'Active Parenting' on Sint Maarten

The feelings of empowerment after participation and the parental needs and barriers to participate

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ABSTRACT

The Active Parenting program was introduced by the government of Sint Maarten to enlarge parental involvement. The purpose was to indirectly reduce external problem behavior amongst youth, break the cycle of poverty and empower the community all together. The Department of Education, Research, Policy and Innovation (DERPI) requested an evaluation of the program and recommendations to improve the program's implementation and to create more support for the program within the society. Field observations were done consisting the observation of nine Active Parenting sessions and conducting informal interviews with parents, teachers, governmental experts and the trainers and leaders of the program. Furthermore 71 parents filled out questionnaires and semi structured interviews were held with 6 parents. The results indicate that parents have feelings of empowerment after the sessions of AP and that those feelings of empowerment make them aware of their needs for parental support. Also there were no direct indications for practical barriers to participate in the program because the program was already offered at different moments and locations. If parents did not participate it was mostly because of unforeseen (family) circumstances or that parents did not see the relevance of the program for their situation. Recommendations are to inform parents and youth care professionals more about the contents and existence of the program. Furthermore to make parents aware of the possibility to use the strategies of the program in wider society.

Key words: Active Parenting, empowerment, parental needs for support, barriers for participation

Introduction

Children need the support of their parents in social development and education. This gives the child the feeling to be valued and that his future is important. In a fast developing world it can be hard for parents to understand what their children are doing and how to offer that support (Maniacci & Maniacci, 1989). A problem in raising children is that some parents feel powerless and feel they are victims of their environment and do not think they have any influence on their child's development (Prinsen, 2005). Parents feel insecure in their task of raising children especially when families have to deal with low socioeconomic status, instable family circumstances or a negative street culture (Murrey, Bynum, Brody, Willerd, & Stephens, 2002; Swick, 2007). Parental Support programs aim to provide parents with the needed strategies to recognize and change behavior and incidents that leads to externalizing problems in children (Eamon & Venkataraman, 2003). Besides the risk of external problem behavior of the child, this situation also maintains low socioeconomic status. Employers find it very difficult to hire competent youth because of their low levels of education and an attitude of instant gratification (Van 't Rood, 2009). An attitude of instant gratification has negative influence on education level because the student is not able to focus on distant goals (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004). The cycle of poverty states that poverty leads to low education, which leads to low labor participation, which sustains poverty. To break this cycle people need to be educated (Bhola, 2006).

In 2002 the government of Sint Maarten introduced a new educational system. This Foundation Based Education (FBE) was meant to improve the youth unemployment rate and to change the inefficiency of the existing school system. The aim of the FBE was to secure optimal participation of the future generation in a constantly changing society. One of the features of the FBE is active parental involvement in school life by good communication and parental participation in school activities (Ministerie van Onderwijs en Cultuur, 2002). In the evaluation report of Poyck and Van 't Rood (2006) changes after the implementation of the FBE were recognized but there were also shortcomings. A practical deficiency in the implementation process was the lack of an adequate monitoring structure and a missing legal framework. An other problem was the low level of parental involvement in schooling on St. Maarten (Poyck & Van 't Rood, 2006).

The Department of Educational Research, Policy and Innovation (DERPI) introduced the '*Active Parenting*' program (AP) in 2004 to increase parental involvement in school context and empowerment in the larger community (Ministerie van Onderwijs en Cultuur,

2002). Research suggests that parental involvement could lead to school motivation in the child (Gonzales-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). The *Active Parenting Now in 3* (AP) implemented in Sint Maarten is the third generation of the original *Active Parenting Discussion Program* (Popkin, 1983) and a compact version, composed of just three sessions of two hours. The general purpose of AP is to support the development of human potential through the family structure by providing parents with the information and skills to foster in their children the qualities necessary for thriving in a democratic society: cooperation, courage, responsibility, self-esteem, and respect (Popkin, 2005). The program is based on building capacity in the society by training local people to become AP leaders. The leaders receive training from professional trainers and the leaders guide with the methods they can use during the AP sessions. The areas the program focuses on are effective communication with children, prevention of substances abuse, discipline while teaching responsibility, encouragement of the child's self-esteem and character development, redirecting misbehavior and sidestep power struggles, and the exploration and encouragement of nonviolent conflict resolution, inside the home and out (Popkin, 2005). The program itself is examined and research indicates that the program is effective in many ways (Fashimpar, 2000; Mullis, 1999; Pilgrim, Abbey, Hendrickson, & Lorenz, 1998).

However, there is no data available about the implementation on Sint Maarten. DERPI requested an evaluation of the program AP with an overview of the obtained results in feelings of empowerment of parents as far as possible to detect at this moment. The general goal of this research is to explore the feelings of empowerment in parents after they participated in the program of AP. Empowerment is a matter of importance because empowerment in people can contribute to a sustainable solution for arrears of specific groups. Empowered parents are more able to forestall the disadvantages their children can incur in schooling and society in large (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Other relevance of this research is the contribution to the knowledge of the need for parental support programs and governmental interventions in general amongst parents on the Netherlands Antilles. Additionally it can create a more explicit image of the feelings of empowerment amongst parents after participating in a parental support program.

