

EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCES AND THEIR RELATION TO LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Children learn at various rates of speed. Some of them who have physical defects (poor vision or hearing) may fail to learn. Physical defects are not the only reasons for non-learning. The children who have emotional conflicts show the symptoms of non-learning also. Resistance to learning is accompanied by school phobia, truancy, extreme withdrawal from class-room activities.

Warm and accepting class-room teachers help to solve the problems of children. Sometimes they are not capable to overcome the severe ones. The child who has serious disability needs special help from a trained therapist.

ÖZET

Her çocuğun öğrenme hızı birbirinden çok farklıdır. Görme ve işitme özürli olan çocukların ise öğrenme güçlüğü çektikleri bilinmektedir. Sadece fiziksel özürli olan çocuklar değil, duygusal bozuklukları olan çocuklar da öğrenme güçlüğü çekerler. Öğrenme güçlüğüne yanısıra okul korkusu, okuldan kaçma, sınıf aktivitelerine katılmama gibi özellikler de gösterirler.

Ilımlı ve kabul edici sınıf öğretmenleri çocukların bu tip problemlerini çözebilir. Problem çok ciddi olduğu takdirde sınıf öğretmenleri çözüm getirmede yeterli değildirler. Ciddi öğrenme bozukluklarında bu konuda özel eğitim görmüş bir terapistin gereği vardır.

Learning Disabilities

There are all degrees of learning disability, ranging from a slight lag in terms of grade norms to serious non-learning with a lag of several years. The child who achieves approximately six months below the expected grade score on standardized achievement test does not have a serious problem, the one who achieves two or three years below the expected score does. Pupils with serious learning disabilities usually have difficulty in all school subjects, but attention is directed toward reading since this ability is necessary for most school learning.

The severe learning disabilities are: "Symptoms of emotional disturbance on neurotic behavior in other words. All children of normal intelligence will learn adequately if they are emotionally ready to learn and if they have no serious physical condition, such as a hearing or visual defect.

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A word of caution is advisable in regard to determining whether a child has normal intelligence. This can be reasonably decided only if the child is examined by competent psychologist. Children who resist learning and present serious learning problems frequently achieve a low mark on group intelligence tests if they are emotionally disturbed. Only trained clinicians can determine on the basis of several tests whether or not the child has good or normal intelligence in these instances.

The statement that "All children of normal intelligence can learn." Assumes that the child attends school regularly and comes home where learning is valued. Some children in our public schools come from homes where the parents have little or no education themselves. Some of them may lack the interest to learn. Some of them are encouraged to learn and profit from all educational experiences. "Most young children are highly motivated to learn unless they come from a very deprived home; they learn if teaching methods are even moderately adequate. There are certain optimal methods for teaching, and it is advisable to use the best systems for the sake of expediency and efficiency"¹.

Individual Differences

Children seem to learn at various rates of speed, and some seem ready before others. This is logical when we think of individual differences in children and the range of normality in walking and talking for instance, it seems pretty well established that children should have a mental age of six and a half before they are introduced to reading. To delay reading until a child is seven years of age would probably insure a high percentage of success in beginners. In first grade, when a child is not learning as rapidly as his mother wants him to, or thinks he should he may become disturbed by his mother's anxiety. He may feel that he has failed and that there is something wrong with him.

The teachers can not allay a parent's anxiety about their child's "slowness" in starting reading by telling them not to worry. He must show the mother what the child is learning and how he is helping him. He needs, also, to let the mother see that he is alert in giving the child every opportunity to learn without making him feel anxious or pressured. The mothers want to know that the child is not forgotten or pushed aside because he does not seem "ready" for reading when the other children do. This is another function of the teacher, and he can give both the child and the mother immeasurable help. Often, serious reading problems begin with parent's anxiety. The anxious parent makes the child anxious and frequently attempts to do something about the reading, only making matters worse. If the mother is secure in the knowledge that the teacher is on the job and if she gets a careful explanation of how her child is being helped, there will be less danger of her doing anything harmful.

Emotional Conflict

If normal child is not making a pretty good start in learning in the second grade, it is time to be concerned. By this time children usually have achieved the maturational level essential for formal learning and are highly motivated to learn.

