

CHAPTER 16

CHILDREN'S HANDICAPS

1. APPROACHES

1.1 Introduction

It is indicated that a deficient learning effect can be a symptom of a child's inadequate personal actualization, against the background of the disharmonious dynamics of teaching. Consequently, providing help should never be directed only to the learning outcomes, but it should aim to harmonize the teaching event. Orthodidactic assistance, thus, is teaching, " ... the best hope lies in providing 'traditional' instructional procedures but doing it better. Better may mean more instruction with smaller increments of learning, over a longer period of time" (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 343 [in English] and, therefore, the didactic principles must be implemented (i.e., choice of ground forms, learning modalities, illustrating, systematizing and ordering, controlling (verifying) and analyzing the learning situation) with the difference that planning the lesson is determined by the child's learning abilities (specific abilities and deficiencies) and not by the contents.

1.2 Orthodidactic ground forms

The ground forms which will ensure the best learning results must be adapted to the child's nature and circumstances. On the one hand, **play** as a ground form might involve a younger child, as an informal, creative being in the lesson event but, on the other hand, for an attention distracted child, playfulness might interfere with learning. **Conversation**, as a lesson form, might place demands on a child with auditory problems which are too high. The use of conversation, and its related teaching methods of **narration** and **question-and-answer**, also must consider the impulsivity and inability to handle "monologue" of the child with deficient attending. **Example**, as ground form, offers an opportunity to select and, by teaching, present the real essence of a matter to a child. In addition, example provides an opportunity to transfer insights, skills and methods of solution, and is particularly appropriate for

use with children with attention deficits because it clarifies possibilities of application.

1.3 Orthodidactic learning modalities

In helping a learning restrained child, concern with **tempo** is a necessity. Because of the contribution of learning success to learning readiness, an initial slow lesson tempo should contribute optimally to attaining the particularized lesson aims. Stagnation must be avoided, and the tempo must be accelerated and varied according to the learning milestones which are reached, learning obstacles which turn up, and the child's own confidence in learning. Also, his/her abilities and inabilities must be considered, e.g., for a child with a concrete way of thinking, demands will not be made for imagining, fantasizing, creativity and abstract thinking.

Illustrating plays a very important role in providing orthodidactic help. Concrete-visual teaching and learning aids must make the essences of the contents clearer as will introducing abstract concepts visually and with understanding. Flash cards, word lists, illustrations, demonstrations, models etc. offer a needed intermediary to bring the child again to the formal contents as they appear in the textbook.

In his/her anticipation of the teaching and learning aids which he/she aims to use, the orthodidactician must consider the disturbed perceiving of a child with attention deficits. Aspects such as color, form and size must be adapted to the modes of learning of the child with attention deficits.

Systematizing and **ordering** promote a child's experience of security and safety because this helps him/her acquire a firm grasp of the learning contents. A simple, stepwise move through the contents, thus, is necessary. The learning contents must be delimited such that it is possible for the child to acquire a grasp of them. It also is required that the principles of the subject matter are elucidated and pinned down. The underlying principles, rules and steps which make it possible to grasp the contents must be strongly emphasized. It is the task of the orthodidactician to continually repeat (there must be adequate opportunity for drilling, pinning down and applying), and at the end of each helping session, to provide a summary or recapitulation of the learning contents.

An improperly chosen principle of ordering [the contents] can be a contributing factor to a disharmonious teaching situation arising. If it is left out of consideration, a child with attention deficits is hindered by dissociations in being able to understand meaningful relationships among learning contents. A **symbiotic** ordering of learning contents, which brings the child into direct contact with reality as it arises for persons in concrete life situations, is particularly appropriate for providing him/her with an opportunity to directly experience and lived experience the learning contents (Van der Stoep and Louw, 1979: 101). Also, **spiral** ordering, where the teacher is directed by his/her ordering of the contents to lead children from the elementary and simple to the more difficult and complex, is particularly appropriate for temporarily putting aside those aspects which a child with attention deficits cannot handle as they should be during a particular period, and which can be returned to at a later stage. Following this method, there especially is an accounting for a child's learning readiness (Van der Stoep and Louw, 1979: 103), and an attention deficit child whose world image appears chaotic and unstructured (Den Dalk and Van Goor, 1974: 20). **Linear** ordering provides an opportunity to divide contents into small steps and to present them directly after each other with a gradually increasing degree of difficulty.

