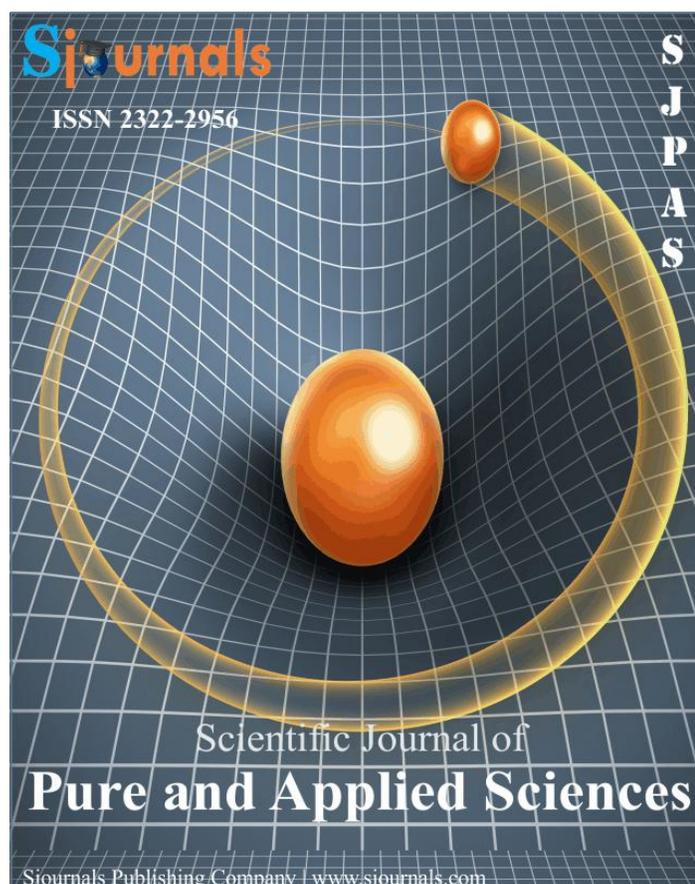


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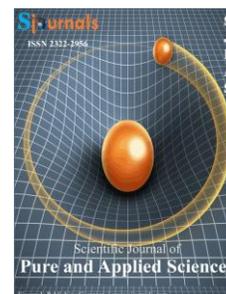
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Review article

Exposition of the constituents of a disharmonious learning situation within an orthodidactic context

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this review was to examine the constituents of a disharmonious learning situation in the context of orthodidactic practice with a view of demonstrating how each one effectively contributes to a disharmonious learning environment. The motivation behind this thrust was that future reviews or research will focus on how these constituents can be best managed. The review established six main constituents namely disharmonious pedagogical relationship, incorrectly anticipated lesson plans, inadequate actualisation of cognitive potentialities, deficient learning effect, lived experience of being different and affective distress. A literature review exposed that these are intractably related to the manifestations of learning difficulties. As such the ensuing literature analysis revealed that the constituents of a disharmonious learning situation, in effect, present themselves as a result of lack of synchrony between and among the essences of the lesson structure coupled with the dynamics of the social interrelationships that characterize the teaching/ learning environment. From the analysis, it was concluded that the constituents of a disharmonious learning situation are at the core of the pedagogy of learning difficulties and therefore are the central focus of orthodidactics as a science of helping a child in distress. The constituents further suggest that a disharmonious learning situation is not only about the child needing help but also about a need to capacitate the teacher to be able to offer effective help to the child in distress.

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1. Introduction

For a lesson structure to be harmonious there should be an inter-relationship between the essences of the lesson structure, that is content, aim, teaching methods and the teaching and learning aids. A degeneration of any or all of these essences manifests in a disharmonious learning situation. Du Toit (1978) defines a disharmonious learning situation as "...one with disturbed relationships among the essences of educating, teaching, learning and the contents that result in the disturbing appearance of the essences of the lesson structure". However, the author further argues that although a disharmonious lesson situation is at the basis of every learning difficulty, learning problems cannot be entirely blamed on the disharmonious lesson situation since not all such situations necessarily result in learning difficulties. This is because the teacher, after realising the disharmony, may re-design the lesson and/or perhaps teach with greater insight, proficiency and purposefulness which may minimize or eradicate the learning difficulties. Van Niekerk et al. (1999) implore that real learning difficulties occur if both the teacher and learner experience the disharmonious teaching situation as being perspectiveless, meaningless and menacing. In addition, to be purely disharmonious, the learning situation should be seen as requiring professional specialist help. It follows that a disharmonious learning situation is a domain of orthodidactics which De Fever (2006) describes as the scientific study of learners who caught within the disharmonious learning situation. In this context, the disharmonious teaching or learning situation becomes the central area of concern in orthodidactics.

