

# THE CHILD WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS: THE PRACTICE OF PROVIDING ORTHODIDACTIC ASSISTANCE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Through the educative intervention of the adult, whether parent or teacher, it is hoped that the child will become formed such that he gradually is able to orient himself in the world as an adult. Thus, the aim of educating (forming) is to go beyond what is already possessed and known to what is not yet possessed or known. Depending on each person's potentialities and formedness, it is possible for him to attain and to acquire continually higher levels of orientation.

## 2. A CHILD WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS SHOWS DEFICIENCIES IN BECOMING ADULT

There is a deficiency in the formedness of a child who lays claim to orthodidactic help. In spite of having the potential (on cognitive, affective and bodily levels) to achieve continually higher levels of orientation, he is not prepared to do so because he lacks the necessary means for reaching the next level in the course of his becoming adult. A child has reading, spelling, arithmetic and writing problems when he does not have the means for adequately mastering these skills. This lack of preparedness to learn can be on a perceptual-motor level (e.g., poor eye-hand coordination), on a cognitive level (e.g., inadequately actualizing the modes of learning such as attending, perceiving, thinking, remembering) and also on an affective level where a not-being-prepared is a not-being-ready; as such, this also can have consequences for an inadequate actualization on perceptual-motor and cognitive levels. This view of the child with learning problems, however, cannot overlook the interrelationship between the origin of the problem and its effects as this is seen in the historicity and diagnostic image of the child (in this case, Wilma).

### 3. ORTHODIDACTIC ASSISTANCE AS PREPARATION FOR LEARNING

It is clear that orthodidactic assistance that only involves concentrating on certain aspects of the learning content cannot succeed without the child being prepared and ready for it. On the other hand, assistance that places the burden on the preparation of one domain (the content) without taking into account the consequences for the other (the child) cannot bridge the gap that has arisen in the child's formedness. Consequently, orthodidactic assistance usually will be paired with occupational and pedotherapeutic help or even be preceded by one or both. Orienting parents and teachers regarding their relationships with such a child should accompany any kind of assistance given the child since the inadequate actualization of these relationships can give rise to the child's being unprepared and unready.

It should now be clear that as much personal and social data as possible are obtained about Wilma because in designing a comprehensive or particular plan for helping her, all components have to be coordinated with her potentialities and limitations in each aspect (e.g., physical, psychic, spiritual) of her being-human. After all of these data are understood in context, one can proceed to determine the aim of the assistance to be given: what does this imply about making her prepared and ready to learn and in what matters of content should she be re-instructed? In this regard, Den Dulk and Van Goor (1974) talk of an "initial situation" that needs to be understood as fully as possible before assistance can begin. Then, the comprehensive aim will determine the form and content of that assistance.

### 4. THE INITIAL SITUATION

Wilma's **initial situation** is presented in summary as follows:

#### INITIAL SITUATION

NAME: Wilma	AGE: 9 years 8 months
BIRTH DATE: January 1968	GRADE: 5
SCHOOL: Sunshine Elementary	

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Achievement not in agreement with potentiality. Born with deformed foot--two operations before school--one leg shorter than the other. Physical milestones achieved normally. However, she is clumsy and fails in such physical activities as netball. Endures ridicule from other children.

### QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Overprotection is prominent and restrains her in her exploration and emancipation. Consequently, she is not supported in accepting her own bodiliness, in affective stability and in establishing adequate relationships.

### EDUCATIONAL POTENTIALITIES AND DIFFICULTIES

#### Aspects of the psychic life

##### Affective

Unfavorable bodily experiences and image. Egocentric attitude. Feelings of anxiety and insecurity of an uncontrolled nature. Tendencies toward infantilism and helplessness. Tense, high-strung, intense experience of failures.

##### Cognitive

IQ is above normal to superior. It is not adequately actualized as a consequence of restrained aspects of learning. Modes of learning are inadequately actualized (e.g., inadequate visual and auditory memory). Tempo and level of work fluctuate. Adheres to global-diffuse or "primitive" analysis. Sometimes breaks through to a better quality of analysis. Intelligence is of good quality and abstraction is sometimes attained; however, it mostly is actualized on a concrete level.

