

LEARNING VIEWED FROM A FUNDAMENTAL PEDAGOGIC PERSPECTIVE*

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1. Introduction

The primary reason a child attends school is to receive instruction in such a way that he will learn what is of value for his growing up and for his eventual adulthood. The task of psychopedagogics is to bring to light what learning is and to clarify how a child learns. Didactic pedagogics addresses itself to the most effective ways of teaching selected contents.

The question here is whether fundamental pedagogics can offer additional, useful knowledge about learning, i.e., knowledge indispensable for a real understanding of it. With respect to learning, fundamental pedagogics has two particular functions:

(a) To disclose the anthropological foundation of learning and its various modes. This should be done so that the teacher, for the sake of his professional activities with the learning child, is aware that when he helps a child learn, he is really concerned with

(i) working at the child's being human (humanness); and
(ii) respecting the child's dignity.

The teacher who has knowledge of the anthropological basis of the modes of learning knows that he is involved with matters more profound than helping the child appropriate and apply certain facts. If he does not assist the child in the best possible way when he learns, the effect is not only that the child knows less but that he also cannot fully live in a way worthy of a human being.

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(b) To bring to light the fundamental pedagogic foundations of learning and its modes. This has to be done so that the teacher who values his own professionalism can know what it means to give effective help to the learning child regarding

(i) his educating (upbringing). In the absence of the essentials disclosed by fundamental pedagogics, educating disappears; and
(ii) his increasing movement nearer to living in accordance with an image of adulthood that is characterized by a responsible and independent relationship to reality.

The teacher who understands what educative learning means knows that he can give rise to faulty educating if he does not enable each child to adequately learn, i.e., to exercise and apply all of the modes of learning.

Thus, for the modes of learning to have educative value they have to be actualized along with the fundamental pedagogic essentials. (This matter will not be discussed further in this article. The interested reader is referred to the publications of the Department of Fundamental Pedagogics, University of Pretoria).

2. Learning viewed anthropologically

(a) Learning is an essential characteristic of humans, i.e., an existentiell⁽¹⁾ (an undeniable way of being human). A teacher who for one or another reason (e.g., poor preparation) does not succeed in creating maximum opportunities for learning through his teaching assaults the child's humanity (human being) and, even with the best intention in the world, really can not be called an educator.

(b) Learning is possible because a person is able to:

(i) acquire (attain): he can bring about relationships with reality;
(ii) master (conquer): he can gain control of his relationships with reality; and
(iii) develop (unfold): his relationships with reality undergo change⁽²⁾.

Thus, viewed anthropologically (i.e., in terms of the nature of being human), learning concerns a person's relationships to the reality around him. He cannot disconnect himself from this reality because he lives in the world and if he wants to live meaningfully, he has to learn, i.e., bring about valuable relationships, master them and continually increase their quality.

Question:

What relationships with reality are acquired, mastered and developed?

Answer⁽³⁾:

Experiencing, willing, lived-experiencing, knowing, and behaving in relationship with reality.

(c) Learning, i.e., acquiring, mastering and developing relationships with reality, occurs when particular activities known as modes of learning are actualized⁽⁴⁾:

- * activities of sensing
- * activities of attending
- * activities of perceiving
- * activities of thinking
- * activities of remembering

Synthesis of (a); (b) and (c)

Viewed anthropologically, learning is acquiring, mastering and developing relationships with reality by means of (with the help of) modes of learning so that one can live a meaningful life.

3. Learning viewed pedagogically

Educative learning occurs:

(a) when the modes of learning are actualized along with the accompanying fundamental pedagogic essentials (i.e., the essential characteristics of educating);

(b) when the joint actualization of the modes of learning and their accompanying fundamental pedagogic essentials lead to a change in relationships with reality in the direction of meaningful adulthood;

(c) when the modes of learning themselves are practiced with increasing independence; and

(d) when the fundamental pedagogic essentials themselves are exercised with increasing independence until they have become adult ways of living (meaningful adult ways of living).

Question:

In school, with what reality are relationships established and improved?

Answer:

With reality as it is presented in the form of school subjects that are divided into lessons.

To learn relationships with reality means that the learning child acquires, master and develop relationships with the contents of school subjects. For this to be a meaningful possibility, these contents have to be unlocked (presented). The most effective means of unlocking them is the lesson with its different modes of presentation that usually are called phases of the course of a lesson.

It is possible to indicate the anthropological preconditions for these phases of the course of a lesson, but this article deals specifically with the modes of learning.

4. Anthropological preconditions that make actualizing the modes of learning possible

(a) Sensing

Anthropological preconditions

(i) Moving-being-in-the-world: moving in the direction of what attracts and being open for it⁽⁵⁾.

(ii) Lived-experiencing-being in-the-world: lived-experiencing the presence of contents⁽⁶⁾.

