

## CHAPTER 13 DIDACTICS AND ORTHODIDACTICS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary state of orthopedagogics and orthodidactics in many respects is a very interesting but also a very neglected matter. In reading the literature it is very clear that these two matters are not brought together *theoretically* in a way that can withstand ordinary scientific logical analysis, especially epistemological and scientific methodological evaluations. Possibly the greatest problem is that the terrains of pedagogics and orthopedagogics have been viewed as autonomous or separate for the purpose of judging the practices that emerge from each. Consequently, the orthopedagogic is viewed directly, for various reasons, as the latest ramification of pedagogic practice. Therefore, it should surprise no one that orthopedagogic and especially orthodidactic practice are not always carried out within a pedagogic context or even executed at all at the present time. The consequence of this is that clearly noticeable is an unhealthy and unrealistic duality in orthopedagogical descriptions (theoretical foundations, research views, practical designs, etc.).

This parallel between pedagogical and orthopedagogical views obviously cannot avoid the terrains of the didactical and orthodidactical. By its nature, a comprehensive and important part of orthopedagogic therapy is really entrusted to the orthodidactic. Nowadays orthodidactic practice shows an enormous diversity of views and contributions from related and even unrelated areas of knowledge and consequently it is not easy to sort out and organized the particulars. Related to this, one must also remember that orthopedagogics has had a very diverse history, especially with respect to its origins. It is logical that most of these origins have emerged from pedagogical views, i.e., in pedagogical studies. On the other hand, there are particularly important and initiating contributions to the field of orthopedagogics from medicine (e.g., from neurology and endocrinology) and from basic sciences such as physiology and anatomy. These contributions cannot be ignored when orthopedagogics is discussed, as such. The same is true of

psychology, an area of knowledge related to the pedagogic, that for many years has carried out comprehensive and insightful research on learning, perceiving, motor skills, personality, etc.

Also there is little doubt that, especially during the past 40 years, pedagogics has paid very close attention to these related, relevant findings from other sciences. In this respect, the problem mainly revolves around one matter: findings of relevant or related sciences cannot merely be transferred, as such, to pedagogical theory. Orthopedagogics is a pedagogical matter. It involves a pedagogical understanding in order to assist the so-called derailed, conspicuous child in need within the limits of *educating* and subject to the *forms of educating*. Therefore, all of these very important particulars from the other areas of knowledge require a pedagogical interpretation in light of the coherencies of meaning and matters in the pedagogic situation.

The purpose of this chapter is not to describe orthodidactic theory and practice. Such a matter warrants a comprehensive and careful investigation of its own. What is noted here is only meant to orient prospective and in-service teachers to particular aspects of orthodidactics with the aim that they will be alert to rash and reckless behaviors in the ordinary school classroom.

Such an orientation is necessary because a fair percentage of restrained children pass through the ordinary day school program and are forced into peer competition even though they are burdened by inborn or acquired deficiencies. In general, these pupils are described as “learning difficult” and they give rise to a particular uneasiness in their parents. Therefore, they also deserve close attention from their teachers. In addition to this, it cannot be denied that there is no child in school who at one time or another, and for short periods, has not experienced definite learning problems. In no way are these pupils restrained or otherwise damaged. Their problems are often rooted in their educative milieu or in their relationship to their life world. Nevertheless, such disturbed relationships have an important educative influence that usually is manifested in one or another form of underachievement.

A very important aspect of the orthodidactic terrain of research is usually ignored in its theoretical views. If one takes into consideration the framework and findings of contemporary didactics, without a doubt, today it is the case that a weak or inappropriate planning of or preparation for teaching contributes importantly to what normally is classified as learning problems throughout the school. Many learning problems do not originate with the child's learning activities as such but in the teaching he receives. Therefore, it certainly is justified, along with Sonnekus, to speak of *teaching-* and *learning problems* when exploratory work is done in the field of orthodidactics. Because in the past this aspect was ignored, there really is no far-reaching, comprehensive research on this matter and at the present time it is not possible to make any scientifically accountable pronouncements about this. The American research available on this matter is usually focused on an aspect or even a very small part of the matter of "teaching problems". Consequently, it is very difficult to clearly determine a synoptic image of the contributions of teaching to the etiology of learning problems. What follows is a brief attempt to look at the matter and the significance of the orthodidactic from a didactic perspective in order to illuminate some of its facets for practice in the ordinary school.

## 2. UNBALANCED INTERPRETATION OF THE ORTHODIDACTIC

It should be reasonable to assert that orthodidactic practice is at least as old as schools themselves. The different variations in which this phenomenon (learning difficulty) has manifested itself through the years has been and still is an intrinsic part of the school and of teachers' tasks. Consequently, the teaching-practical aspects and the related therapeutic programs were and still are the most important focal points for orthodidactics. Concepts such as remedial teaching, bridge teaching and special teaching are thoroughly integrated into the existing policy of teaching and its forms of expression.

This unbalanced emphasis in the first place certainly has resulted in a channeling of research that also is an intrinsic part of orthodidactics. When research is one-sided and practically directed

this necessarily is damaging to its theoretical and thus to its training aspect. Perhaps the most important result of this was that didacticians were thoroughly schooled in particular accepted and especially pragmatic therapeutic techniques that, on closer investigation, seem to be nothing more than isolated orthodidactic devices. Irrespective of how valuable and necessary these patterns of acting might be for orthodidactics, it remains true that its insights (into motivations, diagnosing, designing programs and evaluating) have consistently been harmed. The consequence is that the origins (fundamental research and explanations) are *inferred* from the practical situation rather than stemming from the systematic and sustained investigation of the *phenomenon* and of the results of teaching-practice.

