

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6. RETROSPECT

The theory of the elemental and the fundamental in didactic theory and practice has been disclosed and highlighted. Its relevance for the various part-disciplines of pedagogics was indicated. An account was given of how the elemental and the fundamental figure in the lesson structure.

In this retrospect it is verified whether the research proposed in Chapter One succeeded in all aspects as it should have. The eight groups of questions posed there are considered again by indicating the answers that have arisen during this study.

It ought now to be clear what Drechsler means when he asserts that a person continually finds himself at the intersection of the world and reality. There is a continual appeal to him to participate in the world and this implies a **meaningful participation in terms of mastering contents**. For a child, mastering contents means that he receives particular help that makes such mastery possible. With each mastery of contents, with each insight or understanding, the intersection shifts, the child establishes other relationships with reality and changes his dialogue with it.

The didactic imperative is that the adult would be remiss if he should neglect or omit meeting a child at least half way and unlock contents for him in the most effective ways. By being adult he is obligated to come to the child's assistance in the latter's exploring the world and reality.

A task of didactic theory is to observe, think about and describe the essentials of unlocking contents so that an accountable and effective practice can be established on the basis of its findings. And because teaching and educating are not actualized separately in practice, an accountable didactic theory has to embrace the full impact of the unlocking so that the different dividends that arise can be understood and striven for. The possibility that a person is able to learn, understand and be educated (formed) springs from mastering life contents. Therefore, it is necessary and meaningful that didactic theory says to practice what are the appropriate ways to unlock contents for a child.

## **First group of questions**

The following questions were asked: where do the contents that figure in a didactic situation come from? Who selects them?

The answers provided by this study are: the contents that figure as formative contents in a didactic situation come from the lifeworld as one finds it around him. But not all lifeworld contents are formative. In the lifeworld people steal, they cheat each other, there are those who take another's life, etc.

Obviously such contents will not be selected for presentation as formative material in the situation of unlocking. In the framework of schooling, there really is a two-fold selection of contents. The first selection is the task of the curriculum expert who from an educational ideal, views lifeworld contents and selects those that lend themselves to formative teaching. He first asks himself what contents a child ought to master in a particular subject if he is to reach adulthood and he then justifies his selection on founded criteria.

If contents are introduced into the curriculum only once, it is the teacher's responsibility to unlock these contents for a child. The teacher has the task of looking at the contents in light of the learning aim (of the lesson) and to determine by abstraction the essential moments of these contents. Thus, he reduces the syllabus contents to the elemental. Contents made accessible to a child as an elemental are the only real formative contents. With this answer, the terrain of the second group of questions already is entered.

## **Second group of questions**

How can contents be made accessible to a child? Who has to find the essential elements and order them? Are there particular didactically accountable ways in which the contents can figure in a didactic situation?

Contents can be made accessible to a child in only one way and this is by reducing them to the elemental. This does not mean there is only one way of reduction. This research has brought to light the fact that there is a rich variety of forms of appearance of the

elemental that range from a typical principle, an exemplar, a classic case, principle, law or definition and many more.

It is stressed that contents in themselves are not child-accessible but that they have to be made so. The adult who is going to do the unlocking continually has to decide what the essential elements of the contents are and in what ways he can present them. It is as plain as day that there is no other didactically accountable way the contents can be presented in the activity of unlocking.

### **Third group of questions**

Can contents be educative and formative for a child who does not feel inclined to become involved in and experience the contents and to master them? Can contents be educative and formative if they are not presented in a form accessible to a child?

Didactic pedagogics is embedded in pedagogics and all of the pedagogic criteria for a situation of encounter also hold for a didactic situation. In spite of everything that has previously been said about the elemental as formative contents, the child's involvement and authentic making (the contents) his own have to occur before forming or becoming will. If a child rejects the unlocking, the contents unlocked cannot contribute to his forming or becoming. This is self-evident because there can be no elevation in dialogue if a child has not mastered contents.

With this another aspect of the elemental is brought to light, namely, it is not an isolated phenomenon but there are relationships among the elementals within the structure of the contents. The relationships within which the elementals are presented determine how elementary or advanced they will be for a child. Scheuerl has shed light on this aspect with a pronouncement that should always be kept in mind when unlocking contents, namely, that the elemental is always an example of something for someone. Thus, a teacher should always keep in mind the phase of a child's becoming for whom he is unlocking the contents. Even if a child feels inclined to be involved by the relationship that is established, unlocking above his level of ability cannot lead him to effectively make the unlocked contents his own. A precondition for a double-sided unlocking of the elemental is that it be unlocked on a level that makes it possible for a child to acquire a cognitive grasp of that

elemental content. [The other side is that the child has to unlock or open himself to these contents].

