

Troubles with Antillean adolescents, no attention for Antillean kids

Pedagogic police to prevent delinquency

In the big cities Antillean youngsters demand special attention. An increasing group of street gangs is causing much trouble. Police and justice have their work cut out by these youngsters. The excesses are intolerable. It damages the relationships in the cities and the relationship between the Netherlands and the overseas-isles. Money is only invested at the end of the chain. The policy is just curative, the results are not efficacious and for many involved the ways are frustrating. On the Antilles too problems are increasing. The media regularly report on the rise of violence among minors.

**More social workers
needed for children**

**Six youths held for
violent robberies**

**Academy school
board wants
punishment to
cross school
bounds for fighters**

**16-year-old arrested
for threatening teacher
and throwing rocks**

**COURT NEEDS
HELP WITH KIDS**
Insufficient homes and staff hamper child-intervention efforts

**Teen's shooting may have
stemmed from school fight**
Mother pleads for violence to cease

**Security guard beaten by
Vocational School student**

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**Student detained for
violent behaviour**

Marcel van Herpen, divisional head of the expertise centre of Experience Orientated Education (EOE) in the Netherlands, has been worried for years about Antillean children and wrote the note "Solidarity: the preventive answer to delinquent behaviour of Antillean youngsters. In his note he introduces a new profession "the pedagogic police" as a chain between promising kids and given-up adolescents.



First the good news

About ten years ago Marcel van Herpen came into contact with the headmaster of a primary school on St. Maarten. After reading several publications about EOE the headmaster had become interested in its concept. Van Herpen was invited to the “friendly island” to share his knowledge and experience.... Together with some enthusiastic headmasters and teachers he there founded the institution EOE-St. Maarten. From that day on the expertise centre EOE Netherlands counsels and supports an increasing number of primary schools on St. Maarten. The results are positive. The schools that have been working with the EOE-concept, have changed their ways of working from class teaching in which the teacher dictated the whole of the curriculum, education evolved into a new organization, in which the circle, work by contract, project work, workshops and free choice became common ways of working. The contribution of the children increased more and more. At the EOE-schools on St. Maarten a bell does not sound anymore in the morning and the children are no longer in a queue there. They enter quietly and start working in their classrooms. Parts of the classroom are set up with inviting materials. In the classrooms a self-evident and clear organization has been taken care of, so the children know **what** they can do and **when** they can do it. While the teacher is instructing a group of children, the others are working on their task for that week. They help each other with their work. Every week starts with an opening ceremony, in which the whole school community

participates with presentations. On St. Maarten this concept of education, with its permanent attention for wellbeing and involvement, is still not common. Besides there are many problems in education: the Dutch education language for English-speaking children, the Dutch methods to be used in a Caribbean context and a chronic lack of money.

Delinked at home and at school

The nature of the problems which the schools at the Dutch Antilles have to deal with more and more, is not always purely educational. The home-related problems that many children bring along with them are numerous and complex. There are many one-parent families. Large groups of children do not know their father, many mothers have financial and social problems and large groups of children therefore cannot rely on their homes for their upbringing. These children often are the ones who behave more noisily and aggressively at school. Teachers are troubled by troublesome children, they are punished more quickly, receive insufficient marks, are expelled and sometimes even suspended. These children become delinked from home as well as school. That is exactly the basis of the problems the big cities later have to deal with.

De-link or connect

The faculty of criminology of the Catholic University of Leuven and the Centre of EOE together have done researches into delinquent behaviour among youngsters. Researchers have pointed out that there is an evident relationship between delinquent behaviour and being de-

linked. People who are delinked from themselves, others, nature and their environment may manifest delinquent behaviour in the future. The simple opposite statement is that someone does not damage that with which he is connected or linked. It is striking that teachers at Antillean primary schools can tell you at an early stage which children are threatened in their development, become delinked and will later possibly show delinquent behaviour. Their suspicions are almost always confirmed retrospectively.

