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**PSYCHO-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE LEARNING  
OF THE BLACK PUPIL : A DIDACTICAL REFLECTION**

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**PSYCHO-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE LEARNING  
OF THE BLACK PUPIL : A DIDACTICAL REFLECTION**

Inaugural lecture delivered on accepting the

Chair of Didactics

at the

University of the North

on

5 September, 1974

by

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SOVENGA



Mr Vice-Chancellor,  
Members of Council,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the purpose of this inaugural lecture<sup>1)</sup> I have elected to treat the subject:

### PSYCHO-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE LEARNING OF THE BLACK PUPIL : A DIDACTICAL REFLECTION

The removal of semantic ambiguities must receive attention before meaningful and enlightened conversation can take place. To promote lucidity and prevent talking at cross purposes with others, I shall first discuss the key-concepts in the title of this lecture.

#### 1. Didactics

While Perquin sees Didactics as "de theorie van het leren en onderrichten"<sup>2)</sup>, Bevelander *et. al.* regard it as "de theorie van het onderwijzen"<sup>3)</sup>. On the face of it the two definitions are different, but a closer study reveals that this is not so. Teaching implies that there is someone who learns. The learning component is implied in Bevelander's definition.

In fact the two definitions are not mutually exclusive but complement each other and they place in bold relief the bipolar nature of the didactical effort viz. learning and teaching.

##### 1.1. Practical and theoretical didactics

I should like to submit that Didactics is more than just a theory of learning and teaching. It has both theoretical and practical components. For this reason, a more comprehensive definition of Didactics is that it is the theory and practice of learning and teaching.

As an academic exercise, Didactics is sometimes dichotomised into practical and theoretical streams.

Practical Didactics on the one hand, is concerned with the practical results of the interaction of the integrants of the didactic situation in the practical classroom situation. Theoretical Didactics on the other hand speculates on problems of a didactical nature, without necessarily stressing their applicability in the classroom situation. However, there exists reciprocal influencing between practical and theoretical Didactics, between what is done and what can and ought to be done. More often than not theoretical Didactics culminates in classroom practice whereupon it becomes practical

1. REFER TO AUTHOR'S D.ED. THESIS  
2. N. PERQUIN: ALGEMENE DIDACTIEK, P.20  
3. C. BEVELANDER ET. AL.: ALGEMENE DIDACTIEK, P.8.

Didactics. The practical and the theoretical components are clearly interdependent because theoretical considerations influence the practice of teaching in the hard reality of the classroom situation.

The theoretical didactician should be able to face up to the reality of classroom teaching while the practical didactician should be in a position to rationalize about what ought to be done in the classroom situation. The latter is charged with the task of translating theoretical speculation into practical reality in the classroom: he must know what should be done and what should not be done.

From what has been said it is apparent that Didactics is compounded of a blending and mutual tempering of theory and practice - a view which is both paradoxical and tantalizing.

#### 1.2. Didactics and Method

Because there is a tendency for the didactically uninitiated to use the terms Didactics and Method interchangeably, I consider it not out of place here to differentiate clearly between these two concepts.

Perquin differentiates between Method and Didactics succinctly thus: "... De Methodiek ... onderzoekt de weg die men dient te volgen om op efficiënte wijze les te geven ... Terwyl de didactiek de theorie is van het leren en onderrichten, in verband met de vorming van de gehele persoonlijkheid ..."<sup>4)</sup>.

From this definition it is clear that Method is a narrower concept than Didactics<sup>5)</sup> because it is concerned with the techniques and skills for teaching the subject matter, while Didactics takes into account the moulding of the entire personality. Method is subject matter-centred while Didactics is pupil-centred.

Didactics grows out of the Continental psycho-philosophical orientation to education and is influenced largely by Modern Thought Psychology and the holistic Gestalt psychology. The Anglo-American "Method" finds its roots in the somewhat exclusive empirically-biased approach. This approach stems from the fragmentary, atomistic, associationistic and behaviouristic S-R theories of learning and Herbartian psychology. According to this approach emphasis is placed on the organization and presentation of the subject matter. This leads to a truncated and one-sided pedagogy in which the pupil is relegated to the background.

4. N. PERQUIN: *IBID.*  
5. F. AND O.A. VAN DER STOEP: DIDACTIC ORIENTATION, P.2.



The methodical presentation of the subject matter has, no doubt, its place in teaching and learning. It should, however, be realized that the slavish application of techniques can deteriorate into the sheer methodization of education with little regard for the pedagogical influencing of the pupil by the teacher.

