

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY

5.1.1 Introductory orientation, statement of the problem, aim and plan of study

(a) **The breakthrough of educating and teaching in intervening with autistic children**

The earlier view that autistic children are uneducable, and unreachable and, therefore, are to be committed to lifelong institutional care, is quickly disappearing. The view that autism, as a phenomenon, is the area of study, work, and interest only of psychiatry also is waning nowadays because of the awareness that a basic need of such a child is educative teaching. Until the 1960's, it was thought that psychiatric, psychic treatment was indispensable for autistic children to eliminate their "emotional disturbances". However, during the subsequent fifteen years (with a substantial increase since 1970), increasingly more schools have been established for autistic children overseas and in the Republic of South Africa (RSA), which are an important breakthrough with respect to the nature of the continuous intervention with such children.

In certain circles, intervention with an autistic child, irrespective of its/her form, still has a very strong medical, psychiatric, psychological, and therapeutic flavor, and often there still is mention of a *patient* who must be *treated*, and not of a restrained child who has a need for *orthopedagogic-orthodidactic* intervention.

(b) **The concept "autism" and the name "autistic child"**

The word "autism" is derived from the Greek word "autos" meaning "self" (1 p 231). The most conspicuous characteristic of such a

child is a persistent, excessive, and almost unceasing turning into him/herself [introversion], or existing only for him/herself, and it is the point of departure for practically all descriptions of autism as a handicap.

An autistic child is a non-adult person who is completely and entirely turned inward, shows no interpersonal affection, or attraction and, therefore, does not really encounter fellow persons, is not open to the appeal of the surrounding reality, as an invitation to explore it, is not directed to the world in a meaning-seeking way, and, thus, does not enter it in an exploratory manner. Also, such a child dwells in a frightening, incomprehensible, chaotic world, is not only insecure, unsure, is generally inarticulate, and has language problems, is thrown back on, and caught up in his/her own body, but he/she also clings firmly to a trustworthy little world, and maintains an order by often persisting with stereotypic, compulsive, and ritualistic behaviors.

(c) The causes of autism

Autism today is still largely a mystery, as Leo Kenner described this phenomenon in children in 1943. There is still not a generally acceptable explanation for the onset and causes of autism and, although causes can still not be incontestably proven, it seems that those related to biological and neurological brain abnormalities are the most acceptable and probable (2 p 47).

(d) Prognosis

Because autism is still not fully understood or explained, it seems to be impossible to “cure” it. Successful treatment of children with autism is not yet claimed in the areas of neurosurgery, pharmacology, and psychotherapy (3 p 7). Special educative teaching is the only way in which an autistic child can be supported to a way of existence more worthy of a human being, which is characterized by socializing, speech-language acquisition, and communication, and the mastery of cultural systems.

(e) Statement of the problem

(i) Preliminary statement of the problem

Throughout the world, teaching and working with autistic children is one of the newest branches of special education, and it tends to follow medical, psychiatric, and psychological perspectives. Thus, there is a need for a pedagogically grounded involvement with the *psychic life, educating*, as well as a *theory and practice of teaching* these children. While working with autistic children, there is a special focus on their extremely conspicuous behaviors, without their educative situatedness being central. Thus, there is no mention of an explication of the psychic life of an autistic child and its actualization in an educative situation. The influence of emotional-, volitional-, cognitive- and normative-accompaniment (educating to the actualization of a child's psychic life) is seldom considered. In addition, the deeper significance of a stabilized emotional life, and the mastery of language for such a child's becoming adult clearly are not grasped or explicated.

From the above, it is concluded that there is a pressing need for a psychopedagogical perspective on an autistic child-in-educating to provide a better understanding of the actualization of his/her psychic life.

(ii) A more precise statement of the problem

In the previous sections, the need for an educative fathoming of the psychic life of an autistic child is pointed out. The science committed to such a study is pedagogics, and, particularly, its part-perspective psychopedagogics.

Psychopedagogics is involved with everything regarding the psyche of a child, as it becomes actualized in a pedagogical situation. It studies a child's psychic life in terms of experiencing, lived experiencing, willing, knowing, and behaving, as realized in educative situations (4 p 28).

Sonnekus (5 p 11) does not view the psychic life as a static entity, but as a potentiality which a child has been given, and which he/she must begin to *actualize* at once. Then, the question immediately arises regarding how the psychic life of a child-in-educating

becomes visible and is actualized. It is embodied in two equally original, inseparably connected structures within an educative situation, i.e., learning and becoming, which qualify as modes by which the psychic life manifests itself (6 p 43).

According to Sonnekus and Ferreira (7 pp 142-145, 192-219), an essence-analysis of learning and becoming reveals that:

1. learning and becoming are actualized as a unitary event in a child's becoming adult;
2. adequate accompaniment (educating and teaching) by adults is a precondition for a good quality of learning and becoming;
3. learning and becoming are normative in nature;
4. modes of becoming, such as exploring, emancipating, distancing, differentiating, and objectifying manifest themselves within the actualization of a child's psychic life;
5. the actualization of the psychic life can be realized in terms of different levels of behaving (senso-pathic, senso-gnostic, pathic or pathic-gnostic as well as on affective-cognitive levels);
6. effective learning can only occur when there is adequate affective, cognitive and normative accompaniment (guidance) in pedagogic situations in which the pedagogic relationship structures are realized;
7. learning is grounded in emotional stability, a positive willingness, and intellectual effort; and
8. learning is a phenomenon of becoming in that it is a precondition for it.

Considering the above, the question arises regarding how the psychic life of an autistic child-in-educating is actualized (or possibly inadequately actualized) with respect to learning and becoming. In other words, the question concerns an autistic child's own role, and how it is realized in the events of learning and becoming, as matters of becoming adult. In addition, an answer must be found to the question of what this child's role is in making his/her own, or appropriating, also known as giving meaning to the accompaniment by his/her educators. A question which must necessarily be answered is how the role of an autistic child appears in the events of learning and becoming, and what the educative and

teaching tasks ought to be for this “becoming adult” to provide him/her with the maximum support to adequately (if possible) become adult. These questions are considered in chapters two, three and four.

