

***Taakspel***  
(The Netherlands)  
**Objectives/target groups/ backgrounds**

**Domain:** School

**Project classification:** Best Practice (CED group)

**Brief description:** *Taakspel* is a group-based method aimed at teaching pupils to better observe class rules, to promote pro-social behaviour and to reduce disruptive behaviour. For every teaching situation the pupils and teachers design positive rules, rules that describe the desired behaviour. The pupils observe these rules for a pre-arranged period of time. The pupils form teams and help each other observe the rules. The focus is on rewarding desired behaviour.

*Taakspel* also promotes task-driven behaviour and improves the atmosphere in the group. The *Taakspel* is applied integrally. This means that *Taakspel* can be used in all lessons, not just specific lessons on social competency. At the same time, *Taakspel* aims to improve teachers' ability to learn to manage group processes. *Taakspel* is a translation and interpretation of the original American programme, also known as *Good Behavior Game*. The method was developed in the nineteen sixties and seventies in the US, and then introduced in the Netherlands, translated and published by the de CED group. Also, the effectiveness of the approach was studied and demonstrated in the Netherlands.

**Problem/risk analysis:** The approach aims to prevent problematic behaviour such as rule-breaking and disrupting behaviour in young children based on the idea that preventing and dealing with this behaviour at a younger age can prevent criminal behaviour including committing offences, truancy, alcohol and drug abuse at a later age. Problematic behaviour often follows from concentration problems related to poor learning results and shy and aggressive behaviour. By dealing with the issue of concentration and promoting task-oriented behaviour, problematic behaviour may be prevented.

**Factors that can be influenced:**

- Rule-breaking behaviour; aggressive behaviour
- Disruptive behaviour; boisterous and dominant behaviour
- Shy and withdrawn behaviour

**Objectives of the approach:** The objectives of the *Taakspel* programme are: teaching pupils to observe the rules of the group, promoting task-oriented behaviour in pupils, reducing disruptive behaviour, promoting and encouraging desired behaviour, improving the atmosphere in the group and boosting teaching competencies in the area of the promotion of children's social development. Both the intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies in pupils are promoted. The approach focuses on enhancing expertise, skills and reflection on the personal behaviour and, following the repeated application and implementation, eventually also pupils' attitudes.

**Relation objectives and problem:** The intervention aims to prevent aggressive and disruptive behaviour by learning desired behaviour through rewards in the programme.

**Target group(s):** The target group comprises primary school pupils in groups 4-8. A separate version for secondary education is in preparation. *Taakspel* is a universal programme, which means that it is played with the entire group rather than a selected group or a group of pupils who require extra care. This is about letting the group play the *Taakspel* as a whole, to improve the atmosphere in the group and to break down and reconstruct group dynamic processes. In addition, teachers also form a target group in this approach.

They are taught how to realise better group management by having and demonstrating high expectations, setting and teaching clear rules, involving pupils in the group atmosphere and the group management et cetera.

**Context:** The intervention is used in education, but not in a specific teaching situation; it can be carried out during instruction or individual activity sessions.

**Targeted effects:**

- Improve task-driven behaviour
- Increase desired behaviour
- Improve observing rules
- Decrease disruptive and rule-breaking behaviour
- Decrease in shy withdrawn behaviour
- Strengthen group management behaviour in teachers

This should all combine to provide for a better school climate.

**Demonstrated effects:** Effect measurements have been carried out for the *Good Behavior Game* programme, initially by Barrish, Saunders and Wolf in 1969. Various improvements have since been introduced in the programme. Following a preventative study entitled the 'Baltimore Prevention Project' (Kellam and Dolan) relating to the period 1985-1986, the manual *The Good Behavior Game* (Dolan et.al.,1989) was published, and went on to serve as the basis for the Dutch *Taakspel*. Both the American study into the *Good Behavior Game* and the Dutch study into the *Taakspel* (Van Lier, 2002) demonstrated a decrease in disruptive behaviour during the game, combined with an increase in task-driven behaviour. The study in the Netherlands was carried out among 650 pupils. Teachers and parents of pupils in the study group indicated that both boisterous and rebellious behaviour, but also shy and withdrawn behaviour, decreased. In the long term, the Good Behavior Game particularly helps to reduce aggression. Conclusion - disruptive behaviour demonstrated at a young age is tackled successfully with the *Taakspel* intervention.

## **Vision/ accountability/ method/operationalisation**

**Basic principles/vision:** The underlying idea of the *Taakspel* intervention is that much of the disruptive and aggressive behaviour, as well as shy and withdrawn behaviour, is caused by attention and concentration problems. *Taakspel* aims at task-driven behaviour with the aim of tackling the problematic behaviour at the source (concentration). The set-up of the game and cooperation in teams makes it attractive for pupils and motivates them to join the game. In the game, good behaviour receives a lot of attention and confirmation and is systematically rewarded. Problematic behaviour is ignored.

