activities also seem to want to stimulate parents/NPAs to talk with each other about childrearing. The goals in Part A thus appear to transcend the particular categories of the social contact ladder and are therefore considered as overarching program objectives. Part B (goals 10 to 19) contains goals that were not formulated for activities within all four categories, but overlapped two or three categories. And finally, the goals in Part C (goals 20 to 32) were unique to activities within a specific category. Table 6.1 shows that the professionals formulated no unique goals for category 4.

This section sets out in which activities the professionals operationalized the main aim of Alop – to strengthen the ECS – and which goals they hoped to achieve through these activities (research question 1). In the following section we shall examine the extent to which these goals were in fact attained (research question 2).

Assessments of goal-attainment

In this section we first look closely at the data for goal-attainment for the overarching objectives (Part A in Table 6.1). Of all the 32 objectives, because of the frequency with which they were referred to by the professionals, these goals appear to be particularly important for strengthening the ECS. Accordingly, we should pay close attention to the percentage-attainment of goals per activity as an indication of the success of the separate program activities.

Table 6.1. Goals of the activities as presented to the respondents with the use of *Goal Attainment Scaling* (GAS).

Categories* ⟶ / Goals ↓	1	2	3	4
Part A				
1. I discuss childrearing with other parents/NPAs.	+	+	+	+
2. I get to know other parents/NPAs (better).	+	+	+	+
3. I learn from the (childrearing) experience of other parents/NPAs.	+	+	+	+
4. I feel that I can tell my own story.	+	+	+	+
5. I get childrearing advice from other parents/NPAs.	+	+	+	+
6. I give childrearing advice to other parents/NPAs.	+	+	+	+
7. The conversations stimulate me to think about childrearing (more).	+	+	+	+
8. I think I can call on the other parents/NPAs when needed.	+	+	+	+
9. My participation stimulated me to participate in other childrearing activities.	+	+	+	+
Part B				
10. Participants in this activity give each other practical childrearing support.	+	+	–	+
11. The topics that are discussed here, increase my knowledge about childrearing.	+	+	–	+
12. I develop a bond with other parents/NPAs.	+	–	+	+
13. By participating in this activity I know where I can go with childrearing issues.	+	–	–	+
14. My children learn to play with other children.	+	–	–	+
15. I receive information about other activities for myself and my children.	–	+	+	–
16. I see/talk to/meet other parents/NPAs outside this activity as well.	–	+	+	–
17. My participation made me (more) aware of my role as co-educator.	–	+	+	–
18. My participation made me feel (more) connected to my neighborhood.	–	–	+	+
19. I learn to develop myself.	–	–	+	+
Part C				
20. I stay better informed about what my child learns in school.	+	–	–	–
21. My participation made me feel more confident to approach the teacher.	+	–	–	–
22. My participation made me feel (more) connected to the school.	+	–	–	–
23. Discussing childrearing becomes “normal”.	–	+	–	–
24. I get the tools to get better grip on childrearing.	–	+	–	–
25. I get to know young people in my neighborhood (better).	–	–	+	–
26. As volunteer in this activity I have an exemplary function.	–	–	+	–

Part C				
27. My participation stimulates me to play a more active role in youth activities.	–	–	+	–
28. Mutual understanding between generations increased.	–	–	+	–
29. There is greater support for youth facilities.	–	–	+	–
30. Adults and youngsters communicate more often and in a more positive way.	–	–	+	–
31. The neighborhood has become more livable for all generations.	–	–	+	–

*1 = meeting; 2 = dialogue; 3 = neighborhood climate; 4 = network formation. + = goal was formulated within one or more activities in the category concerned. – = goal was not formulated within one or more activities in the category concerned.

Rating goal-attainment for the overarching objectives

Figure 6.3 shows the average GAS-scores for the overarching objectives, grouped per category of activities. An average GAS-score of 0 or higher indicates that a goal was realized, while a score of less than zero indicates that a goal has not been adequately attained. To determine whether the average GAS-scores differed significantly from zero, a two-tailed t-test was conducted. Significant scores are indicated in Figure 6.3 by * ($p < 0.001$) or ° ($p < 0.05$). The results of the t-tests are shown in full in Appendix D.

Category 1: Meeting. Looking at the goal-attainment profile of meeting activities (Figure 6.3 above left), what strikes one is that seven of the nine objectives are rated positively. Meeting activities especially seem to contribute to parents/NPAs discussing childrearing with each other (goal 1), getting to know each other (better) (goal 2), learning from each other's experience (goal 3), feeling they can tell their own story (goal 4) and an exchange of tips with the other parents/NPAs present (goal 5). Although to a less extent – a positive but not significant score – meeting activities appear to stimulate parents/NPAs to think about childrearing (goal 7) and to participate more often in activities (goal 9). For most participants in meeting activities two of the nine goals seem not to have been achieved. Goal 6 "I *give* childrearing advice to other parents/NPAs" and goal 8 "I think I can call on the other parents/NPAs" are both given a negative average rating.

Category 2: Dialogue. Turning to the goal-attainment profile of the dialogue activities (Figure 6.3 above right), five of the nine objectives yield a positive average rating. In this category too the activities in particular contribute to parents/NPAs learning from each other's experience (goal 3) and being able to tell their own story (goal 4). Although to a less extent – a positive but not significant score – dialogue activities appear to contribute to parents/NPAs discussing childrearing with each other (goal 1), getting advice (goal 5) and being made to think (goal 7). As with the meeting activities, goals 6 and 8 are given a negative average rating. In addition, dialogue activities do not seem to help parents/NPAs to get to know each other (better) (goal 2)

or to participate more often in activities (goal 9).

Category 3: Neighborhood climate. In the third category, that of neighborhood activities (Figure 6.3 below left), six of the nine objectives get a positive average rating. As well as parents/NPAs getting to know each other better (goal 2) and being able to tell their own story (goal 4), neighborhood activities seem to contribute in particular to parents/NPAs calling on each other when needed (goal 8). To a lesser degree (although scoring positively here, but not significantly so) neighborhood activities appear to contribute to parents/NPAs learning from each other's experience (goal 3), being stimulated to think (goal 7) and to participating more often in activities (goal 9). As with the meeting activities and dialogue activities, the participants in neighborhood activities do not give advice to others present (goal 6). The participants in neighborhood activities additionally reported that they received no tips (goal 5) and did not talk explicitly about childrearing (goal 1).

Category 4: Network-forming. The goal-attainment profile of the network activities (Figure 6.3 below right) shows that a rating of zero or above is scored for all nine objectives. The participants in network activities thus judge all the overarching objectives to have been achieved. Six of the nine objectives get a significant positive average rating. The participants in network activities appear, based on the positive average rating, to give advice to the others present (goal 6), being stimulated to think (goal 7) and to participating more often in activities (goal 9), but these ratings were not significant ($p > .05$).

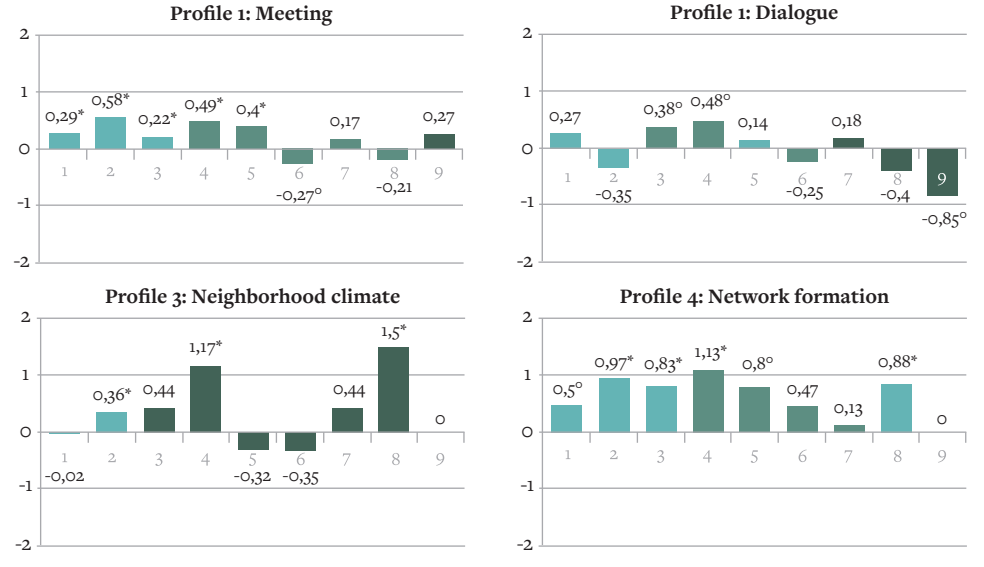
Interpretation of ratings of achievement of the overarching objectives

From the quantitative assessment of goal-attainment in Figure 6.3 it is evident that the goals 3, 4 and 7 rate positively in all four categories. Whether parents/NPAs come together on an occasional or more structural basis, they appear to learn from each other's experience (goal 3) from all types of contact activity, to be able to relate their own stories (goal 4) and to be set thinking about childrearing (goal 7). Contact between parents/NPAs thus seems to help them recognize and reflect on their own ways in dealing with childrearing issues.