Feelings of Empowerment

The first goal of this study was to explore the parental feelings of empowerment after taking the sessions of AP. The program aims at the development of human potential through

the family structure by providing parents with the information and skills to foster in their children the qualities necessary for thriving in a democratic society (Popkin, 2005). This view on the position of parents, where they are seen as capable caregivers merely hindered by external factors, is the opposite of the so-called deficit model. The deficit model is based on the suggestion that parents lack skills, resources and stimulation for a good development of their child (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Critics to that model indicate that the deficit model does not take external community factors into account. They state that parents are a vital source of information and have the capacity to raise their children but can be retained by external barriers to act upon their intentions (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Parents do not simply need to be 'changed' but need to be provided with the tools which will enable them to better manage their own lives and give them the feeling of mastery over child raising. Shepard and Rose (1995) call this approach empowerment. Empowerment is the process by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them (Rappaport, 1987). This ability to take mastery over self and family concerning issues appears to be an effective key element of parental support programs (McLeod & Nelson, 2000). Empowering parents involves more then simply communicating with them or providing training in skills (Zimmerman, 1995). It is about increasing their sense of trust in self and others, an enhanced awareness of viable resources, and an evolving sense of purpose and responsibility to their own families and larger society (Shepard & Rose, 1995).

This research focuses on the question to what kind of feelings of empowerment parents experience after participation in the AP program. The first basic question was if parents knew the program existed prior to the schools' invitation to participate. Becoming aware of the program of AP as a resource for better parenting is a first step to empowerment. To empower a group is to let them gain mastery over issues concerning themselves (Rappaport, 1987). For parents this contains gaining mastery over child raising. The definition given by Shepard and Rose (1995) of empowerment involves an enhanced awareness of viable resources, increasing parental sense of trust in self and others, and an evolving sense of purpose and responsibility to their own families and larger society. These three determinants were used to create an image of parental mastery over child raising.

The general goal of AP aims to provide parents with the information and skills to foster in their children the qualities necessary for thriving in a democratic society. These information and skills are tools for behavioral change that gives parents mastery over their child raising as Shephard and Rose (1995) call empowerment. The mechanisms mentioned

above used in the program include cooperation and participation. These two mechanisms encourage parents to socially interact with others about child raising issues. The other parents can be viable resources or point each other to viable resources which is part of the empowering process (Shephard & Rose, 1995). This increased awareness of viable resources makes parents more confident according to research of Berg, Coman, and Schensul (2009). This confidence influences and increases their sense of trust in self and others (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Another aim of the programs is to build human capital in the society. Encouraged by an evolving sense of trust amongst parents it will foster the sense of purpose and responsibility towards their own families and larger society. The programs' mechanisms that also contribute to this sense of purpose and responsibility are respect and responsibility. Parents are learned to stimulate their children to these concepts by being a roll model in giving mutual respect and taking responsibility for their choices (Popkin, 2005). In theory the program AP itself has the potential to lead to empowerment, the question remains if parents actually do have the feelings of empowerment. Field orientations, done by the researchers in the early stages of the research, indicated that parents did not seem to be aware of the existence of the program before school invited them for participation. These field orientations are more extensively described in the method section. Not until parents participated in the program they were enthusiastic and open to learn new strategies. Also parents did not seem aware of their own parenting skills and the possibilities for alternative way's of handling child raising. The school gave the first onset to empowerment by introducing parents to the program, but does the program continue this by providing the parents with more viable resources and actual tools for behavioral change? As said before research indicated that the program itself was effective in many ways (Fashimpar, 2000; Mullis, 1999; Pilgrim et al., 1998). This could indicate that the mechanisms and strategies of the program gives parents an increased sense of trust in self and others, an enhanced awareness of viable resources, and an evolving sense of purpose and responsibility to their own families and larger society (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Based on the program and the mechanisms it uses, expectations for this study were that after participation parents would have more feelings of empowerment which means they gained more mastery over child raising.

Needs Assessment

        The second aim of this study was to map the actual needs of the parents before they can be involved in their child's life. What information and skills do parents need to be

involved and to be empowered in raising their children? The next question asks if the AP program provides the parents with the skills and information they need be more involved with their children's lives. And are the needs of the parents met in participating in the program AP or do parents need different skills and information to be empowered and to be more involved? A needs assessment diagnoses and describes systematically the social needs of a target group (Rossi, Lipsy, & Freeman, 2005). A needs assessment starts with the specification of the problem, next the identification and defining of the intervention needs, then a description of the target population and finally describing the nature of service needs (Rossi et al., 2005). The needs assessment creates a general image of the problem, the target group and the needed intervention.

The needs assessment was done in the four steps Rossi et al. (2005) suggest them. First, the extent of the problem was specified based on existing data answering the questions when did it start, where is it a problem and how big is the problem. The problem here was stated by the government of Sint Maarten who saw a fragmented and ineffective school system which did not prepare children for labor participation (Ministerie van Onderwijs en Cultuur, 2002). To change that the FBE was implemented in schools and parental involvement was necessary to make the implementation effective. The problem was how to get parents involved with the education of their children, for which they started the program AP. The second step in identifying the extend of the problem was to appoint and define the intervention targets. In this case the direct targets were the parents who are urged to participate in the program and learn new parenting skills. Parenting skills like communication skills, discipline and responsibility, encouragement techniques and conflict resolution skills. The third step was to describe the target group. The target group here were parents who have a child or children in the age of four to twelve years old. A large part of these parents are single mothers (Dienst Cultuur & Educatie, 2006; Meerens & Hermans, 2009) who raise their children with a limited amount of involvement from the father. Another part of the parents on Sint Maarten are unregistered habitants that immigrated for better labor and educational possibilities. These parents are often low educated and do not speak the native language Dutch or English which can impede with participation in parental support programs. Also the inequality of income and relative poverty is a characteristic of the parents on the island. Finally, a relatively high percentage of teenage pregnancies and very young parents in certain groups within the society are contributing to a difficult target group of parents to reach with the research (Dienst Cultuur & Educatie, 2006). The final step was to describe what the target