This matter implies and represents a definite imbalance in the descriptions of orthodidactics as such. With this the fact must be taken into account that orthodidactic practice often is functionalized and even initiated by terrains outside of the orthodidactic. These auxiliary or related terrains are of invaluable worth with respect to their findings and especially the programs that are designed by them and for what orthodidactics has attained nowadays. However, the fact still remains that these particulars are not interpreted pedagogically and very often are not integrated into orthodidactic theory.

Another aspect that to a very small degree has been attended to is the relationship between and relevance of the other pedagogical disciplines for orthodidactics. In this context, a possible exception is psychopedagogics, although its most recent research nowadays still is not interpreted orthodidactically. Examples are fundamental pedagogics, sociopedagogics, historical pedagogics and didactic pedagogics. It is only very recently, e.g., in an orthopedagogic respect, that there is talk of a socio-orthopedagogics and an historical orthopedagogics by which it is acknowledged that orthopedagogics and the other pedagogical disciplines cannot be closely investigated and described in isolation. In this respect, a great task remains for the various pedagogical disciplines to consult with orthodidactics and vice versa.

### 3. THE POSSIBILITY OF AN AUTONOMOUS ORTHODIDACTICS

Another matter that continues to reflect a difference in standpoints and convictions is that of the autonomy of orthopedagogics. Pronouncements in this regard are obviously general and cover the entire terrain that in a narrower or broader sense is known as “the orthopedagogic”. In light of the few orienting remarks in section 2 above, this entire matter is well understood. Regarding practice, from the beginning there undoubtedly had been an alienation and even a degree of irreconcilability between practical and theoretical approaches that have continued into the present. The most important consequence of this was that, on the one hand, orthopedagogics had tried to establish itself as a separate *subject science* in the sense that it counted itself as a multi-disciplinary approach with strong tendencies for application by a large group of practitioners. On the other hand, the standpoint also prevailed that orthopedagogics is a separate, autonomous part-discipline of pedagogics that by virtue of the unique nature of its area of study and the diversity of its academic spectrum gives its own pronouncements about matters such as its grounding (categories), criteria, structures of its aim, its course and relationship, form, contents and design—to mention only a few.

Without going into details, here it must be indicated that the prefix *ortho* in itself carries no meaning if it is not combined with a basic science or fundamental concept. In all of its combinations *ortho* refers to a particular sector or facet of a basic science. Compare, e.g., orthopedics in medicine. Orthopedagogics must be judged within this same frame of reference. One should almost be able to say that it refers to an application- and practice-making aspect of the general pedagogical. What holds for orthopedagogics in general is similarly applicable to the orthodidactic in relation to the didactic.

At the root of the entire view of this relationship is the fact or phenomenon (reality) of educating as it is manifested in all of the variations of the educative situation. Providing help to a restrained, brain damaged, poor sighted, hard of hearing, deaf, blind or generally troubled child clearly implies educating him. As is the case with all of the part-perspectives or pedagogical disciplines, studying and explaining this matter is no more than one educating

(not different kinds of educating). As an event, educating is singular, distinctive and unique in the life of each person. But the *fact* of educating is a universal, generally identifiable part of human experiencing. There is no more than one educating, just as there also is no more than one teaching that can be discerned.

When didactic pedagogical writings are about teaching and express its essences, these general pronouncements must hold true for all teaching as it appears in the life world of persons. This teaching always has its origin in the ways of realizing or putting educating into practice. All educating is realized in and through teaching; and all teaching (in which children are involved) gets its first and last meaning from educative activities as such. The same holds for a phenomenon such as “learning”. A child who is impeded or who has learning difficulties does not have a different way of being in the learning situation than do so-called normal children. All children in an educative situation are involved in the matter (way of being) of learning and its actualization within the context of educating and teaching. An impeded child is still a child. He is a person and lays claim to equal value in educative-, juridical-, social-, religious- and every other context of society. All pedagogical essences hold for him to precisely the same extent as for a child who is not accompanied by his parents to adulthood with extraordinary or exceptional help. Therefore, all children involved in one or another form of orthopedagogic intervention are children in an educative situation who must establish a relationship with an educator and with educative contents and who must be led in terms of particular forms of educating (and teaching) to full fledged adulthood within the limits of their particular problems.

Any other view of this matter is a-logical and only can be raised by proclamation ((i.e., categorically). It would be pretty much impossible to try to substantiate the autonomy and distinctiveness of orthopedagogics in terms of unique and distinctive essences. Clearly, the orthopedagogic cannot surpass or overstep the pedagogic and pedagogical.