(iii) Emotional-being-in-the-world: emotional involvement of self and reality⁽⁷⁾.

Essentials of sensing that are actualized

(i) Immediate being directed to and being open for reality (in the form of a lesson)

(ii) Apparent presence of contents (subject contents begin to appear)

(iii) Initial appropriation (immediate attunement to reality as it appears in the lesson).

Because a person (thus also a child) is in the world as a moving, lived-experiencing and emotional being, the teacher is able to harness sensing as a mode of learning by unlocking reality for and with the child. The teacher who, in giving his lesson, succeeds in bringing the child's sensing into play, at the same time works on the moving, lived-experiencing and emotional facets of his being human, thus on the meaning of his existence (life).

(b) Attending

Anthropological preconditions

(i) Exerting-being-in-the-world: authentic being human means to abandon a lack of exertion and proceed to do meaningful deeds⁽⁸⁾.

(ii) Beholding-being-in-the-world: with interest [in something], a person sharpens seeing into looking at and hearing into listening to reality⁽⁹⁾.

(iii) Being-in-a-meaningful-world: a person continually attributes meaning to the reality around him and also checks these meanings that he lived-experiences.

Essentials of attending that are actualized

- (i) Intensive concern with the course of the lesson: teacher and child are involved with each other through the subject contents and the child is encouraged to do his very best.
- (ii) Active listening to and looking at something during the course of the lesson: teacher and child encounter each other in the subject contents by noticing and listening to their essentials.
- (iii) Sharpened meaning (attributing meaning) of subject contents during the course of the lesson: during the course of a lesson subject contents appear in terms of which the personal meanings are accepted as meaningful and participated in by the child.

Because a child is in the world as an exerting, beholding and meaning giving being, the teacher is able to direct his attention to the course of the lesson. The teacher who then is disposed to have a child pay attention makes a meaningful contribution to his exerting, beholding and meaning giving involvement with his world.

(c) Perceiving

Anthropological preconditions

- (i) Communicating being-in-the-world: communication through language leads to coherence^(10, 11).
- (ii) Inhabiting being-in-the-world: inhabiting reality (= coming into contact with reality as it is)⁽¹²⁾.
- (iii) Inquiring being-in-the-world: awakening a questioning consciousness⁽¹³⁾.

Essentials of perceiving that are actualized

- (i) Beginning ordering through joint classification of existing knowledge (e.g., key-words during the introduction to a lesson).
- (ii) Beginning search for what is (= a search for essentials) already with the introduction to the lesson.
- (iii) Entering the problematic (by appropriate questions there begins to be an awareness of a problem).

Because a child really is a person, he is a communicating, inhabiting and inquiring being-in-the-world. This makes it possible for the teacher to appeal to him to perceive. The teacher who requires that

the child intensely perceive what there is to see during the lesson is doing his part in order to support the child via his communication to inhabit and inquire about his world within which he ultimately has to carry out a meaningful adult existence.

(d) Thinking

Anthropological preconditions

(i) Questioning being-in-the-world: a person has at his disposal a questioning consciousness. This means that the idea can break through to him that life asks something of a person (places demands on him) and that he is obligated to respond with meaningful deeds⁽¹⁴⁾.

(ii) Essence-conscious being-in-the-world: a child wants to grasp the reality within which he lives and grasping a matter means to know its essentials⁽¹⁵⁾.

(iii) Life-actualizing being-in-the-world: there is only authentic human life where order prevails. The authentic person seeks order (orderliness, ordered-ness) to be able to live meaningfully⁽¹⁶⁾.

Essentials of thinking that are actualized

(i) Encountering reality as a problem during the course of the lesson: the teacher helps the child accept that it is proper and that he feels obliged to participate in unlocking the subject contents by thinking.

(ii) Intensified search for what is essential with respect to the phases of the course of the lesson: the teacher helps the child overcome blindness to essences and to see them (core facts, elementals).

(iii) Intensified ordering of givens (essentials) that arise during the course of the lesson: the teacher helps the child apply the principles of ordering the learning material. (For example, see Van der Stoep and Louw's Didactics--pp. 93-98).

Because a human being is able to inquire about, question and live essentials, the teacher can involve him thinkingly in the course of the lesson. The teacher who manages to motivate and guide a child to a thinking involvement makes a valuable contribution to

awakening in him the idea that life places demands on a him, among others that life (as a form of ordered reality) has to be understood.

(e) Remembering

Anthropological preconditions⁽¹⁷⁾

(i) Been-ness [being-past]: a person selects from his past what is still meaningful for the present and also the future.

(ii) Taking up the past: a person is self-consciousness which means that he can become conscious of something lived-experienced and experienced in the past for which he can take responsibility to experience that something in the present with an eye to his future.