Common particulars among children with different learning difficulties can best reflect the constituents of a disharmonious learning situation. Du Toit (1978) earlier identified six possible, such constituents, *visa vie* disharmonious pedagogical relationship, incorrectly anticipated lesson plans, inadequate actualisation of cognitive potentialities, deficient learning effect, lived experience of being different and affective distress. These constituents exhibit interrelationships with manifestations of learning problems which include stagnation in the learning event, deceleration of the learning event, selective stagnation of the learning event, disintegration of the learning event, conflicts in becoming and learning as well as refusing to learn (Du Toit, 1982; Van der Stoep and Louw, 2011). Van Niekerk (1979) implores that examining these constituents of a disharmonious learning situation entail determining where the educating is distorted, how the educative guidance (teaching) and under actualisation of potentialities have let a child become pedagogically distorted and how this becoming distorted can possibly be mitigated. In a way, in order to effectively assist a child with a learning difficulty, one has to be aware of these constituents of a disharmonious teaching/learning situation and be able to locate the ones affecting the child. This review examines these constituents in the context of orthodidactic practice and attempts to demonstrate how each one effectively acts as part of the disharmony. Linkages between these constituents are also exposed.

2. Disharmonious pedagogical relationship

Where a disharmonious teaching situation exists, there tends to be mutual frustration between the teacher and the child. The disharmonious pedagogical relationship is necessarily a function of inadequate guidance from the teacher and the child's failure to actualize his/her psychic life (Van Niekerk, 1979). Van Niekerk and Van Zyl (1984) imply that the disharmonious pedagogical relationship is more dynamic and could also include disharmonious relations among teaching and learning activities and the essentials of the contents as well. This further implies that the pedagogical categories do not appear as they ought to, a scenario which leads to distorted or attenuated appearances of the pedagogical essences (Van Niekerk et al., 1999). On one hand the teacher experiences the child's failure to learn as a reflection of his/her teaching leading to feelings of alienation and inadequacy. Inwardly, the teacher may give up on the child because he/she is unable to appreciate or realise the child's learning difficulty. However, according to Van der Stoep and Louw (2011) when a teacher is incapable of at least recognizing learning problems, he/she is incapable of appearing in front of a class. In other words, the teacher needs staff development in order to understand the diverse needs of the learners. On the other hand, the child feels neglected, unable, unwanted hence under actualised leading to an experience of distress. Thus, to the child, the defective pedagogic relationship contributes to his/her distress related to the learning problems. The child may conclude that the teacher is unsympathetic, uncaring and unapproachable. This would intensify the child's insecurity, anxiety, tension and feelings of inferiority. Once there is this confused pedagogical relationship or misunderstanding between the teacher and the child, a disharmonious teaching/learning situation will emerge. As such there is an increased breach in communication by which a child experiences an inability to make his/her

learning distress known to the teacher (Van Niekerk, 1990). This scenario is escalated when the teacher incorrectly anticipates the lesson plans.