Goals 1 and 5 are rated on average positively in categories 1, 2 and 4. The participants in meeting-, dialogue- and network activities reported that they discuss bringing up children with others present (goal 1) and get advice from them (goal 5). The negative scores in category 3 indicate that these objectives were not attained for participants in neighborhood activities. A possible explanation could lie in the nature of these organized neighborhood activities: compared with activities in the other categories, neighborhood activities were less explicitly aimed at childrearing support. Nevertheless, neighborhood activities do seem to offer support for childrearing indirectly; respondents indicated that they get to know parents/NPAs in the neighborhood (better) (goal 2), are able to tell their own story (goal 4) and have the feeling that they can always call on other parents/NPAs (goal 8).

As with goals 1 and 5, on average goals 2 and 9 also score positively in three of the four

Figure 6.3. Average GAS-scores for the overarching objectives, grouped per category of activities.



objective was an operational objective for (nearly) every activity within the concerning category; reliability relatively high

objective was an operational objective for at least half of the activities within the concerning category; average reliability

objective was an operational objective for less than half of the activities within the concerning category; reliability relatively low

*p < 0,001, °p < 0,05
x-axis = overarching objectives
y-axis = average GAS-score

categories. Meeting-, neighborhood- and network activities appear to help either create new or intensify existing contacts (goal 2). In addition, participation in this kind of activity seems to stimulate parents/NPAs to join more often in (childrearing) activities (goal 9). In the case of dialogue activities these goals do not appear to have been achieved. A possible explanation could lie in the failure to hold repeated meetings. The dialogue activities organized within the Alop program in fact often turn out not to be of an enduring nature. For example, in a childrearing debate a group of parents/NPAs came together once to discuss a specific childrearing theme. A single meeting may well be an inadequate basis for establishing or deepening contacts as well as insufficient to stimulate more frequent participation in (childrearing) activities.

Goal 8 is given a positive average rating in two of the four categories. Participants in neighborhood- and network activities reported that they think they can call on the other parents/NPAs when necessary. This result suggests that structural contact is an important precondition for the realization of this objective.

The assessment ratings in Figure 6.3 show that giving advice (goal 6) was only rated positively (but not significantly though) in network activities (category 4). It is possible that parents/NPAs exchange advice more easily in groups where participants are more familiar with each other. However, in meeting- and dialogue activities the respondents indicated that they did *receive* tips. It is perfectly possible that they underestimate the degree to which they *give* advice to others. Moreover, in all four categories respondents indicate that they learned from the experience of the other parents/NPAs present (goal 3). The exchange of experience may be considered as a less explicit or more indirect form of advice-giving.

Gains from the activities

To give some idea of the gains resulting from the different activities within Alop, Figure 6.4 presents an overview of the percentage of goals achieved per activity. On the basis of the percentage of attained goals and the spread between the goals, the activities are subdivided into: activities that show a relatively high profitable gain (light green), activities showing an average gain (mid-green) and activities showing a relatively low gain (dark green). Examples of activities that show a relatively high gain are the *kitchen table* (category 2, dialogue) and the *children's holiday week* (category 3, neighborhood climate). Both activities show a high average percentage of attained goals – 90% and 96% respectively – while the spread between the goals is low. This means that all objectives that the professionals involved had hoped to attain were also relatively well judged by the participants.

Examples of activities that showed an average profitable gain are the *meetings group* (category 1, meeting) and *coffee time* (category 4, network-formation). In both activities the percentage of attained goals is around 75% with both high (100%) and low (20%) extremes, the spread between the different goals being relatively high. In the case of the *meetings group*, for example, 6 of the 15 goals, including that of "I feel that I can tell my own story", were judged by 100% of respondents as "attained", while the goal "I *give* childrearing advice to other parents/NPAS", was judged by 20% of respondents as "attained".

Examples of activities resulting in a relatively low profitable gain are *playing together* (category 1, meeting) and the *childrearing party* (category 2, dialogue). In both activities the average percentage of goals attained was relatively low – 56% and 61% respectively.

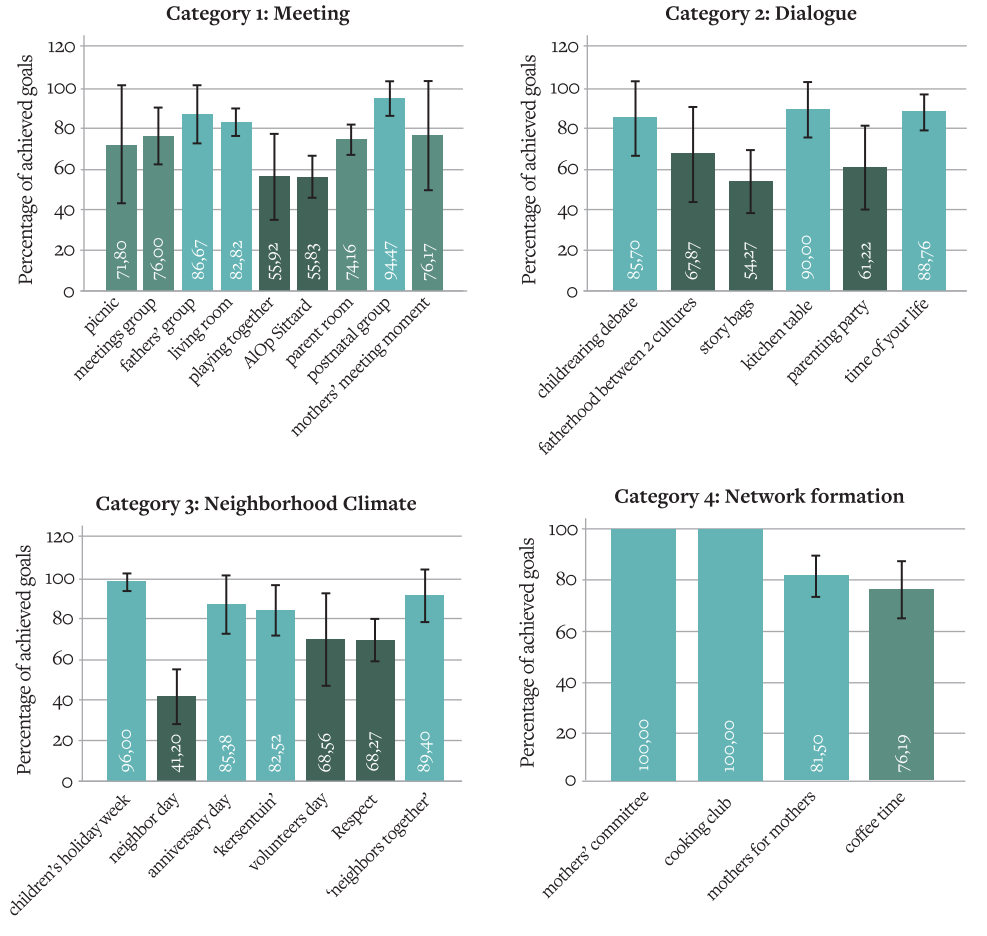
Interpretation of these percentages of positive gain from activities

Of the 26 program activities, 50% (13 activities) resulted in a relatively high profitable gain, 19% (5 activities) produced an average gain and 31% (8 activities) led to a relatively low gain.

In half of the activities, the objectives set by the professionals in advance were thus largely attained. In the other half of activities, where goals were only partly achieved, there would seem to be room for improvement.

From Figure 6.4 it can be seen that not only are there differences in the gains from activities within the separate categories, but also clear differences between the categories. Among the network activities (category 4) 75% achieve a relatively high and 25% an average gain. Of the meeting activities (category 1), on the other hand, only a third of the activities (33%) yield a high gain. The majority of meeting activities (45%) result in an average gain, while a fifth (22%) show a low gain. Of the dialogue activities (category 2) half yield a high gain and half a low gain. Of the neighborhood activities (category 3) almost 60% result in a high gain and around 40% a low gain. From this it may be provisionally concluded that those activities with more intensive contact are more effective in strengthening the ECS.

Figure 6.4. Overview of the percentage of goals achieved per activity.



activity with relatively high gain

activity with average gain

activity with relatively low gain

x-axis = activities
y-axis = percentage of goals achieved

Discussion

The aim of this study was to gain insight into the results of activities conducted in the Alop program. In line with the transition process in the local social domain, eleven pilot municipalities explored ways in which the active role of civil society in the upbringing of young people can be strengthened. A bottom-up approach characterizes this program, since there was no manual of interventions available for strengthening the ECS. Professionals from the eleven pilot municipalities were therefore asked to develop activities themselves and to put them into practice. This was duly done on a wide scale: 26 activities were developed, spread over the pilot municipalities. Using the social contact ladder from the program theory, these activities are categorized into four types: meeting-, dialogue-, neighborhood- and network activities. The professionals formulated a total of 32 operational objectives that they hoped to achieve by means of these activities. Of these 32 objectives, nine were of special significance for the strengthening of the ECS because of the frequency with which they were brought up by the professionals. We consider these nine aims as overarching program objectives. The social contact ladder from our program theory would seem to represent more of a continuum than a set of four clearly demarcated categories. Nevertheless, the ladder provides a suitable conceptual frame within which to order activities on the basis of the intensity of contacts between parents/NPAs.