##### Normative

Weak identity and identification. Inadequate self-concept. Always lived-experiences that she "can not". Experiences everyday activities and relationships as threatening.

##### Didactic Aspects

## **Reading**

Sight recognition of words is weak, mis-readings, d/b confusion; anticipation of words and phrases.

## **Spelling**

Inversions; problems with open and closed syllables; phonetic mode of spelling; problems with vowels and diphthongs.

## **Writing**

Transcription is word-for-word with one-syllable words and nearly letter-for-letter with words of more than one syllable.

## **General**

Language expression is weak and unordered.

## **Modes of Bodily Functioning**

Defective bodily awareness. Poor balance. Experiences problems of coordinated bodily functioning as a whole. Poor spatial orientation and eye-hand coordination. Perceptual deficiencies on visual and auditory levels; thus, problems regarding figure-ground positions in space, discrimination, analysis and synthesis, form constancy, sequences and memory

## **COMPREHENSIVE AIMS**

### **Pedotherapeutic**

Direct to adequate self-concept as well as world and social relationships.

### **Occupational Therapeutic**

Eventual abolition of perceptual problems beginning on a sensory-motor level.

### **Orthodidactic**

1. Increase sight vocabulary by which auditory and visual memory can be practiced.
2. Adequate perception of the sound as well as the symbol by which auditory and visual discrimination can occur.
3. Adequate attack of unknown words by way of analyzing to constructing sound-symbol relationships and structures and the use of contextual clues.

## 5. PARTICULARIZATION OF SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF GIVING ASSISTANCE

Determining the aims should not only involve planning the assistance to be given as a whole but also the aims for each individual helping session need to be determined. Naturally, knowledge of the "initial situation" is always important for doing this. Only then can it be determined **what** needs to be taught to the child as well as **how** it is going to be taught.

True orthodidactic assistance does not occur if the orthodidactician merely presents content again and, as it were, stands **between** the child and the learning material. Rather, it occurs when the orthodidactician stands **beside** the child, when he guides the child who then is confronted directly with the learning material. In being beside the child, the orthodidactician is not involved in presenting the content to the extent that he cannot make use of fruitful educative moments as occasions for giving assistance (e.g., by stabilizing attending or by directing perceiving). Also, in this position, the orthodidactician can readily become attuned to and determine the quality of the child's participation as well as expedite the course of the helping lesson. In addition, he can determine whether or not any adjustments in his strategies need to be made. Thus, there is continual control (monitoring) and evaluation.

## 6. THE LESSON PLAN

To be able to speak in any sense about effective teaching and thus of effective learning, there are certain aspects that have to be figured into any lesson (hence, an orthodidactic lesson as well). This is illustrated by the following lesson, **one of many**, designed to help Wilma, and that is described in detail.

### THE TEACHING AIM

## The Lesson Aim

Actualize the modes of learning that are fundamental to the acts of reading and spelling. For example:

**perceiving** in terms of visual and auditory discrimination;  
**thinking** by purposeful activities of analyzing and synthesizing;

**remembering** by exercising visual and auditory memory;

**all modes of learning** are continually used although at times different modes are prominent.

## The Learning Aim

- (a) acquire a meaningful, orderly method of word attack.
- (b) lived-experience the act of reading as meaningful.
- (c) increase sight vocabulary.

## STATING THE PROBLEM

### Formulating the problem

By means of actualizing her foreknowledge [see 1 below] and stating the problem [see 2 below], Wilma is made aware of the fact that there is a **serious** concern about her reading.

### Solving the problem

Starting with giving meaning and remembering, gradually there is a move to activities of purposefully discriminating and analyzing. For example, after writing a brief "paragraph", there is a progression from the general and more global to the particular and more analytic where discrimination is the **aim**. In this lesson, discrimination of the letter "b" is the focus of attention.

## THE LESSON STRUCTURE

### The Form of the Lesson

**Fundamental didactic forms:** discussion, example, assignment.

**Methodological principles:** deductive.

**Principles of arranging (ordering) learning content:**

linear.

