Creative Action Methodology

What is it all about? What does it mean in practice?

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Acknowledgements

The people at IRCALTT (International Research Academy for Leisure, Tourism and Transport) are a diverse bunch—not just by nature, but also in terms of their specialisms. But as diverse as they are, they still manage to make up a closely-knit team. They consult with each other on what course programme to recommend to each individual student, they collaborate on teaching and coaching the students, they ask for content-related and didactic feedback from each other, they work together to develop the material for presentations at conferences, and they help each other write articles.

These specialists at IRCALTT deserve special thanks. They were, after all, the ones who enabled the students to write the articles in this book and gave shape to the Creative Action Methodology in the practical research situation. They are also responsible for the fact that the IRCALTT students have won the Joop Jannssen Prize two years in a row, i.e. since the founding of IRCALTT. This is the prize for the best thesis, and the examination panel is made up of a team of experts from the field. That is why I would like to extend a special word of thanks to this team of specialists:

- Eric Felt
- Arend Hardorff
- Nicoline de Heus
- Moniek Hover
- Hubert-Jan Jansen
- Caroline van Lindert
- Jacco van Mierlo
- Jeroen Nawijn
- Pieter de Rooy
- Margot Rooyakkers
- Ilja Simons
- Thomas van Velthoven
- Peter van Wijngaarden

I would also like to thank Roeland Bottema, Ger Pepels, Wicher Meijer, Jan Bergsma, Hans Uijterwijk and Nico van Os. They came up with the plans which gave IRCALTT its present form: a course at bachelor level for applied studies that stands foursquare in the working field and develops innovative solutions for practical problems.

Finally, a very special thanks to all IRCALTT students. They all carry the IRCALTT virus—their enthusiasm makes it a pleasure for the IRCALTT team to teach them. Thanks to all of you.

Breda, 15 July 2006,

Paul Delnooz
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Foreword: about education and Creative Action Methodology

1. Introduction

This book is about Creative Action Methodology and has a twofold purpose. First, it aims to paint a picture of Creative Action Methodology. This methodology focuses primarily on finding solutions to practical problems. Secondly, this book aims to provide a helping hand for universities and colleges that wish to incorporate Creative Action Methodology into their own course programmes.

This second aim is further developed in this foreword. I briefly outline what using Creative Action Methodology means for the daily practice of teaching. Then, the first chapter describes what Creative Action Methodology is all about. A number of other chapters written by undergraduate students follow. Each of these chapters is a research article. These are studies carried out by undergraduate students using Creative Action Methodology and they illustrate what it means in practice to work in this way.

This book is intended for researchers, instructors and students engaged in practically-oriented research, people who spend each day looking for solutions to practical problems, and who are interested in innovative and problem-solving thinking. Within The Netherlands, the professional universities in particular have shown interest in Creative Action Methodology.

2. History, academic philosophy, course programme

The Creative Action Methodology programme was developed at the Professional University of Leisure and Transport Studies (NHTV) in Breda, The Netherlands. This programme was developed in 2002 and the first eight students took part in it during the 2003-2004 academic year. It was an experiment in education which, if successful, was to be continued. The programme has now been running for three years.

The programme was specifically developed to train students to find new and innovative solutions for practical problems. In that sense, it is truly Creative Action Methodology. And although the name suggests that action research is involved, that is only partially the case. It is true that Creative Action Methodology works from the same assumptions of academic philosophy as action research, but the methodological outworking is very different. From a methodological viewpoint, Creative Action Methodology is a middle way between the empirical-analytical tradition (setting up an experiment to test cause and effect, searching for patterns) and action research (participating observation, the uniqueness of each situation is emphasised). The first chapter sheds light on this aspect. There, a critical examination of action research moves toward a description of Creative Action Methodology.

This methodological approach also achieves natural expression in the course programme that the students follow. Ample attention is paid to creative techniques as a means to come up with new/innovative solutions for practical problems. Plenty of attention is also given to "traditional" research methods and techniques, where the accent lies on setting up experiments. The thought behind this is that coming up with a new or innovative solution for a practical problem is only half the work. The job is only complete when the solution has also been tested—preferably in multiple situations, so that it is clear that the solution has general applicability.

For clarity, but also as an aid for instructors who wish to introduce Creative Action Methodology in their own teaching programmes, the phases and content of the course programme are listed in Appendix 1. This course series is also offered in the context of a collaborative relationship between the NHTV and various universities and colleges in Europe. In this collaboration, students take classes at the affiliated universities and colleges in Europe for their Master's degree (see Appendix 2 for an overview of these universities and colleges).

The students who follow the Creative Action Methodology programme are also free to choose another methodology, such as the empirical-analytical approach or action research. The programme’s ‘only’
goal is to make students aware of these different methods, so that they can weigh the advantages and disadvantages. However, most students do end up choosing Creative Action Methodology. The most important reason they give for their choice is the challenge of coming up with a new or innovative solution to a practical problem and doing something socially relevant at the same time.

3. The educational process

The educational process is made up of three phases. The first phase is exploration. In this phase, a student chooses a particular goal (for example combating illiteracy, improving the operation of stadiums, preventing youth shoplifting, AIDS prevention through education). The student's assignment is then to collect as much information as he or she can on the issue from every possible angle (marketing, psychology, sociology, health, legislation, the stakeholders involved, news outlets, statistics, infrastructure, technology, etc.). To find all these angles, students use creative techniques such as brainstorming, but also traditional methods like literature studies and interviews with experts. The end result of the first phase is an overview of the following:

- the possible angles from which to view the issue
- the actions that others have already undertaken to achieve the desired goal and/or a similar goal

The second phase is conceptualising. In this phase, the students investigate which angles they think have the best chance of succeeding and achieving the desired goal, and they try to form this vision into a conceptual model. They also try to find out which actions have been most successful in the past in solving a similar practical problem. Finally, the conceptual model is used as a creative instrument to come up with additional innovative actions which could contribute to the set goal. The end result of the second phase consists of the following:

- a conceptual model
- an overview of actions others have come up with to achieve the set goal (see Phase 1), supplemented with innovative actions.

The third phase is testing the action hypothesis. In this phase, the student decides which action or combination of actions should be tested. The principle of academic freedom applies to this choice. In other words, the researcher is free to decide which action hypothesis should be tested. The student writes a research proposal, carries out the experiment, and finally, writes a report.

In the first two phases the students take a course on research methods and techniques. They also take supplementary courses relating to the goal they have chosen. For example, if a student chooses the goal of “making journalistic articles in the newspaper more memorable”, he or she may take supplementary courses on brand perception and cultural participation. These supplementary courses are often taken elsewhere (for example, the University of Tilburg).

The evaluations show that the students are very satisfied, but also that there are still a few bugs to be worked out of the course programme. Below is an overview of the most noticeable issues that have been mentioned by the students and their advising instructors:

a. Time allotment
   When students are asked at what times they look for theoretical angles or innovative solutions or work on setting up their experiment, the answer is usually: “Constantly. I am working on it from the minute I get up in the morning till the time I go to bed at night.” This work pressure, however, is not experienced as unpleasant.

b. Failure to connect with the current educational system.
   In the current educational system, pupils and students are presented with questions for which there is only one answer. With Creative Action Methodology, however, it is the other way around. If a student claims to know the answer, this is immediately challenged. If, for example, a student gives an answer like “stones always fall to the ground,” the question immediately follows, “But is that always the case?” This dialectic didactic approach makes students very insecure for the first
few months. They have to get accustomed to the idea that there are no certainties and that statements like \(1 + 1 = 2\) depend on the angle from which you view reality.

c. Culture shock.
The failure to connect with the current educational system causes a culture shock. Certainties are swept away and the way in which students regard their colleagues, parents and friends changes. In this sense, it can also be said that Creative Action Methodology leads to a better understanding of other cultures and subcultures. The student’s ability to put things in perspective increases.

d. Innovation shock.
Students must make a major adjustment to the idea that there are no certainties and that academic insights are also subject to challenge. Once they get through this phase, innovation shock follows. It suddenly becomes a challenge to come up with innovative ideas (improvements) oneself.

e. Living room model.
Writing a paper is a lonely business that demands a great deal of discipline from students. The loneliness is tempered somewhat by class meetings, but these are held only during the first two phases. As soon as the experiment starts, there are no more classes. That is why the living room model was chosen. The aim is to create a safe and friendly atmosphere in which to advise the students. The students are also stimulated to meet with each other and not just with the advisor. Most students do this, but certainly not all of them. A solution is still being sought for this last group—possibly setting up a classroom like a living room?

f. Business world/financing.
The students have shown themselves to be very creative. For instance, they have come up with innovations in the areas of information, combating stress, and increasing the experience value of a product. The response from the business world has been very enthusiastic and opportunities have arisen to develop these solutions further with the help of financiers.

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Summary
The philosophical ideas that lie at the foundation of action research have led to a methodology in which consultation with the subjects of the research play a central role. It is a methodological outworking that appears to have originated under the influence of authors such as Imelman et al (1981), Galtung (1977), Klüver and Krüger (1972). These authors argue that the researchers and practical workers should work together rather than as separate entities.

This idea is reexamined in this article. It will be argued that action research can still be carried out in cases where consultation with the subjects of the research is well-nigh impossible. This article also argues that it is possible to seek nomological explanations while working from the philosophical ideas upon which action research is based. In other words, it is possible to investigate whether and to what degree a particular action (i.e. cause and effect) is generally applicable.

It is also argued that action research and the aim of analytical-empirical research (to search for patterns—nomological explanations) appear to be reconcilable without doing violence to the fundamental ideas of action research. The methodological model developed for this purpose, which has been given the title of Creative Action Methodology, is presented here. In this model, moreover, it is assumed that consultation with the subjects of the research must always be carried out if at all possible.

§1. Rationale
Authors such as Imelman et al (1981), Galtung (1977), and Klüver and Krüger (1972) state that action research is characterised by consultation with the research subjects. This vision puts a limitation on action research: it means that action research is only suitable for studies in which this consultation with the subjects is possible. That begs the question of whether this limitation is appropriate. This is the central question of this article.

To answer this question, we must first explain exactly what is meant by action research. After addressing the definition issue, we will go deeper into the central assumption at the foundation of action research: the idea that we live in a constructed world and that striving for objectivity is setting an impossible goal. It will be clear that according to this analysis we cannot find out whether a theory describes reality, but we can find out how the result of a particular action is experienced. Examples might include initiatives to educate street children or reform the tax system. If research is subsequently done into how a particular action leads to the same result in different situations, nomological explanations are being sought on action level.

If a particular action leads to the same result in different situations (both in the deterministic and the probabilistic sense), we can speak of our knowledge being objectivised. Granted, the perception of reality is a subjective experience, but it is also objectivising in the sense that there is a nomological explanation. The action—in our experience—leads again and again to the same result.

After the analysis above, we will present a methodological model that has been developed to enable researchers to arrive at nomological explanations while remaining true to the fundamental ideas behind action research. This methodological model is called Creative Action Methodology. The model is illustrated by examples. The model assumes that whenever possible, consultation will be held with the subjects of the research.

§2. The philosophical basis of action research
Dewey and Lewin are generally regarded as the originators of action research (Boog et al. 2005). Lewin (1948) characterised his research as “research for social management or social engineering”, thereby indicating that it was focused on social change. According to Koning et al. (1980), there are two identifiable currents in this change research. The first are those who work according to the tradition of the empirical cycle. This current is referred to here as the empirical-analytical tradition. The second current includes those who work according to the hermeneutical dialectic tradition. This latter current is referred to here as action research.

Action research is based on the idea that it is impossible to observe reality objectively. What we observe is an interpretation of reality. This interpretation is imposed upon us by the “powers that be”, such as our parents, teachers, the television, etc. This can best be illustrated by an example. Most people look at Figure 1 and see a cube. Two- and three-year-old children, however, see only lines. They, like their elders, are taught to look at the figure so that they see a cube. Once they have learned that, they are no longer able to look at the figure and primarily see just lines. That adults are practically unable to do this is something you can try yourself by looking at Figure 1.

![Figure 1: cube](image)

According to action researchers, what we observe is not just determined by the way we have learned to look at it, but also the context in which we find ourselves. This, too, can best be illustrated by an example. If Figure 2 is read from top to bottom, the context is numbers. We read 12, 13, 14. If this figure is read from left to right, the context is letters and we read A, B, C.

![Figure 2: A, B, C or 12, 13, 14?](image)

Morgan, 1975

In this connection, Berger et al. (1966) speak of “the social construction of reality”. We construct our own reality and thus the endeavour to collect objective facts seems fraught with difficulties—if not impossible altogether. Because objectivity is considered impossible in action research, researchers must work together with their subjects, and researchers are responsible for the results of their work. Those being researched are not ‘objects’ but true ‘subjects’ in action research. Together with the researchers, with the help of discourse, they figure out how the reality should be seen and how it should be changed (Benne et al. 1979; Grift, 1982; Habermas, 1982; Moser, 1977; Muis, 1976; Gieles, 1992). The discourse is carried on in a hermeneutic dialectic. Researchers seek the meaning that people give reality and they seek contrasts: in realising the contrasts, a higher level of understanding is achieved.

In summary, action research is based on the idea that objective observation is impossible and that constructions of reality (and discussions thereof) are thus more objective than observations. This critical approach is the core of action research. This has led to the following in action research:
- researchers are aware that observations are also normative
- researchers work idiographically (aiming for understanding) instead of looking for causal connections
- researchers work together with their subjects to define and change reality.

Often, however, it is difficult if not impossible to enter into a discussion with the research subjects. Take for instance a leisure studies student who wanted to use sport to counteract the isolation of disabled children in Kenya. In that country handicapped children are seen as a disgrace and are therefore hidden from the outside world. This student, who began her project in The Netherlands, had no chance at the start of her project to enter into a discussion with her research subjects from The Netherlands. She was only going to be able to go to Kenya after she had thought of a concrete solution to this problem, presented it to people who could finance the project, and had received the financial means to go to Kenya and carry out her solution in practice.

A second example involves the analysis of statistical data. When a researcher receives data on absenteeism due to illness in The Netherlands with the assignment to analyse it and come up with suggestions for a solution, he or she hardly has time to discuss the figures with the subjects, or even a sampling of them. That would not be feasible for practical, and also possibly financial reasons.

Can action research be carried out in working conditions like these? In the sections below, we will try to provide an answer to this question.

§3. Action research = creativity

As described above, constructions of reality (and discussions thereof) are more important than observation in action research. If this idea, along with the dialectic method, is applied to facts, a critical approach is being used. An example:

“It is a fact that flying is the safest form of travel because it has the lowest percentage of deaths”.

Is it possible to look at these figures completely differently (dialectic) and thus give them a different meaning (hermeneutic)? That is possible by using our creativity. For example, it might be said that if one looks at the amount of time people spend in aeroplanes compared with other means of transport, flying is probably the most dangerous form of transportation. If flying is viewed in that way, it is suddenly an extremely dangerous way to travel and has a different meaning in the eyes of the public. Here is a completely different example:

“Our secondary school is of very high quality because the number of pupils that fail the final exam is much lower than the national average”.

Creativity can be used to look at these figures from a completely different angle. Is quality the same as the percentage of pupils who fail the final exam? Or is quality something else, such as the percentage of pupils who complete subsequent courses of study, or are able to function independently, or....

The methodology in these examples is dialectic: searching for the opposite and using it to open a discussion about the meaning of figures like the number of fatalities or the percentage of pupils who pass the final exam. This then generates a normative discussion asking “which meaning is preferable?”

What are the implications of this dialectic method? It means that the researcher must be creative enough to shed a different light on the figures than the one “imposed” by those who came up with them. This runs completely counter to the empirical-analytical tradition, in which the researcher strives for unequivocal figures, where there is agreement that (for example) “safety is the number of fatalities compared with other forms of transport” or “quality is the percentage of students who pass the final exam”. If this definition has been agreed upon, how safe it is to fly or the quality of a school can be determined quite unequivocally. But is this measurement meaningful? That is the question, but one which can only be discussed if someone has been creative enough to come up with other definitions.
In the empirical-analytical tradition, this issue of unambiguousness is referred to as the operationalisation problem. Within this tradition the attempt is made to arrive at agreements like “safety is the number of fatalities compared to other forms of transport” and “quality is the percentage of students who pass the final exam”. Once such an operational definition has been agreed, and researchers start working according to it, it begins to assume a life of its own. The same method of measurement begins to appear in all subsequent reports. This perpetuates the message that “safety is the number of fatalities compared with other forms of transport” and “quality is the number of students who pass the final exam”. It is a case of a social construction of reality.

What can be concluded from this? A study qualifies as action research as soon as a researcher tries to apply different views of reality. As soon as statements like “Economic growth can be seen as the growth of the gross national product” are made in a study, it is clear that economics is regarded as making the rich even richer. Economic growth can also be seen as the number of people who are able to earn a living from their own company. This definition incorporates the idea of the mini-investment in developing countries: give people the chance and the ability to invest in their own company and this in turn will create economic growth.

One possible instrument in developing new views is consultation with research subjects, but this is not strictly necessary. Other possible instruments include using one’s own creativity and looking at how certain issues are viewed in different cultures. This is also why novelists, journalists, artists, etc. are so important. They give us—though certainly not all of us—an entirely different view of the world.

In conclusion, it can be said that a study qualifies as action research if the researcher describes how others see reality (what creations are present in the minds of others) and/or the researcher uses creativity to try and come up with new views on reality.

Action research, in this respect, shows a great deal of similarity with the first phase of the intervention cycle. In this phase an attempt is made to determine the problem that needs to be solved (Hart et al 1998; Verschuren 2000). It is the phase of identifying the problem in which the central question is “From what angles can we view this problem?” and that requires a great deal of creativity.

§4. Action research = creativity + testing

Facts are not facts in action research. We saw previously that the number 13 can also be read as a B. By the same token, a car is not a car, a woman is not a woman, etc. What we observe and express using language are theoretical constructions of reality. The term ‘car’, for instance, is a a linguistic reflection of a theoretical construction. Of course, it is a term that refers to reality, but does not represent it (Rorty 1967; Goodman 1988; Quin 1998). In other words, it is a term that does not reflect reality in any way.

If reality cannot be observed, it is thus impossible to test a theory. It is only possible to ascertain the result of our actions in our experience. What, then, is the use of an abstract theory? It is very important. A theory such as “the colour red incites aggression” may lead, after some creative consideration, to possible actions like “no red clothes may be worn during football games”. If it then appears that this action (in our experience) results in no more fights, it does not mean that the theory is confirmed, but that the action has had the desired result. In other words, a theory cannot be tested, but is a very powerful creative aid for coming up with possible actions. These actions (the way in which we experience the results of particular actions) can be tested. If it then appears that a particular action (like wearing red clothes) always leads to the same result, there is a pattern or nomological explanation on the action level.

It may be concluded that a study can be classified as action research if the theory is used as a creative instrument to come up with actions, and research is then carried out into what results they have in a particular situation. Furthermore, research can be done into whether the action always lead to the same result (testing) in order to trace patterns (nomological explanations).
§5. Conclusions about action research

Lammers (1983) makes a distinction between enlightenment of social reality and engineering (intervening in) social reality. Both aspects appear to be typical of action research. This is explained below.

On the one hand, there is enlightenment because action research explicitly tries to examine the issues of reality/construct other views of reality. On the other hand, there is engineering because action research explicitly tries to develop and test new actions.

Firstly, the preceding makes it clear that within the assumptions fundamental to action research (idealism, hermeneutics, dialectics, pragmatism), it is possible to work towards enlightenment and engineering without consultation with the research subjects. The following are possible:

- developing multiple visions of reality (enlightenment)
- present multiple actions for solving a problem (engineering)

Secondly, the preceding makes it clear that experimental research is possible within the assumptions fundamental to action research. This experimental research can take the form of the classic experiment, the natural experiment and the quasi-experiment to test an action.

Thirdly, the preceding makes it clear that within the assumptions fundamental to action research, patterns can be sought by finding out whether an action leads to the same results in different circumstances. In other words, nomological explanation is very possible within action research.

Fourthly, the preceding makes it clear that participating observation is very important in action research. After all, the endeavour to develop multiple views of reality implies that the view of the research subjects must also be incorporated.

Fifthly, the preceding makes it clear that action researchers, particularly because of the assumptions fundamental to action research, must be aware that knowledge (enlightenment, engineering) is normative. The action researcher must therefore decide whether or not to take part in a study by asking him or herself questions such as:

- Does this study contribute to the propagation of multiple views of reality or does it contribute primarily to propagating a single vision? And if the latter, do I want to contribute to the propagation of this view?
- Does this study contribute to the solution of a practical problem? If so, do I want to contribute to solving this problem?
- Can researchers work together with their subjects in this study? If so, is this being done? If not, is it justified to continue?

In the sections that follow, we will present a methodological model that is developed to achieve enlightenment, engineering and nomological explanations within the assumptions fundamental to action research. Because in this methodological approach the accent is strongly on creativity and action, it has been given the name Creative Action Methodology.

§6. Creative Action Methodology

In the preceding section, we described how action research maintains the viewpoint that reality cannot be objectively observed and therefore a greater emphasis is put on ideas than on empirical observations. To prevent misunderstandings, the term ‘theory’ will henceforth be used to refer to a description in action research.

Looking back at the preceding section, the following steps can be discerned in action research:

1. Formulating the rationale
Action research strives for two things: enlightenment and engineering. Enlightenment is a condition for engineering, but is not a scientific goal. Instead, enlightenment relates to the question “How can reality be viewed? What viewpoints are possible?” Such ‘theories’ cannot be tested according to the ideas fundamental to action research, so ‘collecting’ such ‘theories’ cannot be seen as science. Action research can test how the results of a particular action are experienced. That is why from a scientific standpoint the rationale always relates to the question “What is the desired situation and how can it be achieved?” Here are a few examples of a rationale:

“Counteracting the isolation of handicapped children in Kenya through sport”

“Combating stress in children”

“Predicting the outcome of football games”

“Stimulating the economic growth of a country”

2. Opening the ‘theory’ up to discussion

In action research, a description of reality, even if it is based on empirical observation, is seen as a ‘theory’ (a construction of reality). This begs the question of what other ‘theories’ are possible to describe a particular problem. Creativity, observation and written sources can be used to answer this question. A few examples:

Are physically handicapped children in Kenya really isolated or can this observation also be interpreted differently? Can the isolation be seen as the result of the behaviour of parents/caregivers? Can it be seen as the result of a psychological defect in the handicapped children? Can it be seen as the result of the national culture? By asking questions like these (by means of brainstorming, reading, observation, conversations with experts, etc.) a researcher gets an idea of all the ‘theories’ that are possible.

Are children really stressed out or are they perhaps just pretending? Can the stress be seen as the result of the parents’ behaviour? Can stress be seen as the result of genetic factors? Can stress be seen as the result of bullying? Can stress be seen as the result of brain abnormalities? Can stress be seen as the result of pressure at school or the behaviour of teachers? By asking this type of questions by means of brainstorming, reading, conversations with those involved, etc., a researcher gets an idea of all the ‘theories’ that are possible.

The dialectic and idiographic nature of this phase is characteristic. By describing the problem from as many angles as possible, the researcher gets a picture of all facets that may play a role in the solution of the problem (idiographic), including all facets not previously considered by the researcher (dialectic). A commercial example:

Every year, marketing students are asked which factors play a role in the sale of products. Every year, the answer is the same. They mention price, product, place of sale, promotion and personnel. After all the courses they have already taken, they are no longer able to come up with other ‘theories’ like safety (sharp points), health (chewing on a pencil) and the consumer’s social involvement (how is the pencil made and by whom?). The aim of this exercise is dialectic: making students aware that people have ‘prejudices’, that other ‘theories’ are also possible, and that they must be able to figure out these other ‘theories’ if they really want to understand the consumer.

3. Delimiting the ‘theories’

It would take a lifetime to find out all the ‘theories’ about a subject like stress, to use them to come up with actions, then to test these actions. That begs the question of whether it is possible for a researcher to make a choice from among all the ‘theories’. Making a selection can best be illustrated with an example:

The children in a particular class are rowdy, rude and do not pay attention. The first researcher has the ‘theory’ (whether or not based on observation) that the cause lies with the parents. They are raising their children badly. This researcher also thinks that this type of behaviour is typical for the neighbourhood where the children live. The second researcher has
the ‘theory’ that the children are made to sit still too long in class and that they are trying to escape from ‘prison’.

