

## CHAPTER 4

# EXAMPLES OF ASPECTS OF CHILDLIKE LIVED EXPERIENCING

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The question of lived experiencing is a question of what the experiential world itself offers.<sup>(1)</sup> Thus, what follows are descriptions and analyses of real examples of lived experiences, as fundamental intentionality, of several children acquired through an investigation and exploration of their experiential worlds. In each case, the lived experienced aspects, or moments of a child in his/her situation are disclosed.<sup>(2)</sup>

The approach and methods of pedodiagnosis, with acknowledged possibilities and limitations, are described in a comprehensive series of studies by teachers and students of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. These include the acquisition of a person image (e.g., a language, lived experience, vocational orientation image) of a child; a description of the pedodiagnostic investigation as encounter, conversation, observation, historicity, the use of exploratory media (“tests”), etc. The following topics are thoroughly treated in these studies: the underlying view of being human (philosophical anthropology), the sphere in which the investigation occurs, the phenomenological method, the point of departure of such research, detailed descriptions of the exploratory media, etc.

The following brief images of lived experience are acquired from investigations carried out at the Child Guidance Institute, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. To show the variability of such images, examples of moments of lived experiences for five children are selected from a larger number, rather than choosing two or three for a detailed description in terms of exploratory media. These images are specifically **evaluated** with the help of the **criteria** presented in the previous chapter.

### 2. EXAMPLES OF MOMENTS OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

**(a) Lived experience image of Saartjie:** Saartjie (6 years 0 months) is a member of a family in which her father is in his third marriage, and her mother in her second. There are two other children. Family life is characterized by extremely unstable affective relationships. Her "natural" parents were divorced when she was 1 1/2 years old. After that, she lived alone with her mother and received lots of attention.

Saartjie is required to visit her father twice a year for approximately one month. There, she is corrupted because her father showers her with material things and because he exercises no discipline or punishment. After these visits, the consequences of pedagogical neglect are very conspicuous: then she is undisciplined, selfish, and short-tempered; also, she seeks attention and love with intensity. Her pathic lived experiencing of a need for authority and security is so intense in these periods that she shows the serious symptoms of encopresis and enuresis. Deficient normative lived experiencing, paired with ambivalent educating, lead Saartjie to confusing and bewildering lived experiences. In these visits to her father, the forming of her will, conscience, and responsibility are seriously damaged.

Habitually, Saartjie is an extremely reticent, introverted, quiet, bashful child. Her intense craving to be loved and cherished is significant. She demands a great deal of attention and love from her mother. Her extreme lived experiences of insecurity and uncertainty are especially conspicuous in her relationships with others. For example, she refuses to attend nursery school. Also, she speaks in an uncertain, soft voice. Because the minimal condition for her to lived experience security is not fulfilled, her humanization is hindered, and her socialization is inadequate.

Saartjie does not accept authority and, if she is disciplined, she becomes extremely closed and the actualization of her normative potentialities of lived experiencing shows problematic progress. Her stepfather is too strict, places demands on her which are too high, and he is not always receptive to her problems. The consequence is a lived experiencing of insecurity, uncertainty, and anxiety because the necessary help, support, and acceptance fall short. Then, she seeks her "natural" father, and his affection and acceptance. She does not experience a total commitment of her stepfather as an educator, especially regarding her problems and helplessness.

The divorce of her parents was traumatic for her. She can't understand (gnostic lived experience) or accept (normative lived experience) that they no longer live together. From the above, her visits to her father are always traumatic.

At times she has been so upset that she has hidden under her bed. When Saartjie is physically punished, enuresis results. When she is required to complete a task, she becomes extremely insecure and unwilling, and she must be strongly encouraged (pathically supported) to this end.

According to the intelligence medium, she has good intellectual potential. However, because of her unfavorable pathic lived experiencing, this potential is not actualized as desired. She remains bound to the concrete, she habitually feels insecure and uncertain, and she usually shows a weak intentional directedness (weak motivation).

