

CHAPTER V

ACTUALIZING CATEGORICAL FORMING AND REDUCING THE LEARNING CONTENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

A teacher who has something to teach is immediately confronted with a problem, i.e., "How do I bring this (required) content within a child's horizon of questions?" How do I present this content so it will become a question, a problem which he/she wants to answer or solve? (H. Roth, in Klafki, 1964, p 435). The success of teaching is largely determined by how clearly the **content** is presented to a **pupil** as a question or problem. To be able to do this, a teacher must thoroughly understand where a child "is", i.e., what he/she really knows, what his/her style of learning is, and what regarding a particular topic will (or will not) interest him/her.

2. REDUCING THE CONTENT TO ITS ELEMENTALS

In his/her analysis of the content to be taught, an expert teacher is aware of those aspects of the content which will best represent the whole. He/she must reduce this content to a level which, in its essentials, is understandable to a child. This unambiguous (essential) form in which the content is presented is called an **elemental** and, in didactic pedagogics, a teacher's activity is described as reducing the content to the elemental (to its essentials). It is around this "simplified" content into which the problematic question is woven during the lesson.

3. ESTABLISHING A QUESTIONING ATTITUDE

If the elemental (content made accessible) is first determined, the unlocking (presenting) activity can be launched by continuing to build on the questioning attitude awakened in a child. The questioning attitude arises in terms of content which has caught his/her interest. Thus, there is a fusion of the objective content and

the subject or person. This simultaneous or double unlocking is the real beginning of a child's forming.

The content offered as an elemental awakens a child's interest and motivates him/her to want to know more about the whole matter. To be involved in the content is to be involved with reality. Sufficient interest awakens this questioning attitude, and a resulting willingness by a child to nullify existing ideas which previously were considered obvious or even commonplace to him/her. As for other opportunities, the unexpected is also responsible for arousing a questioning attitude. Anything about which a child begins to wonder arouses his/her curiosity and spurs him/her on to want to know more.

In whatever ways a questioning attitude arises, the fact remains that a problematic question, to some degree, always gives rise to tension in a child. The realization that he/she does not know, makes him/her feel insecure for a moment, but he/she is ready to search for an answer--although this also requires effort. This is the moment a teacher watches for with great patience. Van der Merwe (M. Ed. thesis, University of Pretoria, 1977) views this moment during a lesson as a **fruitful moment**; this contrasts with Copei and Klafki, who assert that the questioning attitude **emanates** from a fruitful moment. Be that as it may, a teacher tries to be prepared so he/she can begin the real activities of unlocking the content when this moment arises.

4. THE UNLOCKING ACTIVITIES

The unlocking occurs in terms of objectified content (content made object). The content which is raised during a lesson is not the matter itself, but a representation, reproduction, example, or exemplar of it. For example, the Leaning Tower of Pisa is a concrete reality located in Pisa, Italy. However, if a lesson is to be given about the Leaning Tower, the explication occurs in accordance with a representation, a print, a recording, etc.

A particular characteristic of the tower comes to the fore, i.e., that this tower is leaning, and follows certain natural laws (gravitational pull) in an exciting, provocative way. In this case, the elemental is in the particular aspect of this tower (which leans) in contrast to other towers which are upright (the general). When the general and the particular are present in the same case, didactically this is called

a representative case. In the case of the Leaning Tower, the elemental is in the particular, and the general (all structures must be perpendicular) falls outside it (Glogauer, 1967, p 135).

The unlocking activities are attuned either to a sudden moment of clear insight, or to a child gradually finding an answer(s) to his/her problematic question(s). Copei (1950, p 115) calls this moment, when insight breaks through, a fruitful moment. Van der Merwe refers to it as the "aha-experience". Many people place the two poles of the unlocking activities one after the other (i.e., the fruitful beginning and the fruitful implementing of these activities). As a result, they do not allow that the way to clear insights also requires challenging and difficult input from both a child and a teacher (Klafki, 1964, p 416).

When the insights dawn on a child, it is the first time he/she really has discovered, understood, and perceived the elemental. The content, which is made as easy and as accessible as possible for a learner, is now understood by him/her.

5. THE ELEMENTALS AND THE FUNDAMENTALS

By mastering the contents (or the elementals), a child acquires new insights. These new insights are called fundamentals. In fact, the perception of the bare elemental, in all its consequences, brings about the beginning of the fundamental.

A child has become enriched with new insights. He/she understands something which, moments before, he/she had not. We say that this event is **formative** because what he/she has newly acquired "forms", or becomes part of his/her entire being as a person. If it is a comparison which he/she can make, in the future he/she also can make other comparisons. For example, if the insight is that oppressing people can lead to revolution, from then on, he/she can think about the causes and effects of oppressing people. So also, the important principle of $1 + 1 = 2$ is the foundation on which the whole system of $n + 1$ is later based.

A child has mastered a new insight because he/she has not concentrated merely on its content or personal aspects, but rather he/she has personally encountered the matter itself in a unique, individual way. These results are described as **categorical forming**. Essentially, the lesson structure must be attuned to bringing about

the simultaneous opening of the matter [by a teacher] and opening the person [by him/herself] -- the so-called double unlocking -- to achieve the desired result, i.e., forming.

Finally, in the lesson structure, opportunities must be provided for the further application of the fundamentals (the formative insights). This means that the learner must use these acquired insights by applying them to all sorts of circumstances. Therefore, in the lesson structure, a child uses these fundamental insights to show that, under certain circumstances, he/she can provide answers. This is the end phase which is known as evaluation, and which really is a test of the success of categorical forming.

6. REFERENCES

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