

## 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 which 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 which 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. A consequence of this is a clearly noticeable 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; consequently, it is not easy to sort out and organize 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, which 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 to assist the so-called derailed, conspicuous child in need within the limits of *educating*, and subject to the *forms of educating*. Therefore, all these very important particulars from the other areas of knowledge require a pedagogical interpretation in the light of the coherent meanings 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 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 an 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 lifeworld. Nevertheless, such disturbed relationships have an important educative influence

which 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/she 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 an attempt to look at the matter and the significance of the orthodidactic from a didactic perspective 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, which 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 accepted and especially pragmatic therapeutic techniques which, 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 motivating, diagnosing, designing programs and evaluating) have consistently been harmed. The result 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. With this, the fact must be considered 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 which are designed by them, and for what orthodidactics has attained nowadays. However, the fact remains that these particulars are not interpreted pedagogically and, very often are not integrated into orthodidactic theory.

Another aspect which, 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 which 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 which, in a narrower or broader sense, is known as “the orthopedagogic”. In the 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 which 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 which, 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* carries no meaning if it is not combined with a basic science or fundamental concept. In all its combinations, *ortho* refers to a 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 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/her. As is the case with 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 is no more than one teaching which 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 lifeworld 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/she 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/her to precisely the same extent as for a child who is not accompanied by his/her 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 forms of educating (and teaching) to full-fledged adulthood within the limits of their 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 pronouncements about teaching which are *valid*, they must necessarily have scientific validity for the orthodidactic. That the orthodidactic, just as the subject-didactic, will make 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 to enliven an *orthodidactic practice* which 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 able 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 orthodidactics 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 lifeworld without the lifeworld, as such, being damaged.

On the other hand, such a researcher can stare him/herself 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 which appear in the lifeworld. These two examples of possibly false ways of establishing a didactic theory are merely mentioned for orientation. They are 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 the 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 surrounding reality, and, even more closely, in the reality of educating, didactic pedagogics presents categories in which the essences of teaching, as it really *is* are verbalized. Also, there is mention of criteria in terms of which the categories can be evaluated in a practical sense, and by which their validity must be judged. When 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 follows two lines for acquiring 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 systems and forms of teaching, curriculum theory, evaluating pupils' achievements, etc. However, 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 reflecting how the didactic findings, from all that has preceded it, are planned for and brought into motion in a formal teaching situation. If one formulates this matter strictly, one can 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 findings now readily available about the lesson structure and its essences, it is very clear that the details included in the whole matter of the lesson structure, to a large degree, form 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 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 does in our technological time. As indicated, the school always builds a bridge between the spontaneous or given (original) lifeworld 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 scientific findings about the matter of “teaching” and “learning”. Hence, the orthodidactic is involved 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 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; the aim is only to orient the teacher with respect to some 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 which must be kept in mind, in this respect, is that a teacher’s preparation (content *and* didactic) is

of fundamental significance for the success which any pupil might achieve in the teaching situation. By the nature of the matter, he/she is the accompanier, initiator and designer of everything which occurs in the classroom. If he/she is negligent or careless with respect to any one of the two important facets of his/her task, it can be expected that he/she will make a very important contribution to the origin of learning problems. Thus far, the matter of teaching problems has received little attention in orthodidactics, perhaps because the results or manifestations of it are described as *learning* problems. The intervention of the orthodidactician, as indicated, however, covers both the role of the teacher and the actualization of learning by a child. The approach which 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/her existence unfolds for him/her. In the fact that he/she learns, he/she provides an answer to the questions and demands of his/her own being situated in surrounding reality. Therefore, an increasing mastery arises regarding his/her association with matters of the lifeworld which can be evaluated in the form of achievements. Thus, a child becomes more adult because he/she learns. 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/her as a person and as a human being, because they curtail his/her going out to reality and mastering it.

At first glance, a learning problem usually shows itself as a partial inability of a child in a learning situation to achieve as expected, in one respect or another. 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 factors which reduce the achievement of a person in the learning situation to a lower level than he/she is capable. 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/her before his/her own inabilities. However, pedagogically, the effect of these experiences runs much wider and spread out of the classroom into the school, the family, the social milieu, religious and moral life and, in these ways, eventually take vengeance on all facets of life.

