

CHAPTER V

FAMILY DIAGNOSTICS AND FAMILY THERAPY AS ORTHOPEdagogic DIAGNOSTICS AND PROVIDING HELP

1. FAMILY DIAGNOSTICS

In the previous chapters it has come to light that family diagnostics is a precondition for effective and meaningful restructuring.

1.1 The role of observing in family diagnostics

A family therapist is trained to recognize family dynamics by means of observing the interactions among family members. Information about the organization of the family is acquired by perceiving what occurs among family members and by correlating the relations among these occurrences.

A therapist observes what occurs in a family on a verbal as well as a non-verbal level. The observing occurs purposefully because a therapist does not merely acquire information but does this to determine the nature of the hierarchical ordering within a family as well as the distance among family members. For this aim, a therapist focuses on aspects such as control of the definition of relationships; family structure; boundaries between subsystems; autonomy and interdependence of family members; the effect of the symptom on the family members and the benefit that the symptom has for them; the place, time and way of symptom manifestation; the isomorphic nature of transactions and the sequence of interactions among family members.

In the following, attention is given to those aspects on which a therapist focuses in order to make a family diagnostic.

1.2 Family structure

1.2.1 Introduction

Various essences of the family and the family structure have been illuminated by the different approaches. These essences are present in each family although they are particular in nature for each unique family.

Each family has its own structure. Minuchin describes the family structure as “the invisible set of functional demands that organizes the ways in which family members interact”¹⁾.

A subsystem within the family system is viewed as a way in which the system differentiates itself in order to perform different functions. A family member is part of different subsystems within which he takes a complementary position. The subsystems are defined by gender, age, interests, etc.

1.2.2 Hierarchy²⁾

A hierarchical organization within a family is determined by the position and authority-status [power] that the members assume with each other. A therapist identifies the family hierarchy by observing the sequences of interactions among family members. Who initiates activity; whose contributions carry weight; who can bring about shifts in interactions by, e.g., increasing or decreasing tension and who enjoys respect are the aspects observed.

A family hierarchy is also determined by the control over defining relationships. In this respect, a therapist indicates the communication and meta-communication among the family members. How members qualify their communication by means of their meta-communication especially gives an indication of who defines a relationship.

A hierarchy is functional when its boundary is clearly defined and preserved by all of the participants.

1.2.3 Distance between family members

The distance between family members is determined by the boundary between the subsystems within a family. The more rigid the boundary, the greater is the distance between members.

However, if a boundary is very vague, the distance between family members is much smaller. The distance between family members is placed on a continuum that extends between the two poles of being over-involved and uninvolved³⁾.

The distance between family members is identified by observing how boundaries within a family are operationalized. A therapist observes in what ways the family members are involved with each other; how the boundaries are respected; which members support each other and to what degree; the degree of autonomy that members enjoy and that is respected; the degree of interfering; and the extent to which boundaries are allowed to be contacted, maintained and communicated among family members.

1.2.4 Lifecycle of the family⁵⁾

A family's existence shows a particular course. Eight phases of life are distinguished through which a family moves during its existence. The childless phase that last approximately two years is followed by an expansion phase when children are born. After this there is a differentiation between the family with children in the primary school level and the family where children have reached puberty and adolescence. Then a phase follows during which the children move out of the house, followed by the so-called "empty nest" phase, and finally there is the phase during which deaths occur. This course usually takes between approximately seven and thirty years⁵⁾.

The particular phase that a family is in is decisive with respect to identifying hierarchy and distance within a family. A family with teenagers and adolescents ought to allow room for greater autonomy for them than a family with toddlers. Hierarchies also occur with respect to a family's course of development to an increasingly more democratic form of authority in which the children play a more complementary role.

1.3 Synthesis

During a family diagnostic a therapist arrives at an image of a particular family's structure, organization, hierarchy, etc.

2. ORTHOPEDAGOGIC DIAGNOSTICS

2.1 Introduction

The being-in-motion of educative essences is qualified as the “dynamic of educating” and it refers to the interaction between a child’s and an educator’s personal actualization within their physical environment that results in a child giving meaning on a higher level⁶⁾.

The dynamic of educating implies separate activities-in-unity and has the possibility of progressing disharmoniously. A parent and child both actualize their psychic life in an educative event and the inadequate actualization of it by one or both can contribute to a disharmonious progression of the dynamic of educating.

