

THE PREVENTION PYRAMID

an integral approach to crime prevention

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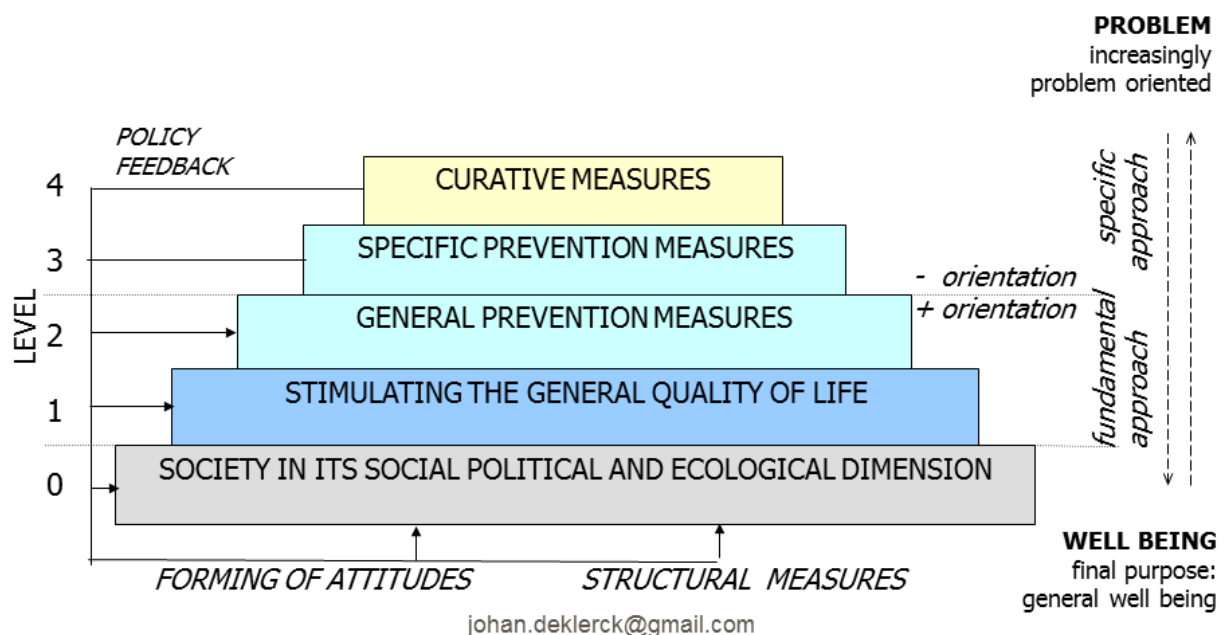
A brief summary of :

Deklerck, J. (2011), De preventiepiramide. Preventie van probleemgedrag in het onderwijs. Acco, Leuven, Belgium

An integral and positive approach

The 'prevention pyramid' is a model that charts very diverse prevention measures and approaches to the problem, and that we quote in the margins of this contribution to better indicate the relation between prevention and curative measures. The basic idea is an “integral and positive” approach, which is not only concentrating on individual problem behaviour and reducing a complex reality to behaviour of the individual, but also oriented on the larger school and societal context

There are many types of prevention or approaches to the problem. All in one way or another have as goal a reduction in criminality and a qualitative improvement in society. We can categorize their contribution to the social climate into four levels, from very general to very specific. The key here is the degree of problem orientation versus wellbeing: How strongly does the problem manifest itself and how clearly do the measures highlight the problem, or contribute to a general wellbeing.



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Four levels

'Fighting fires', taking action with respect to conflicts is the fourth level. This can be punishment, mediation, judicial intervention, etc. Level three consists of prevention measures that shed light on the problem. The installation of locks and cameras for example and also the discussion of possible conflicts as an introduction to mediation can be very useful, but highlight the problems. Measures such as the improvement of school infrastructure, broad pedagogical intervention and good communication have a preventative significance and push possible problems to the background. They belong to levels one and two of the prevention pyramid, of which you find the diagram above.

The pyramid provides an approach to prevention that is enlarging narrow and punitive oriented prevention approaches. *The prevention pyramid orders, broadens and orients prevention measures.* The central criteria is their contribution to the improvement of the quality of life in the school and society. Many prevention projects emphasize certain problems (e.g. information concerning drugs, camera surveillance, sanctioning and disciplining problem students). They focus on problems and are located at levels 3 and 4 of the pyramid. We support an integral approach (all levels) with the accent on positive measures (level 1 and 2). This approach gives than direct and indirect answers to violence and problem behaviour, and opens a larger perspective on problem behaviour and conflicts.

E.g. conflict mediation can be situated on levels 3 and 4, but mediation is not automatically a fundamental answer to diverse problems. After all, mediation in conflicts does not automatically lead to a different school culture of positive and open communication and to a better social climate in general. An important reason for this is that mediation throws light upon possible problems in the school. Mediation is perhaps one of the best solutions to deal with conflicts. But it also means that a school culture focuses upon conflicts and problems, and thus not on positive themes such as good collaboration, multi-cultural relations and all sorts of interesting school activities. For a positive school climate it is better that conflicts and problems are forgotten as quickly as possible, and that they resolve into a broadly established positive atmosphere. However, to the extent that it is integrated more broadly into the school, mediation can bring about another attitude among teachers and students, and be an alternative to the powerlessness that often goes along with escalating conflicts. But this does not happen automatically. Problem children and youngsters are in such a school feeling more at ease, and are less going into problematic behaviour.

Problems such as vandalism or violence should be looked at from a larger perspective. There is a risk that aggression against persons can shift to aggression against materials and v.v.. Another very complex dynamic is the interaction between victim and offender of violence. A deeper analysis shows that in their interaction and the escalation towards the conflict, there is a complex intertwining of experiences and responsibilities. This is also the case with self-destructive behaviour. To arrive at a broader cultural shift and a more fundamental prevention within the school, more is thus required, than only coping problematic behaviour in a symptomatic way.