

# THE CONNECTION BETWEEN EDUCATIVE AND LEARNING PROBLEMS AND THE ORTHOPEDAGOGIC TASK THIS ENTAILS

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## 1. THE PHENOMENON OF LEARNING PROBLEMS

In our contemporary society, a child has no other choice than to be involved in teaching in the school, as a social institution and, of necessity, he/she is confronted with demands which must be satisfied. It is generally known that many children experience problems in satisfying these demands. Even a superficial reflection on learning problems makes it clear that they have a different configuration with each unique child, and this underlines the necessity for a good understanding of **who** a child is, **how** he/she **learns**--more particularly, how he/she learns **inadequately**-- to ascertain the essentials of **his/her** learning problems.

## 2. THE CHILD AS LEARNING PERSON

Each child is continually a **person-in-educating**. As such, **he/she enters a dialogue** with the surrounding world. By experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, knowing, and behaving, **he/she actively goes out** to the world because he/she **wants to know** it and discover its **meaning**, since he/she **wants to be someone him/herself**. In terms of his/her **given potentialities**, in **feeling, willing, behaving, and knowing** ways, he/she attributes **meaning** to life contents whenever he/she is **present** to them by **sensing, attending, perceiving, thinking**, etc., and he/she integrates what he/she discovers there into his/her unique experiential world, or lifeworld.

The entirety of such unlocked meanings constitutes his/her **lifeworld**, which also is continually expanding and enlarging in proportion to new **possessed experience**--as the personal meanings he/she attributes to the contents of reality--which, thereby, become integrated. As a **person**, he/she, thus, is continually becoming **different**. This becoming different is **adequate**, if the life contents

**gradually learned** correlate with the meanings **adults** give to them, of course, if the child has at his/her disposal the necessary **learning potentialities**.

The learning difficulties are situated in his/her **psychic life**, as a **totality**, which is all his/her potentialities, i.e., all his/her **potentialities for exploring, emancipating, distancing, differentiating, and objectifying**; and all his/her **potentialities for experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, and behaving**; and all of his/her **potentialities for sensing, attending, perceiving, thinking, imagining and fantasizing, and remembering**<sup>(1)</sup>. Should he/she **actualize** these potentialities, this is seen as an **event of becoming and learning**, by which new **insights** continually **break through**,<sup>(2)</sup> **strong connections are formed**<sup>(3)</sup>, "yes" is said to values,<sup>(4)</sup> and the learner proceeds to an **acceptance of life**<sup>(5)</sup>.

**Learning**, thus, elevates the level on which a child **carries on a dialogue**, on which he/she **accepts responsibility**, on which he/she **makes choices**, and on which he/she **actualizes values**. By seeking meaning through **experiencing, willing, and lived experiencing**, and the different modes of learning, a child gives meaning to life contents. Thus, becoming adult gradually places his/her personal feelings, thoughts, and meanings—his/her "**learned-ness**"-- at his/her disposal.

By means of lived experiencing, he/she **takes a position** with respect to the learning contents on an **emotional, and knowing** level, and attributes meaning to them. So, for example, on an emotional level by **sensing**, he/she **becomes aware** of the learning material, as **something**. This sensing accompanies all **cognitive** learning, and it can assume at least three qualities, i.e., **impulsive, labile, or stable**. To be open to the content, as a **readiness** to approach it via the cognitive modes of learning, lived experiencing must be emotionally **stable**, since this is the basis or precondition for this readiness.

By means of his/her **willingness**, he/she continually gives **direction**, or a **course** to his/her learning initiative, and he/she directs it to an **aim**, when, by means of perceiving, etc., he/she takes a position, on a cognitive level, regarding the learning material. Then this involves **what the matter** itself, the **content** is as such. For the child to experience learning as meaningful, this position taken must be paired with the **logical, systematic, and ordered**.

The **emotional life** of a child is closely integrated into his/her total being-a-person and, because of this, **educating** always has an effect.

### 3. THE ROLE OF EDUCATING IN ACTUALIZING LEARNING

Regarding the content a child must **learn**, he/she is guided by the adult by **teaching**, an activity which emanates only from the adult. The content the adult presents is carefully selected, and ordered, with the aim of the child becoming adult, as an ordered way of living.

