

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PEDAGOGIC AS POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR A PHENOMENOLOGICALLY ORIENTED DIDACTICS*

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The fact that human beings participate in the reality surrounding them is expressed in many ways in art and science. The history of the world is a rendering of this participation and, as such, it also is a human history. It provides an overview of humanity's highest expectations and desires, its shortcomings in insight and vision, its ingenuity and stupidity, the limits of its knowledge and mastery. In terms of modern concepts there really is no mention of uniformity or a simple way of making history. Therefore, there also is no real mention of patterns in human creative activities merely because the human understanding of reality and, therefore, its relationship with the world changes so constantly. The only constant factor in human history is the matter of aspects with which it is involved: the transcendental and religious, social, juridical, scientific, etc. Its understanding of everything surrounding it is a reflection of this multiple lifestyle as expressive forms and gestalts of its ways of being. But there continually is the reliefs [highlights] humans draw that are directly represented in the fundamentalia of their interpretation of the sense of its existence and its search for an explanation of the fact that it exists here and now. For this reason humanity continually projects the fact that it is on the way but cannot truly see beyond the immediate horizon.

In contemporary human cultural history these facts are explained as streams or periods. In its political history there is mention of realms and civilizations. Each period or civilization gives evidence of a particular approach to or interpretation of reality. Today it is commonplace to refer to these typifications in science as well as art. One needs only to think of "classical" and "baroque" in addition to "idealism" and "scholasticism" by which a point of departure is indicated in the naming that also typifies a fairly general philosophy

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of life. The name connected to the stream in art reflects a decided style with respect to works by which a particular identity is acquired. In architecture a “baroque” church means something other than a “neo-classical” one. In the same context “nationalism” means something other than “idealism” in Philosophy. Art as well as science is sensitive to this naming because the name reflects a point of departure of some sort of nature by which a particular approach to or interpretations of a person’s involvement with reality is typified.

In the history of science, as in art, there are many writings that stress the overarching significance of the point of departure in explanations and descriptions. Briefly, this usually amounts to a hypothesis, premise or problem statement by which the course of thinking is radically directed. The philosopher who views a human being as an extension of nature, whose weal and woe are determined by the regularity of natural laws, is called a naturalist. Understandably, there are many types of naturalists who reflect variants of this point of departure and usually are known as “schools of thinking”. In the same way there are “schools” in impressionism as an art style by which a refined clustering of a point of departure is indicated. Whatever the case, the fact remains that art as well as science show a relief of image or explanation in terms of a point of departure.

In studying Education the matter is no different. One should be able to indicate relatively accurately the turns that have appeared in this science, especially during the past two centuries merely because relatively radical changes had occurred with respect to points of departure. By evaluating the effect of these changes it is well to remember that each standpoint can do nothing other than give an explanation of a human being’s relation to reality and that the educationist each time explains the same aspect of reality broached, namely, the reality of educating. With this it is now held as a point of departure that educating always was and always will be, i.e., that it is an entirely primordial (original) way of human involvement with reality. Also the first stated aim of practicing the science of Education is to describe and explicate this particular aspect of the person-world relationship in its basic essentials in order also to derive criteria in terms of which the course of the

practice of educating can be evaluated and fertilized. This (phenomenological) point of departure subscribes to the idea that the primary source of knowledge in terms of which an experiential phenomenon such as educating can be described is in the educative situation and the philosophy of life that holds in the concerned society. In this light one also accepts that educating cannot occur in terms of nothing. With this it is recognized that educating is always set in motion on the basis of particular contents in the sense that these contents give rise to a definite thematizing of educating. Thus, the particular values that are attached to a philosophy of life are a direction-giving and controlling factor in educating.

In this same line of thought a basic postulate is that educating and teaching are one activity, that there are basically no noticeable differences among the aims, relationships, the course and results of educating and teaching. Thus, educating cannot realize itself without teaching, while the meaning of teaching is in educating. Hence, educating cannot be practiced outside of the activities of teaching. The immaturity of a child is accentuated more strongly in the teaching situation than in any other educative activity. He cannot and does not know and must learn to know and command in order to manifest full-fledged adulthood as a lifestyle. Here the didactic imperative holds as an educative imperative.

The question about the point of departure in writing a didactic theory, therefore, indeed is a sensitive matter in light of the fact that the profile drawn by the theoretical writing is closely related to the premise or hypothesis made about teaching as such. It also is in a snug context with what is viewed as the basic aim in bringing about a didactic theory, i.e., also with what ought to be interpreted in a didactic theory. The profile of the theoretical writing in all respects always offers the contours along which the principles will be scanned in the didactic practice. For this reason, the nature of the theoretical writing will essentially influence the nature of the practice that thereby is expected. A good illustration of this statement is the Herbartian Didactics and the Herbartian school.