group, the parents needed. In this case the first question was, do parents see the problem for which the program was introduced? For this, information was needed about how parents experience the problem, the difficulties and barriers they encounter and their attitude and ideas about the existing program (Rossi et al., 2005). The barriers will be discussed later in the final aim of the research so this part of the needs assessment will focus on the parental experience of the problem and their attitude towards the existing program. The parents' attitude is the attitude they have towards the program (De Vries, Dijkstra, & Kuhlman, 1988). What do they think about the program and do the parents know it's functions? Also the beliefs of parents about the program. What are their expectations about advantages and prejudices of the program? It is important to know the attitude of the parents to compare it with the problem that is stated. How do parents see the presumed general shortage of involvement in the children's education and how do they think they can be more involved? And do parents think the program can and will contribute to a solution of the problem? Research of McCurdy and Daro (2001) already indicates that differences in parental needs are very divers and it is almost impossible to connect to each parents needs specifically. They also state that extra effort must be put in informing the fathers and male partners about the objectives of the program to get them involved (McCurdy & Daro, 2001). This could mean that parents, and fathers in particular, do not see the relevance of the program and need extra incentives before they decide to participate. A similar statement was made by Petterson, Lindén-Boström, and Eriksson (2009) who said that the parents who do not see the need to participate in a program are more likely not to participate then other parents. Expectations for this study were that parents who did not see problems in society with parental involvement and did not feel the need for the program were less likely to participate.

Barriers

The last goal of this study was to assess the barriers that parents experience to participate in the program AP. Knowledge about why parents hesitate to participate or fall-out premature can help to guide more parents towards the program and to connect the program to the participating parents needs. Lee, August, Bloomquist, Mathy, and Realmuto (2006) describes the barriers in participation in community programs on multiple domains. First personal obstacles or stressors, such as crisis at home, parents being too tired to participate or parents having to many other things going on in their lives. This was also presented as a barrier by Nickerson, Brooks, Colby, Rickert, and Salamone (2006) who appointed that

parental personal problems and legal issues impede parents from being involved in their child's treatment in residential facility's. For the situation on Sint Maarten this is very likely to be the case, because many parents are single parents, have multiple jobs to support their family and have a difficult social or financial situation (Salsbach, 2008). Other barriers are demands imposed by the program, such as inconvenient scheduling of activities, and the relationship of the parent with the provider of the program, the AP leaders in this case (Lee et al., 2006). Similar barriers were also presented by Mendez, Carpenter, LaForett, and Cohen (2009). They state that barriers for parents to enroll in support programs are the conflict between the times the program is offered and the parental working schedules, child care issues, enrollment in classes and transportation problems. These barriers are less likely to be of influence in this situation because everything has been done to reach the parents personally and to connect the program to the parents schedule and practical needs. Last barrier presented by Lee et al. (2006) is the relevance of the program. As soon as parents do not understand the relevance of the program for their own situation they are less likely to participate. As mentioned before, field orientations show that parents did not seem to know the program before they started with it and could not tell what the program was about. If these parents did not know the program it was less likely for them to participate. Nock and Photos (2006) state that the more parents are motivated, the less barriers they experience in participating in the program. This study does not cover the topic of motivation though because this subject is to elaborate to fit into this research.

Focus in this research will be on the two most relevant dimensions of barriers for the situation on Sint Maarten as Lee et al. (2006) present them. The dimension personal obstacles and stressors within the parents' lives that impede them from participating in the program first. Secondly on the barrier of the relevance of the program. Not many parents see the importance of the program for their child raising situation and let that stop them from participating in it. Expectations are that parents are too much involved with their personal stressors and do not see the relevance of the program for their situation and therefore do not participate in the program of AP.

Method

By means of qualitative and explorative methods a trend will be sought in the parental feelings of empowerment. Also the parental needs for support programs and their barriers to participate in this program will be assessed to give an indication of the areas in which the

parents still need to be empowered. To address these issues a small scale, multi method approach was used that included qualitative data analysis with an explorative nature. This method aims at ascribing significance to new phenomenon in new situations where there is no previous research available. This qualitative method was used because there was no existing research available on the subject of parental support programs on the Dutch Antilles. The first stage of the data collection was directed towards general field orientations, observations and questionnaires held amongst leaders, trainers and parents during the AP sessions. In the second stage emphasis was on collecting more specific and profound data through semi structured interviews with parents who participated in the program AP. By using multiple instruments that overlap the research questions, the principle of triangulation was used to increase the internal validity of the study (Baarda, de Goede, & Teunissen, 2001).

Participants

There were 77 parents who participated in the research. A total of 71 parents filled out a questionnaire. Their average age was 38 years old with an average of 2 children of which the youngest was not even a year old and the oldest child was 27. Most of the participants were mothers, almost 60% of them was married and 23% was a single parent. The others were living with a partner. Only one parent stated to have no educational background, 38% graduated from high school, about 30% was a college graduate, and about 30% had a graduate degree. This group was selected at different schools from different signatures, so assumption is that it is representative for parents participating in the program. With the remaining 6 parents, all of them mothers, an interview was held of approximately one hour. These parents were selected by AP leaders and assumption is that they selected the more involved parents to talk about the program. All these parents had participated in the AP program. The interview was held were the parent felt the most comfortable, at their house, in school or at the office of DERPI.

Instruments

Q*uestionnaire.* The questionnaire had two parts, part A for parents who started their first AP session and the B part for parents who finished all three sessions. Both questionnaires contained a general part and part with specific questions. The general questions included parental characteristics like family situation, the parents' education and age, and their children's age. The specific questions were derived from a literature review stated in the