As far as educatively accompanying an autistic child is concerned, the stumbling blocks on the path and the means for the most successful psychopedagogic accompaniment of this child to an adequate self-actualization of his/her psychic life potentialities is shown in terms of affective, cognitive, and normative accompaniment.

As far as teaching an autistic child is concerned, the most important aims of a meaningful, comprehensive teaching practice are explicated, and it is indicated which orthodidactic measures must be taken to be able to ensure the needed teaching and learning effects in a school for autistic children.

(f) Aim of the study

The author’s aim is to explicate the problematic regarding the actualization of the psychic life of an autistic child-in-educating, and to enquire about all this entails. More explicitly, the aim is to investigate the actualization of the psychic life of this child with respect to learning and becoming, to think through and descriptively explicate this actualization in terms of psychopedagogical categories to better understanding it. There is also an attempt to determine what tasks this (possibly) different actualization of learning and becoming by such a child holds for teaching, so that learning and becoming can occur as adequately as possible. Also, there is the prospect of offering guidelines, with the aim of establishing measures directed to realizing a more adequate world relationship, and becoming adult of an autistic child, if they should progress disharmoniously.

5.1.2 The autistic child’s actualization of learning

a General

Learning is a genuine human phenomenon of a child which is present from the beginning and is a necessary precondition for becoming. Because of his/her being directed to fellow-persons, as well as his/her meaning-seeking, meaning-revealing, and meaning-giving directedness to reality, a child realizes his/her learning potentialities by means of sensing, attending, observing, perceiving, imagining and fantasizing, thinking, as well as remembering all of which are carried by his/her intelligence and possessed language (8 pp 63-76). A learning initiative implies exertion and is the result of taking a personal position by which he/she, as a totality-in-function, is present; that is, his/her learning possesses affective, willing, striving, cognitive, didactic-pedagogic, and normative moments which co-define the effectiveness of this initiative; in addition, learning is further actualized in terms of specific learning contents.

A child learns because he/she participates in a situation (Langeveld), and actively directs him/herself in his/her openness to the learning contents which address him/her by giving sense and meaning to them. However, learning is also a matter of educating, in that an adult unlocks [presents] reality to a child.

b Learning and the autistic child

When learning by an autistic child is considered from a psychopedagogic perspective, it must be emphasized that, for a variety of reasons, it progresses inadequately. Because of the absence of a manifested, genuine human being aware of him/herself as a person, as well as others, and the lack of the meaningfulness of things in surrounding reality, without which *sensing* is hardly realized, an autistic school beginner seemingly carries out an “unaware” way of existing. Because his/her emotional life can be described as unawake, labile. and even impulsive, his/her sensing is extremely labilized, and this deprives him/her of the will and initiative to conquer and master reality. Self-initiated, cognitively exerted activities are lacking because his/her labile and impulsive affective life hinder the leap from sensing, as a pre-conceptual level of experiencing, to observing, and listening on a cognitive level of experiencing.

With a normal child, sensing initiates learning because it leads to wondering, curiosity, and attributing meaning to the content sensed, but characteristic of an autistic child is an uncommon, ineffectual use of the senses of sight and hearing, as well as a great attraction to tactile, olfactory, and gustatory impressions, merely for the sake of a primitive sensing where this primarily involves bodily satisfaction.

With respect to *attending*, as a precondition for all gnostic-cognitive modes of learning, such as perceiving, imagining, fantasizing, thinking, and remembering, an autistic child under actualizes his/her attending because of an excessive turning into him/herself, and a continual withdrawing from reality. Phenomena such as hyperactivity, heightened distractibility, poor concentration, quickly fluctuating attending, a short attention span, along with an inappropriate attending to trivia, and a compulsive captivation by only a few aspects of the surrounding reality (perseveration), all not only make it difficult for such a child to enter understanding or cognitive ways of being, but also a regurgitation of meaningfully lived experience, and now congealed possessed experience.

Besides inadequate attending, *observing*, and *listening*, as intentional totality-acts, are also under actualized by an autistic child because they in no sense are meaning-searching, meaning-taking, and meaning giving, as well as exploratory in nature. An autistic child usually does not show a directedness to the face, or a positive attunement to the spoken voice of another and, thus, often shows a so-called empty look, pseudo-blindness, and pseudo-deafness.

Perceiving, a gnostic way of lived experiencing on a distanced, cognitive level, which is involved with the real, actual, factual, objectively perceivable, and is actualized by way of a universal medium (9 p 84), for a variety of reasons, is also under actualized by an autistic child. Such a child's defective speech, language acquisition, and mastery, as well as a lack of being directed to fellow persons and reality, spoken language communication, the child-question, spontaneous communication of lived experiences to another, i.e., human openness, all unquestionably imply an

inadequate actualization of perceiving and all other gnostic-cognitive modes of learning.

Imagining and *fantasizing*, gnostic-cognitive modes of learning which are propelled by a child's possessed experience, and intentionality as directedness, and offer possibilities for a more distanced, and further surpassing of reality, and allow space for a creative involvement with reality, are similarly actualized inadequately by an autistic child. Excessive self-orientation, continual withdrawal from, and giving deficient meanings to (interpretive abilities) reality is shown as reasons for this, e.g., as are evident in the following pronouncements by Bettelheim (10 p 81): "The more the person withdraws from reality into autism, the emptier, the more repetitious and stereotyped becomes his fantasy life. Autistic children are not usually interested in what goes on at any distance from them". Also Wing (11 p 220) holds the same opinion and asserts the following: "Autistic children have little imagination and can rarely be interested in fictional events".

Thinking, a gnostic-cognitive mode of learning, which is directed to abstracting, conceptualizing, ordering, and solving problems, is supported and supplemented by all the other modes of learning (12 p 129), and also cannot be fully actualized by an autistic child. Frye (13 p 431) emphasizes the fact that autistic children have difficulty in ordering their thinking because seeing relationships, generalizing, and classifying do not appear.