The first criterion that can be used to make a choice from among the ‘theories’ is pragmatism. For example, experience teaches that ‘raising children differently’ in our perception leads to better behaviour. Equally, experience may teach that ‘if children often play outside’ in our perception this leads to better behaviour. If these types of actions turn out to be effective, we are practically obliged to accept the ‘theory’ behind them. The ‘theory’ has thus proved adequate (pragmatic, although not testable).

A second criterion that can be used is ‘normative considerations’. If we do not wish to change the method of raising our children (for example, more frequent spankings) or send our children outside to play more often (for example because we see it as a waste of time), then these actions are rejected on normative grounds. That implies that the ‘theories’ behind them are also rejected on the basis of these normative considerations.

A third criterion that can be used to make a choice between the ‘theories’ is innovation. It is possible that ‘theories’ (like raising children differently or children sitting ‘imprisoned’ in class) did not prove adequate in the past. This begs the question of whether it is possible, on the basis of these ‘theories’ to come up with actions that have not yet been tried and find out the effect of these actions.

A fourth criterion is creativity. It is possible that a researcher might come up with a new ‘theory’ (such as the behaviour of children in class being influenced by the means of transportation by which they arrived at school) and then would want to find out if this ‘theory’ is adequate.

4. Searching for possible actions
‘Theories’ do not represent reality. They only refer to reality. They are also an aid in coming up with actions. Actions can also be invented by finding out what others have already tried in order to reach a particular goal and/or by using creative techniques (Bono 1967; Vanosmael et al 1988; Walravens 1997).

5. Delimiting the actions
In most research situations, it is not possible to test all actions. That is why a selection must be made. The considerations relating to this are the same as for selecting ‘theories’. Someone who is primarily striving to achieve a desired goal will choose actions that have already been successful in the past. Someone who chooses innovation will primarily focus on testing new (not previously tested) actions.

6. Testing and evaluation
The selected actions must be tested, preferably using a natural experiment. If the test is successful, there is a well-founded reason to use it in other situations as well. If the test also leads to successful results in other situations, there is a nomological explanation on action level.

The examples above relate mostly to social issues. To conclude, then, let us look at a statistical issue. This issue relates to predicting the outcomes of football matches:

A researcher wants to be able to predict the outcomes of football matches. At the start of the study, the researcher has a database containing the outcomes of thousands of football matches. How should this researcher approach the study using Creative Action Methodology?

The answer to the first question in Creative Action Methodology (what is the rationale?) is evident. The researcher wants to predict the outcomes of football matches. The answer to the second question (the question of what ‘theories’ can be used to describe football matches) is less evident. Football can be described using ‘theories’ in the following ways:

- Football is a sport where the team that makes the most points wins (a ‘theory’ few are willing to discuss)
- The outcome of a football match is determined by the ball technique of the players. The better the technique, the greater the chance a team will win
Football regulates the primal instinct of man. It regulates primal instincts like aggression and the desire to be the strongest. The stronger these primal instincts are present in team members, the greater the chance that they will win matches. Etc.

It seems that the number of ‘theories’ could go on forever: discipline, the food players eat, the weather, the insight into the game/intelligence of the players, the defensive and offensive capacities of the team, having a scoring forward line, the freedom a coach gives the players during the match, the opportunity (or lack thereof) of going to the pub before the match, whether the players have had sex before the match, the influence of the media, the income of the players, whether a player is naturally talented, etc. Thus the question arises of whether it is even possible to delimit these theories. To arrive at a delimitation, the researcher must go in search of systematically tested actions. However, it appears that in the past many actions were undertaken in various areas (discipline, skill with the ball, etc.) but that opinions about effectiveness are rather divided. Moreover, statistical ‘theories’ (calculating chances using a normal distribution, etc.) and actions (the choice of variables, the method of operationalising, etc.) seem hardly suitable for predicting the outcomes of matches. In view of this chaos, the researcher decides to be innovative and creative, but only insofar as the actions can be tested using the database. The researcher comes up with ‘theories’ like ‘the more points a team has made in the previous match, the greater the chance that they will win the next one.’ This theory is then tested. The last 19 of 20 matches are tested. The tests show that the number of goals a team makes during the previous six matches is the best predictor. No one knows why, but it works—and the question remains what the deeper meaning of this discovery is. By coming up with other ‘theories’ and actions to test them, the researcher slowly builds a statistical model to predict the outcomes of football matches. Perhaps no one understands why the model works (the deeper meaning) but it does work.

§7. Conclusions

The philosophical foundations of action research are idealism, pragmatism, dialectics and hermeneutics. In general, it may be concluded that these foundational ideas mean that action research is characterised by creativity and action. More specifically, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Within action research, consultation with the research subjects is desirable, but is not a necessary precondition to carry out this kind of research. It is even possible to use action research to analyse databases. It is also possible (within the philosophical ideas fundamental to action research) to look for nomological explanations at the action level.

2. Action research is characterised by creativity and testing actions. The natural experiment thus appears to be the method for action research. But simulation is also an obvious choice for action research. An example would be researching how to predict the outcomes of football matches. In such a study, the researcher simulates (with the help of a database containing the results of thousands of matches) the predictions that are made if a particular action is taken. These predictions are then compared with actual results in the database.

3. Creative Action Methodology gives researchers the steps they need to carry out action research without doing violence to the fundamental ideas of the system. Although the steps of Creative Action Methodology do not follow each other in strict chronological order, they give researches a framework within which they can do action research.

4. The same is true of the ‘theories’. In action research, they are regarded as the framework (basic structures) within which we do our thinking. It is these frameworks that enable us to be creative and think of actions to solve all kinds of problems. A wonderful challenge!

§8. About the chapters that follow
Each of the following chapters is an article written by a student as an undergraduate thesis working according to the principles of Creative Action Methodology. These students asked themselves the following questions:

- Does this study contribute to the propagation of multiple views of reality or does it contribute primarily to propagating a single view? And in the latter case, do I want to contribute to propagating this view?
- Does this study contribute to the solution of a practical problem? And if so, do I want to contribute to solving this problem?
- Is it possible to work together with the research subjects in this study? If so, is this being done? If not, is it justifiable to continue the study?

The students also tried to follow the steps described in the preceding section. They did not find this easy to do by any means. In particular, discussing the ‘theory’ (observations) proved difficult for them. It is not something that fits into our Western culture and their previous education had not prepared them to look at reality in many different ways. On the other hand, creative thinking was a very strong point with these students. That probably has to do with the central theme of the Professional University of Leisure and Transport Studies. This central theme is ‘imagineering’ and all students are trained from the first year onwards in the use of techniques to come up with creative solutions.

The following chapters are a selection of the articles written in the first two years in which the Creative Action Methodology programme was offered at the Professional University of Leisure and Transport Studies (2003-2004 and 2004-2005). In those years, approximately 30 students participated in the programme. At the time of writing, in the 2005-2006 academic year, about 40 students are enrolled in the Creative Action Methodology course.
Works consulted


Summary

Feelings of stress are the order of the day. This is true not only of adults, but of children as well. Eighty percent of working adults in The Netherlands and 68% of Dutch children experience feelings of stress. This has consequences for both physical and mental health. Current theories focused on the individual suggest that the cause may be found in the person himself. However, there is no actual proof of this. In fact, stress appears to have a structural cause rooted in our Western way of thinking and living, and can therefore be traced back to culture and society. Research in creative action methodology reveals that the solution appears to be found in escapism.

More than 95% of Dutch companies struggle with job stress. Novum 22-10-2004
80% of working adults in The Netherlands experience stress at work. Novum 13-05-2004
Every day, Dutch companies lose €6 million due to stress-related absenteeism. Novum 22-10-2004
By reducing the workload, the Dutch police have reduced absenteeism by 30% in three years. This has saved the organisation €41 million. NOS nieuws 06-06-2005
Two-thirds of all working adults in The Netherlands dream of retiring as early as possible. Novum 24-03-2004

1. Rationale

When the phenomenon of stress began to be studied at the beginning of this century by Dr. Hans Selye, it was termed General Adaptation Syndrome. Selye observed that people were less healthy and showed more discomfort if they were forced to make changes in their lifestyle and environment. In 1967, new research into stress was published by Holmes and Rahe, who demonstrated the presence of stress in different situations, as well as the health consequences of stress, using the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS). This research also showed that the greater the change a person is required to make, the greater the stress.

Stress is now recognised throughout Western society and is termed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) a “worldwide epidemic”. Various studies with different approaches prove that feelings of stress are present in the majority of the Western population, initiated by a variety of different specific situations. Despite the fact that in the study of Holmes and Rahe work-related situations only appear from the eighth position in the SRRS onward, work-related situations have now become important stressors.

According to the University of Nottingham, stress in Europe is responsible for 50 to 60 percent of the lost workdays and Dutch companies lose €1.5 billion every year because of stress-related absenteeism. In practice, the percentage of victims of stress is always underestimated. In a survey of 357 personnel managers and 140 company doctors, personnel managers ascribed 12% of absences to stress, while company doctors set the figure at 35%.

1 Dr. J. Lamar Freed (source: www.fysiotherapie.nl / www.lamarfreed.net)
2 www.nrc.nl
3 Dr. J. Lamar Freed (source: www.fysiotherapie.nl / www.lamarfreed.net)
4 www.krauthammer.nl
5 www.krauthammer.nl
6 Novum 22-10-2004.
A 2004 study by Blauw Research, in agreement with a study by CenterParcs, demonstrated that 80% of working adults in The Netherlands experienced stress on the job. High pressure was identified in both studies as the main cause of stress. The study, which was held among 13,000 Dutch, Belgian and German respondents, concluded that all these nationalities were more stressed at the time of the study than they had been the previous year. Research by Stepstone among European employees indicated that 52% of Dutch people said they would be willing to quit their jobs immediately in order to do ‘fun’ things; 14% even said they would like to quit immediately to be free of daily stress.

Typical is the result of a study by Burnin.nl, an independent knowledge centre about stress and burnout, which showed that 77% of Dutch holiday-makers did not feel rested enough after their holiday to return to work. Reasons were unreasonably high expectations of the holiday and travelling to the destination, both of which can lead to even more stress. Additionally, stress problems on holiday are often exacerbated because people cannot leave their stressful jobs behind when they go away. Very typically, feelings of stress re-emerge towards the end of the holiday at the idea of having to work for another whole year—a vicious cycle in which one never escapes from the stress.

Aside from work-related factors, other factors also play a role. These include the loss of persons and relationship problems (SRRS of Holmes and Rahe). There are also many indicators that stress does wait until adulthood to emerge.

Main causes of stress in children: parents (+50%), homework (+50%), friends (+/- 50%), money (+25%)

50% of primary school children are bullied, of which 8% on a regular basis.

In 2003, TNS NIPO carried out a study into stress in children in The Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. This study showed that in The Netherlands, an average of 68% of children between 6 and 15 years old experienced feelings of stress. This gives The Netherlands, in comparison with the other countries, almost the highest percentage of children with feelings of stress. One reason for this is that ever more supposedly required activities are being slotted into leisure time, and that leisure time is ever more planned. Additionally, society is often focused on achieving success even in its free time, and people face certain expectations (music lessons, sport, etc.). The remedial educationalist Nieuwenbroek and the French child psychologist Gisèle Georges indicate that excessively high, as well as excessively low expectations can lead to great pressure and fears of failure in social, cognitive and physical areas. Georges speaks in this connection about school and sport achievement. It is striking that many children who fear failure come from families or belong to groups where the parents and teachers will do anything for the children.

Adultomorphism is a relatively new term which fits with present Western society. This term refers to the phenomenon that grownups often see children as little adults. The remedial educationalist Nieuwenbroek points out that adults often give children tasks and responsibilities inappropriate for

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8 Novum 24-03-2004.
9 Novum 12-09-2004.
10 www.nrc.nl, Holmes and Rahe.
11 Sire, Stichting Ideële reclame.
12 Source: A. Nieuwenbroek: Mislukken mag!
13 Source: R. de Groot: Kinderen en Spel.
their age. The pressure this brings to bear on children is great, because in this context failure is almost unspeakable: *Failure is unthinkable and is not allowed.*

110,000 children and young adults were abused in 2004  
*Metro, 17-11-04*

Every year, 74,000 children are abused or neglected  
*Chris Hulplijn*

400,000 Dutch children suffer from chronic illness  
*Sterrekind*

1,000,000 children in The Netherlands grow up in a household with substance abuse problems  
*Trimbos Instituut*

Every year, about 33,000 children are involved in divorces  
*ANP news 23-03-2006*

Every year, 16,000 to 18,000 children lose all or most contact with one of their parents due to divorce  
*Altena, legal publicist /ANP news 23-03-2006)*

In 2005, the number of children on the waiting list for youth welfare help rose 38% in one year to a total of 10,000 children needing help  
*NOS News 14-03-2006*

Stress as a result of this constant pressure for achievement manifests itself in the ever busier lives of Western people. Sennett, Lasch and Lodewijks-Frenchen pointed to the narcissistic tendencies of Western society. Adults have an ideal image of children and mould the children entrusted to them as they wish. Van der Teems says that pushing children to succeed is a narcissistic trait that is prominent in our society. She points to the pressure to present children with as much knowledge as early as possible to enrich their minds, knowledge that is now available in a wide range of areas like music, art, sport, literature and entertainment.15 Both Donald Baker and the Centrum voor Spelmethodiek emphasise in this context that we live in a busy, chaotic age in which children are overfed with a plethora of ideas and stimulations.

2. **Causes and consequences of stress**

The insurance companies Ohra and Delta Lloyd are planning to offer an annual health test for employees on a provisional basis. This test is aimed at early treatment of the health problems of their employees. Stress, together with heart problems and cancer, are named as the most urgent health problems to prevent in employees.16

Recently there have been many medical results that show that stress affects physical health. It has been proven, for example, that women who experience long-term stress have a reduced chance of success with IVF treatment.17 Moreover, research has proven that stress during pregnancy is harmful for the unborn child.18 Research by Amsterdam Born Children And Their Development confirmed that stress during pregnancy can have an influence on bodily processes in the mother, which in turn can have consequences for the development of the unborn child. The study also showed that high pressure at work during pregnancy increases the chance of pre-eclampsia.19

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14 Source: A. Nieuwenbroek: *Mislukken mag!*
15 Source: I. van de Teems: *Spel en spelen, plaats, functie en visies.*
16 NOS News 12-01-2006.
19 Source: NRC 03-04-2006.
Another argument comes from the ‘Signaleringscommissie Kanker’ (Cancer Advisory Committee) of KWF-Cancer Control. They are working urgently for faster diagnosis and treatment of various forms of cancer. The current waiting times for diagnosis and treatment lead to stress in the patients and therefore to further deterioration in their health, condition, and well-being.20 Also, after Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005, experts indicated that the stress caused by this disaster hastened the deaths of many elderly people and people already suffering from illnesses.21

In January 2005, the UMC Utrecht held a symposium on the question of whether chronic illnesses in children could be the result of the high expectations and pressure placed on children. The possibility was also left open that children were getting so much stimulation that they could not process it all. The UMC has reason to believe that this overstimulation (and therefore stress) derails the brain’s efforts to process it.22

Moreover, figures from Dutch child welfare show that children are displaying more behavioural problems and abnormalities without any clear cause. This points to the importance of stress, but is also an indication that stress is caused by our way of thinking and living. It indicates that the cause is primarily cultural. The studies about work pressure and the expectations placed on people in their free time (see above) confirm this picture. In a January 2003 article in the British medical journal The Lancet, Swedish researchers published the results of a study showing that children who grow up in single-parent families have more psychological problems, are more likely to commit suicide and are more prone to becoming addicts than children in two-parent families.23 This indicates that stress is also caused by structural factors.

The fact that there are therapies for stress that focus on the person experiencing the stress suggests that the cause is with the individual. It suggests that the person does not have enough resistance and therefore got sick. The preceding paragraphs, however, show that there is no indication that this is so. All the causes appear to originate in the direct or indirect social environment. In other words, all stressors, regardless of whether they originate in the work, school, home, or relationship situation, are initiated from social or societal pressure. A source which supports this theory is a study which showed that women are more sensitive to stress and run a greater risk of becoming depressed because they are more socially sensitive than men. This is an important fact to keep in mind when combating the sources of stress in individuals.24

2.1 Therapy
There are various forms of help which focus on changing an individual person. The first type is professional psychological therapy with communication as the primary means of help. The second type includes more creative forms of therapy.

In the first type, the aim is to determine the cause of the problem, name it and open it up for discussion so that the person can deal with it.25 The disadvantage of this type of therapy is that it often has a fairly high threshold. The cost and the investment of time involved are also a major disadvantage.

The second type primarily works from the imagination and empathy of the person. Creative areas such as play, dance, drama and music are used. Play therapy is a form of therapy especially developed for treating children whose development has stalled. Through play, a child has the opportunity to work out radical or traumatic events. Talking about problems is often too difficult or intimidating, whereas fantasy play provides space to express emotions and vent, to re-experience feelings of fear, grief or rage and process life events.26 Play diagnoses the problem.27 Forms of therapy that coincide with this are creative therapy and imagination therapy.

20 De Telegraaf newspaper, 15-03-2006.
22 Source: www.ffcontact.nl.
23 Source: www.jeugdnetwerk.nl.
25 Source: P. Cornelis, educator.
26 www.speltherapie.nl
27 www.imaginatie.nl
A different form of ‘therapy’ is provided by clowns. The form of ‘therapy’ practised by clowns is the only type based on pure escapism, the detachment of children from their reality and letting them forget for a while by entering another world. They work with the patient’s own dreams, wishes and fantasies in the conviction that this contributes to the quality of life of these children. The theory behind the ‘therapy’ of the clowns is thus very different from the creative therapies, as is imagination therapy, NLP and hypnotherapy.

What can be said about the therapies? Firstly, a remarkable state of contradiction can be observed. Therapy is focused on determining the problem in the individual. However, the causes are primarily cultural and structural, and therefore lie outside the individual (see above, cultural and structural causes). Secondly, we note that the therapies seek a single cause, whereas the facts (see above) show that a wide range of cultural and structural factors appear to play a role in this process. Thirdly, it may be observed that this range of factors may lead to brain abnormalities. This suggests that escapism is an important factor that can contribute to the solution, because it gives the brain a chance to rest. Fourthly, knowing the cause of a problem does not by definition contribute to solving it. This also suggests that it is better to find a remedy (escapism?) to a problem than the causes of it.

On the basis of these considerations, the following fantasy theory can be formulated: combating stress is more effective if it is focused on escapism. This help for stress must not be offered in a therapy situation, but be implemented within the culture and structure (the social context, such as school and family).

3. Hypothesis and research method

In the foregoing section we hypothesised that stress must be combated in the social context. Furthermore, we formulated the hypothesis that the aim and manner of the current means used to determine the cause of the problem (communication and experience/creative techniques) could be used more effectively to achieve escapism. Communication, experience and creative techniques in this sense would not be used to try to determine a single cause of the problem, since there is actually a wide range of possible causes; moreover, finding the cause is no guarantee of finding the solution. These techniques can be used in service of escapism, which itself would be the ultimate goal.

The research method cannot be reduced to traditional scientific research, but instead is founded in creative action methodology (developed by P. Delnooz at the NHTV, Internationale Hogeschool Breda).

The effects of this fantasy theory in practice have been researched using an experiment which was held at two primary education institutions, because many forms of social and societal pressure are manifested at school. The subjects of the experiment were children aged six to seven years old in the period of January to March 2005. The institutions in question were A: Sint Joseph Basisschool Roosendaal and B: Basisschool de Watermolen Roosendaal.

The experiment took the form of a lesson cycle divided over both institutions in differing sizes of groups. The experiment could really be classified as more of a quasi-experiment due to factors including the small scale on which it had to be held.

There was a danger of the validity of the experiment being influenced by a systemic flaw, a non-response of the sampling representing a particular group of people. For example, schools where much pressure is placed on the children might not feel drawn to take part in the study and might refuse to cooperate. To limit this possible problem, the research locations were selected by determining in advance that each test group would have at least two children showing externally observable symptoms of stress. The fantasy theory was tested at location A with a group of 25 children and subsequently with a group of four children. At location B, the theory was once again tested with a group of 25 children with certain adaptations made after the experiment at location A. It was decided at the test with the second group of 25 children that the importance of the social context should be emphasised.
The lesson cycle was also expected to be inadequate, giving no insight at all into the set goals. For this reason, the lesson cycle was presented prior to the experiment to both the education experts in question and to an external education expert, and it was adjusted during the experiment in consultation with these experts. The lesson cycle had to contain a measure of didactic responsibility, and it concentrated on establishing a state of escapism among the test group. The lesson cycle is included as an appendix.

During the experiment, quantitative and qualitative observation methods were used. Since qualitative research is open to subjectivity, triangulation was used to overcome this problem. A distinction was made between observing externally observable symptoms of stress and observing the degree to which escapism was achieved (also perceivable by observing flow experiences). At the time of the experiments two observers were present. The first observer was the education expert in question, who had a great deal of information about the test group and could quickly and clearly observe differences in behaviour, specifically any outwardly observable symptoms of stress. The second observer was the researcher, who specialised particularly in the degree of escapism and a flow experience that a person could achieve.

Effectiveness was observed using score lists before, during and after exposure to the different forms of expression in fantasy theory. In this context, the score lists prior to exposure served primarily as a necessary basis with which to compare further observations. The score lists during exposure gave a very good impression of the achievement of a temporary alteration of behaviour through and the score lists after exposure gave insight into a possible long-term if not lasting behavioural change.

### 4. Results of the study

The qualitative research results played the most prominent role in the experiment, but the experiment did also yield quantitative results. If the score tables in this section are compared with each other, it is clear that when a person is exposed more often to expressions of the fantasy theory, the degree of relaxation during and even after the exposure intensifies. The qualitative observations also resulted in unanimous agreement among the experts that exposure to the fantasy theory clearly does something with the children and their behaviour with regard to symptoms of stress is really changed for the better.
Certain conclusions could be drawn after the close of the experiment. All children showed fewer symptoms of stress during the fantasy lessons. Exposure to the fantasy theory sharply reduced the physically observable symptoms of stress when present. When exposure to the theory was ended these symptoms were still lessened, whether or not with a smaller difference. This conclusion suggests a possible lasting change in stress-related behaviour. To make a well-founded judgement, however, the experiment would have to be carried out again for a longer period.

Another important observation is that the degree of escapism was directly connected to the degree of stress symptoms. Where a higher level of escapism was observed, considerably fewer stress symptoms were seen.

Another striking conclusion is that all the experts, through their passive participation, suspected both an intense experience and an active mental participation.

Finally, the qualitative observations showed that implementing the fantasy theory in the school programme at the end of the day influenced the way the children felt as they left school, which would be expected in the long term to affect the way they feel when they remember their day at school and when they return the next day. It is not surprising, then, that in the institution where this was done, the fantasy element itself is being used more often within the lesson programme, especially at the end of a day or part of a day.

This case study was done with children. The results confirm the hypothesis that escapism has a therapeutic effect on feelings of stress. With this in mind, it seems that the use of escapism to combat this phenomenon appears to be not only effective with this target group, but with all target groups who have to deal with stress, including work stress as mentioned above. Moreover, it confirms the idea that the form of the therapy (drawing, etc.) is not as important in combating stress as the degree of escapism.

If you have any questions or comments, or if you would like to know more about this subject and this study, please contact J.T. Cornelis or P.V.A. Delnooz at NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences, IRCALTT Department, 0031(0) 765302203, delnooz.p@nhtv.nl.
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Appendix 1: a lesson from the lesson cycle

Fantasy lesson 1: The drawing lesson

Content:
This lesson bridges the gap between fantasy and reality and stimulates the use of the right brain instead of the left brain. In this lesson, the children are challenged to give their imagination a free rein by planning their own ‘anything goes’ day, the only day on which they can do whatever they want, whether it is really possible or not.