Play diagnostics indicates that, even with familiar and everyday ways of being, such as playing, she shows a deficient initiative and infantility. There is no exploratory venturing in her world of play, or of illusive (make believe) play. (These interpretations correlate with the results from the thematic apperception media). An emotional readiness to participate is lacking, even on the naive level required by play. Saartjie shows the complete impotence of a child experiencing anxiety and who is pathically bound to the everyday world. Also, her relationships with other children and adults miscarry.

Her graphic expressions (drawings) indicate infantile pathic lived experiencing, and the under actualization of potentialities. She experiences a basic life insecurity, anxiety, and tension. She is inflexible, self-centered, and gruff in her relationships. There are additional indications of evasiveness, hostility, and superficiality. Her sloppy drawings point to a pathic flooding, to a lived experiencing of serious traumas, and to a deficient contact with reality. There are few certainties in her experiential world. Saartjie's "sweet" behavior points to a pathic docility, and she shows no behavior problems. The image of her lived experiencing is an example of uncertainty and insecurity.

The emphasis of this image of lived experiences falls on the fact that her pathic modes of lived experiencing signify an extremely

unfavorable precondition for her gnostic and normative directedness and, thus, for her psychic-spiritual becoming in the direction of a morally independent adult. She is continually flooded by experiences of insecurity, uncertainty, anxiety, and confusion. There is little orderly knowing and mastery of reality (even on a childlike level).

**(b) Lived-experience image of Bennie:** Bennie (10 years, 5 months) is the youngest of four children, of which the other three are already adults. His parents describe him as a "lonely, spoiled late-lamb." His unrestrained behavior, which includes generally poor school achievement, has become problematic for his parents, but especially for his mother.

The most distinctive pedagogical deficiency in Bennie's image is an extreme flaw in the exercise of authority, with the consequence that his normative becoming is very distorted. Both parents appear to be self-indulgent, and Bennie's father pays minimum attention to him. Thus, identification with him falters. Bennie is not educated to responsibility, and especially his ethical-normative educating to responsibly actualize his intelligence (gnostic potentialities) is seriously deficient. Affective educating seems to be in order, but too few demands of propriety are set for him.

A child-educator relationship is weak. The complaint is that Bennie cannot direct himself to his homework. His mother helps him a great deal with it; however, she does so in an impatient, tactless way. Thus, a nurturance of an independent work attitude is hindered. Also, this assistance does not occur in the necessary sphere of security and tranquility.

During the investigation, Bennie became open and accessible. However, he displayed an extremely labile or unstable direction to the media (tasks) placed before him. He experiences discouragement and disinterest. His constant seeking of help, and the assurance that he is progressing successfully in solving tasks are indications of his feeling helpless, as well as that he does not make the necessary adjustments and sustain an effort to tackle a task.

Regarding the intelligence medium, his disposition and achievement indicate a being directed not favorable for optimally actualizing his gnostic potentialities. His modes of learning, as ways of lived experiencing, thus are of poor quality. A further finding is a

defective involvement with reality (and, thus, a disturbed lived experience) and labile, pathic modes of lived experiencing, which include anxiety and impulsivity.

Bennie dislikes his teachers, possibly because school is the only place where firm demands for responsibility are made of him.

The following expression (incomplete sentence) indicates that identification with his father is lacking and that he experiences an attenuated father-son relationship: "My father is unfair." In addition, the sentence completion medium indicates that he feels impotent in arithmetic, has a pathic disposition and prefers all which is immediately satisfying, e.g., playing, swimming, birthdays. Bennie is not being educated to lived experience on a desired pathic-gnostic level and to actualize his gnostic and normative potentialities.

Bennie's graphic expressions (drawings) indicate that he experiences uncertainty regarding limits and firmness (demands, restrictions, certainties, etc.). He experiences a futile striving to achieve, restlessness, uncertainty, and some aggression. He also experiences a needless dependency, seeking support and guidance, and lack of self-confidence.

In general, Bennie's lived experiences are infantile. The tasks are not too difficult for his potentialities, but rather for his disposition and directedness. There also is evidence of a weak venturing attitude, poor communication, and a narrow lived experienced or exxperiential world, which involves a narrowness of emotional lived experiences and a serious gnostic restraint.

