

LEARNING EFFECT: ACCOMPANYING THE PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD TO THE LEARNING EFFECT

S. F. M. CROUS

1. DESCRIPTION OF CONCEPTS

As is evident from the title of this paper, there are two concepts that require closer consideration. These are **accompanying** and **learning effect**. However, they imply a third one, namely, **learning** which has to be further described for greater clarity.

1.1 Accompanying

The school is not an institution that originally exists in the human life world. Because of the development of a particular community, the life style may become so complex that the parents can no longer provide for the educational needs of their children merely by exercising their authority. To fill this educational gap, schools are established. Consequently, the aim of the school (and also of the pre-primary school) is to provide children with a more effective education (especially regarding subject matter teaching) than their parents can. Since the ultimate aim of educating is the proper adulthood of the child, **accompanying** (in connection with schooling) should be viewed as the adult's **purposeful** and **planned intervention** with the child in order to attain this aim.

1.2 Learning

Accompanying involves an adult unlocking and opening up complex **life contents** of the adult world for the child. It also involves the child confronting and assimilating these contents by **learning** them. The degree of learning is determined by the meaning the child attributes to these contents. In this light, **under the accompaniment of an adult**, a child learns by being **actively involved** with the contents in order to discover for himself their sense and **meaning**.

· Translation of: Leereffek: Begeleiding tot leereffek in die pre-primere skool. Paper presented at a symposium on Readiness for School held at the University of South Africa on 5 September 1981.

1.3 Learning effect (as life effect)

The learning effect should be viewed as the result or consequence of the adult's accompaniment **and** the child's attribution of personal meaning (learning) to the contents that then become an integral part of his **possessed experience**. The learning effect, as that which he has learned, is manifested in his **behavior**, and this indicates the degree to which he has progressed to adulthood. The learning effect, thus, is evident in the degree to which the **learning contents** have become **life contents** for the child.

2. THE AIM OF ACCOMPANYING IN THE PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL

As already mentioned, the aim of accompanying (educating), even in the pre-primary school, is the eventual proper adulthood of the child. The question, however, is **how** this occurs.

A child can be educated and become an adult because the **potentialities** to do so are at his disposal. These potentialities are actualized under the **accompaniment** of the adult and by the child's **self-actualization**. A child has at his disposal a variety of potentialities such as intellectual, bodily, and linguistic, and by actualizing them he continually moves toward adulthood. This totality of **personal potentialities** with which the child is born constitutes his **psychic life**. Becoming adult implies the adequate actualization of his psychic life in education, and this is the aim to which all educative accompaniment is directed.

This actualization of the psychic life occurs because the adult (teacher), through his guiding, unlocks reality (as contents) for the child, and the child appropriates them for himself by **learning** them. In this way he actualizes his psychic life (potentialities) and thus his becoming adult flourishes. For optimal learning to occur, he needs to be accompanied in such a way that he **will** (i.e., want to) **experience** (i.e., be involved with) and **lived-experience** (i.e., give meaning to) the content. This implies that he needs to be brought into contact with the contents, that he needs to handle them and in this way become involved with (experience) them, and that he has to give sense and meaning (lived-experience) to them. In this way, he learns to **know** the contents. In giving meaning, the contents are assimilated into his **possessed experience** and this

meaning eventually is expressed in his **behavior** that provides an indication of his progress toward adulthood.

In his involvement with the contents, the child attributes sense and meaning in three ways, namely, **affectively, cognitively, and normatively**. As far as the affective is concerned, this can be **labile** or **stable**. The cognitive can be **ordered** or **unordered** (vague, chaotic), and the normative can be **meaningful** or **meaningless**. When particular contents emotionally stabilize the child and also when he experiences them as cognitively ordered, he will experience them as meaningful. Conversely, if the cognitive is labile and unordered the contents will be meaningless to the child. Thus, the nature of his affective and cognitive experiencing determines whether something seems meaningful or meaningless.