**Methods of presentation:** mainly question-and-answer.

## **The Course of the Lesson and Didactic Modalities**

### **1. Actualization foreknowledge:**

Ask the questions listed below and guide Wilma to specific answers. Write the answers on the board. Read and allowing Wilma to read sentence by sentence. Move your hand from left to right under the sentence being read to guide her in moving her eyes from left to right.

During this phase of the lesson, an attempt is made to link up with Wilma's experiential world in order to guarantee that she will lived-experience the learning material as meaningful and, as a consequence, stabilize her emotions

#### Questions:

#### Answers:

Were you ever by the sea?

Does the sea look like a reservoir?

What color is the sea?

What do children do by the sea?

And on the beach?

The sea is much larger than a reservoir.

The sea is blue.

The children swim in the breakers.

They play with a ball on the beach.

#### **Didactic principles:**

Accompanied (guided) activity; quick tempo.

#### **Modes of learning:**

Sensing, perceiving, imagining, remembering.

#### **Teaching and learning aids:**

Blackboard.

### **2. Stating the Problem:**

Beforehand, write on cards the sentences to be put on the board. With these cards, Wilma has to identify and read the corresponding sentences on the board. Ask her how she knows which sentence matches. What are you looking at? If needed, show an example from everyday life (e.g., matched and unmatched shoes).

**Didactic principles:**

Activity; own tempo

**Modes of learning:**

Perceiving in terms of purposeful visual discriminations.

**Teaching and learning aids:**

Sentences on cards; blackboard.

**3. Exposition of the New Content:**

(a) Allow Wilma to look for and identify in the sentences on the board the following words written on the cards: [Afrikaans] see, kinders, swem, speel, groter, dam, branders, bal, blou.

(b) Put the cards with **branders**, **bal** and **blou** under each other or write them under each other on the board. Ask Wilma **what** is the same about them? Answer: the first letter. Say the words and ask her if these first letters also sound the same. Also, let her say the words herself.

(c) Allow her to search for yet another word that begins with the same letter ("b"). This is **baie**. Use the auditory as well as the visual. Also ask: What is different about all of these words? Answer: everything except the first letter.

(d) Let her think of another word that begins the same. Help by asking questions. Write this word on the board. Let her compare it with the above words.

(e) Write the following words on the board and ask what is the same and different. Also attend to the meaning of the words: **kom**, **som**, **bom**.



(f) Do the same with the following pairs of words: **lus** and **bus**, **sal** and **bal**, **terg** and **berg**. With reference to the following pairs, let her substitute the first letter of the first word with "b" or "d": **bak** and **dak**, **bors** and **dors**, **bas** and **das**. Allow for continual cross-comparisons visually as well as auditorily.

(g) Allow Wilma to form the "b" and "d" herself. Help her master this correctly, namely from left to right and from above to below.

**Didactic principles:**

Activity; guided tempo.

**Modes of learning:**

Sensing, perceiving, thinking, remembering.

**Teaching and learning aids:**

Blackboard, word cards, magnetic or felt letters.

#### 4. Actualizing the New Content

Allow Wilma to choose the correct word. First read the sentence to her each time.

(a) Die **berg/terg** is hoog  
Ons ry in die **lus/bus**  
Ons speel met die **sal/bal**  
Ons is **bang/sang** in die donker

(b) Die **boek/doek** lees lekker  
Dit is lekker om koek te **bak/dak**  
Die sterk man het 'n bree **dors/bors**  
Die nors man is **boos/doos**

Always allow Wilma to repeat the correct sentence. Always move the hand from left to right under the sentence being read.

**Didactic principles:**

Self-activity; own tempo

## **Modes of learning:**

Perceiving, imagining, remembering.

## **Teaching and learning aids**

Sentences on the board and on the cards.

### **5. Functionalizing**

Allow Wilma to fill in the correct letters. Make sure that "b" and "d" are formed correctly. [Some of the following are the same sentences appearing in the previous phase of the lesson, but here Wilma's task is different].

