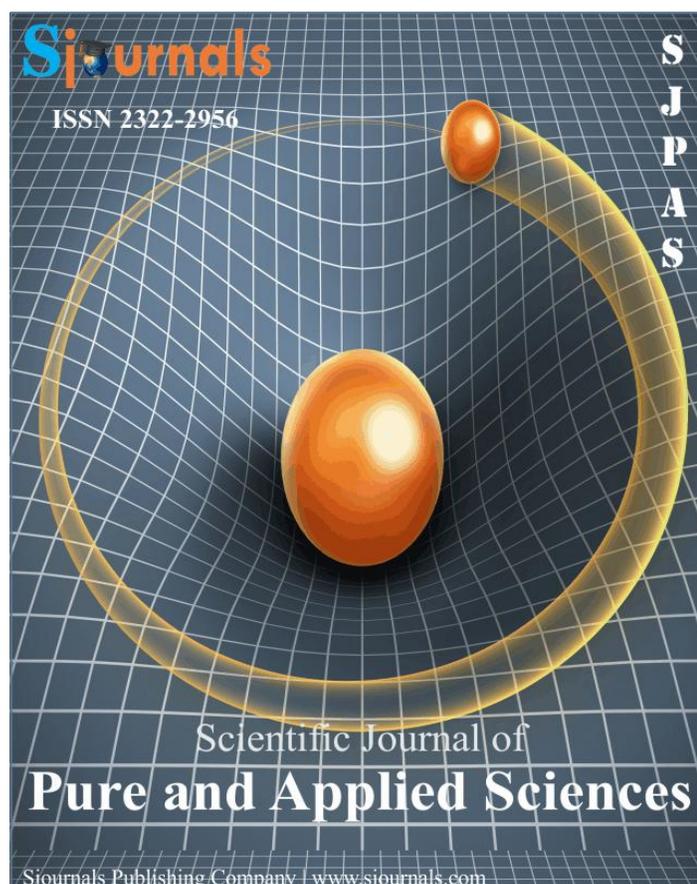


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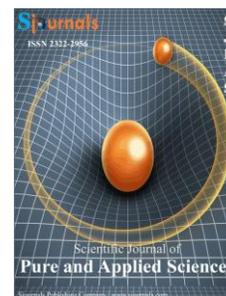
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Review article

Exploring the scope and context of orthopedagogic practice

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to unpack the domain, scope and context of the conceptualization of orthopedagogics as a part discipline of the science of pedagogy and autonomous field in its own right. Literature on orthopedagogics is sparse particularly in English speaking countries, while the available literature is linguistically inaccessible to an average student. The aim of this paper was therefore to add towards the mitigation of this dearth of literature. Although on the surface there appears to be a thin line between orthopedagogics and Special Education and Remedial Teaching for example, orthopedagogics stands distinct as an autonomous science, independent of these fields. Orthopedagogics has however been largely clouded by studies and practices of Special Education, Special Needs Education and Inclusive Education in the many countries where it is not openly acknowledged hence the need for this paper. The paper is expressed in relatively simpler language in order to add to the demystification of the epistemology of orthopedagogics as a subject area. The context in which orthopedagogics is conceptualized in this paper is as has been largely influenced by the process of its evolution which is not distinct from the evolution of Special Education nevertheless. As a way of further illuminating the domain, scope and context of orthopedagogics, the paper comprehensively examines its part disciplines. Consequently, the paper concludes that the scope and context of orthopedagogics practice holds great potential for at its best, mitigation and at its worst, better management of learning difficulties in the school and society as a whole.

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1. Introduction

The concept of orthopedagogics has been elusive and many students of Special Education or Special Needs Education have found it difficult to understand and define. Even literature on the subject is sparse and most of it is old but not necessarily outdated. The available literature, whether by design or default, is written in highly technical and complex language. Perhaps the reason behind this is that orthopedagogics is not often popular in English speaking countries and such literature rarely comes from these countries. This paper is therefore destined to unravel the scope and context of orthopedagogic practice and demystify its conceptualization. The paper is also intended to add to scholarly efforts towards mitigating the dearth of literature in the subject. Thus the paper aims to broaden the reader's understanding of the field of orthopedagogics which while at times mistakenly equated to Special Education has been clouded by newer studies of Special Needs Education and Inclusive Education hence the need for this review paper. From the outset, it should be appreciated that orthopedagogy is more than just Special Education or rather remedial teaching as we know and often practice them. To achieve this, the paper conceives the dynamic nature of the field by examining the various part disciplines that illuminate the field and practice of orthopedagogics. In essence, this paper examines the domain, context and the part disciplines of orthopedagogics.