In summary, a child's psychic life is actualized under the accompaniment of the adult by the child giving affective, cognitive and normative meaning to reality (as contents) which then become sedimented in his possessed experience, and this becomes evident in his increasingly manifesting the behavior of an adult.

3. LEARNING IN TODDLERS

As explained, learning plays a vital role in a child's life. Through learning he actualizes his psychic life (potential) and thus moves closer to adulthood. Therefore, in order to accompany him toward adequately actualizing his psychic life, the adult (teacher) must know **how** he learns.

A toddler's learning is accomplished according to different **modes** which are intimately linked with various ways of experiencing; it is through the modes of learning that the child is able to attribute affective, cognitive and normative meaning to his experiences. Although all children learn (and attribute meaning) in these three ways, the level at which they learn differs in the pre-primary, primary and high school stages. Accordingly, a toddler's learning is **primarily affective**. Because his orientation to the world is mainly affective, intuitive and exploratory, he requires a climate of emotional stability in order to learn adequately.

When the toddler first begins to learn, his initial introduction to and awareness of the subject matter is through **sensing**. This is largely affective and, therefore, extremely relevant in his life. This first

awareness of the subject matter can emotionally stabilize or labilize him since it may arouse feelings of curiosity, wonder and interest or anxiety, stress and insecurity. This resulting stability or lability determines whether he will be **willing** to venture more deeply into the subject matter and whether or not he eventually experiences it as **meaningful**.

If affectively stable and willing to do so, the toddler will **attend** to what he is sensing. Research has shown that the attention span of toddlers is fairly limited, but nonetheless they **can** pay attention. This implies that they may **select** and demarcate a given portion of the subject matter to **perceive** it. These first two modes of learning (sensing and attending) are known as **sustaining** modes because they are predominantly **affective** and support the cognitive modes throughout the course of learning.

The first cognitive mode of learning is **perception**, accomplished in diverse ways by **globally identifying, analyzing, synthesizing and ordering**. A toddler's perceiving is largely global, but he also is already highly analytical in his perceiving. Perceiving is the main way in which he explores and comes to know his world.

When, in his perceptual exploration of reality, he encounters a problem, he proceeds to **think** about it in order to solve it. Thinking includes such actions as **planning, analyzing, comparing and ordering**. Because the toddler's thinking is mainly concrete and because he often is unable to find a solution on his own, he directs an almost unceasing spate of questions to the adult.

Imagining and **fantasizing** are very important modes of learning in the life of the child and are actualized mainly in play. They provide a way in which he can explore his own potentialities and those of his world.

Through **remembering**, subject matter to which the child has attributed meaning in the past again is made accessible to him, particularly with a view to future learning.

The teacher should note this exposition of learning carefully so that he can adequately accompany the young child on his way to adulthood.

4. MODES OF ACCOMPANYING

The teacher's task is to see that the child learns because this is how he actualizes his psychic life and becomes more adult. How should the teacher guide a child to ensure that he learns? Children learn by attributing affective, cognitive and normative meaning to the subject matter. It follows that they should be accompanied in these three ways. There is a direct relationship between the ways the teacher guides the child and the ways he attributes meaning and, therefore learns.

Accordingly, the quality of the affective (stable, labile) and of the cognitive (orderly, disorderly) accompaniment will influence the quality of the normative (meaningful, meaningless) accompaniment. Subject matter which the child experiences as valuable, useful and meaningful will become norms in his possessed experience and will find expression in his greater obedience to norms as he approaches adulthood.

These three modes of accompaniment can never be dissociated from each other, and their interrelationships are very significant for teaching and for the effective actualization of the child's psychic life.

5. AIMS OF ACCOMPANYING AND LEARNING

Since it is especially in the pre-primary school that **guidance** to the **learning effect** occurs, these matters should be formulated as aims to be attained.

