

**THE EXPERIENTIAL WORLD OF THE TRUANT:
a pedodiagnostic investigation of the
phenomenon of truancy with
particular reference to truants
in rural high schools in the
Northern Transvaal**

Translation of:

**DIE BELEWENISWERELD VAN DIE
STOKKIESDRAAIER:
'n pedodiagnostiese ondersoek na die verskynsel
stokkiesdraai, met besondere verwysing na
stokkiesdraaiers in hoerskole op die
Noordtransvaalse platteland**

By

P. A. van Niekerk

M. Ed. Thesis, Faculty of Education,
University of Pretoria,

December, 1969

(Under the guidance of Prof. Dr. B. F. Nel)

Opvoedkundige Studies, 1970, 64, 86-108.

Translated by
George Yonge

(1995)

CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND AN OVERVIEW OF SOME PREVIOUS RESEARCH

1. Aspects of the problem according to current researchers

Truancy is the unauthorized non-attendance of a conspicuously healthy pupil who purposefully skips school without sound reasons and without his parents knowing. This phenomenon appears in all countries where compulsory school attendance is enforced, and it seems to be the most prevalent form of unauthorized nonattendance in the Transvaal.

A clear distinction must be made between **truancy** and **school phobia**. The most important difference is that the truant tries to evade his parents while the school-phobic child wants to be with his parents, especially his mother. A number of researchers suggest that the truant more often is subjected to inadequate socialization while the school-phobic child more often is affectively neglected.

Chronic truancy usually is correlated with one or more of the following inappropriate behaviors: vagrancy, smoking, lying, carelessness, rebelling against authority, sexual misconduct, bullying, aggression, plagiarism, dishonesty, whimsical and capricious behavior, tantrums, use of obscene language, running away from home, excessive drinking, vindictiveness, brutality and boastfulness. In this regard, more than half of the truants in our study smoke, a fourth are careless, lie, and loaf. More than half of the girl truants use obscene language and display unacceptable sexual activity. More boys than girls are truants and it is mainly the high school student who is a truant, especially in the first year.

Most researchers agree that anxiety lies at the core of truancy and, except for "personality defects", environmental factors (especially in the family) usually are considered to be the source of the basic problem. Here there is reference to economic conditions (especially poverty), broken homes, lack of discipline, inadequate intelligence, and excesses regarding teaching (e.g., a confusing school milieu, unsympathetic teachers and uninteresting curricula).

However, in all of this research, the **truant-as-child** commonly is overlooked because it is based on a naturalistic philosophical

anthropology (i.e., view of being-human). From this perspective, the child is viewed as isolated from his world and as one who is shaped within by environmental forces and powers. In addition, the pedagogical virtually is ignored. Consequently, most researchers, in their attempt to apply valid **psychological** principles, see truancy as a **process** by which the child **reacts**, and there is no account of the truant's relation to his experiential world.

2. Anthropological research.

Most educational research is based on a natural science oriented view of being-human that leads only to the periphery of being a person. Consequently, a human being is seen as a compilation of factors, tendencies, capacities, habits and behavior patterns. The spiritual dimension of being-human is ignored altogether; also, one's situatedness and world-relatedness (intentionality) are overlooked. Indeed, a person's broader existential context is ignored, and it is not seen that "being-human, in its existentiality, is subjective and cannot be viewed as a thing for objective knowing"⁽¹⁾.

Human-being does not mean being isolated and enclosed in a body. Rather, "human-being" shows himself as **Da- Sein**, as being-in-the-world⁽²⁾. As presence in the world, he is an initiative that establishes a world and remains continuously involved in this sustained event of constituting a world. Therefore, human-being cannot be objectified or quantified because he gives sense and meaning to his world; by virtue of his ontic openness, he designs a unique world for himself. Therefore, he must be understood as a person, as a concrete totality-in-dialogue, as the initiator of dialogue within his experiential world as a meaningful world.

A **human being** begins as a **child** and remains a becoming being and he must be viewed as such in his total situatedness. We must try to understand the child by means of an anthropological-existential psychology of becoming which, as psychopedagogics, is embedded in the pedagogical situation⁽³⁾, where an adult and a not-yet-adult are with each other and where a situation of encounter is aimed at so the experiential world of the child-in-need can be explored.

To facilitate the establishment of a situation of encounter, use is made of pedagogical aids such as a historicity discussion with parents and other persons with whom the child is in relationship;

also, a pedoclinical investigation is initiated that, in particular, was developed by the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria and that primarily is concerned with understanding the child as a totality-in-communication⁽⁴⁾.

CHAPTER TWO: THE EXPERIENTIAL WORLD OF THE TRUANT AND ITS PEDAGOGIC CHARACTER

1. An accountable anthropology of child-being

Nel⁽⁵⁾ shows that a person in his fellow human-thing-world situation is the phenomenon with which any psychology must begin in order to fully consider him. Therefore, a human science must begin from within its own area of study in order to penetrate to the essentials of being-human, and here the emphasis is placed on the existential of being-human as **being-a-person**. This is because being-human, as a physical-psychological-noetic (spiritual) being with a personal-core who can actualize norms, is synonymous with being a person, and the modes of **Da-Sein** give him ways of being by which he must discover, conquer, and know his world; that is, he must meaningfully inhabit it. Fundamentally, a person essentially is an intentional-existential subject who places himself outside of himself in the world. Indeed, a person leads a choosing and deciding existence, and he chooses from a diversity of possible values. The child also cannot exist in isolation from his world⁽⁶⁾ but always is intentionally directed to the things and fellow humans in the world.

