

## CHAPTER 5 LEARNING CONTENTS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

While describing various matters in previous chapters, the question of contents or learning material repeatedly entered the foreground as an important didactic matter that continually had to be taken into account. Thus, it is clear that contents have an important place in explaining the relationship between educating and teaching; furthermore, contents were dealt with in relation to the different aspects of a theory of teaching and their implications for practice also were considered. Contents also were part of the line of reasoning concerning the description of a teaching situation as well as a clarification of the part that schooling plays in educating a child. Hence, at this stage it is necessary to examine more deeply the entire matter of teaching contents and to arrive at an understanding of their importance for a didactic situation as a whole.

Comments about contents made in previous chapters lead one to conclude that they are not merely confined to what is reflected in a school syllabus. The curriculum, including all of the considerations about its structure and construction, are an important aspect of teaching practice and warrants a chapter in its own right. As far as didactic theory is concerned, contents, as such, are fundamental because they essentially influence the activities of teaching.

In order to understand the problems interwoven with the learning contents, it is wise once again to return to the educative reality or educative situation in which an adult and a child jointly realize educative activities. A study of the original pedagogic situation of adult and child in the home reveals that both exhibit a particular form of living in the way they participate in this educative event. The adult shows himself as an adult, i.e., his form of living is clearly that expected of or associated with adulthood. In contrast, a child's form of living is not yet adult. As far as one can judge from appearances, the form of living adulthood especially manifests itself in that an adult person is responsible and morally mature. This

responsibility and moral maturity are the results of an adult's command of a wide variety of life contents in terms of which he is capable of acting independently and responsibly. On the basis of his mastery of life contents it is possible for him to guide a child in an educative situation.

On the other hand, a child's form of living is clearly not yet adult; this implies that his grasp, command and understanding of life contents are limited to the extent that he cannot adequately evaluate and judge or act responsibly in certain situations. Consequently, a child needs an adult's support as far as his evaluation of reality is concerned. This emphasizes one of the most important differences between an adult's and a child's forms of living; namely, a child does not yet adequately possess the life contents in terms of which he can command life situations. These contents of living are known in various forms or categories such as experiencing, intellectual penetrating, and moral judging. On the basis of these conspicuous shortcomings in a child's form of living, an adult involves himself in a child's existence over a period of many years with the aim that the child must eventually be emancipated as an adult person. One could also emphasize the distance or difference between an adult's and a child's forms of living that primarily amounts to the fact that a child does not yet possess those contents in terms of which an adult generally lives as an adult.

For this reason educating also has the aim—and this is a fundamental aspect of its practice—of eliminating these shortcomings by creating a series of educative and teaching situations in which a child is confronted with contents with the expectation that he will master them.

Contents naturally appear in the reality of educating as *contents of living*. Therefore, it is understandable that they cover the wide and varied fields of a person's daily activities. The two-fold origin or source of these contents has been mentioned previously: life reality, as such, and one's view of life and the world. These two sources are continually brought into harmony in an educative situation in order to strengthen a child's grasp of reality. There is also a definite increase in the amount and complexity of contents as a child

progresses toward adulthood. They vary from easy, everyday, concrete matters to complex, exceptional and abstract ones.

The ways an adult is involved in guiding a child stress the fact that he recognizes that a child is not always ready for or capable of understanding certain contents. Consequently, he varies his presentation in order to establish a harmony between the nature of the contents and the level of a child's readiness. It is also important to note that, for a teacher, the contents are not always an aim in themselves. Although contents often are exposed for their own sake, an adult always has in mind furthering a child on his way to adulthood. Didactically, this is very important: an adult uses contents either as an *end* or a *means* to aid and support a child on his way through the world.

The primary contents exposed in an educative situation understandably are coupled with the concrete, human experiences and everyday life situations in which a child finds himself. They are also mainly aimed at certain activities of a child in order to try to guarantee increasing his security and mobility in life situations. Insofar as one strives to arrive at formal (theoretical) conclusions about this elementary, initial presentation of contents, one must not be misled by its seeming simplicity.

The initial contents an adult presents to a child are meaningful and important to him because his basic situation is acknowledged and accepted. On the basis of this acknowledgment and acceptance, a foundation is laid for the later addition of more difficult and abstract contents. For this reason, the initial contents are no less important than the more complex contents introduced later, especially in school. In fact, they provide a beginning to a more complete mastery of life situations without which a child could not eventually show the image of being an adult.

Aspects such as insights into the meaning of healthy and clean habits, correct table manners, a daily routine, the ability to dress oneself properly, reverence during religious exercises, respect for the property of other people, etc. may superficially simply seem to be forming good habits. However, a deeper examination of each of

these aspects fundamentally influences a child's form of living especially in two ways.

In the first place, each one of these facets introduces a child to a reality that is primarily concerned with certain *norms*. These norms or standards are not merely coupled to activities, as such: they provide an adult with a point of departure on which to base his expectations for a child's future. More specifically, they indicate what is decent and proper and, thus, what must be revealed in a person's own lifestyle for it to be as it ought to be. In this light, learning correct table manners has a certain value because it is useful and represents an aim in itself. Usefulness, however, is not the only aim an adult is concerned with when he intervenes in an educative situation with respect to a child's table manners. He also expects a child to directly acquire these life contents in order to progressively exhibit the image of a human being in an eating situation. On the basis of this aim, an adult continually admonishes and disciplines a child because "a human being does this and not that". The demands of propriety and the authority of the norms (contents) are, therefore, important considerations; in fact, they bring their own influence to bear in every educative situation.