Organisation:

- Materials:
  - name tags
  - 25 sheets of drawing paper
  - drawing pencils

- Time planning:
  - introductions and arrangements: 5 minutes
  - class discussion about previous day: 5 minutes
  - researcher tells story about ‘anything goes’ day: 5 minutes
  - explanation of assignment, distribution of materials: 5 minutes
  - concentrating together on ‘anything goes’ day: <5 minutes
  - drawing ‘anything goes’ day: 20 minutes
  - cleanup and discussion: 5 minutes

Total duration: between 45 and 50 minutes

Use of instruments to produce an experience:

- Theme: a free theme is used, the ‘Anything Goes’ day.
- Storytelling: a fantasy story is told which serves as the basis of the theme.
- Sensory stimulation: the children receive auditory stimulation by listening to a fantasy Story.
- Play: the play element in this lesson is purely in the fantasy game.
- Animation: the lessons are given by a researcher (intentionally not the usual teacher).

Drawing materials are the only materials needed. The environment is the classroom, a stressful environment in which they use fantasy.

Role of the teacher (in this case, the researcher):

At the end of the day I come in the classroom where the children are sitting. I introduce myself and explain that I am in school studying to be a teacher and that's why I am there to give them a few lessons. I also say that I only want to give fun lessons. I don’t like maths and spelling, so I want to give four fun lessons to this group. But to do this, I make the following agreement with the children:

- During my lesson the children will use their name tags.
- We listen politely to each other.
- When I am talking everyone in the class is quiet.
- And for my part, I will listen carefully to the children.
- So we'll agree that if anyone wants to say something they will raise their hand and wait till I call their name.
- We mind our own business. No tattling and no making fun of others.

Then I say that I want to get to know the children better, so I ask them what they did the day before. When I have given 2 to 3 children a chance to tell about their day, I say that I think their day was actually pretty boring. Then I tell the children what I did the previous day—but not my real day, I tell them about my ‘anything goes’ day. I tell them the following story:

When I woke up yesterday morning, I really didn’t feel like going to school. So I just decided not to. I leapt out of bed and went directly to Schiphol Airport. I found the biggest aeroplane of all and asked the pilot to fly me to a faraway tropical island. After a short time, I got out of the plane onto the beach and looked out over a wide blue ocean. First I had breakfast on the beach—biscuits, chocolate sprinkles, fizzy drinks and crisps. Then I went swimming. I swam so far in the sea that I met a dolphin. I made friends with him and swam through the whole
ocean on his back, under the water among the fish, leaping high into the air, racing past all the sharks. Then the dolphin set me back on the beach and I flew back with the pilot to The Netherlands. Then I went right back and laid down in bed. And Papa and Mama didn’t notice a thing! And all of that really happened yesterday.

Now I wait for the children’s responses. Reacting to their responses or challenging them to a response, I talk about whether it really could have happened or not. I explain to the children that it certainly did really happen and, pointing to my head, I tell them about my imagination, which I used on my ‘anything goes’ day, the day you can do anything you want. I explain that everyone can imagine an ‘anything goes’ day. And that’s what we’re going to do right now. First we’re going to imagine it in our head, then try to draw it. Now I pass out the drawing paper and the children can get out their coloured pencils. The children cannot start drawing yet!
I say that it is very important not to tell the other children about your ‘anything goes’ day, because then everyone else will try to copy your ‘anything goes’ day and then it isn’t unique and special anymore. Along with the children, I now close my eyes and try to guide them peacefully toward their daydreams. Now the children can open their eyes and start to draw. I walk around the class to help the children and they can whisper their ‘anything goes’ day in my ear. After 20 minutes, we clean up. I take the drawings home and return them to the children at the last lesson. I also tell the children that I will come back the day after tomorrow and that until that time, the children can think about their ‘anything goes’ day at home, because when you’re by yourself at home you sometimes think of even more crazy things. If they want, they can tell about these fantasies in the next lesson or tell them just to me after the lesson.

**Children’s activity levels**
Learning activities of the children:

- **Material**
  - The children will make a drawing with coloured pencils on paper
- **Perception**
  - The children will look at their drawing and compare it with what they imagined in their heads.
- **Verbal**
  - A few children will tell the class about their previous day as it really happened.
  - While making their drawings, the children may ask me questions and put their ‘anything goes’ day into words and tell me about it.
- **Mental**
  - The children will think about what they did the preceding day.
  - The children will think about their own ‘anything goes’ day.

**Fantasy lesson 2:** a sensory lesson
**Fantasy lesson 3:** a sensory lesson – part 2
**Fantasy lesson 4:** a gym lesson
Appendix 2: additional experiment

Location: Joseph School
Group size: 4 children

Lesson 1:

Content:
Fantasy puzzle in which children put together their own fantasy stories by assembling puzzle pieces with pictures and simple texts.

Material:
The children put together puzzle pieces in the arrangement of their choice.

Perception:
The children will look at the pictures and choose which they wish to use.

Verbal:
When the children finally make their fantasy puzzles, they will share them with the rest of the class and even make additions if they wish.

Mental:
The children will look for puzzle pieces that best connect with their fantasies and interests.

Duration:
30 minutes

Lesson 2:

Content:
Sensory lesson: hearing, smelling, seeing, tasting, feeling in a more personal context.

Material:
The children will work with objects they must feel, on which they will base a fantasy.

Perception:
The children will look at pictures that depict a situation, which they will shape into a fantasy.

Verbal:
The children will share their fantasies, also telling about what they hear and smell.

Mental
On the basis of sensory stimuli, the children will come up with fantasies.

Duration:
30 minutes
Sport as a means of prevention and rehabilitation for street children
Willemijn Assink (bachelor’s thesis)

Summary
Sport is of great importance in the rehabilitation of street children and for prevention. This study using Creative Action Methodology has demonstrated this point and thereby supports a variety of studies carried out by the United Nations and Pos and Hekkink (2004), among others. Street children spend a great deal of their time aimlessly on the streets. They are often ignored or abused by those around them, which leads to a negative self-image (Planije, Van ‘t Land and Wolf 2003). Sport gives children a positive way to occupy their time, it teaches them to win and lose, to stand up for themselves, to work together and express themselves (De Boer 2002; Right to Play 2004; UN 2003). Through sport, street children can regain a feeling of self-esteem.

In this study, the central question is in what way sport can best be offered to contribute to prevention (reducing the time spent aimlessly on the streets) and rehabilitation of street children. This was initially investigated by means of reading source material and conducting interviews (field research). This formed a basis for coming up with ideas about the way sport could be presented and the optimum form was sought. This optimum form (the action hypothesis) was then tested by means of an experiment set up amongst the street children of Kitale, Kenya. Various rehabilitation centres cooperated with the study, and the community was also involved in the project. The results of the experiment were positive.

1. Rationale
Street children are bereft of almost all their rights, including the right to health care, education and protection. At present, street children are one of the largest and fastest-growing problem groups in the world. According to Unicef, this is due to the deterioration in living conditions over the past twenty years (Unicef 2001). Worldwide, there are now between 100 and 140 million children living on the street. This figure is still rising (UN Centre for Human Rights 2003).

Street children are often reserved and suspicious of third parties. According to Planije, Van ‘t Land and Wolf (2003), the reasons for this are rooted in parental drug and alcohol abuse, mental and physical abuse and incest. Moreover, most street children have little or no positive contact with others.

Various development organisations and researchers have recognised that sport is a positive occupation for children and leads to an improvement of their self-image (Unicef, IBISS 2005; Elias and Dunning 1986; Pos and Hekkink 2004; van Bottenburg and Schuyt 1996; United Nations 2003). Further analysis of the sources, however, gives no clear picture of how sport can best be used to achieve a good result. The question of how sport can contribute to prevention (reduction of the time aimlessly spent on the street) and rehabilitation of street children is thus central. This study uses the principles of creative action methodology, a variant which takes a middle way between empirical-analytical research and action research (Delnooz 2006).

To answer the question of how to use sport in the rehabilitation of street children, we must first take a general look at the situation of street children and current thinking on the value of sport. A list of factors was assembled from this information as well as various practical examples. This list was used as a handle for setting up the experiment. Finally, we will look at the experiment itself and the conclusions that can be drawn from it.
On the street, children often lose control of their lives; they are left to their own devices and must manage to survive. To survive, many street children must work. The work these children do is often hard, unhygienic and unsafe. Girls on the street are often ‘invisible’. They disappear into the domestic situation or in the sex trade, or are kidnapped and raped by rebels and militiamen (Unicef 2001). Usually the children do not earn enough money, so they become malnourished and have little chance for healthy development (Unicef). Of all the street children in developing countries, about 75% try to survive by stealing and 23% solely by begging (INPPARES 1999). Street children also often join gangs or organised crime (Unicef 2001).

According to Amnesty International, World Vision, Terre des Hommes and Unicef, violence is one of the greatest dangers for children living on the street in developing countries. Street children are often seen as rubbish; they are abused by police and wealthy citizens and sometimes even exterminated by death squads. Street children in developing countries are also raped in exchange for drugs, and they are arrested for the least offence (for example, stealing an apple) and tortured in jail (Amnesty International).

Many children use drugs to escape their problems (Unicef 2001). Drugs are used to ward off cold, hunger, violence, sexual abuse and psychological and emotional pain (CAS and Terre des Hommes, 2005).

Figures for Kenya

Of Kenya’s 15 million children, approximately 300,000 live on the street; this number is increasing by about 10% each year. The largest group of street children, about 35,000, live on the streets of Nairobi. In Kitale there are approximately 500 children living on the streets (Oliver Lynton, 2005).

2. The value of sport

Street children and children of the slums have almost no opportunity to engage in sport due to poverty and a lack of materials and facilities. The UN Convention on Children’s Rights states that every child has the right to relaxation and play and the right to participate in cultural and creative activities. The first article of the International Treaty on Physical Education and Sport states that physical education and sport are a fundamental right for everyone. The treaty states that:

1.1 Every person has a fundamental right to access to physical education and sport. It is necessary for the full development of a human being. Physical education and sport must be anchored in education and other aspects of life.

1.2 Special facilities need to be provided for young children (UNESCO 1978).

Thus, even children who live on the street must be able to engage in sport. Children who cannot do this lose more than just the pleasure of sport; they lose valuable skills that practicing a sport can bring to their lives (Unicef 2004).

Sport has a great power of attraction to human beings and it has a low participation threshold (Lucassen, Nielander and Sterkenburg 2004). Sport improves the physical and mental health of the person; it can help to heal emotional wounds and deal with traumas; sport brings people together and builds networks; sport removes boundaries and can counteract prejudices based on religion, gender, social background and disabilities (Magglingen Declaration and Recommendations 2003). According to Van Bottenburg and Schuyt (1996), sport helps children to bring structure to their lives. In sport, youths are offered a chance to take part in a meaningful activity and they become integrated into ‘normal’ existence. Some research (Unicef 2004) has shown that sport can contribute to a reduction in crime. Sport promotes a positive use of free time and has been found most effective when coupled with programmes for social and personal development. According to Unicef, sport helps children to develop communication and leadership skills and to improve their self-esteem. Sport promotes friendship, solidarity, fair play, teamwork, self-discipline, respect for others and leadership (Unicef, United Nations, Pos and Hekkink 2004). Lastly, sport fulfils a lightning rod role (Elias and Dunning,
Tensions that build up in everyday life can be diffused harmlessly in sport due to its physical character. Children can forget their troubles for a moment and do something fun (SCP 2003).

By providing a purposeful activity sport can counteract boredom, making it less likely for children to take a wrong turn in life (Unicef 2004). Thus, sport would also contribute to reducing the risk that children end up on the street, if all the additional effects of sport are also taken into consideration.

To get children away from life on the street, a project must build a bridge between that life, with its drug dealing and crime, and facilities like schools, sport clubs and health care. Sport is only one of the aspects that can contribute to this. To prevent children ending up on the street, it is important that these children are offered alternatives—alternatives that give them a compensatory feeling of safety and warmth, alternatives that reduce the attraction of drug dealing and crime, and alternatives that ensure that children can use facilities like schools and health care (IBISS 2005).

3. Factors

The written and field research revealed a number of factors that could have an influence on a sport project intended to contribute to prevention and improve the self-image of street children. To continue this behaviour modification, the children’s self-image must receive continuous positive reinforcement. That is because the behaviour of children emanates from their self-image (T. de Vos and Van der Hoeven, www.mensinwereld.nl).

3.1 Low participation threshold

One condition for a successful project for street children and children in slums is that it must have a low participation threshold. This means that the cost, geographical accessibility and social accessibility must not form a hindrance. The overwhelming majority of the target group is characterised by little or no income (Stronks et al). The reasons these children hardly ever participate in sport are not purely economic; there are often no facilities for sport (Pos and Hekkink 2004). It is also important for children to be able to stay in their familiar environment and for a safe place to be created for them within this area. A project must therefore also be aimed at the whole environment, i.e. the child’s social and physical surroundings must also be considered (Van Assema and Willemsen 1993).

3.2 Activities

To ensure that children become interested in a project, it is important that what is being offered coincides with the interests of the target group and that they have the chance to choose activities themselves (Pos and Hekkink 2004). There must be a tailor-made approach; the activities must be made to measure for the needs of the specific group, the different levels of the children and the local situation (Janssen et al). A study of projects for street children shows that their principal need is for personal attention. They need a friend, someone who is interested in them and whom they can trust (Korf et al 1999; Bottenburg et al 2001; Noom and De Winter 2001). It is also important that clear rules are set. When rules are made and both parties know where they stand, this can lead to a bond of trust (T. de Vos and Van der Hoeven). Besides personal attention, a group approach is also very important. A group can have a self-correcting character; antisocial behaviour is unanimously opposed and social behaviour rewarded (Glen Mills). A group approach is also useful to train children in social skills. Sport has the ability to bring structure to children’s lives and to contribute to cooperation, fair play, respect, awareness of values, living up to agreements and rules and learning to win and lose (United Nations 2003). The last important point for a successful project is neighbourhood participation, or a neighbourhood-oriented strategy. As the neighbourhood becomes interested in the project, it becomes easier to work with local customs and it can bridge the gap between the neighbourhood and the target group (Van Assema and Willemsen 1993). It can even be an incentive for the child, a chance for the neighbourhood, and important for the project itself (Pos and Hekkink, 2004).

3.3 Instruments and motivation

To motivate street children to healthy living habits one needs education, reward and role models. Education (or information) can be a worthwhile element to use in making a project known to the target group. Education can contribute both to increasing knowledge and changing attitudes (Herwig 1993).
The use of reward strategies can be a reason for children to take part in a project; a reward can also stimulate children to good behaviour. Intrinsic reward (being driven to behave well by the effect of that behaviour) is better for a child than extrinsic reward (being driven to behave well by external influences), although a small reward can often do wonders (Pos and Hekkink, 2004). Adult role models have a bond of trust with the children, can communicate an important message and stimulate them to a particular behaviour; “peer educators” can also fulfil this role and serve as a positive example (Cuijpers 2001).

Thanks to the bond of trust that coaches often have with children and the role model function that the coach and assistants have, during a training session they are able to advise children on the dangers of street life (AIDS and drugs) and how to prevent them. Famous sporting heroes or other celebrities can also be used for these purposes. They are often a great example to these children, who are readily inclined to adopt their way of thinking (United Nations 2003).

3.4 Opportunities for further involvement

It is very important that within a project there should be various opportunities for further involvement. For this purpose, it is vital for the organisation to seek out cooperative connections with other organisations (Van der Ploeg 2000). This means that if a project encounters problems with a street child, he will not be kicked back out onto the street, but that there is a possibility to refer him to a health institution (Van der Ploeg 2000). It can also be important for large projects to have a first aid or doctor’s office on site (Oliver Lynton).

Problems are not the only reason why a child would need to be sent on; there should also be cooperative arrangements to deal with successful situations. If any talented young players should emerge from a sporting project, it is important for their future that they are able to be sent to a professional club (J.A. van der Veen). Especially in developing countries, these contacts are often scarce. Projects should also focus on restoring family connections, since parents have the most influence on their children and a good parent-child bond is important for a child’s development (McWorther 2003). Finally, when a project is at an advanced stage, it is important for the children to have the opportunity for further involvement in appropriate educational programmes. The children must get the chance to learn to read and write, and have the right to go to school (UN Convention on Children’s Rights 1978).

4. Strategies to promote behaviour modification

The aim of this study is to investigate how street children can achieve a better self-image by participating more in sport and spending less time aimlessly on the street. Because self-image influences the behaviour a person exhibits, this chapter examines and compares two prevailing theories about behaviour modification. Attitude, social influences and personal factors are behaviour determinants that must be considered when implementing behaviour modification and retention.

According to the theory of reasoned behaviour of Fishbein and Azjen (1975), the attitude and social norm (views of others) lead to the intention of behaviour. People in one's environment play an important role in this theory in the origination, suspension or continuation of behaviour. This theory also states that experience and observation (“vicarious learning”), outcome expectations, values and expectations of one’s own effectiveness affect the behaviour a person exhibits.

The ASE model (De Vries et al 1987; Kok et al 1991) is an integration of various behavioural change models. The ASE model identifies three primary determinants: attitudes (A), social influences (S) and self-effectivity (E). Together, these determinants form the motivation of a person to exhibit certain behaviours. Behaviour does not depend solely on intention, but also on one’s skills and barriers. After exhibiting a behaviour, these factors can result in behaviour continuation or behaviour regression. The ASE model shows that knowledge is also important. Exposure to new information, however, does not lead automatically to a change in behaviour, but when it is stimulated, an attitude change can take place both in the individual and the environment (De Vries et al 1987; Kok et al 1991), and thereby a change in self-image.

5. Experimental research
In the table below, the various ideas are placed in a conceptual model (the ASP model). This model contains roughly the following. When street children decide to take place in a project, this will lead to a reduction of the time they spend aimlessly on the street. When this behaviour leads to a positive or negative result, this will also have a positive or negative influence on these three determinants. In the case of a positive result, repetition will take place and the children will come back. After some time, this can lead to a more positive self-image. This conceptual model forms the basis of the experiment carried out in this study.

![Conceptual model: the ASP model](image)

5.1 Research aim and target group

The aim of the research is as follows: to develop an instrument for development organisations and rehabilitation centres to improve the methods for rehabilitating and integrating street children in society. The target group of the experiment was a group of nine boys and three girls between nine and fifteen years old who live on the street in Kitale, Kenya. The experiment was carried out in cooperation with the Trans-Nzoia Youth Sports Association (TYSA). Throughout the project, TYSA made the services of an interpreter available. The experiment was also supported by cooperation of social workers from the Social Department in Kitale.

5.2 Research method

An experimental study requires that the research target group should undergo measurement both before and after exposure to factors (i.e. the sport project) (Baarda and De Goede 2001). The research technique used during the experiment was interviewing in the form of questionnaires. It should be borne in mind that the responses could contain a certain degree of social desirability. It has been assumed that the number of socially desirable answers was equally great in the first and last interviews. To augment the validity of the study, the interviews were supplemented by daily participating observations by two persons, Kitale municipal social workers.

5.3 Activities

As noted above, the sport project for the street children of Kitale was organised on the basis of the ASP model. This model was used as a creative instrument to arrive at practical measures. The results of this effort of adaptation are described in this section.
Attitude
The children must be convinced of the value of participating at the very first meeting. This was done by providing information about the project. Also, any barriers to participation had to be removed. For instance, the children were given food every morning at the project so that they could start playing sports right away rather than having to look for food first. The food was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Steenbergen. Sport clothes were also made available by the City of Enschede as an incentive for the street children to take part in the project. Every morning began with a warm-up, and the other activities varied according to the wishes of the children.

Social influence
The activities took place daily in a central location. At this location (Prison Playground) there were many passers-by, and children often stood to watch; in the stadium there were frequently also spectators. In this way, the street children came in contact with the community and the community also gained an appreciation for the project, because the children did not just hang around on the street all day long. By getting a former street youth to serve as a coach on the project, the attempt was made to form a better and quicker bond of trust with the children. The former street youth also served as a good example (Adult Role Model). He had been in the same situation and was known to the children, so the children were more inclined to listen to him and adopt his ideas and opinions.
Personal factors (self-image)
A group approach was taken to the social self-image. Every day the children took part in a group warm-up, then played sports in small groups and at the end a football match was held. They also played against a school and in the last week, ‘normal’ children were brought into the project to help integrate the children into society somewhat. As for the physical self-image, the project took advantage of the children’s need to play; they exercised an influence on the activities that took place and games were played on different levels. Running training was also provided, which improved their condition. Different ball games were played to improve their technical skills, which resulted in progress in the children’s performance. An attempt was also made to work on the emotional self-image of the children. A few clear rules were established so that the children knew where they stood. The project also tried to give the children a feeling of value by encouraging and complimenting them. As much personal attention was given in order to give the children a feeling of being loved. Little or no work was done in this test project on the cognitive self-image. No information was given about the dangers of HIV/AIDS or drugs because there was no interpreter available for this and the children had severe difficulties concentrating in this stage because of glue-sniffing. The duration of the project was too short for educational programmes.

6. Results
The children’s social, emotional and physical self-image were improved. This does not mean that the test project would have had a positive influence on all children. Very different responses were received for some interview questions—one child responds very positively to certain situations whereas another child much less so. Thus, the scores per child vary widely, making it difficult to draw conclusions. Looking at the total situation, the score before and after was highest for the social self-image, and during the course of the project the social self-image was the most improved. At the end of the project, more than half of the children responded positively. The lowest score recorded was for the emotional self-image; the test project had more influence on the physical self-image. However, these two aspects did improve during the course of the project.

6.1 Social self-image
Prior to the project, fewer than half the children (5) said they felt that they had friends who liked them, and at the end of the project all the children (12) said they did. The observers confirmed this. They also observed that many of the children were very subdued at first and did not mingle with others. This was tackled by having the children form up into different teams each day so that all the children got to know each other better and learned to cooperate with each other. A few children even said that after having played with the ‘normal’ children they now had a few friends who did not live on the street. The observers also said that at the end of the project, the children fought with each other less than at the beginning.

Something else the observers noticed was that after about two weeks, the children were quieter while eating and waited patiently until they got their food and drink, whereas during the first few days they yelled and begged for food and even tried to snatch it out of the helper’s hand while it was being passed out.

According to the observers, it was especially the younger children who were very shy and quiet at the beginning. This was handled by giving them lots of attention, helping them play sports and encouraging them. After a few weeks their attitude changed somewhat; most children were much more prepared to speak up and seemed more self-assured. By the end, they also took a much more active part in the proceedings than at the beginning. It was also noticed that after two or three weeks most children did not stand aloof any more, which may mean that they felt better about themselves. This may have been due to the attention and value the children received and the few positive contacts with the community. The observers also saw that a bond of trust had been formed with the children; they showed respect and were thankful for the help. Moreover, more than half the children (9) said at the end of the project that they had the feeling that they, too, were important.

6.2 Emotional self-image
After a few weeks, the observers had the idea that the children were feeling lonely less often, because all the children made more friends during the project. Probably even on the street the children are more of a group and more involved with each other, which may make them feel lonely less often. The results also showed that the children have less of a feeling of being alone. The observers noticed that
during the first weeks at the Prison Playground many people acted very negatively towards the street children. Many passers-by also made unpleasant remarks when the children walked to the stadium (“Don’t touch him! He comes from hell. God will punish you”) and people also stared at them. During the first friendly football match against a school, the street children were ridiculed because of their dirty clothes (the new shirts were still on their way) and poor football performance. This match took place in the second week, and the children had not developed their basic skills yet. The sport instructor tried to work on this by telling the schoolchildren that the street children had not chosen to live this way and that it could happen to them too. According to the observers, the children were still inclined to poke fun, but they were considerably quieter. At the end of the project it still happened that people sometimes made unpleasant remarks, but some people had begun to respond positively to the children. The population remained curious, and many people came to the stadium to watch. According to the observers, a few people made contact with the children and even had a brief conversation about the project. Also many children came to watch out of jealousy—they wanted to play sports and join in the game too. The community primarily showed interest when they saw the children walking around in their fine new sport clothes.
During the last two weeks of the project, ‘normal’ boys who sat and watched every day were allowed to participate in the project. According to the observers, the children were proud to join in and be allowed to play. No problems arose and the children played together well.

The results did show that through the project, the children became more aware of their situation. It is understandable that the children would want to be someone else because they are in a very bad living situation. Every morning they could play sports, have fun and eat, but in the afternoon they returned to the hard reality of street life. Probably most of the children were so accustomed to living on the street that they hardly ever thought about any other life; now they were more aware of their bad situation and the fact that life can be different.