Without educating, the child cannot constitute himself as a full-fledged human being because being-adult at first is being-child⁽⁷⁾. That a human being is a being who educates, is educated and is committed to education is in itself one of the most fundamental characteristics of the image of human-being⁽⁸⁾. The pedagogical phenomenon most clearly is an anthropological-personological category in that educating is always and only found among human beings. It is on the basis of the fundamental bipolar relationship of help-seeking and help-giving that the educative dialogue between parent and child thrives. The parent is helpful to the child in a particular direction, namely, in the direction of becoming the adult that he can and ought to be. Fortunately, the child wants to be someone himself.

The child's becoming is not a clearly delimited "developmental process" but, as Nel⁽⁹⁾ states, it manifests itself as emerging from a pedagogical situation, as a situational becoming, as a relational happening, as a series of discoveries by the child by means of which certain possibilities and potentialities are actualized in his constituting a world. Thus, as a human being, as a person who can become adult, the child of necessity and in a committed way is involved in the pedagogical situation.

It is precisely in the pedagogical situation that the child finds definite certainties that support him in his becoming and, through humanization and educating, is helped in the actualization of his potentialities. In this journey of discovery, intentionality and potentiality play decisive roles and, to a considerable degree, they define the course of this becoming.

2. The aim of the study

An attempt is made to study and understand the truant in his child-being within his unique world relationships because each finds himself in a "different" world as a consequence of affective (and, thus, pedagogical) neglect, and he lives this "difference" to such an extent that it disrupts him in his becoming a proper adult.

3. The life world and experiential world of the child

Everything that a human being encounters constitutes his life world; this indeed is the reality within which he lives and, thus, it is the foundation of all of his activities and behaviors. The life world invites him to take a particular standpoint with respect to it, providing he first has entered into dialogue with it.

Because a human being, as an existential being, is directed via his intentionality to the totality of life and reality as a cultural being, he is conscious of a life world. His openness and meaning giving directedness to the life world put him in a position to approach particular phenomena from different perspectives and in his own unique ways. This amounts to ever new perspectives on his life world, and each person experiences the life world in his own ways depending on inner order, educating and becoming. The child continually gives **new meaning** to objects in the world and continually **establishes** a world-of-new-meaning-for-himself, as an

experiential world; this experiential world is an intentionalized life world for himself.

Thus, regarding truants, one must fathom the nature of their relationships as these are found in the **family**, the **school** and **social life**⁽¹⁰⁾. In other words, the ways in which the truant gives meaning to his life world, now seen as an experiential world, must be investigated.

For the truant, each failure is a link in the chain that increasingly shackles him to his experience of impotence; this gives rise to a tendency for him to withdraw in mistrust from his fellow human beings because his present also is filled with anticipations based on the possibilities offered to him by his past⁽¹¹⁾. Thus, the question arises as to the essential nature of the truant's lived-experiencing of his original experiencing, because it is in this way that he establishes for himself an intentionalized life world; that is, a life world-meaningful-for-him⁽¹²⁾.

Learning is a primordial phenomenon of becoming⁽¹³⁾ and because the truant, as child, is someone who wants to become someone himself, he also is someone who wants to learn. However, as a truant, he shows himself as someone who cannot become who he ought to be because of inadequate help and support from an adult. Thus, he gets himself into trouble with respect to learning tasks, i.e., with respect to the adequacy of his giving sense and meaning to and mastering the learning tasks so that they become meaningful to him. Here there is mention of a **truant-world relation** that is equivalent to his learning-world relationship. The latter is embedded in the wider landscape of more comprehensive relationships⁽¹⁴⁾.

4. Pedodiagnostication of the truant

The aim of pedodiagnostication is the establishment of an exhaustive person-image of the truant. With the pedagogical situation as the point of departure, the pedodiagnostician employs particular methods and means of diagnostication to bring to light the total **child-world** relationship and thus obtain the desired total somatic-psychological-noetic (spiritual) image of the truant. By **encountering** him in the pedagogical situation, one can determine his relationships with fellow humans, his established behaviors, trust, mistrust, love or hate, his activity or passivity, his friendliness

or aggressiveness, his initiative or aimless inertia, his feeling of insecurity, safety or anxiety, distress and uncertainty, what his potentialities and intentionalities are, etc.

Such an image of the experiential world cannot be obtained by means of a **psychodiagnostication** since the psychological is not concerned with the value aspect of the becoming personality. Thus, it also is not concerned with the demands of propriety in terms of which the becoming personality must be designed. Also, knowledge is not obtained within an intimate pedagogical encounter because the **psychodiagnostician** is not concerned with the destination to which the child is being educated, and because the actualization of possibilities by the child does not occur as a lawful, natural inevitability that follows particular psychic stages or patterns.

In **pedodiagnostication**, the concern is with a phenomenological analysis of a being who is directed-to-education and who, in a cultural milieu, emancipates himself to independent adulthood. Briefly, the phenomenological method here amounts to the investigator making a natural and unbiased penetration and analysis⁽¹⁵⁾ of a human activity or situation by means of a subjective immersion and a later distancing in order to arrive at an objective description of it.

The immersion, penetration and analysis require that, in addition to communication by means of dialogue, other pedagogical exploratory media (“tests”) are employed; these media are placed between the pedodiagnostician and the truant to invoke him to communicate with these media and, in this way, to establish an experiential world-image of the truant; then, it also is gauged which aspects show a restrained functioning regarding the adequate constitution of the experiential world that ultimately led to truancy.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FAMILY MILIEU AS LIFE-SPACE AND THE TRUANT'S BLOCKAGE THEREIN

!. The family milieu as life-space

The family is possible only as a human arrangement. From birth the child is cast-to-his-parents and is dependent on them for help and support; hence, the family forms the primary milieu for educating. It constitutes a space for encounter in which the being together of

adults and not-yet-adults essentially is directed to the child eventually becoming an adult.