What holds for the relationship between pedagogics and orthopedagogics necessarily must be discussed with respect to the relationship between didactics and orthodidactics. Any

orthodidactic pronouncement or practice *necessarily* has its origin in its basic discipline (namely, the didactic pedagogic). In so far as didactic pedagogics makes particular pronouncements about teaching that are *valid*, they must necessarily have scientific validity for the orthodidactic. That the orthodidactic, just as the subject didactic, will make particular pronouncements about this matter, and that its research will be largely directed to interpreting these generally valid findings within the tasks of the orthodidactic, speaks for itself. Finally, in this respect it can also do nothing other than question subject didactic theory and practice in order to enliven an *orthodidactic practice* that will not be foreign to these pronouncements of the pedagogical, e.g., in terms of an aim-, functional- and situational-analysis. If this is done it opens itself to criticism from all sides. It would certainly be possible for it to undertake research into applications and prescriptions in large areas. However, it will never be in a position to discuss its practice in its ground or depth and to submit the validity of its therapeutic forms and programs to proper and accountable criteria. Such an orthopedagogics or orthodidactic simple would be a sham science.

#### 4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIDACTIC AND ORTHODIDACTIC THEORY AND PRACTICE

It is well known that any didactic theory is basically a search for the structure of teaching as it really is. For a variety of reasons, the resulting descriptions show diversity in many respects and even fundamental differences. It can be that the didactician who wants to undertake an investigation is of the opinion that formal teaching as it appears in the school ought to be the basis for any didactic research. In such a case the didactic activity is radically limited to a second-order, i.e., literally an institution established by persons. The precariousness of such an approach seems clear from the fact that the school can easily be imagined as absent from the life world without the life world as such being damaged.

On the other hand such a researcher can stare himself completely blind on a matter such as, e.g., the curriculum and from curriculum-theoretical views debate the whole question of teaching as such. Such a view is one-sided and does not primarily search for the forms of living and experiencing of human existence because it is simply

absorbed by the contents that appear in the life world. These two examples of possibly false ways of establishing a didactic theory are merely mentioned for orientation. They were discussed more fully in previous chapters.

The problem of why this is so revolves around the decision about whether orthodidactic theory and practice can differ *essentially* from the general didactic. This possibility is discussed to some extent in the previous section. However, different aspects deserve more emphasis without a long-winded or comprehensive discussion. In light of the preceding details it is for the reader to judge whether orthodidactics is an entirely different matter than the didactic.

In its search for the phenomenon of teaching in reality, and even more closely in the reality of educating, didactic pedagogics presents particular categories in which the essences of teaching as it really *is* are verbalized. Also there is mention of particular criteria in terms of which the categories can be evaluated in a practical sense and in which their validity must be raised. When particular categories are not judged to be effective by the criteria, their validity is put into question.

From these basic views of teaching didactic pedagogics then especially follows two lines in order to acquire clarity about teaching *as such* with the aim of interpreting it for the second-order or school situation. These two lines are represented by the matters of *didactic form* and *teaching contents*.

From the didactic research on these two matters (form and contents) a great deal of details and areas of investigation have appeared among which are the matters of didactic ground forms, methodological principles, the evaluation of particular systems and forms of teaching, curriculum theory, evaluating pupils' achievements, etc. However, all of these details must be connected in one way or another for practice and united in a didactic marriage. We find the marriage between form and contents in didactic theory in the lesson structure.

The lesson structure represents an interpretation or construction about how the didactic findings from all that has preceded it are

planned for and brought into motion in a formal teaching situation. If one will formulate this matter strictly, one could also say that the lesson structure implies a formalization of the essence of teaching with the aim of realizing them in organized school practice.

From the relatively comprehensive particulars now readily available about the lesson structure and its essences, it seems very clear that the details included in the whole matter of the lesson structure to a large degree forms the nodal point for the integration and further interpretation of the relations between the other pedagogical disciplines and the didactic. In this connection there is reference to the matter of putting into practice the fundamental pedagogical essences (Landman), the psychopedagogic question of teaching and learning (Sonnekus), the fundamental findings about the didactic connection between teaching and learning (Gous) and especially the coupling of didactic and subject didactic views with the correlated pronouncements about the possibilities of separate lesson designs in the different school subject areas (Van Dyk). The particulars of these connections are considered in the publications mentioned in the bibliography.

One can well understand the significance of this if the context of modern society is examined. Never before in human history has the school, its educative and training programs, its differentiations and its insertion into the order of society played such an important role as it has in our technological time. As already indicated, the school always builds a bridge between the spontaneous or given (original) life world and organized society.

This gives rise to the question of whether the orthodidactic, as an aspect of pedagogic research and practice, is placed in a totally different scientific and therapeutic context than each of the previously mentioned disciplines. Although the categories might clash, at this stage, one can certainly dismiss any arguments with respect to the autonomy and distinctiveness of the orthopedagogic and orthodidactic.

Both orthopedagogics and orthodidactic have their origin in the theoretical interpretations and valid descriptions (constructions) of the pedagogical part disciplines. As far as orthodidactics is

concerned (as already indicated), it deals with the entire matter of teaching and learning problems in general. Therefore, in essence orthodidactics is dependent on the findings of a scientific nature about the matter of “teaching” and “learning”. Hence, the orthodidactic involves itself with nothing isolated. When it does research on the practice of special teaching and the demands it makes, the findings of didactics and subject didactics on ordinary teaching necessarily hold for orthodidactics. In the same way it must take note of, e.g., fundamental pedagogic and psychopedagogic research on teaching practice and learning in order to put the whole matter of restrained educating in perspective. Following this, orthodidactics establishes its line of vision. In orthodidactics and its tasks either teaching or learning or both have gone wrong somewhere. This disconcerting appearance of teaching and learning and the possible ways in which they can be corrected or repaired represent an extension or a closer particularization of pedagogical findings. It is logical that this research with the aim of generalization includes the investigation of separate pupils who experience problems and therapeutic programs with a healing aim.