6.3 Physical self-image

In the post-project interview, most of the children had the feeling that their outward appearance had improved. According to the observers, this change was primarily brought about by the new sport clothes the children wore. The children were very pleased with the sport clothes and proud of them, and the community also admired them. A number of the children also said themselves that their bodies looked better thanks to the sport, that they felt better and less tired. The observers had also noticed that during sports the children sniffed less glue and after a few weeks, almost all of them handed in their bottles when the activities started.
According to the observers, the children made enormous strides in their sporting skills. In the first week, while playing football everyone just ran after the ball, and the quieter children often stayed on the sidelines. But after learning basic skills and receiving much encouragement, these other children were also prepared to take part in the game. The children who were better or older tended to play for themselves and the other children took a less active part. At the end of the third week, the children began to play together more. The children who were very shy at the beginning appeared to be more sure of themselves in the last weeks. They took an active part in the activities and it was clear that the children were enjoying the sport, probably because they had the feeling that they could do it.

7. Conclusions

In small-scale projects, the personnel get to know the children well and there is a great deal of contact, allowing the children to build up a bond of trust with the personnel (Oliver Lynton 2005). It is important that the children get plenty of attention, but also that the children are not rushed at first and are left somewhat to themselves (Russ Brine 2005). Street children are used to their freedom, so it is important for them not to get the feeling that they are shut in. They must have the idea that they can go and stand where they want to. Street children are also unused to interference by others and find it difficult to listen to rules. When they receive criticism or are called to account, in the beginning they often feel as if they are being attacked. That is why it is important that the children know that in the project there is unconditional love for them (Belinda Alexander 2005). Some projects work with reward strategies to stimulate good behaviour in street children. Bad behaviour, unfortunately, does not always have consequences for receiving the reward, but this could be a good strategy to discourage bad behaviour.
All the projects reviewed take into account the interests of the children. The positive effects of sport are widely recognised and the importance of a group approach appreciated. Most projects also have some form of neighbourhood strategy to promote the integration of the street children into society. Another point that stands out is that all projects recognise the importance of education about drugs and HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, there are very few instances of peer education. In general, very little use is made of adult role models; it is difficult for projects to recruit celebrities for this purpose, for example. However, more use can be made of other role models, such as former street children; at the Kipsongo Training Centre, in fact, it appears that they are setting a good example for the children. They understand each other and form a bond of trust very quickly.

Postscript: A number of rehabilitation centres in the area around Kitale have been brought into contact with the test project, so that when the children are ready, the possibility of a transfer to one of these centres can be considered. The sport project is currently being continued by the sporting organisation TYSA in cooperation with the Kenyan Football Federation. They are also considering the possibility of continuing this study in Kitale and starting a lasting sport project.
Bibliography

Books and articles


Reports and brochures


‘Samen werken is samen scoren’ (2001): platform of Sport and Development study day.


Good understanding means reading between the lines

Ellen Verhoef (bachelor's thesis)

Summary

The prevailing theories about behaviour modification are based on a rational image of the human being. It is assumed that a person chooses alternative behaviours and chooses from among them. This assumption has begun to be questioned. Perhaps human behaviour is less rational than we think. Perhaps a person does not weigh options so rationally, but is much more inclined to ‘conform to the set norms’. To test this, a number of stories were added to a collection of reading comprehension material. These stories were read by children from groups 7 and 8 of a primary school. Reading between the lines, the stories communicated the message that drinking alcohol before the Dutch legal age of 16 was ‘not the done thing’. Surveys done before and after the readings tested the effect of this normative method of behaviour modification. The results show that the effect of texts such as that below have a more positive effect on children than the traditional approach in which the advantages and disadvantages of alcohol use are discussed.

“The worst reaction of all was that of Hinke. She just thought he was dumb and gave him a look of disdain. No, from now on he’d just have a cola!”
1. Purpose and description of situation

After earlier concerns expressed by experts in primary education, on 20 November 2003 an open letter signed by 17 prominent individuals in the field of public health called on the government to strive for a stronger alcohol policy to combat the increasing alcohol use especially by underage children. Various sources have confirmed the standpoint of these experts and prominent individuals with regard to the increase in alcohol use among children (NIGZ 2002; KPMG 2002; Trimbos 2003; STAP 2003; GGD 2003; NIPO 2003). Dramatic increases have been measured not only in the number of young occasional drinkers, but also in the number of young problem drinkers. This growth has led to Alcoholics Anonymous in the region of Antwerp, just over the border in Belgium, setting up a text message and telephone line for this target group (ANP 2003).

The aim of this report is to analyse and test how this increase in young alcohol users can be checked and, if possible, reversed. To achieve this, a practical concept was developed and initiated.

This study is focused on one particular group of alcohol users: children under 16 years old. According to Dutch law, no alcohol may be sold to this group. The reason for this ban is that children under 16 are physically immature and alcohol use can thus be especially damaging to them. Moreover, children who start drinking earlier in life have a greater chance of developing alcohol addiction problems later (Trimbos 2001; STAP 2003; GGD 2003). Despite the legal restriction and the health risks, 45% of all 10 to 15 year olds have tried alcohol (NIPO, 2003). This percentage increases with age. The breakdown per age category is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Percentage of children having experience with alcohol according to age. (NIPO 2003)
In general, it appears that the older the child, the greater the chance that he or she has used alcohol. That this is not entirely reflected in the graph is because of the statistical method employed. The graph shows that a large percentage of 14 to 15 year olds have tried alcohol. Apparently, of the children who have tried alcohol, 3 out of 5 said they had consumed alcohol in the past week (Trimbos 2001; NIPO 2003). That adds up to 60%. On average, these children drank 4.6 glasses per person. The 10 and 11 year olds said they had consumed an average of 0.8 glasses in the past week, while 12 and 13 year olds had consumed 3.7 glasses in the same period. The 14 and 15 year olds drank an average of 5.3 glasses. It is also known that almost half of the 15 year olds drank at least six glasses of alcohol on the weekend. About 7% of children between the ages of 10 and 11 said they had been drunk before. Of this number, the number of boys, at 11%, is clearly higher than the number of girls, at 3.1%. In the 12 and 13 year old age category, more boys than girls had been drunk. The figures here are 20.9% versus 11.8%. Boys and girls aged 14 and 15 years had, on average, been drunk most often: 37.3% of girls and 46.5% of boys. Boys get drunk at a younger age and more frequently than girls (Trimbos 2001; NIPO 2003).

Alcohol use among children increased in the 1990s and stabilised thereafter. Research carried out in 2001 showed a slight decline. Currently it appears to be somewhat on the rise again. A possible reason for this is the popularity of pre-mixed drinks like Bacardi Breezer and Smirnoff Ice (STAP 2003; GGD 2003). Favourite alcoholic drinks among girls are mixed drinks (35%) and beer (15%). Boys prefer beer to mixed drinks 33% to 23%. Among the youngest children, soft drinks are more popular than alcohol. In the 10 to 12 age group, only one in ten prefers alcohol to soft drinks. From age 14, however, alcohol is more popular than soft drinks (NIPO, 2003). Of the children in group 8 who had consumed alcohol in the past month, mixed drinks were far and away the favourite.

2. Reasons for alcohol use and behavioural change

A number of factors can be identified that appear to have an influence on the use of alcohol by children aged 10 to 15. First there is the aspect of growing up. Trying alcohol is part of the experimental behaviour which characterises the transition from child to adult (GGD 2003; STAP 2003). The second aspect has to do with the effect experienced by the person who drinks. Alcohol numbs the senses and, in so doing, helps the person to forget unpleasant memories and situations (NIGZ 2002; Trimbos 2003). It also has an inhibition-lowering effect which makes it easier for the user to initiate social contacts (Kentron 2003). Many children also expect that drinking alcohol will put them in a better mood. The third effect is the social factors. Alcohol has a status-raising image that ensures that the user will generally be labelled as ‘tough’ and ‘cool’. Many children are susceptible to this and drink alcohol to fit in (Engels 2003). The taste of alcohol can also be a reason to drink it. The sweet taste of alcopops and pre-mixed drinks make them popular with children under 16 (STAP 2003). The parents and the location also appear to play a role. Just over 50% of parents think it’s fine for their children to drink, but the other half do not agree. Nine out of ten of the children whose parents do not allow them to drink say they have never tried alcohol (NIPO 2003). Children up to age 13 mainly drink at home, while 14 and 15 year olds prefer other locations—a disco or a bar, at a friend’s house, in the sport centre canteen or on the street. Finally, the place alcohol is procured should be mentioned. Most children
purchase alcohol in the supermarket (45%), but another large group prefers bars and discotheques (43%). Almost half the children say that they are never asked about their age (NIPO 2003). The hospitality industry and supermarkets deny this, claiming that they are assiduous in checking age (De Wolf and De Ruiter 2003; KHN 2003). The children who drink but do not buy alcohol get it primarily from their parents (71%). At 17%, friends also have a role in alcohol distribution (Trimbos 2001; NIPO 2003).

Various theories have been developed over the years to bring about behaviour modification. A number of these theories aim at forcing a change and leave the individual little room for influence. Examples are legal statutes and fines for violators. There are also theories based on a voluntary change, exemplified by providing education. These theories will be discussed below.

In 1992, the Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (Scientific Council for Government Policy) formulated three defined strategies for social behaviour modification. The first strategy is force, the second transaction, and the third persuasion (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid 1992; Vlek and Michon 1992; Vlek, Hendrickx and Steg 1993). It should be remembered that these strategies overlap and thus cannot be viewed entirely apart from each other.

With all three strategies, one or more weak points must be considered. Force requires continuous monitoring and is subject to the danger of overregulation (Van Soest 1991; Vlek and Michon 1992; Vlek, Hendrickx and Steg 1993). Then there is the question of how much continuous monitoring is possible or desirable. There is also the chance that people will try to evade the rules wherever possible (Van Soest 1991). For alcohol use, this means that making the purchase of alcoholic beverages by persons under the drinking age liable to punishment would not be very effective. It could even have the opposite effect, because buying alcohol would be more exciting (NIGZ 2002; KPMG 2002; STAP 2003). There is also the danger that, if the purchaser was liable to punishment, the hospitality industry would be less motivated to check the ages of its customers and would shift its responsibilities to them (STAP 2003).

With regard to financial-economic stimulation and inhibition, it can be said that there is not always a connection between the costs and advantages on the one hand and behaviour on the other. An example of this is the low price elasticity of fuel prices which probably applies to other products, including alcohol (Lucarotti 1997; Pronk and Blok 1991; Oum 1992; Van Staalduien and Rouwendal 1994; Steg 1996). Nevertheless, American research has shown that a higher price for hard liquor could lead to lower consumption, but this has not been convincingly demonstrated for children (Moskowitz, 1989). Of course, it cannot be assumed that what is true for America is also true for The Netherlands. The social aspects of drinking alcohol are also disregarded in this strategy, although they certainly exercise influence on the behaviour of young people (Lewin 1947; Kuiper 2003; Fiod-ECD 2003). Another disadvantage is the great chance of returning to previous behaviour as soon as the financial-economic measure is suspended (Van Knippenberg and Van Knippenberg 1988).

The strong points of persuasion are the voluntary basis on which it occurs and the fact that the desired behaviour can be outlined clearly (Pizer and Travers 1975; Vlek and Michon 1992; Vlek, Hendrickx and Steg 1993; Leidelmeyer, Van Wijk and Buys 1993). The greatest drawback to this strategy is the freedom from any kind of obligation. Information that does not connect with existing ideas can simply be ignored (McGuire 1985; Kok 1987). This leads to the conclusion that persuasion can only take place in those who already have some sympathy for the change. This means that the individual has to learn to look at reality differently before the translation can be made to a change of attitude and viewpoint (Lewin 1947). Persuasion as an independent instrument, thus, often does not appear to be effective enough (Schmidt 1988; Algemene Rekenkamer 1991; NIGZ 2002; KPMG 2002). It should also be noted that the social norm must be taken into account, since it is largely responsible for the behaviour of a group (Lewin 1947;
In the case of alcohol use, this social norm means that an abstainer falls outside the group because this behaviour does not fulfil the norm.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that the force strategy can cause a counterreaction and can lead to overregulation. The force strategy is less useful in that respect. Effects that follow from the financial-economic strategy will probably be temporary and last only as long as the stimulus or inhibition itself. The low price elasticity of alcohol must also be taken into account. This makes the strategy unsuitable on its own, but it probably has possibilities if combined with or used in support of other strategies. Persuasion as a stand-alone strategy is probably not adequate because of its voluntary nature and the influence of the social norm. Persuasion can thus be seen as an important part of a successful multidisciplinary modification strategy. Knowledge is often the first element necessary for eventual behavioural change (Benne and Chin 1967; NIGZ 1999; Cuijpers 2001).

Following on from the above, the researchers Vlek and Michon formulated three additional strategies (1992). These were physical alternatives, social modelling and organisational change (Steg 1993).

Physical alternatives involve changing the environment in such a way that people alter their behaviour accordingly. Present actions become more difficult or even impossible, whereas the possibility for alternative actions is increased or stimulated (Van der Meer 1981). This strategy assumes that behaviour is determined by the environment and that change of this environment brings about a change in behaviour. This can be true in the case of necessary behaviour for which there is no alternative, but it is simplistic to claim that any change in the physical environment will bring about the desired behavioural change. The physical environment is only one of the determinants of how an individual behaves (Lewin 1947; Benne and Chin 1967; Klandermans and Seydel 1996; De Bourdeaudhuij and Rzewnicki 2001; Cuijpers 2001).

A possible application of this strategy to combat alcohol use by children would be the development of an alternative alcohol-free mixed drink. According to this theory children would pass up the alcoholic drink in favour of the alcohol-free variant. This would probably not happen because the image of alcohol causes such a stubbornly biased perception that children would not be interested in an alcohol-free drink. The taste and appearance could be identical, but the absence of alcohol would make it less interesting (STAP 2003; Dijkmans 2003). Another way to apply this strategy would be organising parties for children. Various discos organise alcohol-free parties on Sunday afternoons, but otherwise they are the same as other parties. For this initiative, too, the absence of alcohol is the reason children prefer a regular party. This can be explained as follows. The children’s choice is determined by multiple factors: social norm, knowledge, self-effectivity and in the above instance, perception (Klandermans and Seydel 1996; De Bourdeaudhuij and Rzewnicki 2001; Cuijpers 2001; Engels 2003). Removing the component of alcohol means that in the eyes of the target group, these alternatives are not real alternatives. Thus, simply creating physical alternatives is not sufficient, but can be done as a supporting element of another strategy.

Social modelling and support acts on social norms and customs, social comparisons and role models. Friends and teachers can be role models; so can politicians, successful business people, sporting heroes or television personalities (De Bourdeaudhuij and Rzewnicki 2001; Cuijpers 2001; Engels 2002). Use of this strategy is making an appeal to the human tendency to conform by offering behaviour as an example to be followed and/or appealing to group behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Kuiper 2002). The underlying thought of this strategy is that social factors strongly affect behaviour and sayings like ‘practise what you preach’ and ‘where one goes, others will follow’ apply here.

An advantage of this strategy is that people are given a free choice and participation promises a reward from the group. Weak points are the voluntary nature of this strategy and the fact that
individual needs are ignored. If someone wants to show independence, the chance is great that they will deviate from the group norm. In a time when individualism is the prevailing sentiment, this is a probable counterreaction. If one wishes to use role models in this strategy, extensive research must be done into the suitability of the person or persons to be used. On the one hand, the target group must have trust in the role model and on the other hand, the role model must not give conflicting signals that call the message into question (Cuijpers 2001).

Another problem is that a social norm is often difficult to change (Vlek, Hendrickx and Steg 1993). This is the greatest problem of this strategy; in Western society alcohol is so accepted that applying this strategy would probably have the opposite effect (Cuijpers 2001; Engels 2003). Children see many people around them drinking alcohol and they want to identify with them. To get this strategy to work, the drinking patterns of society at large would have to be completely revolutionised (Kuiper 2002).

Despite the fact that research has shown that children copy their elders and that parental drinking behaviour is frequently emulated by their children, it is also known that correct education and guidelines can prevent this imitative behaviour (Cuijpers 2001; Engels 2003). This means that the social influence is not so great that it can explain all behaviour. This observation means that this strategy is not adequate to bring about desirable behaviour and that more is necessary to achieve this end.

Organisational change focuses on adapting the environment to allow a different lifestyle to take root. This can relate to changing the structure and function of social sectors, institutions, companies and households. The implicit idea behind this strategy is that part of individual behaviour is determined by structure, culture and the behaviour of organisations and institutions. These societal structures and the methods of organisations and institutions must therefore be adapted to allow the behaviour of the individual to change (Vlek, Hendrickx and Steg 1993).

Of course, behaviour is partly determined by the organisation of society, but it is not the only influential factor. Other factors that exercise an influence on the behaviour of the individual are the prevailing social norm, knowledge, self-effectivity and perception (Klandermans and Seydel 1996; De Bourdeaudhuij and Rzewnicki 2001; Cuijpers 2001; Engels 2003). Despite the fact that organisational change is not sufficient in itself, it does give a signal to the actors.

The above strategy can be used to curb alcohol use by children by removing all alcoholic beverages from the supermarkets so that it is harder for children to get access to them. Organisational change shows that, in this case, the government is serious about underage drinking and that the subject is high on the political agenda. An additional positive effect is that the subject receives extra attention, generating free publicity.

A strong point of this strategy is that new alternative behaviours are introduced and that the changes are often stable in character. A weak point of change is that it is often a difficult and labour-intensive process (Vlek, Hendrickx and Steg 1993). Again, children will look for different ways of procuring alcoholic beverages. They would probably go more often to bars and discos or have older friends purchase alcohol for them (Grossman 1995; Engels 2002; De Wolf and De Ruiter 2003; K.H.N. 2003).

Moreover, supermarket owners and older consumers are not in favour of this measure. Consumers would be limited in their choices and would have to go to more trouble to get their own alcohol. Supermarket owners would lose turnover and this would not serve to win them over (De Wolf and De Ruiter 2003; K.H.N. 2003).

3. Existing campaigns and projects focused on behaviour modification
A large number of campaigns and projects have been initiated with the aim of limiting or preventing alcohol use by underage children. To analyse whether these campaigns have been successful, research must be done into both short-term and long-term results. Often this research is lacking and there is no hard evidence of how much, if any, effect an initiative has had. An opposite effect can also occur causing a negative result, but this is not recognised.

Research into the Dutch academic sources show that a broad, coordinated approach has the greatest chance of having an effect. The favoured approach is a combination of school interventions with neighbourhood-oriented programmes supported by a mass media campaign (Trimbos 2000). Literature research from the United States has identified a number of elements which school interventions must incorporate in order to be successful (Dusenbury and Botvin 1992; Peters and Paulussen 1997). Most of these elements, however, appear to be stating the obvious. Moreover, little attention is paid to the accompanying difficulties. For example, the opposition to receiving information about alcohol is not recognised or discussed in this list.

4. The action hypothesis and the study

The foregoing leads us to the conclusion that combating childhood alcohol use is based on the theory of the rational person. That is even the case within the normative re-education strategy, although the name suggests differently. This has led to the theory of the ‘person conforming to the prevailing norm’.

The hypothesis used in this study is as follows: *implicit normative education may be more effective in influencing the attitude to alcohol use than explicit education.* Explicit education influences the social environment by clearly telling the target group why drinking alcohol is not good. Implicit normative education makes it clear that drinking alcohol is ‘not done’ without singling it out as a problem. It happens between the lines and thus it is not made into an issue or point of interest.

The implicit and explicit strategy is translated into actions (see above) which were tested by means of a quasi-experimental subject. The experimental stimulus consisted of the variable ‘type of education’. The subordinate variable was attitude. There were four experiment groups. The four experiment groups received the information via the implicit or explicit method. Two of the groups participated in a pre-experiment and post-experiment survey. In the other two groups there was only a post-experiment survey in order to check the effect of the pre-experiment survey. The research units consisted of pupils from two group 7 classes and two group 8 classes. These primary school pupils are between 10 and 13 years old and go to the same school. In total, 125 pupils took part in the experiment. In view of the research topic, the results of this study must be interpreted with care, both in terms of the internal and external validity.

The most frequently used and most successful education programme in The Netherlands is ‘De gezonde school en genotmiddelen’ (‘The Healthy School and Drugs’ GGD 2000). This wide-ranging approach could not be implemented in this study due to lack of time and resources. Therefore, the explicit education was limited to education sessions consisting of:
- 3 lessons about alcohol and tobacco
- training in resisting peer pressure
- training in resisting advertising
- forming your own opinion
The implicit normative education was given using stories. By reading the class three stories over three days in which alcohol plays a role, and clearly communicating that it is not appropriate to use it (but without going into all the effects and risks), the social norm is employed to change the prevailing attitude. This is reinforced during the last session by having another teacher walk into the class and, laughing at the teacher who is reading, say that of course alcohol use by children is inappropriate. This laughter makes it even more clear how ridiculous drinking alcohol is.

The attitude to alcohol is measured using pictures. The pupil is shown pictures of activities and asked what he or she would most like to do. One of these pictures shows alcohol being consumed; others show sports, dancing, reading books, watching a film, and playing with a Playstation. They are also shown a number of beverages and asked which they would or would not like to drink, and whether it is ‘cool’ to drink them (5-point scale).

5. Results of the study

In the pre-experiment and post-experiment surveys, equal proportions of the children considered an alcoholic beverage more ‘cool’ than an alcohol-free beverage. Despite the fact that alcohol retains a tough and cool image, the attitude with regard to the actual consumption of alcohol had declined more sharply with the children who had received implicit education than by those who had received explicit education. The children who received explicit education (N=24) even exhibited a negative effect. In the pre-experiment survey, 6 children (25%) chose drinking alcohol as the activity they would most like to do. In the post-experiment survey, 11 children (46%) chose drinking alcohol as primary activity. In the group that received implicit education (N=101) a positive effect was exhibited. In the pre-experiment survey, 40 children (40%) chose drinking alcohol as the first activity; in the post-experiment survey only 27 children (27%) chose this activity. For the record, there is no evidence that the pre-experiment survey had any effect on the post-experiment survey.

As noted above, these results must be interpreted with caution. They are preliminary indications and calculating the significance is not very helpful because the test groups were not representative samples. The experiment only shows that in this situation the explicit education had a negative effect while the implicit method had a positive effect. Nevertheless, the experiment suggests strongly that explicit education can lead to more interest being generated among the target group for a particular activity (like drinking alcohol), which thus would have a negative effect. The experiment also suggests strongly that implicit education is more effective than explicit education. This all shows that further research/testing of the ‘implicit education’ action form is exceedingly worthwhile.

What does the result of this study mean in practice, for example in terms of the government campaigns against alcohol use and the advertisements on TV? For the government, it would seem advisable to cancel the advertisements. It would probably be more effective to sponsor soap operas in which the norm is established between the lines that drinking alcohol is ‘not done’. It also shows that the role played by films, newspapers, etc. is very important in these issues. These media have particular importance when it comes to “implicit education”.

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Let ’em laugh
A study on the effectiveness of humour as an icebreaker, to counteract prejudice
Liona Marchena (bachelor’s thesis)

1. The social problem

Job Cohen, Mayor of Amsterdam, on 11 March 2004, the day after the murder of Theo van Gogh:
“Dutch people, Moroccans, Muslims, Christians, Jews, everyone—must we continue to feed our hate and fear or can we transform it into trust?”

The Netherlands has become a multicultural society. It is estimated that by 2015, 15 percent of the population (2.5 million people) will consist of first and second generation Turks, Moroccans, Antilleans, Surinamese, Moluccans, Southern Europeans and immigrants from the Third World and Eastern Europe. In the four largest cities, the percentages are already between 40 and 50 percent (Nota Media en Minderhedenbeleid 1999). The social debate of the past twenty years about the position of different ethnicities in Dutch society has a clear tone that expresses certain things very clearly. The central points in that debate include the compatibility of immigrant with native cultures, the limits of cultural tolerance and the possibility of integration, whether or not retaining one’s own cultural identity at the same time. Social relations between the groups in question have also been under pressure recently. Every day the media report serious and minor incidents such as attacks on facilities for groups with other ethnic or cultural backgrounds and threatening letters and physical violence towards these groups, and vice versa (Shadid 1998). No one can ignore how the media today report on multicultural issues.