introduction earlier and refined after the first period of field orientations. The questionnaires were used to ask the parents' opinion about the three aims of this research, their needs for parental support programs, barriers they experience in participating in the AP program, and their feelings of empowerment after taking the AP sessions. Their opinion was asked by using theorems, called items. Examples in the subject of barriers that parents could experience are the items: "6. You do not need a course to know how to raise my children, that is something you learn from your parents" and "7. I think this program is going to cost a lot of time and energy." The closer the answers were to 1 (agree) the more they feel the item as a barrier. For the subject empowerment items for example were "3. After taking AP I gained more confidence in raising my children" on the sense of mastery over child raising, and "22. If I experience problems in raising my children I always find the help I need" on the awareness of viable resources. Besides the items there were also multiple choice questions included in the questionnaire. To see who are asked for advice when parents encounter difficulties in child raising the multiple choice question was asked "34. Who do you ask for advice when you experience difficulties in raising your children?" With the possibility for parents to check multiple answers, "my own parents, brothers or sisters, neighbors, teachers, people from my church, friends, colleagues, family doctor, governmental organizations, no one, and others namely…". The researchers chose to use two different questionnaires because there were too many questions to include in one questionnaire. A conducted pilot study showed that parents needed much time to read and fill out the questions and that they lose their concentration if they were asked too many questions. Also some questions, put in the A questionnaire, could only be asked if parents did not participate yet in the program of AP because participation could influence the answers. And some questions in the B section could only be answered after participation in AP. An example is: 'People in my environment are interested in what I have learned in Active Parenting'. Parents could answer the theorems with an indication to what extent they agreed with the theorem five-level Likert item, 1 (agree) to 5 (disagree). The items on the questionnaire will be analyzed separately and not as summative scales. This was done because the research has a more explorative character while fixed questionnaires limit parents in expressing their opinion. The questionnaires were used as a first indication of the parents' position on the several topics. Semi structured interviews were held later for more extensive and profound information on the subjects. The researchers expected that these questionnaires would give a first indication and a clear view of the specific subjects of the

questions. The choice was made to use questionnaires to reach a large group of parents in a short amount of time.

Semi Structured interviews. Semi structured interviews were held at the parents' home or at the researchers' office. The questions were open ended questions and the parents were asked to elaborate and answer extensively about their own experiences. This instrument was used because it is in line with the explorative nature of the study and gives parents the opportunity to give their personal impression about the questioned subjects. After the questionnaires, the interviews were held to gain more detailed and extensive information from parents about their experiences with child raising and the AP program. Final reasons to use semi structured interviews was to verify the gained data from the questionnaires to enhance reliability and to gain a more balanced view on the mutual relationships amongst the different topics. By using multiple instruments that overlap the research questions, the principle of triangulation was used to increase the internal validity of the study (Baarda et al., 2001; Robson, 2002). First parents were asked about some parental characteristics like their family situation, their own age, the number of children they have and the ages of their children. After that a topic list was used to answer the questions of the three research aims. The topics for the interview were Attitude, Barriers, Tools for behavioral change, Sense of Purpose and Responsibility to own family and larger society, Experiencing of the problem, Mastery over child raising, Sense of Trust in self and others, and the Awareness of viable Resources. For example on the topic attitude towards the program, the question was asked "1.1 What did you think about the program AP before you started to participate?" To get an complete picture of the parents' view on the topic, successive questions were asked such as "What do you remember others telling you about AP?" and "Did you agree with what others said about the program?". These questions were asked to encourage the parent to elaborate extensively on the topic. The interviews were recorded for further analyzing and the answers must be considered as parental self-reports on their feelings, thoughts and behavior.

Procedure

The coordinator of AP, an employee of DERPI, introduced the researchers personally to the leaders of the AP sessions. Also a presentation was held to inform leaders, trainers (the people who trained the leaders) and others who were interested in the progress of AP about the purpose of this study and as an introduction of the researchers. Occasionally a personal introduction was not possible and introduced the researchers themselves.

Field orientation. The coordinator of the AP program introduced the researcher to the participants at schools, churches and other institutions. Informal interviews were held with several leaders, teachers and parents involved with AP in the first phase of the research. They were asked about their experiences with the program and its successes and shortcomings. Also observations were done at a total of nine AP sessions at different schools, eight English-speaking sessions and one Spanish-speaking session. Besides observing also questions were asked to the parents and school employees involved about the implementation of the program and their experiences with it. These sessions were selected because they took place in the period during the study. The researchers expected that the observations would give a clear view of the actual situation concerning daily practice of the program. Furthermore a focus group interview was held with 32 of the leaders and trainers of the AP program. This group was chosen because they are closely involved with the program and have a good insight about the programs' positive factors and obstacles. The participants of the focus group interview were able to discuss with each other and supplement each others responses. This information was used as an exploration on barriers that parents encounter in participation in the program of AP. For the purpose of methodical justification the researchers kept a log were all steps of the research and choices made were noted in (Boeie, Hart, & Hox, 2008). The information from the observations, the informal interviews, and the focus group interview was registered. This was a foundation for further research on the three research goals and was used as reference and background information. The purpose of the field orientation was to get familiar with the program and the parents, to get a better understanding of the situation on Sint Maarten, and to focus the questions for the questionnaires and the interviews at the relevant issues.

Questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed among participating parents before or after the Active Parenting sessions by the researchers personally. These parents were approached at the meetings at eight different schools on the island. The parents were selected because they were participating AP sessions in the period during the study. Because of their participation in AP, the parents were accessible and could be asked to cooperate with the research. In some cases the entire group of parents at a session was informed about the purpose of the research and received an explanation of the questionnaire. In other cases some parents were individually addressed to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected and analyzed using SPSS 17.0 for windows. To get a general image of the answers to the questions the percentages of the parents that agreed or disagreed were calculated. This

general image of the parents' concepts about the program was further explored by the semi structured interviews held later.