The ultimate aim of teaching is adulthood. The task is to determine whether the child continually and adequately is actualizing his psychic life. A precondition for this actualization is that there is **harmony** between guidance by the teacher and learning by the child. For this reason, the following accompanying and learning aims are formulated for the pre-primary teaching situation:

5.1 Accompanying aims

* adequate affective accompaniment to **stabilize** the child's **affective** lived-experiencing

* adequate cognitive accompaniment to **order** the child's **cognitive** lived-experiencing

* adequate normative accompaniment to the child adequately **giving meaning** in his **normative** lived-experiencing.

5.2 Learning aims

- * initiation of learning by means of adequate **sensing**
- * sharpened learning intention by means of adequate **attending**
- * effective course of learning by means of adequately actualizing the cognitive modes of learning (**perceiving, thinking, imagining & fantasizing, remembering**)

After formulating the accompanying and learning aims, the teacher has to plan thoroughly in order to insure that they will be attained during the **presentation of the lesson**. If these aims are not reached, the child's psychic life will not be adequately actualized.

6. PLANNING A LESSON IN THE PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH A VIEW TO THE LEARNING EFFECT

Although teaching in the pre-primary school for the most part is informal, this does not mean that the teacher need not plan the lesson. Indeed, it demands the same thorough planning required of any lesson; it is only the **presentation** that is informal.

From an instructional point of view, as far as the pre-primary school is concerned, there are two matters that should be attended to in planning a "lesson", namely, its **content** and the **form** in which it is going to be presented.

In order to insure the learning effect, the teacher should plan the lesson such that there will be harmony between the lesson's form and content. However, this planning has to lead to presenting the lesson in such a way that during the lesson there is a harmony between the **teaching** and the **learning**.

6.1 Contents

The fact that there is no prescribed curriculum to follow in the pre-primary school does not imply that contents are irrelevant. Although there is no division of contents into different **subjects** in the pre-primary school, still certain **subject areas** can be distinguished, namely, language, science, math, creative activities, cultural and religious contents, singing, music, movement, and

world orientation. There are and have to be contents because teaching and also the actualization of the psychic life only occur in terms of contents. It is precisely in presenting (unlocking) and giving meaning to the contents that the child can attain a particular learning effect.

The contents for the pre-primary school are chosen from the concrete reality surrounding the child. However, these contents cannot be selected arbitrarily. From the complex reality, the teacher needs to choose contents that will be meaningful to the child. In selecting these contents for the pre-primary school, the **child** (his level of becoming, possessed experiences, interests, needs, the ways he learns) as well as the **aim** to be achieved should be thoroughly taken into account. The lesson is aimed at making each child optimally flexible with respect to the realities of life and the demands they make on him.

The contents now chosen need to be cast in a particular **form** and, via the teacher's guidance, be offered such that the child can learn optimally and thus also obtain the learning effect.

6.2 Form

With respect to formally planning the "lesson", consideration needs to be given to the **fundamental forms of teaching**, the **methodological principles**, **principles of ordering**, and **methods of presentation** (unlocking the content). The **teaching aids** also should be chosen with discretion.

In addition, the formal planning of a lesson cannot be done arbitrarily. Constitutive of planning a "lesson" is the **aim** held in view. Thus, it is clear that teaching and guiding are directed to the fact that **the child will learn**. In order to attain this aim, the teacher needs to know **how** the child learns (see section 3).

In choosing each of the above aspects of form of a lesson, the teacher should continually ask himself how the child learns. In this light, the **form** the lesson takes will be mainly determined by the **ways the child learns**. Also, the unique nature of the contents will play a role but this too should always be directed to the ways he learns. Thus, the teacher first must ask about the **modalities or functions** of each of the modes or ways of learning so that in the formal planning of the lesson they can be taken into account.