## 5. TEACHING AND LEARNING PROBLEMS

What is additionally offered here is not complete because the aim is only to orient the teacher with respect to particular origins and forms of appearance of learning problems in the classroom. Therefore, it is not meant as an introduction to orthodidactics and should not be judged as such.

Evidence about the contributions of the teacher to learning difficulties (the manifestation of teaching problems) is provisional and strained. There is still a lack of systematic and empirical research on this matter. The fact that must be kept in mind in this respect is that a teacher’s preparation (content *and* didactic) is of fundamental significance for the success that any pupil might achieve in the teaching situation. By the nature of the matter, he is the accompanier, initiator and designer of everything that occurs in the classroom. If he is negligent or careless with respect to any one of the two important facets of his task, it can be expected that he will make a very important contribution to the origin of learning

problems. Thus far, the matter of teaching problems has enjoyed little attention in orthodidactics perhaps because the results or manifestations of it are described as learning problems. The intervention of the orthodidactician, as already indicated, however, covers both terrains, i.e., the role of the teacher and the actualization of learning by a child. The approach that follows is therefore preliminary because it is conspicuously incomplete. Also it is one-sidedly directed at learning problems as such. Possibly within a few years in a systematic way the teaching as well as the learning aspect will be placed in an orthodidactic perspective.

To learn, especially for a child, means that the whole of his existence unfolds for him. In the fact that he learns he provides an answer to the questions and demands of his own being situated in reality. Therefore, an increasing mastery arises regarding his association with matters of the life world that can be evaluated in the form of achievements. Thus a child becomes more adult because he learns. Actually there is no aspect of human activity not directly or indirectly influenced by the actualization of learning. Thus, it is important to understand that any deficiency or hindrance impeding a child's learning activities will influence him as a person and as a human being because they curtail his going out to reality and mastering it.

At first glance, a learning problem shows itself as a particular, usually partial, inability of a child in a learning situation to achieve in one respect or another as expected. Therefore, learning problems are consistently interpreted as a matter of underachievement. In other words, a learning problem manifests itself as the combined effects of all of those factors that reduce the achievement of a person in the learning situation to a level lower than he is capable of. However, the pedagogue knows that this first way in which a learning problem manifests itself only makes a part of the resulting effect observable. The distress of a child with learning difficulties might speak most strongly in the learning situation because the appeal continually coming from the parent or teacher inevitably places him before his own inabilities. However, the effect of these experiences pedagogically run much wider and spread out of the classroom into the school as a whole, the family, the social milieu,

religious and moral life, and in this way eventually takes vengeance on all facets of life.

In light of the fact that the teacher provides *help* to the learning person (child), the question of learning problems is of great significance for him in the classroom. Each child enters a learning situation as a single, unique person. Consequently, the learning problems of each are unique and individual. In reality, there is no such thing as “the *child with learning difficulties*”. Each time the teacher is involved with a child who experiences learning difficulties in his going out to the world. To help him with his learning difficulty literally means to lend him a helping hand as a person in a crisis situation and to wholly or partly repair his perspective on life.

It was mentioned that there really is no one in school who has not experienced a learning problem at one time or another. Each time that a child does not understand a particular piece of content, there is mention of a learning problem. Learning difficulties are one of the most universal phenomena of the didactic situation. However, the question is (in the usual course of matters) whether such a situation will grow into a crisis situation. The answer depends on many factors and on the design, intensity, availability and quality of the help, and the willing and affective life that are only a few that can be mentioned. When the pupil gets the better of one or another of these matters that influence his learning activities, the learning difficulty is cleared up. In this respect, the learning problem is temporary and even incidental.

However, when he increasingly falls short in the situation for one reason or another this means that he is not in a position to meet the demands. Consequently, he often will try to avoid assignments or is satisfied with an inadequate achievement. When this happens the child finds himself to a greater or lesser degree in a life crisis. In its turn, this implies that he makes a claim for special help and attention. If the condition lasts for a long period it can correctly be expected that such a child will create problems for his educators over the entire scope of his existence.

Each teacher must be in a position to identify this type of situation early and make provision for specialized help. In this connection he

must realize that the lead-in to learning problems really evolves in particular ways with each child. Often the occurrence of a particular learning problem is merely a symptom of deeper-lying difficulties (e.g., educative problems, relationship with his parents or a physical defect) that obstructs the child as a person.

In this respect we must understand well that teaching is a continuous, successive event. Therefore, the matters or facts or phenomena that arise in the didactic situation must be viewed and interpreted in the light of these continuous or successive recurrences. In the ordinary school day program, the achievements of the continuous stream of teaching are continually evaluated as achievement scores, curves or graphs. There are few situations in a child's life in which particular defects or obstructions are placed in the limelight of another's eyes than just this one. Thus, a child's learning achievement is really the point of culmination in which the *totality* of his cognitive becoming is made visible. In addition, he is not allowed any choice regarding his participation. As soon as he refuses to achieve, for one reason or another, in this series of situations he becomes conspicuous and immediately receives some form of special attention such as ridicule, belittlement, encouragement or extra help. Therefore, the teacher must understand clearly that a child's resistance, reluctance, despondency or general indifference that is hidden in other life situations is clearly displayed in a classroom. Each form of resistance and inability outside of school eventually shows its after-effect in the child's relationship and communication with his teachers.

