

## CHAPTER SIX

### Retrospect

#### 6. RETROSPECT

The theory of the elemental and the fundamental in didactic theory and practice is disclosed and highlighted. Its relevance for the various part-perspectives of pedagogics is indicated. An account is 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 which have emerged during this study.

It is now evident what Drechsler means when he asserts that a person continually finds him/herself at the intersection with the world and reality. There is a continual appeal to him/her to participate in the world, and this implies a **meaningful participation by mastering contents**. For a child, mastering contents means he/she receives help which 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/her dialogue with it.

The didactic imperative is that the adult is remiss if he/she neglects or omits meeting a child, at least halfway, and unlocks contents for him/her in the most effective ways. By being adult, he/she is obligated to come to the child's assistance in his/her 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 based on its findings. And because teaching and educating are not actualized separately in practice, an accountable didactic theory must embrace the full impact of the unlocking so that the different resulting dividends can be understood and striven for. The possibility that a person can learn, understand, and be educated (formed) springs from mastering life

contents. Therefore, it is necessary and meaningful that didactic theory says to practice what the appropriate ways are to unlock contents for a child.

### **First group of questions**

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

The answers provided by this study are: the contents which figure as formative contents in a didactic situation come from the lifeworld as one finds them around him/her. 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 are not selected for presentation as formative material in the situation of unlocking. In the framework of schooling, there is a two-fold selection of contents. The first selection is the task of the curriculum expert who, from an educative ideal, views lifeworld contents and selects those lending themselves to formative teaching. He/she first asks him/herself what contents a child ought to master in a subject if he/she is to reach adulthood, and he/she then justifies his/her 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 while considering the learning aim (of the lesson), and to determine, by abstraction, the essential moments of these contents. Thus, he/she 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 is already entered.

### **Second group of questions**

How can contents be made accessible to a child? Who must find the essential elements and order them? Are there 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 illuminated the fact that there is a rich variety of forms of appearance of the elemental, which range from a typical principle, an exemplar, a classic case, principle, law, or definition, and many more.

It is stressed that contents themselves are not child-accessible, but they must be made so. The adult who is going to do the unlocking must continually decide what the essential elements of the contents are, and in what ways he/she 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 the pedagogic criteria for a situation of encounter also hold for a didactic situation. Despite everything previously said about the elemental as formative contents, the child's involvement and authentic making (the contents) his/her own must occur before forming or becoming will. If a child rejects the unlocking, the contents unlocked cannot contribute to his/her 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 illuminated, i.e., 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 are for a child. Scheuerl has shed light on this aspect with a pronouncement which should always be kept in mind when unlocking contents, i.e., 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/she is unlocking the contents. Even if a child feels inclined to be involved in the relationship which is established, unlocking above his/her level of ability cannot lead him/her to

effectively make the unlocked contents his/her own. A precondition for a double-sided unlocking of the elemental is that it be unlocked on a level which makes it possible for a child to acquire a cognitive grasp of that elemental content. [The other side is that the child must unlock or open him/herself to these contents].

#### Fourth group of questions

Does a child learn more or less than what is unlocked? Must the unlocker follow a 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 quality and a certain impact. If the unlocking occurs without the necessary care that a child must participate, there is already the possibility that he/she profits little from the unlocking. Further, the elemental must be chosen to be appropriate for a child, otherwise he/she 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 good chance of launching a successful unlocking. According to Klafki, unlocking which leads to a fruitful moment allows the fundamental to appear. It is by such an unlocking that a child **learns** 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/she him/herself can advance toward future situations, and he/she even has mastered methods, as fundamental equipment for cultivating reality. A fundamental, which 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" which are 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 his/her intentionality being directed and a change in his/her 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 must plan a purposeful path and, therefore, can meet the demands of successful teaching. At least, the guidance must 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/her to functionalize the acquired contents [i.e, helping a child transform the elemental into a fundamental].

In his/her uniqueness as a person, a human being, however, is not completely fathomable and knowable. The self-understanding, which 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 these levels and in all these directions is not possible. Here, the educator stands perplexed before the mysteries of life itself, but he/she can take satisfaction in knowing that he/she was instrumental in stimulating what Pestalozzi calls a "million-fold of slumbering powers". It is significant that an adult's guidance does 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 which eventually actualize his/her forming and his/her 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 him/herself?

The adult is a precondition for establishing an educative teaching situation and, thus, he/she 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/she is more than merely this; he/she is an adult who not only is an able unlocker, he/she is also the carrier and the representative of a form of living.

It is indicated that, not only is it important **that** an adult be involved in a teaching situation, but it also is noted **how** he/she ought to be involved in it. In the first place, he/she is a representative of the [adult] lifeworld, knower of life contents, and

carrier of a form of living. He/she can reduce life contents to elementals and is a good judge of the child to whom he/she feels obligated, and to whose appeals he/she responds. He/she must be able to open him/herself to a child and can only be a sort of knowledge catalyzer by moving from situation to situation, and he/she is not untouched by the outcome. By participating in the act of teaching, the adult is also formed again. He/she is the person who must keep the elemental-fundamental path open so a child can encounter the contents until he/she acquires insight and self-understanding.

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

As an achieving consciousness, a child experiences and learns outside the situation (with an adult). It is not as if learning were a light which switches on by joining in and shuts off after functionalizing the acquired contents. A child learns continually, but it is in teaching that he/she is formed. The teaching situation is a precondition for his/her forming, becoming, and educating. A child also experiences and learns without an adult; however, without the adult, he/she 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 the practice of teaching, neither the elemental nor the fundamental have validity, or the right to exist. The first question is answered redundantly, i.e., "elemental" is the term used to describe contents which have been made accessible. There is a line of

thought which merely views the elemental as the focal point, or entrance to a larger structure of reality, and which, 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/her 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/her own does not have a simple effect. The fundamental is not only acquired contents, it is also illuminating (categorical) contents, and 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 which is not simple". For Klafki, 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 the framework of didactic practice) there certainly are contents which 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 this research.

Since the elemental is "the simple which 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. Indeed, there are successful and less successful introductions to contents. Reasons for stronger or weaker unlocking vary according to the nature of the learning contents, the teacher's ability to abstract the elemental, his/her ways of unlocking, the child's intellectual disposition, the child's potentiality to make the contents his/her 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/her ability and directedness to anticipating. Unlocking, in which a child participate, decidedly can 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 pathic-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 important and significant for all teaching and, therefore, the hope is that this is not the last thing we read or hear about the elemental and the fundamental.