Structuring the learning environment, and a strict methodologically ordered engagement, thus, will ensure that the various modes of learning will be actualized optimally.

1.4 Control (verify)

Continual verification must be exercised during the lesson phases, namely, actualizing foreknowledge, stating a problem, presenting and actualizing new contents, functionalizing and evaluating, to ensure that the child keeps up: for a learning restrained child, each learning step is a precondition for the following one, and adequate verification and timely correcting ensure not only learning success, but also strengthens the experience of the meaningfulness of the learning contents.

The learning situation analysis where notice is taken of the disharmonious dynamics of educating and teaching (inadequate teaching, faulty control of the contents, inadequate learning) which contribute to an accurate description of the inadequate actualization and results of learning. On this basis, a **beginning**

situation is determined by which decisions can be made regarding the reduction of content, the entry level and the level of actualizing learning. Reducing learning material [to their essences], thus, must occur in accordance with what a child can deal with as an elemental, and also can be linked up with his/her attenuated foreknowledge. This means that there must be reflection about the nature and amount of learning material essences which are going to be dealt with (Gauthier, 1985: 363). The **teaching aim** includes the strategies by which a child is going to be made learning ready and retaught. In this way, the **lesson form** is linked up with the selection of the most appropriate ground forms, methodological principles and methods of unlocking [presenting] the contents. Planning the **phases [course] of a lesson** includes actualizing foreknowledge, stating a problem, which must be simple and easily understood, determining contents, etc. and eventually reevaluating to determine if the lesson aim has been reached.

Essentially, orthodidactic assistance is educative help, which means that the parents as well as teachers are continually involved in providing help to the child in terms of the most appropriate activities of educating and teaching.

Although learning problems are paired with deficiencies in specific skills, there is not yet conclusive evidence that the use of all kinds of perceptual and motor skills, **per se**, lead to better learning achievement.

The point of departure for designing a helping strategy is an analysis of a child's learning situation--in particular, the manifestation of deficiencies in actualizing learning, and in its inadequate results, as constituents of a disharmonious teaching situation.

Since the inadequate actualization of learning necessarily implies the inadequate actualization of the total person, this means that a child with learning restraints is not ready to learn because of his/her experiences of failure, negative self-image and reluctance to learn.

Making a child learning ready by indicating meanings with the aim of emotional stabilization is, because of the result which this has on the accompanying modes of learning [sensing and attending], a precondition for providing meaningful help. In this connection, it is necessary to establish optimally favorable educative relationships so

that effective educative communication can take place. Making a child ready for learning also requires correcting, optimizing and practicing the ways of actualizing learning which, until now, have occurred disharmoniously. Resistance can be expected in this regard because inadequate or attenuated modes of learning very likely already are habitual. In each case, this undertaking must lead the child to experience the learning activity as meaningful, based on his/her improved learning achievement. For this reason, the elucidation of principles, particular ways of attacking problems and effective learning strategies are much more valuable to a child with learning difficulties than mere practice, drill work and rote learning. This view explains the limited and ephemeral success of reading programs and learning techniques which are applied in ill-considered ways without considering the child in his/her disharmonious teaching situation.

According to the literature (Lerner, 1981: 296-325 and Hallahan et al., 1985: 216-229), there are two main approaches to providing help regarding learning problems, namely, a **developmental** and a **remedial approach**.

A **developmental approach** is based on the normal development of a child's skills. Reading materials are graded from the beginning phase of reading in degree of difficulty regarding vocabulary, story content and developed skillfulness.

The proponents of this approach place various facets of beginning reading in the spotlight:

*** Decoding**

This involves deciphering written language. Gurren and Hughes (1986: 339-346) indicate that a decoding approach must make provision for teaching all grapheme (written symbol) and phoneme (auditory symbol) relationships so a child can correctly pronounce the written symbols correctly in the right sequence.

*** Deriving meaning**

Here the advocates believe that a child must understand what he/she reads, rather than mechanically reading [i.e., pronouncing the words] correctly. Thus, word attack is not so important. This approach also is known as global reading -- look at and say the

whole word. This includes mastery of a basic sight vocabulary through repetition so that stories constructed from these words quickly can begin to be read. In connection with this, the proponents of the whole language approach believe that understanding is the most important aim and that a child's own language usage must be incorporated into teaching reading. They believe that learning to read must occur as naturally as learning to speak. The implementation of this approach then implies teaching a child to derive meaning from written language rather than switching over to oral language. This method includes an immediacy and a moment of creativity which is important for maintaining a child's interest: he/she expresses his/her own experiences in his/her own oral and written language.