When a matter such as pedagogical neglect in the home comes to the surface in the school situation in the form of weak achievement, the teacher must immediately interpret this. If he merely qualifies this as a learning problem, one can well understand that his attempts to help him will amount to patchwork since he treats a symptom and not the origin. This naturally does not disregard the fact that such a child really has to contend with learning difficulties. For example, he could have lagged behind for a long time so that optimal achievement has really become impossible. However, should the teacher not proceed in one way or another to determine the origin of his problem, the help will only be superficial. For the

sake of being systematic, learning problems in the school are divided into two categories: those whose originating factors lie *outside* of the child, or those whose originating factors stem from the person and that give rise to difficulties. Formally, one should thus distinguish between *exogenous* and *endogenous* origins of learning problems.

## 5.1 Endogenous factors

Factors of an endogenous nature often offer the teacher in the classroom severe problems. These origins arise from the child himself and are often so mysterious and concealed that it is difficult to delimit or properly examine them. Therefore this type of origin often gives rise to guesswork and errors of judgment in orthodidactics. Also they are often interpreted in the heat or crisis of the moment as personality or character weaknesses and that need not be the case at all. The teacher must also keep in mind that a child with learning problems of an endogenous nature seldom or ever is able to exercise direct control over the actualization of his learning.

The therapy that is used in this connection often stretches over a long period of time and in many cases involves a total reorientation or even a radical re-educating. What is offered here as endogenous origins of learning problems covers only their most conspicuous and important aspects. It is important to take note that this extremely complicated matter is what requires specialized help and attention. The task of the teacher is primarily to recognize the problem as such and to make provision or arrangements for this specialized help.

### 5.1.1 Problems in becoming

In the first place, disturbances in becoming certainly must be interpreted in its physical aspect. It is well understood that this must have a particular effect on the child's actualization of learning.

Any organ from the brain to the foot can be a physically impaired part of the body that can create particular problems for an individual child. As far as learning achievement is concerned, here

one especially thinks of a hyperactive goiter or damage to and/or underdevelopment of some parts of the brain by which perceiving, psychic and physical energies, the motoric, speech, etc. can be impaired. Problems of this nature are extremely complicated and must be handled with the greatest circumspection and in collaboration with medicine.

On the other hand, disturbances in becoming manifest themselves also in such matters as becoming or readiness factors, psychic puberty, etc. In a previous chapter it was indicated that the level of becoming or readiness of a child can have far-reaching influences on particular aspects of learning achievements in the curriculum.

In this connection what the teacher must note very well is that such a disturbance does not necessarily have to manifest itself immediately or in a short period of time. A child with particular deficiencies can plod along until the day the load becomes too heavy for him and he simply crumbles under the pressure.

### **5.1.2      Affectivity (emotionality)**

It is only logical that affective problems have the closest connection with the deepest and innermost being of a child. His affective state is a matter of security, a venturing attitude, exploration and emancipation and self-confidence—all aspects that can influence the act of actualizing learning.

Anxiety, tension, aggression and isolation are all forms of expression of an affectively impeded child that leads to an imbalance (lability) in the learning situation and that brings about learning problems. When the affect is not stabilized, attempts at teaching are relatively fruitless.

An important aspect that the teacher must search for in this respect is thorough or acceptable intellectual control by the child. A person has never lived who does not feel anxiety, tension, fear, aggression or isolation from time to time. If these matters are placed under good intellectual control, they are viewed as ordinary life phenomena among persons. However, should one or another of them get the upper hand and lead the child to behaviors over which

later he partly or totally loses control, this forms a fruitful ground for the spread of learning problems on an incredible scale. It is obvious that a teacher and his actions in and before the class can exercise a very direct influence on these experiential aspects of a child. When the learning situation is a situation of anxiety or resistance, a child simply cannot be guided to effective or optimal achievements.

### **5.1.3 Motivational disturbances**

Motivational disturbances are especially related to the child's affective life because the latter is the bedrock that supports his intentionality. Therefore, disturbed motives can largely refer back to incongruities in the child's intentionality, and this includes the more generally known acts of will. In a learning situation, such a child shows himself as one who is going to bend under low spiritual energy, show a deficiency in his readiness to achieve, a refusal to compete with others and similar forms of manifestation.

In addition, they often show an unhealthy, unjustifiable and naively aggressive resistance that manifests itself suddenly and for the slightest reason and the use of colloquial language that often is described by a teacher as "uneducated". A pupil with motivational disturbances often manifests himself as an aimless person who flits around and about which the teachers as well as the parents often have no suggestions. Further, it is notable that this phenomenon often shows itself during puberty when the child to a much greater degree is placed under the norms of society. He indeed wants to venture in this but does not know precisely how he must comport himself. Such a life uncertainty, hesitancy, and especially rejection of authority must also be seen in this context as an attempt to flee from and to conceal his deficiencies.

It is only understandable and normal that in these years [of puberty] the adults will impose increasingly higher demands on these pupils with respect to their judgmental abilities, life of values and especially their perspective on the future. In the family situation this conflict can stem from a never ending arguing, preaching and disharmonious family climate that is not at all conducive to achieving good learning. Most of these children

reorient themselves within the course of two or three years or even longer before an adult and accountable participation in the learning situation really come to the surface. At this stage the child begins to achieve again as he did in the elementary school. It also is important to indicate that, especially in the case of boys, many do not experience this reorientation before they are already in the university. Therefore, often, within two or three years, poor and average school pupils develop into able students in their college years.