When a child **learns** this content, while the adult **teaches** it, is nothing more than a **conversation** <sup>(6)</sup> between learner and teacher, which flourishes as the educative event flourishes, based on mutual **trust, understanding, and obedience to authority**. The aim of this conversation is to allow the child to become capable of independently accomplishing his/her life tasks<sup>(7)</sup>; to help him/her with meanings<sup>(8)</sup>, with forming a conscience<sup>(9)</sup>; to activate him/herself morally<sup>(10)</sup>; and to allow him/her to acquire responsibility<sup>(11)</sup>.

Regarding a child's role in this conversation, he/she always has to **feel ready** to participate in it, and this involves a **willful act** on his/her part. The strength or not of his/her **willpower** is continually determined by his/her **sensing**, as modified by his/her affective **stability** or **lability** which, as such, is of direct **educative importance**.

As an **emotional mode of learning**, sensing also qualifies as an **accompanying** mode of learning <sup>(12)</sup>, and it is continually the **preparation for**, or the **beginning of** all cognitive learning. It is the first concerned involvement with things, a **becoming aware** of learning content. Now, when a child attends to what he/she has become aware of, he/she **opens** him/herself **to** and is **ready** to make the content part of his/her own experiential world by **learning** it via perceiving, thinking, etc.

Each sensing begins **intuitively** from a child's previous experience, or from any matter in his/her situation which directs an emotional appeal to him/her. Now, when a teacher confronts him/her with specific content, he/she becomes aware of it and, if his/her sensing is stable, he/she also takes a position toward it on a cognitive level.

A child has a **hierarchy** of possessed experience which refers to the modes and qualities of lived experiencing, e.g., labile, or stable affective lived experiences, ordered, or unordered cognitive lived experiences, etc. Unassimilated lived experiences continually direct a strong appeal to him/her in terms of **anxiety, uncertainty, insecurity**, as **moments** of his/her experiential world; and the intensity of these feelings influences how readily he/she lived experiences the learning-related problem, and breaks through or out of his/her subjective sensing to a remaining with the learning content, in ordered ways, by perceiving, thinking, etc.

Then there is always the possibility of affective lability by which the learning-initiated sensing cannot accompany/guide the cognitive modes of learning. Then, he/she also lived experiences that he/she is not learning adequately, and this leads to the further intensification of his/her feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Concretely, such a situation can be represented as a **"wall"** between his/her **learning potential**, and his/her **learning effect**, instead of a **"bridge"**, when he/she lived experiences security, and feels ready and prepared to also actualize his/her cognitive learning potentialities.

Then, the educator sees that the information he/she wants to present to the child is not meaningfully received by him/her.

Because a child continually interprets the relationships with his/her parents, teachers, and others, and each relationship does not allow him/her to escape, especially emotionally, care must be taken that he/she always experiences and lived experiences these relationships such that he/she also can learn, can achieve, is someone who gives meaning to something. Specifically, this has to do with the **atmosphere** or **climate** between parent and child, where mutual **trust** should be present. If this is lacking, the educator contributes to building a **"wall"** between the child's learning potential and his/her learning effect.

#### **4. THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PROBLEMS OF EDUCATING AND LEARNING**

The educative dialogue always remains a point of intersection of the subjective interpretations of the adult and the child, where short-circuits can arise, says Vermeer<sup>(13)</sup>. Therefore, it also is clear that no child learns **automatically** because, to be **able** to learn, he/she must

**actively** go to the appealing content, and become intellectually involved with it, while the adult must **actively teach** him/her.

However, in current teaching, the role of a child's **emotions** is still overlooked, and the **cognitive** is especially concentrated on, as well as the role of the teacher. When either of the two parties participates in this dialogue half-heartedly, this means the educative relationship, sequence, aim, and activity structures are not being properly actualized, says Landman <sup>(14)</sup>.

Often, a child's inadequate participation stems from a **labile emotional life** which as such, is a purely educative matter <sup>(15)</sup>, and it is evidence that the educator might not adequately trust and understand the child, or confront him/her with sympathetic authority. Muller-Eckhard <sup>(16)</sup> says, when an adult's understanding and interest are lacking, "a disordered and confused lived experience" arises, and he emphasizes that this can have serious consequences because, with deficient understanding, the child's "whole psychic development is disturbed"<sup>(17)</sup>.