2. The domain of orthopedagogics

As highlighted in the introduction, orthopedagogy has been traditionally viewed as being an equivalence of Special Education. However, this paper argues that orthopedagogics goes beyond the psychology of exceptionality which seems to limit intervention to mere schooling. Instead, orthopedagogics covers the broad array of pedagogic (*educative*) and didactic (*teaching*) problem events within the home, school, care institutions and the community (Du Toit, 1982). De Fever (2006) also insinuates that orthopedagogics does not target a child with a handicap but the entire problematic educational situation (PES). A PES, according to Ter Horst (1980) is one that is experienced by those involved in it as hopeless, meaningless and threatening and in which, without professional help, one cannot succeed in an entirely satisfactory way to change a perspective that is resistant to change. Thus a PES is one characterised by factors or forces which impede learning such as intellectual challenge, poor teaching and impoverished learning provisions. In the jargon of orthopedagogics, a PES is a result of a disharmonious learning or teaching situation. Put in another way a PES is a manifestation of impeding factors that influence a child's becoming adult (Du Toit, 1982). Pretorius (1999) asserts that an educative situation becomes problematic as a function of the educationally impeding factors dominating those that promote educating. These notions go beyond the basic definition of Special Education and imply that orthopedagogics is broader than the mere conceptualization of Special Education.

In this context, Hanselmann (1946) describes Special Education as a field of educating and caring for all those children whose physical-psychic development remains restrained by individual and social factors. Other scholars have thus attempted to distinguish orthopedagogics from this way of conceiving Special Education. Sonnekus (1952) for instance conceptualizes orthopedagogics as that aspect of the pedagogic/educative process which uses specialized, corrective pedagogic measures to re-educate children who deviate somatically, psychically and / or spiritually. Some of these children will have escaped Special Educational well-meaning interventions. Clearly, this conception of orthopedagogics already subscribes to the notion that, unlike Special Education, the context of orthopedagogics is not limited to the educational sense as confined to the four walls of a classroom but to a broader conception of a PES. It goes beyond Special Education boundaries to cater for a wider context in order to correct dysfunctionality associated with impoverished classroom learning environments. Orthopedagogics is thus the theory of educative treatment of children whose educability is limited (Van Gelder, 1962). In the mains, Du Toit (1978) defines orthopedagogics as that discipline of pedagogics that involves itself with readjustment or getting back on track of a derailed child and by implication, the elimination of what restricts him in becoming adult. By the way, the ultimate goal of child education is to make children be adult, that is, not to become adults but to grow up to be adults. It is the theory directed at the corrective education and guidance of a derailed child, as a total person but who has learning and educational deficiencies (Du Toit, 1982). Orthopedagogics can thus be viewed as the science that studies the education of children who experience significant difficulties in the progress of their education. From this analysis, orthopedagogics, although more diverse, can in basic terms therefore be also be

seen as the science of Special Education. This scientific nature of orthopedagogics however intricately legitimizes it as an autonomous discipline, independent of Special Education per se.

Van der Stoep and Louw (2011) even go further to challenge the foregoing conceptions arguing that orthopedagogics is not concerned only with children who remain restrained or disturbed but with all children who experience learning difficulties for other reasons. The authors believe that it is not orthopedagogics that tries to re-educate a child but the teacher, parent or guardian for instance. In other words, treatment of a child by means of orthopedagogic processes is not an educational but educative activity. Van der Stoep and Louw further premise their point of argument on the notion that the designation *educably limited child* is not tenable because no one ever attains optimal adulthood. The authors are of the opinion that some of the descriptions give an impression that learning difficulties can only be situated in the child. So the authors propose an even broader conception of orthopedagogics which does not associate learning only with a child, but any learner who needs re-education to restore functionally learning that would have been eroded by disharmonious/dysfunctional learning environments. Thus, orthopedagogics is the scientific study of assistance given to all those concerned with the PES, namely the child and his or her entire family (De Fever, 2006). It does not locate the source of the learning difficulty within the learner, but within the whole learning environment which includes the child, the teacher, the family and the totality of the learning provisions. 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 to constitute an orthopedagogic matter. From these analyses therefore, Van der Stoep and Louw (2011) propose that orthopedagogics is the science whose object of study is the problematic educational situation (PES) in which case an educational situation is the complex interdependent totality of factors that influence a child's education. To further illuminate these conceptions of the domain of pedagogics, the next section engages the context of orthopedagogics by examining its developmental stages as a field of practice.