For these reasons the search for a point of departure for an authentic didactic theory really necessarily also is a search for origin—in this case for the establishment of didactic explications.

Didactics can never be a metaphysics because its practice must reflect the realities discussed (claims, pronouncements) in its theory. In this connection, it does not matter what type of teaching is implicated. Teaching is a matter of transition that in each variation is measured and evaluated in terms of its expectations (aims, effects, results, outcomes). Speculating is a foreign approach for didacticians. The same holds for free experimenting (Flitner). Both methods are indications of a hesitancy, uncertainty or ignorance of a valid origin (root) of research and a defective point of departure. On close examination, the fundamental question is not how must teaching be done but what is teaching? A choice for the latter question is a choice for the knowledge possibilities of an experiential whole such as teaching rather than an actualization preference. An approach favoring an actualization preference implicitly says it is unimportant to know what constitutes teaching as such. The history of didactic thinking is replete with examples of this point of departure. Perhaps the best example is the so-called school-projects that was in the foreground four or five decades ago and was presented as a didactic theory. No one can show that educating is classroom directed. Indeed it is life directed and, as such, is occupied with life. However, it should be possible for teaching within an educative context to be allowed to take its spontaneous, intuitive course within the mentioned context without a trained teacher or school being present. Schools and [trained] teachers are not fundamental givens in the life world and consequently are not acceptable as origins for understanding and explaining the activities that we in our original involvement of person and world can indicate as teaching.

The search for a point of departure for didactic research and explication, therefore, essentially is one of context. By this is meant an original given frame of reference within which the activity "teaching" is actualized unrefined (i.e., in its primordial givenness). This is a matter of essential importance in the search for a firm foundation for establishing a didactic theory because teaching appears in such a great variety of terrains in the established life world. It is especially the diffusion of organized teaching that easily gives rise to persons within their contexts searching for the establishment of didactic activities. Also there are plenty of

examples of this. The most important deficiency that usually arises here is that an aspect of teaching is taken as the point of departure for designing a successful school practice. In some cases this involves aims, in others a didactic analysis, a theory of learning or a particular approach with respect to contents as one finds with exponents of exemplary teaching (De Cort, Moller, Scheuerl). In evaluating these theoretical constructions one must understand well that they are not meaningless for insights into teaching. The perception of the investigators also is not directed to nothing. They indeed are involved with teaching and their focus in formulating matters such as aims and teaching strategies are directed to teaching. The point of departure that is stated in the form of questions and/or hypotheses however involve the issue of how the teaching ought to be realized and not on what teaching is as such. Because the point of departure focuses on matters such as aims, ways and methods, i.e., on the design and effect of teaching, the answer to the question of what is teaching remains absent or it is taken up haphazardly in the theoretical writing. In most cases this appears as axiomatic in the sense that teaching implies a transfer of knowledge by which a variety of generally valid aims are indicated. The general convergence of this view then usually lies in the change in behavior along the entire range of affective and cognitive behaving (Bloom, Karmel). Indeed, the latter can be accepted as an authentic educative aim if one also is aware that the change in behaviors does not amount to the manipulation of affective and cognitive structures. With respect to educating, this not only involves acquiring an intellectual grasp of reality but discovering one's own relation to reality as a whole (contents) in terms of which the center of one's own involvement and attunement to reality are placed. Mastering insights into school subjects is not the final guarantee of adulthood. The motivation of this standpoint is the fact that the integration of or realization of contents to the level of existentialia cannot end with intellectual mastery.

Therefore, in order to understand teaching in its essence, one must inquire about its most primordial appearance, i.e., its first way of appearing. One must verify whether teaching as such appears in the life world in order to determine the context within which it manifests itself as independently and separately knowable. Also in this respect there are epistemological and anthropological points of

departure that are accepted, some of which deserve mention. The first is that human involvement in the world is one kind of fact of life in the sense that no other living being of nature is present in reality in the same way or with respect to the same matters (contents). Of all living beings only human beings have an awareness of self and morality, and only human beings are aware of a reality above and outside of them (realm of the transcendent). In the philosophy of life of a Christian-Western person this involves God as Creator, Jesus Christ as Savior and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier. With this a state of fallen-ness is indicated in a person that gives him a mandate in the sense of a dependence on his Creator and an existential disposition (sinfulness) about which he must change and remain changed by the unconditional acceptance of normative behaviors and by which in the first place he comes to be influenced as contents in his educative practice. From this it really follows that a human being is a person who does not design his life as an extension of animals and is not thrown into a ready made or complete world. This incomplete mode of existence announces the fact that he is a being who educates and is dependent on education (Langeveld, Oberholzer). The second is that a human being is not surrendered to his life world or his origins but can rise above them in order to show the image of being human within the limits as stated above. A person is obliged to do this by virtue of the ordinances of the Creator. One of the most excellent ways in which this obligation can be fulfilled is that of educating where the relevant contents are unlocked for mastery within the power of choice the Creator has granted to each person.