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

It is mentioned that there is no one in school who has not experienced a learning problem at one time or another. Each time a child does not understand a 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. The answer depends on many factors, and on the design, intensity, availability and quality of the help, and the willing and affective life, which are only a few which can be mentioned. When the pupil gets the better of one or another of these matters which influence his/her learning activities, the learning difficulty is cleared up. In this respect, the learning problem is temporary and even incidental.

However, when he/she increasingly falls short in the situation for one reason or another, this means that he/she is not able to meet the demands. Consequently, he/she often will try to avoid assignments, or is satisfied with an inadequate achievement. When this happens, the child finds him/herself, to a greater or lesser degree, in a life crisis. In its turn, this implies that he/she makes an

appeal 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/her educators over the entire scope of his/her existence.

Each teacher must be able to identify this type of situation early and make provision for specialized help. In this connection, he/she must realize that the lead-in to learning problems evolves in specific ways with each child. Often, the occurrence of a learning problem is merely a symptom of deeper-lying difficulties (e.g., educative problems, relationship with his/her parents, or a physical defect) which 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 which 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 is continually evaluated as achievement scores, curves or graphs. There are few situations in a child's life in which defects or obstructions are placed in the limelight of another's eyes than just this one. Thus, a child's learning achievement is the point of culmination in which the *totality* of his/her cognitive becoming is made visible. In addition, he/she is not allowed any choice regarding his/her participation. As soon as he/she refuses to achieve, for one reason or another, in this series of situations, he/she 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, which are 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/her 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/she merely qualifies this as a learning problem, one can well understand that

his/her attempts to help him/her will amount to patchwork, since he/she treats a symptom and not the origin. This, naturally, does not disregard the fact that such a child really must contend with learning difficulties. For example, he/she could have lagged for a long time so that optimal achievement has 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 which 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 him/herself and are often so mysterious and concealed that it is difficult to delimit or properly examine them. Thus, 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 which 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/her learning.

The therapy which is used in this connection, often stretches over a long period 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, a disturbance in becoming certainly must be interpreted in its physical aspect. It is well understood that this must have an 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 which can create 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 complicate, 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 is indicated that the level of becoming, or readiness of a child can have far-reaching influences on 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 manifest itself immediately or in a short period. A child with deficiencies can plod along until the day the load becomes too heavy for him/her, and he/she 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/her affective state is a matter of security, a venturing attitude, exploration and emancipation, and self-confidence—all aspects which can influence the act of learning.

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

An important aspect which 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/she partly or totally loses control, this forms a fruitful ground for the spread of learning problems on an incredible scale. A teacher and his/her 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 it is the bedrock which supports his/her intentionality. Therefore, disturbed motives can largely refer 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 him/herself as one who is going to bend under low spiritual energy, show a deficiency in his/her 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 which manifests itself suddenly and for the slightest reason, and the use of colloquial language, which often is described by a teacher as "uneducated". A pupil with motivational disturbances often manifests him/herself 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/she, indeed, wants to venture in this, but does not know precisely how he/she must comport him/herself. Such a life uncertainty, hesitancy, and rejection of authority must also be seen in this context as an attempt to flee from and to conceal his/her 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, which 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/she 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 pupil's progress. To help them in pedagogic ways to endure, amidst of this life crisis, is no small task. Poor learning achievement, in this case, often is merely a symptom, which emphasizes that a child, in this stage of his/her life, must not be left to his/her 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 potentiality is noticeable regarding him/her. That this, talent does not mean a fixed given or constant quantity is well-known to all. A child's talent can only be evaluated by what he/she makes of it as a person. It also is generally accepted that he/she 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 which 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 something.

A factor which sometimes exercises an enormous influence here, and which 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 which 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/her talent, and the perception of the teacher regarding its forms of expression, are two matters which must be deliberately correlated in the adult's judgment (of the child).

#### **5.1.5 Organic defects**

As stated, a large percent of learning problems are rooted with an organic or physical basis. This means that a child in a learning situation has physical or organic potential at his/her disposal to which he/she, indeed, is not abandoned, but which, as a person, he/she must make something of, even if a 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/her own corporeality and body image, and often a crisis 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 which directly influence a child's learning achievement. Direct consequences which flow from this can be, e.g., the quality of the pupil's perceiving, his/her acquisition of a skill and, particularly, disturb or restrain his/her mastery of language.