3. Incorrectly anticipated lesson plan

An incorrectly anticipated lesson plan is one in which the pedagogical essences that have to do with actual teaching and learning are distorted, disjointed or disharmonious. This is often due to incorrect judgment on the part of the teacher. For instance, the teacher may mistakenly assume that a child is operating at a certain level and on that erroneous basis, set inappropriate specific aims and subject content. In other words, an incorrectly anticipated lesson plan is one in which there are disturbed relations among the essences of educating, teaching and learning and the contents of the lesson (Du Toit, 1980). Thus, the incorrectly anticipated lesson plan creates disharmony between the planned lesson and the dynamics of teaching and learning. As a result, inadequate learning occurs manifesting in a disharmonious teaching/learning situation. Du Toit (1978) declares that an incorrectly anticipated lesson plan constitutes a disharmonious teaching situation in that the lesson is not attuned to the appropriate level of the learner. Certainly, when essences of a lesson structure are not focused on the child's actualisation of his/her learning modes, a disharmonious teaching/learning situation will ensue. Van Niekerk (1990) postulates that an incorrectly anticipated lesson plan is a reflection of an ineffective role of a teacher in selecting and reducing the learning contents, stating the objectives, systematically unlocking the lesson contents and estimating pupils' assumed knowledge, skills and proficiencies. This results in failure to adequately unlock the lesson for effective assimilation of knowledge and learning to occur. Van Niekerk (1985) further argues that in an incorrectly anticipated lesson plan, this would occur even when the teacher is effective. In such cases, the level of difficulty of the lesson contents could either be too high or too low, the core concepts and relations may not be clear enough, strategies may not be elucidated and learning techniques and fundamental principles may either be ignored or not indicated leading to inadequate actualization of learning regardless of the cognitive potential.

4. Inadequate actualisation of cognitive potentialities

When the cognitive potentialities of both the child and the teacher are inadequately utilised, a disharmonious teaching/learning situation is bound to arise (Van der Merwe, 1999). The teacher who feels as being wrongly deployed to that class because he/she feels that her qualifications, skills and experiences are under-utilised for instance will hardly be committed to the teaching. This has particularly occurred where qualified secondary school teachers are deployed in primary schools; junior primary school teachers are deployed in infant or ECD classes or when mainstream school teachers are deployed in special classes and specialist teachers deployed in ordinary non-inclusive classes. On the other hand, a learner who feels that the matter being taught is far above expectation is bound to lack interest in learning the matter. In essence the learner feels that he/she is subjected to subject matter that is beyond his/her cognitive potential. The basis of such feelings is often related to a dysfunctional central nervous system on the basis of which there also is reference to a psychoneurological difficulty (RGN, 1981). Thus, one major intra-personal constituent of a disharmonious learning situation is largely bordered on the child's failure to cope with learning demands as a result of a depressed cognitive ability. However, the DSF Literacy and Clinical Services (2014) insinuates that a disharmonious learning situation occurs not only due to inadequate actualisation of cognitive potentialities but to a wide range of causes, including factors such as sensory impairment, severe behavioural, psychological and emotional difficulties, poor language, ineffective instruction, high absenteeism and inadequate or misplaced curricula as well.

For Starling (2010) learning difficulties themselves are not primarily due to inadequate actualisation of cognitive potentialities, but maybe associated with a diagnosed primary problem such as an attention problem. But such attention problems are often rooted in psychosocial and necessarily cognitive domains. This explanation is indicative that indeed a disharmonious learning situation can, by and large be characterized by inadequate cognitive potentialities. On this score Van der Mwere (1999) identifies under-achievement, poor literacy development, concentration, memory and mental organization as well as difficulty in multi-modal tasks as significant factors qualifying inadequate actualisation of cognitive potentialities as a constituent of the disharmonious learning situation. These characteristics can actually be indicators or factors of a deficient learning effect.

5. Deficient learning effect

A deficient learning effect can necessarily be a consequence and not a constituent of a disharmonious learning situation in its own right. It only qualifies as a constituent when there is sufficient evidence that the result of learning is clearly deficient. For instance, there has to be a history of failure leading to a cumulative effect. One reason for this skepticism over a deficient learning effect becoming a definite constituent of a disharmonious learning situation is that it is inclined to the cognitive domain for which to the contrary the effects of learning are not limited to the cognitive domain (Du Toit, 1978). In this context, affective factors, motor-physical dexterities and versatilities, as well as interpersonal factors are all seen as key influencers of the teaching and learning outcomes. For Meyer (1982) a deficient learning effect is observable through a gap between the achieved level of learning potentialities as well as a restrained becoming adult. This deficient learning effect manifests in a maturational lag, poor self-image and uncertainty, over-dependence, inadequate actualization of potentialities and inability to perform objectively and rationally (Van Niekerk, 1990).