Family relationships are possible because a human being is **openness**⁽¹⁶⁾. Being together in the family is a particular being-with-each-other in intimacy that Smit⁽¹⁷⁾ describes as "we-ness". It is a space of mutual commitment where the child truly can become fulfilled. The essential reality of the [traditional] family is constituted by a space of we-ness as that intimate, trusting and entrusting connection of commitment among husband, wife and children. [This, of course, is not the only family reality possible].

The quality of this we-ness determines the quality of the elevation of dialogue, that is, the ways in which the child gives meaning to his world. The family must support the child in the dialogue that he conducts with life-reality and this must always be elevated to a higher level until he conducts it in such a way that he can be called an adult.

2. The truant's blockage in the family situation

(a) General

Each individual truant's unique family situation must be evaluated against particular criteria that refer to truancy as a failure in the realization of the family's educative task. The family must be viewed as home, as space for accessibility, as present-space, as future-space, as space for becoming, etc.

A superficial evaluation of the externally perceivable family constituents clearly indicates that:

- (i) most truants come from weak homes;
- (ii) a lack of stability prevails in the home;
- (iv) there is a lack of parental care, especially by the mother;
- (v) one or both parents are absent, or the marital relationship is troubled.

Regarding the families of twenty-five truants studied, it was found that, in most cases, housing accommodations leave much to be desired; that social interactions are weak; that family income is low; that a number of mothers work; that a good number of parents are in poor health; that 72 percent of the parents are older than 40 years; that broken marriages are in abundance; that a negative

attitude toward norms is prevalent; and that 88 percent of the families seldom, if ever, attend church⁽¹⁸⁾.

(b) Particular family constituents and their role in truancy

In the **home** residence, the unique experience of a secure and welcome shared space for the child is to be established. The family offers the child, as fellow traveler, particular certainties that are necessary for his becoming. This "spiritual communication"⁽¹⁹⁾, "this provision of safety, this tender contact between mother and child"⁽²⁰⁾ is the best foundation for nourishing the feeling of security and for educating because then the child's exploratory going out to the world is activated.

Truants usually come from homes that cannot contribute to the creation of a sufficient feeling of security, and the intimate personal interactions among family members usually is lacking. Consequently, it is rarely that negative influences can be headed off or neutralized.

Through acceptance, which also implies making room for the other, the child is "elevated to a partner, is invited to take part in a common world that must continually be verified in the future, and that has its ultimate foundation in a being-with-each-other as encounter"⁽²¹⁾. When the child is not accepted, there is a defect in the situations of association and encounter between parents and child and the intrinsic needs of the child for help, care, love, norms, and educating are not satisfied.

In the truant's house, often it is found that the possibility for intimacy appears not to be lacking, but in reality it falls far too short of the notion of a residence-as-home-for-me. For example, Gerda⁽²²⁾ does not have a secure place in her house, and she experiences this as being lonely and lost; she is always intensely anxious, and this deprives her of the courage to strive for that which she ought to become.

There must be mention of appropriate accessibility of the family members to each other that manifests itself in parenthood and childhood. To be present for the child includes, among other things, providing a home, food, clothing; establishing opportunities for exploration; activating potentialities; setting directions and posing demands; exemplifying norms and supporting the child to

accept responsibility-in-freedom. The child is directed, supported and helped not only by the parent's instructions, prohibitions and admonitions, but, to a great degree, he also orients his behavior toward the living example set by his parents.

The fact that the family disappeared as mainly a production-unit also has allowed it to become threatened as a normative-unit⁽²³⁾. Moreover, the modern materialistic establishment hastened the confusion of general feelings and higher values; because many parents are uncertain about all of this, they do too little regarding educating.

From the person-images of our truants, it appears that not many emulate norms in a positive way. Family quarrels, blame and undirected life behaviors, for example, allowed a hierarchy of norms to originate with Jan⁽²⁴⁾ in which reliable school attendance is not included and notions such as honesty, loyalty, modesty and generosity simply could not be pursued by him. For Jan, it is "normal" to steal, to lie, and to oppose what is proper. Also, he seldom experiences sympathetic authoritative guidance in the family situation.

Most of the truants hadn't learned about proper moral obligations, and they weren't supported in conducting themselves according to these demands of propriety. Without sympathetic authoritative guidance, the social and spiritual derailment of the child is an unavoidable consequence, and this usually goes hand-in-hand with an antagonistic attitude toward the traditions, customs and conventions of the adult's world⁽²⁵⁾.

The motherhood and motherliness displayed by Gerda's mother did not extend much beyond bringing her into the world out of wedlock. Unconditional and spontaneous acceptance are clearly lacking in the image of Gerda's experiential world. The mother never became a trustworthy person for her daughter, someone who could support her in her times of need. There was never mention of Gerda being addressed in a pedagogical sense. Consequently, in her relationship with her mother, she never experienced a listening attitude directed at understanding her and the insufficient love for her clearly has contributed to her emotional poverty and to her impotence for deep, firm emotional bonding with others; also, in school she shows a spirited remoteness, a lack of genuine interest and an inadequate forming of conscience⁽²⁶⁾. Also, Gerda's

stepfather remains only a distanced source of anxiety and all possibilities for accessibility summarily are dismissed.

A closer look at the families of truants shows that the fatherly function of exercising authority and emulating norms is weak and to a greater or lesser degree falls by the wayside. Consequently, this function is relegated to external influences.

Also conspicuous is the fact that many truants do not accept their childhood as a task and, for this reason, they really do not seem to be concerned with their own proper becoming. Consequently, in their becoming, as the **gradual embodiment of adulthood**, they are impeded, and a number of truants try to hide from themselves behind a screen of **apparent adulthood**.