It is necessary to take cognizance of the fact that Method is but a part of Didactics, and the two terms cannot be reduced to a common conceptual denominator.

### 1.3. Didactical reflection

I have dealt with Didactics and some of its ramifications that serve to shed more light on its understanding. It is my intention to bring into focus, through reflective thought, the essence of some aspects of the didactic phenomenon as it manifests itself to us. I am interested especially in those psycho-cultural aspects that have a bearing on the learning of the Black pupil.

## 2. Learning

Learning is the acquisition of knowledge. This is so elementary a definition as hardly to warrant further elaboration. But to be absolutely clear, two points should be made about learning.

Firstly, there is a tendency in some didactically unsophisticated circles to cling tenaciously to the out-moded view that learning is purely a function of the pupil's cognitive endowment. This view is not quite acceptable. Learning is subject to the operation of a great number of uncontrolled variables which account for the disparity between intellectual potential and achievement. It is not only the cognitive domain that is involved in learning; the conative, affective and psychomotor domains also have a share in it, and it is when they supplement and reinforce one another that learning efficiency is heightened.

Secondly, I should like to dispel the popular notion that learning is a process; a notion which, paradoxically, has become threadbare with wrong usage. One should really talk of the "learning activity" instead of the "learning process". My view is that learning is a subjective undertaking initiated, directed and sustained by the learner - it is certainly not a process guided by blind inanimate forces along a fixed and immutable course.

## 3. The term Black

The term Black is used here in reference to the black people of South Africa, unless the context indicates otherwise. It can be used synonymously with the term African.

## 4. The pupil - his place in modern Didactics

It is generally accepted that the components of the didactic situation are the pupil, the teacher and the subject matter. But there are didacticians who disagree with this contention, maintaining that this limits the number unrealistically. They assert that there is more to the didactic situation than the "trinity" generally postulated.

I shall not allow myself to be drawn into the merits and demerits of these views because for my present purpose I propose to focus attention on the most important and non-controversial component - the pupil. My point of departure is not dissimilar to that of Davis who maintains that the real essence of education is the "learner-learning not the teacher-teaching"<sup>6</sup>). There is a tendency to create a mystical instead of a catalytic function for the teacher in the educational activity. This has led to the neglect of the pupil's desire and capacity to create, discover and learn for himself. It is for this reason that in this lecture I have accentuated the learning aspect rather than the teaching of the Black pupil.

Thanks to the concerted efforts of the naturalists, positivists and progressivists, the pupil has been reinstated to his rightful place which was usurped by the teacher and the subject matter under the banner of Herbartian psychology.

The mystical aura that used to surround the teacher has been dissipated. It must, however, be pointed out that the materialistic approach of the naturalists, positivists and progressivists errs in regarding the pupil as an object rather than a subject with an ego. It leads to a naive absolutism in which absolute rules of thumb are formulated about him. This is contrary to the complex nature of the human child.

It is worth remembering that in his complexity the pupil is more than just a psycho-physical organism that the naturalistic philosophers say he is. He is, in phenomenological terms, a somato-psychic-noetic being. Over and above the psychic and physical dimensions, he has the spiritual dimension which transcends the two-dimensional perspective of the naturalistic philosophers. Over-emphasis on teaching led to the creation of the concept of the mythical "average pupil". This smacks of statistical quantification. It is to this hypothetical statistical construct that the teacher gears his teaching. The average pupil, as Mursell<sup>7</sup> tersely points out, is merely a statistical concept which cannot, on that account, learn and be taught.

6. I.K. DAVIS: "TOWARDS A TECHNOLOGY OF LEARNING", PAPER READ AT THE SEMINAR ON PROGRAMMED INSTRUCTION, JOHANNESBURG, 28TH MARCH TO 3RD APRIL 1966, P.1.

7. J.L. MURSELL: SUCCESSFUL TEACHING, P.187.



## 5. Psycho-cultural considerations

The pupil must be helped to unfold his complex psychological nature. This development takes place within a given cultural complex which must be taken into account when teaching him. As van Gelder so correctly points out: "Modern didactics maintains that in the school situation our study object is not *'the child'* as an abstract concept, but it is the learning child as he is found in a *specific cultural situation*".<sup>8</sup>

But the pupil is the product of the interaction of his specific cultural milieu and his psychological make-up, hence my interest in both the psychological and cultural components in his learning.