One may well wonder how and why natives and immigrants have difficulties functioning together in society. The reasons can be found in several quarters. Countless studies have shown that the phenomenon of image formation plays an important role in the success of intercultural contacts, i.e. contacts between people of different cultures. The term image formation can roughly be defined as ‘notions and opinions people have about themselves, their own group and culture, as well as about other groups and their cultures’ (Shadid 1998). The expressions of image formation may include stereotypes, prejudices, ethnocentrism and racism (Shadid and Koningsveld 1999). This report will examine the phenomenon of prejudice more closely. Various sources show that prejudices play an important role in image formation (Shadid 1998; S. Peeters 1999; www.palet.nl 2004).

The aim of this study is as follows: To obtain insight into the actions that make a method of combating prejudice effective, in order to increase the effectiveness of that method.

2. Methods of combating prejudice

According to Chin and Benne (1967), there are three main methods of combating prejudice. The first of these is the normative re-education strategy. This method works to change prejudices by promoting social contacts (the normative influence of third parties) and by guiding people during the process of change (learning by experience). The second strategy is the rational strategy. The idea behind this strategy is that providing information can change prejudices; however, the way the message is formulated and communicated is very important. The third strategy is force. Opinions on the effectiveness of force in combating prejudice remain divided. This strategy could have the opposite effect to the one intended.
Shadid (1998) argues that prejudice is an inter-group attitude. In his view, similarities are an important factor because an individual likes to identify with others (Shadid 1994; Franck 2003). Knowledge could help to create more understanding about other ways of life, and when there is less misunderstanding, prejudices should be more subject to change (Kok 1985; Burnstein and Vinoker 1977; Kok 1978; Meertens 1976; Vinokur and Burnstein 1978). According to Franck (2004), this information must be interactive. This means that the topic remains open for longer and people feel more involved in the issue. Others (Franck 2003, Gladwell 2001 and Gielen 2004) propose that the message must be regularly repeated, which would also keep the message from being forgotten. Collective action against people with prejudices would also ensure that prejudices were combated (Grubben 2004).

Looking at the literature, it is striking that communication of knowledge and learning by experience are still central to the various methods of effecting changes in attitude (Chin and Benne 1967; Kok 1985). This is even more surprising as it appears that the emotions are heavily involved. Changing an attitude is not just a rational decision, but an emotional event as well. This latter aspect, however, is rarely mentioned in the literature. The emotional element does appear in the methods based on the normative re-education strategy, but even there, the emotional moment itself is not central; learning by experience and thereby overcoming any opposition to change is considered much more significant. This has led to the following hypothesis:

“An emotional icebreaker can draw away the emotional charge of certain subjects, making it easier to think about them and subsequently to change one’s attitude.”

3. Humour

As noted above, emotion is an important factor in combating prejudice. However, little attention is devoted to this aspect in the existing methods of approach. It may therefore be assumed that if something is done to play on these emotions, it could serve to reduce or even eliminate prejudice. Humour seems the most likely way to do this. Authors and experts such as Grubben (2004), Ouled Radi (2004) and Lievens (2004) suggest that humour can serve as an icebreaker. Humour is presented by these authors as an element that can disarm emotionally charged topics and help establish an open atmosphere. When a subject can be discussed there is more chance that the other important factors can also be dealt with.

Bearing in mind the importance of the group process (the normative re-education strategy) and the informational (rational) strategy, the following action hypothesis can be formulated:

“An interactive education supplemented with humour helps break the ice about a topic so that it becomes easier to discuss, and people will be more inclined to change their attitudes”.

Examples of combating prejudice in this way might include a theatre performance (possibly interactive) incorporating a great deal of humour or followed by a group discussion. Another idea is interactive lesson materials which include humour for use in schools.

4. Experiment

In cooperation with Bureau Discriminatiezaken West Brabant, we looked at how humour could be added to an existing education programme. Bureau Discriminatiezaken has been working for some time with the theatre education project “Waar sta je?!“ (Where do you stand?). In this project, they work with secondary schools on various issues like prejudice, exclusion, discrimination and peer pressure. The theatre education project consists of three parts: a discussion game, a video with subsequent discussion and a rap or drama workshop.
Two experiments were carried out. Both took place with vocational-bound secondary school pupils. The first experiment was done with a class of 12-year-olds and the second with a class of 14-year-olds.

In the first experiment, only the discussion game was altered; it was transformed into a joke game. The duration of the experiment was one class period (50 min). In the second experiment, the joke game was repeated and the video material was also replaced with a humorous video. The duration of this experiment was two class periods (100 min).

Questionnaires were used in the first experiment. In total, 60 children took part in the experiment. Questionnaires were used to test the pupils before and after the experiment. By way of a “friend game” (in which they could choose whom they would most like to have as a friend) and agree/disagree statements, their prejudices were measured with respect to Moroccans, homosexuals and the disabled. The pre-experiment questionnaire may have influenced the result, because it made the children aware that they were taking part in a study. In hindsight, this may indeed have been the case, because the results do not indicate what real attitude changes might have taken place in the group. The results of the first questionnaire cannot thus be considered truly valid. For this reason, this experiment will not be discussed further in the next section.

The plan of this experiment is shown at the end of this section. In view of the experience gained during the first experiment, observers were used in the second experiment. The observers had a checklist which they used to note certain aspects. This checklist is also reproduced at the end of this section.

The elements in the checklist were chosen to show which group participated most actively in the discussion. The intention behind adding the element of humour is to create a more open, relaxed atmosphere. Every question on the checklist is meant to show how much the group was able to open up and discuss things together. The more often these elements are fulfilled, the more open/relaxed the group became (Lewin 1958; Gladwell 2001; Zimbardo and Ebbesen 1969).

In general, the impression is that the results were valid enough to present. They also show that humour may be an important, but up to now underestimated factor in combating prejudice.

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**Research plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>T1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T= time  
O= observation  
X= experimental stimulus (theatre education)  
Group1: experimental group, presentation with added humour  
Group2: control group, presentation without added humour
**Checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
<th>Option 3</th>
<th>Option 4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you find the atmosphere of the group?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How many people? Count the number of people</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How often is a question asked?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often does the discussion leader receive a spontaneous response?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do the research subjects have an open attitude?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do the research subjects have a closed attitude?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do they laugh?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often is there interaction within the group?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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</table>
| How do you find the atmosphere of the group?  
  Indicate whether the atmosphere in the group changed as compared with the beginning of the discussion. |          |          |          |          |

5. Results of the experiment

The results of the second experiment show that humour serves as an icebreaker, helping the group to feel freer and more relaxed about discussing the topics. The results of the checklists from both groups (theatre education project without humour and theatre education project with humour) were compared with each other. The group that most often performed the elements on the checklist is also the group that participated best in the discussion. With both sets of education materials (jokes/discussion game and video) it appears that the group with the humorous materials participated more easily and were less constrained in the discussions.

On the other hand, the group sometimes became too relaxed and did not always discuss the topics seriously. The group without the humorous materials appeared to discuss the topics more seriously, but there was somewhat less interaction and response from the group. The observers remarked that humour kept the group’s attention. The following conclusion can also be made about the use of a number of discussion statements within the 50-minute class period: the group without the humorous materials got through more than 6 of the propositions, whereas the group with the humorous materials only managed to discuss 4 of them.

It was also determined that it was important to have a good discussion leader to lead the discussion. This discussion leader must be able to work with the icebreaker/humour. The observers said that the video material was well received by the pupils, but that the discussion leader did not follow up and bring it into the discussion, and therefore some of the group took no further part in the discussion.

6. Analysis

If the results of the experiments are considered in light of the hypothesis, it is clear that more research must be done in future on the effect of humour to combat prejudice. The experiments show that humour does have a positive influence. However, the results of the present experiment are only relevant for these research subjects and cannot be considered decisive with regard to external validity and the long-term effects.
It is also recommended that a group discussion or expert meeting should be held to determine the limits of the humour and what role humour should play in the education programme. It is very important to dose the humour carefully. The intention is to put the group more at ease and facilitate relaxed participation in the discussion, but it should not go too far. A judicious amount of humour can allow the group to loosen up at the right moments, but then revert to serious discussion of the topic afterward.

Since the first steps have been taken, it is therefore recommended that more research should be done into the effects of humour. Humour seems to be a good way of establishing an open and relaxed atmosphere when it can be regulated with care.
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Interviews:

Nelleke van de Wiel (26-10-2004)
Project worker with COS West & Midden Brabant, centre for international cooperation, specialising in subjects relating to multicultural society. She is the coordinator of two projects attempting to combat prejudices against immigrant cultures.

Mimoen Ouled Radi (27-10-2004)
Actor in the film *Shouf shouf habibi.* This film uses self-mockery and humour to deal with its actual topic, prejudices about Moroccans.

Jandurk Tuinier (10-11-2004)
Director of the Stichting Vredeseducatie. This association offers a number of interactive and educational forms of ‘lesson materials’ endeavouring to make children more aware of prejudices and what they mean.

Ge Grubben (10-11-2004)
Policy officer with the Landelijk Bureau voor Rassendiscriminatie, which specialises in the area of image formation. The LBR uses many means to combat prejudice, discrimination and racism.
Sport as a means of acceptance and integration of disabled children in developing countries: a case study in Kenya

Isabel de Vugt (bachelor’s thesis)

Summary

Handicapped children in Kenya seem to occupy a disadvantaged position in society. Denial of rights, exclusion from participation in social activities and neglect are the result. This is despite the fact that their rights are established in the UN convention on children’s rights. These handicapped children in Kenya often suffer from a negative self-image and a high degree of trepidation about entering the outside world. Further investigation shows that the cause of the negative self-image and fear of participation are not just the result of the children’s disabilities. In this case, the attitude of non-handicapped people to those who are handicapped is the chief reason for the social disadvantage and often bizarre circumstances in which handicapped people live. A prime reason for this negative attitude is ignorance and unfamiliarity with regard to handicaps.

Literature studies and field research have shown that sporting activities can be a significant means to improve the situation of the disabled. Sport offers handicapped children the chance to develop themselves physically, it gives them a chance to get out of their barren situation and spend some time with children their own age. Through sporting activities, children learn how to win and lose—but most of all, how to work with others. Sport also gives handicapped children the chance to show who they are and what they can do, despite their disabilities. In addition to the sporting activities themselves, education is an important element to increase the understanding of handicaps. Having looked at the different behaviour modification theories, it appears that education alone is not sufficient to influence attitudes positively. However, the combination of integrated sporting activities and education might be an excellent recipe to promote the integration process for handicapped children.

The actual value of this combination was investigated in Kitale, Kenya. Here, a test project was set up and run for seven weeks with 10 physically handicapped children and 10 non-handicapped children and their parents. In the course of seven weeks, daily sport and games and a few informational meetings appeared adequate to see a change in the behaviour of the handicapped children, the non-handicapped children and their parents. In view of the results of this test project, it may be concluded that positive changes in the behaviour of non-handicapped children can lead to a better situation for the handicapped. A combination of integrated sporting activities and educational sessions for both the handicapped children and the non-handicapped children and their parents proved an extremely effective means to realise this goal.
1. Introduction

Studies published by Maina (2004), De Boer (2002/2004), Thate (2004), Crawford (2004), Miller (2004) and Gichuki (2005), among others, testify that the situation for many children in developing countries is very bad. The weaker children in society have an especially hard time—and the same is true for children with a disability. To improve the position of all children in the world, the UN convention on children’s rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1998. Participating countries are required to guarantee the rights of children. Article 2 of the convention forbids any form of discrimination against children, particularly handicapped children. Article 23 states that handicapped children have the right to special care aimed at allowing them to live as independently as possible and take full part in society (UN convention on children’s rights 1998). In practice, however, it appears that these rules are hardly ever observed. Often in developing countries there is too little specific knowledge about handicaps and the government simply has no funds available to handle existing problems. The right to sport and play is also listed in the convention as a separate right. The right to sport and play also appears to be neglected by many governments in developing countries. Part of the reason for this is the ignorance of what sport can do for children, and handicapped children in particular.

According to estimates by the WHO (2002), there are about 500 to 600 million people in the world with a disability of some kind. About 120 to 150 million of these are children. Of these children, 80% (96 million) live in developing countries, and most in remote areas. Only 1 to 2 percent of these children go to school. There are no precise figures for how many people in developing countries live with a handicap, but the WHO gives a general estimate for 2006 that 10% of the population of a developing country are handicapped.

Various studies, including those of Thate (2004), Maina (2004), Bonnel (2004), Alden (2004), Allen and Thomas (2004), De Boer (2004) and Gichuki (2004), have shown that handicapped children in general, but particularly those in developing countries have a disadvantaged position in society. Handicapped children in developing countries are described as being more frequently bullied by their peers, receiving less attention from their parents than their ‘healthy’ brothers and sisters, receiving little or no education, often getting no treatment from a doctor, getting less to eat than the rest of the family, being abused and running a greater risk of being sexually abused. Kenya is one developing country familiar with these problems. Despite the fact that structural assistance for children with disabilities is slowly becoming available, the situation at the moment is still very bad. The problems listed above arise more as a rule than as an exception. Ignorance about the origin of handicaps and how to deal with them is a great problem in Kenya, especially for people in the countryside. As reported by Randiki (2002), Agessa (2005), Achoki (2004) and Bifwoli (2005) among others, parents of handicapped children frequently experience enormous frustration, anger and fear. A handicapped child is often viewed in Kenyan culture as a disgrace to the family. A physically handicapped child is often seen as a curse or a bad omen. Society frequently sees disabilities as punishment for the sins of the child’s parents or grandparents. Handicapped children are therefore hidden from the outside world. They are treated with suspicion and often do not experience the same rights as other people in the community.

2. Figures for Kenya

How many people in Kenya actually live with a handicap is unknown. This is partly due to a problem of definition, but fear and ignorance also play a role. The problem of definition is partly
due to the fact that English-speaking countries use the word ‘disability’, which the abovementioned authors describe as being difficult to translate into other languages. The translated term conveys the wrong impression to those who hear it. In 1989, a preliminary estimate was made of the number of handicapped people in Kenya. According to the Kenya Society for the Physically Handicapped there were at that time about 252,000 people with a physical disability. This was about 2% of the total population of the time, which was 12.6 million. The population of Kenya is now at 31 million. Estimates by the WHO and the Kenya Society for the Physically Handicapped show that 7.2 million Kenyans now live with a disability. This number comes to more than the guideline average of 10% determined by the WHO. Of course, there are a number of reasons for this increase. Firstly, the lack of medical services leads to people suffering serious handicaps caused by eminently curable diseases that are left untreated because of the shortage of medicines and care. Secondly, the lack of food and drinking water in certain areas leads to malnutrition, increasing the chance of a child being born with a disability. Finally, many handicaps are caused by war (Maina 2004; Crawford 2003; De Boer 2004; Unicef 2004; Liliane Fonds 2004; War Child 2004).

3. The value of sport

What is the significance of sport in the acceptance and integration of physically handicapped children in developing countries? Development organisations like NCDO, Right to Play, Terre des Hommes and the United Nations indicate that the role of sport is underestimated by governments and organisations in developing countries. Studies by De Boer (2002), Right to Play (2004), Thate (2004), Nebas NSG (2004), Crawford (2003), French and Hainsworth (2001), United Nations (2003) and Miller (2004) indicate that by taking part in sporting activities, children learn to assert themselves, to win and lose, to work together and about what they are good at and less good at. Perrin (1992) adds that participation in sport and games improves quality of life and integrates the child into the community. Studies by Guttman (1976), Lindstrom (1980), NFSOG (1982), Hovens et al (1982), Eason et al (1983), Dunn (1985), Fagerly (1987) and Teasell et al (1994) show that it is important for disabled children to be able to take part in sport and games so that they can get out of their social isolation. Neglect and discrimination mean that many handicapped children in Kenya have no contact with other children. It is particularly important for children to belong to a social group and interact with their peers (Van Dellen and Crum 1975; Bosscher 1977; Van der Loop 1984; Duijff 1997; Wankel 1993). These authors also state that participation in sport and games increases handicapped children’s powers of concentration. This enables them to perform better in school and in other areas. Moreover, sport and games enable them to show who they are and what they can do despite their disability. Sport can allow players to realise they are equal.

According to Bosscher (1977), Hovens et al (1982), Duijff (1997), Manders (1985) and Sherrill (1984), exercise also fulfils a therapeutic function for physical, psychological and social functioning. Taking part in sport increases muscular strength, which leads to improvement in the performance of everyday activities and better development of physical abilities (resting and active), again increasing the chance for full participation in daily activities. For this group, participation in ‘ordinary activities’ is a positive aspect that contributes to acceptance and integration in the community. Van der Loop (1985) and Bolk (1981) add that with sport, a situation arises where the player can express himself, get involved, and discover and utilise his personal abilities. Sport also counteracts the psychological problems caused by the disability, strengthening self-esteem and self-image (Klein et al 1993). The pleasure of exercise also appears to be an important motivation for taking part in sporting activities (Datillo and Scheilen 1994). A study by Sherrill (1984) indicates that gaining acceptance and esteem from the outside world for the abilities of a player with a disability can be a motivation for participation in sport. In sport, the handicapped athlete has the opportunity to profile himself and so to give the able-bodied a better concept of all the capabilities a person with a handicap has (Guttman 1976; IOS 1984). Studies by Sytsema (1981), Schleien et al (1988) and Nebas NSG have shown that direct
contact and frequent interaction between handicapped and able-bodied people acts to stimulate the development of positive attitudes in able-bodied people and vice-versa. One way to bring about this life experience is integrated participation in sporting activities. The above researchers believe that sport participation increases the chance of socialisation and integration into the ‘able-bodied community’.

3.1 Negative effects of participation in sport

Literature studies and field research show that up to the present time, little research has been done into the risks disabled people run when participating in sporting activities. Baken (1997), Kobes and De Vries and Nebas NSG note that when the handicapped take part in sport, attention should be paid to the pain that they might experience during participation. The consequences of an injury can be mental as well as physical. The athlete finds himself once again socially isolated from fellow athletes and friends. Apart from this social factor, there is also fear about taking part in future sporting activities. The NebasNSG (2000) concludes in its report about organisational integration that with regard to sport participation by persons with disabilities, certain things should be borne in mind. For instance, coaches must have some knowledge of the handicaps and what circumstances could have a negative influence on the capabilities of a particular athlete. Another aspect which must be borne in mind, especially in a country like Kenya, is the fact that sport is an arena where personal vendettas are sometimes pursued. De Boer (2004) points this out and gives the illustration of a sporting project in India. During a sporting match two tribes erupted into a feud that had probably been going on for years. Thus, one should be circumspect about the backgrounds of the participants, because Kenya also has these power struggles between the various tribes.

4. Limitations in sport

From the above, one may conclude that participation in sporting activities by the disabled has a positive influence on both the physical and social situation of the individual. Many researchers, such as Bos (2004), Gichuki (2004) and De Boer (2004) point out that disabled people, and especially children, remain far behind in sport participation compared to able-bodied people. First there are a number of general reasons for the fact that people with a disability participate less in sport than people without a disability. According to Vermeer (1981), disabled people often do not take part in sporting activities due to the existence of certain ‘exercise impediments’. Henneveld and Vegting (1983) subdivide these exercise impediments into those of the individual, those of the environment and those of the interaction between the person and the environment. One of the causes of non-participation in sport, according to Manders (1985), is the degree of visibility of the disability. Dijkstra explains that the obviously disabled are less favourably judged and are not really accepted. Van der Loop (1984) adds that the seriousness of the handicap can act as an impediment with regard to sport participation. The disability can seriously limit the person’s physical functioning. Those who offer sporting activities often cannot provide appropriate opportunities for disabled athletes due to a lack of materials and/or necessary knowledge. The visibility of the handicap and its seriousness can elicit negative reactions from able-bodied people. Bos (2004) says that once a disabled person has had a negative experience, the threshold of subsequent participation in sport is very high. Another impediment is the individual’s idea of his or her level of competence. An inaccurate self-image often turns out to be the reason disabled people do not participate in sport (Fine and Asch 1981). This tends to be gender-dependent. Research by Van der Loop (1984) and Baken and Duijf (1994) among others has shown that girls and women with disabilities have a more negative self-image than their male counterparts. Initial inhibitions are one of the major factors in non-participation (Manders, 1985). Research by Sherrill (1984) indicates that for adults and particularly for children, the lack of friends to play or train with is a major impediment to sporting activity. Another not insignificant point is the mobility of disabled people. These authors state that participation in sporting activities
in most cases requires going somewhere, and for disabled people it is often difficult to get to another place quickly. A study by Verwoerd (1992) showed that handicapped people who are mobile—whether on foot, by bicycle, car or public transport—take part more often in sport than non-mobile handicapped people. There are also high costs associated with transporting the disabled. Finally, one other issue which has recently become a major point of discussion is that the emphasis is still being put on what disabled people cannot do instead of what they can do. The NebasNSG has adopted the following slogan: “The regular way if possible, a special way if it’s needed.”

4.1 Kenya

According to De Boer (2002), Thate (2004), Right to Play (2004) and Bruijn (2004), the situation of disabled people in Kenya is not too different. The common difficulties described above certainly also apply to handicapped children in Kenya. There are also other significant factors. According to the above authors, children with disabilities often do not even have access to education. Handicapped children get less to eat and are often left to themselves at home because no one knows what to do with them. It is often assumed that disabled children cannot learn anything. Thus many children end up socially isolated. According to Agessa (2005), there is still relatively little understanding among the local population in Kenya, especially in rural areas, about the origin and treatment of disabilities. In some cultures a handicapped child is thought to be from the devil or sent as a punishment from God. Sport and play are often not conceived as possible for the disabled.

5. Factors

To tackle the current problem, an overview has been made of the current state of affairs. This was done by means of surveying theories from the literature and ideas from people in the field in order to attain a more concrete picture of the factors that play a role in the acceptance and integration process through sport. Below is a table showing the factors that play a role in acceptance and integration on the basis of literature studies and conversations with people in the field. These factors will then be discussed in turn.

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Negative self-image

According to Manders (1985) and Bos (2004), a negative self-image holds people with a disability back from participating in activities in everyday life. But how is a negative self-image formed in the first place? The term self-image in this instance includes a number of different but related facets.

- **Seriousness of disability and acceptance**
  In addition to the authors above, Lindert and Janssens (2000) note that the seriousness of the disability plays a role in how well it is accepted by the individual and the community. So long as the individual does not accept his or her handicap, they find it very difficult to get about in public with it. The community does not accept the handicap quickly if the individual does not accept it himself.

- **Estimated competence level**
  Often the disabled person’s own estimate of his or her competence level is very low. People with physical disabilities who are confronted with so many difficulties in everyday life often do not even think they are able to take part in sport (Handboek SportMix; Bos 2004; Gichuki 2005).

These authors are of the opinion that both the acceptance of the handicap and the estimated level of competence can be positively influenced by participation in sport. Many of the current projects in Kenya, including that of Terre des Hommes, have set the improvement of negative self-image as one of their major goals. De Boer (2004) and Bos (2004) remark that a negative self-image originates not just from the handicapped child. The child’s environment plays a role in this process. King (2003) had already indicated this in his conceptual model of factors influencing the participation of children with a disability. According to the authors, the disabled person’s own estimate of his or her competence is not positively influenced if the community does not give it a high estimate. It has been seen in various projects that when people see disabled people playing sport or when they participate in sport with them, the respect and understanding for the individual with a disability grows (NebasNSG 2000; De Boer 2004; Guttman 1976; IOS 1984). This has been observed, for example, in the Kisii Special School for the Mentally Handicapped in Kenya. The school is very progressive in the area of sport and games and participates regularly in large national and international competitions. The children really showcase their abilities, which increases understanding and respect for them. In northern Tanzania the Nafasi project holds sport days twice a year which are attended by the parents of the handicapped children. This has the effect of increasing the parents’ own understanding and respect. Thus, it seems important to involve the parents of the disabled children in projects as well (Terre des Hommes).