The second aspect that must be considered is that the initial elementary contents are the basis for communication between adult and child. As a matter of communication, these contents necessarily are also a matter of language. This implies two demands a child must meet: in the first instance, he must properly master the activity. In the second, on the basis of language, he also must arrive at a particular awareness of the meaning or *sense* of these contents. This meaning or sense is closely related to each person's approval or disapproval of the contents. For this reason, language, *as such*, is an aspect of the educative reality that must be carefully considered in school.

The dialogue or conversation between adult and child in an educative situation follows a certain course provided by the contents. An adult expects a child to master these contents in order to change his activities in the future and in doing so to act and behave in ways an adult approves. The educative involvement with contents must help a child change because he can change and,

therefore, must change. Thus, educating a child implies that he subjects himself to the authority of the contents (norms) and that in mastering them, he is able to act differently in the future, i.e., like an adult. The distance between the basic situation of a child and an adult is eliminated, in principle, by educating him. In mastering elementary, everyday activities, he learns to act like an adult. Consequently, even at this early stage, a child is beginning to exhibit an image of adulthood, however incomplete or imperfect.

The relationship between forms of living and life contents deserves closer attention. In light of the above examples, it is clear that a child learns (is educated) to understand that his activities in certain situations are subject to evaluation. It is expected that he will comply with certain codes of conduct. Such compliance is evidence that he has mastered certain contents and this is why demands are made of him with respect to them. These demands are aimed not only at a greater mastery of a situation but also at awakening his conscience by means of self-criticism and self-censure. When evaluating a child's activities, an adult generally demands accountability especially in two respects:

- knowledge a child has of the contents, and
- obedience to the norms contained in these contents and the ways this is externalized in relevant situations.

What is now of particular importance is the unity and reciprocal bond between the contents (knowledge) and the forms of life (obedience) that is of considerable importance in any teaching situation. Without knowledge of the codes or norms relevant to a situation, a child cannot obey them. On the other hand, unconditional acceptance and obedience of the norms reflect a child's feeling of respect for them. This convergence of contents and form in elementary, everyday situations is of fundamental pedagogic importance. As a child grows older, this mutual relationship not only increases in scope but it also increases the level and quality of the demands made of a child.

In assessing "learning contents" as they are dealt with in a didactic situation in school, a teacher must understand that certain contents are part of a child's primary involvement in reality and life.

Consequently, being confronted with contents in school is not foreign to a child's experiences at home. The only real difference in an educative situation at home and a more formal school situation is that in school contents are presented in formalized ways in terms of particular systems and fixed routines. It is obvious that the learning contents a child is exposed to in the immediate, small world of his home are not adequate for him to fulfill his form of living and lifestyle.

Although a parent does not relinquish this aspect of his involvement with his child as long as he is still at home, he does transfer the formal aspects of his involvement to the school as soon as his child is ready for it. In this way, a school exposes the wider world outside of the home by means of contents with the expectation that he will orient himself in terms of them in order to enrich himself and reach a fuller form of living (adulthood). In principle, a school continues the educative activities initiated at home. Within the framework of this brief explanation, it is necessary for a teacher to account for "learning contents" and their implications for the practice of teaching.

## **2. LEARNING CONTENTS IN DIDACTIC PERSPECTIVE**

From what has been said, learning contents represent unknown aspects of the life world that a child still has to examine and make his own. The relationship between the learning activities of a child and his guidance by a parent or a teacher puts the activities in school under the concept "going out into life". Although the contents in school are generally formal, the transition from concrete, everyday contents of living (in the home) to the more formal, structured curriculum of school is gradual.

All life contents, i.e., all of the knowledge a human being possesses, are products of the activities of the human spirit. Insofar as learning contents are a reflection of the sciences with which humans are involved, actually it only is an image of reality that a human being gradually builds up. The fact that a child becomes involved with the learning contents in school implies, on the most fundamental level, that he goes out to life itself.

We know that the learning act is an existential matter. In the same light, learning contents also are contents of life, our cultural heritage and a representation of human ways (means) of living generally. The correlation between learning contents and contents of living are clearly seen in the way a child flourishes and grows in a learning situation to become a responsible and morally adult person. To the extent that a child is involved with contents in school, to that extent he is placed in the presence of reality. He becomes involved in reality itself. By means of contents, a child examines the human life world and learns to live as a person or human being. This is exceptionally important for a child's eventual perspective on life and view of the world.

In a later chapter dealing with the orienting task of the school, it is indicated that learning contents presented there enable a child to establish his own position in time and space. In school, learning contents are introduced to eliminate a child's shortcomings regarding space and time by means of which objects, people and even God are brought closer. Learning contents, thus, provide a confluence of past, present and future, and they are presented to a child in various ways (e.g., by means of language, direct observation and experience). A child's questions about what *is*, what *was* and what *will* be are basically answered by contents.

One can only understand the importance of the above for a child himself if one considers the initial affective entry of a child into reality is supplemented by introducing learning contents and that a child's existence is enriched and fulfilled by means of an increasing cognitive command of reality. It is peculiar to a child that as he grows older he deals more rationally with reality; in fact he becomes more adept at intellectually understanding and explaining relationships between various matters. Dealing more rationally with reality occurs whether or not a child attends school. However, a school offers a wide and varied field of possibilities for a child, with the support and guidance of a teacher, to ensure that he develops to the fullest extent of his potential and capabilities.

When examining "learning contents" didactically a teacher must consider the following aspects carefully in order to meet the demands made of him in a teaching situation.