In our case we are concerned with the effect of the psychological make-up and the specific cultural milieu on the learning of the Black pupil. It is for this reason that I now wish to direct my attention to the Black pupil as a learner in a specific cultural context to enable us to understand him with a view to helping him to learn more efficiently.

Before any pupil can be helped to learn more efficiently some of his characteristics as well as his peculiar difficulties should be understood. In our specific case the pupil whose cultural environment and psychological nature we have to understand is not the generalized pupil but the Black pupil. We must try to understand him better so as to help him learn more efficiently. It is to him that I now turn.

### 5.1. The differential effect of rural and urban cultures on the learning of the Black pupil.

The Black pupil's learning is influenced by a complex of perplexing factors. Some of these factors can be identified, analysed and controlled while others are elusive and beyond easy reach. Important among these factors is the differential effect of rural and urban cultures and sub-cultures on the learning of the Black pupil.

More than his rural counterpart the urban pupil lives in a socio-cultural milieu which is in a state of flux, in a community whose norms and values are changing rapidly. He is an heir to the materially-dominated culture of the West. Urbanization makes an indelible imprint on his personality, and often he is torn between his culture and Western values. He tries to make his own what he cannot understand fully and assimilate. At times he imitates what he sees of White culture in cinemas. This renders the urban pupil a victim of many conflicts which culminate in an assortment of disciplinary problems which may find their way into the classroom.

8. L. VAN GELDER QUOTED BY P.A. DUMINY: AFRICAN PUPILS AND TEACHING THEM, P.51.

The myriad of inextricably interwoven learning problems with which the Black pupil has to battle become even more complicated when the differential effects of urbanization and ruralization on his learning are taken into consideration. Each of the two environments has a culture and sub-cultures of its own, which generate problems that require forethought and circumspection in their treatment.

Unlike the urban pupil who is subject to the influences of Western culture, the rural Black pupil has relatively few outstanding problems relating to psychological weaning, emotional emancipation and heterosexual adjustment. He lives in a relatively simple homogeneous community in which ties amongst individuals are somewhat strong and personal. Here social cohesion is marked. The community is closely-knit and provides very little scope for deviating from social norms. Social disapproval and fear of being ostracised still have a fairly strong deterrent effect on would-be transgressors. The rural pupil, consequently, tends to be amenable to discipline at home and at school. But his learning is beset with problems stemming from the tremendous cultural leap that he has to make as a result of the immense cultural differences of his home and the school.

From the foregoing brief description of the Black pupil's urban and rural cultures, it is apparent that his environment bristles with innumerable complicating factors to which the teacher is sometimes oblivious and yet he still hopes to teach him.

In keeping with the tenets of "total education"<sup>9</sup> and Gestalt psychology, which hold that the whole pupil must be taught with due regard to the whole environment in which he finds himself, it must be emphasized that to teach the Black pupil effectively he and his "umwelt" must be understood. Failure to appreciate the Black pupil's existential world leads to prejudiced notions being formulated about him; it impedes the establishment of a positive pedagogical and didactical encounter between him and his teacher and hinders the consummation of what should be a pleasurable and fruitful horizontal dialogue.

9. Cf. M.L. JACKS: TOTAL EDUCATION: A PLAN FOR SYNTHESIS.



The teacher of the Black pupil should remember that, as with pupils elsewhere, the behaviour of his pupil is also subject to the influence of factors extraneous to the learning situation. Some of these factors he can control, others elude and defy his best attempts at controlling them. The lack of understanding of some of the psychological and cultural factors which impinge on his learning have often led to some assertions being made, which are as superficial as they are speculative.

## 5.2. The effect of cultural determinants on the perceptual learning of the Black pupil

It has been asserted that perception is the *sine qua non* for learning and that without it efficient learning is not possible because it is the basis of conceptualization. This has been established firmly by Lindworsky's Cologne School which formulated the Theory of the levels of consciousness and proved by Kohnstamm at his Amsterdam School. For our purpose it is important to establish the perceptual modes of learning of the Black pupil and to identify any operative cultural determinants.

The effect of culture on learning has been investigated and related especially to auditory and visual perception. Most of the studies have centred on the appraisal of the threshold of auditory and visual acuity and their learning implications for Black and White subjects. Conflicting findings are reported in these studies.