To determine the extent to which the operational objectives were realized, this study uses the method of *Goal Attainment Scaling* (Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968). In this method the respondents – the parents/NPAs participating in the activities – indicate on a five-point scale the degree to which goals were, for them personally, attained. By counting up the individual scores rated by the respondents, the study gave an indication of the effects of activities: on the one hand at the level of goals (the degree to which each goal was attained), and on the other hand the level of the activity (the extent to which goals per activity were realized). Although unable to determine definitively the effectiveness of the program activities, this study does provide guidelines for the further development of methods. It is evident from the ratings of goal-attainment that the nine overarching objectives are to a large extent attained. In particular, parents/NPAs seem to gain support from the activities through the exchange of experience (goal 3), by being able to tell others their own story (goal 4), and appear to be stimulated to reflect on their own approach to childrearing (goal 7).

The ratings of goal-attainment show that some types of activity are more effective than others for attaining objectives. Thus neighborhood activities appear to be a bridge too far for explicit childrearing conversation or for exchanging advice. And yet this type of activity does appear to provide childrearing support, for instance by allowing parents/NPAs to relate their own accounts to each other. In addition, dialogue activities, because of their once-off character appear to be less suitable for getting to know other parents/NPAs or as a stimulus to participate more often in such activities. Further, structural contact would seem to be a precondition for

parents/NPAs feeling able to call on each other when necessary. This goal can primarily be attained through neighborhood- and network activities. Giving advice appears to be achieved only through network activities (positive but not significant score). Despite the fact that familiarity may be a necessary condition before parents/NPAs are willing or dare to give advice to others, it is equally conceivable that parents/NPAs underestimate the extent to which they themselves do actually give advice to others, for instance by way of exchanging experience.

This study shows that activities aimed at strengthening contacts between parents/NPAs can facilitate support for the upbringing of young people. This mutual support has become more important because of the recent transition process in the local social domain. In the new youth care system, governing authorities are making greater demands on the active role of civil society. The insights from this study could be used by local government authorities and professionals to stimulate a more communal involvement in bringing up young people, for example, via neighborhood teams with which many authorities are currently experimenting in light of the transition and transformation of youth and family care. The idea behind neighborhood teams is that families are supported by a single fixed contact person whose basic starting-points are the family's own strength and their social networks, and who less readily refers problems to specialist care. The focus of neighborhood teams seems so far to lie mainly on the questions and worries of childrearing of individual families. With the insights from the present study neighborhood teams could also fulfil a role as facilitators of contacts between parents/NPAs. The accent here should not then lie on organizing single activities, but on the creation of the essential conditions for repeated meetings. Future research could demonstrate which activities are best suited for this purpose.

Appendix C

Table 6.2. Summary of the most important characteristics of all 26 program activities within *Allemaal opvoeders*.

Name activity	Category	Location	Target group	Scope	Short description	Respondents GAS
Picnic	Meeting	City park in the municipality of Eindhoven	Mothers of the mothers' committee, their children and NPAs	15 adults, 20 children	Nonrecurring activity where mothers/NPAs gathered to meet each other and each other's children	N= 13; all women, mainly mothers of Moroccan descent with child(ren) of preschool or primary school age
Meetings group	Meeting	Community center in the municipality of Enschede	Parents (non-native, nonworking) and their children in the age of 0-4 years	10-12 parents per group (total of 20 groups) with their children	Weekly gathering, with theme mornings (8 times a year), for example, about consistent parenting and healthy eating for kids	N= 5; mothers, 4 of Syrian and 1 of Turkish descent, with children between 6 months and 4 years old
Fathers' group	Meeting	Primary school in the municipality of Enschede	Syrian fathers with children at the primary school	6 fathers	4 gatherings during school hours, with varying themes such as children's social development	N= 5; fathers of Syrian descent with children of primary school age
Living room	Meeting	Youth and Family center (CJG) in the Vinkhuizen district of Groningen	Parents and their children in the age of 0-4 years	About 25 parents with their children per week	The living room is open 5 mornings a week and is run by parents themselves. Besides meeting, the parents organize activities and there is a clothing and toys exchange.	N= 10; mothers, mainly migrant, with children of preschool and primary school age

Name activity	Category	Location	Target group	Scope	Short description	Respondents GAS
Playing together (In Dutch: Samen Spel)	Meeting	Community center in the municipality of Maastricht	Parents and children who participate in Play at home (in Dutch: Spel aan huis)	About 40-50 families per year	Monthly gathering originated from Play at home – an individual parenting support program – wherein parents indicated that they would like to get in touch with other parents	N= 6; 1 father and 5 mothers, all migrant, with children of preschool and primary school age
Alop Sittard	Meeting	Primary school in the municipality of Sittard	(Grand)parents with children at the primary school	5-8 (grand)parents per month	Monthly gathering during school hours where (grand)parents meet	N= 5; 1 grandmother (native) and 4 mothers (1 nonnative, 3 native) with (grand)children of primary school age
Parent room	Meeting	Two primary schools in the municipality of Tilburg	Parents with children at the two primary schools	15-20 parents per week	Parents gather on Wednesday and discuss themes such as bullying and drinking, often a guest speaker is invited, for example, a CJG employee	N= 30; mothers, mainly native, with children of primary school age
Postnatal group	Meeting	CJG and infant welfare center in the municipality of Zaanstad	Mothers who have recently given birth	About 100 mothers per year	Series of three meetings that offers mothers, who met during antenatal education, the possibility to continue to meet each other after childbirth	N= 30; mothers, mainly native, who have recently given birth

Name activity	Category	Location	Target group	Scope	Short description	Respondents GAS
Mothers' meeting moment	Meeting	Parents'/NPAs' house in the municipality of Houten	Parents/NPAs who live in Houten	8 mothers gathered 8 times during a period of two years	A group of mothers who participated in Time of your life (see Dialogue) continued to meet each other as a group. Meanwhile, there are more than 100 similar initiatives in the Netherlands.	N= 7; mothers, mainly native, with children of primary school age
Childrearing debate	Dialogue	Primary school in the municipality of Eindhoven	Parents and other neighborhood residents	20 adults, mainly parents, with children at the primary school	Nonrecurring activity with varying statements to discuss, for example, 'This is a good neighborhood for children to grow up in'	N= 7; mainly mothers of Moroccan descent with children of primary school age
Fatherhood between 2 cultures	Dialogue	Community center in the Graan voor Visch district of Haarlemmermeer	Migrant fathers who live in Graan voor Visch	10 fathers	5 gatherings where fathers discussed the difficulties they sometimes experience in the upbringing of their children	N= 7; fathers of North-African descent with children of primary school age
Story bags (In Dutch: De Verteltas)	Dialogue	Community center in the municipality of Houten	Parents/NPAs and their children (mainly migrants)	30 adults who make the story bags and families who use the story bags	Parents/NPAs make "story bags" together, which are loaned to neighborhood families to stimulate reading	N= 15; mainly mothers, both native and nonnative, with child(ren) in different age groups

Name activity	Category	Location	Target group	Scope	Short description	Respondents GAS
Kitchen table	Dialogue	At events in the municipality of Maastricht	Parents/NPAs who visit the events	Varying, on average 5 adults per kitchen table	During events, for example, "De Nationale Buitenspeeldag" ("National Play Day"), the local CJG invites parents and NPAs to sit down at a table to discuss childrearing themes	N= 4; 1 father (native) and 3 mothers (1 native and 2 of African descent) with children of preschool and primary school age
Childrearing party	Dialogue	Parents'/NPAs' house in the municipality of Maastricht	Parents/NPAs who live in Maastricht	30-40 parents and NPAs per year (5-8 participants per party)	A parent/NPA with a specific childrearing question, e.g., difficult behaviour at the toddler stage, organizes – with help of a CJG counsellor – a discussion meeting in his/her house for friends and acquaintances	N= 10; 2 fathers (native), 7 mothers (6 native, 1 of Turkish descent) and 1 NPA. 8 of the parents present have child(ren) of preschool and primary school age, 1 father has teenage children
Time of your life	Dialogue	Parents'/NPAs' house/ primary school in the municipality of Houten	Parents with children at the primary school	Two groups with a total of 35 participants, all parents	Series of five workshops wherein parents discuss childrearing	N= 17; both fathers and mothers, mainly native, with child(ren) of primary school age

Name activity	Category	Location	Target group	Scope	Short description	Respondents GAS
Children's holiday week	Neighborhood	The Vlokhoven district of Eindhoven	Children and parents/NPAs who live in Vlokhoven	52 children and 22 adults	Leisure activities for children during the summer holidays, also aimed at stimulating intra- and intergenerational contact and active participation of neighborhood residents	N= 20; parents and other neighborhood residents, both of Moroccan and Dutch descent, equal distribution of men and women, majority has child(ren) of primary school age
Neighbor day	Neighborhood	A neighborhood in the municipality of Loon op Zand	Neighborhood residents; both adults and youth	±30 adults and 50 children	'National Neighbors Day 2011' (In Dutch: Nationale Burendag 2011) was grasped as an opportunity to bring neighborhood residents into contact	N= 17; both men and women, mainly native, both with and without child(ren)
Anniversary day	Neighborhood	A neighborhood in the municipality of Loon op Zand	Neighborhood residents; both adults and youth	50-75 adults and youngsters	Nonrecurring activity on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of a concept where a school, senior housing and social facilities are housed in one location	N= 29; both men and women, mainly native, both with and without child(ren)
'Kersentuin' (= name of the neighborhood)	Neighborhood	A neighborhood in the municipality of Utrecht	Kersentuin residents and residents of the surrounding neighborhood	Residents of the 94 houses and the surrounding neighborhood	100% residents' initiative with 94 homes where the residents jointly undertake (non-explicit) educational activities such as joint dinners and a car sharing system	N= 19; both men and women, mainly native, majority of the respondents had child(ren) of preschool and primary school age