This image shows how weak normative (authority) educating can restrain a child's becoming. Bennie lived experiences himself as free to be egocentric instead of being free within the constraints of norm-centricity. Because he is given too much freedom (without responsibility), he cannot acquire his freedom (as moral independence). Parental authority, needed to foster a child's freedom, is deficient.

Although Bennie enjoys an emotionally warm educating, is accepted, is lovingly cared for, etc., too seldom are demands and norms held out to him. This indulgent educating, with deficient norming and disciplining, along with an inadequate exercise of authority, as well

as defective guidance and forming of Bennie's volitional life and willing lead to his experiencing uncertainty regarding demands, prohibitions, norms, and values. This uncertainty is paired with feelings of insecurity and anxiety. Bennie's experiential world is not a normatively certain space and, therefore, not a secure one. Consequently, his affective readiness to participate, his gnostic disposition, his intellectual orientation, and his norm-directed activities are deficient.

**(c) Lived-experience image of Rika:** Rika (14 years, 3 months) displays rejection and aggression, especially directed to her mother. She is difficult to manage, and her school progress is very poor. She is the only daughter in a family of three children. According to her mother, Rika has a fine sense of responsibility, and the parent-child relationship is good. However, her mother does not really know and understand Rika very well, and that she experiences herself as not being understood. Mother and daughter live (and lived experience) past each other pathically, gnostically, and normatively. This is confirmed by the pedodiagnosis, and especially in the subsequent pedotherapeutic sessions. Rika is irresponsible, as is seen from her actualization of intelligence as well as from her report card, which labels her as "lazy, undisciplined and uncooperative."

This girl in puberty is uncertain in her interpersonal relationships; also, in her experiential world of schooling, she is uncertain and lacks self-confidence. Since her parents neglect their exercise of authority, Rika does not easily accept anyone's authority. Affective educating appears to be good, but her normative educating lacks demands for obedience and responsibility.

When Rika first entered school, she was not ready and, initially, she experienced uncertainty, helplessness, impotence, and insecurity regarding school. Also, with time, there was serious didactic neglect.

Rika has not grown very much physically during the past two years, an event for which she was not psychically-spiritually prepared; consequently, she finds this difficult to assimilate and accept. Furthermore, she has not received the needed help and support to assimilate and accept this problem. She does not lived experience the sense and meaning of her physical growth and maturity as well as her own femininity.

Her intelligence is very superior (IQ = 136) and she should not be failing in school. However, an ethical-normative basis for her gnostic directedness is mostly lacking, as is a necessary intention to learn.

In the pedodiagnostic investigation, Rika appeared to be exceedingly shy, reticent, unapproachable, and distant. At the same time, she usually directed herself well in completing the tasks presented to her. For this reason, her performances on the media are meaningful.

The thematic apperception media brought out Rika's conflict with the values and norms of her parents, e.g., "My parents do not like music." There is projection of escaping into private activities, as well as threatening to run away from home because of her conflicts with her parents. According to these media, Rika experiences her father as "fairly old" and "not very strong."

The sentence completion medium reveals her vital-pathic initiated lived experiencing, i.e., her intense desire for vital-pathic pleasures such as vacationing, partying, dancing, swimming, dating, and reading. She has a strong dislike for schoolwork, getting up early, some teachers, and examinations. Even so, a normative moment of her lived experiencing is evident in, e.g., her remorse over failing school. In addition, she is afraid of further failures, and experiences her impotence and unwillingness to learn. Also, she experiences her future as dark.

She is in revolt against the issue of going out at night, and feels an injustice because other children are allowed more than she is in this respect.

The following expression shows her bodily lived experience, as self-experience: "I am very aware of my height."

She experiences her parents as childish; she thinks her mother acts as if she were twenty years younger. The example set by her mother prevents her from experiencing that her mother is a real example of being a woman. Through her deficient identification with and trust in her parents, her lived experience of the sense and meaning of their norms and values fails.

