CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS ON THE LESSON STRUCTURE

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If one does not first attend to the primary task of didactic theory, it probably will be impossible to appropriately differentiate and interpret the basic relationships within a lesson structure. The problems inherent in these relationships are broadly understood and in a variety of ways. Briefly, the task of **didactic theory** is to describe the essentials of teaching. This means that the didactician's task is to determine what is knowable and describable about teaching as such. Without this, insight into basic didactic practice really is not possible because understanding the essential nature of teaching is needed for a teacher to really account for what he is doing other than by referring to his own experience. Granted, experience is the main and original source of knowledge about what teaching really is; still, the facts derived from experience not only have to be formulated and organized but also interpreted. Understandably, such **interpretation** is the first step didactic theory takes toward discovering what a lesson structure might mean.

Next, didactic theory has to investigate **how** teaching occurs in primordial (informal) life situations. Research into this aspect of reality offers the possibility of considering in advance and anticipating the practice of teaching in formal situations such as schools. The theoretical reason for this standpoint is that, in addition to its origin, teaching is an experiential matter that is actualized within the boundaries of general human possibilities, and, as such, this experience cannot exceed itself in teaching. For the practice of teaching as we know it in school, this implies that the circumstances of a school situation cannot exceed what is at one's disposal in the primordial life world. One can refine, combine, mold, etc. but the data of the life world essentially cannot be exceeded.

Didactic theory next investigates **what** it is that needs to be taught. Obviously, this is a matter of **content** which, as far as the school is

concerned, results in curriculum theorizing and planning. This is an important matter for didactic practice because without content the aims of teaching are unattainable.

In didactic theory, the question of **aims** has two facets. The first is a general, comprehensive, remote aim which is related to educating (bringing up) a child. This generally is known in a variety of ways (e.g., to bring a child up to adulthood, to awaken in him a love for his language, to help him become a useful citizen). It is obvious that this type of aim is of little value for the teaching situation because it is vaguely formulated and lies far in the future. Teaching requires a much more definite aim to initiate the school situation. Therefore, particular or immediate aims are more meaningful for a didactic theory because didactic practice is directed by them.

From these particulars, didactic theory builds a **structure** (or structures) by which formal instruction can be planned. This is called a **lesson structure**. It includes all didactic constructions of formal teaching among which are didactic models, school plans, and pronouncements about implementing practical lesson plans. The significance of a lesson structure is that essentially it makes a teaching plan possible. Viewed more closely, this means that any didactic theory results in a lesson structure of some kind. One can verify this conclusion, which might sound categorical, in the history of teaching, e.g., with Herbart or Montessori. On the other hand, one can investigate the matter by considering the structure of some modern tendencies such as, e.g., programmed instruction. Herbart's so-called learning stages and a linear framed teaching program both are lesson structures of a sort. One does not need to agree with the above to recognize that they represent constructions according to which teaching can be planned and executed.

In light of these few introductory remarks, any lesson structure, as such, is a thought construction representing what is deduced from the data made available by basic didactic research and that their didactic possibilities for establishing a teaching situation have to be formulated, ordered and interpreted. Reality, as such, does not offer a lesson structure as a construction or a compiled unity. Any lesson structure acquires its coherence from the didactician's thinking. Hence, the degree to which the structure itself is valid needs to be verified in practice.

From the above, it is relatively obvious that for anything identified as a lesson structure, careful attention has to be given to four things. These are its **aim**, its **form**, its **content** and its **modalities.** The emphasis and focus on these four matters might differ; also there might be differences in ordering and in priorities. However, essentially the lesson structure involves the relationships among these four components. To provide an orientation, a few general remarks are made about them.

In any situation, the **aim** always has a guiding function. This holds for a scientific investigation, for manufacturing a particular product, for organizing a sporting event and also for designing a lesson. In each case, the aim guides the direction of and the nature of the activities engaged in, the people involved in the matter, etc. Without a carefully and precisely formulated aim, an activity acquires a haphazard or casual character and its outcome also is left to chance. Such a casual standpoint cannot hold true for teaching for the simple reason that the teacher has to be able to give an account of the effect he intends to achieve by his instruction. Therefore, the entire matter of aims has a strictly guiding function in a construction such as a lesson structure and, unless there are aims, the person designing one thing or another cannot make authentic pronouncements about his design. Without aims, the other aspects of the lesson structure (i.e., its form, content and modalities) also have no relevance. It really is unimaginable that anyone could involve himself in a construction such as a lesson structure without being properly read and practically skilled in setting aims irrespective of whatever scheme or structure is followed in relation to them. The significance of any design, hence also a didactic design, is contained in and formulated by the aim.

In a construction such as a lesson structure, **content** is of central value since it is directly related to the aim. Because one can formulate different aims regarding the same content, the relationship between aim and content is extremely important. This is because the aim determines if the content to be presented is relevant. For example, if the sonata is a theme for music instruction, one can formulate different aims within the framework of the concept "sonata". This formulation is directly related to the pupils' foreknowledge, the reduction of the content, its exercise, control and evaluation, to mention only some aspects of a lesson. As a coherent structure, it is assumed that relevant content in the lesson situation will allow the aim to be attained. Consequently, as

far as the aim is concerned, one can distinguish between content as end and content as means. When the focus is on the content as such, it is the aim. When the content is introduced to attain another aim, it is a means. These are not separable but represent only distinguishable aspects of the activities regarding the aim. In a pure educative situation, the content usually is a means for attaining an aim regarding the child's becoming rather than an aim in itself. In an instructional situation, this often is reversed because the instructionally defined knowledge, as such, is assumed to result in a certain mobility of the pupils regarding the matter presented.