One of the greatest problems for the teacher is the offensive self-proclamations to which some of these pupils progress. To help them in pedagogic ways to endure in the midst of this life crisis is no small task. Poor learning achievement in this case often is merely a symptom that emphasizes that a child in this stage of his life must not be left to his own devices.

#### **5.1.4 Talent and temperament**

To delve deeply into these two aspects and their connection to the question of learning problems is a difficult and comprehensive task.

The following matters are certainly important for the teacher to know about. A child's talent merely points to the fact that a particular potentiality is noticeable regarding him. That this talent does not mean a fixed given or constant quantity is well known to all. A child's talent really can only be evaluated in light of what he makes of it as a person. It also is generally accepted that he cannot exceed certain boundaries in this respect. That the pupils in a classroom can show mutual feelings of greater or lesser dignity in this regard is also a fact of experience. However, the matter that deserves emphasis is that the continual stream of achievement evaluation gives a definite identity to this talent, e.g., in sciences or languages. A general complaint heard by teachers, especially in the secondary school, involves this talent for a particular matter or not.

A factor that sometimes exercises an enormous influence here and that shows a close connection to talent is the child's temperament. In the strongest sense of the word, it also is strongly related to the affective attunement (stability or lability) of the pupil.

Temperamental change and affective lability, along with the child's talent, are factors that especially contribute to the nature and level of a child's achievement in the class. Therefore, this also must be illuminating with respect to an image of learning problems. The pupil's expressions of his talent and the perception of the teacher regarding its forms of expression are two matters that must be deliberately correlated in the adult's judgment (of the child).

### 5.1.5 Organic defects

As already stated, a large percent of learning problems are rooted in an organic or physical basis. This means that a child in a learning situation has particular physical or organic potential at his disposal to which he indeed is not abandoned, but which, as a person, he must make something of, even if a particular deficiency is noted.

Physical retardation of one or another nature (conspicuous or inconspicuous) is one of the most fundamental contributions to the origin of learning problems. Therefore, there is mention of a child intensely experiencing his own corporeality and body image, and often a crisis situation arises because of this bodily experiencing. Malformed limbs, weak eyes requiring thick glasses, obesity, deafness and poor motor skills are but a few of the generally familiar physical problems that directly influence a child's learning achievement. Direct consequences that flow from this can be, e.g., the quality of the pupil's perceiving, his acquisition of a particular skill and particularly disturb or restrain his mastery of language.

Regarding matters such as brain damage, we know that in many respects it so hinders the child's activities that he no longer can participate appropriately in the teaching situation in normal ways. Often these pupils show a defective dexterity in language in all of its forms so that learning to read and spell already partly fail in beginning teaching. These deficiencies reproduce themselves in the child's school career and after a few years he really stagnates entirely in the learning situation. The healthy relationship between word and reading, on the one hand, and language, on the other, is not possible under these circumstances because they consistently show a meta-stable character.

Serious forms of brain damage, weak sightedness and deafness are determined relatively easily and quickly, often even before a child goes to school. However, what is very important for the teacher is that many forms of minimal brain functioning manifest themselves so subtly and indirectly that specialists in this area can make serious errors in judgment in connection with the ways they are manifested. Everywhere in our day schools there are children with mild epileptic states and other forms of slight brain damage that only come to the surface in the image of the pupil's achievement. In this respect one must be vigilant for a child who is easily fatigable, who quickly becomes aggressive, whose attending fluctuates greatly, who has difficulty working through from a concrete to an abstract level and who in the classroom is hyperactive and troublesome.

Although disturbances with respect to left-right dominance are not necessarily an indication of a learning problem, in relation to other symptoms, it still can raise the teacher's suspicions.

Another aspect of a child experiencing his corporeality that often is left out of account is that pupils in puberty usually experience very intensely changes in their own corporeality. Sometimes the parents prepare their children for these changes and sometimes not. A sudden increase in weight, height, bodily hair and changes regarding the condition of the skin and the sexual life can so absorb and disrupt a child that he completely loses his equilibrium concerning an involvement in learning and achieving. Although this is a temporary matter in the life of practically all children, this exercises a tremendous influence on the tempo at which such a child works in the sense that a pupil can so fall back in one or more of the school subjects that he carries the effects of this with him to the final school examination.

## **5.2 Exogenous factors**

In as much as the actualization of learning has been elucidated from a variety of perspectives, it seems that many external factors (factors that are outside of the child himself) can drastically influence his learning achievements. These factors do not have a separate, definite classroom identity because they affect each child differently and are experienced and assimilated in various ways by

the individual children. A factor that can adversely influence one child in the lesson situation sometimes will pass another by even though their circumstances are approximately the same.

Also this phenomenon manifests itself with respect to children from one family. Fine nuances in the affective stability, talent and temperament can give rise to the fact that a particular environmental factor can affect a child such that his achievement is weakened, while his brother or sister gives no evidence that they are aware of such a circumstance. To contend that all children ought to be influenced in the same way by similar environmental conditions is observed to be untrue and unjustified by everyday experience. For the sake of systematization, only the following important and often conspicuous aspects are presented briefly.