The Wartegg-drawing medium shows Rika's good potentialities for contact on an egocentric level, and also her good intelligence. On five of the eight drawings, the emphasis in her experiential world seems to be on the physical and on questions of femininity and beauty.

Graphic expressions (drawings) show that Rika experiences herself as small, inadequate, rejected, as inferior. She is uncertain and strives to achieve. There are indications of possible early sexual maturation. Also, her emphasis here is on the experiential world of youth (clothing, appearances, hairstyle, etc.). Her pathic, gnostic, and normative lived experiencing show confusion and lability. Rika's pathic disposition, as well as her psychic-spiritual non-adulthood are brought out in the results from these drawings. An additional attitude is that of indecision and vagueness--a waiting attitude. She lived experiences her dependency and need for support.

Rika's pathic and normative lived experiences are not favorable preconditions for a distanced encounter-with-herself (self-acceptance, self-understanding, self-affirmation). The lived experience of self (self-consciousness) is primary with her and, consequently, she is thrown back on her lived body-ness. The desired level of lived experiencing sense and meaning, as ethical-normative lived experiencing, is not actualized. The help and support which she needs (from father and mother) are lacking. Their view of the task of educating misses what is required of them by Rika's psycho-spiritual puberty. Loving spiritual care is very deficient: the expected gnostic trust and distancing to self-protection are distorted.

Rika's ethical-normative educating to responsibly actualize her gnostic potentialities is damaged. She displays confused and bewildering pathic, gnostic, and normative lived experiences typical of a misunderstood child. Also, there is little mention of the following: Rika's exploration of the world, her emancipation to independence, freedom and responsibility, a favorable work attitude, a habitual gnostic-normative directedness, the desired lived experiences of norms and values (especially on a knowing level), and a lived experience of sense and meaning favorable to her psychic-spiritual becoming.



**(d) Lived experience image of David:** David (14 years, 9 months) is a **multiply retarded child**. He suffered brain damage at birth. Further, he has motor disturbances, he is inclined to convulsive attacks, he suffers a serious degree of progressive loss of sight, and he has serious verbal deficiencies because of his very slow acquisition of language. A consequence is poor school achievement.

The investigation indicates that David lived experiences his multiple physical defects as well as the frustrations, failures, discouragement, and impotence resulting from them.

David's father is impatient, too strict, and sets high demands for him, even regarding his school achievement. He has a great deal of difficulty accepting David's multiple impediments. David's identification with his father occurs on a pathic-docile, dependent level. His mother is always mild and indulgent; she gives too much support and attention, and she is over-protecting. For example, she helps David too much with his homework, so an independent work attitude is lacking. Because of his father's attitude, David is not understood, while his mother's ways of dealing with him constrain him regarding his life potentialities. Consequently, because of this ambivalent educating, David experiences confusion, uncertainty, and insecurity along with intense anxiety and tension. Thus, he is not being adequately helped and supported to accept and assimilate his deficiencies and disabilities.

Most noticeable in the image of David's lived experiencing is his constricted (pathic, gnostic, and normative) experiential world, his pathic disposition, his unactualized potentialities, his deficient pathic, gnostic and normative lived experiences and his infantile ways of lived experiencing, which include lack of responsibility, dependency, introversion, defective self-confidence, deficient initiative, a weak venturesomeness, a seeking of acceptance, and an over-sensitivity to criticism.

David's handwriting, his drawings, his gait, and bodily movements reflect his disturbed motor and spatial lived experiences.

With respect to any difficult task, David experiences anxiety, tension, frustration, impotence, and discouragement; the task itself is experienced as unpleasant and difficult. His concentration on such tasks is labile and defective.

David lived experiences his deficiencies in a strongly pathic manner; he does not positively and actively assimilate and accept them, and this results in experiencing awkwardness and self-consciousness.

Especially on the graphic expression (drawing) media, in significant ways, David gives form to his lived experiences of his physical defects and of reality. Based on the results from these media, there is a general, basic insecurity about life and strong infantile aggression.