- (a) Die **\_erg** is hoog  
Ons ry in die **\_us**  
Ons speel met die **\_al**  
Ons is **\_ang** in die donker  
Die **\_oek** lees lekker  
Die huis se **\_ak** lek  
Dit is lekker om koek te **\_ak**  
Van al die loop is ons nou **\_ors**  
Die sterk man het 'n bree **\_ors**

(b) Do the same with the original sentences [in phase 1 of the lesson] about the sea. In each case, support her strongly in her reading.

## **Didactic principles:**

Activity; own tempo.

## **Modes of learning**

Imagining, remembering.

## **Teaching and learning aids:**

Sentences on paper in front of Wilma as occurs in everyday reading activities.

## **7. SUMMARY**

Designing a helping lesson around these aspects of the lesson structure reduces the probability that one or another method will merely be applied to the child without taking into account her specific potentialities and limitations. In a lesson that runs its course in terms of these aspects, on the one hand, the child is encountered with her total potentialities--among which are her learning potentialities-- but, on the other hand, also the learning material to be mastered by the child is what is encountered and not merely one or another method.

In providing orthodidactic assistance, adequately actualizing the modes of learning figures just as much as an aim as does the acquisition of certain learning material. Consequently, the content considered in the lesson often also is a means for guiding the child to adequately actualize her modes of learning.

The methods for unlocking the learning material, the principles for ordering it and the teaching methods, as well as the principles for actualizing all of this (i.e., the didactic modalities) are determined by the child's level of readiness and restraint in learning as well as by the nature and structure of the learning material.

Commercially available programs are based on the general features of children with certain problems and so the individuality of each child's potentialities and difficulties gets lost. Although the value of such programs as aids in presenting a helping lesson should not be overlooked, their clear danger is related to their tendency to omit various functions that should be fulfilled during the course of any lesson (e.g., actualizing foreknowledge).

The quality of a lesson depends on whether effective teaching and learning occur. Thus, in planning, attention should be given to the behavior of the one giving assistance as well as to the position the child is going to take--depending on her readiness and attunement. For example, is the child going to be continually accompanied (guided) in her activity or is there going to be a greater demand for self-activity? How is tempo variation going to be determined, and what is the role of individualization or socialization (i.e., involving the class as a whole)?

Although the child's modes of learning are distinguishable though not separable, still at a particular time a greater emphasis can be

placed on actualizing one or another mode. Thus, some moments lend themselves admirably to accompanying the child to adequately actualize perceiving by means of auditory and visual discriminations, and other moments favor ordered thinking, remembering, etc.

It is clear that even a well-planned lesson can fail if the relationship between the teacher and the child is not of good quality. On the basis of the security she lived experiences in this relationship, she will venture to the learning material, discover and explore it and in this way gradually be able to discover and actualize her own potentialities.

## **8. WILMA'S PROGRESS AS A RESULT OF ORTHODIDACTIC ASSISTANCE**

Wilma still receives a combination of pedotherapy, occupational therapy and orthodidactic assistance on a weekly basis. In all respects, the assistance has taken a favorable course. Orthodidactic lessons, on the whole, have almost the same thrust as the pattern followed in the lesson described above as an example. In other words, the adequate actualization of the modes of learning is posed as an earlier aim than the content of concern. As progress is made regarding this earlier aim, e.g., by a more adequate perception of linguistic signs by means of visual and auditory discriminations (e.g., in the form of particular spelling rules), the content begins to stand out progressively more as the aim.

At this point, Wilma lived-experiences few problems with spelling words governed by rules (in Afrikaans) of open and closed syllables or the doubling of consonants. Faulty discriminations of letters and sounds are no longer present. Although far from perfect, her word attack also is considerably better. Inversions, mis-readings and anticipations now seldom occur when she reads. However, her reading is still slow and is not yet entirely on her own age level. She still has problems with figure-ground as seen in the fact that she sometimes reads words in adjacent sentences. These aspects are now being concentrated on in the occupational therapy, while in the helping lessons all sorts of aids are employed to provide her with support and practice.

## **9. REFERENCES**

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