   Semi Structured interviews. DERPI had sent a letter to AP leaders from eight schools and the AP leader at a hospital to inform them about the interviews. The leaders that were approached each selected two parents for participation in the interview and passed that information to the researchers. They approached the parents to make an appointment for the interviews. The selected parents were chosen because they understand and speak English, their ability to understand the purpose of the interview and their skills to verbally express themselves. Not all parents responded, one recording got lost and finally a total six interviews were conducted and useful for the research. The interviews were done by two researchers to enhance reliability. One to ask the questions and who had the conversation with the respondent and the other made notes and secured recordings. The data from the interviews were analyzed in a quantitative way. By using inductive coding techniques, which mean constant coding of interview quotations, categories were generated with regard to the goals of the study (Baar, 2002; Baarda et al., 2001). To reduce the chance on bias in the analysis, the inductive coding and the categories created were kept as close to the original quotations of the participants as possible (Baar, 2002). The aim of the researchers was to get parents to share their experience with the program and reflect on the possible changes it caused. A quantitative analyzing method was used to keep the possibility open for new insight in the parents needs for support programs and a new perspective on their feelings of empowerment.

Results

   In this part the most notable results of the questionnaires and the semi structured interviews will be presented. Field orientation and the focus group interview were used as foundation and background information to get a clear focus for the questionnaires and the interviews. Answers are structured by the three aims of the research, the parents feelings of empowerment, the parental needs, and the barriers they experience in participating in support program's. The results from the parental self-reports will be presented and will be verified with the outcomes from the questionnaires as far as possible. The most significant categories that were developed in the analyzing process will be discussed here for every aim of the research. In every paragraph, another determinant will be handled and the most valid or indicative category found will be printed in *Italic*.

Empowerment

Exactly 50% of participants to our questionnaires knew about the program of AP before the school introduced it to them. Table 1 shows to what extent parents agreed or disagreed with the given theorems. To theorem B.1, I have decided to raise my children in a different way, 54% of the parents said they (1) agreed which indicates that parents see the relevance of the program and have the intention to change their child raising behavior.

Table 1. Parents Self-report On Feelings of Empowerment And Barriers To Participate in AP

	Agree				Not agree, Not disagree				Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
A.2	14	(43.8%)	3	(9.4%)	5	(15.6%)	6	(18.8%)	4	(12.5%)
A.3	21	(61.8%)	3	(8.8%)	9	(26.5%)	1	(2.9%)	-	(0.0%)
A.4	24	(72.7%)	4	(12.1%)	4	(12.1%)	1	(3.0%)	-	(0.0%)
A.6	14	(45.2%)	5	(16.1%)	7	(22.6%)	5	(16.1%)	-	(0.0%)
A.7	18	(54.5%)	6	(18.2%)	5	(15.2%)	1	(3.0%)	3	(9.1%)
A.17	11	(33.3%)	2	(6.1%)	12	(36.4%)	4	(12.1%)	4	(12.1%)
A.22	13	(40.6%)	1	(3.1%)	11	(34.4%)	2	(6.2%)	5	(15.6%)
B.1	19	(54.3%)	9	(25.7%)	4	(11.4%)	2	(5.7%)	1	(2.9%)
B.2	15	(41.7%)	17	(47.2%)	4	(11.1%)	-	(0.0%)	-	(0.0%)
B.3	19	(55.9%)	9	(26.5%)	4	(11.8%)	2	(5.9%)	-	(0.0%)
B.4	20	(58.5%)	8	(23.5%)	3	(8.8%)	3	(8.8%)	-	(0.0%)
B.16	15	(45.5%)	9	(27.3%)	7	(21.1%)	1	(3.0%)	1	(3.0%)
B.22	6	(17.6%)	12	(35.3%)	12	(35.3%)	3	(8.8%)	1	(2.9%)

A. N = 34
B. N = 37

Theorems:
A.2   The sessions take place at inconvenient hours
A.3   Child raising is something that happens at home and does not need to be discussed with others
A.4   I want to learn more about how to raise my children
A.6   You do not need a course to know how to raise my children, that is something you learn from your parents
A.7   I think this program is going to cost a lot of time and energy
A.17   A lot of parents in my environment are participating in school activities
A.22   Some parents interfere to much in school affairs
B.1   I have decided to raise my children in a different way
B.2   I am able to change my child raising behavior
B.3   After taking AP I gained more confidence in raising my children
B.4   The program gave me the knowledge I need to become an Active Parent
B.16   I think AP makes me more able to handle conflicts at home
B.22   If I experience problems in raising my children I always find the help I need

At the question if they feel they have the ability to change their way of parenting (B.2) almost 89% of the parents agreed or partially agreed. *Close family is the primary resource* parents use when experiencing difficulties in child raising. Their own parents, their partners or sisters are mentioned most frequently. Two mothers said not to have problems but they did say to go to family for advice in child raising. Mother nr. 6 specifically has good girlfriends she asks for advice to help in raising her child. She also has a supportive partner but emphasizes that it she thinks it is more important that a child has one happy parent then two unhappy caregivers. This was also strongly said by mother nr. 5 "So I don't want put

somebody to my kids just for me to live in apartment and to live good. I don't want that, because I don't want anything bad with my kids." The mothers seemed to be aware of the school being a resource for advice in child raising because all mothers but one said to turn to the teacher or social worker in school for advice. The parents who were interviewed seemed to be resourceful and mentioned to go online for advice or ask their boss, co-workers or other parents in school for advice in difficult family situations. But there was also a more reticent attitude within two mothers who said not to ask for advice outside of the family. Mother nr. 2 "I would never go outside or… They have peettantes enzo and I never even ask them to help" The questionnaires also reveal that parents primary go to their own parents for advice. Teachers at school or personal friends are a close second and most parents do not use the family doctor or church as a resource for enhancing their family situation. Some mothers have the feeling that their mastery over child raising increased by participating in AP. They declare to have difficulties in child raising and to find them hard to deal with sometimes. Mostly the child itself is not the problem but being separated from the father, working a lot or other family circumstances make that the problems heap up. The mothers say the program gave them tools to change their parental behavior and to create a better family environment. They mention tools like communicating more with their children, being more able to explain and make the child understand certain situation. Strategies they have learned involve patience, understanding, and improved communication with the child. Also to apply logical consequences and be more persistent in their behavior towards their children are frequently mentioned strategies. All parents said that *applying the new strategies goes back and forth,* it takes effort to integrate the new strategies to their daily parental routines. They say it does not come spontaneously and the new way of parenting needs work but they all name strategies they have tried and mention new features they learned to apply. It seems they have trust in their newly learned child raising abilities. Still it sometimes happens they go back to old habits and "just let the kid." Mother nr.4 recognizes that the old way was instant but had no long term results. She emphasized that the new way of raising makes sense but that it is easier to take the time to negotiate at home then in public spaces because at home she was more confident. "If it's like in the supermarket, then 'here take a toy!' You know, their terms, it's a little different." Mother nr. 6 does not want to complaint because she sees other mothers around her struggle harder then she has to with financial problems or difficult family circumstances. Not only concerns for the functioning of the child itself are mentioned, mother nr. 5 sees a society where there are many bar's and casino's but there is no room anymore for