The sentence-completion medium brought out lived experiences which are central in David's world: he experiences his mother's over-protection as "love"; he experiences his dependency as a concern that his mother will go away; he experiences his shortcomings in comparison with other children; he is aware that his thoughts sometimes wander; and he longs to achieve in sports (i.e., achieve physically).

This study reveals moments of David's existential distress related to the fact that his body, as medium of existence and center of becoming, is handicapped in many ways, and he lived experiences being handicapped. His existential distress indicates that his potentialities for lived experiencing are not being actualized. His lived body is impotent in many regards, and his lived experiences of this are a barrier to his psycho-spiritual becoming. An additional source of distress is his insatiable need to be totally accepted and to feel that he is someone of value. The necessary parental understanding, insight, tact, and patience fall short; his infantile aggressiveness and insecurity indicate that he does not experience that his parents' intervention expresses an understanding of him.

As far as his gnostic directedness is concerned, David is extremely terrified of new situations which arrests adequate actions in such situations. Ethically-normatively and affectively, he is not being educated to actualize his intellectual potential. He does not respond positively to the gnostic appeals directed to him.

Because of his defective intentional directedness, his pathic unwillingness, and his unfavorable normative lived experiencing, David's forming is not progressing optimally. He does not unlock (open) himself to reality. His potentialities are not broad or deep. There is not a stable intention to learn or of an objective-distanced disposition toward and exploration of the world (as knowing

disposition and cognitive lived experience). Confusion, aimlessness, lability, defective orientation, and insight, and limited potentialities characterize his gnostic directedness. Hence, he shows defects in language as a means for actualizing his potentialities and for expressing and ordering his experiential world. Moments of unordered thinking continually appear.

Because David cannot distance himself to obedience, his acceptance of authority and norms occur on the level of docility. Thus, it is difficult for him to choose and decide in terms of acquired norms and values. There is only normative based on an educator-bound-docility and a dependent identification with the educator. His personal forming is damaged because he does not lived experience himself as spiritually-emotionally accepted. Especially his mother makes too few demands of self-restraint and of a distanced directedness. Also, his pathic lived experiences provide an unfavorable precondition for his normative lived experiencing. His lived experiences of the sense and meaning of his own existence are not favorable; his existential-ethical involvement with reality is not accountable.

There is hardly any educating to emancipation as moral independence, to a gnostic-normative disposition, and to a distanced (objective) response to his being appealed to, and the "prognosis" is that David will be dependent on pedagogic support much longer than is usually necessary. He is so flooded by his pathic lived experiences, which is unfavorable for his becoming, that the image of his lived experiencing points to a restrained becoming.

**(e) Lived experience image of Robert:** Robert (9 years, 11 months) and his two younger sisters suffer the consequences of severe pedagogical neglect. Irrespective of his extremely poor school achievement (average of 44% in grade 2), he shows the following behavioral problems: truancy; he is difficult to handle; he is not responsible, sloppy, and careless; for the past three years, he has had encopresis daily; he steals; he is nervous and quickly becomes disorganized and confused. His mother describes him as immature and tense.

Robert's oldest sister had also visited the clinic because of learning and behavioral problems. His youngest sister does not attend school yet and is cared for daily by a servant because both parents are working. The parents have little time for or interest in their

children, and they show rejection of as well as impatience and frustration with them.

Robert's father's deviant behavior and moodiness give rise to serious tensions in marital and family relationships. Also, his mother is tense and has received recent psychiatric treatment for this. Both parents are inclined to depression. The mother-father relationship is so tense that both are considering divorce. Because of ignorance and irresponsibility, they exercise little authority with their children. Normative educating is extremely inconsistent. The parents themselves recognize that the father-son, mother-son relationships are extremely restrained and fall short of what is expected. Also, Robert's humanization is deficient. His affective educating is such that he often asks his parents if they love him.

The parent-child relationship, as a lived experienced learning relationship, is extremely unfavorable. In addition, there is didactic neglect at school. His mother says he is averse to and poorly directed to schooling.