Marsh<sup>10</sup> found that Black pupils learned more in object lessons than White pupils, but in extract lessons and with the film, the White pupils performed better than the Blacks. In a study in which he investigated the effect of cultural factors on pictorial perception, Hudson<sup>11</sup> came to the conclusion that cultural experience, and not educational standard, was the determining factor in dimensional perception of picture material. He suggests that perceptual difficulties of unacculturated groups and particularly of the black man in Africa have a bearing on training and education. He maintains that they may be at the root of some of the difficulties which Black engineering and medical students experience, since both these disciplines require accurate perception of pictorial and illustrative material<sup>12</sup>.

10. Z. MARSH, QUOTED BY W. HUDSON; "CULTURAL PROBLEMS IN PICTORIAL PERCEPTION", SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF SCIENCE, VOL. 158, NO. 7, 1962, P.195.

11. W. HUDSON; OP. CIT., P.189.

12. IBID., P.194.

Contrary to the findings of Hudson, Portugani<sup>13</sup>, in a study in which he compared the visual and auditory acuities of White and Black university students found *inter alia* that:

1. Whites are better than Blacks in visual acuity; and that
2. the Blacks learn more visually than auditorily.

Like Hudson and Marsh, Portugani confirms that the Whites are better than Blacks in visual acuity; it is in his second finding that he does not agree with the other researchers. What is apparent at this stage, is that both groups learn more visually than auditorily.

At first glance the findings of Hudson and Portugani contradict each other but a closer study reveals that this may not be the case. Portugani used Black university students whose acculturative level was markedly advanced; Hudson's subjects were an unacculturated group. If the acculturative factor is taken into account, it can be inferred that visual perception improves with acculturation.

If the above interpretation is correct, then it is difficult to agree with Hudson's view that cultural experience and not educational standard is the determining factor in visual perception. By its very nature education increases cultural experience; education serves both as an acculturative and enculturative implement. It is difficult to conceive of learning which does not enhance the recipient's cultural experience.

For the sake of the didactician interested in the learning of Black pupils, it is important to establish whether the Black pupil is more visually or auditorily inclined in his learning. Up till now, there has been no unanimity as to whether visual or auditory aids are to be stressed in the schools for Blacks.

Some didacticians who claim that the culture of the Black pupil is auditorily inclined advocate the use of audio-aids, others maintain that because empirical findings based mainly on White pupils have proved that they learn more efficiently from visual aids, all pupils regardless of their culture, should be exposed more to visual than auditory aids.

Perhaps the importance of studies relating to visual versus auditory perception will be reduced by the current tendency in some progressive educational circles to stress multisensory perception rather than auditory or visual perception. Together with other forms of perception they contribute their quota to the learning activity.

13. Y. PORTUGANI; "A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF INFORMATION HANDLING CAPACITY", LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH ON THE 28TH AUGUST, 1967.



### 5.3. The psycho-cultural considerations in the learning ability and intelligence of the Black pupil

Now that the question of perceptual learning has been surveyed, at least in part, we have to turn to conceptual learning. The question to be answered here is: is the Black pupil possessed of the necessary intellectual equipment and prowess to learn and what is the effect of his culture on his learning?

The controversial and yet central problem of the learning ability of the Black pupil demands attention. I regard this problem as central because an accurate and objective appraisal of the intelligence and the learning ability of the Black pupil will enable teachers to help him learn more efficiently and to make the necessary adjustments where they are justifiably called for.

Research on the learning ability of the Black pupil has been based on his performance on intelligence tests.

Comparative cross-cultural studies conducted in this connection by Fick<sup>14)</sup>, van Rensburg<sup>15)</sup> and Dent<sup>16)</sup> have shown that there is a significant difference in intelligence between White and Black pupils. This difference is in favour of the former racial group.

In assessing the validity of the findings of these researchers, especially Fick's, Biesheuvel<sup>17)</sup> points out that apart from the many difficulties of sampling and testing techniques encountered in measuring the abilities of the Black pupil, there is the fundamental objection that the manipulative, perceptual and thinking habits of Blacks are at present culturally distinct from those of their White counterparts. He comes to the conclusion that there is no point in applying a quantitative measure to entities which are qualitatively different.

Unlike their White counterparts, most Black pupils live in cultural environments that are not sufficiently intellectually stimulating<sup>18)</sup>. The cultural environment factor is an important contaminant in research of this nature, it cannot be overlooked because it has a depressive effect on achievement and intelligence test scores.