Because there is such a close affinity and interdependence between the development of thinking and the progressive mastery of language, it is understandable that a passive, language-deficient autistic child under actualizes thinking as an active act of understanding. There must also be an awareness that an adherence to a fixed, rigid way of existing not only results in an autistic child's world remaining unordered, but also that his/her appropriation of knowledge, memory, fantasizing, and thinking cannot develop.

What has been said about an autistic child's deficient seeing relationships, generalizing, integrating new knowledge with existing possessed experience, at the same time, stress his/her inadequate *remembering*, as a gnostic-cognitive mode of learning. A

phenomenon such as meaningless parroting (echolalia) unquestionably refers to a deficient attribution of meaning to spoken language and is only one of an autistic child's obstacles to remembering adequately.

An autistic child often shows a competence in being able to recall incidental or less important matters, and generally to recall and make present memories without error, or change. Things are recalled very precisely and recited as initially learned without one's own interpretation or reformulation of the concerned content, there is no integration of the new knowledge with existing possessed experience, and varied [flexible] ways of applying knowledge, or transferable insights are not shown.

Because the adequate actualization of sensing and attending, the accompanying modes of learning, as well as the cognitive modes of learning of perceiving, etc. do not take place with an autistic child, it is obvious that he/she also will not be able to properly actualize his/her *intelligence*. Some autistic children create the image to the uninformed that they are particularly "intelligent", especially because they can show outstanding achievements in simple construction tasks, where the correct handling of building blocks, jigsaw puzzles, or form board materials are required during an investigation of intelligence. In sharp contrast to these achievements, as "islands" of intelligence, it is conspicuous that autistic children continually become blocked when they are confronted with intellectually demanding tasks requiring adequate mastery of language, categorical abstraction, abstract thinking, and reasoning, integration of knowledge, seeing relationships, varied application of one's own insights, originality, a rich imagination, and creativity (14 pp 11, 79, 86, 203, 204; 15 pp 32, 163, 246; 16 p 431).

Hence, it is found that there is an inadequate actualization of learning with an autistic child, which includes an under actualization of his/her psychic life potentialities, and a limitation in the shifting of the horizon of his/her experiential world.

5.1.3 The becoming [adult] of an autistic child-in-educating

a General

Because he/she is openness and directedness to the world, from the beginning, a child is actively involved in actualizing his/her given potentialities; this implies that, by his/her conduct, actions, and behaviors, he/she takes the initiative in his/her becoming in the direction of the adult lifeworld. A child has the potentialities to change at his/her disposal through self-actualization or becoming, but their proper realization is clearly a matter of educating. Viewed from a psychopedagogic perspective, a child actualizes his/her becoming through experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, knowing, and behaving, as ways of actualizing learning and becoming. The following is an explication of five essences of becoming, also called modes of actualization of the psychic life of a child-in-educating with specific reference to the autistic child.

b Essences of the psychic life of an autistic child-in-education as essences of becoming

(i) Experiencing as an essence of becoming

Ferreira (17 p 53) describes experiencing as follows: “Experiencing is an original, continuous act of turning to and reaching (grasping) reality, which leads to knowing. It is the beginning of a becoming aware of reality by which cognitive, or conceptual thought is made possible. Experiencing is the first orientation of the subject (person) in his/her surrounding world, and forms the basis for an understanding of the world on a higher level”.

Experiencing is of cardinal importance to a child because it forms the ground for all learning, and represents a way of actualizing learning and becoming. Linschoten, as cited by Sonnekus and Ferreira (18 p 47), comments on this as follows: “Experiencing transforms us from moment to moment, it changes us and the way we experience things. One who has experienced has a history behind him that has taught him to see, to think and to lived experience differently”.

Experiencing makes demands of a child: a lived experiencing of safety and security, as well as an adequate mastery of language,

because experiences must be ordered. Where experiencing means a purposeful moving to, an active self-involvement with, a reaching of reality from which experiential knowledge is acquired, it is obvious that an autistic child, because of a labile affective life, a weak willing, inadequate exploratory attitude, a fear for the unknown, a deficient mastery of language, and attribution of meaning, a lack of interest in new things, a convulsive adhesion to the familiar, no active dialogue with reality, is carried out and, therefore, their experiential knowledge is not adequately build up.

(ii) Willing as an essence of becoming

The fact that willing is indissolubly intertwined with the cognitive, as well as emotional life especially comes to the fore in an autistic child's deficient potentialities for giving meaning, as shown in his/her urge to preserve the same circumstances, and insistence on resisting change in a specific order, as well as his/her deep insecurity, and deficient exploratory attitude in encountering the unknown. Willing, as the initiator of actualizing an experiential world, thus, appears weakened with an autistic child. The direction-giving effect of willing is weak and, thus, an autistic child appears to be aimless. With an autistic child, its propelling power remains directed to the vital level (his/her intentional directedness is thwarted by his/her imprisonment in vital-pathic lived experiences), and it is difficult to move to a psychic-spiritual level, where there are willful actions, choices, and decisions.

(iii) Lived experiencing as an essence of becoming

Sonnekus (19 p 23) has describes the concept lived experience "... as the intentionally determined, subjective, personal (pathic-normative) taking a position by a child as a totality-in-function in his communication with reality". According to Sonnekus (20 p 118), lived experiencing is the meaningful completing, refining attribution of meaning, which necessarily pushes through to valuing, or evaluating what is experienced.

That lived experiencing is an important essence of becoming is expressed by the fact that a child must continually and progressively show an elevation in the level of his/her lived

experiencing. The gradual elevation in lived experiencing from the pathic, to the affective, and from the gnostic, to the cognitive, etc. indicate that a child continually actualizes his/her learning and becoming on higher levels.

An autistic child differentiates him/herself from other children in that, as far as his/her emotional lived experiencing is concerned, he/she remains bogged down unusually long in senso-pathic lived experiencing because of an affinity for vital-pathic lived experiences. His/her emotional lived experiencing also shows an intense and prolonged character of impulsivity, and lability.

