

THE PSYCHIC LIFE OF THE AUTISTIC CHILD-IN-EDUCATION

By

MARTHINUS GOUWS

SUPERVISOR : PROF DR M C H SONNEKUS

DEPARTMENT : PSYCHOPEDAGOGICS, SOCIOPEDEGOGICS AND
VOCATIONAL ORIENTATION PEDAGOGICS

FACULTY : EDUCATION

DEGREE : MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

S U M M A R Y

The aim of this study is to penetrate, investigate and understand the psychic life of the autistic child-in-education and to explicate it in terms of psychopedagogical categories (essences).

First there is an attempt to examine the actualization of the autistic child's learning from a psychopedagogical perspective and to determine if he actualizes his modes of learning differently from a normal child. If so, it is necessary to determine the extent and nature of this different actualization in the school situation and elsewhere.

It is found that the autistic child's inadequate interpersonal encounter, his lack of a genuine awareness of himself and others as persons and the meaninglessness of objects in surrounding reality, the lack of an exploratory directedness and readiness to explore and expand his experiential world all hinder his learning. Attentively-being-in-the-world, as a primordial learning potential, is attenuated and he is described as being less aware of reality. A labile sensing makes attending to and unlocking reality difficult for such a child. This weakened attending leads to an inadequate control of language, a preoccupation with his own body and a rigid, stereotypic, compulsive and ritual-bound way of existing that impede the actualization of the gnostic-cognitive modes of learning such as observing, perceiving, imagining, fantasizing, thinking, remembering and actualizing intelligence. An under-actualization of learning and thus

of the potentialities of his psychic life leads to a limited broadening of the horizon of his experiential world.

As regards the course of becoming, it is indicated that the same factors that impede learning, and that are unique to autism as a handicap, also hamper the proper becoming of such a child. Problems in the acquisition and control of language and its communicative use, as well as a labile and impulsive emotional life also give rise to a lack in actualizing the modes of learning and becoming. Consequently, autism gives rise to inadequate experiencing, willing, lived experiencing, knowing and behaving such that this child under-actualizes his exploring, emancipating, distancing, differentiating and objectifying, as modes of becoming; i.e., his entire psychic life leads to his inadequately becoming adult.

Accompanying the autistic child via the unitary event of educating and teaching in order to support him to affective, cognitive and normative self-actualization is a particular psychopedagogical, orthopedagogical-orthodidactical task for educators. Because affective accompaniment to affective self-actualization is a precondition and driving force for cognitive as well as normative accompaniment to cognitive and normative self-actualization, the necessity for realizing an intensified relationship of pedagogical trust in the school situation is emphasized. Only when this child experiences security can he be supported to self-activity, exploring and learning where initially use is made of concrete and meaningful learning material and then his own ordering of cognitive moments becomes possible.

Normative accompaniment of this child to normative self-actualization demands that the educator exemplify stringent normative examples. Such a child should be praised in an almost exaggerated manner if he does something worthy of approval so that he may have a lived experience of his own worth (dignity) and realize the meaningfulness of the normative.