

CHAPTER FIVE

5. THE THEORY OF THE ELEMENTAL AND THE FUNDAMENTAL AND THE DIDACTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHING METHODOLOGY AND TEACHING SYSTEMATICS*

A theoretical investigation of the elemental and the fundamental such as this, necessarily has relevance for teaching practice. Where, during the investigation, there often is reference to elemental methods (see Pestalozzi), this study cannot be completed without also discussing teaching methods and their relationship to teaching systematics.

A study of teaching methods must be placed in the framework of the didactic for it not to end up on a side street. Methodology, as an area of study outside of didactics and without complying with systematics can lead to absolutizing methods or, in the most extreme cases, one or a few teaching methods which can seriously violate the freedom of the teacher and pupils as participants in a teaching practice.

Indeed, didactic-pedagogic freedom is always a relative autonomy which is limited by authorities such as the state, the church, the culture, industry and technology, and the prevailing climate of life in a society. In addition, it is required that his teaching intervention delivers a child to society as one who complies with the demands society poses. The teacher cannot select contents from the lifeworld which he prefers and considers appropriate but is bound to syllabi compiled by others and which he must implement.

The school framework itself, in its grouping of classes and division of time and cycles which must be met, has the consequence that a teacher cannot be completely free or fully autonomous. There are tests and examinations which must be passed. For example, many departments of education still do not recognize that examinations

* The concept teaching systematics is derived from Erich Weniger who represents in this way the teaching system since in earlier views, apart from and next to school subject systematics, it had exclusive validity. Teaching systematics also represents a first query into the "fundamental" in preparing a lesson.

predispose methods. Examinations which test the dominant spirit or ethos will promote a different methodological practice than an examination which emphasizes ready factual knowledge, as will a subject which tests its encyclopedic scope rather than principles or essential constituents. The teacher also must satisfy superiors, school heads, and supervisory personnel--some of whom advocate their own methods and some who prescribe them. Encompassing all these aspects is yet the requirement that the teacher must execute teaching policies as stipulated by the government.

Also, a great many restrictions hold for a child who sets foot in a teaching situation in a school framework. Notwithstanding the routine demands, he can't choose the situation, but is dependent on the teaching practice the teacher establishes and the methods he uses. For the rest, it also is possible that he enters a situation with pupils with past experiences and intellectual abilities which differ significantly from his. The current policy that children must choose collections of subjects, also of necessity, can lead a child to choose a subject or even more for which he has no strong interest.

Despite the above limiting factors which indicate a degree of constraint, the participants in a teaching situation must arrive at an **authentic encounter**, otherwise there cannot be a didactic-pedagogic situation. It is a teacher's task to use methods such that the situation and the course of teaching will be meaningful for a child.

A teacher must be mindful that the application of method entails a tension to bridge the tension between the learning subject (child) and reality. Rigid methods and a recipelike introduction and teaching sequence do not offer the desired solution. Only a teacher who is uncertain of his own actions will turn to a methodology which is not grounded in a genuine didactic theory! Only didactic ignorance invites one to a prominent method which reduces his being open to the world to a being who can master contents only in a few ways!

The appropriate way for a teacher to bring about a fruitful unlocking is to find out what didactic research has said about his practice. The theory of the elemental and the fundamental, as didactic-theoretical research, gives an indication of a methodological course which can be meaningful. It is expected that the teacher chooses from the extensive variety of elementals, indicated in a previous chapter, those ways of representing which

lend themselves to effectively unlocking the content area in question. The choice of a way of representing predisposes one to a predominant form within which the elemental content can be unlocked. Outside of the basic forms of teaching of play, conversation, example and assignment, alone or in combination, a lesson cannot be set in motion.

Certain ways of representing (elemental methods) will lend themselves better to application in some subject areas, while others will be the preferred choice in other subject areas. The greatest variety of methodology to deal with is in subjects with human science contents. The natural sciences and, especially mathematics can manage with a smaller variety of elementals.

What can didactic theory offer the school and the teacher? Through epistemological research and a phenomenological view of the didactic situation in the primary and secondary school practice, and in the primordial (home) situation, didactics can disclose and describe the essentials of an effective practice. Didactic research should flow into a practice established following an accountable lesson structure. In this way, an input and outcome can be indicated which can have a beneficial influence on the practice of teaching.

Sometimes method is referred to as didactics. However, the two concepts cannot be equated. Didactics is the more comprehensive concept which includes studying the whole terrain of teaching and learning, and the learning effect resulting from unlocking contents for teaching and forms of unlocking, while teaching methodology is merely the study of the methods of unlocking. There also cannot only be unlocking after unlocking without controlling, looking back, and reflecting. It is here that systematics arises. Systematics, while teaching, refers to summarizing, looking back, deepening and being accountable for progress. This is an entirely different view of systematics than a sequence of teaching which is built on a strict systematics. However, room for methodology and systematics can only be made if the didactic aim is clarified.

As far as this study and the resulting conclusions are concerned, didactic research indicates the necessity of teaching methodology and (its systematics) is relevant because, for unlocking contents in an elemental way to occur, there must be a deliberate path made for a child to make the fundamental his own.

This confirms that educating and teaching children are not techniques, since they do not involve lifeless objects. Therefore, viewed didactically, methods are a form of human encounter, varying from time and place, individuality and situation, frame of mind and disposition.

Methods of teaching are indispensable, but if a teacher is coerced into methods, he forfeits his unique human ways of being in the world and the teacher and child lose their own human rights, original experiences and lived experiences. While teaching, which springs from a coercion of methods, the teacher is a slave to his own actions.

Fixed systematics and the course of a lesson which are grounded in a systematic succession are equally less acceptable or desirable-- there is an indication that such a course even can be detrimental for a child (Copei).

The only meaningful involvement in the teaching activity is along the didactically acceptable way of unlocking the elemental by which the life principle of mastering the lifeworld and reality is continually going to be accomplished. This prepares a fundamental path which carries the child to insights and views and eventually to a command of the world and reality.