

The *stichting Ontdekplek* (Discovery Centre) is an independent foundation and is a cooperative initiative between primary education and social cultural work within a special programme for deprived children.

The Ontdekplek is a place in Haarlem where children aged between 4 and 12 can gain an introduction to the basics of modern technology. Through a medium of exciting experiments with safe and simple materials, they learn through play some of the early concepts of technology which will be covered later in their school career and in trades and professions.

Activities include bricklaying with miniature bricks, experiments with light, colour and sound, building and testing aeroplanes, helicopters, flying saucers and parachutes. They can also work safely with electricity to operate lights and run machines. They also make constructions from paper, building the highest tower or the strongest bridge, and build dykes and dams in streaming water. Photography and the use of a dark room are also available.

Originally the Ontdekplek was developed as a project for deprived children in order to enhance their development and their potential for further education. Now the scheme includes others, from the retarded to the gifted.

Discovering The Ontdekplek

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Haarlem, Holland

How a venture in The Netherlands takes technology to deprived children in after-school sessions



■ The Ontdekplek in and after school

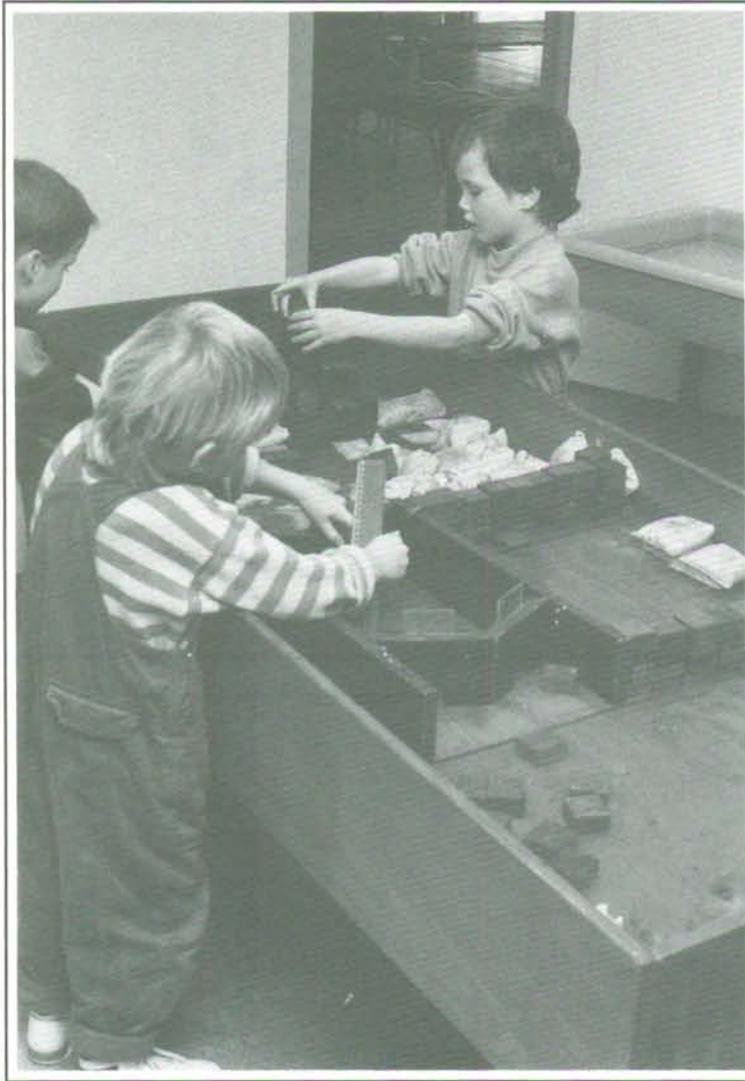
The Ontdekplek offers a programme in school as well as after it. Some skills may be taught in school and applied in the Ontdekplek, or learned in the Ontdekplek and applied in school. The Ontdekplek also offers children who are not taught technology in school an opportunity to become acquainted with it.