### **5.2.1 Asking too much**

Each person literally lives his own life. However, in the case of a child it often happens that in the learning situation he is confronted with tasks that he cannot do because of his talent and/or temperament. These demands from the parents can come from their expectations of him, in accordance with the prestige of the family in the community, to maintain a profile of achievement that he is not in a position to do. On the other hand, a teacher who is very strongly attuned to good examination work and results can ask entirely too much of such a child. Whatever the reasons for asking too much, there is no doubt that this places a pupil in a crisis situation whose scope and intensity increases during the course of time.

The fact is the child cannot meet these demands. In his experiences and behaviors on the basis of these demands, the pupil really has one of two choices. He can withdraw and isolate himself in such a way that none of the demanders can reach him. On the other hand he can throw everything into the struggle to try to meet the demands and later carry the sadness of his failure. Attitudes such as aggression, nonchalance, gross indifference and excessive participation in sports and other forms of play are but a few familiar forms of fleeing that are implemented by these pupils. A danger in asking too much is that eventually the pupil will be

compelled to reject the learning situation in its entirety. Consequently, achievement actually comes to a standstill and as a result the pupil becomes a potential school dropout.

### **5.2.2 Overindulging and neglecting**

All teachers know that the educating a child receives at home is of decisive significance for his achievement in school. The school situation is a matter of authority, norms, input and effort. Therefore, school achievement is also a matter of disciplining and identifying that directly concerns the future of a child. When a child's self-censure and the awaking of his learning intention are damaged because these matters are neglected in his educating at home, one can expect that the resistance that is unique to the school tasks in one way or another can overwhelm him and by which he necessarily becomes an underachiever.

Here the teacher is confronted with an extremely difficult task. As an adult he cannot replenish these deficiencies in a short time by re-educating the child. As an institution the school also cannot merely squeeze in and take the place of the family. In this connection, what holds for neglect also is true for overindulgence. An overindulged child often shows himself as someone who makes little effort or has no resolve for self-censure, self-judgment and self-discipline. Obstacles never really challenge him. All that he has truly refined during this entire period of overindulgence are his techniques of evasion. The healthy pedagogic authority on which the school relies and that the teacher often tries to present and augment, then becomes stagnated; and it can be eliminated only by intensive re-educating. Fundamentally, to indulge or neglect a child means to commit an educational "crime". Ordinarily the neglected child shows a way and attitude of living that indicate that as a person he is ignored and given the cold shoulder. Nothing is ever expected of him, he never is encouraged, love and discipline are not received, but his participation in the learning situation often has the character of a bored hanger-on. In this time of a fast tempo of life and overprotection of children, this is one of the most important environmental factors that contributes to learning problems.

### **5.2.3 Identification**

To be able to identify himself with an adult is one of the most fundamental needs in a child's life. He continually searches for someone that he can imitate and who awakens in him the will to do, to talk and in general to act as an adult. This person identified with usually is someone who wields authority, makes choices without hesitating, behaves elegantly and (especially with a very small child) is very handsome or beautiful or very strong. Thus within the sphere of the family there is an indubitable identification noticed of children with their parents and even other relatives. Thus, also in school there is a definite identification between pupils and teachers. This matter of identification is of such significance that it can drastically influence a child's lifestyle.

In the family under usual circumstances the father is a strong identification figure because he cares for the status of the home, its economic security, its authority and especially also because to a large extent he can guarantee its future. Should it happen that a child grows up without an adult entering the foreground somewhere in his life history with whom he can identify, his stake in life and participation in his being situated are much poorer and more drab than they ought to be. This fact shows itself extensively especially during and after puberty. Because a child wants to be someone himself he continually looks for an adult he can imitate. Defective identification easily leads to life uncertainty and to hesitation in the learning situation.

#### **5.2.4 Skepticism**

Today is a time of skeptical and even revolutionary thinking in practically every respect. Nothing is merely accepted, least of all the school, the teachers and the pronouncements of the parent. It also is a time of overwhelming contents that flow to the child along various external channels of communication without him ever seeking information or being able to internally assimilate it and integrate it into his ways of existing.

Our time is also one of contrasts and clashes. These contrasts and clashes are actually observable aspects of the life world. The school does not escape this. Ordinarily, the school shows itself as a conservative and cautious institution that does not allow itself to be

influenced by quick changes in society without being able to justify them. The most important consequence of this is that usually there is a discernible distance that arises between the school world and the outside world because the school is so strongly directed to tradition, authority and norms. When the norms in society shift, the school usually is the last institution to accept them.

These changes are difficult for some children to understand and interpret. Their attitudes about school often have a negative, indifferent or even aggressive character. It cannot be doubted that all of these matters can be an influence on a healthy and positive learning disposition in the life of a child because they can adversely affect his learning intention. Often they find the school's activities laughable and, as they say, childish. This holds for a wide variety of aspect that are unique to the practice of schooling such as teaching aids that appear to be relatively wretched in comparison with the aids that are used in advertising and other forms of influencing.

It is logical that this inclination also holds with respect to other forms of diversion and leisure and where the school enters into competition with the community itself. The school's attempts and tempo often obviously are drabber compared to those in the world outside of it. Therefore, one need not be surprised to know that a relatively large percent of children who participate intensely in the diversity and life tempo of the world outside of the school view the latter as a place that is deficient and poor in imagination.

