

SUMMARY

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ELEMENTAL AND FUNDAMENTAL IN DIDACTIC THEORY AND PRACTICE

A person is always at the intersection of him/herself and a world/reality with which he/she is in continual dialogue. There is a field of tension between person and reality, and he/she must continually break away from a position of rest to conquer those aspects of reality which will enable him/her to give meaning to his/her life.

Conquering a world (his/her own) and reality (surrounding him/her) can only occur through mastering contents. Conquering a world and reality without contents is unthinkable, because this implies an insight into and understanding of something which is without structure and devoid of all phenomena (Kant).

A person is a being who educates, and who is committed to education. Without educating and teaching, a person cannot live and exist, in the true sense of these words. A child is dependent on an adult for support on his/her way to adulthood. This help implies not only tending to his/her biological and vital needs but also helping him/her to master lifeworld contents, by which he/she gradually enters a more advanced dialogue with reality. A child continually appeals to the adult to guide him/her in learning contents, and the adult is remiss if he/she does not meaningfully answer this appeal.

Didactics is the human science which deals with teaching and learning. Among other things, it investigates contents and ways of presenting them to a child. For a child, contents of reality can appear diffuse and unordered, and it is the didactician's task to show how these contents figure in the teaching situation so that a child can grasp them, i.e., how these contents can be reduced to their essentials and, thus, be made accessible to him/her.

In this study, it is shown that there is a multiplicity of ways contents can be reduced to their essentials (“elemental-ized” or simplified) and placed within a child’s conceptual horizon, and it also addresses the effects which mastering contents (fundamentals) have on him/her.

The concept “elemental” expresses the concept which, in German, is known as “das Elementare”. It is the essentials of the contents which make them accessible to a child, and not what is merely simple or elementary. It is indicated that elementals must be chosen with a child’s level of becoming, or attainment in mind. Thus, the elementals and their interrelationships provide a basis for differentiated (e.g., individualized) teaching.

The effects on a child of contents mastered, also are pursued under the concept of the “fundamental” (German: “das Fundamentale”). The line of thought in the discussion of this concept is that, in a fruitful didactic unlocking (presentation), it is possible for a child to achieve considerably more insight than merely an understanding of the factual. He/she gains insight into reality itself and even into means of dealing with reality.

There is a path from the elemental to the fundamental. This path should always be kept in mind by a teacher and never be blocked or obstructed. Further, as an essential of the contents, the elemental should not figure in a didactic situation merely for its own sake but rather to facilitate a pupil making the fundamental his/her own. The elemental has an unlocking function, and facilitates presenting the contents to a child, but the elemental is valid didactically only in so far as it is transformed into a fundamental by a child.

Some students of pedagogics refer to the impetus to move from the elemental to the fundamental as a transition from the subject matter (contents) to the person (living).

The elemental-fundamental approach, if used appropriately, leads to effective teaching culminating in genuine learning—a didactic practice, which constitutes the most meaningful of all human activities. This implies that contents which have been mastered, become part of a child’s intellectual possessions by means of which

he/she can encounter future lifeworld situations. By functionalizing these mastered contents, a child eventually develops his/her own lifestyle.