14. M.L. FICK: THE EDUCABILITY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIVE.
15. J.A.J. VAN RENSBURG: THE LEARNING ABILITY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIVE COMPARED WITH THAT OF THE EUROPEAN.
16. G.R. DENT: AN INVESTIGATION OF CERTAIN ASPECTS OF BANTU INTELLIGENCE.
17. S. BIESHEUVEL: "THE NATIVE'S INTELLIGENCE AND ITS MEASUREMENT", SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF SCIENCE, VOL. 49, NO. 3-4, 1952; P. 130.
18. T. ENDEMANN: DIE INTELLIGENSIE VAN DIE NATURELLE IN DIE LIG VAN PEDAGOGIESE BEVINDINGE AAN DIE BOTSHABELO OPLEIDINGSKOOI VIR NATURELLE, UNPUBLISHED M.ED. DISSERTATION, PRETORIA UNIVERSITY, 1937, P.35.

It must be realised that most intelligence tests that were used by the above researchers were culture-bound and written in a medium foreign to the Black pupil. It is more than likely that difficulty in understanding the medium used had a depressive effect on the Black pupils' I.Q. scores. That the language factor operates against the Black pupils when verbal tests are used, is borne out by the fact that no significant differences in intelligence between Whites and Blacks are found when non-verbal tests are used, but these differences appear when verbal tests are used<sup>19)</sup>.

Most group intelligence tests are speed rather than power tests. This emphasis on speed and competition introduces factors that are not very highly prized in Black culture. White culture places a high premium on speed and competition, Black culture does not attach too much significance to these factors<sup>20)</sup>.

The test items used reveal a tendency towards culture-loading. This could serve as a depressant on the measured I.Q.'s.

In the light of the above, it would seem that the lower measured I.Q. and the learning of the Black pupil have cultural and not congenital<sup>21)</sup> determinants. The observed disparities between the two racial groups should be explained in qualitative rather than quantitative terms, Nel<sup>22)</sup> and Duminy<sup>23)</sup> are in accord with this view. They suggest a phenomenological approach in assessing the learning ability of the Black pupil.

According to phenomenological psychologists, human learning is too complicated to be expressed in quantitative terms. To analyse the learning of the Black pupil in statistical terms is to over-simplify an essentially complex human activity in which there are too many interacting uncontrolled variables. Even factor analytic methods are of doubtful use in this research area.

From the foregoing discussion it is apparent that the Black pupil's learning ability cannot be assessed easily. However, it seems fairly certain that this ability can be stepped up if the influence of his psychological make-up and peculiar socio-cultural milieu is taken into account in the didactic situation.

19. J.A.J. VAN RENSBURG: OP. CIT., P.4.
20. S. BIESHEUVEL: AFRICAN INTELLIGENCE, P.42.
21. R.F.A. HOERNLE: "THE EDUCABILITY OF THE BANTU", IN E. MALHERBE (ED.), EDUCATIONAL ADAPTATIONS IN A CHANGING SOCIETY, P.446.
22. B.F. NEL: "THE LIVING WORLD OF THE BANTU CHILD", IN P.A. DUMINY (ED.), TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN THE EDUCATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN BANTU.
23. P.A. DUMINY: LEARNING AND THE AFRICAN CHILD.



It is true that the Black pupil's achievement is not always commensurate with his ability. That this unsatisfactory achievement is inherent in him is dubious. Deeper and more subtle causative factors must be sought to replace the superficial test-based intellectual factors. The phenomenologists have already pointed out the direction in which more deep-seated subtle causes might be sought. Perhaps too much attention has been given to the intellectual domain to the exclusion of the equally important and yet not easily quantifiable emotional, volitional and psycho-motor domains.

It is my opinion that two important subtle causes have not received the attention they deserve. They are of vital importance because they act against the Black pupil's learning effort. They are the inhibitory effect of his non-stimulating cultural milieu and the effect of cultural and linguistic discontinuity.

#### **5.4. The inhibitory effect of cultural deprivation on the learning and thinking ability of the Black pupil**

The development of thought depends on schooling and cultural stimulation. Schooling induces mental alertness and leads the pupil to interact more readily with his environment. If the cultural environment in which the pupil is reared is stimulating, his capacity to think and learn is developed. This capacity is depressed if the milieu is non-stimulating. A stimulating environment provides many problem situations which exercise the mind, it promotes anticipatory thought and the desire to learn.

Because of their impoverished cultural milieu, Black pupils enter school with little or no familiarity with learning material; they lack certain skills and modes of thought essential for learning certain subjects. These pupils from circumstances of deprivation and disadvantage need compensatory education.