A **remediation approach** includes techniques which normally would not be used in ordinary teaching:

- * The **multisensory** approach incorporates the sensory modalities (visual, auditory and tactile) in providing help, e.g., the method of Fernald (1943) where a child sees, hears, says, copies and writes a word.
- * There also is the technique of coupling the **method of teaching** with **unimpaired modalities of actualizing learning** with the assumption that a child then will learn more quickly.
- * The **behaviorist** approach stresses rewarding accurate reading aloud and reading comprehension, the correction of errors and the verification of progress. Specific techniques which are used here are the "**neurological impress**" technique, **repetition** and **content as guide**. The "**neurological impress**" technique (Heckelman, 1969: 277-282; Bos, 1982: 51-57) involves the pupil and orthodidactician reading aloud together with the help of fingers. The orthodidactician can read sometimes louder, sometimes softer, also slightly faster as the pupil reads. The aim is to allow the child to feel that he/she can read as an adequate reader, i.e., eliminate reading slowly, laboriously, analytically. Repetition means that a child reads a piece aloud over and over until he/she can do it quickly and accurately with minimum attention to decoding and promoting comprehension. There also is a study (Pflaum and Bryan, 1981: 252-258) which shows that the use of guidance from the contents can help with decoding.

However, research has shown that these approaches and techniques do not lead to complete success, although they can be of great value

in helping children with learning problems. The best approach, thus, will be to select for each child with a learning problem the technique which will be of greatest value for him/her.

The practice of helping must be planned in terms of the reduced essences of diagnosing. There must be a choice of the weight given to preparing a child to learn (pedotherapy to try to make up a retarded becoming), making a child learning ready (help in actualizing learning) and remediation (reteaching specific subject matter contents), and these three components must be integrated. According to Ekwall and Shanker (1985: 271 [in English]), "one important implication that the remedial reading program should have built-in provisions for the improvement of students' self-concepts as well as for the improvement of students' cognitive skills." Also, Harris and Sipay (1980: 70-71) say [in English] " ... it seems that for most children a balanced eclectic approach that uses visual, auditory, touch and kinesthetic cues in combination, and develops word identification and comprehension simultaneously, seems safer and less likely to produce difficulties than any method that relies primarily on one sensory avenue or stresses one important side of reading while neglecting another".

Also, it must be emphasized that diagnosing and evaluating are part of the event of providing help. Ekwall and Shanker (1985: 333) say [in English] "Careful diagnostic teaching is probably the most important procedure to be followed ... ". Also, Early (1969: 61-62) says [in English] "Diagnosis of the complex process of reading is continuous".

2. HELPING TECHNIQUES

2.1 Pedotherapy

Regarding pedotherapy, the same practice discussed in Part III of this book holds true.

2.2 Making a child ready to learn

Help in making a specific learning restrained or handicapped child ready to learn differ regarding its duration, regularity and intensity. The approach and contents might overlap considerably. Making a child ready to learn includes a variety of activities directed at eliminating the deficient actualization of learning and should always

result in working on subject content by means of remediation, since it has been shown that a deficient learning effect is a symptom of the inadequate actualization of learning. Ekwall and Shanker (1985: 22) say [in English] "Non-word perceptual training seems to be of little or no value in reading. Studies usually indicate that children receiving this type of training perform better on perceptual tests but fail to reach a higher level of reading achievement." Also, " ... we have emphasized the importance of providing instruction that closely parallels the act of reading" (1985: 397).

In this regard, a variety of data are available (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 305-308, 329-335, 356-358, 397; Lerner, 1981: 308, 223-240; Erwee, 1980: 236 and Grove and Hauptfleisch, 1979: 152-227) which, with careful planning, can find a place in a child's individual helping program. Martin (1971: 471) says [in English] " ... including motivation, perceptual strengths, style of learning - individualization of the child's teaching to capitalize on those strengths presently holds our most promising assistance to the handicapped child". It is important that "for each handicapped student an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be developed" (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 39).