In addition, the truant's family usually is remiss in providing the child with possibilities for **work**. This prevents the truant from becoming actively involved with the world, which is required for his self-actualization. This is because to make the world habitable never is a passive matter but rather always is a call to make it so by working at and with it as a self-project⁽²⁷⁾. When the child is given support to enable him to **work-at-the-world**, his potentialities and limitations must continually be taken into account. This means that one must be on guard against asking too much (or demanding too little). Also, recognition and appreciation, even for modest achievements, must be forthcoming.

Chris⁽²⁸⁾ parents continually confront him with demands of good scholastic achievement. Their derogatory and devaluing remarks in this connection contribute to the fact that at the end of each term he experiences his report-card as a symbol of defeat. As a result, he experiences uncertainty and anxiety that is the basis for a feeling of impotence for satisfying their demands. His experience of being stagnated-in-the-school situation is so intense that he must flee this situation.

In his presence with others, a person essentially directs an appeal to the other to acknowledge and accept his presence. Because the child is someone who himself will, can and must become, he does not want to be identified as a weakling. Rather, he aims at becoming independent and self-sufficient, and he anticipates the acknowledgment from the adults that he has become a responsible person.

We continually found that the truant, in his yearning to be acknowledged for his own worthiness, has no success in his presence with others, and actually experiences himself as someone who is "unsatisfactory" in the eyes of others. By listening to conversations between the truants and family members, we find that these conversations of the parents with their children can be characterized as a presence that does not seem to have the child's becoming a proper adult as an aim since the conversations do not promote dialogue.

The mutual expectations that parents and children foster in each other jointly establishes a view of the future. A trustworthy, safe, hopeful view of the future elevates the family's present to an experiencing of the future as reality and possibility. Especially, with the truant, the aspects of anticipating and establishing a future must be taken into account. However, from the person-images, it is clear that many parents of truants do not take into account whether their children have unrealistic expectations of the future because for most of them there is a very unrealistic future anticipated, and by their truancy the truants show that they are not really responsibly involved in establishing their future in the present.

The child's increase in responsibility might not be invited by objective norms and first grows through the experience of perspective and the actualization of one's potentialities. The experiencing of the implicit order of and connectedness with the world is the primary way to become oneself. Thus, it always must be determined if the view of life in the truant's family promotes or restrains the becoming of the particular child.

In many cases, the initiative for the truant's "becoming grown up" was turned entirely over to him alone. Consequently, totally ignored is the active care and sympathetic support and guidance co-experienced as a walking together on the path of becoming a person and toward true freedom which is so indispensable for the child. The truant has not arrived where he, in freedom, is able to take responsibility for himself and adequately answer to the demands of propriety.

CHAPTER 4: THE TRUANTS' UNAVOIDABLE CONFRONTATION WITH THE DIDACTIC AND THEIR "BLOCKAGE" IN THE SCHOOL SITUATION

1. The school as a necessity in becoming a person

The school is an indispensable force in the child's becoming and has as its main task his intellectual forming. Because it also provides assistance and support with the aim of the child becoming an adult, there cannot be talk of a separation between the pedagogical and the didactical situations.

2. The school as an educative milieu

Sonnekus⁽²⁹⁾ shows that learning is a primordial phenomenon that is given with child-being, and it always is a change as an elevation in the dialogue of the child's relation to reality. In and through his learning, a child is involved in becoming someone. Thus, it also is the task of the school to expect increasing independence from the child.

3. The teacher as provider of support

Because the responsibility for providing support in school primarily is that of the teacher, we continually must ask ourselves how prepared he is regarding the intellectual forming of his pupils. This is because the way in which the truant constitutes the learning material will be greatly determined by the way the teacher comes forward to meet the pupil in the learning situation⁽³⁰⁾. From the person-images of various truants, it is clear that often the teacher can contribute greatly to making the school a bearable world for these pupils--provided that each child in distress truly is **encountered**.

4. The truant's blockage in the school situation

Notwithstanding the previously considered particular requisites for the child to learn successfully, e.g., adequate intellectual ability⁽³¹⁾, the child must have a good relationship with the teacher and the other pupils, and in his affective becoming he must not be so restrained that he experiences problems in taking initiative. Family educating plays an extremely important role here, and the security offered by the familiar setting of the parental home allows the child

to enter the school milieu with confidence, and it remains the main source of his experience of safety.

Also in school, the child must always experience that he can find a personal place in this community, and, especially, the teacher must help him experience himself as a worthwhile person. It often happens that a truant's self-esteem is damaged by a thoughtless comment or act by a teacher or fellow students. Many truants, by means of their improper actions, try to shock others into knowing that "**I also can do things**".

When thought is given to the truant, the question immediately arises about his **intentionality** in encountering things and persons in his life world. A preoccupation with thoughts and feelings about his problematic relationships impede not only his concentration but, since the mutual affective bonding with the adult (parent, teacher) is negative, the intrinsic motivation to achieve at school also can be lacking.

From the different person-images, it is clearly apparent that the truant transfers his frustration, animosity and resistance to the entire school world. Consequently, his intentional directedness to school also usually is exceedingly weak. The teacher's task in his relationship with the potential truant is to continually intentionalize him to the maximum, that is, to help him to actualize his potentialities to the maximum.

In addition, the school must support the child in developing a positive future perspective. The school forms a particular foundation on which certain aspects of ideal images develop. The negative work attitude manifested by the truant hinders a successful constitution of his landscape in the school situation.

Often the truant merely is labeled "lazy". In this regard, Vedder⁽³²⁾ indicates that laziness does not belong to the nature of being-a-child. On the contrary, the child's way of being-in-the-world is characterized to a great extent as **activity**, among other things. For a great majority of the truants, their performance at school is very minimal while elsewhere they are very active. Thus, it is clear that their "laziness" merely is relative. The real reason for each person's laziness at school must first be understood. Then it will be possible to support him to activity and to the spontaneous willingness to

accept and fulfill his tasks so that he also can taste the satisfaction implicit in the joy of work.