Concerning the knowing lived experiencing of an autistic child, it is mentioned that such a child usually remains bogged down in extremely primitive senso-gnostic lived experiences and, at the same time, show an affinity for bodily satisfaction (satisfaction of impulses, and desires according to a psychoanalytic view). Thus, there is no mention of a progressive ordering in his knowing directedness, and a breakthrough to cognitive lived experiencing.

Normative lived experiencing presupposes gnostic-cognitive, as well as affective self-actualization, and because an autistic child under actualizes both of these modes, this largely explains the problematic of the normative accompaniment, as well as the normative self-actualization of such a child.

(iv) Knowing as an essence of becoming

Knowing is viewed as an activity, or action which results in the acquisition of knowledge, insight, and understanding. The fact that an autistic child does not live in a connected way with others, and manifests a conspicuously confused [obscuring] intentionality, implies an inadequate disposition to know, as well as a deficient intuitive knowing. A conspicuous absence of original observations, and informative assertions, as well as the absence of the child-question indicate that with an autistic child, a clarifying and questioning knowing are not fully actualized.

Because language is a child's most important medium for exploring and constituting his/her own lifeworld, it is not surprising that an

autistic child, because of a deficient language mastery, has difficulty in arriving at a structuring and understanding knowing.

(v) Behaving as an essence of becoming

As a genuine human phenomenon, behaving is manifested in the various relationships a person establishes with his/her world. The situational boundness of behaving clearly emerges when Buytendijk (21 p 185) says that behaving is a way of being which corresponds to an attitude, i.e., to a meaningful involvement with something, whether it be an object, fellow persons, living beings, etc. Also, a person behaves as a totality in relation to his/her world (i.e., bodily, emotionally, psychic-spiritually, intellectually, normative-ethically, and religiously) and, therefore, behaving is the meaningful crowning of the totality of a person's involvement with reality.

Where a normal child continually actualizes his/her behaving on a progressively higher level, and has the ability to shift his/her horizon of the known and familiar, an autistic child not only shows an intense affinity for the familiar, but also an unusual need to preserve daily routines, and a fixed pattern of living according to which activities are carried out; there are stereotypic, peculiar behaviors, compulsive, and ritualistic activities, an affinity for specific objects which apparently are meaningful for him/her, as well as an endless daily fidgeting with a specific object (22 p 153; 23 p 64).

With respect to expressive behavior, a way of being which figures forth as emotional expressions within interpersonal situations of encounter, the conspicuous differentness of an autistic child, in this connection, is clear from the following assertion by Prick (24 pp 166, 276): "Van echte representatieve bewegingen, die bewuste intenties tot uitdrukking brengen is bij het infantile autisme geen sprake, daar autistische kinderen niet tot bewuste intensies kunnen geraken. Uitdrukkingsbewegingen en representatieve bewegingen vertonen zich pas in een subject-wereld-verhouding, waarbij de twee pollen gevormd worden respectievelijk door mij en de anders. Het is juist dese subject-wereld-verhouding, die bij deze kinderen gestoord zijn".

Thus, an autistic child proceeds inadequately, via arbitrary and expressive behavior to actualizing the possibilities of his/her psychic becoming.

c Modes of actualizing the psychic life, as becoming, within an educative situation with special reference to an autistic child

Positive changes in a child's becoming are manifested by means of a progressive and sustained exploring, signs of becoming emancipated, increased distancing, and objectifying in his/her behaviors, and a conspicuous differentiating which also include his/her possibilities of choosing.

(i) Exploring as becoming

Exploring, a fundamental given in the psychic life, as a way of becoming means a child's intentionally directed to going out to and exploring the world. Characteristic of an autistic child, in this regard, is that the initiative to explore is often lacking. An autistic child is not only unaware of him/herself and others as persons, but also of important things in his/her environment, shows no appropriate directedness to the things around him/her, no self-determined, intellectually effortful activity, or creativity, and does not him/herself succeed in establishing a meaningful world.

(ii) Emancipating as becoming

According to Langeveld (25 p 49), within the principle of exploration, there is another genetic [developmental] principle available, i.e., a child wants to be someone him/herself—this is, the so-called principle of emancipation. This phenomenon, a fundamental given in the psychic life of a child, is manifested as a spontaneous, natural initiative by a child to want to walk, play, dress and undress, use eating utensils, wash, etc. by him/herself [without help].

It has been emphasized that an autistic child experiences, wills, and lived experiences inadequately and, therefore, he/she also has problems in being future-directed, and in becoming emancipated.

(iii) Distancing as becoming

To carry on a dialogue with reality on a continually higher level, a child must gradually distance him/herself from him/herself, and move to the world, and especially from the known to the unknown.

As far as distancing from the parents is concerned, a criterion for school readiness with a normal child, an autistic child differentiates him/herself from other children in that, by school age, he/she usually is still not bonded with cohorts, and separating, or distancing him/herself from his/her parents makes no impression on him/her. For such a child to carry on dialogues with reality by distancing him/herself from a senso-pathic lived experiencing, via stabilized affective lived experience, to more differentiated levels (i.e., affective-gnostic, and gnostic-cognitive levels) is extremely difficult to achieve. Difficulty in distancing from an extremely primitive senso-pathic level of play is also one of the most general phenomena found with an autistic child.

(iv) Differentiating as becoming

Differentiating, the phenomenon which a child directs him/herself to and becomes involved with reality in differentiated ways, figures forth in extremely inadequate ways by an autistic child because it involves emotional, knowing, or understanding effort. According to Prick (26 pp 257-258) with an autistic child there is only mention of very primitive, little differentiated intentional relationships and acts because of an undifferentiated bodily way of being. According to him, with such a child, there is only mention of “... het bemerken en lustvol opgaan in het eigen lichaam ...”. He calls this phenomenon “... het stemmingsmatig ervaren van het eigen-zelf en van de wereld, voorzoverre deze laatste het subject gegeven is in lichamelijke toestandsveranderingen, welke door milieu-invloeden zijn opgeroepen”. Because an autistic child experiences, wills, and lived experiences inadequately, it also is clear that he/she differentiates inadequately in exploring, emancipating, and distancing in various horizontal ways so he/she can enter reality to create his/her own experiential world.