Regarding matters such as brain damage, we know that, in many respects, it so hinders the child's activities that he/she no longer can participate appropriately in the teaching situation in normal

ways. Often, these pupils show a defective dexterity in language, in all 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/she 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 which 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/her corporeality, which 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 so that he/she completely loses his/her 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/she carries the effects of this with him/her 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 outside of the child him/herself) can drastically influence his/her 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 which 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 an environmental factor can influence a child such that his/her achievement is weakened, while his/her 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/her own life. However, in the case of a child, it often happens that, in the learning situation, he/she is confronted with tasks which he/she cannot do because of his/her talent and/or temperament. These demands from the parents can come from their expectations of him/her, in accordance with the prestige of the family in the community, to maintain a profile of achievement which he/she is not able 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, and whose scope and intensity increases over time.

The fact is the child cannot meet these demands. In his/her experiences and behaviors, because of these demands, the pupil has

one of two choices. He/she can withdraw and isolate him/herself in such a way that none of the demanders can reach him/her. On the other hand, he/she can throw everything into the struggle to try to meet the demands, and later carry the sadness of his/her 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 which 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 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/her 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 which directly concerns the future of a child. When a child's self-censure and the awaking of his/her learning intention are damaged because these matters are neglected in his/her educating at home, one can expect that the resistance, which is unique to the school tasks, in one way or another can overwhelm him/her, and by which he/she necessarily becomes an underachiever.

Here, the teacher is confronted with an extremely difficult task. As an adult, he/she 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 him/herself as someone who makes little effort or has no resolve for self-censure, self-judgment and self-discipline. Obstacles never really challenge him/her. All that he/she has refined during this/her entire period of overindulgence are his/her techniques of evasion. The healthy pedagogic authority, on which the school relies and which 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

educative “crime”. Ordinarily, the neglected child shows a way and attitude of living which indicate that, as a person, he/she is ignored and given the cold shoulder. Nothing is ever expected of him/her, he/she never is encouraged, love and discipline are not received, but his/her 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 which contributes to learning problems.

### **5.2.3 Identification**

To be able to identify him/herself with an adult is one of the most fundamental needs in a child’s life. He/she continually searches for someone he/she can imitate, and who wakens in him/her 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/she can guarantee its future. Should it happen that a child grows up without an adult entering the foreground somewhere in his/her life history with whom he/she can identify, his/her stake in life, and participation in his/her 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 him/herself, he/she continually looks for an adult he/she 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 parents. It also is a time of overwhelming contents which 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/her ways of existing.

Our time is also one of contrasts and clashes. These contrasts and clashes are observable aspects of the lifeworld. The school does not escape this. Ordinarily, the school shows itself as a conservative and cautious institution which 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 which 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 these matters can be an influence on a healthy and positive learning disposition in the life of a child because they can adversely influence his/her learning intention. Often, they find the school's activities laughable and, as they say, childish. This holds for a wide variety of aspect which are unique to the practice of schooling, such as teaching aids, which appear to be relatively wretched, in comparison with the aids which are used in advertising and other forms of influencing.

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

Together with the rest of modern humanity, modern youth also cry 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 population concentration, mass-production, mass-recreation, interpersonal alienation, etc. Other matters which also have a detrimental effect on the school have been a central theme for sociology for more than a decade. Therefore, additional findings of this [socio]pedagogical discipline are referred to.

### 5.2.5 The school

Although the school often is a passive party amidst the neglect and skepticism which 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 which 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 is discussed relatively broadly in a previous chapter. The school is a dynamic institution which sets a pace which 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 a school differentiates (groups), always remains a problem which never can be entirely resolved 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/her 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 these variations is really wishful thinking, and cannot be denied. Yet, amidst the complexity and the style of modern society, one must notice the difficulties which flow from it with respect to the achievement profile of the pupils and, at least, to 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. 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 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/she withdraws from his/her parents and teachers, sometimes participates intensively in forming an unfavorable group, and shirks his/her obligations; in conversation, he/she 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/she 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 surface when a child must begin a new subject about which he/she cannot acquire an understanding from the start.

On the other hand, the stagnation can be *progressive* in nature, because of an unexpected change in learning contents, the attainment of one's own ceiling of learning or the unexpected challenge from a physical condition which had not 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 which 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 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/she intensively experiences his/her 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/her intentionality in the learning situation begins to languish, with the result that his/her 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/she make a study of this issue so that he/she can recognize these appearances of learning difficulties. Finally, learning problems are a matter in the teaching of *each* child which must be considered. When a teacher is incapable of at least recognizing learning problems, he/she is incapable of appearing in front of a class.