The achievement of the culturally deprived Black pupil is more often than not unsatisfactory. This may be ascribed, in large measure, to the fact that he comes from the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder, and that he is often emotionally disturbed by unsalutary home conditions or poor prevailing environmental factors. Money for buying books is either hard to come by or in short supply. Parental inspiration and encouragement are often conspicuous by their absence. At times parental attitudes to learning are blatantly indifferent or shockingly negative. A pupil thus afflicted is, by and large, lacking in self-reliance and self-propulsion,

and he is often extremely diffident and self-effacing or embarrassingly over-assertive. He, indeed, learns under exceedingly unstimulating circumstances of abject cultural deprivation. This may end in a morbid dislike of school, with the result that he may drop out.

Before any teacher can toy with the hope of teaching the Black pupil with some measure of success he must be aware of his cultural deprivation. The pupil's environment affects his psychological endowment. It affects the dynamics of his development and has a bearing on his scholastic attainment. Teachers often overlook this fact with deleterious consequences to learning.

#### **5.5. The effect of cultural and linguistic discontinuity on the learning of the Black pupil**

One error that is commonly made is to interpret the learning of the Black pupil out of context. The effect of cultural and linguistic discontinuity on his learning is often disregarded. Usually, little notice is taken of the fact that frequently considerable differences exist between the culture of the school and that of the home of the pupil. This cultural gap is widened by the fact that at home he uses his own language and at school he has to learn through a foreign medium or media.

Language is the gist of Didactics, the vehicle of interpersonal communication. Without language facility, the two-way communication between the pupil and the teacher is impeded. For maximal learning, the language proficiency of both the teacher and the pupil should be above reproach.

Because he has to teach through a medium over which he can claim limited mastery, the Black teacher cannot always transmit knowledge as well as he should to his pupils. And the pupils are even worse off. They often have to scale linguistic barriers that stand in their way and impede their learning.

Where there is cultural discontinuity there is neither continuity nor contiguity, but an alienation between school and home expectations, which are at variance with each other. The conflict that ensues from this situation leads to a lowering in the achievement of the pupil.

In drawing up syllabuses there is a tendency to overlook, perhaps inadvertently, the fact that most learning material is Western in conception and content. Whereas the White pupil is familiar with most of the subject matter taught at school, because it is part and parcel of his culture, the Black pupil



has to be acculturated first and later enculturated, because initially what he learns is foreign to his culture and only later in his school life does he get reasonably close to the Western way of life.

At this stage another problem rears its head: As the Black pupil proceeds with his studies he drifts further and further from his culture towards Western culture. This drifting can easily lead to his despising his culture and all that goes with it as he finds himself in the clutches of a sophisticated Western culture.

This type of alienation can lead to depersonalization and unhealthy feelings of estrangement between the pupil and his people with disastrous consequences to his mentality and learning, and particularly to his self-concept because his learning is a product of how he sees himself. To ease this problem, the subject matter taught in schools for Black pupils should be based on the socio-cultural foundations and experience with which they are familiar<sup>24)</sup>, particularly in the early crucial formative stages of schooling.

#### 5.6. Psycho-cultural considerations in the choice of the subject matter

Learning does not take place in a socio-cultural vacuum but rather in a socio-cultural continuum. The pupil belongs to a definite cultural group with its own norms. The role of the school is to initiate him into the socio-cultural heritage bequeathed to him by his forebears through socialization and enculturation.

If he must learn to adopt certain skills foreign to his culture, as is the case with the Black pupil, he must undergo acculturation. Because he lives in society and interacts with his fellows, he must be socialized. In structuring the subject matter due regard must, therefore, be paid to its enculturative, acculturative and socializing possibilities.

The correct choice of the subject matter is a factor of moment where acculturative influences exist. What may be normal and proper in one culture may be obscene and may even generate emotional reactions in other cultures. Care should, therefore, be taken in teaching emotionally charged aspects of a subject<sup>25)</sup>. If this is not done emotional involvement can blur intellectual vision, obstruct scholarly

24. Cf. A) G.G.F. KNELLER: EDUCATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY, P.16 2.  
B) G. HIGHET: THE ART OF TEACHING, P.17.

25. Cf. I.D. HARRIS: EMOTIONAL BLOCKS TO LEARNING

objectivity, and lead to the generation of more heat than light. This may culminate in resentment against both the teacher and the tutorial matter. It is important to consider the feelings and socio-cultural background of the pupils for whom the subject matter is meant.