## 2.1 The situation of being a child

The basic consideration an adult takes into account when involving a child with contents is that a child does not know the contents nor does he have the necessary skills to discover their essences on his own. For this reason a child cannot command the various aspects of the life world if these shortcomings are not made good. Hence, the basic issues concerning learning contents are essentially pedagogic (educative). A child must learn the contents and learn to judge them if he is eventually to choose correctly as an adult and be capable of accounting for his choices.

The relationship between the pedagogic and didactic involvement of a child with learning contents becomes clear if one considers that learning contents represent the whole or totality of the life world. This whole includes religious, moral, social, historical, physical, esthetic and other categories of reality that directly influence a child's world of knowledge and therefore his judgment and choices.

One must also realize that learning contents can never be considered in isolation from a human being's awareness of values. Thus, learning contents are always subject to the authority of values vested in a view of life and world. It is within this context that a teacher accepts the validity of learning contents.

The unity of a child's world of knowledge and values is made possible by each one of the categories mentioned above. Because the learning contents selected by an adult represent the totality of reality, a teacher in his presentation (lesson design) makes a representation of an aspect of known reality that influences his form of living and that eventually enables him to make decisions. The quality of his decisions is reflected in his lifestyle. A teacher's responsibility in this respect is immense. To represent reality for the benefit of a child means fundamentally to influence the image of reality that a child eventually accepts as his own. For this reason a teacher tries to realize the educative ideal in his classroom by overcoming a child's not knowing and not being able to do certain things.

## 2.2 The didactic-pedagogic task

When a child achieves a certain level of competence regarding reality, he also establishes a clear relationship with that reality in the sense that his relationship is stabilized and expanded, thus providing him with a base for further exploration. The nature and scope of a child's relationship to reality is directly influenced by his knowledge of it. The nature of this relationship becomes apparent in his ability to make genuine decisions in a given situation, thereby determining and strengthening his own position in it. Eventually he achieves a different attitude toward life and also a certain lifestyle. The realization of his relationship to reality and his own lifestyle make up a large part of his becoming an adult person. Becoming an adult represents both a pedagogic and didactic ideal. Consequently, the contents by which a child establishes a relationship with reality as well as a personal lifestyle are of fundamental importance.

For this reason, selecting and presenting learning contents in school deserve an adult's careful attention. A teacher must subject the learning contents to his educative norms. The validity of these contents is not only assessed by scientific criteria but also in terms of criteria emanating from his view of the world and life. Therefore, he makes his decisions about learning contents in terms of both of these types of criteria. This is especially important if one considers the open, future-directed mode of living, particularly of a young child. The course on which a teacher leads a child to reality is represented by the learning contents and the relationship between the various aspects of them. In this light, learning contents are not primarily the aim of educating but they are the means for realizing it.

One must understand that a child's going out to and being involved in reality, by its nature, is characterized by a sense of achievement. This achievement is directly related to the learning contents while he is at school. During the school years an adult sees a child's acquisition of the learning contents as the surest guarantee of his increasing adulthood and especially his eventual vocational independence.

As far as a child is concerned, learning contents are a matter of demands, responsibilities and the acceptance of tasks. On the one hand, they offer him opportunities for self-knowledge and self-discovery; on the other they provide opportunities for creating his own life world.

On the basis of the achievement-directed nature of a child's involvement with reality, and therefore the school situation, learning contents represent a challenge he cannot avoid or deny. In any case, a teacher will not allow him to avoid this challenge,

The essence of the didactic-pedagogic task concerning learning contents is to select, order and present them in such a way that a child will participate authentically in a teaching situation. For this reason learning contents are studied by a teacher as a didactic problem in close relation to every other facet of didactics. A teacher's task is to select the learning contents and design his lesson in such a way that he presents a child with an image of reality that he will consider worthwhile and therefore something in which he will want to become involved.

### **2.3 Learning contents and the teacher**

The teaching event is given its course and theme by the learning contents. Hence, it is not strange that learning contents are largely responsible for the meaning of teaching. As an area of involvement of a teacher as well as a pupil, learning contents can serve as a means or an aim. With an eye to designing a teaching situation, a teacher can choose the learning contents as an aim or a means.

It is also important to note that a teacher's authority is largely vested in his own command of the contents. A teacher's knowledge makes him a suitable person to support a child in his discovering and understanding reality. Whether learning contents will have an important formative effect on a child depends on how capable a teacher is of interpreting the contents for him. One must also accept that when a teacher presents a certain aspect of reality to a child, he can never be absolutely neutral, objective or impersonal. As a human being he is a religious person, cultivated (cultured)

being, etc. and remains so in a teaching situation. He has his own experiences and preferences about the contents.

For this reason, a teacher's interpretation of contents is based on his own life world and view of life, i.e., on his own experiences, observations, dispositions and attributions of meaning. Hence, a teacher's interpretation of the contents markedly influences a child's understanding and appreciation of meanings and relationships between concrete matters. A teacher must keep in mind that in a didactic situation a child's activities generally follow his example. This means that a child generally learns in terms of the teaching he receives. A child imitates the example a teacher sets; what a teacher does and says is also said and done by a child. A teacher's interpretation of the contents is the basis for a child's interpretation.

This interpretation of the contents revolves around their *meaning*; i.e., it is directed at their value and appearance/emergence in the life world. Hence, a teacher is responsible to the community he serves to ensure that he has a thorough command of the contents and especially that his interpretation will allow a child to enter that specific aspect of reality.