A disharmonious dynamic of educating is described as an event where a child’s personal development is realized inadequately under the accompaniment of an adult. He then becomes conspicuous because his behaving is in harmony with unfavorable emotional, knowing and normative meanings of himself and learning contents and not in harmony with the behavior that can be expected of him in accordance with his developmental level and personal potential⁷⁾. Consequently, orthopedagogic diagnostics involves determining the [nature of] the disharmonious dynamic of educating.

2.2 Orthopedagogic diagnostics

In an orthopedagogic diagnostic an analysis is made of the parents’ functional activities in connection with a child’s inadequate meanings in order to determine where the educating had gone wrong. For example: how a parent’s impatience about the questions that his/her eight year old son continually asks leads the child to interpret him/her as a parent who does not readily want to talk with him and that he somehow does not meet his parent’s expectations⁸⁾.

Knowledge of a child also requires an understanding of how he interprets his situatedness because it is indeed this meaning that continually directs his acting or lack of acting in this educative

situation. Thus, e.g., definite feelings are awakened in him by the behavior of his educators and he attributes his own cognitive content [meaning] to such activities. These insights and feelings once again influence his further participation in the educative event⁹).

Both child and parent actualize their psychic life within the event of educating; the parent does this in terms of accompanying his child. Hence, when there is mention of a disharmonious dynamic of educating, a parent also can actualize his psychic life inadequately in terms of this accompaniment (guidance).

Thus, the question is if here there is mention of a dynamic, to what extent can the parents' interpretation of their child's behavior shape their insights and feelings, and also influence their further participation in the educative event. A parent can evaluate the successfulness of his own functional activities in terms of the child's behaving and this can influence his further participation.

There also is the question about how a parent's attribution of meaning is analyzed.

A child's giving meaning to the educative event for the most part is highlighted via media [tests] while a parent's giving meaning is gauged by a historicity conversation. Questions are asked about how the parents interpret the relationship with their child. A parent gives a rendition of his interpretation of the relationship and this is expressed as he sees fit. To determine the real nature of the relationship the interpretation of the child and a parent's rendering of his own personal interpretation of the relationship are correlated each other. In this way, the failure of the relationship and its nature are determined.

The nature and view of the parents' relationship with their child are discussed with them in terms of their functional activities and the diagnostician attributes his own interpretation without observing the activity and relationship between the members as such. The relationship between the members is derived from the various interpretations and meanings.

The parents' functional activities and how they operationalize them are acquired by means of a questionnaire. During their accompaniment the parents are guided to acquire insight into how their child experiences their activity and they are guided to change their functional activities if necessary, and in this way contribute to a change in the child's giving meaning to this activity. The parents continually report on how this again has come into motion.

After a reliable image is acquired of the relevant moments of a child's meaning-structure as this is related to his unfavorable behaviors and the connection between these meanings and the functional activities of the parents are explored, the pedotherapeutic aims are determined. By means of pedotherapy a child is helped to change the disturbed or attenuated unfavorable meanings.

By changing the child's unfavorable meanings and the dysfunctional activity of the parents the disharmonious dynamic of educating is eliminated.

The actual operationalizing of the functional activities of the parents and the activities of the child, as a result of both actualizing their psychic life, however, are not observed or explored within the context of a family dynamic. Thus, in the following attention is given to a family diagnostics as an orthopedagogic diagnostics where the actual putting-into-motion of the relationship between parent and child and the actualization of the psychic life of both can be explored within the context of a family dynamic.

3. FAMILY DIAGNOSTICS AS ORTHOPEDAGOGIC DIAGNOSTICS

3.1 Introduction

From a family therapeutic approach where a family is observed as a whole in order to describe the context and connection of the interactions and the particular organization of a specific family, a therapist can observe and describe the phenomenon of educative failure within the dynamic of a particular family.

Perceiving, exploring and describing the phenomenon as such are defined as the phenomenological method. A therapist who explores and describes phenomenologically the family dynamic is thus involved in describing the primary educative situation, or its failure. The family is the primary educative situation and also the point of departure for pedagogical thinking.

3.2 Family dynamic

A person's activity is a projection of his giving meaning. Behaving is the result of a person actualizing his psychic life¹⁰⁾ and the personal meaning given to the educative event is observable in the activity of parent and child.

In educating, parents and children actualize their psychic life. The relationship between the actualization of the psychic life by parents and children as such has not yet been researched and described.

Othropedagogic diagnostics includes the exploration of the parent's acting functionally and the determination of the meaning a child gives to this acting. The meaning a parent gives to a child's acting is evaluated by means of a historicity conversation.