Fear of participation

According to the NebasNSG (2000), among others, initial inhibitions are important factor when it comes to sport participation. People are often afraid of the unknown and the negative reactions they could receive from others. According to Baken et al (1994), intensive coaching and encouragement could dispel these inhibitions. Where do the inhibitions come from? The disabled are often afraid of negative reactions to the disability. Moreover, bad experiences in the past often discourage them from taking part in activities in which able-bodied people are also involved (NebasNSG 2000; TNO 2004). These studies state, however, that for this very reason projects should involve able-bodied people in the community as well as people with disabilities. The model of King (2003) confirms this. In Kenya there are scarcely any sport or other projects involving able-bodied people and those with disabilities together. Kenya does have special homes near ordinary primary schools where disabled and able-bodied children attend primary school together, such as Aquinoe Private Special School and Kiminini Small Home. Various reports, such as that of Agessa (2004) show that integrated schooling contributes positively to the acceptance of handicapped children. Researchers such as Sherril (1984) and Sytsema (1981) confirm that frequent interaction between handicapped and able-bodied children stimulates the acceptance of handicapped children. Extensive literature study and interviews with people in the field has proven that there are a few projects in The Netherlands where the disabled play sport with able-bodied people. An example is a project called SportMix run by the NebasNSG.
Low participation threshold

Projects for people with disabilities must have a low participation threshold in certain areas:

- **Low cost**
  
  There must be relatively little cost associated with participation. This is certainly true in Kenya, where the disabled child in a family is seldom a main priority in the family finances (De Boer 2004; Maina 2004).

- **Cooperation**

  To keep costs low and make results and ideas available to others, organisations can supplement each other and offer advice (Garcia et al 1980; Linten 2005; Bifwoli 2005).

- **Education**

  According to De Boer (2004) and Agessa (2005) a problem in Kenya is that children with disabilities attend school. What one sees most often now is that sport and games are integrated into schooling. More and more special schools are being established for children with disabilities with sport and games as an element in the curriculum; for example Kiisi Special School and Trans-Nzoia Primary School (King et al 2003).

- **Accessibility**

  Especially for disabled children, it seems important for sporting projects to take place at an easily accessible location, such as school grounds, and in cooperation with the school. This lowers the threshold for taking part in such activities (Agessa 2005; Bos 2004).

**Advantages**

It is important for there to be a specific programme for children with disabilities. With regard to the current projects and trends in sport and development cooperation, the programme must fulfil a number of requirements.

- **Personal attention**

  There must be personal attention for the children. Handicapped children must be intensively coached and encouraged (De Boer 2004; Miller 2004; Thate 2004; Crujff 2004). In projects in Kenya, including the sport lessons at Aquinoe Private Special School, this is achieved by working in small groups, thus increasing the coach's attention for each child. An important aspect of this is emphasising what they can do instead of what they cannot do (NebasNSG).

- **Equipment**

  Children with a disability require adapted sport and game equipment. It is very difficult to come by special sport equipment in Kenya. Programmes are often dependent on gifts from developed countries (De Boer 2004; Thate 2004; Bruijn 2004; Warchild 2004; Miller 2004; Right to Play 2004; NebasNSG 2004; Crawford 2003; French and Hainsworth 2001). The Dutch association 'Ons Kent Ons' and the Johan Crujff Foundation offer possibilities in this area.

- **Social skills**

  The experience of many projects, including the Score Project, shows that it is important for children to work on their social skills. They can learn a lot from sport: winning and losing, asserting themselves, working together, etc. (NebasNSG 2000; Nieuwenhuyzen-Kruseman 1975; UN 2005; Cuilenborg 2005; Thate 2005).

- **Individual contribution (co-creation)**

  Experience from a number of projects, including that of Terre des Hommes, seems to demonstrate that it is important that projects organised for and (in part) by children should have a
higher degree of involvement than projects organised for children. This is not yet being seen in Kenya, but in The Netherlands the importance of participant contribution is beginning to be recognised. A sport weekend for physically handicapped children from Zeeuws-Vlaanderen corroborates this observation. The children work together actively with the organisation—preparing, executing and evaluating. They even make their own promotion for the weekend and recruit new children. During the weekend, alongside the sport lessons, they give clinics in their own favourite sports. Throughout the weekend, conceptualisation of the disability is central. How do you deal with the reactions of able-bodied people (Hopmans 2005; De Boer 2004; Thate 2004; Maina 2004)? Terre des Hommes has a number of projects in developing countries, such as Sri Lanka, where handicapped children invent their own games and make their own equipment.

Parents
According to the conceptual model of King et al (2003), the presence and support of the parents is a very important influence on the child. King also says that relationships that parents and children have with others can strongly influence the participation of and understanding for the disabled child. He argues that parents must give their children positive support in taking part in sporting activities. This support is beginning to be seen in practice in developing countries. Various projects organise sport days where the parents come to watch, help with the organisation and sometimes even take part with the children. In some projects, special courses are organised for the parents. An example is St. Mary’s School for the Deaf in Kenya. With this project, parents are actively involved in the education the children receive. Parents can take part in courses and attention is given to AIDS prevention, neglect and child abuse (Terre des Hommes 2004; Johan Cruyff Foundation 2004).

Education
It may be concluded from the large number of projects which incorporate a form of education that education is important in the acceptance and integration process. According to Maina (2004), De Boer (2004), Agessa (2005) and others, it is important that people in Kenya get information about disabilities. This will prevent neglect and abuse and increase the chance of a decent life. Terre des Hommes is trying to bring this about by offering courses to parents and also providing education about subjects related to the handicapped child (NebasNSG 2004; Terre des Hommes 2004). The abovementioned researchers note that some attention is given to this topic in primary schools, especially if there are handicapped children at the school. Projects in Kenya and The Netherlands, including the holiday weekend in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and the Nafasi project, show that it is important to educate handicapped about how to cope with negative reactions. This seems to be important for the development of the child. Both education for the disabled about how to deal with negative reactions from others as well as education for able-bodied people (the social environment) about disabilities are very important.

Attitude
In view of the above factors, one may conclude that there is one overarching factor in the acceptance and integration of handicapped children, namely the attitude of able-bodied people (the social environment). Disabled children’s negative self-image and fear of participation can be positively influenced if the attitudes of able-bodied people about those with disabilities is changed for the better. In Kenya, certainly, there are still prejudices against people with disabilities (Hopmans 2004; Gichuki 2005; De Boer 2004; Bos 2004). These prejudices are so strong there because there is so little knowledge about disabilities. Prejudices can ultimately lead to stigmas, stereotypes, unfair treatment, limited social acceptance and lower expectations with regard to sporting capabilities (Terre des Hommes; NebasNSG). Influencing the attitudes of able-bodied people can positively influence the acceptance and integration process of the disabled. This, in turn, can positively affect the self-image of disabled people and their initial inhibitions with regard to taking part in activities. Two important instruments in influencing the attitudes of able-bodied people are a specific programme of integrated sport and games incorporating personal attention,
6. Strategies for promoting behaviour modification

As indicated above, to promote the acceptance and integration of handicapped children, the emphasis must be laid on influencing the behaviour of the social environment. This attitude is influenced on the one hand by education about handicaps and on the other hand by integrated sporting activities incorporating personal attention, co-creation and the participation of the parents. By combining these two elements, the understanding for the disabled and knowledge with regard to disabilities must increase. Moreover, both education and integrated sporting activities individually can also have a positive influence on the negative self-image and initial inhibitions of the handicapped children.

This study has used the ASE model supplemented by Kok’s model of behaviour modification through education. In this adapted model, education shares centre stage with learning from experience. As noted by Bandura and by Petty and Cacioppo, education alone does not appear sufficient. Active learning and participation, in combination with education, can contribute to a positive intention to change one’s behaviour. This adapted model, the ASAB model, is represented below. More concretely, this model means that integrated sporting activities offer disabled and able-bodied people the opportunity to learn from experience, while additional education is needed for the disabled to learn to cope with negative reactions, and for the parents and the able-bodied children to learn about disabilities.

In the above model, the determinants Attitude and Social Influence are the centre. Attitudes are important because they are based on logical reasoning, mental considerations and customs and beliefs. The negative tendency of the able-bodied not to accept the disabled must be overcome. This can be achieved by
appealing to the cognitive component: knowledge about the consequences of the behaviour, gained particularly from learning by experience.

In addition to attitude, the influence of the social environment is important. In Kenya people think very negatively about the handicapped because they are different. This can be overcome by means of education and integrated activities, but it depends on the degree to which the able-bodied allow themselves to be affected by this opinion of the environment. It is important to work on all components of social influence, but especially important are social support and modelling (observed behaviour). By involving parents in the project, they can also come away with a more positive attitude to the disabled. They can motivate their children (social support) and set a good example (modelling), because they have perhaps, thanks to the project, understood the importance of correct behaviour. If they have a better understanding of the handicapped, perhaps they can influence the social norm positively.

The determinant ‘expectation of self-effectiveness’ is considered less important in this model but should be taken into account, because it can have a negative effect on intended behaviour. Education may serve to positively adjust the expectation of self-effectiveness.

7. Experimental study

Based on the foregoing information, a quasi-experimental study was held to test the value of combining integrated sporting activities and education for the process of acceptance and integration.

7.1 Test group

The study took place in cooperation with the Trans-Nzoia Youth Sports Association (TYSA). The target group in this study consisted of eight physically disabled children and eight able-bodied children, varying in age from six to twenty-two years. All the children came from the city of Kitale, Trans-Nzoia District, Kenya. The study was held over a period of seven weeks in the public Kitale Stadium in Kitale. Throughout the project, TYSA provided an interpreter. There was also cooperation with social workers from the Social Department in Kitale. Both handicapped and non-handicapped children came together every weekday during this period to take part in sport and games.
7.2 Research method

This study made use of different research techniques (triangulation). Observation by independent persons was combined with personal interviews in the form of a questionnaire. It was borne in mind that the answers could contain some social desirability. It has been assumed that the degree of social desirability is the same in the initial questionnaires as in the later questionnaires. This assumption was used to determine whether or not changes took place.

7.2.1 Pre- and post-experiment surveys

At the start and end of the project, personal interviews were held in which the questionnaires served as a structured list of questions for the disabled children, the able-bodied children, and the parents. The parents represent an important aspect of the social environment of the child. They learned something about disabilities and how disabled children should be treated. They serve as role models for their own children (modelling) and can attach social sanctions to negative behaviour. It is also important to learn from the parents of disabled children how they are affected by the reactions of able-bodied people. Afterwards it can be determined whether the parents of the disabled children have seen any change and if they themselves have begun to look at their own child’s handicap differently.

7.2.2 Participating observations (running measurement)

To increase the validity of the study, the interviews were supplemented with daily participating observations by three observers (social workers). Thanks to these participating observations, certain situations could be directly exploited and the study ‘steered’ to a certain extent. Before the study started, the observers were given a list of points they needed to pay particular attention to; these included the children’s reactions to each other, playing together and helpfulness. After every meeting, the observers recorded their findings and at the end of every week they made a weekly overview. In the evaluation of this project, the observations confirmed the interviews in certain points and contradicted them in others.

7.3 Activities

In the beginning stage of the project the children took part in simple sporting activities like ball games, football and running training, in which both groups of children were encouraged to work together. The shy and giggly atmosphere at the beginning gave way after several weeks to friendship and cooperation. After a few weeks, the handicapped children in particular showed physical progress. After this, games could be expanded. In addition to the sport, there was also drawing every day. This was to serve as a break from physical exertion. Sometimes an assignment was given to structure the drawing and colouring. Because previous research had shown that personal attention is very important, the children worked in small groups with several sport instructors. By involving the children in the project to a great degree, it was decided that the children should help decide about the games to be played (co-creation). This not done until a few weeks into the project, however, because at the beginning of the experiment the children did not know any other games than football.
7.4 Parents

The parents of both groups of children were invited to be present during the activities because they form the social environment of the child and can make an important contribution to image formation with regard to disabilities. To encourage the involvement of the parents, they helped regularly in the sporting activities.

7.5 Education

Education was provided to the able-bodied children about the kinds of disabilities suffered by the other children in the project. Providing an opportunity to ask one another questions meant that the education made a lasting impression. The session constituted a sort of peer education. Helpers briefly talked to the disabled children about how to cope with negative reactions from able-bodied persons.

7.6 Supplementary research

In addition to the experimental research, supplementary research was done into existing projects for the physically handicapped in Kitale and environs. Four projects for the handicapped in the district were visited. A project in Mombasa was also visited. In the framework of the study, it was interesting to get out to Mombasa, because according to several researchers the level and number of projects for the disabled in Mombasa were very advanced.

8. Results of experimental study

Both the observers and the results of the questionnaires confirm that at the beginning, the children were very standoffish with each other. They stayed in two separate groups. Also, at the beginning the able-bodied children did a great deal of laughing and teasing during the sporting activities. All the disabled children remarked on this. The participating observers in the project intervened properly in this situation. After a few days, the sport instructor mixed the children by putting individuals side by side during exercises or giving them jobs where cooperation was actively encouraged. Moreover, the able-bodied children were called to account for their negative behaviour (social sanctions) and a good example was shown by the sport instructors and later also by the parents. After a few weeks, the able-bodied children were less giggly and cooperated actively with the handicapped children. Of course, the laughter had not disappeared entirely by the end of the test project, but observations and interviews with the handicapped children indicated that it had clearly been reduced. At least 90% of the disabled children said that the laughing and whispering had lessened as the project went on. What was noticeable was that the interest of the children in each other increased as the project went on. This was expressed especially in how the able-bodied children encouraged their disabled counterparts. The helpfulness of the able-bodied children increased enormously. The observers noticed this, for example, when a disabled child was run over by a BodaBoda and all the bystanders began to laugh. The able-bodied children told off the bystanders for their conduct and helped the handicapped child up. This helpfulness, especially, was noticed by all observers, 90% of the handicapped children and most of the parents.
After about 3 to 4 weeks, the children played games of football, volleyball or handball in mixed teams. Both groups of children were actively encouraged in this. The disabled children were very shy and waiting to see what would happen. They were encouraged to join in the game. As the observers noted, the able-bodied children were still inclined to ignore the disabled children in a mixed game. The sport instructor called the able-bodied children's attention to this during the project, and in a few cases social sanctions were taken for negative behaviour. In the last two weeks of the project, the observers noted that things were going much better. The disabled children underwent a physical process whereby they were able to play better, and they also became more familiar with the able-bodied children. They were then confident about getting into the game and the group came together. Because the disabled children got better at the game and became bolder in the presence of the able-bodied children, the latter said they began to enjoy the integrated sport more and more. John said afterwards, “I am really glad that I could play football again, and with other children too!”

The able-bodied children said in the post-experiment survey that they knew more about disabilities than in the pre-experiment survey. The education provided appeared to have really added to the children’s knowledge. The fact that the children had been associating with each other in the project actively before the education session meant that they had more questions about disabilities. During the education session they had the chance to ask these questions of the disabled children. The children were also actively supervised in this process. Esther said that “I was finally brave enough to ask the question I had wanted to ask Papilicia (a handicapped girl) for some time.”

The majority (75%) of the able-bodied children indicated that they will act more positively towards the disabled, i.e. that they will not laugh at and tease them so much. A majority of 75% also indicated that this project has made a positive contribution to a better life for the disabled. The disabled children themselves think the same thing. The observers noticed that the able-bodied children did start behaving more positively towards disabled children, and not just those in the project.

In view of the reactions of the able-bodied children and their parents, it appears that the handicapped children in the project were a topic of conversation at home. A mother of an able-bodied child: “I spoke with Peter a lot about the children in the project. Now I also think that handicapped children have a future.” Thus a sort of discussion has opened up about these children. Another interesting aspect is that both groups of parents had regular contact with each other during the project. The parents also noticed positive changes in the behaviour of their able-bodied children. “My child is different with disabled children in the street. He now asks or tells me something. Sometimes I don’t know how to answer his questions.” These are the same changes that the observers also noticed.

What is striking is that both the able-bodied children and their parents said that they had not expected that the handicapped children could do so much. A parent of an able-bodied child: “As it turns out, the handicapped children really can play sports. I didn’t know that. I thought that they couldn’t do anything.” This contributed positively to the image both parents and children had about the handicapped. An able-bodied child said: “I didn’t know we could play football together. At first I didn’t think it was fun. But now we can do it!” Both groups indicated that this image had changed for them. One may conclude from this that involving the parents in the project had a positive effect.

The parents of the disabled children also saw changes in them. The most widespread change was that in the eyes of their parents, the children had become happier than they were before the test project. This was expressed in more energetic behaviour: laughing, talking and playing. The observers were in full agreement. All the disabled children became happier. The children laugh and talk much more with each other and with the able-bodied children. As the project went on, the children became more energetic in whatever they did, which may indicate that they felt more at ease and less ashamed of their disabilities. When asked, the children confirmed this. A disabled
child: “Esther and Hellen have become my friends.” This was expressed most clearly by the fact that when the children arrived, they would immediately change and run out to the field to play football together until it was time to start. The fact that the handicapped children began to get more enthusiastically involved in the game shows that they felt more at ease and less inhibited by their disabilities and reactions to them.

The observers determined that the parents of both groups became more open. At the beginning of the project they were two separate groups and sat separately in the stands. The parents were actively involved in the project by having them help with the activities, helping the children change and by the many conversations that took place. After a number of days there was a positive atmosphere between all the parents, which eventually resulted in one close-knit group.

9. Test project conclusions

It seems clear from the results that this project made a positive contribution to the acceptance of the disabled children by the able-bodied children in the test project. The majority of the able-bodied children indicated that after they had the education and question time about disabilities, they had more knowledge about them. The majority also indicated that they had developed a positive attitude to people with a disability, which expressed itself in somewhat changed behaviour. It may be concluded that the education and integrated sport, among other things, influenced the first part of the ASAB model (attitude), and that the able-bodied children had reconsidered the advantages and disadvantages of their previously exhibited behaviour.

In addition to this first part of the ASAB model, the second part—the social environment—also exercised an influence in the change of behaviour. By involving parents in the project and, as they indicated, opening up the lines of communication about the disabled, the social environment was also influenced. The parents of the able-bodied children have developed a more positive attitude with regard to the handicapped. This development has opened up communication between parent and child. Thus the child is less inclined to fall back into old behaviour patterns (sociale sanctions). The sporting activities took place in the public Kitale Stadium. People from Kitale, including athletes and others, could all come to watch the activities. This also contributed to a more positive attitude in the community with regard to the handicapped children.

It can also be concluded from the results that the handicapped children have gone through a major change. At the beginning of the project, they hardly had the feeling, if at all, that they were accepted and they said they were afraid of negative reactions from the able-bodied children. A number of them were also unsure of whether they could play sport. Ultimately, the disabled children came away with the feeling that they were accepted by the able-bodied children because they sometimes helped them, but particularly because the able-bodied children started acting nicer towards them. This was confirmed by the observers. The disabled children also became much more relaxed and happier. The children were extremely shy at first but eventually they mixed with the other children to play. The sport got better and better as both parties accepted each other.

Everything indicates that this test project, which fulfils the factors set out above, made a positive contribution to the acceptance of the test group of handicapped children by the test group of able-bodied children. One may thus conclude that the ASAB model is a step in the right direction. One cannot avoid the conclusion that the combination of factors being tested in the experimental study made a positive contribution to the acceptance of physically disabled children by the test group of able-bodied children. Moreover, one may conclude that this has been a study on the micro-level. To make the project more widely usable, in future it would have to be set up in multiple locations to see if the same result would be achieved. Additionally, this experimental project did not test the value of integrated sporting activities and education for parents and children separately. This, too,
would have to be subject to further research in the future. This test project will be set up in several locations in Kenya to study whether the same effect can be achieved everywhere. If this is the case, a checklist will eventually be made up which can function as a general guideline for starting sport projects intended to promote the acceptance and integration of handicapped children.

Note: A number of disabled children from this project were put in contact with the Trans-Nzoia Assessment Centre, which is considering what the possibilities are for these children. If possible, they may receive education or be placed in a home. The test project is currently being continued by the sporting organisation TYSA in cooperation with the Kenyan Football Federation.

Following on from the conclusions, recommendations have also been made for a definitive implementation of this project. Because supplementary research was also done in Kenya with regard to existing projects, recommendations have also been made for implementing a sport programme within existing projects.

9.1 Recommendations

This section is divided into three types of recommendations: those for the implementation of a test project, the implementation of a test project within an existing project in Kenya and the implementation of a test project in The Netherlands. An overview of the most important recommendations is given below.

9.1.1 Recommendations for the project
- When the project is implemented, the target group should be as homogeneous as possible: preferably the same age, the same sorts of disabilities, etc. This makes mutual communication and playing sports easier.

- If this project is truly to promote the acceptance of the physically handicapped, it needs to be implemented in more areas of the Trans-Nzoia district. The project can be implemented in various neighbourhoods and villages by bringing about good cooperation between the responsible organisation and other important organisations. Implementation within current projects is also important and could reach a large group of people.

- It was found that it was important to have both the disabled and able-bodied children present in one education session about disabilities. It is recommended that disabled children (or adults) be present who can tell something about their lives and answer the questions of the able-bodied children. This increases the retention value of the session for the able-bodied audience.

- Due to unforeseen circumstances, this study did not test the education of the parents of able-bodied children. It is recommended that this should be tested in any follow-up study. Such a session could be linked to a ‘training afternoon’ (see below).
- It is recommended that both groups of parents should be invited. This does not need to be every day, as in this project, but certainly on a regular basis. The mutual contact between parents of both groups of children ensures that the parents also share their experiences, as happened in practice. This can contribute indirectly to a more positive attitude in both the able-bodied children and their parents (social sanctions). The parents can be invited to watch the children’s activities, but to increase interaction it is also possible to actually involve the parents in the organisation. If this is done, it is important for the parents to be well-instructed in advance and familiar with the games being played. One possibility is to hold a ‘training afternoon’ beforehand so that the parents know what to do. This was not tested in this study, but various other projects show that it most certainly makes a positive contribution to image formation with regard to the disabled and probably also improves interaction between both groups of parents.

- Another thing that can contribute to the acceptance of handicapped children is matching an able-bodied buddy to a handicapped child. At Kiminini Special Home they have found that a buddy certainly contributes to acceptance. It is worth recommending for the project that a handicapped child be given a buddy after the project has begun to progress. The buddy can help the handicapped child change clothes and deal with all the other difficulties a disabled person faces. In this way, the buddy sees that the life of a handicapped person is not easy and his understanding for that person increases.

9.1.2 Recommendations for current projects

- Research showed that especially Aquinoe Private Home has to deal with negative reactions from the community. They say there is not much they can do about it, just as the other homes cannot. It might be a good idea to have a teacher and a social worker start visiting the community. If a person starts walking around in a village to give explanations and ask questions, the whole village will turn out. Thus a large number of people are reached. They can find out what people’s opinions and objections are in the area. Depending on the outcome, a plan can be made for bringing people’s attention to the home and the disabled in a positive way. A useful means to do this might be organising a sort of open day when the community can visit the school. That way they can gradually become familiar with the school and its pupils and thus with the disabled who live in the Small Homes. Of course, people in the Trans-Nzoia district do not tend to get involved in things if there is no advantage for themselves. They must therefore be motivated to come to the open day. This might be achieved by offering food (perhaps fruit) and drink. Of course, this would only be possible if there are some funds available.

- Another option is to organise a sport day for all schools in which the community is invited to come and watch. This can increase understanding for the disabled and the school and can also contribute to a reduction in negative reactions from the environment, such as when a disabled child leaves the school grounds. Such a sport day or morning must be organised on a regular basis, because otherwise people will just come to stare at the children with the result that the children get laughed at, thus defeating the purpose.
Another important point, as proven in this test project, is that the sport day must display integrated sport. This makes it easier for people in the community (parents and other family members) to decide to come. It can also reduce the ridicule because the parents see their able-bodied children playing sport with disabled children. The children are already used to this because they receive integrated schooling.

- Up to now, there have been hardly any opportunities for disabled children finishing primary school to move up to a secondary school. Perhaps the Assessment Centre can make a contribution here in cooperation with the district primary and secondary schools. A bus service for the disabled children so that they could continue to live in the home would be one of the cheapest alternatives. There could also be cooperation with Mrs. Anderson Farm. The Assessment Centre could improve this transition.