The interpretation a teacher offers is closely related to the way he himself is involved with the contents and the criteria he uses to evaluate a child's attempts. Therefore, it is imperative that in his design and presentation, and especially in his interpretation, he consciously searches a child's life world to construct new structures that will be meaningful to him. In addition to the above, and as far as the didactic imperative is concerned, the relationship between a teacher and the learning contents is summarized as follows:

2.3.1 In designing a lesson, a teacher must ensure that reality is meaningfully represented to a child. To do this he must carefully take into account a child's life world and form of living in order to relate his teaching to a child's experiencing, willing, knowing and behaving. As an adult, he is aware that as far as his lesson design is concerned, he must be thoroughly conversant with each one of these aspects of a child's psychic life because they have not yet been finally formed.

His aim in presenting contents is to ensure greater stability and a more accountable form for these as yet partially formed structures. This is to ensure greater mobility of a child in and out of school.

If children possess certain experiences of a matter, theme or topic, a teacher must attempt to exploit their experiences as far as possible in his presentation and interpretation with the aim of fostering and promoting their learning. If a child does not have relevant experiences, a teacher tries to supplement his experiences artificially or to directly present opportunities for experiencing. This can be done with teaching aids. A teacher's task is difficult. He must place a certain aspect of reality that a child does not know within the boundaries of his lesson in a classroom. Also, he must support a child in learning consciously and with understanding.

2.3.2 A teacher's presentation, therefore, is also a matter of supporting and helping a child. Support, aid and help are not only confined to presenting a lesson. A teacher's task is related to every aspect of the school's activities, whatever they may be. The influence of his teaching must be continued in every other form of activity that the school considers to be meaningful for its curricular program. For this reason, control and evaluation are the culmination of his aid and support. They must be thoroughly planned and carried out responsibly because they are primarily concerned with creating a future for his pupils.

2.3.3 In view of the above, a child must create his own image of reality. This implies the highest form of influencing (a teacher influences a child and a child a teacher) in a teaching situation. The formative as well as pragmatic value of the learning contents must be evident to a child. This means that he as well as his image of the world or perspective on life must change as a result of his contact with the learning contents. Change in a teaching situation always has a positive emphasis and is expressed in terms of an increased and more effective grasp, wider and sharper insight, more relevant and clearer

application, etc. Each of these matters will be discussed again when the theory of the elemental and the fundamental is dealt with.

## 2.4 The authority of the learning contents

In the didactic literature, learning contents are often described as form-systems of a culture. Apart from the quality of representing contents of life, they also place time and space within a child's grasp, enabling him to transcend the learning contents to situations, realities and abstract structures that would otherwise remain beyond his reach. By starting with a child's immediate surroundings, a teacher offers him an opportunity to range farther afield by means of the learning contents. In this way he encounters the rest of reality, enabling him to establish his own views, opinions and conceptions. In this way he comes *to* reality *in* the world *with* other people.

Learning contents, as an image or representation of reality, undoubtedly have authority because certain aspects of what *is* in reality are placed at a child's disposal. After all, the life-space a child inhabits is demarcated by contents and is made accessible by presenting them. Factual knowledge introduced when presenting learning contents has authority since they are true or valid in one sense or another. By accepting the authority of learning contents in terms of their validity, a child places himself under the authority of the contents that provide him with access to the life world.

The validity or truth of learning contents is only the first aspect of its authority. When a pedagogue deals with world and life world with contents and learning contents, his considerations always include values and norms. Values and norms always impact the meaning and sense of the contents. An adult always aims at a child gaining knowledge of and insight into norms and values of the life world by means of contents. For this reason, an adult also unconditionally subjects his own knowledge and science, especially in practical life situations, to the authority of values and norms. The contents that a child must master in a didactic situation thus imply knowledge of the structure of norms that a human being accepts in his pursuit of science.

If we take into account that human being's past, present and future converge in learning contents, they have authority (apart from their scientific authority) in terms of the following:

- a) they describe the life world and, therefore, make entry into it possible;
- b) they give perspective to the life world regarding intuitive or pre-scientific existence and a human being's explanation of reality;
- c) they make certain demands of a child concerning both the scientific as well as the pre-scientific aspects of reality by which a balanced life space is made possible.

In this sense, learning contents represent fixed beacons of the general human life world by means of which a child can orient himself in order to establish his own position in the world.

The relationship between the authority of a teacher and the authority of the learning contents is obvious and is not dealt with any further.

## **2.5 The learning contents and the pupil**

From what has been said concerning the relationship between a child and the learning contents, the main points are summarized as follows:

- a) learning contents and the orientation of a child in reality are closely related;
- b) contents provide a child with fixed points in terms of which he can determine his own position in reality;
- c) educational authority and the authority of contents cannot be separated;
- d) because learning contents make certain demands of a child, they offer him the opportunity to account for himself by means of his achievements.

A child's life of achievement deserves closer examination. In a teaching situation, learning contents especially provide excellent

opportunities for a child to achieve affectively as well as intellectually. The meaning of this achievement will be lost if one considers learning achievements in isolation from life achievements. To achieve a certain level regarding contents in a learning situation essentially means that a child announces himself as a person among other persons. His achievement is essentially a matter of moving toward or grasping his future.

Besides the utilitarian value that the command of contents implies, the conditions are created for self-discovery and self-realization in a learning situation—but always in the presence and under the protection of an adult. In each one of these activities a child experiences his involvement in reality as a participating person. However, as soon as this participation loses its character of achievement it becomes pedagogically inadmissible and unacceptable.