Because what he derives from the subject matter is internalized and integrated into the personality structure of the pupil, with concomitant behavioural changes, care must be taken to distil and purge the subject matter of any undesirable ingredients. The subject matter must be freed from all negative pedagogical influences and emotional irritations.

To illustrate this point: in drawing up syllabuses and teaching Black pupils science, the fact that this subject is essentially Western in orientation and conception is sometimes overlooked. Often the aim of science teaching is to develop attitudes valued in Western culture. These do not always tally with the attitudes, cultural values and beliefs of the Blacks. At times they result in emotional blocks to learning. These blocks are engendered especially where the beliefs of the Black pupils are dubbed "primitive", "superstitious", "backward", "uncivilized" and "illogical".

Instead of adopting a holier-than-thou attitude, it might be better to use the mental attitudes and beliefs of the pupil as a starting point and explain certain phenomena that he ascribes to the supernatural in terms of scientific principles. In this way, the pupil can be gradually made to seek answers to his perplexing problems in physical rather than metaphysical causation. It is when he recognises the operation of cause and effect in the explanation of observed phenomena that he will develop a positive attitude towards science and shed defence mechanisms that are often employed by those in whose mind conflict is engendered by failure to reconcile science and belief in the mystical.

While I regard socio-cultural factors as important in the learning of the Black pupil, let me hasten to say that I regard culture not as static but as dynamic. Socio-cultural norms are in a state of flux and much that is tradition-bound and time-honoured is being re-appraised by the Black communities. Education is certainly not immune to the forceful impact of the winds of change. It behoves the teacher to take cognizance of these changes. To cope with these rapid changes we need intellectual vigour, flexibility and adaptability as well as an inertia-free approach to our educational problems.



The choice of the aspects of their culture that must be reflected in the subject matter should be the responsibility of the Black educationists who are steeped in the culture of the people in whose service they stand. The reprehensible intrusion of others who pose as authorities on the Black pupil's culture and claim to know it so well as to even have the temerity to choose for him aspects of it that have to be learned is unfortunate, painfully paternalistic and prescriptive and must be discarded. For too long the Black educationists have remained on the touch-line of the educational pitch of their charges instead of being actively engaged in the compilation of their curricula and syllabuses. It is time they were afforded the opportunity of exchanging their role of consumers for that of producers.

The choosing of the aspects of their culture that must go into the formation of the subject matter should harmonise with a clearly formulated aim of Black education by the Blacks themselves in which they set out what they hope to achieve through education.

Going to school because it is in vogue to do so or because he is expected to or even forced by his betters and elders is a sterile exercise devoid of vision. To use his strength of sinew and mind the Black pupil must know the goals towards which he is striving by learning. The lack of clearly articulated educational aims may be at the back of the not-infrequent upheavals that have a proliferation reminiscent of cancerous cells and about which spirited concerted efforts should be made to find long-lasting or permanent solutions instead of ineffectual intimidatory short-lived palliatives which have become an exercise in futility and are wasteful of human material. These eruptions may be symptomatic of a greater learning problem syndrome to which Black pupils are subjected.

All too often the schools are sadly out of step with current contemporary developments taking place and colour the thoughts and actions of the Black pupil and have an adverse effect on his learning.

Finally, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I maintain that to discharge his onerous and yet rewarding task of preparing his charges for life, the enterprising teacher should have recourse to the tenets of Total Education. Total Education for the Blacks should place great store on the understanding of the whole Black pupil in the whole context of his Black experience and existence. While securely rooted in universal educational soil, Black education should at the same time be relevant to the extent that it is situational and contextualized.

In this address I have tried, for reasons of brevity, to limit the area of discussion to the psycho-cultural operative factors. But I must again stress that it is only when the Black pupil and the religious, social, cultural, political, economical and psychological factors that impinge on his learning are thoroughly comprehended, that his learning can be improved to reflect his aptitude, that the astonishingly high drop-out rate can be checked and the flimsy hold of the school on pupils remedied. Then the school will be able to improve its image and attraction so that it can retain those within its precincts, and lure the derailed outsiders.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I hereby dedicate myself to exposing the hydra-headed problems of the learning of the Black pupil with the object of amputating at least some of the paralyzing tentacles that stifle his learning efficiency, to help him to transmute his latent potentiality to actuality and make it possible for him to reach the highest brackets of academic performance.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I hereby accept the Chair of Didactics at the University of the North.