A deficient learning effect could also manifest in the child's unreadiness to learn, restlessness, rebelliousness, dishonesty, hyperactivity, troublesomeness, distractibility, impulsivity and poor visual and auditory discrimination as well as poor visual and acoustic memory. These reflectors of a deficient learning effect could also invariably become the causative factors. Van Niekerk (1979) believes that such symptoms are nothing more than an indication of a gap between the achieved level of becoming adult and the learner's current achievable level. In effect, the learning environment becomes counterproductive and the child's situation prevents him/her from learning. In these regards the Institute of Mental Health (2014) suggest that a deficient learning effect is characterized by difficulty to learn and inability to understand. According to RGN (1981) the child would not achieve due to lack of learning potential. A deficient learning effect is therefore an occurrence of a learner showing deficiencies in the actualisation of learning modes resulting in him/her experiencing problems in understanding spoken or written language which eventually leads to an inability to think, talk, read, spell and do arithmetic computations (Du Doit, 1985; 1990). Technically the child is restrained from learning or fails to learn. As earlier suggested, the child feels isolated, inferior and different in a negative sense.

6. Lived experience of being different

Owing to continuous experiencing of inadequate learning effects, the child with learning difficulties repeatedly sees him/her self as a perpetual failure in the eyes of peers and/or society (Pretorious, 1999). The child feels inadequate and excluded. The lived experience of being different constitutes inadequate actualization of the fundamental pedagogical structures and an under actualization of the child's psychic life in education. He/she feels different and inferior and does not understand or appreciate his/her difference. The child carries a negative self-image which further contributes to his/her under-actualisation leading to an obscured perspective of the future. According to Ter Horst (1972) it is especially the child who experiences the learning environment with feelings of impotence, distress, confusion, dejection, loneliness, guilt and disillusionment. This experience becomes a significant element of a disharmonious learning situation. In effect, the child finds him/herself in the midst of a problematic educative situation which is experienced as without prospect, as meaningless and threatening, especially where professional help is unavailable (Van Niekerk, 1990). The child becomes caught in a retarded act of learning and of becoming adult, often leading to sustained affective distress.

7. Affective distress

Affective distress for a child is necessarily a pedagogical distress. According to Broekens et al. (2015), learning does not only drive adaptation in human behavior, but also affects the complexity of emotions. Thus the implication of this revelation is that, on the flip side, negative emotions such as affective distress retard learning. In these regards, Baumeister et al. (2007) argue that emotions drive adaptation in behavior and are therefore often coupled to learning. As such, a child in a disharmonious learning situation tends to lack the affect or drive to learn. The child is demotivated because of sustained failure to achieve. Due to affective distress, the child comes to experience the educative situation as meaningless and threatening. The child's intentional directedness and cognitive attainment which are necessary for effective learning are derailed in these regards (Du Toit, 1984; De Fever, 2006). In other words, the child experiences distress which according to Broekens et al. (2015) is typically

expressed through irritability. Irritability may manifest in feelings of desperation and confusion-feelings that completely obscure learning to occur. Such feelings of desperation and confusion impede learning and facilitate disharmony in the teaching and learning situation.

8. Discussion and conclusion

From the treatise, constituents of a disharmonious learning situation can be conceptualised as the elements that characterize the learning situation as distorted and hence as lacking harmony. They are intractably related to manifestations of learning difficulties. As such, they present themselves as a result of lack of synchrony between and among the essences of the lesson structure coupled with the dynamics of the social interrelationships that characterize the teaching/learning environment. In these regards, the elements individually or collectively impede effective teaching and block the learning effect. They relate to the whole learning environment thereby affecting the teacher, the learner and the essences of the lesson structure. These constituents are interrelated and tend to overlap such that one leads to the other and vice versa. From this discussion, one could conclude that the constituents of a disharmonious learning situation are at the core of learning difficulties and therefore form the central focus of orthodidactics as a science of helping a child in distress. The constituents further suggest that a disharmonious learning situation is not only about the child needing help but also about the need to capacitate the teacher to be able to offer effective help to the child in distress. It follows from the foregoing that learning difficulties therefore do not occur haphazardly neither can they be attributed to haphazard factors. Thus, there are definite forms in which learning problems manifest themselves suggesting that future reviews or research will have to focus on how best the constituents of a disharmonious learning situation could best be managed.

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