In the Ontdekplek (in the after-school programme), children can choose from a long list of possibilities the activity they would like to take part in. From a central desk we hand out the materials needed as well as simple work-books which we produce ourselves. In the work-books hardly any written text is used. They are composed of drawn instructions so that children who read little (either because of learning difficulties or because they come from Morocco or Turkey and Dutch is a new language) can work on a similar level to others in their age group. The children work very independently, but further guidance is always available if they need it.

■ The mobile Ontdekplek

After a year it became obvious that many children had difficulty in finding the Ontdekplek and that we didn't reach the deprived children we had set out to benefit as they tended not to venture from their neighbourhoods.





To tackle these problems we developed the Mobile Ontdekplek. This was mobile in the sense that materials needed for Ontdekplek activities would be transported to a school or community centre, where a temporary Ontdekplek would be set up on the spot. We have focused on a cooperative venture between primary schools and social cultural work since we believe that knowledge is only really effective when used in leisure when it can be expanded if necessary. The social and cultural workers provide great opportunities for this, and we can offer extra services to schools and community centres to extend their work.

In a school project we provide two weeks of technology lessons either with in-class instruction for one teacher and one group or for three teachers and three groups, after which the teachers are able to teach the basics of technology. Alternatively, the whole team can enrol for an eight-hour course specifically designed for their school. All the materials and work-books are supplied by us.

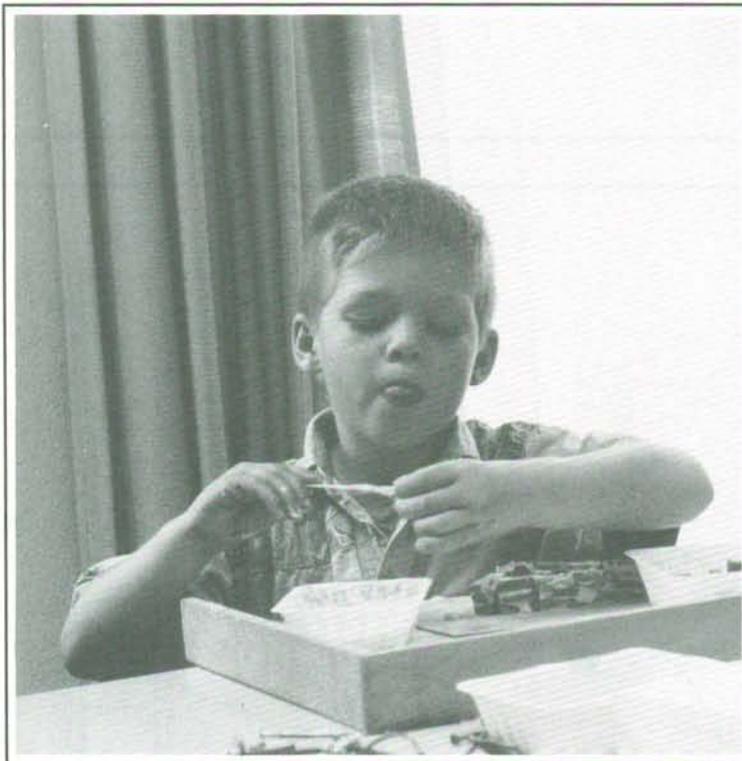
We also train the social cultural workers and their volunteers so they themselves are then able to offer at least a six-week programme. We advise on the content of the programme offered and donate the material needed as well as work-books for the children. We strongly stimulate the cooperation of the school and community centre in the same neighbourhood, to bring their activities together.

Even though the Mobile Ontdekplek takes place less than once a year, we have met with a great deal of cooperation, especially from social cultural workers, whose enthusiasm often motivates schools to participate.