Name activity	Category	Location	Target group	Scope	Short description	Respondents GAS
Volunteer day (In Dutch: Wapperdag)	Neighborhood	Three neighborhoods in the municipality of Zaanstad	Parents and children who live in one of the three neighborhoods	30 parents and 25 children (= the volunteers), and ±150 neighborhood residents (= the visitors)	Family volunteer day on which parents and children make joint efforts for the neighborhood they live in	N= 15; mainly non-native mothers
Respect	Neighborhood	The Born district of Sittard	District residents, both adults and youth	A group of about 30 'initiators' and other district residents	In this project, residents handled (experienced) nuisance themselves by organizing intergenerational activities	N= 21; both youth (40%) and adults (60%), all native and all living in Born
Neighbors together (In Dutch: Samen buurten)	Neighborhood	Community center in the municipality of Hoofddorp	Children in the age of 0-12 years with their parents/NPAs	About 400 children per year with their parents/NPAs	Once every three weeks, different generations meet and undertake a joint activity under the guidance of volunteers	N= 4; non-native women, 3 volunteers and 1 participant
Mothers' committee	Network	Community center in the municipality of Eindhoven	Moroccan (grand) parents who live in the neighborhood	10 (grand)parents	Weekly gathering with joint activities, organized by the (grand)mothers themselves	N= 9; mothers, mainly of Moroccan descent, with child(ren) in different age groups
Cooking club (In Dutch: De Kookketel)	Network	Community center in the municipality of Maastricht	Mothers who live in the neighborhood, mainly Moroccan	±15 mothers	1 evening per week the mothers gather together to cook, exchange experiences and discuss childrearing themes	N= 9; migrant mothers, mainly of Moroccan descent, with child(ren) of primary school age

Name activity	Category	Location	Target group	Scope	Short description	Respondents GAS
Mothers for mothers (In Dutch/Moroccan: Oum 'n Oum)	Network	Community center in the municipality of Haarlemmermeer	Migrant mothers with children in the age of 0-4 years	20 mothers	Weekly gathering during school hours wherein mothers discuss childrearing themes, undertake joint activities and children play together	N= 9; migrant mothers with child(ren) of primary school age
Coffee time	Network	Community centers in two neighborhoods in the municipality of Zaanstad	Women, mainly migrant	±30 per neighborhood	Weekly gatherings wherein women discuss themes – sometimes introduced by a guest speaker – and children play together	N= 6; migrant mothers, mainly of Moroccan descent, with child(ren) in different age groups

Appendix D

Table 6.3. Average GAS-scores for the overarching objectives, grouped per category.

CATEGORY → / GOAL ↓	Meeting *M*(*SD*)	*t*(df)	*p-value*	Dialogue *M*(*SD*)	*t*(df)	*p-value*	Neighborhood *M*(*SD*)	*t*(df)	*p-value*	Network *M*(*SD*)	*t*(df)	*p-value*
1. I discuss childrearing with other parents/ NPAs.	0,29(0,62)	4,92(109)	0,00	0,27(1,22)	1,61(50)	0,06	-0,02(1,19)	0,12(46)	0,45	0,50(0,93)	2,63(23)	0,01
2. I get to know other parents/ NPAs (better).	0,58(0,70)	8,60(105)	0,00	-0,35(1,33)	1,73(42)	0,05	0,36(0,81)	4,43(100)	0,00	0,97(0,92)	6,07(32)	0,00
3. I learn from the experience of other parents/ NPAs.	0,22(0,85)	2,35(80)	0,01	0,38(0,86)	2,02(20)	0,03	0,44(1,26)	1,39(15)	0,09	0,83(1,05)	3,89(23)	0,00
4. I feel that I can tell my own story.	0,49(0,67)	6,78(85)	0,00	0,48(0,99)	2,31(22)	0,02	1,17(0,99)	5,02(17)	0,00	1,13(1,13)	3,90(14)	0,00
5. I get advice from other parents/ NPAs.	0,40(1,05)	2,83(54)	0,00	0,14(1,07)	0,78(35)	0,22	-0,32(1,20)	1,14(18)	0,13	0,80(1,15)	2,70(14)	0,01

CATEGORY → / GOAL ↓	Meeting *M*(*SD*)	*t*(df)	*p-value*	Dialogue *M*(*SD*)	*t*(df)	*p-value*	Neighborhood *M*(*SD*)	*t*(df)	*p-value*	Network *M*(*SD*)	*t*(df)	*p-value*
6. I give advice to other parents/ NPAs.	-0,27(1,03)	1,97(54)	0,03	-0,25(0,91)	1,23(19)	0,12	-0,35(1,22)	1,19(16)	0,13	0,47(1,25)	1,45(14)	0,08
7. I am stimulated to think about childrearing (more).	0,17(0,97)	1,27(53)	0,11	0,18(0,81)	0,90(16)	0,19	0,44(1,25)	1,51(17)	0,07	0,13(0,99)	0,52(14)	0,31
8. I think I can call on the other parents/ NPAs when needed.	-0,21(1,13)	1,33(52)	0,09	-0,40(1,26)	1,00(9)	0,17	1,50(1,04)	6,10(17)	0,00	0,88(1,08)	3,98(23)	0,00
9. I more often participate in other childrearing activities.	0,27(1,33)	0,77(14)	0,23	-0,85(1,46)	2,09(12)	0,03	0,00(0,00)	*(1)	*	0,00(1,26)	0,00(5)	0,50

M= mean; *SD*= standard deviation; *t*= t-value; df= degrees of freedom (*n*–1); *No t-test possible because *n*= 2

Chapter 7

General discussion

This dissertation had two aims. The first aim was to further explore the concept of the *pedagogische civil society* (the *educative civil society* – ECS) on the basis of both theoretical and empirical research. In the Netherlands, there has been growing interest in this contextual approach to childrearing. After being introduced by De Winter in 2008, the ECS seemed to be embraced and widely used in both policy documents and practical initiatives. However, thorough theoretical knowledge of and empirical support for the concept were largely lacking. More research was needed, as the Netherlands and other Western societies are going through a transformational process, moving toward placing a greater emphasis on the active role of civil society in the upbringing of children and adolescents.

The second aim was to gain insight into the results of the activities within *Allemaal opvoeders* (Alop – *Partners in parenting*), a national program that was conducted on behalf of the former Dutch Ministry for Youth and Families. In Alop, in line with the transformational process happening in youth and family care, eleven pilot municipalities across the Netherlands explored ways through which the active role of civil society in childrearing could be invigorated. As such, Alop can be considered an example of an initiative meant to strengthen the ECS. The evaluation study of the activities within the Alop program, as described in Chapter 6, provides empirical material that can be used to further develop the ECS.

This final chapter reflects on the research presented in this dissertation by summarizing the main findings and discussing the limitations of the research. Furthermore, it reflects on the implications of the research findings and discusses the future development of the ECS.

Main findings

Since little was known about parental and nonparental perspectives on sharing childrearing responsibilities, an exploratory *literature review*, presented in Chapter 2, was conducted first. We started the chapter with a clarification of the term "nonparental adults" (NPAs). Based on the level of proximity and the degree of professionalism, we distinguished three categories of supportive NPAs: proximal informal NPAs, proximal distant NPAs, and proximal formal NPAs (see Figure 2.1). We also presented a definition of NPAs that we used throughout this dissertation: *supportive related or unrelated individuals with informal or formal status who are naturally part of the family's social environment.* The literature review itself had two aims. The first aim was to uncover possible explanations for parental and nonparental perspectives on shared childrearing. The second aim was to shed light on the actual division of childrearing responsibilities between parents and NPAs. The findings from our literature review identified cultural as well as contextual explanations for parental and nonparental perspectives on shared childrearing. The cultural explanations were related to childrearing ideology and cultural background, whereas the contextual explanations were related to neighborhood characteristics, societal influences and policy influences. An important finding is that the Western trend of sole parental responsibility seems to provide an important explanatory account of parental and nonparental perspectives

on shared childrearing. In line with this trend, sharing childrearing responsibilities appears to be a delicate issue. Although the literature showed that parents and NPAs pay lip service to the notion of shared childrearing – sharing responsibilities seems to be acceptable and even desirable – actual sharing comes with conditions (McCartney & Phillips, 1988; Scales et al., 2001, 2003, 2004; Van Daalen, 2010). Parents place great importance on communication and agreed practice; they expect NPAs to inform and involve them in their childrearing actions and they do not seem to be willing to relinquish control (Kesselring et al., 2012; Market Response, 2010; Uttal, 1996). NPAs seem to take their role as secondary caregivers seriously, but at the same time they feel the anxiety about being intrusive. They seem to be juggling between two conflicting norms: "not interfering" and "being there" (Mason et al., 2007). Furthermore, some of the studies provided evidence for the existence of separate "territories of responsibility". We found several indications of the existence of a nurturer-teacher division (Forsberg, 2007; Maital & Bornstein, 2003). Strikingly, a majority of the studies focused on the role of the NPAs we defined as "proximal professionals", especially on teachers. Only a relatively small number of studies investigated the role of informal NPAs, particularly the NPAs we classified as "informal distant" such as neighbors and parents of the child's classmates.