children to play. Especially for underprivileged children who cannot afford it to play tennis at the hotels. She says "You want to go practice with them, they don't have no sights for it, especial in the playing ground, everything is mashed up." This mother tries to involve her son in activities of the church to keep mastery over the influence society has on him. She also mentioned that the program made her see that she herself was able to take care of her child. "First I think the teacher is better then me, I don't know how to do this, well after I could take my responsibility … for my children." More then 55% of the parents in the questionnaires say to agree with the theorem to have more confidence in child raising after participating in AP (see table 1, B.3). More than half of the participants state the program gave them the knowledge to become an Active Parent (B.4) and gave better ways to handle conflict situations at home (B.16). Parents do feel more responsible towards their family environment and larger society after the program AP. In their *family environment they have less tensions and try to create a more confident environment* that brings everybody together and where children are more involved. Mother nr.2 states that everybody is learning from the program and that her family can always improve itself. Mother nr.1 is more willing to compromise now and wants to be more patience with her children. "... before I hear and would have jumped… okay, you did this, this is your punishment and that's it!" Not every parent recognizes other places where they could use the strategies from AP. Mother nr.1 does not see how that would apply at her job although other mothers do see the use but have not had the chance yet to experience it. Mother nr.2 sees a difference because of the strategies of AP within her own attitude in public places. Not only does she set more boundaries towards her children but she also learned to stick to her guns in other situations. "Ik laat niet over me heenlopen meer. Weet je, want vroeger was ik ook niet zo" (I don't let them walk all over me anymore. You know, because I wasn't like that before.) The same is said by mother nr. 5 who states *she is more confident, more relaxed, is more educated now in what to say in her job* at an insurance company and that makes her very happy. Strategies of the program that parents saw as useful in larger society were how to talk to others, find out what the problem is, and involving them in making decisions.

Needs assessment

　　　To what extent parents see a problem with parental involvement in school differed for the questionnaires and the interviews. The results from the interviews give a quite scattered picture. The mothers say that *they see that most parents are involved with their children but*

that school activities are not well attended and that some parents do not seem to care at all. That lack of parental involvement is shown in the behavior of the child according to mother nr. 6. She sees another child showing nasty behavior towards her daughter and tries to explain her to be patience with that child. Mother nr.2 says that sometimes she sees not only the mother but also the father be involved, but other children have a serious lack of attention at home. "Ik kan ook niet zeggen hun schuld ofzo maar je moet toch tijd maken voor je kinderen. (…) Maar sommige kinderen missen echt aandacht" (I cannot say it is their fault or anything but you do have to make time for your children (…) some children really lack attention.) What most mothers want their children to accomplish in life is that they have good education and achieve their own goals. They see good education and success in school mostly as the parents responsibility. A parent should teach respect, make time for their child, and practically see to it they do their homework. Mother nr.2 emphasizes the importance of being a good roll model to your children. All mothers said that it is of great importance to be involved in some way or another. As mother nr.4 puts it "I have to speak with the teacher, to see where he good in, where he needs improvement. It is my responsibility to make sure that, because that's what I've got to do." These parents see the difference it makes to be involved in the school career of their children. In the questionnaires 33% of the participants responded that the parents in their environment were active in school activities (see table 1. A.17). And 40% the group thinks that some parents interfere too much with school affairs (A.22). Mother nr.2 said a lot of the other parents did not have a clue what the program was about. Mother nr.1 was one of them; *she didn't know exactly what the program was about and guessed it had something to do with kids and discipline*. She found that child raising needed to be different from her own generation because the children have a whole different mentality now. One mother read about the program in the newspaper but most of them had never heard of it and were informed by the school eventually. Mother nr.6 was not sure if the program would be for all the children in school and if she would be invited or not. This mother really wanted to attend because her own mother never did and she wanted to make a difference in her daughter's life. Not everyone found the strategies from the program belief worthy and mother nr.4 was pleasantly surprised that it worked after she tried them. "Participating in it, it did not seem realistic, because of how the society is and how the children are. (…) …just being consistent in it. And it works, it works!" Mother nr.1 also was quite skeptical in the beginning "…just to see what it's all about and if what they talk about would work" but later she saw the relevance for her family and wanted to see if there maybe were different ways

how she could deal with her children. Two mothers said they participated because it was compulsory according to the teacher at their children's school. Those mothers were not motivated to participate until after the first session after which they became very enthusiastic about the program. Although mother nr.6 did think it was a lot of reading and she needed to make an effort to keep up with the homework. But she did think *it was worth it and said it was very informative, helpful and she could identify herself with the program*. Mother nr.2 already knew the program because she already participated in a similar program and had a very positive attitude towards it. She was looking forward to participate and was interested in the content of the sessions. Also mother nr.4 was eager to participate because everything regarding her sons well being was important to her. They both wanted new information and answers to their questions about child raising. The mothers mentioned that not all parents in their environment were as open to participate. Mother nr.6 had a friend who didn't want to participate because the program came too late. The mother agreed with this and said the program should be done at a younger age "It should be done compulsory when parents registering their children at a school. (…) And that is before the damage is done." But she also said her friend had a fixed attitude about it and could have learned something in the program if she was open to it. The same thing is said by mother nr.5 who acknowledges that the program is very important to do for parents with an open mind. The Spanish speaking mother was very clear that she would like the program to be compulsory for all parents to do before their children could be registered to a school. This mother emphasized that especially the Dominican parents, like herself, are mostly lower educated parents in a difficult financial position with a small opportunity to learn about how to improve their family situation. The program had helped her to have a better way of communicating with her children and to become more relaxed and confident in society in general. She wanted to convey her experience to the other Dominican parents. Making the program compulsory would give those parents the push they need to make an effort to attend.