From the person-images, it is quite clear that the truant is not in a position to organize the peripheral aspects of his being as tools for actualizing compulsory life values. Since it seems that the truant consistently shirks responsibilities, it can be expected that his feelings of responsibility will not result in a notion of propriety, which is the acceptance of responsibility as obedience to the call to task acceptance and performance.

Closely related to the truant's difficulty in accepting tasks is the absence of a spontaneous acceptance of authority, also in the learning situation. In most cases, at home the truants encounter an authoritative guidance that is too lax, and they cannot submit themselves to "healthy" authoritative guidance at school. When sympathetic, authoritative guidance is lacking in the family situation, the teacher can contribute much to the support of the truant to become obedient to authority. But for this to happen, the teacher must be in a position to provide sympathetic, authoritative guidance and the truant must be given the time to bridge the gap without being harmed, as are a number of our truants, by failing--a failing experienced to such a degree that the school is seen as the source of their personal problems.

Unrealistic demands with reference to the particular potentialities and/or limitations of the child are an important factor in playing truant, as is shown clearly by the findings of different researchers. They especially stress intellectual disabilities. However, in this connection, the many specific learning difficulties (e.g., spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic) experienced by the child also must be thought about.

For the child, as someone who wants to become someone himself, the fact remains that because of deficits resulting from failures in scholastic and other activities, he experiences himself as doomed. This is a prevailing factor leading him to anticipate that he is incapable, and he often manifests a school weariness and timidity.

From the person-images, it seems that most of the truants experience themselves as being overwhelmed in the learning situation. A considerable number of them have less than average intellectual ability at their disposal; however, a qualitative analysis

of the intellectual functioning of each truant makes it clear that it is not merely a deficient intellectual potential that allows them to stagnate in the learning situation. The truant runs aground as a consequence of a variety of reasons that hold true for the entire range of his being a person. Commonly, truants experience themselves as blocked in the learning situation, and they experience that they are "no one" there. Most of them also are blocked in the family situation, and they also are not supported in the proper working out of their impasses in the school situation. Because the child experiences himself as the one judged, not only by the teacher but also by the other pupils, the teacher must continually be aware of his experiences of failure, achievement and short-comings regarding his involvement in the class so that he can provide the necessary support for that child.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE PERSON-IMAGES OF THE TRUANTS

Here only a brief discussion is given of the experiential-world-images obtained from four of the exhaustive pedodiagnostic case studies.

1. Gerda

In Gerda's experiential world we meet a child who experiences herself intensely as being cast out by those near her. From an early age she experienced herself as being unwelcome, and she never found a "home" especially because both parents have let her experience clearly that she is unwelcome and is a source of their unhappiness--and they often inform her of this! She is extremely restrained in her emotional development (i.e., affective becoming). Moreover, in her family, she experiences neither appropriate authoritative guidance nor the exemplification of norms because consistent and positive pedagogical intervention seldom is exercised. The establishment, then, of a strong intentionality also is continually handicapped such that she especially cannot venture in problem situations as she should. Also, the excessive tension between her and her milieu along with her experience of being unacceptable--especially with respect to her father--allow a dissatisfaction with herself to arise, and she experiences mistrust and suspicion in her world. In turn, this contributes to the intensification of her feeling of insecurity and of being an outcast. To compensate for this, she is dissatisfied, aggressive and moody

because nowhere does she experience that she means anything to anyone or that she even is someone herself. She also experiences being "imprisoned" by her illegitimate birth, and her relationship with others remains gruff. In addition, she experiences her world as restrictive and blocked, all of which she wants to flee. Her experience of helplessness, uncertainty and insecurity, against the background of her threatening family milieu, lies at the basis of her impulsive moodiness and outbursts of aggression.

As a result of her experience that she means nothing to anyone and is not even **someone** herself, she readily enters into "friendly" relationships with young men, because in this way she feels that she can have a baby for whom she will indeed mean something.

Since school also is a place where she experiences no security and a number of failures, her learning world has become an obstruction on her way to self-actualization, and it is something that must be avoided. Consequently, her cognitive potentialities cannot be actualized properly and, in fact, are actualized on a level lower than that suggested by her (IQ) score. It is clear that her deficient intentional directedness and her being in an uncultivated pedagogical climate, in which she feels neglected, intensifies her experience of being increasingly threatened. The avoidance of school, as a direct stumbling block and, especially as it hinders marriage, is for her the obvious way for her to try to be self-assertive.

2. Chris

It is very clear that here is a boy from which too much is expected. Since he started school he has had to deal with his parents' perfectionist attitude regarding scholastic achievement. From the interview it appears that Chris, as a result of this perfectionist attitude, receives no real support and at the end of each school term he experiences his report card as a symbol of failure. The depreciating comments of his parents in this respect have had the consequence that the experience of being blocked holds a central place in his experiential world--a being blocked that he is unable to **appropriately** change.

Chris has at his disposal a clearly average intellectual quality. Quantitatively, his best achievement is in language and reasoning. The quality of his intellectual potential also is satisfactory but, for a

variety of reasons that hold true over the whole range of his being-a-person, he is not in a position to adequately actualize it. He is caught in a pathic (affective) flooding with a resulting defective cognitive directedness. This blockage also precipitates a fluctuating attending. At the basis of his experiencing of insecurity and anxiety lies confrontation with unattainable scholastic demands, especially as presented by his father, and he experiences himself as being over-loaded (by too many demands). He continually experiences himself as a disappointment to his parents and with such intensity that he wants to flee the school situation, which then also is at the basis of his truancy.

As a consequence of his experienced life insecurities, he also has considerable problems initiating contact and this runs him aground with respect to social relations.