#### Fourth group of questions

Does a child learn more or less than what is unlocked? Must the unlocker follow a particular path leading from the "matter" to the child or can the path be left to chance? To what extent can there be guidance on this path?

A child can learn more or learn less than what is unlocked. An unlocking has a particular quality and a certain impact. If the unlocking occurs without the necessary care that a child will participate, there already is the possibility that he will profit little from the unlocking. Further, the elemental has to be chosen to be appropriate for a child otherwise he can walk away and say, "I don't understand nothing from nothing". The teacher who implements the didactic principles of sympathy, clarity, tempo, dynamic and balance has a fairly good chance of launching a successful unlocking. According to Klafki, unlocking that leads to a fruitful moment allows the fundamental to appear. It is by such an unlocking that a child will **learn much more** than is unlocked because the fundamental includes concepts, insight, formative insights, a basic attitude, self-understanding, anticipation, transcending and many more dividends. A child has mastered contents by which he can himself advance toward future situations and he even has mastered methods as fundamental equipment for cultivating reality. A fundamental that is the result of a fruitful unlocking blossoms into much more than is embraced by a stimulus-response theory. It is not merely a "stimulus" and a "response" that is raised here, not just the possibility of transferring what is locked in the "stimulus" but rather it is the control of life contents **by a person** and the functionalizing of these acquired contents. This amounts to an intentional directedness and a change in one's own position--it is something internal put into action rather than an outward "transfer" and application of what is learned.

Teaching loses its meaning if it doesn't lead to forming. A practice based on unlocking rather than on a purposive path from elemental to fundamental contents does not satisfy the criteria for successful teaching. The unlocker has to plan a purposeful path and, therefore, is able to meet the demands of successful teaching. At least the guidance has to stretch as far as initial attempts at

functionalizing. The task of the teacher includes bringing about and unlocking the elemental, planning the path to making it the learner's own and guiding him to functionalize the acquired contents [i.e, helping a child transform the elemental into a fundamental].

In his uniqueness as a person a human being, however, is not completely fathomable and knowable. The self-understanding that is a dividend of the unlocking, the grasp of more extensive structures of reality, the fantasy awakened, anticipating and transcending may exceed the immediate situation to such a degree that guiding a child on all of these levels and in all of these directions is not possible. Here the educator stands perplexed before the mysteries of life itself, but he can take satisfaction in knowing that he was instrumental in stimulating what Pestalozzi calls a "million-fold of slumbering powers". It is really significant that an adult's guidance not extend to the final reaches of a child's taking positions and establishing relationships. It is a child's **own** role to functionalize the acquired contents that eventually will actualize his forming and his being a participant in the world. Teaching in its essence is self-teaching, and forming in its essence is self-forming.

### **Fifth group of questions**

Is the adult indispensable in the teaching situation? Can educating and forming also prosper without adults? As an achieving consciousness, to what extent can a child master the world and reality by himself?

The adult is a precondition for establishing a[n educative] teaching situation and consequently he is indispensable for the activity of teaching. In a functional-didactic framework, there is reference to the adult as the unlocker of reality. However, he is more than merely this; he is an adult who not only is an able unlocker; he is also the carrier and the representative of a form of living.

It was indicated that not only is it important **that** an adult be involved in a teaching situation but it also was noted **how** he ought to be involved in it. In the first place, he is a representative of the lifeworld, knower of life contents and carrier of a form of living. He can reduce life contents to elementals and is a good judge of the child to whom he feels obligated and to whose appeals he responds.

He has to be able to open himself to a child and can only be a sort of knowledge catalyzer by moving from situation to situation and he is not untouched by the outcome. By participating in the act of teaching the adult is also formed again. He is the person who has to keep the elemental-fundamental path open so a child can encounter the contents until he acquires insight and self-understanding.