Barriers

　　All mothers had a quite strong opinion about practical reasons why not to attend the program. At least two mothers said it was conveniently organized. And *all others saw reasons why it could be difficult to attend the sessions but none of them took that as a reason not to come*. Mother nr. 4 said "But I would make an effort to put my gym time, dance time whatever away and attend. For me it is a priority" As long as there was good childcare for

their children parents made an effort to come to all three sessions. The only thing that could prevent them from participating were family circumstances or other circumstances beyond their control. Mother nr. 1 pointed out she had a daytime job and a husband at home so all circumstances were good and it was no problem for her to make sure she attended the program. But the participants did see others around them having a hard time supporting their families and being too preoccupied with their three or four jobs to participate. Mother nr.5 sees the Dominican parents around her struggling and sees that is a reason why it could be more difficult for them to attend. But she also thinks the program could be a viable resource to improve their situation. The program should be a priority for their own good. "Because they so busy making the money. [Those parents say]'Ehhh I don't have no time' You gotta make time! (…) Because they have time to go to the casino!" In the questionnaires over 43% of the parents answered that the sessions were at inconvenient hours (A.2) and almost 55% agreed that the program was going to cost a lot of time and energy (A.7). Still all these parents were present at the sessions when they filled out these questionnaires and did not take that as an excuse not to attend. The mothers did not see any reasons not to participate in the program "everything was to the point" and "Nothing pertaining to the program." Still mother nr. 6 could put into perspective why a friend of hers could not fit the program in her schedule. After the first session her friend said she already raised a seventeen year old son and did not need someone now to tell her how to raise her children. *The program did not have any priority for that friend* and that was why she did not want to accommodate her schedule to the program. She had a fixed attitude towards the program, something mother nr. 6 says she see's a lot on the island "I think it is quite a challenge for the program especially on the island because there are a lot very fixed attitudes …[a lot of people] who aren't open to new ideas" Mother nr. 4 sees a cultural difference between the way the program offers child raising and the way people in the Caribbean were raised themselves. This mother says she knows people around her that would get beaten and bruised in their childhood if they disobeyed their parents. For them it could be difficult to change their way of thinking in how to raise their own children. It is difficult to give your child respect, as the program asks you to, when you never received respect from your own parents when you were a child. Mother nr. 4 "So for them, to hear to have respect for a child… (…) you can't really blame them for their behavior." From the participating parents 72% wanted to learn more about how to raise their child (A.4). But talking about how you raise your own child is still seems difficult. At the theorem A.3 'child raising is something that happens at home and does not need to be

discussed with others' almost 62% of the parents at the sessions answered to agree with that. Also 45% says not to need a course to know how to raise their children and to learn that from their own parents, but the answer to that theorem is more spread out (A.6).

Discussion

In this section answers to the research questions are given and the three aims of the study are related to each other to answer the general research question. Also recommendations will be formulated and some suggestions for further research will be given.

The use of the strategies in larger society and the improvement of the family environment at home indicate an enhancement of the feelings of empowerment amongst the parents that participated in the program of Active Parenting (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Parents are empowered after participation in the program. The enhanced feelings of empowerment seem to be limited only by the awareness of viable resources that could not be demonstrated to be influenced by the program. This means that most of the expectations formulated in the introduction can be confirmed. The only prospect that could not be confirmed was that parents would report to use more resources for advice and support in their environment. Participating parents mentioned the obvious resources for which there were no reasons to assume those resources changed by the influence of the program. Although the quantity of the resources did not increase, there is still a possibility that the quality of the way parents use the resources did increase. Further research is necessary for firm conclusions. About the needs of the parents there were only questions and no expectations were formed. Only one mother said to have a need for information and to want to attend everything offered in relation to child raising prior to participation in the program. Most of the other parents did not seem to have a direct internal need for information and parental support. This could partly be explained by the lack of knowledge about the contents of the program; parents did not know what the program was about before they started to participate. This corresponds with the earlier statement that parents need to know about the objectives of a program to get them involved (McCurdy & Daro, 2001). Parents enroll in the program because teachers motivate them or say the program is mandatory. Then change in the parental needs is seen after participation in the first session when they see the program as a feasible and inspiring alternative way for themselves to raise their children. The program seems to make the parents aware of the changing society and how different strategies in parenting can contribute to educating their child to be a valued participant in that society. There still is a group of uninvolved parents that does not see the