(v) Objectifying as becoming

Here objectifying means a matter-of-fact attunement to reality, taking an objective attitude, or lived experiencing on a distanced gnostic-cognitive level which is directed to the identification and determination of what is essential or generally valid regarding a matter or object, without one's own subjective opinions prevailing (27 p 194).

One of the greatest impediments in the life of an autistic child to be able to objectify is his/her deficient spoken language communication in interpersonal encounters. A lonely autistic child who fails in orally communicating also fails in building up his/her own meaningful world and/or a common one. Thus, such a child is bogged down in attributing subjective meaning, and is not able to give objective or generally valid meaning to reality. Because an autistic child has difficulty stepping "outside him/herself" (his/her own bodiliness), fails in encountering others, or discuss matters and learn to judge as others do, he/she cannot purposefully actualize objectifying, as a cognitive way of being.

Hence, autism gives rise to an inadequate experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, knowing, and behaving such that he/she under actualizes his/her exploring, emancipating, distancing, differentiating, and objectifying, as ways of becoming, i.e., his/her entire psychic life, with an inadequate becoming adult as a result.

5.1.4 Educating and teaching as accompanying an autistic child to self-actualize his/her psychic life potentialities

a General

A child overcomes his/her initial helplessness, and succeeds in thriving as a person because he/she is not only equipped with psychic-spiritual potentialities (among which are cognitive, knowing, or understanding potentialities), but also stands open to the world, can direct him/herself in search of meaning, can actively collaborate in his/her becoming, is educable, and becomes educated. Thus, a child has possibilities of becoming at his/her disposal, but they must be actualized in the direction of proper

adulthood. Viewed psychopedagogically, this means that a child must self-actualize his/her possibilities of becoming, and he/she must be accompanied (educated and taught) by an educator in his/her self-actualization.

Self-actualization refers to a self-initiated, active involvement, and development, or figuring forth of one's own human potentialities. This act of giving meaning entails that a child continually gives greater and higher meanings to reality, or its contents. This elevation in meaning, elevation in dialogue (also called elevation in level) implies the actualization of his/her psychic life possibilities, which are manifested in the actualization of the two equally original structures learning and becoming.

However, for becoming adult to progress harmoniously, a child is dependent on the support and intervention of an educator. This means that an educator's educative influence has a direct impact on and a role in the ways becoming is actualized. Psychopedagogically, this means that a parent and teacher must accompany a child to a stable, ordered, and meaningful actualization of his/her psychic life, which is a precondition for effective learning.

It is emphasized that when there is mention of educating, teaching is always implemented. The reason is that educating and teaching are complementary sides of each other in a unitary event, and each has a common aim, i.e., the eventual adulthood of a child (28 pp 27-33).

b Accompanying an autistic child to self-actualize his/her psychic life

(i) Affective accompaniment

Affective accompaniment not only lays the ground for the other modes of pedagogic accompaniment (cognitive and normative), but it is of cardinal importance for a child's actualization of all his/her becoming. Affective accompaniment results in establishing and maintaining a pedagogical relationship of trust, an emotional relationship between child and educator, which is characterized by co-involvement, reciprocity, or interaction, communication,

conversation, or dialogue. This is accomplished because an educator, by means of standing open, surrendering, and turning lovingly, and acceptingly to a child, allows him/her to feel safe and secure. Also, affective accompaniment is characterized by solidarity, and by a genuine emotional bonding because the educator lovingly turns to the child, and this touches his/her latter emotionally, as is evident from his/her actions.

However, from birth, an autistic child shows a lack in accessibility to, regard for, directedness toward fellow persons, and an inability to become involved with them, to encounter them, and to live in intimate connection with them. Thus, with an autistic baby, suckling, and toddler, there is little affective accompaniment, since such a child, because of his/her retarded emotionality, is hardly reachable, impressionable, is untouchable, or not addressable, and can be influenced with difficulty. In a parental home, affective accompaniment of an autistic child to affective self-actualization is an almost superhuman task.

A teacher who has specialized knowledge regarding an autistic child, and the full implications of his/her handicap, and the nature of the his/her educating and teaching, and who is not as subjectively involved in educating such a child as are his/her parents, eventually succeeds, after a time of sustained affective accompaniment, to awaken such a child emotionally, and which allows him/her to proceed to affective self-actualization. A teacher's intervention, in this connection, to a notable degree, is focused on realizing a genuine emotional bond between him/herself and this child, so that the latter can break through his/her excessive indifference and be willing to meaningfully explore the surrounding reality. A teacher must, as it were, play the role of a surrogate mother and intrude him/herself on a child in awakening his/her emotional life, as part of his/her attempt to accompany a child on his/her way to affective self-actualization.

(ii) Cognitive accompaniment

Cognitive accompaniment implies giving support to a child in an educative situation by his/her educators to help him/her actualize his/her knowing-intellectual potentialities. For the parents of an

autistic child, it is almost impossible to accompany their child to actualize his/her cognitive potentialities because this child does not encounter his/her parents, or live in connectedness with them, he/she does not acquire language, shows a deficient knowing directedness to and giving meaning to reality, and displays a labilized emotional life.

In lesson situations a teachers must support an autistic child via affective accompaniment to a readiness and willingness to direct him/herself in a gnostic-cognitive way to the learning material offered, since a stabilized emotional life, as a favorable preformed field, serves this child in actualizing his/her cognitive potentialities. In a lesson practice, it is usual for a teacher to begin in his/her cognitive accompaniment with very elementary constructing-, unwrapping-, inlaying- or assembling-work. Trustworthy [consistent] contact with these activities promotes a child's feeling of cognitive safety, and provide him/her with the necessary impetus to also master more advanced learning assignments and contents.