Chris, who really experiences anxiety with respect to the demands that life presents to him, now manifests an "artificial" future perspective based mostly on fantasy because, as a result of his experienced blockage, he "knows" that he simply cannot attain the level of achievement expected by his father.

It is clear that Chris proclaims himself as a truant because he continually finds himself blocked in the world of learning. He cannot succeed in maximally actualizing his potentialities, and he does not experience his learning space as a secure space. This especially is because of the deficient rendering of appropriate pedagogic support and because his parents respond to his need for such support in entirely inadequate ways, and who, in fact, always confront him with still higher demands. He cannot openly show his rebelliousness against and opposition to them so he flees into an imaginary reality. His experience of being blocked results in an experience of being blocked in the learning situation as such. A consequence is that he cannot adequately actualize his learning potentialities on a cognitive level.

Chris, in the first place, does not have a learning problem. In reality, he is confronted with deficiencies in the primary (home) pedagogical situation. This touches his entire becoming as a person and, indeed, his existence proclaims itself as an existence with deficiencies.

3. Jan

When one encounters Jan in his experiential world, it is conspicuous that he has discovered few positive life values. His father is old and sickly, and has been since his birth, and he seldom gives any fatherly support in the direction of becoming adult. His mother, who also is sickly, merely has spoiled him, apparently because she wants to make life "easy" for him, and because the life circumstances that they as parents can offer him are not very satisfactory. Here there is little evidence of motherliness in the true sense of the word.

In the total family structure, Jan hardly has become acquainted with the demands of propriety of life, and his pedagogical milieu only has indicated that there is not a positive future perspective for him to develop. He also has not had the privilege in the family situation of being able to work-at-his-world and, consequently, to continually establish a positive future. The entirely deficient actualization of values at home and in his surroundings necessarily has "set up" this unique child for a real conflict with the demands of the school situation. Even in elementary school, it was necessary to remove him from the home and place him in a clinic school. Here it went so well for him for two years that a return to the regular school seemed possible. However, the "unhealthy" home atmosphere and the increased demands of the school, his particular cognitive abilities, his defective intentionality (direction, motivation) and the absence of a positive future perspective thwarted this possibility.

The degenerate pedagogical climate and his pathic floodedness prevent him from adequately actualizing his already limited cognitive potentialities. The demands that life presents to him continue to escalate further pathic flooding.

Because Jan has his own hierarchy of values that, in fact, is an accentuation by him of his lack of a healthy notion of norms, he will not look for nor can he find fault with himself, although he has a fault-finding and quarrelsome attitude toward others. In truth, Jan is a person who is disappointed with his world and, therefore, aggressively opposes it and continually remains stubborn and unstable. He experiences insecurity and anxiety and feels he must do something to change these experiences. However, his feeling of impotence to do anything positive about this contributes to the intensification of his feelings of anxiety and aggressiveness--to such

a degree that he even attacks his father. There is such a weak notion of norms that he cannot restrain himself from this.

He tries to be someone in the eyes of his two "friends" by an attitude of bravado and by "courageous acts" at school. Also, to manifest truancy and to engage in other deviant behaviors does not result in his feeling guilty. Considering his particular hierarchy of norms, for him these are "normal" and "meaningful" behaviors.

4. Mathilda

It is clear to the co-experiencer of Mathilda's experiential world that she has been given very little opportunity really to be involved in the affairs of being a child on the path of her becoming (an adult). In fact, the privilege and right by which she is entitled to be the "**child**"-of-her-parents is lacking.

It is likely that Mathilda found a home but the intimacy of **being-with** (especially) her mother is not that of a mother-daughter but too quickly it became that of friend-friend. The image of propriety that the mother has portrayed for her daughter has led to a "politeness" where she doesn't say "no"; instead of this, she could have discovered that saying "no" is an important demand and obligation of her "experiential world" correlated with becoming an adult. That she cannot now adequately answer the demands that propriety presents to her is evidenced by the fact that she lies, tells tales and steals without any pangs of conscience.

In the family situation, Mathilda has not experienced realistic authoritative guidance, and she is not able to obey authority since the voice of propriety arising from outside of the family situation does not speak to her. Also, she lacks true fatherliness; her father also allowed his "precocious" daughter to experience that she already is "grown up" by encouraging her to go out with a particular young man.

Actually, she received her "freedom-as-adult" too early. By ten years, she no longer experienced her childhood as such, and she no longer played children's games but already got "pleasure" from the "games" of adults. Since then, her experiential world especially is constituted out of sexual affairs, and she remains in her actions and thoughts involved with this (a fact confirmed by most of the media; i.e., "tests"). Because going to school only is fitting for a child, it no

longer is appropriate for her as an "adult" to be involved with the affairs of children, and she feels that it is "absurd" for her to remain involved in them (e.g., to be in school).

Precisely because of the future expectations created for her in the family situation, she developed a distorted future perspective that also was repeatedly verified by the media (i.e., "tests"). The active establishment of the future with which she is involved is such that without drastic external intervention, it likely never will lead to a responsible answer to her being called to adulthood, and her existence probably will remain deficient. Her lack of an adequate direction to the future is the basis for her particular way of establishing a world in which the school world has no place and where, thus, there no longer is any consideration of her going to school.

CHAPTER SIX: SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary value of the present study is that it clearly shows truancy to be a didactical-pedagogical problem. As such, it must be handled by pedagogically responsible and appropriately trained students of pedagogics who have specialized in orthopedagogics. This implies that pupils identified as truants immediately must be brought to the attention of competent authorities with the aim of a pedotherapeutic reorientation. They must not, in the first place be "reported" to the school attendance officer, which often only leads to an aggravation of the problem.