In this light, presenting learning contents creates a new life space for a child in especially three respects:

- a) they provide him with the opportunity to understand the values and norms that are valid in the life world of adults. In this connection a teaching situation influences a child's opportunity to respond systematically to the appeal that adults direct to him as a person;
- b) presenting learning contents provides a situation in which educating is continued and completed. To act in accordance with the learning contents is being accountable. If one takes into account that teaching insures a gradual transition from play to the world of work and labor, then the learning contents open new horizons of living for a child;
- c) presenting learning contents also help a child to change his initial openness to the world to a more closed form of living of an adult. By means of contents, a child achieves a surer and clearer concept of reality and everything this implies. This quality helps him in his choices and radically influences the preferences and rejections he, as a unique person, arrives at over a period of time. The difference between what a child accepts and rejects is an indication that his initial open world-relationship has progressed to the more cohesive world-

relationship of an adult; this is mainly a result of the teaching to which he has been exposed.

This brings us to the essential *nature* of the contents, which is dealt with next under the heading of the theory of elementals (German: *das Elementare*) and fundamentals (German: *das Fundamentale*).

### 3. THE ELEMENTAL AND THE FUNDAMENTAL<sup>1</sup>

In order to understand the significance of contents in the person-world relationship, the German didactician Glaeser suggests that one try to forget everything one knows, everything one has experienced, heard or learned; one should attempt to ignore everything that surrounds one; stop what one is involved with and avoid all actions in which one influences something or by which one is influenced; forget all names, characteristics, all laws and all consciousness of color, form and feeling. Then one should try to account for oneself and everything that surrounds one. Although this is not possible, the attempt to imagine a world without contents gives some indication of the actual scope and complexity of contents and meanings.

It was stated that grasping and understanding the world essentially means grasping and understanding contents and meanings. In this way the relationship between person and world is built up. At the same time the contents serve as a mirror in which the quality of a person's involvement with everything that surrounds him is reflected. For this reason it is the task of teaching to present the contents in such a way that a child is offered the greatest opportunity to grasp them and acquire insight into them. During this activity a child must learn to know himself and establish a relationship with reality. To teach contents means to make them accessible for someone who has not yet mastered them. Therefore, a teacher also must have insight into the total framework or constitution of reality (contents) in accordance with its nature and essence.

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<sup>1</sup> In this connection, see the study by R. A. Kruger: "Die betekenis van die begrippe elementare en fundamentele in didaktiese teorie en praktyk" (M.Ed. thesis, University of Pretoria, 1974) and published as **Pedagogiekstudies/Pedagogic Studies**, No. 86 (1975).

This problem was mentioned in passing in a previous chapter. In that explication it was indicated that in truth reality shows a categorical structure. This means that one can really examine reality only if one views it in terms of or by means of its *essences*. The categories or essences of reality include all of its various facets one encounters. In this connection one thinks of such essential aspects of reality as the religious, the economic, physical, chemical, historical, geographical and many more.

These categories actually have different identities only in a person's consciousness. This means that in the totality of reality they do not appear separately or as different entities. Both reality and the life world are totalities. Therefore, to the extent that there is mention of particular categories that appear as a totality in reality, this only means that a person's investigation and description of this reality makes use of these categories in order to describe the variety encountered within the unity or totality of reality. Therefore, there is not a religious or chemical reality existing as separate unities, as such. Each can only acquire a certain identity through human thinking and can be denoted and described in terms of human understanding. As in every other case, the whole is much greater than its parts. Also, the parts cannot be separated from the whole or be described or examined as a distinctive aspect of the whole.

The above makes an important statement regarding the *nature* of reality. The separate aspects or categories always must be viewed and interpreted within the framework of the whole. If this is not done one easily can fall into a scientific error by which the truth or validity of scientific findings seriously are interfered with.

What must be taken into account is that a person as a totality is involved in reality as a whole. The various categories of reality represent the great number of variations or aspects of reality mentioned. And just as one cannot separate one's intelligence from one's willing, so, e.g., one cannot separate the religious as a category of reality from the historical or geographical as categories. Each of these facets appears within the *coherence* of the whole. Consequently, especially for a teacher, this coherence represents the most important insight into the *nature* and *essence* of reality, i.e., of

the contents. Each of the categories is connected with and in context with each other; without an understanding of the coherence of reality as a whole an insight into the whole of reality cannot be attained.

Reality shows itself as a whole because of the coherence among its various categories. Thus, the religious category cannot be understood fully outside of its coherence with, e.g., the moral and the juridical. If a teacher confronts a child with the well-known commandment: “You may not steal”, then this has meaning for the religious, moral and juridical areas. The coherence and interrelatedness among religious, moral and juridical categories are clearly illustrated by this commandment.

In light of the above, one can understand that insight into and command of certain aspects of reality by a person actually are of a two-fold nature: The first is that he gains insight into the meaning or sense of reality. The second is insight into the factual or objective composition of reality. In terms of what was said above about the importance of coherence, a person’s knowledge of reality fundamentally is two-fold in nature:

- a) insight into coherencies of sense or meaning, and
- b) insight into factual or objective coherencies.

At this stage it would be difficult to draw a different conclusion than that teaching ought to be attuned to these coherencies of meaning and facts of reality as a whole but also to disclose their various categories. Only by searching for the meaningful and factual essences of categories of reality in their mutual coherencies can a child be led to a real and authentic participation in it. In this way, evils of teaching such as “knowing-it-all”, knowledge without insight or skill and overloading a child with learning contents are avoided.

However, one also can understand that no single person can be aware of all of the categories of reality at the same time. Given our contemporary explosion of knowledge it no longer is possible for a single individual to be able to make scientific judgments about all of the facets or categories that appear in reality. This especially is true of the life world of a child. Not all categories of reality are

immediately present from the beginning in the conscious life of a child. From the nature of his existence as a child this cannot be otherwise because certain aspects of reality have a stronger and more immediate appeal than others. As we know, after his birth a child's greatest needs are to be nursed in an emotionally safe and stable way and properly nurtured physically. In many respects it takes many years before his consciousness becomes focused on moral and religious issues and the coherencies they have with his emotional and physical life.