During the relationship between educator and child, what will be unlocked for a child must be conveyed by means of a clear "message". Too often, a child does not understand the message or understands it incorrectly.

It also is readily understood that, it is a child with learning difficulties who acts incorrectly, fails, and ultimately is a "failure". The parent's logic is that his/her child must work harder and be more productive, which might be entirely correct, from his/her point of view, but the **way** this is communicated to the child usually fails, when he/she is not taken into consideration as a lived experiencing person.

Everything about him/herself and his/her educative relationships which he/she is unable to meaningfully assimilate into his/her experiential world leads to **anxiety**. Therefore, Lubbers also says, "the communication between parents and children can occur such that the child yields in fear and withdraws into underhanded behavior."<sup>(18)</sup> A child experiences and lived experiences educative deficiencies on a vital-pathic level, and **he/she feels** unsafe, insecure, and uncertain, lonely, helpless, awkward, dependent, and inadequate.

Here, it is only emphasized that errors in educating, such as the following, usually lead to learning problems: rejecting, spoiling, overprotecting, an authoritarian way of exercising authority, lacking restraint, being inconsistent, indoctrinating, lacking love, over-estimating, rejecting order, demanding too much, being permissive, exploiting. Then, a child is **affectively, cognitively, and normatively** neglected:

- he wants to become someone himself but is kept small;
- he is an initiative of relationships but is forced into a waiting attitude;
- he wants to be accepted but feels rejected;
- he wants to feel like someone of value but feels inferior;
- he seeks stability but lived experiences lability;
- he wants to be understood but feels he is not; etc.<sup>(19)</sup>

He is really abandoned to his anxiety and he feels that there is no one he "dare" share this feeling with.

As unassimilated experiences increase quantitatively, a child is gradually driven into an affective no-man's-land, and this deprives him/her of a readiness to also explore his/her world on a cognitive level as, a willing, experiencing, and lived experiencing learner because, as Noordam<sup>(20)</sup> says, it is only a non-anxious, non-neurotic child who can learn adequately. Because he/she cannot defend him/herself against the anxiety, he/she withdraws into the apparent security of hi/her own world. Lubbers<sup>(21)</sup> says this forces him/her to take a **defensive attitude**.

Such educative neglect also means, essentially, that the adults contribute to the child's "lack of readiness" by dismantling his/her **learning preparedness and readiness**, and because of this, his/her **sensing** and **attending** are further labilized in the lesson situation, and he/she is unable to learn adequately.

The multiple formed nature of **learning**, educating, and teaching, on the one hand, and the complex nature of the child's psychic life (emotionality, intellectuality, etc.), on the other hand, gives rise to tensions by which a learning problem then shows itself in several possible symptoms. These symptoms are nothing more than an indication that there is a **gap** between the child's **attained** and his/her **attainable level of learning**. There is a difference between what he/she, in fact, **knows** and **understands**, and what he/she

ought to know and understand, in accordance with his/her potentialities.

In the following, brief attention is given to the **handicapped** child with learning problems.

## 5. THE HANDICAPPED CHILD WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS

Learning problems mean there is a **disharmony** between a child's self-actualizing his/her learning intention, particularly regarding the **course of learning** which includes a **disharmonious** actualizing of experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, and behaving. The result is a **disharmony** regarding a **labile** emotionality, and an unordered cognitive attribution of meaning, as a defective foundation for integrating the newly possessed (learned) experiences.

It should be clear, however, that the onset of emotional lability should not be attributed merely to educative neglect **as such**. **Preparedness and readiness to learn** also require the availability of cognitive potentialities, and physical and sensory skills. In this connection, a **handicapped** child must contend with specific problems. Thus, e.g., a weak-sighted child is **limited in exploring** the world, and his/her **freedom** to adequately design his/her own world is hampered by his/her weak visual perception. He/she is limited in how he/she will/can explore his/her world.<sup>(22)</sup> In addition, h/shee is also continually wrestling against his/her total physical handicap, while his/her lived experience of his/her eyes alone recedes from the foreground.<sup>(23)</sup>

When, because of sensory or other defects, a child lived experiences that he/she does not cumulatively acquire a stronger grasp of life contents, gradually he/she **feels and believes** that he/she **is not able**, and this quickly becomes a feeling of "I will not try, because it doesn't make any difference." Indeed, he/she must continually contend with an emotionally labilizing vicious circle.