Together with the rest of modern humanity, modern youth also cries for bread and games while the school is a place of sweat and exertion. For some pupils, the deficiency of the school with respect to the world outside of it is too great and unacceptable with the result that they reject the learning situation and search for more exciting experiences in the world outside of the school. For a long time sociology has investigated comparable problems such as that of population concentration, mass-production, mass-recreation, interpersonal alienation, etc. A matter that also has a detrimental effect on the school in this terrain has been a central theme for sociology for more than a decade. Therefore additional findings of this pedagogical discipline are referred to.

### 5.2.5 The school

Although the school often is a passive party in the midst of the neglect and skepticism that reign in modern society, as an institution it often contributes in many respects to the creation of its own problems. These problems often follow from the announcement of policies by teaching authorities, the worldwide shortage of teachers, and an international hesitation to convene a meeting on teaching.

As an institution, the school can do little about these kinds of problems. However, there are also other factors in the context of the school's purpose that raise the question of learning problems and about which the school itself can do something. That school life can exercise an indelible influence on a child's becoming and forming was discussed relatively broadly in a previous chapter. The school is a dynamic institution that sets a pace that cannot be easily modified. This dynamic and tempo usually are that of the average. But the school is not entirely populated by average pupils. A school population is precisely as heterogeneous as society itself. Consequently, the dynamic and tempo will be too fast for some children and too slow for others. For the one group this leads to asking too much and for the other to boredom. How intensively at all a school differentiates (groups) always remains a problem that never can be entirely solved or left out of consideration when there is reflection on the origins of learning problems.

The school's basic organization relies on the ability of people to guarantee its good progress. However, teaching policy does not always make provision for this. Some teachers can be entirely successful with large groups and class work, others not. Some have a spontaneous and intuitive attunement for the situation of a child and for the quality of his own accompaniment, others not.

The same holds for pupils. Some children can achieve in large groups and classes (i.e., without receiving personal attention), others can't. Some can achieve in the classroom and on the athletic field, others not. That a school framework that can make provision for all of these variations is really wishful thinking certainly cannot be denied. Yet, in the midst of the complexity and the style of

modern society, one must notice the difficulties that flow from it with respect to the achievement profile of the pupils and at least be ready, as far as possible, to make provision so that, as factors contributing to learning problems, they can be eliminated.

### **5.3 Forms in which learning problems appear**

The occurrence of learning problems cannot be haphazard or be attributed to haphazard factors. As a whole one can possibly summarize their most important forms of appearance as follows.

#### **5.3.1 Refusing to learn**

When a child refuses to participate in the learning event without their being a direct or identifiable organic reason, the origin must be sought elsewhere. The teacher must be aware that this rejection can touch the child's learning as a whole or only partly (with respect to a particular school subject).

The most important forms of expression of this are isolation and aggression. In this case, a child's isolation is especially shown in the fact that he withdraws from his parents and teachers, sometimes participates intensively in forming an unfavorable group and shirks his obligations; in conversation he shows a very cursory willingness to learn and achieve. Aggression shows itself in the fact that the pupil conspicuously avoids obeying orders, is cantankerous, brutal and disorderly and must be continually punished or reprimanded because he acts self-righteously.

#### **5.3.2 Stagnating in the learning event**

Also different forms of this are indicated. Thus a teacher can find that the learning achievement of a pupil can *suddenly* stagnate, e.g., because of a chronic illness, traumatic experience or an unexpected and radical change in the level of the learning activities themselves. This latter aspect can especially surface when a child must begin a new subject about which he cannot acquire an understanding from the start.

On the other hand, the stagnation can also be *progressive* in nature as a result of an unexpected change in learning contents, the attainment of one's own ceiling of learning or the unexpected challenge from a physical condition that had not yet been diagnosed to that point in time.

### **5.3.3 A deceleration of the learning event**

As a form of learning difficulty this aspect usually enters the foreground through the limitations of intellectual talent or of a deficiency that might exist in the inner (psychic) life of a child in education. Certainly, this is the most important basis for a deceleration regarding the appeal to achieve acceptably.

### **5.3.4 Selective stagnation in the learning event**

One usually finds this form of manifestation in sensory impeded children (blind, deaf mutes, deaf, physically disabled, poor sighted, hard of hearing and motor handicapped). This also arises in children with serious language disturbances, the origin of which must be sought in the psychic-linguistic sphere.

### **5.3.5 Conflicts in becoming and learning**

This form of appearance of the phenomenon of a learning problem obviously can appear across the child's school career. It usually begins with a deficiency in school readiness, but also can create serious problems in puberty and thereafter by which the ability to influence and give help to the child are restrained.

### **5.3.6 Disintegration of the activities in the learning event**

This form of manifestation often enters the foreground when the intellectual level of the teaching is such that a child can no longer easily attain the contents.

He intensively experiences his own impotence to solve the problem, serious disturbances in concentrating arise, the schemes of thinking become looser and disordered, the directedness and actualization of

his intentionality in the learning situation begins to languish with the result that his achievement image regresses all the more.

Here it must be very strongly emphasized that the above offers a very brief and incomplete image of the entire question of learning problems. However, the comprehensiveness of this problem in the modern school demands of each teacher that he make a study of this issue so that he can recognize these appearances of learning difficulties. Finally, learning problems are a matter in the teaching of *each* child that must be considered. When a teacher is incapable of at least recognizing learning problems he is incapable of appearing in front of a class.