

SUMMARY

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ELEMENTAL AND FUNDAMENTAL IN DIDACTIC THEORY AND PRACTICE

A person is always at the intersection of himself and a world/ reality with which he is in continual dialogue. There is a field of tension between person and reality and he has to continually break away from a position of rest in order to conquer those aspects of reality that will enable him to give meaning to his life.

Conquering a world (his own) and reality (surrounding him) can only occur through mastering contents. Conquering a world and reality without contents is unthinkable because this implies an insight into and understanding of something that is without structure and devoid of all phenomena (Kant).

A person is a being who educates and who is committed to education. Without educating and teaching, a person cannot live and exist in the true sense of these words. A child is dependent on an adult for support on his way to adulthood. This help implies not only tending to his biological and vital needs but also helping him to master lifeworld contents by which he gradually enters a more advanced dialogue with reality. A child continually appeals to the adult to guide him in learning contents and the adult would be remiss if he did not meaningfully answer this appeal.

Didactics is the human science that deals with teaching and learning. Among other things, it investigates contents and ways of presenting them to a child. For a child, contents of reality can appear diffuse and unordered, and it is the didactician's task to show how these contents figure in the teaching situation so that a child can grasp them, i.e., how these contents can be reduced to their essentials and thus be made accessible to him.

In this study it is shown that there are a multiplicity of ways contents can be reduced to their essentials ("elemental-ized" or simplified) and placed within a child's conceptual horizon, and it also addresses the effects that mastering contents (fundamentals) have on him.

The concept “elemental” expresses the concept that in German is known as “das Elementare”. It is the essentials of the contents that make them accessible to a child and not what merely is simple or elementary. It is indicated that elementals need to be chosen with a child’s level of becoming or attainment in mind. Thus, the elementals and their interrelationships provide a basis for differentiated (e.g., individualized) teaching.

The effects on a child of contents mastered also are pursued under the concept of the “fundamental” (German: “das Fundamentale”). The line of thought in the discussion of this concept is that in a fruitful didactic unlocking (presentation) it is possible for a child to achieve considerably more insight than merely an understanding of the factual. He gains insight into reality itself and even into means of dealing with reality.

There is a path from the elemental to the fundamental. This path should always be kept in mind by a teacher and never be blocked or obstructed. Further, as an essential of the contents, the elemental should not figure in a didactic situation merely for its own sake but rather to facilitate a pupil making the fundamental his own. The elemental has an unlocking function and facilitates presenting the contents to a child, but the elemental is valid didactically only in so far as it is transformed into a fundamental [experience] by a child.

Some students of pedagogics refer to the impetus to move from the elemental to the fundamental as a transition from the subject matter (contents) to the person.

The elemental-fundamental approach, if used appropriately, leads to effective teaching culminating in genuine learning—a didactic practice that constitutes the most meaningful of all human activities. This implies that contents that have been mastered become part of a child’s intellectual possessions by means of which he can encounter future lifeworld situations. By functionalizing these mastered contents a child eventually develops his own lifestyle.