1 Biehler, R.; *Psychology Applied to Teaching* Houghton Mifflin Comp. p. 574-579, Boston, 1982.

In most instances the reasons for non-learning do not lie within the teaching but within the child. His non-learning is usually a symptom of emotional disturbance of greater or lesser degree. "Only in rare instances we find physical cause for non-learning. The physical cause can be poor vision or hearing, general poor health making for lack of energy. Many children, however, who have a hearing or visual defect become excellent students, while others who are physically normal fail to learn"². Competent psychologists apply intelligence and personality tests to the children who have difficulty in learning. Following this examination a complete personality study should be made by the psychologist so that reasons for the child's non-learning can be obtained. If there are no serious physical or mental defects, the non-learning behaviour indicates some emotional conflict which can be discovered by psychological examination.

Non-learning symptoms mean different things for different children. For example some children fail to learn because they do not want to grow up. By not learning, they think they can remain weak and helpless and in need of extra care. They are asking why some children do not learn: The answer is because it is not worth their while. Their parents have not given them the attention and affection that indicates they are loved and important; therefore, they do not feel it is worthwhile doing something they know the parents want them to do.

Some children unconsciously use non-learning as a weapon to express resentment toward parents. It is an effective weapon and one over which the child maintains complete control. Nobody can make him learn if he does not want to. Often when a child enters therapy, he becomes aware of the meaning of his school failure and drops this neurotic pattern. The older children who are angry at their parents may use non-learning as a two edged sword. He feels guilty because of his resentment toward his parents: so he thinks he needs to be punished by non-promotion, by the scorn of his classmates, and by the anger and/or punishment of his parents.

Some children fail to learn because they think, they must not know certain things. To learn to read is to learn forbidden things, often sexual in nature. So these children become non-learners. Certain children are just so unhappy and confused because of parental neglect or conflict that they can not mobilize their energies to learn. If a child shows the symptoms of enuresis, stuttering, excessively withdrawn from class, room activities or aggressive behavior, he can learn easily because of reasons behind the symptoms. To show hostility toward his parents and peer group, he uses non-learning as a tool. Another words children cover their fear and anger by being non-learners they believe they will be accepted if they resist learning. These are children who feel rejected, dominated by others, deprived, jealous or resentful:

All normal children occasionally show some of these symptoms in a mild form. The child's age must always be considered in connection with the symptom. Certain symptoms show extreme interpersonal disturbance and indicate the need for immediate attention not because the symptom itself is any more disturbing to the classroom than others but because it indicates severe disturbance within the child that can lead to neurotic behavior patterns or delinquency. Such symptoms

2 Gardiner, L.W.; *The Psychology of Teaching* Brooks/Cole Publ. Comp. p. 230. Monterey Ca. 1980.

are school phobia, truancy, extreme withdrawal from class-room activities often accompanied by resistance to learning.

In any disturbed child, usually find not one symptom but several; the child also may show first one symptom then another. This is because he is trying to solve his problems or disturbance through a grouping behavior and he will try a variety of ways which we see as symptoms. It becomes necessary; then, to discover what the symptom or behavior means to the child, that is, what problem, what personal relationship, what fear or anxiety he is struggling with.

Many non-learners are seen by adults as compliant, good natured children who try hard to learn without success or they may be seen as good natured but lazy. The adults feel they could learn if the children would only try themselves. They will give many "reasons" why they can not learn. They say "it is too hard" or "I am stupid". All of them think they really want to learn but suffer from the ridicule of their classmates which is usually well concealed from the teacher.

When extra study and remedial help occurs, some change has come into the life of the child that makes it no longer necessary for him to continue non-learning as a neurotic symptom. Sometimes a remedial teacher who is warm and accepting can be therapeutic enough in the approach he uses so that the child will learn in this case, it is actually the good relationship that is responsible for the child's learning rather than the extra teaching. Some therapists have had little children tell them they will learn for them and for no one else. This happens when the therapist has won the child's love and trust. When this happens, the youngster learns his daily school lessons with no extra tutoring. Sometimes, a fourth and fifth grade child has missed so much while he was resisting learning that he needs tutoring at the point in his therapy at which he becomes receptive and ready to learn.

Older children often give up their neurotic non-learning behavior after considerable therapy and become highly motivated to learn. If they have superior intelligence, they may catch up without tutoring. If they average intelligence they may need special tutoring for a while.

A psychological study is not always easy to have done because of the limited psychological services available to many schools. If and when educators become aware of the meaning of non-learning behavior, they may take the necessary steps to insure this service. It probably would be far more profitable for the schools to have psychologists, able to give therapy to non-learner children, than to have a team of remedial teachers. Class-room teachers can be responsible for helping pupils who lag somewhat in reading, but the child who has a serious reading disability needs special help from a trained therapist.

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