(iii) Normative accompaniment

According to Landman (29 p 39), "Educating is helping a child with his observing and complying with the normative until proper adulthood is acquired, i.e., until an unconditional identification and appropriation of norms has occurred". Normative self-actualization presupposes cognitive, as well as affective self-actualization—matters with which an autistic child has a problem. The fact that a young autistic child is emotionally unresponsive, and generally without language, largely explains the problematic of his/her normative accompaniment, as well as normative self-actualization in his/her primary (home) educative situation. An autistic child experiences emotional, as well as intellectual problems in meeting the demands of propriety, and identifying him/herself with norms.

Thus, in a second order educative situation (i.e., the school), the normative accompaniment of an autistic child also has its origin in affective accompaniment. By means of exemplifying the normative, and an almost excessive intervention, teachers of autistic school beginners must support them to respect and emulate the demands of propriety. By providing support to stable pathic-affective lived

experiences and, to ordered, systematic gnostic-cognitive lived experiences, an autistic child must be led to recognize and accept norms, i.e., to normative self-actualization, to the extent that this is possible for such a child.

c Educating and teaching an autistic child as the task of a specialized school

(i) General

The task of a teacher can be qualified as educative teaching because effort is simultaneously directed to forming a child's personality and forming him/her with respect to the cultural systems of the milieu. Teaching autistic pupils especially differs in two aspects from all other teaching: i.e., it is paired, to a very great extent, with purposeful orthopedagogic intervention with him/her, and the fact that teaching him/her is begun with extremely elementary assignments.

(ii) Some orthodidactic tasks

Teaching an autistic child is especially characterized by a greater deliberateness, a broader field of intervention, intensified pedagogic measures, and specially designed didactic modes of attack, and techniques which can be pursued in terms of the following aims:

- 1 Awakening an autistic child's learning readiness, directedness, and activities in a teaching situation, during which a genuine emotional bond is created between educator and child which serves as the point of departure.
- 2 Awakening an autistic child's facial-, voice- and visual-directedness, as well as his/her attending.
- 3 Filling an autistic child's need for a means of communicating, as a precondition for meaningful orthopedagogic and orthodidactic intervention.
- 4 Provision of specialized language instruction and therapy.
- 5 Improving an autistic child's gross and fine motor movements.
- 6 Improving an autistic child's mobility, control of rhythmic bodily movement, and play activities.

- 7 Making an autistic child aware of his/her own body and allowing him/her to acquire a body scheme, body knowledge, and knowledge of body use.
- 8 The promotion of an autistic child's independence, including basic self-care skills, table manners, and performing tasks independently.
- 9 The promotion of an autistic child's association with others, and self-maintenance in a social context (socialization).

d Synthesis

The accompaniment of an autistic child to arrive at an affective, cognitive, and normative self-actualization presents teachers with a special task. From a psychopedagogic perspective, it appears that an autistic child is inclined to under actualize learning and becoming and, thus, his/her psychic life, all of which make accompanying such a child a psychopedagogic, as well as an orthopedagogic-orthodidactic task. It is a teacher's task to establish an intensified relationship of trust with this child without which his/her adequate affective, cognitive, and normative self-actualization are not possible.

5.2 FINDINGS

5.2.1 The identification of autism and the course of an autistic child's becoming

With respect to an autistic child's actualization of becoming, the following is found:

- 1 When such a child does not learn to speak and establish situations of interhuman encounter quickly enough, there are indications of an inadequate actualization of becoming.
- 2 The initial inadequate actualization of becoming of an autistic baby, or toddler is usually brought to the attention of a general practitioner by the parents, after which he/she is referred to a pediatrician, or a child psychiatrist.
- 3 After a child psychiatrist has qualified such a child as autistic, the child is sent to a school or unit for autistic children.

- 4 With respect to actualizing his/her psychic life in terms of actualizing his/her becoming, it is found that an autistic child manifests phenomena such as excessive indifference, a turning into him/herself, a bodily imprisonment, a lack of human accessibility, devotedness, involvement, and encounter, an “unaware” way of existing, a lack of an active meaning-seeking, meaning-receiving, and meaning-giving directedness to reality, a deficient attribution of meaning, problems regarding the acquisition, mastery, and communicative use of the spoken language, as well as an extremely labile and impulsive emotional life, and the full range of his/her becoming is restrained.
- 5 Autism gives rise to an extremely inadequate experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, knowing, and behaving, and such a child under actualize his/her exploring, emancipating, distancing, differentiating and objectifying, as modes of becoming.
- 6 Educative accompaniment of an autistic child presents the involved educators with an extremely challenging and specialized task.

5.2.2 The course of learning of an autistic child

With respect to the learning of an autistic child, the following are found:

- 1 Autism gives rise to an extremely inadequate actualization of the accompanying modes of learning, i.e., sensing and attending, as well as to the under actualization of the gnostic-cognitive modes of learning such as observing, perceiving, imagining and fantasizing, thinking, remembering, and the actualization of intelligence.
- 2 The realization of an intensified relationship of trust, characterized by the establishment of a genuine emotional bonding, is the only precondition, and is the foundation for all learning of a child involved.
- 3 In a formal teaching situation, the learning of an autistic child takes place, for a long time, merely on a concrete-practical and not so much on an advanced gnostic-cognitive level.

- 4 Widely divergent differences in degree of learning potentialities often come to the fore with autistic children, and positive changes which they are ready and able to learn, settle in as a result of years of specialized educative teaching.