3. The context of orthopedagogics

The history of orthopedagogics is quite diverse with respect, particularly to its origins. Van der Stoep and Louw (2011) observe that, it is logical to conclude that most of the origins of orthopedagogics can be traced to pedagogical studies. Additionally, other initiating contributions have come from the field of medicine and from other basic sciences. The same can be said about social sciences such as psychology and sociology as well as philosophy and socio-political science. These have contributed immensely to the evolution of orthopedagogics. According to Du Toit (1982), orthopedagogics was proclaimed to be one of the part-disciplines of pedagogics but under the jurisdiction of psychological pedagogics. The variations in which learning difficulty has manifested in the school and the various intervention strategies that have been crafted such as remedial teaching, accelerated teaching, bridge teaching, special teaching and individualized teaching are firmly connected to the evolution of orthopedagogics since they all aim to correct a disharmonious learning situation (Du Toit, 1978).

To this end, there are two major events that might have given rise to modern day orthopedagogics. One is the establishment of the first institution for the Deaf in Paris in 1770 (Hawkins and Galloway, 2011) and the other is the emergence of contemporary orthopedagogics as an autonomous science in Netherlands between the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s (Broekaert et al., 2004). It was then that orthopedagogics became an autonomous part discipline of science (De Fever, 2006). However, a closer examination brings to six, the phases through which modern day orthopedagogics has evolved to date. The first phase was the institutional care. The kind of care provided at these institutions was for philanthropic reasons (Hausstatter and Thuen, 2014). Children with severe so called defects (disabilities) were cared for in residential institutions and were regarded as sick and helpless and therefore dependent on the benevolence of the institutions. This was followed by the practice of viewing educational problems from a scientific or clinical perspective. The first attempt to view educational problems from a scientific perspective was by Ludwig Strumpell (1890) in his book which focused on the use of psychiatric strategies for treating deviant behaviour in children. This led to what could be regarded as Psychological Psychiatry.

Consequently, after approximately 1930, based mainly on the views of Hanselmann (1946), psychological psychiatrics dominated practices in orthopedagogics. Medical - psychiatric - psychological intervention took root that learning difficulties were a result of inherent disturbances and deficiencies that could be managed by training particular functional disturbances (Du Toit, 1982). The problem with this approach was that it reduced the child to

a stimulus response organism. In other words, orthopedagogics became contextualized within laboratory practices where children with learning difficulties were treated as mechanical objects who could respond to preset clinical interventions including drug therapy. This was challenged, creating a precursor to what was to become modern day orthopedagogics as contextualized within modern pedagogy. According to Van der Stoep and Louw (2011), from roughly 1950, the development of orthopedagogics was strongly directed by modern pedagogic thought. The authors observe that, for the first time there was concern about the role of the specialist teacher (pedagogue) in helping children who were *conspicuous in their becoming*.

An attempt was also made to craft a new definition of orthopedagogics in terms of modern orthopedagogic thought. It was around the same time that orthopedagogics was realized as an autonomous science (De Fever, 2006). In South Africa, where a number of universities have established Departments of Orthopedagogics, orthopedagogics is prominent. This was influenced by German, Dutch, Swiss and Belgian systems. In many English speaking countries in particular, however, the term orthopedagogics is rarely used. Instead Special Education is the term used to refer to any specialized teaching and learning. In those countries, Special Education was initially equated to the growth of didactic care of the handicapped, but today is rapidly changing to be more focused on special needs instead of being driven by the connotations of disability and handicap under the banner of Special Needs and even Inclusive Education.

