

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PEDAGOGICAL 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, thus, it 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 is no uniformity or simple way of making history. Therefore, there are no real patterns in human creative activities, merely because human understanding of reality and, thus, its relationship with the world continually changes. 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 reflects these multiple lifestyles, as expressive forms and gestalts of its ways of being. But there continually are the reliefs [highlights] humans draw, which are directly represented in the *fundamentalia* [essentials] of their interpretations 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 are realms, and civilizations. Each period or civilization gives evidence of an approach to or interpretation of reality. Today these typifications are commonly referred to in science and in art. One needs only to think of "classical" and "baroque", in addition to "idealism" and

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“scholasticism”, by which a point of departure is indicated in the naming which also typifies a general philosophy of life. The name connected to the stream in art reflects a decided style with respect to works by which an 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 an approach to or interpretation of a person’s involvement with reality is typified.

In the history of science, as in art, there are many writings which 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 images 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 which have appeared in this science, especially during the past two centuries, merely because relatively radical changes have occurred in points of departure. By evaluating the effect of these changes, it is well to remember that each standpoint can do nothing other than explain a human being’s relation to reality, and that an educationist, each time, explains the same aspect of reality broached, i.e., 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 aspect of the person-world relationship in its essentials to also derive criteria by which the practice of

educating can be evaluated and fertilized. This (phenomenological) point of departure subscribes to the idea that the primary source of knowledge by which an experiential phenomenon such as educating can be described as it is in the educative situation, and the philosophy of life which 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 with contents, in the sense that these contents give rise to a definite thematizing of educating. Thus, the values which are part of 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 [in their primordial occurrence] . Thus, [here] educating cannot be realized without teaching, while the meaning of teaching is in educating. Hence, educating cannot be practiced outside the activities of teaching. The immaturity of a child is accentuated more strongly in a teaching situation than in any other educative activity. He/she cannot and does not know and must learn to know and command to be able to [eventually] display 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, thus, is a sensitive matter, considering that the profile drawn by the theoretical writing is closely related to the *premise* or hypothesis held about teaching itself. It also is in a close 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 are scanned in didactic practice. For this reason, the nature of the theoretical writing essentially influences the nature of the practice which, accordingly, is expected. A good illustration of this claim is Herbartian Didactics, and the Herbartian school.

For these reasons, a search for a point of departure for an authentic didactic theory also is necessarily 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 which, in each variation, is measured and evaluated in terms of its expectations (aims, effects, results, outcomes). Speculating is a foreign approach for [phenomenological] 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 itself. The history of didactic thinking is replete with examples of this point of departure. Perhaps the best example is the so-called school-projects, which 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, thus, 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 an educative context without a trained teacher or school being present. Schools and [trained] teachers are not fundamental givens in the lifeworld and, thus, are not acceptable as origins for understanding and explaining the activities which 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, is essentially 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 a search for a firm foundation for establishing a didactic theory, because teaching appears in such a great variety of terrains in the established

lifeworld. It is especially the diffusion of organized teaching which easily gives rise to persons, within their contexts, searching for the establishment of didactic activities. Indeed, there are plenty of examples of this. The most important deficiency which 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 an 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. Indeed, they are involved with teaching, and their focus in formulating matters such as aims and teaching strategies, are directed to teaching. The point of departure which is stated in the form of questions and/or hypotheses, however, involves the issue of *how* the teaching ought to be realized, and not on *what* teaching is. 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 or self-evident, 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), by which one's own involvement and attunement to reality are placed at the center. Mastering insights in 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, 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 itself appears in the lifeworld to

determine the context within which it appears as independently and separately knowable. Also, in this respect, there are epistemological, and [philosophical-] anthropological points of departure which 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 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 them (realm of the transcendent). +++[For the critical reader, I (G.D.Y.) am separating these several sentences because they are a post-phenomenological interpretation by Van der Stoep in terms of his Christian beliefs/philosophy of life. Phenomenology discloses that a philosophy of life is essential for educating but does not prescribe a specific one]. 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, which gives him/her a mandate, in the sense of a dependence on his/her Creator, and an existential disposition (sinfulness) about which he/she must change and remain changed by the unconditional acceptance of normative behaviors, and by which, in the first place, he/she comes to be influenced, as contents, in his/her educative practice. From this, it follows that a human being is a person who does not design his/her life as an extension of animals, and is not thrown into a readymade, or complete world. This incomplete mode of existence announces the fact that he/she is a being who educates, and is dependent on education (Langeveld, Oberholzer). The second is that a human being is not surrendered to his/her lifeworld, or his/her origins, but can rise above them 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 itself. Educating is and remains a phenomenon which 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. A child cannot even survive physically if his/her educators do not guarantee it.

As stated, this educating cannot occur in terms of nothing. Although the world is not a child’s destination, it remains his/her dwelling place, in the sense that it is the space within which he/she actualizes his/her life at a specific time. The world and its transcendences (meaning giving) are matters of contents. The contents of all facets of the lifeworld are and remain the perpetuation of the daily, as well as future existences of a child. The meanings are the landscape of the future. Life is meanings: to live implies attributing meaning. After consideration, educating is actualized by presenting, unlocking, interpreting the available contents. In other words, educating is realized 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 is realized 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 person’s 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 which flows from it.

1. The frame of reference for the aim, contents, and form of a didactic practice is described from within the original appearance of teaching itself. With this teaching freed from all the chatter, which has been the order of the day, since science has been written down, and consequently, didactic theory was often nothing more than the application of insights from a great variety of other sciences, and streams of

thought. To illustrate, one need not look further than the Herbartians, or the Psychology of Thinking. At the same time, this provides an opportunity to investigate a didactics which is true to educating as, indeed, it shows 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 from 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 is 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 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 are already many didacticians, especially young ones, who have empirically established this way of viewing fundamental didactic questions, among which are curriculum development in all its facets, technological support for teaching, and, 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 of paramount importance for describing and developing that view of what teaching is. 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. From this, educative reality is taken as the point of departure because teaching in educating is the most original manifestation of teaching in human existence. The reason for this point of view, firstly, is that educating is actualized in teaching and, secondly, that the meaning of [this original, primordial] teaching is found in educating. Various important consequences of this relationship have a direct bearing on reestablishing the unity of pedagogics within [the practice of] the school teaching context, as well as on bridging the gap between theory and practice.

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