Gradually, and in an unmistakable way, during the course of this study it became obvious that the truant's problem only can be grasped there where the "root of the evil" is situated. To solve this problem, it is necessary that the truant be seen in his neediness and in a sympathetic way re-educated to a responsible acceptance of authority and a practice of responsibility that gradually will put him in a position to see the norm image of adulthood.

The truant finds himself in a unique situation. This "different" situatedness addresses a unique educative task to all adults who are concerned with the truant's becoming. It especially is the parents, as providers of support in the primary pedagogical milieu, who have the greatest task. In addition to their other educative responsibilities, they have the responsibility for educating the

truant, as a child-in-distress, to a responsible attitude in the school situation. This is because the child who proclaims himself as a truant must be re-educated in his life world to responsibility and to a responsible actualization of his learning potentialities. Therefore, **pedagogical** family therapy often is indispensable because it commonly is found that it is a miscarriage of the pedagogical in the family that has obstructed the child's becoming what he must and ought to become.

It is essential that the truant, in being blocked in his life- and learning-world (as experiential world), should not be rejected but rather should be so supported so that there will be a future for him to anticipate. He must be subjected to discipline and even punishment, but his experiences of this must always be that of safety and security, and he must acquire self-discipline.

Because, in time, truants are recognized in the school situation and because the child also must be supported there, it is recommended that the teachers from all schools, in a pedagogically responsible way, should be given an appropriate orientation to the problem so they will be well acquainted with the criteria by which the interpretations of potential symptoms of truancy can be evaluated. The ideal is that at each school, there will be a sufficient number of pedagogically trained teachers so that not only vocational guidance will be offered but that there will indeed be a "miniature child guidance clinic" that, in addition to adequate vocational orientation, also will provide various pedagogical services to the pupils and parents. Then, only the truly clinical cases need to be referred to the (state) departmental or university child guidance institutes.

Since truancy often is the result of an attitude toward life held by parents and their children, schools must turn with intense diligence and dedication to the task of activating and motivating their pupils to responsibility and to a responsible attitude toward life, especially those pupils who show a weariness and shyness about school.

The guardian teacher [in South Africa], to a great extent, must know about the families of the children under his care so he can be a knowledgeable conversational partner with the child. To a great extent, he must establish a co-experiencing with the children, and there must not merely be a sporadic familiarity with the child's problems. He must be in a position to know when the child is the least bit affectively disturbed. His central task must be an

awareness of the child's experiential world because this is very difficult for the subject matter teacher to accomplish. Then the guardian teacher also quickly can discover where problems exist--also in child-teacher relationships--so that a particular teacher can be informed of this and a more positive relationship can be established. The "knowledge" of the guardian teacher can be of invaluable significance for the pedoclinician because it is extremely difficult to make intensive contact with the child because of the large number of teachers relating to the derailed child.

This implies that the guardian teacher must indeed be a practicing orthopedagogue so that support can be offered in the school itself to the pupil experiencing problems of becoming. The school continually has the responsibility to ensure that **each** pupil will be supported to optimal becoming in the direction of adulthood, and a number of teachers must be re-oriented in order **not** to want to "repay" a pupil's "rebelliousness" by "ignoring" it.

The teacher must first identify and inform himself about a child in distress as soon as possible and, with reference to the potential truant, his periodic absence (non-attendance), e.g., must be seen precisely as an indication of a child calling for help, and steps must be taken accordingly. If the teacher frankly asks himself, "now, what further with this child?", he will also, by means of the various pedagogical auxiliary services (psychology, etc.), be able to find an answer.

The subject matter teacher must contribute to the pedotherapy in orthodidactical and orthopedagogical ways for it to be successful and to make it possible for the truant to remain concerned about his becoming in a more responsible way. This requires that each teacher have a foundation in pedagogics and in didactics, in general, and more specifically also in orthodidactics.

From the above, it is clear that the task of the educator-teacher is, in the first place, a pedagogical task, in particular with regard to the **truant** as a learning and becoming child. The educator-teacher must pedagogically-didactically orient the truant, as a child in distress, such that there is a future for the child to anticipate, and that, as someone becoming an adult, he will direct himself to the adult life world and give an indication in his becoming of a norm directed participant in life reality.

AUTHOR'S ENGLISH SUMMARY (Slightly edited)

Certain aspects of the problem of truancy, as stated by current researchers, have been brought to the fore. Various findings have been studied and it was found that throughout they are characterized by a quantitative approach to the problem, by which the acuteness of the problem of truancy in fact is accentuated and general hypothetical causes are raised but which entirely overlook the truant himself. Consequently, it became clear that it is only a scientifically founded personological-anthropological pedagogics that can promote an evaluation of the truant's world of experience where he is, as a co-constituter of this world and who continually has the possibility of becoming a normal human being.

Because it is a child who proclaims himself a truant we dealt with an accountable anthropology of being a child and attempted to penetrate the being of a child as an existential being who is continually concerned with his own world as being situated in the world at large. Further it was shown that the child inevitably and necessarily continually finds himself in a pedagogical situation and it is evident that this situation must be taken as the starting point in reflecting on any pedagogical occurrence at all.

Because the human being's world relationship, and therefore the child's, is the result of the fact that he is an existential being and is intentionally directed to the total world of meaning and reality, the developing child in his being can only be studied and understood within his own world relationships and it is obvious that only by penetrating the truant's experiential world can it be determined what really lies at the root of his being "blocked" and his accompanied conduct. Such an investigation into the experiential world of the truant is only possible by means of the phenomenological method.

The family forms the primary pedagogical milieu and thus definite family constituents were discussed and traced to the truant's experiences of finding himself caught up against the family situation. By means of examples, it was demonstrated that the families in which the truants find themselves did not adequately comply with the requirements of a home in the true sense. The

world of accessibility, of work and of what he is to become, or the world of becoming were discussed.