The adult is intertwined with the contents for a child. In a child's primordial experience, the adult who enters his life horizon is the most important content. His conception of fellow beings is a fundamental dividend of his encounter with the adult in a teaching situation. A child coins his world according to the adult's world he learns to know in a teaching situation. He identifies himself with the adult in whom he reflects himself and after whom he coins his self-concept. Viewed in this way, the adult is more than only a functional unlocker of reality. He is an educator in the fullest sense of the word.

As an achieving consciousness, a child will experience and learn outside of the situation (with an adult). It is not as if learning were a light that is switched on by joining in and shut off after functionalizing the acquired contents. A child learns continually but it is in teaching that he is formed. The teaching situation is a precondition for his forming, becoming or educating. A child also will experience and learn without an adult; however without the adult he cannot be formed (adequately).

### **Sixth group of questions**

Can the contents made accessible be described as the elemental? Should the larger structural relationships be typified as the fundamental? Does the fundamental merely lie on the level of the contents or does it also refer to human insights into these contents?

Outside of the practice of teaching neither the elemental nor the fundamental have validity or the right of existence. The first question is answered redundantly, namely, "elemental" is the term used to describe contents that have been made accessible. There is a line of thought that merely views the elemental as the focal point or entrance to a larger structure of reality and that in this view is described as a fundamental. The didactic interpretation of the "fundamental" is that it represents in a lesser or greater degree a structural relationship but as this is understood by the pupils. This

can even be a deficient insight into the structure of reality. Even so, they remain contents acquired by a child and made his own. It also is necessary to see that acquiring contents changes the child's (pupil's) life horizon and that making the elemental contents his own does not have a simple effect. The fundamental is not only acquired contents, it is also illuminating (categorical) contents and also is criterial equipment for a child or pupil.

### **Seventh group of questions**

Is the elemental merely the elemental and the fundamental merely the fundamental? Can the course of teaching begin with the elemental or must it be expedited by unlocking the elemental?

According to Wagenschein, the elemental is "the simple that is not simple". For Klafki, again, it is the unlocked elements of something basic. The elemental is *not* merely what is *elementary*. Didactics in South Africa must adopt the Afrikaans-ized form ["die elementare"] of the German concept ["das Elementare"] because the Afrikaans concept "element" or the "elements" ["die elementer" or "die elementere"] cannot illuminate the connotation or meaning implied by the German concept of "the elemental". Also the concept of the fundamental ["das Fundamentale"] has a very distinct didactic connotation and cannot be referred to as something "basic" [die fundamentele" in Afrikaans] in a didactic regard. Viewed purely as contents (outside of the framework of didactic practice) there certainly are contents that are elementary and basic. Within a didactic framework it is essential that specific meaning be attributed to elemental and fundamental contents as has been done during the course of this research.

Since the elemental is "the simple that is not so simple", it is essential that an unlocking prepare the way to unlock "the elemental" such that it expedites and doesn't begin with teaching the elemental.

### **Eighth group of questions**

Does unlocking leave a child untouched? On what level of unlocking is a child's lived-experiencing still pathic-affective? When is meaning received and normative attunement evident?

Unlocking in didactic practice varies qualitatively. Certainly there are successful and less successful introductions to contents. Reasons for stronger or weaker unlockings vary according to the nature of the learning contents, the teacher's ability to abstract the elemental, his ways of unlocking, the child's intellectual disposition, the child's potentiality to make the contents his own, the child's previous experiences on which the unlocking builds, the teacher's guidance of a child in functionalizing the elemental, the child's readiness to make use of the fundamental and his ability and directedness to anticipating. Unlocking in which a child participates can but only have an effect.

The child's initial involvement in and first encounter with the elemental contents occur on a pathic-affective level although the cognitive always figures in to some degree. When the unlocking proceeds to a fruitful moment, this points to a gnostic-cognitive grasp of them as lifeworld contents. Also understanding the larger relationship of the structure of reality indicates a cognitive attunement with which the affective is an accompanying moment. The interpretation of contents as contents-for-pupils, their increasing self-understanding and their appreciation of structures, as fundamentals, refer to normative and meaning giving moments. Also making the fundamental functional, although supported pathically-affectively, places a child predominantly on the level of the normative, on the level of attributing meaning.

With the above, the report of the investigation of the concepts of the elemental and the fundamental is concluded. The two concepts are of significant importance for all teaching and, therefore, the hope is that this will not be the last thing that we will read or hear about the elemental and the fundamental.