

# LEARNING EFFECT: ACCOMPANYING THE PREPRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD TO THE LEARNING EFFECT\*

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## 1. DESCRIPTION OF CONCEPTS

As is evident from the title, there are two concepts which require closer consideration. These are **accompanying and learning effect**. However, they imply a third one, i.e., **learning**, which is described further for greater clarity.

### 1.1 Accompanying

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

### 1.2 Learning

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

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**involved** with the contents to discover for him/herself their sense and **meaning**.

### 1.3 Learning effect (as life effect)

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

## 2. THE AIM OF ACCOMPANYING IN THE PREPRIMARY SCHOOL

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

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

This actualization of the psychic life occurs because the adult (teacher), through his/her guiding, unlocks reality (as contents) for the child, and the child appropriates them for him/herself by **learning** them. In this way, he/she actualizes his/her psychic life (potentialities) and, thus, his/her becoming adult flourishes. For optimal learning to occur, he/she must be accompanied in such a way that he/she **will** (i.e., wants to) **experience** (i.e., be involved with) and **lived experience** (i.e., give meaning to) the contents. This implies that he/she must be brought into contact with the contents which he/she must handle and, in this way, become involved with (i.e., experience) them, and to which he/she must give sense and

meaning (i.e., lived experience). In this way, he/she learns to **know** the contents. In giving meaning, the contents are assimilated into his/her **possessed experience**, and this meaning is eventually expressed in his/her **behavior**, which provides an indication of his/her progress toward adulthood.

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

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

### 3. LEARNING IN TODDLERS

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

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

When the toddler first begins to learn something, his/her initial introduction to and awareness of the subject matter is through **sensing**. This is largely affective and, therefore, extremely relevant in his/her life. This first awareness of the subject matter can stabilize or labilize him/her emotionally, since it may arouse feelings of curiosity, wonder, and interest or anxiety, stress, and insecurity. This resulting stability or lability determines whether he/she is **willing** to venture more deeply into the subject matter, and whether he/she eventually experiences it as **meaningful**.

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

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

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

**Imagining** and **fantasizing** are very important modes of learning in the life of the child and are mainly actualized in playing. They provide a way for he/she to explore his/her own potentialities and the possibilities of his/her world.

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

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

#### 4. MODES OF ACCOMPANYING

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

Accordingly, the quality of the affective (stable, labile) and of the cognitive (orderly, disorderly) accompanying influences the quality of the normative (meaningful, meaningless) accompaniment. Subject matter which the child experiences as valuable, useful, and meaningful becomes norms in his/her possessed experience and is expressed by his/her greater obedience to norms, as he/she approaches adulthood.

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

#### 5. AIMS OF ACCOMPANYING AND LEARNING

Since it is especially in the preprimary school that **guiding** to the **learning effect** occurs, these matters should be formulated as aims to be attained.

The eventual aim of teaching is adulthood. The task is to determine whether the child is continually and adequately actualizing his/her psychic life. A precondition for this actualizing is that there is **harmony** between guiding by the teacher and learning by the child. For this reason, the following accompanying/guiding and learning aims are formulated for the preprimary teaching situation:

##### 5.1 Accompanying aims

\* adequate affective accompanying to **stabilizing** the child's **affective** lived experiencing

\* adequate cognitive accompanying to **ordering** the child's **cognitive** lived experiencing

\* adequate normative accompanying to the child adequately **giving meaning** in his/her **normative** lived experiencing.

## 5.2 Learning aims

\* initiating learning by means of adequate **sensing**

\* sharpening learning intention by means of adequate **attending**

\* effective course of learning by means of adequately actualizing the cognitive modes of learning (**perceiving, thinking, imagining & fantasizing, remembering**)

After formulating the accompanying and learning aims, the teacher must plan thoroughly to ensure that they are attained during his/her **presenting the lesson**. If these aims are not reached, the child's psychic life will not be adequately actualized.

## 6. PLANNING A LESSON IN THE PREPRIMARY SCHOOL WITH A VIEW TO THE LEARNING EFFECT

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

From an instructional point of view, as far as the preprimary school is concerned, there are two matters which should be attended to in planning a "lesson", i.e., its **content** and the **form** in which it is to be presented.

To ensure the learning effect, the teacher should plan the lesson such that there is harmony between the lesson's form and its content. However, this planning must lead to presenting the lesson in such a way that, during the lesson, there is a harmony between the **teaching** and the **learning**.

### 6.1 Contents

The fact that there is no prescribed curriculum to follow in the preprimary school does not imply that contents are irrelevant.

Although there is no division of contents into different **subjects** in the preprimary school, still certain **subject areas** are distinguished, e.g., language, science, math, creative activities, cultural, and religious contents, singing, music, movement, and world orientation. There are and must be contents because teaching and the actualization of the psychic life only occur in terms of contents. It is precisely in presenting (unlocking) and giving meaning to the contents that the child can attain a learning effect.

The contents for the preprimary school are chosen from the concrete reality surrounding the child. However, these contents cannot be selected arbitrarily. From the complex reality, the teacher must choose contents which will be meaningful to the child. In selecting these contents for the preprimary school, the **child** (his/her level of becoming, possessed experience, interests, needs, the ways he/she learns), as well as the **aim** to be attained, should be thoroughly considered. The lesson is aimed at making each child optimally flexible with respect to the realities of life and the demands they make on him/her.

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

## 6.2 Form

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

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

In choosing each of the above aspects of the form of a lesson, the teacher should continually ask him/herself how the child learns. In this light, the **form** the lesson takes is mainly determined by the **ways the child learns**. Also, the unique nature of the contents play a role, but this should also always be directed to the ways he/she

learns. Thus, the teacher must first ask about the **modalities or functions** of each of the modes or ways of learning so that, in the formal planning of the lesson, they can be considered.

## 7. PRESENTING THE LESSON TO ACHIEVE THE LEARNING EFFECT IN THE PREPRIMARY SCHOOL

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

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

Accompanying in the preprimary school breaks down into **child-initiated** and **adult-initiated activities**. As far as **child-initiated activities in free play situations**, it seems that there is not much guiding by the teacher. Although the different lesson phases are not so explicit, the teacher thoroughly plans and orders the free play. Even though the choice of activity rests with the child, in no sense is guiding absent; it is simply **indirect**. The teacher must choose and plan the activities so they stabilize the child emotionally. However, a cognitive challenge should also be directed to the child so he/she, in his/her involvement, arrives at a unique solution and **him/herself attributes meaning**.

As far as the guiding is concerned, the teacher should move around and observe, assist and, when necessary, intervene and accept, encourage, reinterpret, and provide direction when the play stagnates. However, here the teacher's greatest task is helping the child acquire insights into his/her situations and to deepen his/her grasping the contents so, thereafter, he/she lives in terms of these contents as he/she ought to live.

The **adult-initiated activities** are more formally planned, and the phases of the lesson are comparable to the primary school. These activities should thoroughly consider the different modes of

learning and their actualization in the different phases of the lesson. Here, the accompanying is more purposive and direct, and aims at expanding the child's knowledge and increasing his/her mobility with respect to his/her surrounding world.

Also, during presenting the lesson, the modes by which the child learns are central and, if the adult's accompanying is consistent with them, the learning effect very likely occurs.

## 8. CONCLUSION

For the child in the preprimary school to be accompanied to the learning effect, it must link up with the ways in which the child gives meaning. This means the accompanying should lead to affective stability, cognitive orderliness, and normative meaningfulness. With respect to planning and presenting a "lesson", the point of departure should be the different ways of learning and their functions, as these are actualized by the child so the contents and form of the lesson result in the desired learning effect.

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