In Chapter 3, we described the *program theory* of Alop – the theoretical foundations of the program activities – that served as a framework for the evaluation study (presented in Chapter 6). We started the chapter with an exploration of the concept of the ECS resulting in a definition of the ECS that we used throughout this dissertation: *the readiness of citizens to share the responsibility for the upbringing of children and adolescents within their own social networks and in the public domain, in the form of mutual support and informal social control*. We also introduced a four-step social contact ladder, which made it possible to categorize the program activities on the basis of their subgoal: meeting, dialogue, creating a positive educative neighborhood climate, or network formation. Furthermore, we described the preconditions and moderators that could foster and undermine the expected working mechanisms respectively. In our description we took special consideration of the role of professionals, because they can play an important role in enhancing civil society involvement in childrearing by, for example, creating opportunities to meet and exchange experiences. Promoting practices in shared childrearing may in the long term contribute the realization of new social norms on shared childrearing. At the end of Chapter 3, we provided a schematic summary of the program theory (see Figure 3.2).

In a *quantitative study*, presented in Chapter 4, we explored if parents subscribe to the proverb that it takes a village to raise a child. Data were collected through a quantitative survey with 1090 parents from 17 Dutch neighborhoods. Parents' attitudes were operationalized as the willingness to share responsibilities and the interest to participate in shared parenting activities. In line with the findings from our literature review, our quantitative study showed that sharing childrearing responsibilities is a delicate issue on which parents have ambivalent

feelings. Almost 70% of the parents reported that they are solely responsible for the upbringing of their children and more than 60% reported that the involvement of NPAs was not important to them. However, nearly 80% reported that NPAs could support them in the upbringing of their children.

For a further exploration of where parents draw the line between their own and other people's responsibilities with respect to childrearing, we conducted a *focus group study*. The results from this focus group study, presented in Chapter 5, gave rise to a nuancing of the antithesis "private worry versus public issue": parents believe that they do not have, nor insist on having, the monopoly on childrearing. Parents are not just willing to share childrearing responsibilities, they also emphasized the additional and compensatory value of NPAs' involvement as secondary caregivers, both for their children and for themselves as primary caregivers. However, in line with the results from the literature review and the quantitative study, the focus group study showed that the way this secondary caregivers' role should be fulfilled, seems to require attention. Parents were unanimous in saying that they decide on *what*, *when* and *how* to teach their children, and with respect to whom they give a mandate to act as a secondary caregiver. This mandate seems to be defined by time, place, and subject, i.e., NPAs only temporarily take over parents' responsibility, only in specific settings such as school and sports club, and only on subjects that actually concern them. In addition, parents set conditions that stem from their wish to have their parental authority respected and their wish to have both their child's and their own vulnerability shown consideration. To meet these wishes, it seems important that NPAs abide by certain "interaction rules", for example, aligning their childrearing actions and responsibilities with parents, and approaching parents and children with a helpful attitude, using the "right" tone of voice, i.e., not didactic or condemning.

In Chapter 6, we presented an *evaluation study* of the activities conducted under the aegis of the Alop program. In this study we explored activities in which the pilot municipalities embodied the idea behind Alop and what the operational goals of these activities were. In order to evaluate to what extent the operational goals were attained, we used the method of Goal Attainment Scaling (Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968). Alop started from a bottom-up approach, i.e., the activities within the Alop program were not fixed, but developed and organized by social professionals from the pilot municipalities. This bottom-up approach resulted in 26 activities that were – on the basis of their expected working mechanism – categorized within one of the four steps of our contact ladder, resulting in nine meeting-, six dialogue-, seven neighborhood- and four network activities. For each activity the professionals involved formulated the operational objectives they hoped to achieve, which amounted to a total of 32 objectives. Nine of these objectives seem to be of special significance for strengthening the ECS because of the frequency with which they were brought up by the professionals and were therefore considered to be the overarching program objectives (see Table 7.1). Based on the findings of our evaluation study alone, it is impossible to draw any definite conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the activities. However, it is evident

from the goal attainment rating that the nine overarching goals have to a large extent been attained, in particular goal 3, 4 and 7 (see Table 7.1). These findings indicate that activities aimed at strengthening the contact between parents and NPAs provide childrearing support.

Table 7.1. Overarching objectives of the *Allemaal opvoeders* program

1.	I discuss childrearing with other parents/NPAs.
2.	I get to know other parents/NPAs (better).
3	I learn from the (childrearing) experience of other parents/NPAs.
4.	I feel that I can tell my own story.
5.	I get childrearing advice from other parents/NPAs.
6.	I give childrearing advice to other parents/NPAs.
7.	The conversations stimulate me to think about childrearing (more).
8.	I think I can call on the other parents/NPAs when needed.
9.	My participation stimulated me to participate in other childrearing activities.

The ratings also show that some types of activities are more effective than others for attaining the overarching objectives. An important finding is that structural contact appears to be a precondition for parents and NPAs feeling that they are able to call on each other when necessary. Thus, with respect to this objective neighborhood- and network activities seem to be the most suitable. Neighborhood activities seem less suitable for stimulating explicit conversations about childrearing or for exchanging advice, whereas dialogue activities appear to be less effective for getting to know other parents/NPAs (better) or for stimulating to more participate in childrearing activities.

In summary, in the studies described in Chapters 2 through 5 we explored the ECS approach through theoretical and empirical research. Using the method of Goal Attainment Scaling, as described in Chapter 6, we were able to take a first look at the effects of activities to strengthen the ECS. In addition, we have laid the foundation for more extensive evaluation studies. This dissertation did not demonstrate convincing effects of the activities within Alop, for which the novelty of the ECS approach may be an important explanation. At the start of the Alop program in 2009 there were only a few interventions in the field of the ECS. There was no "cookbook" approach to civil society involvement in the upbringing of children and adolescents. The ECS approach was a new, unexplored terrain. As a consequence, a bottom-up approach was adopted in the development of the program activities. Since the activities were so diverse, we were not able to conduct a classic evaluation study. However, this dissertation is more than a "what works" dissertation. This dissertation was directed toward exploring the concept of the ECS as an alternative, contextual approach to childrearing.

Despite the gains from the research presented in this dissertation, there are some limitations as well. These limitations will be discussed in the next section.

Research limitations

A first limitation of the research presented in this dissertation is that sampling bias may have occurred in gathering the data for the studies presented in Chapters 5 and 6. In the focus group study (Chapter 5), a part of the study sample consisted of parents from pre-existing groups. Some of the respondents from these pre-existing groups were participants in one or more activities that were part of the Alop program. Possibly, these respondents were already more used to the idea of sharing childrearing responsibilities. This may have influenced the results. In the evaluation study (Chapter 6), the exact composition of the study sample was dependent on the attendance of parents/NPAs on the day the researchers visited the activity and measured goal-attainment. No information is available on the differences between the parents/NPAs who were present and the parents/NPAs who were absent during the data gathering. However, there is no reason to think there are major differences because those present and those absent did not differ significantly from each other in important background characteristics.

A second limitation is that the empirical data described in this dissertation (Chapters 4-6) are based on a population of parents with children in the broad age range of 0 to 19 years. In each stage of development – from infancy to adolescence – parents are confronted with different challenges that lead to different parenting questions. The participants' responses might be related to how old their children were during the data collection period. Due to the recruitment process – i.e., a majority of the respondents were recruited by or with help from professionals and mostly came from pre-existing groups (with the exception of the quantitative study presented in Chapter 4) – and the diversity of activities, it was not possible to focus on a more similar group of parents. In our focus group study, we may have compensated for this potential problem by using six vignettes that described situations with children of different ages. By letting the participants reflect on these situations, they were challenged to look beyond the upbringing of their own children.

A third limitation is that mothers were overrepresented in the samples of the focus group study (Chapter 5) and the evaluation study (Chapter 6). Regarding the results of these two studies, it would be more appropriate to speak of "maternal" instead of "parental" perspectives.

A fourth limitation concerns the way in which we determined the ethnicity of the participants in our studies. Ethnicity was based on the participants' country of birth. Therefore, the group of non-Western parents comprises parents only from the first generation, i.e., born in a non-Western country. The second generation parents – born in the Netherlands but with one or both parents born in a non-Western country – were included in the Western group. This might have distorted the results of both groups.

Despite these limitations, the research presented in this dissertation contributes to the theoretical and empirical underpinning of the ECS approach and provides insight into the desirability of the ECS approach from the perspective of parents and NPAs. In addition, the

research has important implications for the further development of this approach. These implications, some criticism, and the future development of the ECS approach will be discussed in the final section.