Essentials of remembering that are actualized

(i) Observance of one's own been-ness [being-past]: in the course of the lesson (beginning with actualizing fore-knowledge) there is a continual reaching back to what was taught and learned in the past so it can be used during the lesson.

(ii) Help with assuming responsibility for one's own past: the child is expected to responsibly use (apply) in the present (i.e., in the lesson that is now beginning) what he learned in the past.

The teacher expects the child to remember certain matters and on later occasions make use of what should be remembered. This is possible because a child's being-human is characterized by been-ness and by being able to take up his own past.

The teacher who requires a child to remember and apply meaningful matters contributes to promoting two important ways of being human, namely, the possibility to select meaningful experiences (knowledge) from his own past and to take responsibility for dealing meaningfully with his past.

5. The relationships with reality

The following have to be clearly discerned:

- (a) Reality, as such, appears in the school in the form of school subjects.
- (b) In exercising his relationship with school subjects, in fact the child is practicing his future adult relationships with reality as such.
- (c) The means of exercise at the teacher's and child's disposal are:
- * the course of the lesson;
 - * the modes of learning; and
 - * the fundamental pedagogic essentials.
- (d) The relationships that are exercised are
- * experiencing
 - * willing
 - * lived-experiencing
 - * knowing
 - * behaving

The most important essential characteristics of the relationships with reality are summarized as follows (Table 1):

Table 1: Modes of relationships with reality to be practiced

Experiencing

- (a) Personal exertion regarding reality as exertion for disclosing essentials.
- (b) Attaining reality, i.e., its essentials.
- (c) Searching exploration of reality, i.e., approximating (bringing nearer) with the aim of disclosing essentials.

Willing

- (a) Personal initiative regarding reality as initiative to disclose its essentials.
- (b) Making a choice regarding reality as a choice for becoming conscious of essentials.
- (c) Search in viewing reality, by separating essentials from non-essentials.

Lived-experiencing

- (a) Personally taking a position regarding reality, i.e., being conscious of essentials.
- (b) Acquiring a sense of reality, i.e., of its essentials.
- (c) Searching for attunement to reality as penetrating into essentials (= the affective).

Knowing

- (a) Being personally attuned to knowing reality, i.e., to disclosing its essentials.
- (b) Attaining clarity regarding reality, i.e., knowledge of essentials.
- (c) Searching for ordered-ness as structuring of essentials.

Behaving

- (a) Personal “norming” regarding reality with consciousness of essentials as demands of propriety.
- (b) Acquiring clear motives regarding reality, e.g., the motive to disclose essentials.
- (c) Searching for acceptance of responsibility for reality.

The teacher who has knowledge of the anthropological basis of learning can make an indispensable contribution to the learning child’s being-on-the-way to proper adulthood by promoting the child’s

-- Personal involvement by

- * exerting
- * initiating
- * taking a position
- * attuning
- * norming

-- Reaching reality because of consciousness of essentials.

-- Exploring reality that leads to disclosure of essentials.

6. Synthesis

- (a) The child is taught in terms of the phases of the course of a lesson that are filled with subject contents.
- (b) The child learns by means of the modes of learning that are directed to the subject contents.
- (c) For actualizing educative teaching and learning, the anthropological and fundamental pedagogic requirements have to be met.
- (d) The effect (result) of actualizing * teaching, * learning, *the anthropological, and *the fundamental pedagogic, with due consideration for meaningful subject contents, is that the child's relationships to reality are actualized on continually higher levels until the level of proper adulthood is reached⁽¹⁸⁾.

7. Summary

The teacher who has knowledge of the anthropological basis of the modes of learning realizes that he is concerned with more profound matters than merely helping a child to make certain facts his own or to apply them. In reality he is concerned with

- (a) the child's being-human (humanness); and
- (b) protecting the child's dignity.

The teacher who has knowledge of the essential characteristics of educating, and thus of the fundamental pedagogic essences, also realizes what educative learning means. He knows that the modes of learning should be actualized together with the pedagogic essences if the learning child is to progress on his way to meaningful adulthood.

The learning child acquires, masters and develops particular relationships toward reality, viz., relationships of experiencing, willing, lived-experiencing, knowing and behaving. The means by which this is achieved are the modes of learning, viz., sensing, attending, perceiving, thinking, imagining/fantasizing and remembering.

The teacher can aid the learning child in the best possible way by applying the modes of learning within the framework of the essential characteristics of educating in order to elevate the child's relationships with reality in the direction of meaningful adulthood; at the same time, the teacher has to support the child to actualize the modes of being-human that eventually are going to become part of his image of adulthood, which includes being involved or concerned with reality in the following ways: exerting oneself, taking initiative, taking a position, being attuned, establishing norms on the basis of "proper adulthood."

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