In the 1960s, Special Education began to gain popularity in countries such as the Netherlands reflecting a rapid growth of orthopedagogics even in South Africa, where between 1960 and 1963 comprehensive research was conducted in the area (Hanselmann, 1964). In effect, systematic study of orthopedagogics in South Africa began in 1959 owing to the works of Nel and Sonnekus (1962). It was in this phase that there was the deepening, acceleration and reformation of orthopedagogics to what it is today. The phase was indeed a turning point for orthopedagogics in which case the focus of *pedodiagnosics* (diagnostic assessment of children with learning difficulties) shifted to the establishment of person or learning image, lived experience image, becoming or language image of children with learning difficulties (Van der Merwe, 1999). In other words, orthopedagogics has become a psychological science whose implementation is informed by assessment of needs as reflected through the learning difficulties experienced by the learner. These needs include communication of which Pretorius (1999) identifies disturbed communication as characteristic of a PES. Du Toit (1982) adds that disturbed communication between educator and child necessarily results in a child's inadequate personal actualization. In other terms, it results in child's failing to be adult. This kind of contextualization formed the basis of modern and post-modern orthopedagogics. Modern and post-modern orthopedagogics is characterised by research on new developments in orthopedagogics. There is a deepening interest on building upon orthopedagogic studies using joint perspectives for the current and for the future (De Fever, 2006). Van der Stoep and Louw (2011) contend that implementing joint perspectives as well as applying categories, criteria and fundamental structures ensures that orthopedagogic studies, in the future, will increasingly be characterised by depth, systematic growth and radicalness. However, and notwithstanding the fact that remedial teaching, Special Education, Special Needs Education and Inclusion in particular have taken center stage in the education systems of many countries, the same may not be said about orthopedagogics as an autonomous subject area. It is only countries such as Germany, Netherlands and South Africa that seem to have taken direct keen interest in the subject.

4. Part disciplines of orthopedagogics

As has already been suggested, orthopedagogics is an independent part-perspective of an autonomous field of pedagogics. It has been largely illuminated by other part-perspectives namely psycho-orthopedagogics, historical orthopedagogics, fundamental-orthopedagogics, socio-orthopedagogics, didactic orthopedagogics, vocational-orientation-orthopedagogics and residential orthopedagogics. Psychopedagogics have characterized orthopedagogics for a long time. The concern of the psychopedagogic category is lived experience and the experiential world of the child with a learning difficulty (Pretorius, 1999). New possibilities now exist for applying newly designed psychopedagogic categories relating to the individual child's experiences, knowledge, willingness and behaviour. According to Van der Stoep and Louw (2011), '...a good future possibility exists for orthopedagogics to share perspectives with a modern psychopedagogics that is solidly accountable regarding its name, point of departure, area of study and underlying anthropology and categories.' In a way, unlike the general psychopedagogics, psycho-orthopedagogics is more particularized and concerned with not just the psychic life of

the child but with the disturbed psychic life and disturbed expressive life of a child with a problematic educative and learning situation.

In historical orthopedagogics, the orthopedagogue (specialist teacher) raises critical evaluative and comparative questions about the child's pedagogical history. It is critical that the teacher establishes how the child with a learning problem was cared for, taught and how the child learned in the past. This is achieved through the process of assessment. Answers to these fundamental questions form the foundation of a more accountable orthopedagogic programme for the child. Fundamental pedagogics plays the role of indicating what can be actualized pedagogically. A joint perspective of orthopedagogics and fundamental pedagogics is what we conceive as fundamental orthopedagogics. Thus, fundamental orthopedagogics focuses on the categorical pedagogical structure that is particularly relevant to the learning needs of children with learning difficulties (Du Toit, 1982).

The other part discipline of orthopedagogics is socio-orthopedagogics. Socio-orthopedagogics is the study of the disturbed social life of a child-in-education (Broekaert et al., 1998). This may mean that the total social situation of the young learner is problematic because socio-pedagogic essences such as social belongingness, social integration, social responsibility, social identity and social inclusion were not adequately actualized. Such problems may arise within the family or as a function of undesirable social influences. The net result of such problems can be devastating leading to school dropout, drug addiction, street life etc. Faulty child protection laws such as too low the age of consent or the majority age have at times been blamed for causing these problems. Modern socio-orthopedagogics should therefore be concerned with these problems within a pedagogical or learning context. This implies merging teaching and learning with effective maintenance of discipline and management of social behaviour among the children. Related to socio-orthopedagogics, is physical orthopedagogics which is concerned with the theory and practice of the problematic educational situation due to the child's physical limitations. According to Van Niekerk et al. (1999) physical orthopedagogics uses physical therapies such as physiotherapy, hydro-therapy, orientation and mobility exercises and other such therapies to help the child cope with the disharmonious educative or learning situation.