One can accept as a mere fact of experience that certain aspects of a child's involvement in reality come into focus earlier than others. In addition to the two mentioned above, one thinks, e.g., of language, fellow persons and his immediate surroundings. In this way a child proceeds to order reality and establish a life world for himself as was briefly described in the introductory chapter.

The fact that reality is constituted in accordance with particular essences or categories also implies that the various facets of the categories similarly are constituted in accordance with certain essences or essential aspects. One cannot grasp these various facets of reality without sifting out their essences and making judgments on the basis of them. Thus, there are certain essences that distinguish botanic reality from chemical reality and essences that distinguish geographical reality from historical or economic reality. To acquire access to any aspect or category of reality means to keep in view its essences. No one can acquire insight into the structure of a particular aspect or slice of reality by concentrating on what is non-essential to it. For example, it would be impossible to understand the contemporary South African political situation if one did not take into account the awakening of the national consciousness of Black people in Africa, the mutual economic dependence of different areas and the history of especially British colonial politics. This example illustrates that certain basic or fundamental insights provide access to the aspect of reality in focus. In didactic theory these basic facts that provide access to and insight into an area of reality are known as *elementals*.

To the extent that the question of the elemental crops up in teaching children one can understand that this does not have to do

with content for the sake of content or with insight for the sake of insight. For an adult the aim of educating indeed manifests itself as an attempt to introduce to a child contents of the life world to help him become an independent person. Therefore, teaching the contents must have a clear and recognizable effect. Also the facts of the contents must influence a child's basic attunement to God, fellow persons and the world. Insofar as this influence is observable in the life of a child, didactic theory speaks of it as a *fundamental*, i.e., the effective change in a child's lifestyle as a result of the radical influence of teaching. It is only logical that these two concepts (the elemental and the fundamental) represent the final reduction of the learning contents. Therefore they warrant further examination in any view of teaching contents.

### 3.1 The elemental (German: *das Elementare*)

The teacher's task is to unlock or expose the contents of the life world for a child. As educator, his aim is that in this way a child is in a position to orient himself in reality as a whole. The way he tries to realize this aim is to expose those categories of reality that individually and collectively must form the basis on which his mobility in reality ought to rest. In order to succeed in this, as already indicated, a teacher determines the essences of these categories or slices of reality. Thus, there is very clear mention of *carefully defined* contents that must provide access to a certain aspect of reality, i.e., elementals.

These elementals (contents) represent the only way a child can acquire an understanding of the life world as well as the objective facts of reality. The previous explanation implies that not all contents are elemental contents. A teacher must arrive at the elementals on the basis of the *reductions* he makes. These reductions to the elementals have two essential facets: the first is in the activities of curriculum experts who, on the basis of careful reductions of a school subject area in its totality, determine which elementals are relevant for one or another grade level and for differentiated teaching. A teacher in a classroom really has little to do with this reduction and since the entire question of curriculum theory is dealt with in a separate chapter, this issue is considered there.

The second aspect of reduction to the elementals certainly is the task of a teacher. The themes or aspects of the school subject chosen by the curriculum expert as elementals and inserted into the curriculum, in their turn, also are a matter of elemental and non-elemental contents. With the aim of designing a lesson a teacher must be in a position to differentiate these two aspects of his lesson contents (elementals and non-elementals) from each other. His aim is effective learning on the basis of the pupils' insight into the essences of the learning contents. Regarding a particular lesson theme, the elementals are those aspects of the contents that can carry a child's insight into the particular theme.

To master a particular aspect, theme or problem implies that a child have a grasp of the elementals of that particular aspect, theme or problem. Because a child does not yet know and understand it cannot be expected of him that he differentiate between elemental and non-elemental aspects of the contents. He also does not possess the background of the subject to reduce the contents to their elementals for himself. To reduce the contents to their elementals means that a teacher must have the necessary subject background and knowledge as well as knowledge of a child to be able to strip a lesson theme of all aspects of the contents that are not essential to it so it can contribute to creating and stabilizing a pupil's insight into it.

Thus, when one speaks of elementals one is involved with a comprehensive and difficult concept. The elementals often are that aspect of the contents that expose the basic, elementary and fundamental structure of a matter—but that, per se, are not necessarily a simple matter. Elementals indeed are basic contents but, as such, not easy or uncomplicated.

At this stage, a brief description of some aspects or descriptions of what elementals are is systematized in order to make the following explanation clearer:

- i) an elemental implies learning content reduced to their essences;
- ii) an elemental is a basic (essential) aspect of reality;

- iii) an elemental provides access to a basic concept, principle, law or definition;
- iv) an elemental always is authentic, i.e., the authority of its pronouncements can never be doubted;
- v) an elemental always is the foundation of insight.

In their coherencies, elementals represent the foundations or original composition of reality. One could expand this thought; however, that is not the aim of this introduction. The basic insight here is that elementals are the simple, basic and authentic contents that *provide access* for a learning child to reality as such. That is why the categories of reality appear in the elementals in the form of concepts or denotations, laws, processes of nature, numbers, quantities, etc. In the case of teaching Christian-Protestant doctrine elemental contents are the Fall of Man, his redemption and his gratitude. In the same sense concepts like “statesman”, “constitution” and “foreign policy” are elemental contents of history. In natural science elementals, e.g., would be the fact of gravity, the change of seasons and the life cycle of plants. Authentic insight into and understanding of these contents (elementals) are the conditions for effective learning in each of the different school subjects. Thus, elementals function as providing access to the greater, constituted and involved descriptions and explanations of phenomena of reality that are systematized in the school curriculum. In this sense, elementals can be compared to a gateway leading into a city or a door leading into a room.