Because the truant especially experiences a “blockage” in the school world, his inevitable confrontation with the didactical situation was investigated in detail. It was shown that the teacher does not always answer properly to the demands of real support to the child.

It also became apparent through an encounter with the truant in his school experiential world that he feels himself as being “blocked” therein because of a lack of a sufficient feeling of security, and that he often is being affectively hurt there and does not possess a strong intentionality. He has a warped future perspective and he does not feel that he chooses to accept duty. He also cannot spontaneously obey authority and he feels that too much is being expected of him; he feels that he is condemned-to-being-judged-under-the-scrutiny-of-his-fellow-beings.

To further clarify the truancy phenomenon, the experiential worlds of the four truants were discussed in light of their significance for this study.

In conclusion, certain recommendations were made which may contribute to the recognition of the truant, and even potential truant, in view of helping and supporting him within the family and school situations.

REFERENCES

- (1) Gouws, S.J.L.: ‘n Besinning oor die ondersoek van kinders met leermoeilikhede, **Opvoedkundige Studies**, UP, No. 53, p. 14.
- (2) Joubert, C.J.: ‘n **Ondersoek na die betekenis van die likaamlikheid by die beroepskeuse van jeugdiges**, p. 23 (D. Ed. Dissertation, UP, December 1967).
- (3) Nel, B.F.: **Antroplogiese aanloop tot ‘n verantwoorde Psigologiese Pedagogiek**, Univeristy Publishers and Booksellers, Stellenbosch, 1967, p. 80.
- (4) Joubert, C.J.: Die kind-as-beroepsoefenaar-in-wording as totaliteit-in-kommunikasie (reprint from : **Paedagogische Studien**, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1964), pp. 37-40).
- (5) Nel, B.F.: **Antroplogiese aanloop tot ‘n verantwoorde Psigologiese Pedagogiek**, op. cit., p. 69.
- (6) Nel, B.F., Sonnekus, M.C.H and Garbers, J.G.: **Grondslae van die Psilogie**, University Publishers and Booksellers, Stellenbosch, 1965, p. 108.
- (7) Langeveld, M.J.: **Studien zur Antroplogie des Kindes**,

- Max Niemeyer, Tubingen, 1966.
- (8) Langeveld, M.J.: **Beknopte Theoretische Paedagogiek**, J.B. Wolters, Groningen, 1965, p. 165.
- (9) Nel, B.F.: op. cit., p. 9.
- (10) (a) Gous, S.J.: **Die skool as weg tot wereldontwerp in didakties-pedagogiese perspektief: 'n Inleidende beskouing**, Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, UP, 1967, p. 51:
(b) Ferreira, G.V.: **'n Pedokliniese ondersoek na die vasgelopneheid van die skoolverlater in sy leerwereld as beleweniswereld**, M.Ed. thesis, UP, 1968, p. 51.
- (11) Delftgaauw, B.: **Wat is existentialisme?** N.V. North Holland, Amsterdam, 5th Ed., 1959, p. 73.
- (12) Sonnekus, M.C.H.: **Die leerwereld van die kind as beleweniswereld**, University Publishers and Booksellers, Stellenbosch, 1968, p. 30.
- (13) Ibid., p. 123.
- (14) Ferreira, G.V.: op. cit., p. 38.
- (15) Nel, B.F. and Sonnekus, M.C.H.: Psigiese beeld van kinders met leermoeilikhede, **Opvoedkundige Studies**, UP, No. 39, 1962, p. 6.
- (16) Landman, W.A. and Gous, S.J.: **Inleiding tot die fundamentele pedagogiek**, Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, Johannesburg, 1969, Chapter III,.
- (17) Smit, W.J.: **Die gesin as factor by die etiologie van skoolverlating**, M.Ed. thesis, UP, December 1968, p. 46.
- (18) See thesis, p. 67 et seq.
- (19) Kriekmans, A.: **Gezinspedagogiek**, Netherland Bookseller, Antwerp, H. Nelissen, 2nd revised edition, 1954, p. 148.
- (20) De Ruijter, T.H.: **Moeders en Kinderen**, G.F. Callenbach, Nijkerk, p. 9.
- (21) Smit, W.J. op. cit., p. 55 – see (a) Landman, W.A. in press in **Onderwysblad**, May 1968; (b) Nitschke, A.: Das Verwaiste Kind der Natur. From the estate compilation of August Nitschke, pp. 11, 12, 18.
- (22) See thesis, p. 73.
- (23) De Necker, J.G.H.: Die betekenis van die anamnese in die pedodiagnostisering van kinders, **Opvoedkundige Studies**, UP, No. 51, P. 18.
- (24) See thesis, p. 73.
- (25) Wolmarans, A.D.W.: Die gesinsituasie as factor by die ontsporing van kindeers, in: B.F. Nel (Ed.) **Aspekte van 'n modern-pedagogiese diagnostisering van kinders met gedrags- en leermoeilikhede**, **Opvoedkundige Studies**, UP, Special Issue, 1966, p. 123.
- (26) Vedder, R.: **Kinderen met leer- en gedragsmoeilijkheden**, J.B. Wolters, Groningen, 4th edition, 1964, pp. 173-174.
- (27) Luijpen, W.: **Existensiele Fenomenologie**, Aula Books, Utrecht, 1966, p. 51, et seq.
- (28) Pulles, J.A.: Gezin als pedagogisch Milieu, in: **Op zoek naar een pedagogisch denken**, Hoogveld Institute, Roermond, 1958, pp. 150 et. seq.
- (29) Sonnekus, M.C.H.: op. cit., p. 48.
- (30) Gouws, S.J.L.: **Pedagogies-didaktiese diagnostisering van kinders met leermoeilikhede**, D.Ed. dissertation, UP, 1965, p. 150.
- (31) Vedder, R.: op. cit., p. 4.

⁽³²⁾ Ibid, p. 9.