Implications, criticism, and future development

This dissertation has generated a number of implications that would be of interest to policy makers, researchers and professionals who work with youth and families. In this last section we will reflect on these implications. In light of our research findings, we will then discuss some critical comments that have been expressed about the approach in recent years. Finally, we will discuss the future development of the ECS approach.

Implications of the research findings

In recent years the ECS has received much attention as a potentially effective contextual approach, complementary to the dominant at-risk approach. The question is whether this approach remains promising, in light of our research findings. The results from our quantitative study and our focus group study confirmed what emerged from our overview of the international literature: both parents and NPAs are reticent in sharing responsibilities for the upbringing of children and adolescents. The results from our quantitative study suggest that parents wish to keep the upbringing of their children to themselves, and think that other adults should not interfere too much. Furthermore, as emerged from our focus group study, they were quite resolute that they decide *what*, *when* and *how* to teach their children.

Although we have collected less empirical data on NPAs, our review of the international literature showed that shared childrearing is a sensitive issue for them as well, mainly stemming from the fear of being intrusive or attracting a negative reaction from the parents. These findings raise the question of whether the network idea of the ECS fits in an individualized society where the autonomy of parents as primary caregivers seems – both from the perspective of the parents themselves and NPAs – a basic principle.

However, although the results confirm the existence of sensitivities toward shared childrearing, they also demonstrate that there is a need for sharing responsibilities and experiences. Both our literature study and our empirical studies showed that parents consider NPAs' involvement in childrearing to be valuable. Parents emphasized that the role of NPAs in childrearing could be both additional and compensatory to their own role as primary caregivers. Furthermore, the results indicated that parents wish to exchange childrearing experiences and tips and tricks in non-threatening locations, such as parent rooms in schools and CJG. NPAs, in turn, seem to take their role as secondary caregivers seriously and – whilst straddling the line between support and interference – they seem to believe it is important to be involved in the upbringing of other people's children, by, for example, giving a child a compliment, reprimand a child in case of negative or dangerous behavior, or by being a good role model.

In summary, the research presented in this dissertation shows the tense relationship between parental autonomy and the need for sharing responsibilities and experiences in the upbringing of children and adolescents. In individualistic societies such as the Netherlands, parental autonomy in childrearing seems to be the norm. This norm, however, does not seem to fit in with the practical need for sharing responsibilities and experiences, which might stem from living in a complex society in which people are confronted with questions, doubts, and challenges with respect to, for example, balancing work and family life. In the ECS approach, mutual contact and exchange can be facilitated, making the approach an important complement to the care focused on individual families.

In addition to the question of whether the concept remains promising in light of our research findings, the question is whether the effect of the approach could be demonstrated. Using the method of Goal Attainment Scaling, our evaluation study gave us indications of the effect of the activities aimed at strengthening the ECS. Furthermore, our literature review, questionnaires, and focus groups provided insights into parents' and NPAs' perspectives on the desirability and conditions of the ECS approach. Thus, by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, this dissertation brought to light the first indications of the effects of the ECS approach and provided an initial but fundamental step toward more extensive evaluation studies. Due to the complexity of the concept and the multitude of influencing factors, a combination of methods seems the most appropriate approach to gain more insight into the effects of complex bottom-up initiatives such as the ECS approach. That in itself is an important implication for future research. In addition, to adequately assess the impact of programs such as Alop, a longitudinal study design seems to be most suitable. Programs like Alop involve changes in practices that are rooted in society and it takes time before the impact of these changes become visible.

Criticism of the educative civil society approach

The ECS approach got positive resonance in recent years and became more common in both policy documents and practical initiatives. However, the approach has also been criticized. In light of our research findings, we will discuss the validity of these critical comments.

A first point of criticism concerns the achievability of the ECS approach, a criticism that has been expressed by, for example, Van Ostaijen, Voorberg and Putters (2012). Van Ostaijen and colleagues warn that a focus on the active role of citizens might be a new belief in the "malleability" of society (in Dutch: de maakbaarheid van de samenleving). According to the authors, the receding role of the Dutch government – mainly driven by austerity measures – combined with a changing citizenship conception – from a focus on rights to a focus on responsibilities – might lead to a shift from "macro malleability" to "micro malleability", i.e., influencing society, not so much by government intervention but by citizens' efforts. The authors argue that citizens vary in the extent to which they are self-reliant and in the extent

to which they have access to social capital. As a result, the authors fear that not every citizen will be able to respond to the governments' appeal to his or her own responsibility (Van Ostaijen et al., 2012, p. 81). In this light, the ECS seems to be a sympathetic idea more than an achievable approach. It is fair to say that it is too optimistic to expect that all citizens will spontaneously create their own childrearing partnerships. As described in the program theory (Chapter 3), professionals can play a stimulating and facilitating role in invigorating childrearing partnerships. They can help parents and NPAs to uncover or strengthen their bonding, bridging and linking social connections (Van der Lans, 2010; Fisher & Gruescu, 2011). Especially the latter type of connections deserves attention in view of the unequal distribution of self-reliance and social capital. The starting point of the ECS approach should not be "singular fixation on self-reliance and autonomy" (Van Ostaijen et al., 2012, p. 88), but co-production between citizens and professionals, with the latter acting as important community organizers who are aware that long term efforts are essential to invigorate the inherent strengths of families (Fisher & Gruescu, 2011). Eigeman (2012) points out that it is important to note that the ECS is not so much an ideal to work toward, but rather the available potential of childrearing partnerships that needs to be invigorated. In some families that potential is clearly visible; in other families professionals will have to devote more effort to facilitating the development of this potential.

A second frequently expressed point of criticism is that the ECS approach disregards the importance of professional efforts (Hilhorst & Zonneveld, 2013; Van Ostaijen et al., 2012). As we argued in our reflection on the first point of criticism, the ECS approach starts from the thought that professional efforts are indispensable for strengthening childrearing partnerships, because mutual efforts to help each other in the upbringing of children and adolescents may not occur naturally. Vreugdenhil (2012) argues it may require a switch in thinking to turn self-reliance from "take care of yourself by utilizing the right public facilities" to "take care of yourself by knowing how to organize the right support within your own social network" (p. 130). More civil society efforts do not imply less governmental and professional endeavors. On the contrary, as Van der Lans (2010) points out: solidarity for the upbringing of children and adolescents presupposes – not disregards – the commitment of governments and professionals: active citizens and active professionals go hand-in-hand. Thus, it is not about *less* effort, but about *other* efforts; utilize the knowledge and experience of professionals in a different way, i.e., less direct professional interventions aimed at individuals, and more efforts aimed at invigorating the potential strengths of parents and NPAs in such a way that childrearing partnerships can occur (Hilhorst & Zonneveld, 2013). This aligns with the desired course of youth and family policy: empowering the members of society to take an active role in childrearing.

A third point of criticism is that the ECS approach too easily assumes that serious childrearing problems, such as child maltreatment and parental substance abuse, can be solved by the efforts of families' own social networks (Van Ostaijen et al., 2012). This criticism concerns a

key element of the ECS approach, namely the thought that supportive social networks are vital for families, whether families face every-day or serious childrearing problems. This thought is not new and is supported by empirical research (Garbarino & Sherman, 1980; Marshall et al., 2001). For families facing severe or multiple childrearing issues, the ECS can be a valuable complementary approach – in addition to and not as a replacement for specialized professional support – that helps the professional to look at the family's needs from the perspective that families with stronger networks may be better and more enduringly equipped to handle parenting issues. Thus, every form of care, whether stemming from relatively simple every-day childrearing questions or complex questions, should be aimed at invigorating families' own inherent strengths and the support within their own social networks.

Toward the future development of the educative civil society

In the general introduction to this dissertation (Chapter 1), we have shown that in the last ten years the foundation was laid for the ECS to function as an alternative approach to Dutch youth and family care, as a counterpart to the at-risk approach. What has started as a potential alternative approach has in the meantime become a more common and complementary approach. There is clearly a greater focus, both in policy and practice, on civil society involvement in the upbringing of children and adolescents and on the importance of reinforcing this involvement. Despite increased attention and the development of initiatives, the question is whether the still fragile basis for the ECS approach endures under the influence of the transition process that is still going on in the local social domain. Local government authorities and professional organizations are struggling with administrative responsibilities and the redistribution of (shrinking) budgets. Despite good intentions, there is a real risk that the transformation process fades into the background and that youth and family care will eventually be transitioned to become the responsibility of the local government authorities without real alterations to the content of that care. To achieve genuine substantive renewal of youth and family care, it is important to nourish and guide the transformation process. This dissertation provides conceptual and empirical insights to reinvigorate the debate on the transformation of youth and family care.

In this dissertation, the role of (proximal) professionals has often been mentioned. They can be important contributors to the development of a strong ECS, because they can elicit the willingness in parents and NPAs to share responsibilities for childrearing. Fulfilling this stimulating and facilitating role requires a different attitude toward supporting families than most professionals are accustomed to. Governments and professional organizations could support professionals in practicing the active ingredients of the ECS approach, by guiding the awareness and development of such an attitude in, for example, (advanced) training. In guiding social care professionals in making the switch from a (mainly) caring to a (mainly) facilitating role, it is important that professional organizations give professionals the explicit task to

strengthen the ECS and, subsequently, give them room to fulfill that task, i.e., to leave room for flexibility and for experimenting with methods that have not yet been proven effective. In addition, quality criteria could be determined not only on the basis of efficacy (evidence-based practice), but on the practical experiences of professionals as well.