**Scientific grounds:** The *Taakspel* programme boasts extensive scientific support, and is based on learning theoretical principles, in particular the operant conditioning: understanding the correlation between what a person does and what the result is.

The report '*met Taakspel lukt het wel* ('*Things will work with Taakspel*,' Van der Sar & Goudswaard, 2004) provides a detailed description and sets out the grounds to all the steps and choices made in setting up the programme. This regards, among other things, the choice for:

- a universal programme, aimed at all pupils in the group, rather than a select group of problematic pupils
- setting behaviour alternatives rather than banning certain behaviour
- using rewards and devoting attention to good behaviour rather than punishment
- working in teams to enable pupils to help each other and to cooperate, so that group processes can be opened up
- letting the pupils draw up rules they must observe

**Method/mechanism:** *Taakspel* is based on operant conditioning, a movement within the teaching theory based on learning the correlation between behaviour and effect.

*Taakspel* is a group-driven programme teaching pupils to better observe the class rules, reducing restless, disruptive and aggressive behaviour, positively influencing the task-driven behaviour of pupils. In addition, pupils know what is expected of them, they know what the rules are and what they should observe rather than being told all the things they are *not* permitted to do.

*Taakspel* is a game played in teams during regular lessons. It is a playful way to promote pupils' sociable behaviour and responsibility for their own situation in class. Attention is focused mostly on the desired behaviour (compliments/rewards), which benefits the emotional development and positive educational learning climate. Cooperation in teams and helping each other observe the rules also increases the chances of improving the atmosphere within the group, the feeling of social self-responsibility and group relations.

## Set-up/implementation

**Operationalisation:** *Taakspel* works as follows: the teacher and children together come up with a number of positive rules that describe the desired behaviour. The teacher divides the class in small groups combining both quiet children and children with boisterous and restless behaviour. The teacher then hangs/lays the icons with positive rules somewhere everybody can see them. During *Taakspel* every group is given a number of cards. Every time one of the group members fails to observe the rules, the teacher will take a card. The teacher must make sure the children know a card has been taken, but not address the children individually. To get a reward, they need to be left with at least one card by the end of the period agreed. The more they cooperate and stimulate each other by observing the rules, the better their chances. The *Taakspel* is played during normal lessons, during instruction or independent activity sessions.

**Coaching/training:** Schools that want to work with *Taakspel* must have their teachers or internal coaches trained by a trainer with a *Taakspel* license. For instance, an educational coach working for a teaching coaching service (OBD). This trainer must teach the teacher the following skills:

1. observe rule-compliant behaviour and regular observation of rule-breaking behaviour
2. think in terms of desired behaviour, formulating positive rules
3. consistently observe agreements made
4. compliment on desired behaviour to maintain and expand on it
5. ignore undesired behaviour where possible to extinguish it

When introducing *Taakspel* in the Group, teachers go through three phases. Every phase is combined with an introduction training. Furthermore, there are ten class consultations per year.

**Quality monitoring , process, and product evaluation:** The licence folder (put together for school coaches), sets out how internal coaches can monitor the process of implementation of *Taakspel* and its quality. Also, teachers are given the assignment to observe and register rule-breaking behaviour, both when playing *Taakspel* and at other times. The outcome determines if working with *Taakspel* has the desired effects. Also, when the effects of *Taakspel* in the group seem to wear off after a while, it may be necessary to reintroduce *Taakspel*. As the teacher registers the rule-breaking behaviour on a regular basis and compares it, he will know in time if this is necessary.

## Factors for success or failure

### **Success factors:**

- Teacher competencies are being honed.
- The operational systems for teachers are simple.
- The game is easy to play in all sorts of group situations, and is not restricted to a particular lesson or hour.
- The game motivates pupils.
- Pupils know exactly what is expected from them, and what their behavioural tasks are: this offers structure for pupils who have trouble concentrating or working on tasks.
- Acknowledging positive behaviour changes the tone of the interaction in the group.
- Group processes can actually be broken down to realise a change in atmosphere.
- Pupils learn to cooperate, support each other and confront each other with their behaviour.
- Pupils design the rules they need to observe.

### **Failure factors:**

- Teachers must continue to work critically towards improving their own interaction with pupils. This is vital. The question is whether the internal coach must continue to monitor this and the quality of the teaching skills. There should be a fixed structure for intervention.
- The method seems mostly suited to schools with a strong focus on rules and structure and is more difficult to combine with schools that operate with a less structured, and less rigid method.
- Some teachers dislike working this way: they believe observing rules is just one aspect of social behaviour.
- *Taakspel* lacks two key 'tools' of social competencies, namely reflection on the individual behaviour and working directly on changing attitudes. This might mean that the transfer and change in behaviour are not optimal.
- *Taakspel* does not cooperate with pupils to solve conflicts and conflict situations and does not address undesired behaviour that cannot be ignored.  
How is this dealt with?
- Obedient behaviour is approved. Behaviour that does not conform to the rules, is not rewarded. Even if this is non-disruptive and inventive behaviour.

### **Contacts/licenses:**

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