The fact that a blind child cannot **read visually** does not qualify as a **learning problem**, but also when he/she cannot do this by **touching** or **hearing**. At most, his/her blindness is a "learning defect" which can **aggravate** his/her learning. However, this does not **force** him/her to not use the learning potentialities he/she does have at

his/her disposal. An unwillingness to **listen, think, read, play**, etc. is not attributable to his/her specific handicap as such.

Regarding the learning problems of a handicapped child, it is, however, not always possible to distinguish whether the affective problem is primarily brought about by the handicap as such, or by educative neglect. For this reason, it is disturbing that there still is so much consensus regarding the origin of the learning problems of handicapped children. Too readily, the handicap is viewed as the only cause, and then there is not enough consideration given to the role of inadequate educating and teaching.

Viewed essentially, a handicapped child's learning is no different from that of a child not handicapped. However, because of his/her experiential and lived experienced deficiencies--as moments of limited freedom—he/she very easily shows a **different** profile in actualizing the various modes of learning, and it is necessary that he/she be given "**extraordinary**" help. Then, there is an accounting of his/her **limitations**, but also of his/her **potentialities**, with the aim of **preventing learning problems from arising**.

The "**extraordinary**" help involves the teacher finding "special" ways for making the contents most effectively communicable to the child. In this connection, he/she makes use of a wide variety of aids and techniques, from which he/she selects the most appropriate for teaching a unique child. Thus, the child is helped with respect to his/her **permanent** defect, and with the most effective ways of communicating with life.

However, these children also must be continually supported emotionally. To do this successfully, it is necessary that the child continually be diagnosed in his/her **educative situation** with the aim of determining, as early as possible, the under actualization of his/her **learning**, and the **teaching** and **educating** he/she is receiving.

Thus, a "**continuous diagnosis**" is necessary to be able to link up with available potentialities and skills, and to make sure that there are no "**gaps**" between a child's learning potential and learning effect: if there are such gaps, the handicapped child must also become involved in **orthopedagogic** intervention.



Therefore, the teacher in Special Education not only must be prepared to use "special" techniques for improving the child's communicating as such, but he/she also should be a schooled **orthopedagogue**.

## 6. ORTHOPEDAGOGIC ASSISTANCE FOR A CHILD WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS

### 6.1 Introduction

If a child is identified as someone with a learning problem, then the immediate question is **how** this problem can be abolished and, with this question, **orthopedagogic practice** <sup>(23)</sup> is entered. The cardinal questions which the orthopedagogue must answer are **what aspects of the learning problem are controllable** and correctable, and how this can be done. Therefore, in the first place, a child is involved in an **orthopedagogic diagnostic investigation**.

### 6.2 Orthopedagogic diagnosis (evaluation)

Since a learning problem is observable, certainly the appropriate way to begin is with a diagnosis. However, the **nuanced** nature of the problem requires nuanced **diagnosing** and **helping**.

For this reason, the orthopedagogue also interprets the findings of other disciplines with the aim of designing a program of assistance-- a task which only an **orthopedagogue** can do because his/her **practice** is based on knowledge of the results of the various pedagogical disciplines, which are integrated into a comprehensive perspective. <sup>(25)</sup>

By an intra- and inter-disciplinary approach, and after the orthopedagogue has interpreted the findings, an insight is obtained into the "different" meanings a unique child with learning problems attributes to things, and the **nature, circumstances, and underlying causes** of his/her **learning** problem are disclosed.

The **nature** is determined by the **quality** of his/her **actualizing** the different **modes of learning** in his/her educative situation. This occurs in terms of a comprehensive image of his/her lifeworld, as an experienced, willed, lived experience, and behavioral world, by which is also acquired an indication of his/her achieved level of

learning, by using **pedagogical criteria** and **learning norms** derived from the learning plans.

The **nature** of the learning problem is then knowable in terms of the gap between a child's **achieved** and **achievable learning**, with reference to his/her current level of becoming.

