

THE PSYCHIC LIFE OF THE AUTISTIC CHILD-IN-EDUCATION

By

MARTHINUS GOUWS

SUPERVISOR : PROF DR M C H SONNEKUS

DEPARTMENT : PSYCHOPEDAGOGICS, SOCIOPEDEGOGICS AND
VOCATIONAL ORIENTATION PEDAGOGICS

FACULTY : EDUCATION

DEGREE : MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

S U M M A R Y

The aim of this study is to penetrate, investigate, and understand the psychic life of the autistic child-in-education, and to explicate it, in terms of psychopedagogical categories (essences).

First there is an attempt to examine the actualization of the autistic child's learning from a psychopedagogical perspective, and to determine if he/she actualizes his/her modes of learning differently from a normal child. If so, it is necessary to determine the extent and nature of this different actualization in the school situation, and elsewhere.

It is found that the autistic child's inadequate interpersonal encounter, his/her lack of a genuine awareness of him/herself and others, as persons, and the meaninglessness of objects in

surrounding reality, the lack of an exploratory directedness, and readiness to explore, and expand his/her experiential world, all hinder his/her learning. Attentively-being-in-the-world, as a primordial learning potential, is attenuated, and he/she is described as being less aware of reality. A labile sensing makes attending to and unlocking reality difficult for such a child. This weakened attending leads to an inadequate control of language, a preoccupation with his/her own body, and a rigid, stereotypic, compulsive, and ritual-bound way of existing, which impede the actualization of the gnostic-cognitive modes of learning, such as observing, perceiving, imagining, fantasizing, thinking, remembering, and actualizing intelligence. An under actualization of learning and, thus, of the potentialities of his/her psychic life leads to a limited broadening of the horizon of his/her experiential world.

As regards the course of becoming, it is indicated that the same factors which impede learning, and which are unique to autism, as a handicap, also hamper the proper becoming of such a child. Problems in the acquisition and control of language, and its communicative use, as well as a labile and impulsive emotional life also give rise to a lack in actualizing the modes of learning and becoming. Hence, autism gives rise to inadequate experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, knowing, and behaving such that this child under actualizes his/her exploring, emancipating, distancing, differentiating, and objectifying, as modes of becoming; i.e., his/her entire psychic life leads to his/her inadequately becoming adult.

Accompanying the autistic child, via the unitary event of educating and teaching to support him/her to affective, cognitive, and normative self-actualization is a specific psychopedagogical, orthopedagogical-orthodidactical task for educators. Because affective accompaniment to affective self-actualization is a precondition, and driving force for cognitive, as well as normative accompaniment to cognitive, and normative self-actualization, the necessity for realizing an intensified relationship of pedagogical trust in the school situation is emphasized. Only when this child experiences security can he/she be supported to self-activity, exploring, and learning where, initially, use is made of concrete and

meaningful learning material, and then his/her own ordering of cognitive moments becomes possible.

Normative accompaniment of this child to normative self-actualization demands that the educator exemplify stringent normative examples. Such a child should be praised in an almost exaggerated manner if he/she does something worthy of approval so that he/she may have a lived experience of his/her own worth (dignity), and realize the meaningfulness of the normative.