- Especially in the area of image formation with regard to disabilities, the homes can do something to help the schools. Teachers sometimes devote some attention to disabilities. Because the effect of education is greater when someone with a disability tells about them, it would be a good idea to involve disabled children in this, as in the test project. Able-bodied children can direct all their questions to an ‘expert’ in that field.

### 9.1.3 Recommendations for the situation in The Netherlands

- The project can certainly also be applied in The Netherlands. The NebasNSG, among others, have indicated that much can be done with regard to image formation and the disabled. The NebasNSG could apply this project in The Netherlands. The project could be set up for the children of an ordinary primary school and the Mytyl and Tyltyl schools. The children could, for instance, meet every Wednesday afternoon to play sport together. The education and integrated sport can take place then. The recommendations in Section 9.2.1 must certainly also be applied to the project here if the same effect is to be achieved. It is also recommended that a test project should initially be set up in The Netherlands, because there may be different issues involved. The education about disabilities, for example, would have to be adapted. The level of sport for the disabled children may also be higher in The Netherlands than in Kenya. These considerations should be borne in mind.

- If physically disabled children go to an ordinary school, it would be a very good idea to give them a buddy who would help the child with all sorts of difficult things. This principle could be implemented not only in schools but also in sporting clubs. The NebasNSG, for example, can introduce ‘organisational integration’ into its project. A buddy within the sporting club could, in the first instance, show the disabled person the ropes within the club. Then of course, the buddy could also help the disabled person change clothes and get around. In this way, the handicapped person does not need to have a family member along to help and does not need to continuously ask people for assistance; it also promotes direct contact between the disabled person and the buddy, thus possibly promoting interaction with other club members as well.
- Education for able-bodied people about people with disabilities can best be given in cooperation with the disabled themselves. Then it is possible for the able-bodied to ask questions of the disabled and the message then likely ‘sticks’ better.

- It can be a good idea to give education to people with disabilities about how they can cope with reactions from the community. This education can be provided at the special schools and can serve as a preparation for integrated sport, whether or not at a sport club. The education can be given by a specialist educator but it would be better if it could be supplemented by a disabled person. This person can share his or her experiences with the children. By giving the children information about how they can deal with negative reactions from the sporting environment, it can lower the intimidation threshold for participation.
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Evaluation

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§1. Introduction

There are two evaluative aspects to the development, organisation and instruction of the course in Creative Action Methodology. In this chapter we will examine these two types of evaluation, which relate to the following aspects:

1. Developing, organising and teaching the course in Creative Action Methodology was action research in itself. From a more specific viewpoint, it was a study incorporating the three phases of a textbook action research study: the theme phase, the crystallisation phase and the illustrative phase. An attempt was made to keep the parties involved (instructors, students) equal in all these phases and to determine whether a degree of effectiveness was achieved. In other words, we wanted to determine in a mutual dialogue whether the new knowledge being gained was the most effective for improving the action. This evaluation is referenced here as ‘action evaluation’ and will be described by Paul Delnooz.

2. The Creative Action Methodology programme is now in its third year. There is a danger of stagnation—getting stuck in certain constructs and ways of working. That is why an outsider (Ben Boog, a recognised specialist in the area of action research) was asked to evaluate the programme, throw new light on the course if possible, and make recommendations for the future. Ben Boog’s contribution is the second part of this chapter.

§2. Action evaluation

To evaluate the action, discussions were held with the students and their instructors throughout the academic year. This was done both individually and in groups. Additionally, each year we spoke with 5 to 10 students who had already graduated. It emerged from these dialogues that they were convinced of the value of the course programme. They were adamant that the course programme better prepared them to act in their future profession (and thus in later life) than the traditional method of teaching. In this regard, the students mentioned first and foremost their increased ability to put theories and facts up for discussion. This can best be illustrated by some of the students’ own examples:

- The students all spoke about ‘the classes of the past’. These were the classes in which you were supposed to accept what the instructor said uncritically and whether or not it made sense. These were the classes in which you did not come to discuss the content of the lesson, but where you just listened, took notes and memorised material.

- A modest student who, after graduation, went on to do a teaching degree (which she thought would be great) and had a complete breakdown. She was expected to learn theories and facts mindlessly instead of discussing them and thereby arriving at her own way of working in practice. However, using discussion to develop one’s own alternative actions for professional practice was not appreciated on this teaching course. She was later obliged to go to a university to complete her studies.
- In a group evaluation, the students made a drawing of an island. They drew themselves on the island working independently and critically to develop things for their graduation project and later professional practice. This was in contrast to other students.

In their comments about career-oriented action, the students refer not only to the course research, but to the total structure of the programme. The instructors also confirm that the structure has a positive influence on the capability of the students to act in professional practice. Characteristic of this structure is the freedom the students have. Each student begins with a self-selected problem (AIDS, for example) and takes the research course (mandatory), but is otherwise free. Thus, in a dialogue with the adviser, the student determines:

- which supplementary courses to take
- which symposia/conferences to attend
- a reading list of scholarly works
- which experts and people from the field of study to interview
- which organisations to visit
- etc.

In other words, the programme is adjusted to the student’s situation as much as possible throughout the academic year. Instead of taking disparate classes, an attempt is made throughout the entire programme to determine what steps are needed at the moment to progress in the process of learning professionally-oriented actions. In that sense, the programme also seems suitable for dual learning.

Secondly, the students indicate that by following the course programme, they find it easier to find work in an organisation than the ‘normal’ students. They give various reasons for this. The first is that during their studies they have concentrated on developing and testing concrete solutions. This appears to open doors. The second reason is their wide-ranging knowledge. The students are convinced that during their studies they have accumulated a great deal of field-specific know-how and theoretical knowledge and that they profit from this in conversations with others. The third reason is making contacts. During their studies, the students make many contacts in the field and that opens doors. The fourth reason is the level of research. It enables them to get exemptions in follow-up study programmes and makes it easier to start talking to organisations.

The supervising instructors also agree that the course programme contributes to their professionally-oriented action. First, the teaching method (continual consultation about the next steps the student will be taking) changes the relationship between teacher and student. It is more coaching than teaching. This is very much appreciated. Secondly, the teaching method changes the instructor’s responsibilities. The instructor is no longer someone who tries to teach in a didactically responsible way, but who also helps each individual student to fulfill his or her programme as well as possible (although the instructor is not solely responsible for this, but also consults the team of advisers). Thirdly, there is a schooling effect in the area of academic philosophy and research methodology whereby they are able to refresh their skills in supervising the students. Fourthly, there is a schooling effect in their area of specialization. When an instructor has supervised multiple students in a particular area (such as combating AIDS through education, or the prevention of shoplifting), they develop an picture of the actions that are possible in that area and the effectiveness of these actions. That enables them to write an article and/or advise people in the field. Based on these experiences, they are again better equipped to advise their students.

The course programme thus appears to be a success, but there are still a few areas for improvement. First there is the evaluation itself. The students and faculty who choose to participate in the course programme are by definition positively inclined towards it. Thus, there is self-selection and that may explain the large number of positive reactions from the students and instructors involved. The question is thus whether other types of students and instructors would be equally as enthusiastic. The doubt increases if we look at the dropouts. About 15% of students
drop out of the programme and three instructors have also withdrawn. Besides personal reasons like illness, etc., the main reason students give for leaving the programme is its chaotic nature. They need more structure. They need an instructor who says exactly what to do and when, and tells them whether their work is correct or incorrect. The instructors who have left mainly said that they are still positive towards the programme, but that it required too much energy to supervise the students in this way. The students confirmed that some advisers were not able to summon as much energy for this purpose.

A second point for attention is clear when we look at the steps of Creative Action Methodology: 1. formulating the rationale; 2. discussing the ‘theory’; 3. demarcating the ‘theories’; 4. looking for possible actions; 5. demarcating the actions; 6. testing and evaluating the chosen actions. In particular, steps 2 and 4 involve creative techniques (brainstorming, hats&caps method, etc.). In the students’ articles, however, this is hardly mentioned. The contribution of these creative techniques in combination with the use of existing literature and knowledge remains unclear. Thus a distinction can be made between two types of contributions. First is the contribution the creative techniques make in examining the actual situation and coming up with a problem to solve (step 2). Secondly, the creative techniques contribute to finding possible practical solutions. Especially in Creative Action Methodology, the contribution of the creative techniques should be clearer. But there are two factors working against this. First, it is clear from the evaluations that no student has derived his or her solution (deductive-nomological) from the theory. In the practice of the education process (and/or writing the article), however, the use of the creative techniques appears to have been critical to their action. The students believe that the current literature/knowledge in a particular area is a necessary condition, but gives a rather one-sided picture of the problem. This shortcoming can be rectified by using the creative techniques. Secondly, one may wonder whether it is possible to determine the contribution of the creative techniques in connection with existing literature/knowledge.

A third point for attention relates to the supervision of the students. First, it has been found that even the supervising instructors have to be ‘re-schooled’. Most of them were educated in the empirical-analytical tradition and thus need time to get accustomed to the body of ideas that make up Creative Action Methodology. Secondly, it has been found that the adviser’s practical experience (knowledge of the field) plays a significant role. More practical experience implies such things as being better informed about actions carried out in the past to deal with a particular problem; being better informed about expected and unexpected side effects of the actions taken in the past to solve a particular problem; and being more able to put students in contact with experts and other persons involved in the field. In other words, the quality of the advisers’ action is partly determined by their practical experience in the field.

A fourth point of attention is the lesson material for the research course. The idea behind Creative Action Methodology was developed over the years and has been crystallised in the form of lectures. A textbook has not yet been written for the research course. It would seem wise to do this in order to improve the quality of instruction and to enable other educational institutions to start using this method as well.

A fifth point of attention is the institutional structure. Two perspectives play a role here. The first perspective is international cooperation in the action researchers’ home country. Action researchers are active all over the world, and in view of the higher vocational education landscape in The Netherlands, it seems wise to look for connections there. A first step could be to set up a cooperation workshop within the polytechnic institution for the action researchers in order that they may reinforce the effectiveness of each researcher’s actions. A first step on such a workshop has already been made. This is being done in cooperation with the Professional University in Leeuwarden (contact person: Maaike de Jong). The second perspective is the institutionalisation of cooperation with the professional field. From the perspective of action research especially, cooperation with the field is an obvious choice. Considering the actions the students have tested in the two years the Creative Action Methodology course has been run, the following possible examples of cooperation could be explored:
- Umbrella organisations for shops and hospitals. Examples of experiments might include those currently being carried out by students with regard to the effect of particular smells on the perception of various objects. Other examples might include the effect of layout and decoration of such buildings on the level of shoplifting.

- National and regional government, film and television companies. Examples of experiments might include those currently being carried out by students with regard to the effect of different types of education, showing that present forms of education may be ripe for change.

- Development organisations. Examples of experiments might include those described in this book about the integration of disabled children and street children by means of sport. Other examples might include setting up experiments to combat trauma and stress among victims of war.

In short, there are myriad possibilities for society to profit directly from the work carried out by the students and instructors engaged in a certain form of action research. To better implement this, however, there is a need for a portal offering the user an entry to be able to make use of these actions.

In summary, it may be said that the course programme in Creative Action Methodology has a solid foundation at the Professional University of Leisure and Transport Studies (NHTV) in Breda. That there are (and will remain) points for further improvement is natural for such a 'young' branch within a college. The question remains how an outsider would view the programme. This critical vision will be put forth in the next section from the standpoint of action research.

§3. Ben Boog’s observations on Creative Action Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The preceding chapters comprise an intermediate stage of a programme in practical-oriented research methodology for students in higher education. It is a programme under construction. I was asked to contribute by making critical observations, remarks and suggestions for the further development of the course. And that is what I hope to do in the pages that follow.

Creative Action Methodology was established as a capacity-building course for students at vocational colleges and universities. It is a methodology aimed at the development, innovation, change and improvement of work practice for professionals in fields like health care, welfare, education and policy. The key is that students learn to develop action alternatives in a creative and innovative way by means of a research process. The course has two parts: an introduction into the scientific foundations of different research paradigms, research designs and research methods and techniques and a practical research project. An important educational goal in the first instance is to free the students from the pattern of traditional scientific practice, the (at least in The Netherlands) prevailing empirical-analytical paradigm. That liberation is necessary in order to offer them a broad view of all kinds of possible research logics. Such an overview is a precondition to design a proper research plan on the basis of a practical problem in which finding a solution for an action problem is central. Such an overview offers them a basis for reflection on the possibilities that they as practical researchers have, which in turn offers scope for creative and innovative solutions.

Why do students often get so caught up in empirical-analytical thinking? The empirical-analytical paradigm is central in the natural sciences. It is characterised by the unravelling of a
phenomenon down to the smallest elements and searching for patterns, causal connections. It assumes a knowledge-based theoretical realistic perspective. That means that reality is seen as a positive, objective fact that, in principle, can be known if one’s instruments are fine enough. The success of medical science and technology is largely attributable to this way of thinking. People in Western society are steeped in this thinking to the point that they define it as the only truly scientific method of thought. In cultural studies, from history to economy to the social and communication sciences, however, the natural science model has been up for debate for some time. In the course of time, there have been a number of fundamental discussions and alternative models developed. Well-known examples are the first and second debates over positivism (in the time of Weber, around 1900, and Habermas versus Popper in the 1960s), the linguistic turn, the rise of black and feminist critical studies, the rise of many forms of interpretative (or qualitative) research movements and action research. Strictly speaking, in theory the natural science model is no longer considered applicable to the cultural sciences. Nevertheless, academic practice in The Netherlands is not in agreement with this conclusion.

In the following pages, I will describe the theoretical foundation of action research. I will first mention that it is a broad foundation, a synthesis of social constructionism, critical theory, philosophical pragmatism, humanistic psychology and systematic intervention. Action research has become a large family with ever more members. These members can be divided into roughly four directions: pragmatic action research, cooperative inquiry based on humanistic psychology, critical emancipatory action research and action research based on systematic intervention or the soft systems approach. I will then describe how this synthesis expresses itself in a number of new action theories. Action research is best rooted in action theory. To explain this, I will first describe the paradigm of action research and the aforementioned four directions.

I will then go into the creative moment in Creative Action Methodology. I will supplement this with the elements of action research, (cooperative) reflection and cogenenerative learning. Participation—in the proper form—can generate a great deal of creative energy, which then becomes synergetic.

Finally, I will talk about the need to establish a resource centre/workshop as an organisational structure for this course programme. The knowledge and experience, supervision and presence of fellow students at this centre can increase the individual and collective learning process (action learning) enormously for both students and staff members.

3.2 (Social) constructionism or critical reflective and action theory (critical social constructionism)

The theoretical foundation for Creative Action Methodology was described above as (social) constructionism. Additionally, Creative Action Methodology attempts to unify this with empirical-analytical logic, because a creatively discovered action practice which is successful in many different situations will provide nomological (paradigmatic) knowledge. For instance, introducing sporting activities for disabled and able-bodied children can lead to rehabilitation of the disabled children anywhere and at any time. I will go into more detail on both these viewpoints.

- Action research is a social science research paradigm that synthesises different theoretical foundations and in which generated knowledge flows directly to action (individual/collective action, policy, professional action)

Social constructionism is only a part of the theoretical foundation of action research. There are now four major directions within action research which have developed in the past three decades. Action research is thus a fully-fledged paradigm in which a growing number of different theoretical approaches have come to work side by side, but with certain strong similarities. Social constructionism functions as a foundation mainly in the interpretative (or hermeneutic or
reconstructive) paradigm. Action research is based on a synthesis of critical theory, pragmatic philosophy and social constructionism. The chief elements of systematic intervention and humanistic psychology are also included. In that sense, all action research is a synthesis in a way comparable to the newer action theory, such as that of Habermas, Giddens, Touraine and Bourdieu. All types of action research can be traced back to an action theory. Moreover, all action research strives to allow the research process, which is also a process of ‘deep’ (mature) learning, to progress in a cooperative and participative way. This is the rational of direct democracy, which we see both in the work of the originators, Dewey and Lewin, as in that of Habermas and the humanistic psychologists.

- There are roughly four directions (which each have different approaches) within action research

a. Philosophical pragmatism
The first of these is action research based on philosophical pragmatism. Historically, this is the first main foundation, because the philosopher Dewey was involved in the development of Collier's methodology, community education, and the casework. Later the work of Dewey's friend, the social psychologist Mead, gained a key foundational place in Habermas' theory of communicative action (Habermas 1981). Whyte had already published a book in this tradition (Whyte 1991). The Introduction by the American Greenwood and the Swede Levin (Greenwood and Levin 1998) is a very recent systematic handbook written from this tradition. In their contribution to Reason's and Bradbury's Handbook (Greenwood & Levin, 2001) they give a summary of Pragmatic Action Research. First, there is the philosophical pragmatic action theory. This theory states that through the cycle of action and reflection, people generate knowledge and construct their world, whereby action is always transaction. Research is nothing other than such action. Knowledge is validated when in concrete social situations, actions based on this knowledge work, fit, turn out, especially in the sense of increasing the research participants' control of their situation. Dewey linked this theory with the importance of participative democracy. Citizenship is only possible when people are free to make an active contribution to society, to interact together, to experiment and deliberate, to figure out together what is best for them. Whyte (1991) called this co-generative learning. In The Netherlands, Lanser recently reported on an action research project carried out in this tradition (Lanser-Van der Velde 2000).

b. Co-Operative Inquiry
The second approach is based primarily on humanistic psychology, although it brings together important elements from the radical psychotherapeutic movement and the radical feminist movement, mostly awareness-raising group work (for example gestalt, co-counselling, encounter, transactional analysis). Many ideas from the personal growth movement are found here, as well as elements from spiritualism, New Age and more new and old currents from what is sometimes called the alternative circuit. This approach arose in the first half of the 1980s. It is the co-operative inquiry approach particularly espoused by Reason, Rowan, Heron and Torbert. In the early period, Reason and Rowan had already begun to claim a separate 'third' paradigm status for their research approach (Reason and Rowan 1981, 1983). It was most fully and thoroughly described in Heron's book Co-Operative Inquiry (1996). This book contains a psychological action theory and a strongly supported argument for direct democracy as a necessary condition for optimum individual self-realisation. In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Action Research at the School of Management in Bath, Peter Reason (2002) spoke of the importance of spiritualism and especially Buddhism for participatory action research. Not long before (Reason and Torbert 2002) he once again claimed a separate ‘third’ paradigm status—now, however, as a necessary development in the social sciences: after the linguistic turn we are now seeing an action turn. This current incorporates a great many elements concerning how researchers and their subjects relate to each other—how people are treated and how they communicate with each other during the study. These are techniques that work well in practice, which have proved their worth in the practice of professionals in social assistance and women's services and health services. The so-called ‘action turn’ is thus a ‘communication turn’ as well.
c. Critical theoretical

Thirdly, there is the critical-theoretical (emancipatory) approach. This approach is expressly founded in critical theory, including sociological (Habermas, Giddens), pedagogical (Freire) and psychological (Holzkamp) theory. As noted above, Freire is regarded as the most important founder of this approach. We find this approach in various forms in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and the United States. The authors Zuber-Skerrit (1996) and McTaggert are often credited with the foundations. In participative development work in the so-called Third World, Freire (1970, 1998) is the most frequently mentioned by, and in addition to, Orlando Falls Borda (1998). An outspoken exponent is from Dutch soil, exemplary action research (Coenen 1987; Boog et al 1993, 1996, 1998, 2001; Keune 2000). In addition to ‘participatory and emancipatory ethics’, an important theoretical element is that the system and actor levels are simultaneously analysed, as supported in Giddens’ structuration theory and Touraine’s actionalism. It is especially in this current that we find elements from various critical movements thrown together and often combined. We find women’s studies (gender studies), (post)structuralism, social constructionism, critical ethnography and psycholinguistics combined.

Coenen’s illustrative action research is a product of The Netherlands. It was set up according to Freire’s problem-defining learning method which was adapted by Nijik as ‘illustrative learning’. The three phases of Freire’s approach are the model for the three phases of illustrative action research: the theme phase, the crystallisation phase and an exemplary phase. In the theme phase, the researcher makes an inventory of the possible knowledge about the problematic action situation of the research subjects. The crystallisation phase involves honing in on the main points and working out an alternative action scenario. In the exemplarian phase, that scenario is tested in practice, often on a small scale. If it is successful, this new action assumes an exemplary value, hence the term exemplarian action research. Freire’s dialogical approach was based on the theoretical principle of the double hermeneutic: researchers interpret a reality that has already been interpreted. But that also applies the other way round for the research subjects. They are equal to the researchers. During the research process, communicative validation of the new knowledge up to that moment in the dialogue and on the basis of the principle of the double hermeneutic is the process used to determine reciprocal effectiveness. The parties to the research determine for themselves and also jointly that the new knowledge obtained up to that moment is, given the means and opportunities available at that time, the most effective knowledge to aid in improving the action.

d. Systematic intervention

The fourth current is grafted onto systematic intervention. In The Netherlands, a group of authors with the adult education specialist De Zeeuw as the central figure has enlarged on this idea in recent decades. The theoretical basis is thinking in systematic relationships, but also the hermeneutic which, according to Nijik (who worked closely with Zeeuw), is by definition also ‘critical’. This is an action theory; Nijk and De Zeeuw were working on a discipline which, at its core, consisted of improving the action of adults. Systematic intervention (Flood, 2001) regards action as being embedded in often unsurveyable and complex situations. Action and situation must be analysed as a whole, as a system. It emphasises what Giddens called unknown conditions under which we act (meaningfully) and, on the other hand, the unintended consequences of that action. The world is not as malleable as it seems. Systematic intervention demands extra attention for reflection, both individual and institutional. Many social systems arise and continue behind our backs; we are not able to exercise direct influence on them. Flood (2001) refers to two points of systematic intervention which are of great importance for action research. These are derived from the way in which systematic intervention regards action. The first point is that systematic intervention is holistic and gives us the feeling of spirituality; we are a part of an unending whole. This thought is also to be found in the co-operative inquiry of Reason and Heron. The second point is that systematic intervention is emancipatory (he uses this term again instead of ‘empowering’). That is because it is a manner of systematic reflection that gives you the opportunity to design an alternative system. Secondly, it gives people—again, due to their unique capacity to reflect—the possibility to do and think things differently.
• The synthetic (and synergetic) foundation of action research does exclude nomological thinking, but not theoretical realism nor the use of quantitative methods and techniques. In other words, it does not rule out the instrumental-technical rationality applied in Creative Action Methodology.

The aim of action research is, in the first instance, to widen the scope on the level of local practice for research subjects and allow them to learn (henceforth) to regain their own action space whenever they are again restricted. Additionally, researchers learn to improve the research approach, the heuristics. They learn to manage such research—and such learning processes—better: they gain more practical experience in setting up, executing, supervising and communicating. But the researchers also certainly learn 'theoretically'. There is then an exemplarian generalisation and a sort of heuretical generalisation. New action scenarios must be tested in practice. Thus, action research always has an experimental moment or phase.

3.3.1 About paradigms and social constructionism

Nowadays, social science research practices termed ‘action research’ are very diverse. Nonetheless, together they form an emerging third paradigm beyond the other two (positivism/post-positivism and ‘interpretive’ social science). The latter, the ‘interpretive’ paradigm, is the ‘qualitative research’ paradigm. Recently, outstanding social scientists and representatives of this qualitative research paradigm like Denzin and Lincoln (Denzin and Lincoln 1994) combined all kinds of qualitative methods, interactionism, humanist psychological and feminist approaches and even several action research models into a ‘new’ paradigm. They call this paradigm constructivism. It is called ‘new’ in relation to the mainstream empiricist paradigm which is positivism and post-positivism. Broadly speaking, the first paradigm, (post)positivism, is a technological-instrumental paradigm.

However, what is a paradigm? Social research paradigms are sets of basic beliefs about social research activities in relation to human beings and society. These sets form rationalities for broadly three sets of entities: (1) a priori notions about being, reality, the socio-cultural and politics (taking parti prix); (2) action rationality, epistemology; and (3) methodology. Researchers have their ‘core set’ to compare their way of doing research and the research data. Core sets are groups of scientists involved in a paradigm network, which is a kind of ‘scientific conceptual web’ (Collins 1985).²⁸

Although Denzin, Lincoln, Guba (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Guba and Lincoln 1989; Guba 1990) and others point to critical theory as the third paradigm, it will be my argument that action research is an emerging third research paradigm. Admittedly, the action research paradigm owes a great deal to critical theory. But it is also interpretive. Several ‘core sets’ have revolutionised the first and second paradigm networks by doing action research and trying to underpin this praxis anew. Action research has more of a paradigm beyond positivism and the constructivism of Lincoln and others (Boog 1996).