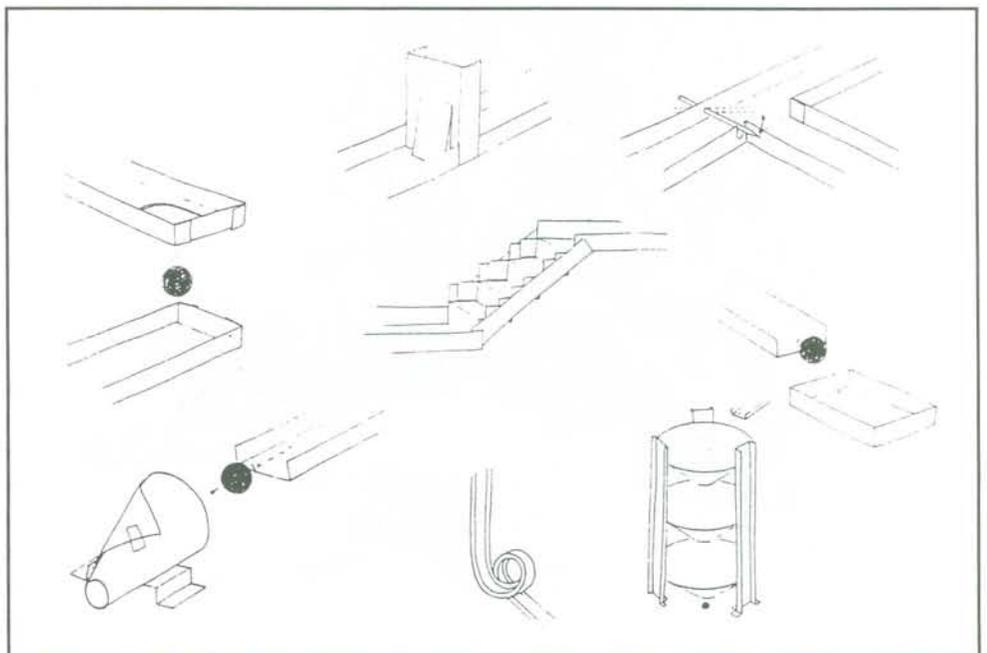
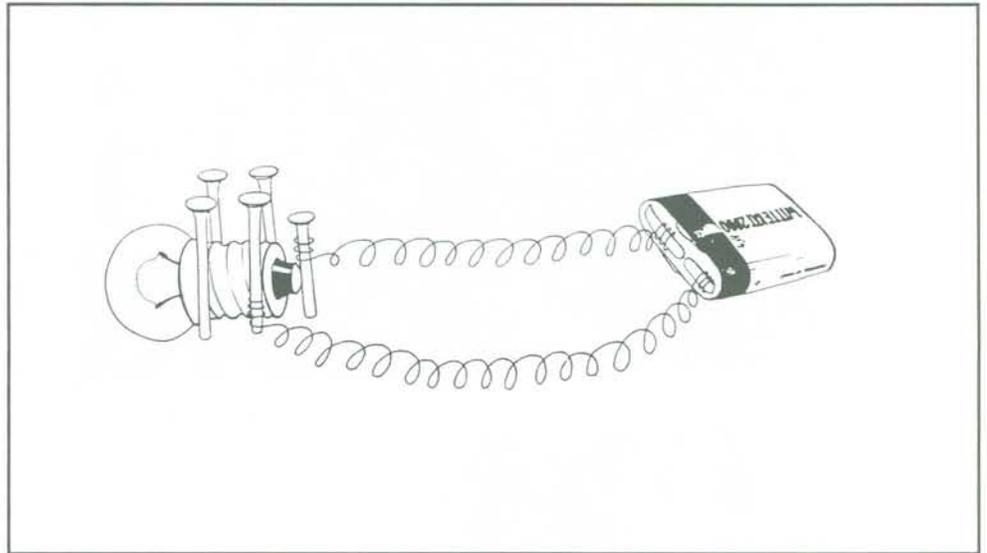
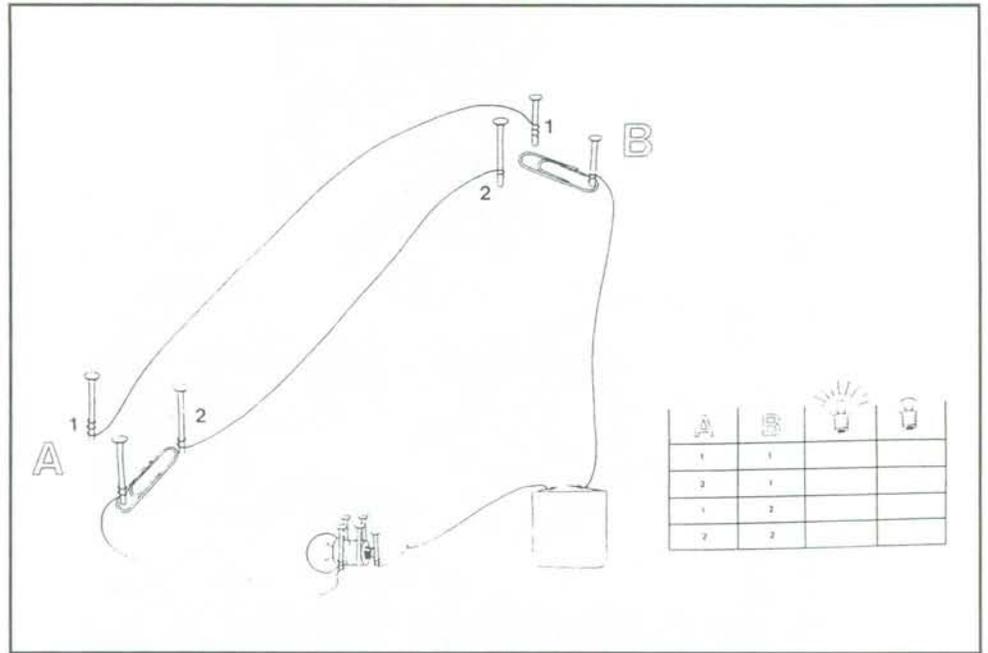
■ Finances