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## PSYCHO-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE LEARNING OF THE BLACK PUPIL : A DIDACTICAL REFLECTION

In this inaugural lecture Bevelander's and Perquin's definitions of Didactics serve as a point of departure. They are analysed and compared. In spite of apparent superficial differences, it is established that the two definitions are in point of fact not contradictory but complementary; they show the bipolar nature of the didactical effort viz. learning and teaching. The bifurcation of Didactics into practical and theoretical branches and the difference between Didactics and Method are touched upon briefly.

The main thesis of the lecture is that the pupil must be helped to unfold his complex psychological nature with due regard to the cultural setting in which he is reared. It is suggested that the pupil is a product of the interaction of his specific cultural milieu and his psychological make-up.

The effect of the psychological make-up and the specific cultural environment on the learning of the Black pupil is discussed. Attention is focused on the Black pupil as a learner in a specific cultural context. Account must be taken of this fact by teachers who must understand him with a view to helping him to learn more efficiently.

To throw light on the problem under discussion, particular attention is paid to the effect of the following relevant aspects of the Black pupil's learning:

1. The differential effect of rural and urban cultures on his learning.
2. The effect of cultural determinants on his perceptual learning.
3. The psycho-cultural considerations relating to his learning ability and intelligence.
4. The inhibitory effect of cultural deprivation on his learning and thinking ability.
5. The effect of cultural and linguistic discontinuity.
6. The psycho-cultural considerations in the choice of the subject matter.

It is asserted that the choice of the aspects of their culture that must go into the formation of the subject matter for Black pupils should harmonize with the clearly formulated aims of Black education by the Blacks themselves in which they set out what they hope to achieve through education. The deleterious consequences that stem from failure to take cognizance of this fact are indicated.

Finally, it is contended that to discharge his onerous but rewarding task of preparing his charges for life the enterprising teacher should have recourse to the tenets of total education. The whole Black pupil should be understood in the context of his experience and existence.

## PSIGO-KULTERELE OORWEGINGE IN DIE LEERPROSES VAN DIE SWART LEERLING : 'N DIDAKTIESE BESINNING

Aan die begin van hierdie intreerede word Bevelander en Perquin se definisies van die Didaktiek geanaliseer en vergelyk. Ten spyte van oënskynlike oppervlakkige verskille, blyk dit dat die twee definisies mekaar nie weerspreek nie maar aanvul; albei dui op die bipolêre aard van die didaktiese opset, nl. leer en onderrig. Die verdeling van die Didaktiek in 'n praktiese en teoretiese rigting asook die verskil tussen Didaktiek en Metodiek word kortliks behandel.

In hoofsaak gaan dit in hierdie lesing om die stelling dat die skolier gehelp moet word in die ontplooiing van sy verwickelde psigologiese aard, met inagneming van die kulturele opset waarin hy opgroei. Daar word geponer dat die leerling die produk is van die wisselwerking tussen sy kulturele milieu en sy psigologiese aanleg.

Die effek op die Swart leerling van sy psigologiese samestelling en die spesifieke kulturele omgewing word bespreek. Die aandag word gerig op die Swart kind as 'n leerling in 'n spesifieke kulturele konteks. Leermeesters moet eers die kind begryp alvorens hulle hom kan help om doeltreffend te leer.

Die probleem word belig deur besondere aandag te gee aan die volgende relevante aspekte van die Swart kind se leerhandeling:

1. die differensiërende invloede van die landelike en stedelike kulture op sy leer;
2. die invloed van kulturele determinante op sy perseptiwiteit;
3. die psigo-kulturele oorweginge t.o.v. sy leervermoë en intelligensie;
4. die stremmingseffek van kulturele ontbering op sy leer- en denker-vermoë;
5. die effek van die diskontinuiteit in kultuur en taal;
6. die psigo-kulturele oorweginge by die keuse van leerstof.

Daar word aangevoer dat die keuse t.o.v. die kulturele aspekte wat ingebou moet word in die studiemateriaal vir die Swart kind, in ooreenstemming moet wees met die duidelik geformuleerde opvoedkundige doelstelling van Swartes in terme van hulle opvoedings-ideaal. Die nadelige uitwerking van versuim om rekening te hou met hierdie feit, word aangedui.

Ten slotte word dit gestel dat die ondernemende onderwyser die grondslae van 'n omvattende opvoeding in gedagte moet hou in sy veeleisende maar dankbare taak om sy leerlinge vir die lewe voor te berei. Die hele Swart leerling moet begryp word binne die konteks van sy ervaringswêreld.



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