In terms of circular causality, in contrast to a linear approach, the interaction among members and its change is viewed as the point of focus of therapy.

Hypotheses then also are stated as circular relations. For example, because a mother allows the authority for her son to be given to the grandmother, the mother acquires more freedom, the grandmother experiences that she is being helpful and the child has the best of two worlds. Both the mother and the adolescent boy can find the divorce to be very traumatic.

Circularity is also observable in an educative situation, also in a case where only one child and both parents are found. An educator takes the initiative by acting functionally; a child actualizes his psychic life and he experiences and interprets this functional acting. The sense and meaning the child attributes to the educator's action is observable in his own activity. This activity of a child contributes

to a parent's actualization of his psychic life again. A parent can evaluate his own functional acting in a child's behaving and this will play a role in his further acting.

Both parent and child actualize their psychic life within educating and each attribute meaning to the activities of the other person. When there is mention of modifying interactions, the modified meanings of both parties are implicated.

3.3 The connection between the miscarriage of the educative relationship in the family and the particular hierarchy of the family structure

3.3.1 Observing as a medium for determining the family structure

The family diagnostic conversation is structured into a social and problem stating phase in which the spontaneous interactions among family members are observed. It is observed who takes the lead; who talks first; and what communications and meta-communications occur. The spontaneous interactions of the family show its organization to the therapist. For example, a therapist observes the following: a mother shows her children their places where they must sit, then she takes her own place and then she lets the father and therapist choose their own places to sit. To the therapist's request to the family to introduce themselves, the mother takes the initiative to present the family and say what each member does. When the therapist asks the family about the problem, the mother answers. He listens to her description and notes that the rest of the family support and sometimes correct and interrupt her. There is much activity. When the therapist asks the father for his opinion, he speaks very softly while the rest of the family are quiet and look down, after which the mother and the identified patient begin to softly converse with each other while the father is still talking with the therapist.

The hypotheses are then stated that boundaries in the family are vague; that the boundary between mother and children is diffuse; and while the father is on the periphery, the mother and children are in a coalition against him.

In connection with the stated hypotheses the therapist activates interactions in the interactional phase of the conversation, e.g., by asking the mother and father to discuss a relevant matter. The therapist tests whether the children will interfere again and when. The therapist observes successive events and sees that the same thing occurs repeatedly; i.e., each time the mother communicates with the father or whenever the father must state his position, he is not allowed to do so because of the coalition formed between the children and the mother. The boundary of the parent-subsystem is invaded and this throws doubt on the father's position in the hierarchy.

Even so, this can also fulfill a function, e.g., by offering the father, who is more comfortable if he is not so much in the foreground, the opportunity to concentrate on his work.

However, the question is how does the hierarchy shape the exercise of authority within the family and to what extent is this exercise of authority maintained in the hierarchy.

In the hierarchical organization in the above example the mother is the person who exercises the most authority in the family. The fact that she and her children are in a coalition against the father has the consequence that her own authority becomes undermined. The children acquire a higher position in this hierarchy because of this organization of the family.

When the family dynamic (organization and interaction) is observed and an individual's action is a projection of his personal attribution of meaning, the failure of these essences of authority can be described in terms of an obscure hierarchy and the position of the members within it.

3.3.2 Essences of the educative relationship of authority

From a fundamental pedagogical perspective, the essences of authority are described as¹¹⁾:

- (i) “Telling”: the adult “tells” what is proper and the child allows himself to be persuaded by what is said.
- (ii) Being addressed: the adult talks clearly with the child about the demands of propriety.
- (iii) Being appealed to: an appeal is made to the child urging him to do what is proper.
- (iv) Obedience: the child is willing to listen and carry out meaningful directions.
- (v) Recognition of authority: the child sees in and gives to the adult the right to tell him what is proper.
- (vi) Complying with authority: the child must live up to the adult’s explanation and example.
- (vii) Acknowledgment of the authority of norms: the authority of the demands of propriety is acknowledged.

Thus, the question arises about how the above macrostructures of the relationship of authority are realized in a specific family and what is the connection between a dysfunctional relationship of authority and an obscure hierarchy. How does an obscure hierarchy contribute to a dysfunctional relationship of authority and in what way does the failure of authority, in its turn, contribute to the maintenance of the hierarchy?