Although the ECS approach appears to be a promising new and complementary approach in the care for young people and their families, further development of the approach requires a mixture of modesty and dare. Modesty, because the ECS approach is not a cure-all or a "hurray story". The at-risk approach has long been the dominant discourse in Western societies' youth and family policy. The ECS approach provides an alternative way of thinking; or rather, a course correction, a necessary adjustment of the at-risk approach, which seems to have been carried too far and seems to have been elevated to the discourse of "the normal". However, we need to be careful that we do not fall into the same trap by creating a new dominant discourse for youth and family care. There is no one single answer to all the complex questions in the field of youth and family care. Creating effective support structures for young people and their families is a joint effort of citizens, volunteers, professionals and governments. Further development of the ECS approach also requires daring in order to move from reflection to real implementation of the concept. The fact that the ECS is not a panacea does not mean that we could not embrace it as a promising and complementary approach in youth and family care. This dissertation contributes to the further theoretical and empirical underpinning of the concept of the ECS. Governments as well as professional and voluntary organizations can play an important role in fleshing out the concept of the ECS, not least by seizing the opportunity to turn the transition process in the local social domain into a real alteration of the care offered to young people and their families. Youth and family policy faces major challenges during this time of transition. At the same time, there are opportunities to actually transform childrearing from a private worry to a public issue – a transformation to the notion that we are all partners in parenting.

Chapter 8

Bibliography

Summary

Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

Dankwoord (Acknowledgements)

About the author

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Summary

This dissertation focuses on a contextual approach to childrearing: the *educative civil society* (ECS – in Dutch: *pedagogische civil society*). The term ECS could be described as the joint activities of citizens in the upbringing of children and adolescents (De Winter, 2008). ECS in itself is a relatively new term, but has its roots in various scientific approaches and theoretical concepts such as the ecological-transactional model of childrearing, positive psychology, and empowerment. The ECS can be considered as promoting a new interest in empowering the members of society by giving them the opportunity to strengthen mutual childrearing responsibilities. In the Netherlands and other Western societies, the concept of the ECS has attracted increasing attention in the run-up to the transformation process of youth and family care. In recent years, various initiatives based on the concept of the ECS have been developed in the Netherlands. One of these is the program *Allemaal opvoeders* (Alop –*Partners in parenting*) in which eleven pilot municipalities between 2009 and 2011 organized activities to promote the greater involvement of civil society in bringing up children and adolescents.

The aim of this dissertation was to contribute to a further theoretical exploration of the ECS as a contextual approach to childrearing and to explore whether there was any support for this approach by scrutinizing a program – Alop – wherein this approach was operationalized.

Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to the research presented in this dissertation. The chapter addresses substantive arguments to invest in the ECS. Furthermore, it provides a short overview of the developments in Dutch youth and family policy that may have served as a breeding ground for the ECS approach, followed by a description of the Alop program. The chapter ends by presenting the dissertation's main objectives.

Since little was known about parents' and nonparental adults' (NPAs) perspectives on shared childrearing responsibilities, an explorative overview of the international literature was conducted first (**Chapter 2**). The chapter starts with a clarification of the term "NPAs" resulting in a definition used throughout this dissertation: *supportive related or unrelated individuals with informal or formal status who are naturally part of the family's social environment*. The literature review itself had two aims. First, describing possible explanations for parents' and NPAs' perspectives toward sharing childrearing responsibilities. Second, exploring the actual division of childrearing responsibilities. Findings from our literature review identified cultural explanations – related to childrearing ideology and cultural background – and contextual explanations – related to neighborhood characteristics, societal influences and policy influences. Furthermore, the study indicated that sharing childrearing responsibilities appears to be a delicate issue: although parents and NPAs pay lip service to the notion of shared childrearing, the actual share comes with conditions.

Chapter 3 presents the program theory of Alop; the theoretical framework of the program activities that served as a basis for the evaluation study (presented in Chapter 6). The chapter

starts with an exploration of the concept of the ECS resulting in a definition used throughout this dissertation: *the readiness of citizens to share the responsibility for the upbringing of children and adolescents within their own social networks and in the public domain, in the form of mutual support and informal social control*. The chapter also introduces a four-step social contact ladder, which made it possible to categorize the program activities on the basis of their subgoal: meeting, dialogue, creating a positive educative neighborhood climate, or network formation. Furthermore, the chapter discusses preconditions, moderators and the role of professionals in the ECS, and concludes with a schematic summary of the program theory.

A quantitative study (**Chapter 4**) was conducted to explore if parents subscribe to the proverb that it takes a village to raise a child. Data were collected through a quantitative survey with 1090 parents from 17 Dutch neighborhoods. Parents' attitudes were operationalized in the willingness to share responsibilities and in the interest to participate in shared parenting activities. In line with the findings from our overview of the literature (Chapter 2), the results showed a paradox in parents' attitudes on sharing childrearing responsibilities; parents seem to appreciate the involvement of NPAs, but at the same time they seem to be reluctant in sharing their primary caregivers' role.

A focus group study (**Chapter 5**) was used to further explore where parents draw the line between their own and other people's responsibilities. The results are in line with the findings of the literature review and the quantitative study: sharing childrearing is a delicate issue that comes with conditions and "interaction rules", for example, aligning childrearing actions and responsibilities, and approaching parents and children from a helpful attitude. Parents were unanimous that they decide on *what*, *when* and *how* to teach their children, and on who they give mandate to act as secondary caregiver. This mandate seems to be defined by time, place and subject, i.e., NPAs only temporarily take over parents' responsibility, only in specific settings such as school and sports club, and only on subjects that actually concern them. At the same time, the results give rise to a nuancing of the antithesis "private worry versus public issue": parents believe that they do not have, nor insist on having, the monopoly on childrearing. Parents are not just willing to share childrearing responsibilities, they also emphasized the additional and compensatory value of NPAs' involvement as secondary caregivers, both for their children and for themselves as primary caregivers.

In the evaluation study (**Chapter 6**) we used the method of Goal Attainment Scaling (Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968) to evaluate to what extent the operational objectives of the Alop program were attained. Alop started from a bottom-up approach, i.e., the activities within the program were not fixed, but developed and organized by social professionals from the pilot municipalities. This bottom-up approach resulted in 26 activities that were – on the basis of their expected working mechanism – categorized within one of the four steps of our contact ladder (presented in Chapter 3), resulting in nine meeting-, six dialogue-, seven neighborhood- and four network

activities. Within each activity the professionals involved formulated the operational objectives they hoped to achieve, which amounts to a total of 32 objectives. Nine of these objectives seem to be of special significance for the strengthening of the ECS because of the frequency with which they were brought up by the professionals and were therefore considered as overarching program objectives. Based on the findings of our evaluation study alone, it is impossible to draw any definite conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the activities. However, our findings indicate that activities aimed at strengthening the contact between parents and NPAs can provide childrearing support. With the ulterior aim of transforming youth and family care, local government authorities and professionals can use the insights derived from this study to develop and strengthen the ECS.

Chapter 7 provides a general discussion. This final chapter presents the main findings and discusses the limitations. Finally, it reflects on the implications of the research findings and discusses the future development of the ECS. We argue that future development requires a mixture of modesty and dare. "Modesty" because the ECS is not a panacea, and "dare" because this does not mean that the approach cannot be embraced as a promising complementary approach in youth and family care. This dissertation contributes to a further theoretical and empirical underpinning of the ECS approach and gives directions to move from reflection to real implementation of the approach.

Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

In dit proefschrift staat een contextuele benadering van opvoeden centraal: de pedagogische civil society, wat omschreven kan worden als de gezamenlijke activiteiten van burgers rondom het opgroeien en opvoeden van kinderen en adolescenten (De Winter, 2008). De pedagogische civil society (PCS) is op zichzelf een relatief nieuw begrip, maar heeft zijn wortels in verschillende wetenschappelijke benaderingen en concepten, zoals het transactioneel ecologisch model, de positieve psychologie en empowerment. De PCS-benadering is gericht op empowerment van burgers door het versterken van de gezamenlijke verantwoordelijkheden rondom het opgroeien en opvoeden van kinderen en adolescenten. In Nederland en andere Westerse landen heeft deze benadering in aanloop naar de transformatie van het jeugd- en gezinsbeleid in toenemende mate aandacht gekregen. In Nederland zijn er de afgelopen jaren verschillende initiatieven ontwikkeld om de PCS te versterken. Een voorbeeld hiervan is het programma *Allemaal opvoeders* (Alop), waarin elf gemeenten tussen 2009 en 2011 activiteiten georganiseerd hebben om de betrokkenheid van de civil society bij het opvoeden van jeugdigen te bevorderen.

Het doel van dit proefschrift was tweeledig. Ten eerste, bijdragen aan een verdere theoretische verkenning van de PCS als een contextuele benadering voor opvoeden. Ten tweede, verkennen of er steun voor deze benadering gevonden kon worden door de effecten van Alop te onderzoeken, een programma waarin de PCS-benadering werd geoperationaliseerd.