To return to the question of the most original (primordial) appearance of teaching, the following explication is relevant as a frame of reference for understanding teaching as such. Educating is and remains a phenomenon that is given with being human. It does not have an origin in the usual sense of the word. Educating involves what Flitner calls “Lebensleistung” (life achievement), a matter from which nothing comes directly apart from an educative connection. The child cannot even survive physically if the educators do not guarantee it.

As stated, this educating cannot occur in terms of nothing. Although the world is not the child’s destination, it remains his

dwelling place in the sense that it is the space within which he actualizes his life at a particular time. The world and its transcendences (meaning giving) are a matter of contents. The contents of all facets of the life world are and remain the perpetuation of the daily as well as future existence of the child. The meanings are the landscape of the future. Life is meanings: to live implies attributing meaning. In terms of these contents educating actualizes itself by, after consideration, presenting, unlocking, interpreting the available contents. In other words, educating realizes itself through teaching. Also, within this context, there is no greater significance in teaching than the fact that the course of educating is brought into motion by it. Here educating realizes itself in teaching. The aspect of reality mentioned here is the reality of educating. The context or frame of reference for investigating the question of what teaching is and in which ways it appears is the context of educating. As an original experience teaching appears no place else than with persons. This is the primary access in each persons living of life so that the situational givens for the matter of “teaching” are knowable fundamentally and only here.

The choice of the educative situation as the point of departure for establishing a didactic theory has various consequences for developing an authentic theory itself and for particularizing it in the subject didactics that flows from it.

1. The frame of reference for the aim, contents and form of a didactic practice are described from within the original appearance of teaching as such. With this teaching is freed from all of the chatter that has been the order of the day since science has been written down, and as a consequence didactic theory often was nothing more than the application of insights from a great variety of other sciences and streams of thought. To illustrate, one need not look farther than the Herbartians or the Psychology of Thinking. At the same time this provides the opportunity to investigate a didactics that is true to educating as it indeed manifests itself to be.
2. Nearness to life is a primary characteristic of the reality of educating. Views of teaching in this context offer the immediate possibility of sorting out the universal validity of

the categories (essences) of teaching in terms of which the various aspects or constituents of teaching become knowable as they are and not as one thinks they ought to be. It follows from this that the relations of aim, form, contents and modalities have a unique significance on the basis of which there can be an accountable theoretical structure without related areas of science such as Philosophy doing violence to it or as an applied field to be surrendered to them.

3. Conversation with the other Pedagogical disciplines is meaningful because the accompanying aims (of educating) function in an overarching way. With educating as the point of departure the identification of joint areas of research are switched over from slogans to reality. With this the unity of the Pedagogical is restored to the extent that there no longer can be mention of school teaching outside of the insights of, e.g., Fundamental- or Psycho-pedagogics.
4. Developing or designing teaching as an organized practice can be offered as an extension of the theory. With this the age-old reproach of the gap between teaching theory and practice is set aside. The consequences for preparing teachers and the Pedagogical studies to which they are exposed are obvious.

The particularizations from this point of departure in the Republic of South Africa are barely a decade old and yet there already are a great number of didacticians, especially young ones, who have empirically established this way of viewing fundamental didactic questions among which are curriculum development in all of its facets, technological support for teaching and also especially the particularization of subject didactics without which the design of an authentic practice simply would not succeed.

Summary

The point of departure for a didactic theory is in many respects of paramount importance for describing and developing that particular view. The crux of the matter is the description of what teaching is before the functional aspects of teaching (i.e., the how) can be described. Taking this into account, educational reality is taken as the point of departure because it is the most original manifestation of teaching within the sphere of education.. The

reason for this point of view is firstly that education is actualized in teaching, and secondly that the meaning of teaching is found in education. Various important consequences of this relationship have a direct bearing on re-establishing the unity of Pedagogics within the school teaching context as well as on bridging the gap between theory and practice.

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