From a family diagnostic it is possible to apply the hierarchy essences of the family to illuminate the exercise of authority in the family. In the above-mentioned family the sequence of interactions is observed in terms of making the essences of authority operational and this is related to the defining of relationships and the obscure hierarchy that exists.

The sequence of interactions is as follows: the father appeals to the children to stop their arguing, the children remain quiet and look at their mother; she looks down and shakes her head, the children continue arguing, the father remains quiet and looks at the therapist; the therapist keeps quiet and the mother chastises the children and they obey. The mother explains to the therapist that the children are very disobedient and that they are not successful. The children resume arguing and the mother looks at the therapist.

3.3.3 Interpretation of the event

The essence of authority that arises is “being addressed”: the parents address the children to do what is proper. However, the children do not obey and do not acknowledge their authority. During the sequence of interactions the father thus does not realize the sequence structure “intervening”. His authority is not heeded.

It is hypothesized that the boundary between the parent subsystem and the child subsystem is vague and that the children and the mother form a coalition against the father. The children hold a higher position in the hierarchy than the father whose position in it is very unclear. From the reciprocal positions of the family members and from the hierarchy, the father’s authority is not accepted and is undermined. Defining relationships: the effect of the coalition is that the mother and children define the relationship of authority. Consequently, hierarchically, the father is placed in a subordinate position in the coalition.

The function of this organization is that the father does not need to be involved, and the mother is the center of interaction and emerges as the more successful one. The children interpret this situation as an opportunity to get the best from both sides.

If the father is not control and doesn’t see that his demands are not being carried out, in this case, the children define the relationship. The boundary of the parent subsystem is obscure but since the father is very involved in his work and prefers to be left alone, the problem serves a function for the family members: the father can go his own way, the mother has companionship that she will lose if children are not over-involved with her and if they escape a situation where authority is enforced and they must obey certain demands.

The mother of the family has interpreted the father’s actions and, from her meta-communications, it has become clear that she does not give weight to them. The coalition forming is interpreted by the father, and he has withdrawn himself and not exercised his authority.

hands it to him. The father then answers the therapist's question.

This sequence of interactions is later tested again and from observing how the parents repeatedly correct their child, keep an eye on him and remain involved with him and all of this allows the hypothesis to be stated that the family is over-involved and that there is not sufficient distance since the boy is already eleven years old. There is no opportunity created for autonomy and independence.

Thus, there is the question of the degree to which this over-involvement of the members leads to a problematic relationship of trust between parents and child. There is also the question of the degree to which a disturbed relationship of understanding contributes to the over-involvement and how the over-involvement prevents the parents from understanding their child.

3.4.2 The essence of understanding

Fundamental pedagogics describes the essences of the relationship of understanding as follows¹²):

A. Understanding child-being

- (i) **Understanding otherness:** each child is someone who himself wants to be someone and a parent must understand each child's uniqueness and communicate this to him.
- (ii) **Experiencing otherness:** each child must feel and experience that a parent takes into account that he differs from others.
- (iii) **Interpreting potentialities:** a child must be helped to discover and to understand his potentialities.
- (iv) **Developing potentialities:** a child must be helped to harness his positive potentialities and allow them to develop.
- (v) **Valuing potentialities:** a child must be helped to appreciate his talents.

B. Understanding the demands of propriety

- (i) **Authority of the demands of propriety:** to be governed by particular demands, they must be understood and accepted.
- (ii) **Understanding the demands of being human:** the requirements that must be satisfied to be considered a “proper” person must be understood and complied with.
- (iii) **Understanding responsibility:** the obligation to choose and act must be accepted and an account of this must be given.
- (iv) **Understanding proper effort:** a child must understand that he must always do his very best regarding the activities in which he engages.
- (v) **Understanding obedience:** a child must know that if something is required of him, he must obey.

The essence of the relationship of understanding that is not realized adequately in the over-involved family, among others, is the following: interpretation and development of potentialities (the child is not helped to discover and develop his own potentialities because of the parents’ over-involvement and the consequence that the child does not have autonomy. Both the parents and the child do not actualize the understanding of proper effort and of responsibility. In truth, the child does not depend on the parents to provide him autonomy.

3.4.3 Essences of trust

Fundamental pedagogics describes the essences of trust as follows¹³):

A. Regard for the dignity of a child is attained by:

- (i) **Regard for otherness:** observance of the fact that children differ from each other.
- (ii) **Regard because of realizing values:** regard for a child as a participant in making a reality something of highest value.