Hoofdstuk 1 geeft een algemene inleiding op de studies waar in dit proefschrift verslag van gedaan wordt. Het hoofdstuk behandelt inhoudelijke argumenten om te investeren in de PCS. Daarnaast biedt het een kort overzicht van de ontwikkelingen in het Nederlandse jeugd- en gezinsbeleid die mogelijk als broedplaats voor de PCS hebben gediend, gevolgd door een beschrijving van het programma Alop. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met de presentatie van de belangrijkste doelstellingen van het proefschrift.

Aangezien nog weinig bekend was over het perspectief van ouders en medeopvoeders op het delen van opvoedingsverantwoordelijkheden, is allereerst een verkennende internationale literatuurstudie uitgevoerd (**hoofdstuk 2**). Het hoofdstuk begint met een toelichting op de term 'medeopvoeder' (in het Engels: nonparental adult) wat resulteert in een definitie die gebruikt wordt in dit proefschrift: *ondersteunende verwante of niet-verwante personen met een informele of formele status die van nature deel uitmaken van de sociale omgeving van het gezin.* De literatuurstudie zelf had twee doelen. Ten eerste, beschrijven van mogelijke verklaringen voor perspectieven van (mede)opvoeders ten aanzien van gedeelde opvoedingsverantwoordelijkheden. Ten tweede, verkennen hoe de verdeling van opvoedingsverantwoordelijkheden er daadwerkelijk uitziet. De bevindingen wijzen op zowel culturele verklaringen – gerelateerd aan opvoedingsideologie en culturele achtergrond – als contextuele verklaringen – gerelateerd aan buurtkenmerken, maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen en beleidsinvloeden. Verder bleek uit de studie dat het delen van opvoedingsverantwoordelijkheden een delicate kwestie is: ondanks dat zowel ouders als

medeopvoeders de notie van gedeelde opvoedingsverantwoordelijkheden onderschrijven, lijkt de daadwerkelijke verdeling van verantwoordelijkheden verbonden aan voorwaarden.

Hoofdstuk 3 presenteert de programmatheorie van Alop; het theoretisch raamwerk voor de programma-activiteiten die als basis diende voor de evaluatiestudie (hoofdstuk 6). Het hoofdstuk start met een verkenning van de PCS, resulterend in een definitie die in dit proefschrift gebruikt wordt: d*e bereidheid van burgers om met elkaar in de eigen sociale netwerken en het publieke domein verantwoordelijkheden rond het opgroeien en opvoeden van kinderen te delen, in de vorm van informele wederzijdse steun en informele sociale controle*. Vervolgens is een contactladder geïntroduceerd die het mogelijk maakte om de programma-activiteiten te categoriseren op basis van hun subdoel: ontmoeting, dialoog, het creëren van een positief pedagogisch buurtklimaat, of netwerkvorming. Ook worden in het hoofdstuk randvoorwaarden, moderatoren en de rol van professionals in de PCS besproken. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met een samenvattend schematisch overzicht van de programmatheorie.

Met een kwantitatieve studie (**Hoofdstuk 4**) is onderzocht of ouders het gezegde 'It takes a village to raise a child' onderschrijven. Door middel van een vragenlijst zijn data verzameld bij 1090 ouders uit 17 Nederlandse buurten. De attitudes van ouders werden geoperationaliseerd in de bereidheid om opvoedingsverantwoordelijkheden te delen en in de belangstelling om deel te nemen aan gezamenlijke opvoedactiviteiten. In lijn met de bevindingen uit onze literatuurstudie (hoofdstuk 2), wezen de resultaten op een paradox in de attitudes van ouders ten aanzien van het delen van verantwoordelijkheden; ouders lijken de betrokkenheid van de medeopvoeders te waarderen, maar tegelijkertijd lijken ze terughoudend in het delen van hun rol als primaire opvoeders.

Met een focusgroep studie (**hoofdstuk 5**) is verder verkend waar ouders de lijn trekken tussen hun eigen en andermans verantwoordelijkheden in de opvoeding. De resultaten sluiten aan op de resultaten uit de literatuurstudie en de kwantitatieve studie: het delen van opvoedingsverantwoordelijkheden ligt gevoelig en is verbonden aan voorwaarden, zoals het afstemmen over opvoedtaken en -verantwoordelijkheden en het benaderen van ouders en kinderen vanuit een behulpzame, welwillende houding. Ouders waren unaniem dat zij beslissen over *wat*, *hoe* en *wanneer* ze hun kind iets bijbrengen, en over wie zij het mandaat geven om op te treden als secundaire opvoeder. Dit mandaat lijkt te worden afgebakend door tijd, plaats en onderwerp; medeopvoeders nemen alleen *tijdelijk* de verantwoordelijkheden van ouders over, uitsluitend in *specifieke settingen* (zoals school en sportvereniging) en alleen als het gaat over *onderwerpen* die hen – vanuit hun secundaire opvoedersrol – aangaan. Tegelijkertijd, geven de resultaten aanleiding tot een nuancering van de tegenstelling 'opvoeden als privé- vs. opvoeden als publieke zaak': ouders geloven niet dat zij het monopolie hebben op opvoeden en dringen daar ook niet op aan. Ouders zijn niet alleen bereid om opvoedingsverantwoordelijkheden te delen, ze benadrukken ook de additionele en compenserende waarde van de betrokkenheid van medeopvoeders, zowel voor hun kinderen als voor henzelf als primaire opvoeders.

In de evaluatiestudie (**hoofdstuk 6**) gebruikten we doelrealisatieonderzoek (in het Engels: Goal Attainment Scaling, Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968) om te evalueren in welke mate de operationele doelen van het programma Alop gerealiseerd zijn. Alop kende een bottom-up werkwijze, dat wil zeggen dat de programma-activiteiten niet vooraf vaststonden, maar door de professionals uit de pilotgemeenten zelf werden ontwikkeld en georganiseerd. Deze werkwijze resulteerde in 26 activiteiten die – op basis van hun verwachte werkzame mechanismen – werden gecategoriseerd binnen een van de vier treden op de contactladder (zoals gepresenteerd in hoofdstuk 3), resulterend in 9 ontmoetings-, 6 dialoog-, 7 buurt- en 4 netwerkactiviteiten. Binnen elke activiteit hebben de betrokken professionals de operationele doelstellingen geformuleerd die zij hoopten te bereiken, wat een totaal van 32 doelstellingen opleverde. Negen van deze doelstellingen lijken van speciale betekenis voor de versterking van de PCS vanwege de frequentie waarmee ze door de professionals werden ingebracht en werden daarom beschouwd als overkoepelende programmadoelen. Zonder definitieve oordelen te kunnen geven over de effectiviteit, laat deze evaluatiestudie zien dat activiteiten gericht op het versterken van het contact tussen (mede) opvoeders, informele steun bij het opgroeien en opvoeden kunnen faciliteren. Met oog op de transformatie van het jeugdstelsel, kunnen gemeenten en professionals de inzichten uit deze studie gebruiken om handen en voeten te geven aan het versterken van de pedagogische civil society.

In **hoofdstuk 7**, de algemene discussie, worden de belangrijkste bevindingen en beperkingen van de studies in dit proefschrift besproken. In dit laatste hoofdstuk reflecteren we daarnaast op de implicaties van de onderzoeksbevindingen en gaan we in op de toekomstige ontwikkeling van de PCS. We stellen dat de toekomstige ontwikkeling een mix van bescheidenheid en durf vraagt. 'Bescheidenheid' omdat de PCS geen panacee is en 'durf' omdat dit niet betekent dat de aanpak niet kan worden omarmd als een veelbelovende en aanvullende benadering in het jeugd- en gezinsbeleid. Dit proefschrift draagt bij aan een verdere theoretische en empirische onderbouwing van de PCS-benadering en geeft indicaties om van reflectie op tot daadwerkelijke uitvoering van de aanpak te komen.

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About the author

Marije Kesselring was born on the 27th of August 1983 in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. After completing her secondary education (Athenaeum) at the Weredi College in Valkenswaard, she received her bachelor's degree in nursing from Fontys University of Applied Sciences in Eindhoven. From 2005-2007 she studied Youth, Education and Society (in Dutch: Maatschappelijke Opvoedingsvraagstukken), a master program at the department Education and Pedagogics of Utrecht University. During her master studies, Marije worked as a nurse in the field of developmental disabilities. After obtaining her Master's Degree in July 2007 (with honors), Marije completed a two-year State Government Traineeship at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In January 2010, she started her doctoral research into the educative civil society at Utrecht University. During her time as a PhD-student, Marije also gained experience in teaching, as she supervised master theses, was lecturer in two bachelor courses, and gave various guest lectures. From October 2014 till November 2015 Marije worked as a lecturer at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. In July 2015 she got her Teaching Qualifications (BDB – Basiskwalificatie Didactische Bekwaamheid). Currently, Marije works as a researcher and lecturer at the department Education and Pedagogics of Utrecht University, and as a researcher at the Research Group Participation and Society of the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht. She is involved in a research project on the role of social neighborhood teams in strengthening the educative society.

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