3.3.2 The foundations of an action research paradigm

As noted above, a research paradigm is a set of basic beliefs about social research activities in relation to human beings and society. These sets form rationalities for broadly three sets of entities: (1) a priori notions about being, reality, the socio-cultural and politics (taking parti prix); (2) action rationality, epistemology; and (3) methodology.

²⁸Lincoln (1995) calls this an ‘inquiry community’.
Central to the first set of entities is a radical democratic stance. A good society is seen as the outcome of Verständigung about differing life worlds, which include basic belief systems, lifestyles, argumentations grounded in feeling and intuition, etc. All this is found in the concept of a democratic culture. Touraine coined this concept. It is the social situation wherein actors can be both subjects and agents. They can be subjects in that they are able to have their own projects. They are agents of the existing historicity. As agents they share an intersubjective constructed world, which became partly uncontrollable as 'system'. They are subjects in that they try to regain control over their lives. To get to such a life politics, as Giddens would call it, they have to attain collective emancipation from economic, sexual, racial and cultural exploitation. Central for the second set is methodological situationism and mutual understanding. The third set of entities could be headed under 'the cycle of exemplarian learning'.

As in every paradigm, ontological, epistemological and methodological entities are closely interrelated. The ontology in the case of the action research paradigm is the easiest to treat differentially, because what matters in action research is explicitly the reflections of the subjects involved on their relative power position in society as a whole and the real research situation in particular. Moreover, the ontological position of action researchers forms an explicit difference between action research and those who represent one of the other two paradigms. Therefore, the ontology will be treated first and after that the ontological position will be taken along to the epistemology and methodology. The latter two entities will be treated under one heading.

(1) A democratic culture
Exemplarian action research is based on a subject-subject relationship of researchers and researched. The research process as well as the ontological principles of this research approach have a democratic culture. The assumption about reality is, like that of Giddens, 'transcendental realism' as worked out by Bhaskar. This position is very close to that of the interpretive paradigm. Outhwaite (1987) argued that transcendental realism, as defended by Bhaskar and given flesh and blood in Giddens' structuration theory, shows the convergence of realism and hermeneutics into critical hermeneutics. However, the most important difference is that transcendental realists believe in emancipation. As Bhaskar observes (quoted from Shotter 1993:187):

An emancipatory politics (or therapy) depends upon, though it is not reducible to, a depth science of society insofar as there really are deep structures at work. Moreover it is difficult to see how radical social change can occur - or this book have any effect - unless agents' reasons for acting really can be causes of changes in the social world, which is also an emergent property of, as it is embedded in, manifest in and continually reacts back on, the natural world.

Important to this stance is that social research has its starting point in hermeneutics. A democratic culture is a kind of communicative democracy. As Touraine (1994) shows, it is a democracy which is the continuing outcome of three conflicting entities. The first entity is that of the Universal Rights of Man. All people are equal. The second entity is that of (cultural) community. One can easily see the possible conflict between the universal right of freedom of religion or life stance and a fundamental religious community. The third entity is that of (positive) individual freedom, for example free economic interchange. Here again, the conflicts between these three elements are easily seen. The 'radical liberal' position conflicts here with notions of solidarity and collective responsibility. In a democratic culture these three elements are seen as being in continuously conflict. In a society with a democratic culture, democratic rules are continually debated and changed.

So basically this paradigm has an emancipatory ontology. This is more in line with modernism than with so-called postmodernism. However, it is a reflexive modernism, as we shall see explicated in the next point.

(2) Epistemology and (3) methodology
The most important point concerning epistemology is the connection of action on the micro level with action on the macro level and the other way round. Exemplarian learning is the keyword here. As previously said, any knowledge and insight about action start with hermeneutics. Action is seen as purposive in three ways: it is instrumental, value-directed and expressive (Habermas). Therefore it is communicative. Situated action is based on enduring reflection. This makes life ‘life political’ (Giddens) or the individual more of a ‘subject’ (Touraine).

The action research situation is a double hermeneutic interaction in the sense of both (self) research and learning by exemplarian action and exemplarian reflection. The democratic culture is shaped in the research situation. One of the most important procedures of this democratic culture is the mutual validation process of ‘mutual adequation’.

The action research situation is shaped by the research partners: the researchers and the researched. Coenen’s (1987) and Touraine’s practices gives some clues of how to organise this. However, based on my own research experience, I combined their main insights with the Habermassian criterion of ‘power-free’ communication. This means that the research situation has to be a ‘free place’, a shelter for the researched, researchers and for both as partners, where they are free to express themselves, to bring their experiences to the fore, where they are open-minded and open-hearted (Smaling 1996), where there is much space for their personal (future) projects and for sociological imagination (Negt and Mills).

Exemplarian learning begins in more or less ‘sheltered’, or as Touraine calls them, ‘closed’ group sessions. At first, all kinds of experiences concerning the situation of the researched are expressed and ‘situated’. Thereafter, the process of finding the most important or central ‘exemplars’ starts, through several ‘learning cycles’. As said this happens in several interventions by researchers and also by interlocutors. Exemplarian action, constructed exemplarian actions and/or experiences play the most important role in mutual adequation. Through this the ‘local’ knowledge, tacit or not, is used as generative. This generative knowledge is a process-tool which in a way shapes as well as gives some structure to other situations. These situations may be comparable in the sense of being of the same character. These situations may be of the same area, such as work, education or politics. However, these situations may also be situated in another area and have comparable structuring characteristics. The total world of subjects, mostly consisting of several life worlds such as work, home and neighbourhood, free time etc., may become a unity in the sense of exemplarian knowledge. In all these situations, individuals are learning inasmuch they have to do with each other and what exploitative processes are going on in their shared situations and how to be freed from exploitation by collective action.

There are a lot of methods and techniques in social research (qualitative and quantitative), in group work, field work and in professions such as counselling, social case work, community and adult education which fit well into these action research processes. However, it hardly needs saying that the researched have to evaluate which methods and techniques fit them, and, on the other hand, researchers must have experience and confidence in certain methods and techniques. This, too, is a question of mutual adequation.

### 3.3.3 About action theories

Action theories form an anti-positivistic substream in social theory. Central to these theories is the notion of human development through ‘transaction’ (Dewey) and interaction-communication (Mead). In behavioural theories human beings are seen only as reacting units, black boxes or as similar to the pigeons and dogs of Skinner’s operant conditioning. Social scientists use the epistemology of the natural sciences as it started with Newton and Lavoisier.

The formation of action theories started with the work of Mead, based on Dewey’s philosophical pragmatism and Schutz, who leaned heavily on Husserl (Outhwaite 1983, 1990). Around the
Second World War the work of Parsons started out as an action theory, but it gradually turned into structural functionalism. Combined with Lazarsfeld’s statistical approaches, we got what Giddens called ‘the orthodox consensus’, which was basically positivistic. The domination of this model endured until the late sixties and was rivalled only by approaches of the ‘qualitative family’. After several decades of domination and, preceded by structural and action approaches such as Marxism (structural) and symbolic interactionism (action), new synthetic action theories were conceptualised by Touraine (1978), Giddens (1984) and Habermas (1981). They designed new action theories which synthesised structuralist, functionalist and different phenomenological and actor approaches, sociological, psychological and other cultural-historical currents. Moreover, these new action theories were anti-positivist. Though these theories are essential for the foundation of action research projects, as well as for the enhancement of action research and thus were able to give action research a firm basis, only Touraine designed a corresponding action research methodology, which was called sociological intervention (Boog 1989; Dubost 2001). In addition to this, the core of these action theories is as follows (Boog 2003):

- they go beyond the dualisms that were usually applied in the explanation and understanding (epistemology) of action. Rationalism and historicism, individualism and collectivism, structure and action, inside and outside and subject and object were not opposed but taken into account side by side;

- action is ‘intentional action’ (Weber) and ‘transaction’ (Dewey, Mead), which means that it is embedded in a dynamic social context, an intersubjective social cultural space. Action is learned in the transactional processes of socialisation. Human beings’ lives consist of socio-cultural performances that are controlled by the possibilities permitted by the social systems they are part of. But what they do or do not do, feel and think is basically not predictable. Human beings have room to learn, to develop new action strategies (projects) based on new insights (reflection). Their capacity to learn empowers them to do otherwise or make a difference.

I would like to point out the importance of the role of attitude for the action researcher. The principles of this paradigm require the researcher to take on a role that is enormously different from that in research carried out under the (neo)positivistic and constructivist paradigms. These latter two paradigms give room for a far more detached role for the researcher and require no experience with the direct practice of working with adult education groups.

Action research is a temporal relationship of social scientific researchers and lay self-researchers in a research process. This process can be described as a cultural democratic situation, partly a ‘laboratory of self-research’, where mutual openness and mutual adequation are fundamental for a critical hermeneutic research cooperation, where participants learn from each other and learn to cope with relatively powerless real situations in the sense of becoming more emancipated persons, becoming more ‘subjects’. This also means that they learn to take collective action to attain a democratic culture in society, a combination of life politics and generative politics (Giddens 1991;1995), based on continuing individual and institutional reflection.

4. About Creative Action Methodology

- The basic structures of Creative Action Methodology and action research generally coincide. Both consist of four steps that may be cyclically repeated: identifying a problem and taking stock of theory and actors, crystallisation of the most important theories, creating an alternative action scenario and finally, testing and evaluating that alternative action scenario.

- In change-oriented/innovative research, one must take into account in the research design and execution the social system in which the alternative action scenarios of the
researched must fit (the other actors, power and authority relationships, cultural/subcultural characteristics). Participation thus relates to all actors in greater or lesser degree.

It at all possible, there must be space in Creative Action Methodology for the participation of the research subjects, as Paul Delnooz mentions in Chapter 2. As indicated, participation is a key element in the paradigm. But in practice, it is often a problem.

Most of the student projects described above relate to developing new action scenarios for children. This makes these pedagogical projects different in character from the more adult-oriented projects that make up the majority of action research. In adult education, the emphasis is put more strongly on supervision and coaching, as opposed to the stronger emphasis on teaching in children’s education. Adults have had a chance to learn more about determining the direction of their lives independently and responsibly. In addition to the children as the main target group, the projects also expressly targeted adults who were related to the children in a nurturing capacity—social workers, parents and teachers. The research framework, a final study project, made it almost impossible to arrange good participation in projects like the one about sport in Kenya. This does not detract from the fact that the professionals at the project location did participate as researchers, because their observation reports were necessary. The work of these professionals improved markedly over the course of the study. The parents, family members and tribe members/neighbours were involved in the activities. Professionals, parents, family members and tribe members/neighbours were empowered by means of the research process. Moreover, the projects were of short duration and mostly had the character of an intervention, a programme that was being tested and the impact evaluated. The student researchers referred to them as quasi-experiments.

The projects had multiple phases in which various methods and techniques were used in succession and simultaneously. The order of these phases progressed according to Creative Action Methodology; first there was a description and inventory of the problem and theories about the problem, possible explanations and/or solutions to the problem (phase 1). The most creative and/or innovative of the adequate/plausible theories were then crystallised (phase 2). Then an action scenario (action) was created in which it was assumed that it could offer a pragmatic solution (phase 3). This scenario was tried out and an impact evaluation was made (phase 4). The transition from the first to the second and third phases was the actual creative moment. Four criteria were indicated to determine whether certain actions and the theories behind them were adequate. I would like to add the following observations.

- **It is important that the process of selecting a theory from which a creative and/or alternative action scenario is crystallised should take place transparently, not just for one’s fellow students, supervising instructors and policy functionaries, but also—as much as is possible—for the research subjects and the people with whom they have direct dealings in their life world.**

- **The participation of the researched and the actors they deal with gives insight into the definitions of their situation and theories, how they see the world and who does and does not ‘belong’ in it. Thus the researcher and the research subjects both get a fuller picture of all the theories in play.**

- **There are many types of ‘theories’—practical theories and prepositional theories (theories about the WHAT, HOW and WHY of actions…). It is also about all kinds of ‘notions and prejudices’—definitions of the situation, the models and theories of scholars. Action is what people do or do not do, how they justify it, moral choices and defining situations; emotions, motivations and sensory observations play a role. Thus, action is just the tip of the iceberg. Research and learning involve ‘reflection’ on this action—action on a ‘reflexive’ level. This is to be distinguished from ‘routine’ action. Routine action makes up the greater part of human action. Routine action can always be reflected upon.**
With the right communicative techniques, working together on a solution can result in a great deal of creative energy (synergy).

Creatively constructed action scenarios must be supported by those who are testing/executing them.

Impact evaluation of new action scenarios is important, especially because traditional scientific practice requires it, but also because the fact that they are ‘successful’, they ‘work’, is the highest form of validity: ecological validity.

If you read the students’ reports it seems that the creative inspiration for an alternative action scenario is a rather one-sided event on the part of the student researcher. For example, the choice of sporting activities to rehabilitate or activate disabled or street children already appears to be fixed at the beginning of the theory inventory. But the people there at the test locations cooperated enthusiastically. In the study on reducing stress through escapism, an action scenario was chosen based on a creative idea. The same applies to combating prejudice through humour.

In action research, the researcher has his or her own expertise, which is primarily in the area of setting up a study, and the elements of research, the methods and techniques. The research subjects are the only experts about their life worlds.

6. What are the general characteristics of action research?

- It is a multi-actor (network) and multi-method approach, and also a communal and egalitarian research process in which the research subjects’ potential and scope for action is central.
- It takes place in vivo—i.e. in the real, existing situation of the research subjects.
- It has a subject-subject rationality (Kunneman 1986). It is based on a radical democratic ideology, which is often also described with the adjectives ‘humanising’ and ‘emancipatory’.
- It is defined as the improvement of people’s social action by means of a dynamic research process combining 1) research: in the first instance social science research, but also self-research in the sense that the research subjects reflect on their own social action; 2) intervention in the practice of the research subjects by the researchers; and 3) a learning cycle: analysis of the action situation, planning other ways of acting, action and evaluation are carried out multiple times, as if in a spiral.

7. About a Creative Action Methodology centre and action research in general

Such a practically-oriented research methodology can best be taught in an action learning workshop. This is a centre in which an organic cooperation between students in different phases of their study and in different phases of their final projects, staff members and wherever possible (depending on the project), people from the practical field. Such a workshop is a research centre, an inspirational learning environment for students, staff and people from the field and functions as a knowledge development centre for professional practice and the university.

As a resource centre, such a workshop organises courses, refresher and follow-up meetings about methods and techniques as well as students’ current research projects. Preferably, supervising instructors should also have to carry out research projects. Supervisors’ field experience is important for the practical side of supervision, anticipating possible problems the
student researchers might encounter, and for giving effective advice to students and what can be asked of them within the conditions of a final study project. This field experience applies to all phases and facets of a study in practice, from the first contact with the research subjects and/or clients all the way to the reporting and other possible products such as journal articles and books.

The centre is also a meeting place for people from the university and the professional field. The centre forms the framework for a continual dialogue/learning process for everyone. Students and staff can learn from each other and help each other with problems that arise and the necessary background. For everyone, but especially for people from the field, it must be a welcoming and accessible institute.

The centre should maintain an up-to-date digital and accessible archive of periodicals, books, reports, experiences etc. relating to all aspects of action research.

Wherever possible, the centre should maintain contact with researchers elsewhere in the world in order to assist with their questions and/or problems.

An action learning workshop supports, develops, facilitates, offers courses, teaches, communicates, organises and maintains networks and publishes: it is a centre for education and practical research.
Bibliography


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Wadsworth, Yoland (2002) “We are one (paradigmatic river) and we are many (tributary streams)”. ALAR Journal, Vol. 7, 1, 3-26.


Appendix 1: the content of the Creative Action Methodology course

| Lectures | 28 hrs |
| Workshops | 28 hrs |
| Coaching | 14 hrs |
| Part 1, Research proposal | 30 ECTS |
| Part 2, Research and final paper | 30 ECTS |

Total: 60 ECTS

There are two aims in this course: understanding and developing skills. Developing skills means: to understand first and to develop the skills later on. The aim of this course is to:

1. Understand the historical concepts of “being objective”
2. Understand the stages and purpose of a research process when using different concepts of “being objective”.
3. Understand the methodological consequences of the different concepts of “being objective”.
4. Develop methodological skills for making a problem analysis/ situational analysis.
5. Develop methodological skills for collecting and analysing theories.
6. Develop analytical skills for making a conceptual framework (narrowing down)
7. Develop methodological skills for collecting and analysing actions.
8. Develop analytical skills for selecting actions (narrowing down)
9. Develop skills for making a research design (the focus is on experimental designs)
10. Understand different research techniques (interviewing, questionnaires, observation, sampling)
11. Develop the skills for using several research techniques (triangulation)
12. Develop the skills for making and analysing basic descriptive statistics
13. Develop the skills for making and analysing basic statistics about cause and effect.
14. Develop the skills to write a research proposal/ project proposal (including a pre-test, planning of time and financial costs)
15. Develop the use of academic reference systems.

Learning Outcomes:

On completion of this unit you should be able to:

1. Knowledge and understanding:
   - Outline the different general structures/ stages of a research
   - Compare and contrast different philosophical / methodological approaches.
   - Judge literature and empirical observations from different philosophical/ methodological angles
   - Understand the concept of problem analysis/ situational analysis
   - Understand the status of theory in different types of research
   - Understand the status of actions in different types of research
   - Understand techniques for creative thinking (such as brainstorming)
   - Understand the concept of narrowing down
   - Understand research designs
   - Understand the concept of triangulation
   - Understand methodological techniques (interviewing, questionnaires, observation, sampling)
   - Understand basic descriptive statistical techniques
   - Understand basic causal statistical techniques
   - Understand research proposals (including the pragmatic issues time and costs)
   - Understand academic reference systems
2. Professional skills:

- Judge the value of a research report from a philosophical point of view
- Judge the value of a research report from a methodological point of view
- Judge the value of a research report from a statistical point of view
- Judge the value of a research report from a theoretical/applied point of view
- Apply techniques for creative thinking
- Make a problem analysis/situational analysis
- Narrow down and construct a conceptual framework
- Collect and analyse theories/actions/secondary data
- Collect data with the aid of several methodologies
- Set up a research design (including statistical analysis)
- Write a research proposal
- Use references accurately

3. Transferable skills:

- Manage your own learning and reflect critically on your development in applied research in terms of situational analysis, literature, interviews, actions, observation, narrowing down, final goal, research questions/hypothesis, research design, data collection, data analysis.
- Develop a critical and analytical attitude towards existing information.
- Develop a “problem solving” (consultant) attitude and skills.

Indicative Content Lectures:

1. The history of “being objective”
   a. Natural forces
   b. Empiricism and social facts (Süssmilch, Quotelet, Durkheim, Darwin)
   c. The concept of falsification (Wiener Kreis, Popper)
   d. Interpretative research (Nietzsche, Weber, Garfinel, Wieder, Berger et al.)
   e. Action research (Nietzsche, Habermas, Klüver et al., Moser)
   f. Historical context (Kuhn), Anything goes (Feyerabend), Pragmatic (Wittgenstein, Rorty, Goodman, Laudan)

2. Research structures
   a. Empirical cycle (observation, induction, deduction, testing, evaluation) (Groot)
   b. Intervention cycle (practical problem, diagnosis, planning, actions, evaluation) (Strien, empirical-analytical research: nomothetic model)
   c. Induction (Verstehen/Grounded theory and Constant Comparative Method) (Glaser et al.)
   d. Learning cycle (practical problem, diagnosis, planning, action, evaluation) (action research, idiographic model)

3. Research stages
   a. Problem (theoretical/practical)
   b. Describe and analyse the present knowledge
   c. Contribute to the present knowledge without gathering primary data (new ideas; a conceptual framework; select actions)
   d. Decide what extra information will be gathered (a description; testing a theory; testing actions)
   e. Write a research proposal/project proposal (a + b + c + d + time schedule + financial costs)
   f. Fieldwork
   f. Conclusions, evaluation and recommendations

4. Academical judgement criteria
   a. Theoretical knowledge (opposite theories; multiple disciplines/angles)
   b. Empirical knowledge (such as: facts and figures; involved parties; similar cases)
   c. Analytical skills (such as: situational analysis; judge theories, methodological and statistical issues)
5. **Creative Action Methodology**
   b. Creative thinking: multiple “theories” to describe a situation
   d. Theories are creative instruments. They generate ideas for actions.
   e. Research stages (practical problem; “theories”; actions; select actions; testing; evaluation
   f. Selection criteria: being pragmatic; normative; innovation, creativity

6. **How to look at Creative Action Methodology?**
   a. Theoretical and applied (developing “theory”, testing actions) 
   b. Interpretative and “behind a desk/ creative thinking”
   c. Idiographic (“theoretical” based) and nomothetic (action based)
   e. Descriptive and causal
   f. Cross-sectional; Intercultural; Comparative
   f. Empirical means: discussing the interpretation of observations
   h. Validity means: prediction validity (no construct validity)

7. **Common requirements in research**
   a. inter-subjectivity (agreement about the way(s) in which the empirical world can be interpreted)
   b. Logic
   c. Mini-max principle
   d. Usable knowledge

8. **Discussing “theories”**
   a. Operationalisational problems
   b. Container-variables
   c. Spurious correlations
   d. Reversing cause and effect
   e. Counter-examples with variables that are IN the theory
   f. Counter examples with variables that are OUTSIDE the theory

9. **Discussing (statistical) measurements**
   a. (Non) obtrusive measurements
   b. Operationalisational problems (predictive validity)
   c. Nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio
   d. Discrete and continuous variables

10. **Collecting primary data: interviewing**
    a. Purpose of a scientific interview (discovering “theories”/ actions)
    b. Effects of spatial and social influences on interview results
    c. Effects of type of questions on interview results
    d. Interview framework and types of questions
    e. The concept of laddering
    f. Making notes and interview script
    g. Data analysis (validity, reliability)

11. **Collecting primary data: observation**
    a. Participant observation
    b. Researcher roles
    c. Data collection and analysis
    d. Structured observation

12. **Collecting primary data: questionnaires**
    a. Purpose and types of a questionnaire
    b. Correlated and non-correlated items
    c. Types of questions / wording / coding
    d. Design of the survey form and cover sheet
    e. Types of questions/ analysis and effect on statistical analysis
    f. Administration and pilot testing
13. **Analysing statistical data**
   a. Data matrix
   b. Straight counts (central tendency, variance)
   c. Cross-tabulations
   d. Linear equation and trend analysis
   e. Normal distribution
   f. Chi-square distribution
   g. Binomial distribution

14. **Research designs**
   a. Examples of research designs (experiment, quasi-experiment, longitudinal)
   b. Random sampling and comparable groups
   c. Placebo effect
   d. Control groups
   e. Measurement of an effect
   f. Systematic errors and random errors

15. **Sampling**
   a. (Non) random samples
   b. Theoretical, empirical, sample population
   c. Calculating sample sizes for cross-tabulations
   d. Calculating sample-sizes for means
   e. Systematical and random errors

**Indicative Content Workshops:**
   a. Assignment: present and discuss (scientific) articles (4 hours)
   b. Assignment: theoretical choices and building a conceptual framework (2 hours)
   c. Interview training (2 hours)
   d. Interview assignment: present and discuss the results (2 hours)
   e. Assignment: present and discuss a questionnaire (4 hours)
   f. Statistical assignments: present and discuss the results (12 hours)
   g. Training in SPSS (2 hours)

**Indicative Content Coaching:**
   a. Discussing in small groups the paper that you have to make for this course (8 hours)
   b. Discussing with your tutor the paper that you have to make for this course (6 hours)

**Requirements:**
- You are required to attend the lectures
- You are required to attend the workshops
- You are required to complete your assignments before the workshops

**Final paper:**
You have to write a paper for this course. This paper is a research proposal. You have to hand it in within 3 weeks after the course. If the paper gets a mark of 50 percent or more then you are allowed to implement the research proposal and write your final paper for the bachelor's degree.