

THE CHILD WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS IN PRACTICE: THE PEDAGOGIC CONVERSATION WITH THE PARENTS

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1. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

It is a well-known and generally accepted fact that human life is not characterized only by success but that there also are failures. Just as success, achievement, prosperity and progress are familiar to human existence so also is the fact that we can experience failure, underachievement and adversity.

In the course of the life of each person and child, successes and failures are experienced to a greater or lesser degree depending on one's life circumstances. Thus, it is not at all surprising that children on the long and difficult road to adulthood often are faced with problems that impede their becoming adult. A child's becoming adult requires that he learn a great deal in order to give form to the notion of a person and it is not strange that children, in addition to the successes they achieve in numerous learning situations, also sometimes experience learning problems.

The question of a child with learning problems has long enjoyed the attention of experts such as physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists and educators. Each approaches the problem from the perspective of his own domain. The contemporary view is that learning problems, because of their complex nature, are clearly a multidisciplinary issue. In this connection, it is said that the results of the different experts involved with this child must be more effectively coordinated in order to really help him in his distress. Indeed, this is a step in the right direction and has decided advantages for the child experiencing learning problems as well as for those on whom research is done and for trying to prevent and effectively correct the problem.

Viewed from a pedagogic perspective such a team effort is acceptable **provided** the undeniable fact is taken into account that a child who experiences learning problems should never be considered apart from his **world**. This implies that it is not possible to understand a child with learning problems [or any child, human

being] if his total situation is not looked at. When it is looked at, there is reflection on who the child really is and where he is going, and it has to be stated beyond any doubt that each child is someone who has to become adult and that for this to occur, he is dependent on the help and support of an adult(s). In order to become adult, i.e., to be able to lead an independent and responsible life, a child has to be educated. Educating occurring between an adult and a child, a parent and child, a teacher and child can correctly be described as assisting the child to be able gradually to meet the demands of adulthood. However, it must be clearly understood that a child can only be educated, can be taught because he can learn. If he does not learn effectively, then his educating and with this teaching him cannot take the most favorable course and consequently his becoming is retarded.

A child takes an active part in his own becoming adult, first, because he is able to learn and, second, because an adult teaches him in an educative manner. Hence, a child who learns and yet still has learning problems should never be reflected on apart from his educative situation. When there is talk of an educative situation, what is first meant is the primary situation or the family situation and second the school situation as a formally established educative situation. Within this educative framework a child will, in accordance with his learning potential, learn more or less effectively. Hence, a child with learning problems, irrespective of their nature, is someone whose educating (teaching) has become problematic for one or another reason and any intervention should thoroughly take into account the quality of his education.

Projected against the above introductory thoughts, it is clear that to grasp and understand (via orthopedagogic diagnostics) the child with learning problems and help him (via pedotherapy as well as orthodidactic assistance), it is necessary to first explore his pedagogic situation. This includes fathoming his personal historicity in terms of the educational relationships established between parents and child over the course of time as well as the quality of his becoming in which he himself has actively cooperated.

2. THE PEDAGOGIC CONVERSATION WITH THE PARENTS

The pedagogic conversation with the parents is the first phase of investigating a child with learning problems, and it also serves as a basis and precondition for assisting him, be it pedodiagnostic,

pedotherapeutic [or orthodidactic]. As the primary educators and "teachers" of the child, clearly they are the persons who, on the basis of their personal educative experiences with their child, are able to provide the researcher with essential information.

As an exploratory conversation about the child's course of education and becoming, for practical considerations, the pedagogic conversation is divided into the following facets:

2.1 Identifying particulars

With reference to the child, his parents, his school, etc.

2.2 Stating the problem

During this phase of the conversation, the parents are given the opportunity to tell the orthopedagogue what is problematic about their child's learning activities. Here the parents are invited to speak not only about and make known the child's learning problems but also about their own distressful situation regarding their educating their child. The child with learning problems is a child-in-distress and this distressful situation compels the parents to seek the expert help and support of the orthopedagogue, and others if necessary, so that the problem can be eliminated.

2.3 The child's physical development

It is of essential importance that the orthopedagogue take note of everything discussed about all of the child's becoming. Information obtained from the parents regarding the pregnancy, the child's birth as well as milestones (sitting, crawling, walking, talking, etc.) reached by the child and at what age they were reached are important. This information is of particular importance since, e.g., a physical trauma before, during or after birth can have a big influence on the child's course of becoming as well as on the education he receives. If the orthopedagogue suspects that this facet of the child's becoming is problematically affected, help and advice can be solicited from experts such as a physician, speech therapist, occupational therapist and a number of others. Such advice is then eventually integrated into the results of the orthopedagogue's investigation in order to obtain as complete a person image, as learning image, of the child as possible.

2.4 The quality of the child's education

In order to judge the quality of the child's becoming, it is necessary to analyze the pedagogic situation and particularly the different educational relationships founding it.

Educating is adequately actualized in those situations where there is mutual trust between adults (parents) and child, where the child feels accepted, where he feels understood in his child-being and where he is certain about what is proper. An educative climate that is characterized by positive emotional bonding, consistent authority, mutual understanding and an experience of belongingness are a solid basis and secure place from which he can explore his world and thus learn. Such an educative milieu fosters in the child a feeling of security, willingness and enthusiasm to broaden and enlarge his experiential and knowing horizons. Should he fail or partly fail, e.g., as far as his learning activities are concerned, he has a firm understanding that his home is still a safe "haven" to which he can return in order to become re-invigorated and to overcome his failures.

However, if educating is inadequately actualized in terms of the few aspects mentioned, it can happen that the child becomes derailed which is observable in a negative learning attitude, a lived-experiencing of all learning and learning activities as meaningless, behavior problems and more. The implication is that if educating miscarries the child can become so emotionally labilized (anxious, tense, frustrated, uncertain, aggressive, feel inferior, etc.) that his readiness and willingness to learn become subdued, even "smothered". Thus, educating as it is actualized in and through the different educative relationships [trust, understanding, authority] can either promote or impede the child's learning attitude.

From the above few brief remarks it ought to be clear that during the pedagogic conversation it is necessary for the orthopedagogue to make a penetrating inquiry into the nature and quality of the educative relationships existing between the parents and their child. In this way the orthopedagogue is in a position to determine the quality of the child's education and becoming as well as obtain detailed information about:

1. The nature and scope of his learning problems
2. Readiness to learn

3. How he learns
4. The nature of his study methods
5. Skillfulness, sense of duty and sense of responsibility with respect to his work
6. The homework situation and the parents' availability and readiness to help
7. Achievement in general and in particular
8. Expectations held by parents and teachers
9. Inclusion at school and in school activities
10. Relationships with teachers and fellow students
11. Teaching problems
12. Possible behavior problems
13. Personality problems, etc.

All of the data obtained from the exploratory conversation with the parents provide the researcher with the first basis for constructing a preliminary person-image, now also viewed as a learning-image of the unique child with a unique learning problem. This learning-image provides, first, an image of the particular child's education and becoming, especially as this concerns the history of his learning relationships (learning historicity) with his parents, teachers, fellow students, the learning material, etc. Second, it also provides an image of the child's unique learning experiences and the meanings he has given them during the course of time. Last, it throws light on his possessed experience as the totality of meanings he attributes and has attributed to all of his experiences in terms of his education, teaching, learning, interpersonal relationships and more.

2.5 Synthesis

In conclusion it can be said that a scientific understanding of a child with learning problems and the task(s) that arise from this is not possible without taking into consideration a discussion of the child's pedagogic situation.

3. REFERENCES

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