The **learning results** always show his/her **successes and failures**. The **achievable learning**, which **now** can be expected of **this** child, is determined with the help of available evaluative media, and by taking into consideration what can be expected of a child of his/her age with approximately the same talents or deficiencies. For example, if it is found that he/she does not **read, spell, write, or figure**, his/her history of knowing is not **what** it is for other children with approximately similar talents.

Regarding the underlying **causes** of the problem, the directly relevant causes are indicated, e.g., a loss of function, motor problems, poor muscle coordination, problems of eye-hand coordination, laterality problems, uncertainty about direction, poor spatial orientation, neurological dysfunctions, sensory loss and more.

However, this is not sufficient and **aspects of learning restraints** as such, also must be disclosed in terms of the child **inadequately actualizing** his/her various **modes of learning-in-educating**.

The connection between under actualizing the modes of learning, of functional, and other losses, and the quality of the educative and teaching structures which are at the foundation of the inadequate learning are, thus, indicated.

Thus, the **causes** can only be shown in their **essentials** by means of an **experiential image** of a child with learning problems. An image is acquired of his/her **possessed experience**, as his/her **personally coherent meanings**, which also refer to the **modes of learning** which he/she **had actualized** while acquiring this experience, and which give an indication of the current level and quality of actualization of the non-effective learning by the various emotional and cognitive modes of learning.

Thus, this image involves determining **what** a child **knows**, what he/she has **learned**, **what meanings** he/she gives to the learning

tasks, and **how** he/she has arrived at such meanings. On the one hand, it shows **what** constitutes his/her experiential world and, on the other hand, **how** he/she him/herself gradually establishes this experiential world under the guidance of his/her educators.

Now, the orthopedagogue knows **how** the manifested **learning problems**, and the **restrained aspects of learning** show themselves, and are integrated into the child's total **personal actualization** in his/her educative situation, with the help also, e.g., of a **medical, occupational therapeutic, language- and arithmetic-investigation**, and he/she also knows **where** and **how** either the child, the adult, or both participate inadequately in the event of teaching and educating.

Indeed, now, he/she has determined why this child is not **now prepared and ready to learn** and can proceed to plan a program of assisting him/her.

### 6.3 Orthopedagogic assistance

Teaching children with learning problems is not different from teaching children not experiencing them. What is "different" is that there is a "wall" which hinders the child with problems in learning as he/she is able to, and he/she also must be supported to a "new" **readiness to explore**, as a purposeful resolve to enter the lesson situation, and be **willing** and **wanting** to master **alternative meanings** of the contents, until the meanings he/she gives the contents correspond with his/her learning potential.

Since a child with learning problems is being "incorrectly" educated, it also is necessary that his/her parents and teachers continually be given guidance so that their errors of educating can be eliminated.

Hence, orthodidactic assistance as such, includes much more than a mere "**remediation**" of specific learning failures. These "failures" must be given thorough attention, and specific functions must decidedly be "practiced" so a child can also have at his/her disposal **skills** and **proficiencies which** are continually required; **practicing** and **exercising** the maturing potentialities at his/her disposal are necessary. A child must be guided to **listen**, to **attend**, to discriminate well between foreground and background, etc.

However, clearly confronting the orthopedagogue is an **educative task**, and it is more than mere remediation. Initially, a safe space

must always be created for a child, within which he/she can overcome his/her feelings of insecurity and affective lability, along with the adult guiding him/her more cognitively.

What has to be given specific attention is sketched in the diagnostic results, which are the basis of the orthopedagogue knowing, among other things, the nature of the unique child's learning problems, what the nuanced structure is of his/her psychic life, which different modes of learning are most and least prominent, which modes of learning are actualized inadequately, and what their relationship is with the psychic life, as a functioning totality, what the state is of his/her emotional foundation, what the state is of the guidance by the adults to the child inadequately actualizing his/her learning potentialities, and to what degree the learning problems possibly contribute to further under actualizing learning.

In the light of the above, a stereotypic method--even with children who superficially manifest similar restraints or learning problems--cannot be followed, but an adaptation of method to each individual child is required.

By means of orthodidactic help, a child is supported to a **preparedness and readiness to learn**, as well as to a "**learning acceleration**", by which is meant that he/she will master those **skills and contents** he/she had been obliged to master but didn't.

As soon as this has happened, **orthodidactic guidance** proceeds to an **ordinary**, or a **special educating**.

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