5.2.3 Educating and teaching

As far as educating and teaching autistic children are concerned, the following are found:

- 1 Parents of autistic children experience, perhaps without exception, prodigious problems in caring for and educating the latter, and without professional help, they often are not able to resist, or deal with their feelings of confusion, impotence, rejection, guilt, self-reproach, despair, despondency, frustration, anxiety, and tension because of their ostensible failure in educating their autistic children.
- 2 Unlike at a school for normal children where, in many respects, the activities are an extension of what had already begun at home, with an autistic child at [a special] school, in all respects, i.e., in terms of affective, gnostic-cognitive, and normative accompaniment, *one must start with educating and teaching*. Because the lifeworld of an autistic child is unordered, chaotic, and even appears to be unsafe, his/her world must be built up for and acquired by him/her *stone by stone, as it were, by means of specialized educative and teaching accompaniment*.
- 3 Before an autistic child has acquired a stable emotional life, as the basis for all learning activities, by means of an intensive affective accompaniment there is little mention of the forming of his/her knowing, or intellectual life, simply because the latter is propelled by the former.
- 4 Psychopedagogic accompaniment also includes a more intensive cognitive accompaniment by means of a teacher ordering (teaching) the cognitive moments of experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, knowing, and behaving within the actualization of the psychic life of an autistic child.
- 5 Psychopedagogic accompaniment also includes a more intensive normative accompaniment by a teacher giving meaning (by exceedingly careful and almost excessive

- pedagogic agreement via praise, etc.) to normative moments of experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, knowing, and behaving, as ways of giving meaning in the actualization of the psychic life of an autistic child.
- 6 Sometimes in teaching an autistic child, there is proper, as well as improper, and almost inhumane use made of the principles of conditioning, as an attempt at bringing about a faster progression of the affective, cognitive, and normative accompaniment of such a child to self-actualization.
 - 7 In teaching an autistic child, the services of a speech therapist, and school psychologist are necessarily used as auxiliary services.

5.2.4 Teacher preparation

With respect to the preparation of teachers for autistic children, the following are found:

- 1 Up to the present, teachers employed by schools/units for autistic children, in most cases, at the time of employment, had neither experience with nor qualifications for teaching these children.
- 2 On the one hand, use was made of the services of teachers in possession of ordinary teaching diplomas, nursery school diplomas and/or degrees obtained from teachers' colleges of provincial departments of education and/or universities and, on the other hand, of teachers who had obtained diplomas in other countries, including the Montessori teaching diploma.
- 3 In service training managed by the head of and experienced teachers in a school, or unit for autistic children serves, as an emergency measure, because newly employed teachers cannot be completely left on their own to carry out their extremely specialized educative and teaching tasks.
- 4 The University of Stellenbosch has taken the lead by offering a diploma course of study for teaching autistic children. The value of this attempt at meeting this pressing need is recognized. However, such a curriculum ought to include a thorough study of the actualization of the psychic life of the autistic child-in-educating.

- 5 Educating and teaching autistic children require skill in properly understanding and counteracting all the problems stemming from their inadequate encountering fellow persons, inappropriate directedness to reality, peculiar activities, and lived experiences, inadequate acquisition of speech and language, communication problems, a labile and impulsive emotional life, and inadequate cognitive, and normative self-actualization.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 The identification of autism and the course of becoming of the autistic child

a Recommendations for identifying the autistic child

Because child psychiatrists are responsible for diagnosing autistic children [in South Africa], it is recommended that:

- 1 the curriculum in child psychiatry be planned and offered in coordination with the Faculty of Education at the concerned university. (Child psychiatrists must continually ask questions about the psychic becoming of the child of concern in conversing with the parents, and for this reason a basic knowledge of psychopedagogics ((a study of the actualization of the child's psychic life potentialities within an educative context)) can make a meaningful contribution to enriching any child psychiatry curriculum); and
- 2 where possible, child psychiatrists must be given the opportunity to be able to observe autistic children in a school situation, where the latter are involved in safe, familiar surroundings, in contrast to a child psychiatrist's examination room, which is unfamiliar to them, so that, in this way, a realistic person image of a child can be compiled.

b Recommendations for the autistic child's course of becoming

It is recommended that:

- 1 further research on the becoming of the autistic child-in-educating be the focus of comprehensive longitudinal studies; and
- 2 education authorities must have knowledge of the essences of a child's actualizing his/her psychic life and, particularly must be familiar with an autistic child's under actualization of his/her psychic life potentialities, i.e., the inadequate actualization of becoming and learning.

5.3.2 Recommendations regarding the autistic child's learning

It is recommended that:

- 1 educational authorities, teachers, and parents of autistic children, and other interested persons, must be made aware that there are differences in degree of handicaps found in different autistic children, as shown by the phenomenon which several autistic children, after years of specialized educative teaching, *show a positive learning attitude* and, as a result, of affective self-actualization (the fruit of an established, intensified pedagogic relationship of trust), there is a *progression to cognitive self-actualization*, i.e., cognitively effortful learning of some kind; and
- 2 the initial "establishment" of the nature and degree of an autistic child's learning restraint itself, must not be used as a means of predicting the eventual learning results of such a child, but that *the actualization of his/her total psychic life* should be used as a criterion regarding this child's learning effects.

5.3.3. Recommendations regarding educating and teaching autistic children

It is recommended that:

- 1 parents of autistic children must receive expert orthopedagogic guidance, advice and accompaniment at home and at appropriate parental guidance clinics at schools regarding the pedagogic needs of these children to support them, as well as

- possible, to their affective, cognitive, and normative self-actualization;
- 2 during the teaching of these pupils, special emphasis is given to the psychopedagogic accompaniment of the psychic ways of actualization (affective, cognitive, and normative);
 - 3 teachers in the teaching situation must not depend on applying conditioning technique, but rather must ensure that the pedagogic relationship, sequence, activity, and aim structures are actualized when he/she is guided affectively, cognitively, but especially normatively; and
 - 4 school psychologists, as well as speech therapists connected with schools or units for autistic children, in addition to advanced academic and professional qualifications, also must make a thorough study of *pedagogics* and must have at their disposal basic knowledge of autistic children and teaching them, to be able to provide an *auxiliary educative service*.