7. PRESENTING THE LESSON TO ACHIEVE THE LEARNING EFFECT IN THE PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL

What the teacher has planned in his "lesson" scheme has to be **actualized** during its presentation through his **guidance** and through the **participation** of the child in the unfolding of the lesson. This implies that the child needs to be affectively, cognitively and normatively accompanied to the learning effect via the contents and the form in which they are presented.

Since the teaching event in the pre-primary school is informal, the different **phases of the lesson** (actualizing foreknowledge, stating the problem, unlocking the new content, controlling, functionalizing, and evaluating) are not as clearly distinguished as in the primary and especially in the secondary school.

Accompaniment in the pre-primary school breaks down into **child-initiated** and **adult-initiated activities**. As far as **child-initiated activities in free-play situations** are concerned, it seems that there is not much guidance by the teacher. Although the different lesson phases are not so explicit, the teacher thoroughly plans and orders the free-play. Even though the choice of activity rests with the child, in no sense is guidance absent; it simply is **indirect**. The teacher needs to choose and plan the activities so that they stabilize the child emotionally. However, a cognitive challenge also should be directed to the child so he, in his involvement, can arrive at a unique solution and **himself attribute meaning**.

As far as the guidance is concerned, the teacher should move around and observe, provide assistance when necessary, intervene and accept, encourage, reinterpret and provide direction when the play stagnates. However, here the teacher's greatest task is to help the child acquire insights into his situations and to deepen his grasp of the contents so that thereafter he can live in terms of these contents as he ought to live.

The **adult-initiated activities** are more formally planned and the phases of the lesson are comparable to the primary school. These activities should thoroughly take into account the different modes of learning and their actualization in the different phases of the lesson. Here the accompaniment is more purposive and direct and

is aimed at expanding the child's knowledge in order to increase his mobility with respect to his surrounding world.

Also, during the lesson presentation, the modes by which the child learns are central and if the adult's accompaniment is consistent with them, the learning effect very likely will occur.

8. CONCLUSION

In order for the child in the pre-primary school to be accompanied to the learning effect, it needs to link up with the ways in which the child gives meaning. This means that the accompaniment should lead to affective stability, cognitive orderliness, and normative meaningfulness. With respect to planning and presenting a "lesson", the point of departure should be the different ways of learning and their functions as these are actualized by the child so that the contents and form of the lesson will result in the desired learning effect.

9. REFERENCES [Titles are translated into English]

- CROUS, S F M: **Pedoterapeuties begeleiding van die affektief-versteurde kind** [Pedotherapeutic guidance of the affectively disturbed child], D Ed dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1979
- GARBERS, J G, FAURE, J S and KOK, J C: **Die ontwerp van opvoedingsprogramme vir kleuters** [Designing educational programs for toddlers], University Publishers and Booksellers (PTY) Limited, Stellenbosch, 1976
- LE ROUX, S S: **Pedagogiese grondslae van die pre-primere onderwys** [Pedagogic foundations of pre-primary teaching], M Ed thesis, University of Pretoria, 1980
- SONNEKUS, M C H: **Ouer en kind** [Parent and child], Perskor Uitgewery, Johannesburg, 1976
- SONNEKUS, M C H: **Onderwyser, les en kind** [The teacher, the lesson and the child], University Publishers and Booksellers (PTY) Limited, 1975
- SONNEKUS, M C H and FERREIRA, G V: **Die psigiese lewe van die kind-in-opvoeding** [The psychic life of the child-in-education], University Publishers and Booksellers (PTY) Limited, Stellenbosch, 1979
- VAN DER STOEP, F: **Didaskein** [Didactics], McGraw-Hill Book Company, Johannesburg, 1972
- VAN DER STOEP, F: **Didaktiese grondvorme** [Fundamental didactic forms], Academica, Pretoria, 1969

VAN DER STOEP, F (Ed): **Die lesstructuur** [The lesson structure], McGraw-Hill Book Company, Johannesburg, 1973

VREY, J D: **Die opvoedeling in sy selfaktualisering** [The self-actualizing educand], University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1979