An important matter regarding the content is **reducing** it to its elementals (essentials). Without going into detail, as far as the lesson structure is concerned, it is important to indicate that reducing the content to its **elementals** involves the theme as a whole from which the teacher then can select relevant matters related to attaining his aim. What is of significance for the structure itself is the designer's ability to know and choose those facts that will convey insight into solving the lesson problem. Here, if the aim degenerates into generalities, vagueness and indefiniteness, this really means not being in a position to select, on the basis of a general reduction, relevant data for designing the lesson. When analysis of meaning is dealt with it is assumed that at the end of the presentation the pupils can analyze a simple or complex meaning. To do this, they need to know certain things. Thus, in this connection, the question is a simple, "What must they know and what must they be able to do after the lesson is presented?"

The question of the **form** of a lesson arises in the lesson structure in a way similar to the way the content appears. The form of a lesson is a matter of modes. As such, it is directly related to the teaching aim, that is, to that aspect of the aim where the teacher's own contribution to the lesson situation is formulated. The fundamental starting point (in deciding on the form of a lesson) is how to make particular content available to the pupils or to unlock it for them. These contents can be grasped in a particular way or be presented in a definite form such as **discussion** (narrating), **play** (dramatizing), **assignment** (giving homework) and **example** (demonstrating). The form the teacher chooses determines and limits in several ways the didactic possibilities he allows himself. This also influences his choice of teaching methods (lecture, question-and-answer, etc.), his choice of methodological principles (inductive, deductive) and the ways he orders the content

(chronological, symbiotic, linear, etc.). The form of a lesson is a matter of didactic practice and instructional skill. The form is the dish on which the food (lesson content) is served. Without knowing these forms there is no knowledge of one's teaching possibilities. Refinement of a lesson form, therefore, implies a refinement of teaching possibilities. The choices the teacher exercises in this connection give real form to the role he takes in the lesson situation and clearly delineates his initiative. Consequently, a study of the lesson form in all of its possibilities and particularities is as important to the teacher as is knowledge of his subject. Without knowledge of the lesson form he merely works on the basis of his intuition which, by chance, can be good or poor. The fact that he has a definitely formulated learning aim in view forces him to account for how he intends to achieve it. After making a few comments about the lesson phases, this topic will be returned to.

With the didactic **modalities** (i.e. didactic principles, modes of learning, teaching- and learning-aids), the focus is on the interaction between teacher and pupil with the aim of attaining the learning aim. One also can think of the modalities as the level on which the lesson design is put into operation. Here it is clear that especially the nuances in the teacher-pupil situation are brought to the fore by making an accurate study of the position each of them takes regarding the learning content itself. This is why, here, so much consideration is given to guided- and self-actualization (i.e., principles of actualization) within the context of the question of stimulating the modes of learning and implementing (teaching and learning) aids for optimal learning.

One can state from experience that the positions of the pupil and teacher continually change with respect to the content introduced as the **lesson** moves from **phase** to phase (from actualizing foreknowledge to stating the lesson problem to presenting the content, etc.), in formulating the learning aim and in evaluating the learning effect. To mention but one example, the situation always changes when the lesson phase called actualizing foreknowledge is compared with the phase called actualizing (controlling) the lesson content, where there is practicing **of** and practicing **to** insight. Consequently, the didactic modalities are a direct bridge between planning the lesson phases and reducing the content, within the comprehensive framework provided by the formulated aims. Briefly, in planning the didactic modalities, there is consideration of the ways the lesson can be set in motion and how the learning aim

can be operationalized. The result of the planning that gives rise to a lesson structure is a specific lesson design. A lesson structure offers the practitioner nothing more than a blueprint or plan for converting the basic relationships of the lesson situation into a lesson plan. Thus, there are general data that have validity for designing a lesson. These data, in one way or another, always are particularized in constructing and justifying the reciprocal relationships among the facets of a lesson structure. Therefore, the lesson structure, as such, is a skeleton. The teacher gives it flesh and blood by anticipating a future situation in preparing his instruction, and, in light of his own skills, by expanding this blueprint into a complete design that can be implemented in a specified practical way. For this reason, the design itself is the point of contact between didactics and subject didactics in that subject didactic theory begins its contemplations with the facts of a lesson structure that have to be planned and organized with regard to a particular situation. Thus, one hardly can talk of a general design because each lesson is situation-bound and has to have a particularized teaching and learning aim. Herein also lies the significance of the lesson phases, beginning with actualizing foreknowledge and ending with evaluating the teaching and learning results.

The validity of any lesson structure can be tested only by whether the lesson design can be put into practice in accordance with the principles contained in that lesson structure. Therefore, knowledge of the lesson structure will not guarantee the success of a practice unless it is interpreted as a fundamental situation from which teaching a subject is initiated in terms of particular aims.