On the sentence-completion medium, his expressions are extremely infantile; he was poorly directed and showed serious language deficiencies. He live experiences his poor school achievement: "**My greatest worry is to pass.**"

During the entire investigation, Robert's directedness was so labile and weak that significant lived experiences were brought to light with only a few of the media. His poor direction itself, is a sufficient indication of his faulty work attitude, weak venturing attitude, and inadequate exploration, as well as feelings of helplessness, uncertainty, confusion, anxiety, and tension.

Robert has good, average intelligence (IQ = 106), but actualizes it in deficient ways, since he is not being educated to do otherwise.

Also, the projective media show that his lived experiencing is very infantile for his age; further, the constricted nature of his experiential world (especially the emotional) and conflicts in his interpersonal relationships, paired with avoidance, hostility, aggression, and distrust are conspicuous.

His graphic expression, once again, show his extreme uncertainty and infantilism; further indications are introversion, impulsivity, self-consciousness, conflict, unrest, anxiety, and tension. Robert

experiences himself as small, rejected, and inferior; he is dependent and shows a lack of self-confidence. Conspicuous is an image of confusion, inhibition, lability, and aimlessness in both his pathic and gnostic lived experiencing.

Robert's pathic lived experiencing is extremely unfavorable for his becoming: his upbringing is emotionally poor, and his humanizing miscarries; his primary need for and primordial experience of a longing for love, warmth, pampering, and acceptance are not met; therefore, he shows the condition of being an affectively neglected child. He does not experience his affective relationships as stable; this condition shows itself in the form of serious learning and behavioral problems.

Because the normative moment of the pedagogical is severely deficient, there is little evidence of the normative, of disciplining, of an awakening of conscience—thus, of forming a person.

Because of his non-actualized potentialities, Robert simply is not able to take a distanced, gnostic perspective. He lives in a sphere in which normal psycho-spiritual development is impossible. Love, understanding, surrender, self-sacrifice, patience, and tact from his parents are not what they should or need to be. This neglect, especially of his affective and normative educating, results in ways of behaving indicative of psychopathology.

These two parents, indeed, are the destiny of their child.

### 3. SYNTHESIS

Because of the dialectic relationship between the experiential world and a child's lived experiencing, an attempt is made to know some children, via the unique images of their own lived experiencing, and we arrive at a better understanding of the lived experiencing child-in-the-world.

No lived experience leaves a child untouched; it is either favorable or unfavorable for his/her becoming and for reaching his/her destination (adulthood).

In the foregoing images of lived experiencing, we disclose how defective lived experiencing restrains a child's becoming. These children were encountered and studied in their situations, i.e.,

pedagogical situations which fall short of the criteria and guidelines for evaluating and guiding a child's lived experiences.

The main aspects or moments shared by the above five images of lived experiencing are: the educator did not support a child's lived experiencing in his/her experiential world to attain adulthood--thus, pedagogical neglect is present in one form or another, along with lived experiences flowing from such neglect, i.e., insecurity, uncertainty, helplessness, and anxiety. Additional common findings are: a constricted experiential world; infantile and confused lived experiences; learning and/or behavioral problems; parental non-acceptance of their child, his/her defects or problems; non-assimilated lived experiences by a child, e.g., traumas, handicaps, deficiencies, problems; defective becoming a person; a pathic disposition. Each of these images culminates in the finding of the inadequate actualization of pathic, gnostic, and normative potentialities, and of the fact that a child's lived experiencing is unfavorable for his/her becoming.

Each of these images of lived experiencing is problematic. Here, the author wishes to avoid the impression that all images of lived experiencing show problems. The above findings are not accidental in the sense that these children were studied at the Child Guidance Clinic because their parents were concerned about their learning/behavioral problems. When the above-mentioned psychological-pedagogical criteria (Chapter 3) are not satisfied, the lived experience image is conspicuously touched in psychological and pedagogical ways. When these criteria are satisfied so a child's lived experiences are favorable for his/her maximum psycho-spiritual development, the image of his/her lived experiencing is not psychologically-pedagogically conspicuous.

### References

1. Kouwer, B. J. & Linschoten, J.: Inleiding tot de Psychologie, p. 90.
2. Kouwer, B. J. & Linschoten, J.: op cit., p. 94.