Van Herpen: *"We know that the situation at home at the Antilles is not efficacious for many children to grow up safely and we know that the present school systems will even further the delinking of those children. In addition we also know exactly which children it concerns. You do not have to be a psychologist or educationalist to recognize these children in the classrooms or playground. Why then not discern the problems of Antillean youngsters from the moment they enter school, or better still from the moment they are born. After all, it is absolutely clear where the educational problems develop. The delinquent adolescent was a kid with needs that have not been observed and met. Attention for the well-being and the involvement of these children must be stimulated at all schools. The most important task for school in this matter is the realization of links."*

Milan

Ria Uiterloo is chairwomen of the foundation EOE-St. Maarten. She stood at the cradle of the changes regarding instruction and describes in an example how the cooperation between parents, children and teachers can be successful.

Uiterloo: *"We have a lot of children here coming from socially weak surroundings. Those young children are confronted at an early age with problems they cannot face and cope with. Their territory is the neighbourhood in which they often have to solve the problems themselves. Milan is such a boy. He is a pupil of group 8. His parents are divorced. He sometimes lives with his mother and sometimes with the mother of his father. In the course of time he showed more and more aggressive behaviour and was not communicative anymore. After conflicts with other children he constantly ran away while using abusive language. His mother accused the school of incomprehension. She reproached the headmaster of her son for always blaming him for something. At a certain unguarded moment Milan beat up a young child. The parents of the boy immediately called the police and involved the school board. The police caught Milan in the neighbourhood where he was usually wandering about after school. Jessie, the headmaster of the school took him with her to her house and gave him time to calm down. During the days after the incident Jessie regularly took Milan out. She took him to the pictures and talked a lot with him. She discovered that his parents did not undertake anything with him. In a conversation with his parents the mother told that she had already very often warned Milan against other children. In spite of her beating him regularly, his behaviour got worse and worse. On account of these conversations the mother was compelled to follow a course for parents. Beating and shouting were forbidden. The teachers who worked with Milan used the same strategies to create a bond with him. Milan has become the leader of the baseball team of his school and his parents come to school more often to talk for a short time about positive changes. The*



mother now realizes that beating, shouting and isolation delink. Her linkedness with school and the linkedness between Milan and the teachers hopefully have prevented delinquent behaviour.”

The pedagogic police

In his note Van Herpen advocates a preventive policy aimed at predictable “drop-outs”. He wants the generally male police to support the generally female teachers. He describes a new function: “the pedagogic police as a link between promising kids and adolescent drop-outs. The pedagogic policeman is a man with authority and influence. He has knowledge of and affinity with the world of the police, teaching, pedagogy and the Antillean culture. He has to act coordinately between home, school, police, politics and social organizations with the task to trace as early as possible children who because of a threatening situation at home run risks of becoming delinked and to keep an eye on them together with all parties involved. The pedagogic police should do all that is possible to create or have solidarity created for this group of threatened children. He should also encourage schools and organizations to undertake specific actions that enhance wellbeing, involvement and linkedness. Van Herpen thinks about pre-school and after-school activities, sports, studies and work. Naturally this pedagogic policeman should become the central figure in advising those responsible for policies. He is a functionary who propagates the principles of linking (educational) concepts.

The cohesion with connecting organizations will determine the success. There have to be linking organizations that assist him, also for 12 to 15 year olds. In the Netherlands there are already splendid examples of such organizations as “broad schools” which cooperate with youth care, companies etc.

Kids are no election-item.

Van Herpen: *“Practice has shown that many well-meant initiatives have produced minor results until now. The reason behind this is that initiatives did not lead to linkedness and were not considered fundamentally. Pedagogy does not score. Kids are no election-item. But those kids are the ones who still are susceptible to learning and are still pliable. Linkedness with every individual is not only desirable, it is a strict necessity. We know in the meantime that one individual can disrupt a whole community, so nobody may be passed over. For me it is inconceivable that so much annoyance costs so much money and that in the meantime we only fight symptoms. Delinquent behaviour is an explicable phenomenon, linkedness an even more explicable answer.”*

Marcel van Herpen

Marcel van Herpen is divisional head of the expertise centre EOE Netherlands, co-founder of primary school “Uilenspiegel” (the first EOE primary school in the Netherlands, 1990), co-founder of NIVOZ, final editor of the educational magazine “Egoscoop” and author of Experience Oriented Education: from orientation to implementation (2005) See also: www.marcelvanherpen.nl

The definition, concepts and materials of Experiential Education refers to the work of Ferre Laevers and The Centre for Experiential Education, Leuven, Belgium. (www.cego.be)