relevance of AP for their situation and therefore do not participate or quit before finishing all three sessions. This corresponds with Lee et al. (2006) who state that if parents do not see the relevance of the program they could experience that as a barrier to participate. Cultural differences between the way parents were raised themselves and the strategies given in the program, were mentioned by participating parents as possible reasons why some others did not participate. Because the non-participating parents were not questioned, no firm conclusions can be stated why they did not participate in the program. For the exact motives of these parents and their possible prejudices against the program more research is necessary. Another expected barrier was that parents were too involved with their personal stressors to participate in the program (Lee et al., 2006; Nickerson et al., 2006). The mothers in the study said the only thing that could have prevented them from participation were circumstances beyond their control. Stressors and personal problems are in a certain way unforeseen and uncontrolled circumstances but are in most situations also more permanently present. The participating mothers did not have permanent situations like pressing financial problems or multiple jobs to sustain their families. They did know other parents in their personal environment who said to be too preoccupied making a living to attend the sessions. A Spanish speaking mother mentioned her fellow Dominican parents. This is a minority group with a difficult financial situation and the parents often have multiple jobs to support their families. This group could be an example of parents that are too preoccupied to attend the program. Still it is important to note that not all parents from the same group have the same needs for support (McCurdy & Daro, 2001). This means that the needs of the Spanish speaking and Dominican parents can differ greatly. Barriers in participating in a program are not solely a problem of individual parents but are also a matter of community involvement and commitment. If the members of a community and the leaders have a stake in the outcomes targeted by the program, it is more likely to succeed (Lee et al., 2006). A condition identified by Lee et al. (2006) is that the community and it's representatives have active participation in shaping solutions for problems in the program like funding and participation barriers. The same thing is said in the study of August, Winters, Realmuto, Tarter, Perry, and Hektner (2004), namely that shared ownership of a program creates support in the community, this can help to divert funds to or raise funds for a program. If community members perceive that a program is being forced on them without being given the necessary facilities and support, the program is not likely to endure (Lochman, 2000). On Sint Maarten the community members with the highest risk of being overloaded with responsibilities for the program are the

programs' trainers and leaders. Without the proper support from school boards and the government they will not be able to sustain the program. This because on Sint Maarten the AP program is not carried community wide yet. Not everyone knows the program or is involved with it in some way or another. A good start is made by training the local school teachers to be leaders and in that way enlarge human capital. But this human capital implicitly including support for the program, will take time to spread throughout the entire community.

Empowerment, parental needs and barriers are mutually related. Empowerment helps parents overcome barriers in all sorts of circumstances that prevent them from being involved in their children's lives. Empowerment increases the parent's sense of trust in self and others and making them more aware of viable resources (Shepard & Rose, 1995). This will increase their ability to overcome barriers. Empowerment also makes parents aware of the possibilities they have to improve their own and their children's lives. This creates a need for more knowledge, resources and support to keep enhancing their situation. If parents see the relevance of a support program they are more likely to participate Lee et al. (2006). The need for support and parental motivation also reduces barriers they experience that prevent them from participation in support programs (Nock and Photos, 2006). This corresponds with the findings of the study were a mother reports her friend not to participate because of the lack of relevance she has for the program.

There is a group of parents that does not see the relevance of the program for their situation because they do not have the internal need for support. This leads towards general recommendations for DERPI about how to reach the parents. These recommendations can be made more specific in additional reports. Firstly, all professionals involved with children have to know about the program and it's purposes. The main message should make everyone familiar with the name of the program, briefly with it's contents and where the program is offered. This information should be available with all youth care professionals and maybe also with church pastors and in community or sport centers. They can point families at risk towards the program. The parents themselves have to become aware of the specific relevance of the program for their situation. This can be done in two ways. First in short clear messages in the media where emphasis is put on the relevance of the program for the society of Sint Maarten and every family in it. The second way is through parents personal networks. This avoids to reach the already involved and interested parents again. Give enthusiastic parents the opportunity to have sessions at their house or church for example where they can invite their personal friends or co-workers. This gives parents the opportunity to share their

enthusiasm for the program amongst friends who would possibly never attend a session at school. It also shifts the part of the responsibility and workload of organizing the meetings from the leaders to the parents. At the same time involving parents creates shared ownership which makes the program more successful (August et al., 2004). The last recommendation is about the importance of the awareness that the feeling of empowerment could be transferred to other situations besides at home in raising the children. During the interviews it was noticed that not all parents seem to be aware of the possibility to use the strategies in other environments then at home. If this possibility was to be emphasized more by the leaders during the sessions it could make mothers more aware of this possibility. That gives mothers the opportunity to exercise the AP strategies at work, with neighbors or in larger society. That could give parents mastery not only over child raising but over their participation in larger society.

Several limitations to this study have to be taken into account when interpreting these results. The selection of the parents for participation in the interviews was done by the leaders of the program and assumption was they selected the higher educated and more articulated parents because of these parents' ability to express their views and opinions. This probably created a self selection of the more involved and participating parents for the interviews. Because of the suspicion of a positive selection of parents, the researchers already took that into account when asking the questions and in analyzing the data. This means these parents were not used as representatives for non-participating parents in the AP program. Furthermore all parents that were interviewed were mothers. This is partly as seen in society and schools were fathers are not the largest group involved and mothers dominate. The opinion of a father could have been a valuable addition to the study if a representative father would have been willing to participate. This was the problematic part because fathers who could have been willing to participate were the involved Dutch fathers with opinions very likely to be similar to the participating mothers. Because over 70 parents filled out the questionnaire and gave their opinion about the three aims of the study it was not thought necessary to interview an extensive group of parents. The interviews gave a thorough and detailed image of the parents perceptions which could be verified with the information from the questionnaires. The 6 mothers contributed in two ways. By confirming findings from the questionnaires on one hand and bringing in new topics on their mind and suggestions for possible explanations and backgrounds on the other. To avoid social acceptability in the questionnaires it was mentioned that the researchers were independent trainees from DERPI and that the research would be

conducted for Utrecht University. Emphasis was put on the fact that parents own opinion was the most valuable for us and that there was no right or wrong answer to any question. This study aims at creating an image that is as genuine as possible of the situation amongst parents on the island of Sint Maarten. Though it was not possible to speak to all parents in all situations, by consulting several experts to aim our focus in the right direction, doing extensive field orientations, and using the principle of triangulation, the reliability of the results was optimized.

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