

The Liberalization of Attitudes Towards Handedness: A By-Product of the Anti-Authoritarian Philosophy of Education

A question which needs to be addressed is whether the liberal attitude towards left-handedness that emerged in the 1960's and 70's in Germany can be traced back to the effects of Sovak's work. However, the broad anti-authoritarian movement in the education of children seemingly had a greater impact. Thus, the more liberal pedagogical ideology followed along with the general political movement of this period led to a less conservative management of handedness in education. This liberalization was probably "only" a by-product of the general anti-authoritarian trend rather than a result of any specific scientific realization made. Within German speaking countries, experts in the field then made serious contributions to this trend and concerned themselves with the specific issue of handedness. For it was in the main special pedagogists (e.g. the already mentioned Milos Sovak and Josefine Kramer), speech pedagogists (e.g. Alfred Zuckrigl), doctors and psychologists who were concerned with developmentally retarded and neurologically disturbed children (e.g. Andreas Rett, Thaddäus Kohlmann and to a certain extent Günter Strauch).

In the decades following, counter-movements to the anti-authoritarian education took a very different stance on the issue of handedness. Namely, without much reflection, the age-old perspective that left-handed children should, in fact, be converted to the right was taken. Further, the position was also taken that any ensuing complications found were due to a faulty methodological approach to converting rather than the actual switching in and of itself.

Making the Public Sensitive by Providing Targeted Explanations for the Consequences of Converting Handedness

Slowly but surely, insights from ortho-pedagogical research on left-handedness and the effects of converting have become increasingly accepted and the number of children who write with their left hand has slowly begun to rise.

Since the middle of the 1980's attempts have been made to heighten the public's general awareness on this issue. Accordingly, organizations like the Interest Group for Left-Handers were founded in 1985. Through their initiative, there has been a gradual increase in sensitivity to the negative consequences of converting handedness. Over time, there has also been an increase in the precise research findings; the interest of the media in the subject has increased and the issue has become even more familiar. The continuing work of the Munich based Consulting and Information Center for Left-handers and Converted Left-handers and parallel research on

the lateralization of the cerebral hemispheres and the consequences of converting handedness have also been instrumental in effecting these positive changes.

Chapter 6: Support for Converted Left-Handers by Reappraising the Consequences of Converting Handedness

For many converted left-handers, the recognition that a large portion of their problems has a causal connection with the often long forgotten and/or repressed converting of handedness first comes as a shock. Then it becomes an extremely important experience.

Before, they believed their difficulties only affected them alone. They felt themselves to be somehow impaired or even disabled even though they could not find a plausible explanation for their problems. They gradually became accustomed to tying their feelings of self-worth to their abilities or lack thereof. Thus, their difficulties are often manifested in negative feelings of self-worth.

The realization that they are *not the only ones* but that many other people have fought and continue to fight against these problems even though they might not *speak about them* is often a relief. At the same time, it can also trigger depression as a reaction. "Why did it have to happen to me?!" they ask.

Frequently, anger at the persons responsible, the parents, the teachers, and others occurs. This also often results in massive accusations being made. In these cases, it is not uncommon that the accused persons are unable to remember the converting event. Such persons might have forgotten the event, having deemed it trivial or unimportant. When this happens, converted left-handers experience new feelings of anger and are thrown back even more deeply into their problems. The reason is simple. The persons very close to the converted left-hander as well as others who are thus being accused even though they are not responsible for the converting, may react aggressively and might consider that the left-hander is simply trying to construct an alibi to gain an advantage in their everyday life, in their relationships, or at work so that they can work out of their responsibilities. Confronted with this defense, the converted left-hander often plunges even deeper into feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, and newly ignited feelings of inferiority. Unfortunately, once again, a pragmatic solution to the perceived problems may not be found. Moreover, a re-appraisal or re-evaluation of the person's capabilities, the achieved success, and a change of the entrenched patterns of behavior the converted left-hander has employed would be critical.

To successfully process and find an acceptable resolution to the problems presented by converting the person's inborn handedness, introspection of the primary and secondary consequences is of primary importance. In this process, the actual consequences of conversion should be clearly distinguished from other precipitating factors or causes (e.g. impulses because of parental behavior) that later became decisive in interpersonal relationships.

Through a positively conducted process, where the correct classification of the problems and various connections is central, many people experience a surprising and ever-increasing improvement in the primary and secondary symptoms of converting. According to many, the changes are astonishing. Persons affected often report feeling that a "burden has been lifted from them", a burden of wrongly construed causalities; the burden of having unjustified feelings of inferiority. Such people feel that they are freer to react differently. They approach the tortuous blocks in thought, the difficulties in concentration from a new perspective. Their typical debilitating fear of failure is then decreasingly and less intensively projected onto their ability to perform. In the end, they experience a continual improvement and increased feelings of relief.

For many persons affected, the correct classification of symptoms then generally already sets decisive processes in motion. They find it somewhat easier to integrate themselves and, depending upon the individual case, many of the negative behavioral patterns may be broken.

Of course, the actual cause underlying these problems, the converting of inborn handedness, is not removed by this information. However, a process of growing acceptance of the difficulties without the affected person experiencing immediate feelings of inferiority and depression does occur; or that they still increase their level of performance such that a physical and psychological break-down becomes a frightening possibility.

It would be inappropriate, however, to raise false hopes that all the primary consequences of converting handedness will eventually recede or completely disappear. They will, in fact, reappear. This fact must be reckoned with and accepted; just as one would accept a disability that was ever-present. What is far more important, however, is the empirical conclusion that it is precisely the negative *secondary consequences which will significantly abate* with the aid of automatic emotional feedback.