Also, it is important that the level of difficulty of the contents be related to the child's level of skillfulness in the contents involved, "start at the child's level" (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 43) and must always be relevant for the child's age and grade level. There also must be opportunity for careful repetition and drill until an automatic response is acquired. " ... disabled readers require repetition and drill to a point often referred to as overlearning. This means that something has been learned so well that it evokes an automatic response Whether you are teaching word-attack skills or sight words, the automatic response level must be reached" (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 331-332 [in English]). The contents must be presented in a logically ordered way so they will be meaningful for a child, and eventually will lead to quicker learning or an improved learning effect.

2.3 Improving learning skillfulness (remediation)

Activities and aids which can play a role in word recognition, among others, are:

- * Flash cards with letters, sounds, words and sentences;

- * general word games, e.g., "Wordbingo" and "Scrabble";
- * use of the Language-master (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 112), the Read-master (Erwee, 1980: 233) and tape recorder/player;
- * Increasing vocabulary (see Erwee, 1980: 293);
- * Increasing a basic sight vocabulary (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 64, 178-179); and
- * oral reading by means of "neurological impress" and echo-reading (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 180-181).

Activities for reading comprehension:

- * Multiple-choice exercises;
- * completion exercises (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 147, 177);
- * use of punctuation marks (Ekwall and Shanker, 1985: 184).

Activities for spelling (writing):

- * The integration of sound, visual and auditory attending and motor activities is important here because spelling is an act of multi-sensory integration. See the Fernald method or the AKT-method as discussed by Ekwall and Shanker (1985: 329-331).

Activities for computing:

- * As seems to be needed, contents can be offered from the concrete to the abstract.

For theoretical models as explanations for developing learning skills and related teaching strategies, the reader is referred to Lerner (1981: 169-381).

3. AN EXAMPLE OF A HELPING STRATEGY FOR ALIDA (See Chapter 14)

3.1 Pedotherapy

The following meanings must be changed:

- * Unsure of herself;
- * experiences inadequateness;
- * withdraws from interpersonal relationships -- sensitive to the opinions of others;
- * experiences rejection; and

- * experiences inadequate relationship with her mother.

Techniques which can be implemented for her situation are drama therapy; Theraplay; play therapy; image therapy by which she can be guided to self-confidence and spontaneity in interpersonal relationships, a readiness to venture and an experience of accepting herself, also acceptance by her mother.

3.2 Making her ready to learn

The modalities of actualizing learning which will be focused on are:

- * attending: looking and listening exercises with an assignment;
- * ordered thinking: ideate, narrate, write a story; organize shuffled materials;
- * visual global recognition and closure: use of partially hidden pictures, objects, flash cards; cut-out window cards;
- * visual discrimination: use of objects, pictures, blocks, letters;
- * auditory analysis: recognition of sounds, noises, syllables; and
- * auditory sequencing: use of learning tunes, carrying out assignments, formulating sentences.

3.3 Improving learning skillfulness (remediation)

3.3.1 Reading

- * Word analysis coupled with auditory analysis and sequencing by which all types of reading errors she commits can be eliminated. Global recognition and closure, as already indicated, also will be considered here.
- * Recognition of vowels and diphthongs by means of auditory analysis and memory exercises.
- * Speed reading with the help of the Combo 8-reading apparatus (RGN, 1982), "Language-master" and "Read-master", a dictionary, a telephone directory, searching reading in news items.
- * Global recognition with the help of the "neurological impress" method; omit, for example, every ninth word which must be filled in ("cloze" technique); increasing sight vocabulary.
- * Reading comprehension: draw conclusions from read parts; enlarge on creative ideas and representations after a part is read.

3.3.2 Spelling

- * Syllabification with the help of auditory analysis.
- * Vowels and nasals with the help of visual memory and auditory analysis exercises.
- * Increasing sight vocabulary.

4. SYNTHESIS

Helping a child with learning problems requires much more than mere remediation because a deficient learning outcome, as a symptom, announces the indisputable presence of an underlying problematic. With further reference to the particularized essence of this problem, via diagnosing, there must be an individualized program of help planned for each child with problems in which there will be a concentration on how, via pedotherapy and more, the child can be prepared and made ready for learning, on the one hand, and eliminate the content deficiencies by means of remedial teaching, on the other hand. This implies harmonizing teaching and educative activities in which all parties in the disharmonious dynamics of teaching must become involved.

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