Now, the issue of the educative or learning situation forms the foundation of yet another part discipline in the fold of didactic orthopedagogics. To start with, didactic pedagogics as a science of teaching in general has provided important insights into how we can help or teach a child with learning difficulty. Current developments show that future orthopedagogics no longer need to be haphazard, casual or intuitive, but should be planned in terms of the fundamental structures which are also central to didactic orthopedagogics (Van der Stoep and Louw, 2011). In using the therapeutic designs highlighted elsewhere in this paper, the specialist teacher should start by identifying the relevant subject matter and then planning according to the individual child's circumstances. By implication, didactic orthopedagogics should be pinned on individualized educational planning (IEP). To this end Du Toit (1987) posits, 'No lesson for an affectively disturbed child can be considered without the principle of individualization.' In addition, learning and teaching aides used should meet particular requirements such as reduction to absolute essentials in order to avoid any possible distractibility.

As the children grow, it is essential to deliberately orient them to be adult. This is partly achieved through vocational-orientation-orthopedagogics which is quite an advanced part discipline of orthopedagogics. Vocational-orientation-orthopedagogics is concerned with re-orientation of adolescents with problems in making vocational choices. Coetzee (2003) observe that vocational choice derailment is often a result of faulty family education regarding vocational dispositions and possibilities. The adolescent's failure to appreciate his/her own potentialities and to recognize or utilize the available vocational possibilities leads to defective vocational choices. For Jourbert (2003), the essences of vocational education therapy lie in giving support to clarification and meaning of the future and self-actualisation. A multi-perspective approach is possible in this regard since orthopedagogics is also premised on collaborative guidance of children and youths to adulthood (Coetzee, 2003). Teachers, trainers, medical professionals, vocational counselors, rehabilitation officers and parents work together to ensure that the adolescent with learning difficulties obtains sustainable future socio-economic independence. This kind of self-independence is reinforced through residential orthopedagogics. The concern of residential orthopedagogics is with institutional care of children with disabilities or behaviour problems (Du Toit, 1978). It encompasses themes such as hospitalization of the children, punishment as an educational strategy and foster home placement among others. Integration of residential and independent skills with didactic interventions (lessons) for children with learning difficulties is critical and possible in these regards.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Clearly, orthopedagogics is an essential field which uses multiple scientific approaches and strategies in dealing with learning difficulties. Although on the surface, there appears to be a thin line between orthopedagogics and Special Education and Remedial Teaching, orthopedagogics stands distinct as an autonomous science, independent of these fields. It of course uses some similar specialized approaches and strategies as those used in Special Education and Remedial Teaching but also borrows from Medicine and from across social sciences. Orthopedagogics is quite expositive of the centrality of the problematic educative situation (PES) as the basis of learning difficulties. It dismisses the short sighted view of blaming learning difficulties solely on the learner. Instead orthopedagogics locates learning difficulties in the whole learning environment which goes beyond the four walls of the classroom. It views the child, the teacher, the provisions, the subject material and even the family and community as all possible sources of learning difficulties. In technical terms, learning difficulties are largely a function of disharmonious learning or teaching situations which place the child at a decided disadvantage.

The context in which orthopedagogics is conceptualized and practiced therefore, has been largely influenced by the process of its evolution which is not distinct from the evolution of Special Education nevertheless. This has resulted in it being clouded by studies and practices of Special Education, Special Needs Education and Inclusive Education in many particularly English speaking countries. In countries where it is practiced, however modern and post-modern orthopedagogics has become an autonomous subject area supported with new and emerging research. The illumination of orthopedagogics with part-disciplines show its sensitivity to child development as influenced by various other scientific fields. This qualifies orthopedagogics as a multi-disciplinary field. Unlike Special Education per se, it also concerns itself with orienting children to be adults right from their tender age to when they reach adolescence using didactic or educative interventions. This is notwithstanding its ability to tape from other sciences such as Medicine and social sciences. This leads to the conclusion that the scope and context of orthopedagogic practice holds great potential to at its best, mitigate and at its worst, better manage learning difficulties in the school and society as a whole.

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