5.3.4 Recommendations for preparing teachers for autistic children

It is recommended that:

- 1 because in the past in the RSA, there was no diploma offered in teaching autistic pupils, the existing practice of a recognized, ordinary teaching diploma and/or a university degree plus a teaching diploma, as a prescribed requirement for teaching autistic pupils must be provisionally maintained;
- 2 the Department of National Education grant a study leave, with financial support, to teachers for full-time study at the University of Stellenbosch to become qualified to teach autistic children, since this university has taken the initiative with the establishment of a teaching diploma curriculum in this area;
- 3 the preparation curriculum must be a full-time, *two-year* course of study, and not one year, as in the case of the courses compiled by the University of Stellenbosch, and it must be offered jointly by this university and local school for autistic children;
- 4 the teacher preparation program must be able to show an adequate balance between practical and theoretical preparation, i.e., a purely academic, i.e., university preparation, and

practically oriented preparation in the school classroom (theory and application of teaching methodology, as well as lesson practice) must both be integrated facets of such a system of preparation;

5 the content of such a teacher preparation program, in addition to its existing content, must also be built up from the following subjects:

- Fundamental pedagogics.
- Psychopedagogics (with emphasis on the psychic life of an autistic child-in-educating).
- Sociopedagogics (with special attention to the problem of socializing an autistic child).
- Didactic and subject didactic pedagogics.
- Orthodidactics (with an emphasis on teaching methodologies for autistic pupils, including aspects such as reading and arithmetic didactics, preschool didactics, the use of Montessori materials, and other suitable teaching media, measures for improving an autistic child's gross and fine motor movement, bodily balance, rhythmic bodily control, and inadequate perceiving (perceptual problems), etc).
- Orthopedagogics (with an emphasis on the specific problematic of educating the autistic child, orthopedagogic diagnosis and determining the state of becoming of autistic children, as well as the orthopedagogic accompaniment of the parents of autistic children, etc).
- Communication pedagogics (with an emphasis on the significance of language and speech in the life of persons, the acquisition and mastery of speech and language in normal and autistic children, the problematic of spoken language communication of the autistic child, the phenomenon of echolalia, as well as the methodology for speech and language instruction for the autistic child).
- Physical education (including the problematic of acquiring body knowledge, body image and knowledge of body use of the autistic child).
- Origin of autism, physiological, neurological, and other related matters regarding the autistic child.

5.4 PERSPECTIVE

It is acknowledge, with gratitude, that the Department of National Education has already made serious provision for the special education of autistic children, as a result of implementing the recommendations included in the “Report of the research committee on the treatment, education and care of autistic children” (1971) under the chairmanship of Professor Murray. Autistic children are housed at the School for Autistic Children located at Mowbray in Cape Town, the Unit for Autistic Children connected to the New Hope School for Cerebral Handicapped Children in Pretoria, and in a few exceptional cases, autistic children are accommodated on an experimental basis in regular classes at the Brown School in Pinetown, and the Cape Receife School in Port Elizabeth (both schools for cerebrally handicapped pupils).

As far as the quality of the teaching of autistic children at the school in Cape Town is concerned, it is noted that it is outstanding because, since its founding in 1970 until the end of 1978, this school had been placed under the able leadership of a world-famous school head. Thus, as far as teaching is concerned, a solid foundation was laid, which can be built on in the future. Because, at the beginning of 1979, the former head of this school was appointed to the Unit for Autistic Children, connected to the New Hope School for Cerebral Handicapped Children in Pretoria, the future teaching of these children has been placed in secure hands. With the prospect of teachers qualified to teach autistic children being made available because of the newly established curriculum for preparing teachers at the University of Stellenbosch, there is the hope that, in the future, the teaching of these pupils can be markedly improved.

References

- 1 COPELAND, J.: For the love of Ann. *The Reader's Digest*, August 1976, pp 230-272.
- 2 SUID-AFRIKA (Republic). Departement van die Nasionale Opvoeding.
*Verslag van die komitee van ondersoek:
na die behandeling, opvoeding en versorging van
outistiese kinders.*
- 3 OPPENHEIM, R. C.: *Effective teaching methods for autistic*

- children.*
- 4 SONNEKUS, M. C. H. and FERREIRA, G. V.: *Die psigiese lewe van die kind-in-opvoeding. 'n Handleiding in die psigopedagogiek.*
 - 5 SONNEKUS, M. C. H. et al.: *Psigopedagogiek.*
 - 6 VAN DER MERWE, C. A.: Die aktualisering van intelligensie by die kind.
Pedagogische Studien, 47 (11), 1970.
 - 7 SONNEKUS, M. C. H. and FERREIRA, G. V.: *Die psigiese lewe van die kind-in-opvoeding. 'n Handleiding in die psigopedagogiek.*
 - 8 SONNEKUS, M. C. H.: *Die leerwereld van die kind as beleweniswereld.*
 - 9 SONNEKUS, M. C. H. et al.: *Psigopedagogiek.*
 - 10 BETTELHEIM, B.: *The empty fortress.*
 - 11 WING, J. K. (Ed): *Early childhood autism.*
 - 12 SONNEKUS, M. C. H. and FERREIRA, G. V.: *Die psigiese lewe van die kind-in-opvoeding. 'n Handleiding in die psigopedagogiek.*
 - 13 FRYE, I. B. M.: *Fremde unter uns: Autisten, ihre Erziehung, ihre Lebenslauf.*
 - 14 See no, 11.
 - 15 PRICK, J. J. and VAN DER WAALS, H. G. (Eds): *Nederlands handboek der psichiatrie.*
 - 16 See no. 11.
 - 17 FERREIRA, G. V.: *Ervaar as verskynsel in die leefwereld van die kind: 'n studie in die psigopedagogiese kategoriale denke.* Pretoria, University of Pretoria, 1973. (D.Ed. dissertation).
 - 18 SONNEKUS, M. C. H. and FERREIRA, G. V.: *Die psigiese lewe van die kind-in-opvoeding. 'n Handleiding in die psigopedagogiek.*
 - 19 See no. 1.
 - 20 See no. 2.
 - 21 See no. 3.
 - 22 VEDDER, R.: *Kinderen met leer- en gedragsmoelijkheden.*
 - 23 See no. 4.
 - 24 See no. 7.
 - 25 LANGEVELD, M. J.: *Ontwikkelingspsychologie.*

26 See no. 7.

27 See no. 10.

28 VAN DER STOEP, F. and VAN DER STOEP, O. A.: *Didaktiese orientasie*.

29 LANDMAN, W. A.: *Leesboek vir die Christenopvoeder*.