Therefore, it is understandable that elementals are the primary focus of any didactic theory dealing with contents. Where elementals are ignored, progress in the formal teaching situation is an incidental, haphazard and thus inauthentic matter. Each pronouncement about the question of elementals has direct and decisive significance for didactic practice as this is given form in a teaching design. However, it cannot be denied that a teacher must give form to the elementals in accordance with his own insights and teaching skills. Even so, the fact of the matter is that all lesson designs are in vain if the reduction of contents to the elementals of the matter does not expose the theme directly and clearly.

Everything that has been said above about the elementals refers to the fact that they are the means by which reality is represented for a child. In other words, reality cannot be unlocked for a child by an adult except by means of elementals. In order to present these elementals directly and clearly a teacher continually estimates a child's foreknowledge and especially his experiential world. In his explanations and interpretations it is imperative that the teacher keeps as close as possible to reality and life. The fact that he focuses on the elementals may *never* allow him to lose sight of his learning aim; he must evaluate everything in terms of the learning aim and as far as his lesson design is concerned, the learning aim always must be at the center of his attention.

In this connection Kruger<sup>2</sup> says directly: "The elemental first must be found by an adult. An elemental must be unlocked for a child in a didactic situation. A child must throw himself open and step up to the unlocked reality. If this happens categorical forming occurs and a child changes in that his insights are increased because of his participation in a life demanding unlocking. The elemental must be understood in this way and not as if this merely occurs as a double unlocking in the life world."

In this way formal teaching contributes to a child's becoming. His insight into reality and his mobility regarding the elementals must stabilize this becoming or forming with an eye to his eventual maturity. Maturity or adulthood is the final, all-encompassing aim striven for. Both the teaching aim and the learning aim are incorporated in every lesson design. All teaching is initiated from this all-encompassing aim. This means the contents also must bring about effective changes in a child's lifestyle, relationship to reality and view of the world. In this way insight into and mastery of reality must return to the situation of life itself. If this were not the case, a school would produce a polished and intellectually facile barbarian in society. The wonders of reality and its inherent order and regularity also compel (under the guidance of a teacher) modesty, a sincere unassuming attitude and wonder, respect for knowledge and gratitude for life. When this has occurred the elementals have become fundamentals, i.e., they show educative

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

dividends in the course of a child's life. He becomes involved in reality as a *human being*, his relationship to reality, God and his fellow persons must change because his insights enable him to establish his own position in the world with greater accuracy. In fact, he is progressively creating his own life world in which these elementals function as fundamentals.

### 3.2 The fundamental (German: *das Fundamentale*)

It has been repeatedly stressed that the activity of educating never is without an aim. Teaching is included in the activity of educating because educating actualizes itself through teaching. As such, both concepts speak very clearly to the fact that an adult consciously intervenes in a child's life with the aim of bringing about change (more becoming). *The concept "fundamental" indicates the expected dividend that must accrue from teaching.* This teaching dividend can be qualified as the degree of change that can be noticed in a child-world relationship. Also, it was stated that educating and teaching are actualized in one activity. Therefore, the educative and teaching aims are original in nature and also must be actualized at the same time. Nowhere in educating are there situations that are purely educative or other situations that are purely teaching situations.

In light of this a school continually strives to present reality as authentically as possible and to integrate its coherencies of meanings and facts into the relationship between child and world. The sense of the elementals is to place the essentials of the contents within an understandable relief. But this is not enough. In order to support and stabilize a child's becoming, the elementals also must progress to the terrain of the fundamentals. Therefore one can define briefly the fundamentals as the becoming visible of the coherencies of meanings and of facts, the spirit or ethos of the contents in connection with life itself.

Teaching with respect to the elementals presupposes that a child *learns to know*. Teaching, as far as fundamentals are concerned, implies that a child also *learns to live* as a human being ought to live. Fundamentals are a matter of deepening (in the sense of greater spiritual value) the contents that lead to self-knowledge,

insight into one's own being situated with all of its demands and a willingness to answer positively the appeals and demands of life itself.

Seen in this way, as far as teaching is concerned, the concept "fundamental" means a direct and conscious influencing and attuning of a child to accept a valid view of life, to respect his language and culture, his history and the origin of his people, his surroundings and their unpolluted conservation, to mention a few important aspects. Fundamentals influence and form a child's dispositions and views of the world. The grasp he has acquired of the elementals must enable him to experience his own life as meaningful. On the basis of the fundamental contents a child must be able to assess and evaluate his own being situated in reality. He also must be able to anticipate the future and the demands it will make of him. Under the influence of the fundamentals he must internalize and make his own the spirit and ethos and the explicit and implicit meanings of everything he comes into contact with.

As with the "elemental" the "fundamental" also is a concept that has to do with contents. Elementals make it possible for a child to enter reality authentically, gain access to and be able to master it. Fundamentals involve the question of what a child is going to *do* with these contents. Thus, to the extent that there is mention of fundamentals, the emphasis falls strongly on making the contents functional (useable). Wolfgang Klafki says that the fundamentals represent an extension of the elementals into a demanding and meaningful world.