Finances have always been a problem for the Ontdekplek. We mostly survive on special grants aimed at deprived children, supplemented by money from the sale of work-books.

At the moment we are only able to finance 19 professional work hours for the work of the Ontdekplek and the Mobile Ontdekplek, which means that we have to rely on voluntary workers also. For the Mobile Ontdekplek we have a budget of £2500, to cover the cost of materials, work-books and transport. The schools and community centres pay a small fee for the use of the materials. Currently we need money for materials and have to ask for a



Examples from the Ontdeplek's visual work-books



financial contribution which amounts to £1.50 per child per afternoon session. Obviously we try to keep the charge as low as possible so that lack of money does not prevent children from taking part.

■ Further developments

The Mobile Ontdekplek has been so successful that two community centres in other cities have started up permanent branches. The government supplied a small grant to build a Mobile Ontdekplek to cover the rest of the province.

Since written language is not used for instruction, the work-books can be used virtually anywhere. They have been tested in Poland and will soon be published in Germany.

Together with the University of Central England, the Hogeschool Alkmaar and the University of Oldenburg we have started an exchange programme for schoolteachers and teacher-trainers.

■ Children's experiences

Colin, aged eight, rates the Ontdekplek highly: "Why watch TV? TV makes you stupid, whereas here I learn a lot and make many friends".

At the time when some of the dykes in Holland were in danger of breaking due to widespread flooding, the children were building dykes in swollen waterways. They felt it was a serious business, and helping to uphold the reputation of the Dutch people as dyke builders. As Jurriaan, one of the builders, said, "It looks like playing with water but there is a lot more to it. When the dykes break through again, at least we will know how to solve the problem".

Children obviously enjoy working with the Ontdekplek, and working with technology seems to be particularly successful in enhancing the self-esteem of deprived children. Paul is a classic example of this. Talking busily all the time, he doesn't settle for a moment at anything, but after a few afternoon sessions with the Ontdekplek he has begun to settle more. The counsellor has to give him special attention, but his attention is growing each week. Obviously the attitude and support of counsellors is very important in making this a success.

Girls too enjoy working in the Ontdekplek. Natasja and Marijke both have clear views on the advantages of the Ontdekplek compared with school:

"At school all the subjects have to be taught in projects and subject blocks. Four weeks soldering and then four weeks on something else, so that gets boring after a while. In the Ontdekplek there are many activities and you can choose whatever you feel like at the moment."

Natasja is already working on her own future: she wants to be a sculptor. "I need to know how to solder with metal plates and how to work with stone, and I will also need to know about bricklaying."