B. Acceptance is realized by:

- (i) **Willingness to relate:** eagerness to create a relationship with the child which involves:
- a) **taking action:** a child is influenced with the aim of supporting him.
 - b) **bonding:** an intimate attachment is formed between adult and child.
 - c) **fellow-humanness:** a child must always be related to humanly since he is no animal or thing.
 - d) **address-listen:** the adult must speak clearly with a child and the child must listen thoroughly.
 - e) **respect:** an adult must handle with respect, appreciation and consideration a child's wanting to be someone himself.
 - f) **being-partners:** "come stand here by me so that I can help you".
 - g) **being-accompanied (guided):** "now go further with me".
 - h) **being-a-participant:** a child must be allowed to take an active part in valuable activities.
- (ii) **Intention to care for** is realized by:
- a) **caring-space:** a child must experience the home as a place where he is gladly cared for.
 - b) **situation of acceptance:** opportunities are created for a child to experience that he is welcome.
 - c) **caring out of love:** a child must experience that he is intervened with out of good will toward him and not with ulterior motives.
 - d) **action-in-love:** a sincere kindness toward a child is evidenced by:
 - **making a child feel at home:** a place in which a child feels at home—happy, at ease—is especially arranged for a child.
 - **establishing nearness:** a personal nearness is created.

- **admitting into our space:** a child is admitted into a place with someone with whom “we” can be mentioned.

From the image of this family that is over-involved with each other, the following essences, among others, are realized inadequately: respect and appreciation for a child’s wanting to be someone oneself. The child has no opportunity to participate actively in valuable activities.

Thus, it is not possible for the parents and child to arrive at an adequate relationship of trust and understanding if in the organization of interactions the family members are over-involved with each other. If, in therapy, this organization can be changed such that the parents can interpret their activities as helping their child too much and that when their child remains silent they do things in his behalf; and that by requiring the child to participate in the activities, the parents define the relationship; the hierarchy becomes clearer; the parents are more strongly directed to each other for meeting needs; and the child becomes distanced and makes friends with his peers.

3.5 The relationship between the failure of the pedagogic sequence structures and the family dynamic

An analysis of the extent or “pecking order” of who is the most active initiator; the type of activity, e.g., constantly changing; the direction or movement of the interaction; and the sequence of interactions can contribute to an understanding of the failure of the relationship structures from the particular family dynamic.

4. FAMILY THERAPY AS THERAPY FOR ELIMINATING THE DISHARMONIOUS DYNAMIC OF EDUCATING

4.1 Family therapy as changing meaning

Here is an example of a single parent and her son’s interaction and how they have given new meaning to their interaction:

In the first conversation, during the phase of stating the problem, the mother stated that she could no longer tolerate her child. He steals, tells lies, fails his tests and examinations, is disobedient and this causes her to relate to him as a tyrant and to hate him. During the interactional phase, the mother is given the task of finding out from her son who he had taken the stolen goods from. The sequence of interactions are briefly summarized as follows: the mother asks her son the question and he looks down or away, she repeats the question and he answers that he does not know. The mother turns to the therapist and says this is the way they communicate, he doesn't answer and later in the conversation, if the interaction repeats itself, the mother either becomes disconsolate and begins to cry or becomes furious and begins to scream at him.

The observation regarding the hierarchy is that it is unclear because, in remaining quiet the child defines the relationship. Also the distance between mother and son is very great and they are not much involved with each other.

Some of the essences of the relationship structure that are not adequately realized are, among others:

- understanding proper effort;
- understanding obedience;
- addressing-listening;
- being partners;
- caring out of love; and
- recognizing authority.

The interpretation that the therapist provides the mother is that she works too hard, that she must ask the question, and the moment that she becomes angry, she must not help her child answer it. However, her son is so clever that he manages that she does all of the work for him. This interpretation of the event is provided to her and she is asked not to repeat the question and to require an answer from him. Intensity and focus are maintained on this interpretation and interaction and the therapist explains to the family the sequence of interactions emphasized by this interpretation whenever they occur. The mother defined the relationship and in doing so this clearly affirmed the hierarchy and her authority. Her

son accepted this restructuring and adequately answered her question. At the same time the distance between them decreased and they became more involved with each other. In due course, at the suggestion of the therapist, she could also let her child understand that it is her concern about his future that allows her to act in this way.

The family dynamic that is acquired by means of a family diagnostic can also be verified with the help of orthopedagogic media (tests).

5. REFERENCES

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