Since a child himself must learn to know, in a teaching situation he himself must use these contents or make them functional. An educator (teacher) certainly will thoroughly guide, influence, help, interpret the contents for him and support him. But he has to realize the fundamentals himself because they always are a difficult and demanding matter of his personal existence. A child's lifestyle, his interpersonal relationships, his willingness to accept tasks, his sense of duty and responsibility within the framework of the reality of educating represent what the fundamentals are about.

The basic insight that must be understood is that the elementals must always be pushed through to the level of the fundamentals if one can speak of effective teaching and the actualization of educating through teaching.

#### 4. THE CONSTRUCTION OF LEARNING SUBJECTS

In order to establish the structure by which the various learning subjects are incorporated within a school curriculum, a didactician should ask the question of how persons order reality as a whole. This means that in a scientific examination of every aspect of reality certain major structures are used that enable a person to demarcate the encompassing whole in order to provide access for research and reflection. The demarcation of reality in major areas understandably is in close accord with a human being's experience of reality. This means that those areas with which a person becomes involved will be identified. The following possible classification should help a teacher determine the relationship between the different learning subjects:

- a) the religious-moral terrain;
- b) the linguistic-literary and esthetic terrain;
- c) the historical and social-political terrain;
- d) the mathematical-natural scientific terrain.

In order to help orient a child concerning the totality of reality, an adult will have to take each one of these terrains into consideration when constructing a curriculum. The curriculum must represent the totality of reality. Therefore, in school, there is a grouping of subjects chosen from these different terrains and included within the curriculum. The choice an adult makes in this regard partially rests on his aim to present a child with a representative selection that will include every aspect of reality. He also bases his choice on the degree to which he can make use of the formative and orienting possibilities of the school subjects in light of his overarching educative aim.

Because language is the basis of communication in a teaching situation, it is understandable that language-study will be a focus of teaching during a child's school career. From linguistic-literary

teaching, other esthetically formative subjects (music and art) will develop. The construction of the subject structures in this terrain enables the teaching to intensify and reach a more formative level.

In addition to language studies, school subjects of a social-political nature, with history especially as a focal point, will have to be included in the curriculum. This combination enables a teacher to select and order themes such as citizenship, geography, legal science and many others. These themes are arranged and integrated within the social-political whole in an attempt to involve a child in this aspect of the life world, but in accordance with a child's readiness.

A third terrain that must be included in the curriculum consists of the mathematical-natural scientific subjects. They provide various possibilities to arrange and order the most important related subjects and themes. Special attention can be given to various aspects of the natural sciences in accordance with the demands of differentiation. The composition of the curriculum regarding this terrain will depend on an adult's teaching aim and how the related subjects will be dealt with in higher education.

Technical and economic education will have to be included in close conjunction with the above three terrains. On the one hand, technical and economic education provides a solid basis for generally formative educating, especially during the first years of secondary schooling. Technical and economic educating are important in themselves because they reflect an important aspect of human activities in our contemporary cultural situation.

Including the above in a curriculum does not mean that its structure has been finalized. The religious-moral development of a child provided for by relevant school subjects cannot be fully realized by only presenting the specific school subjects. This aspect of educating a child includes all subjects or learning contents and therefore must be viewed by a teacher as a primary factor in teaching [in South Africa—G.D.Y.]. Because this aspect generally represents a particular point of view, it will be interpreted and applied in accordance with specific aims and, therefore, will radically influence the presentation of various school subjects. For

this reason, the religious-moral forming of a child deserves careful consideration and attention by those who plan teaching situations.

From this general ordering of various scientific areas, there must also arise a definite indication of teaching subjects to reflect a person's working and creative activities. Whether this aspect of teaching is the concern of vocationally directed schools or whether it should be realized in post-school vocational training is not an issue. What is important, however, is that it is an essential focal point of the curriculum for teaching, as such.

The construction of learning subjects must clearly provide for the following major contents in terms of which a teacher can assess the validity of a school curriculum:

- i) religious education, offered in conjunction with ethics;
- ii) physical education, also offered in conjunction with esthetically formative subjects like music;
- iii) linguistic-literary subjects. Besides the Mother tongue, as many foreign languages as possible should be included;
- iv) esthetic subjects or rather subjects that will develop a child's esthetic experience and appreciation. Subjects such as art, music, history of art, domestic science, etc. serve this purpose well;
- v) history, socially and politically directed subjects, including subjects such as civics and judicial subjects reflecting the social structure, must be included;
- vi) technical subjects that offer the opportunity to do manual work and undergo vocational preparation, but that also provide opportunities for the application of subjects such as mathematics, physics and chemistry are important;
- vii) empirical-scientific subjects where relationships and logical order, but also the natural phenomena of the world, are the focus of the teaching.

The above views and reasoning put the learning contents in school into perspective. However, it is a teacher who actually deals with learning contents in school. This is why the final stage of his preparation for teaching is devoted to the study of subject didactics. It was mentioned that the major problem of subject

didactics is to particularize the general didactic pronouncements. Learning contents also must be particularized.

Subject didactics starts from the point of view that the didactic pronouncements concerning contents must serve as a background or frame of reference. Against this background, subject didactics interprets each one of the school subjects as a subject with its *own nature*. When subject didactics makes a pronouncement about contents, the nature of the school subject is a teacher's point of departure. The nature of history differs from that of biology as mathematics differs from chemistry. It is in a lesson design that the nature of a school subject comes into its own right. Therefore, the nature of the subject provides important guidance for designing a lesson. A teacher must be well informed about the importance of the nature of the school subject that makes certain demands of a lesson design and, at the same time, gives direction to a teacher's planning. In the final analysis, it is a teacher who gives substance to the ideals described in the general educational and didactic literature.