

DIDACTIC PEDAGOGICS IN PERSPECTIVE

Inaugural Address

by

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With the offering of didactics as a subject area for teacher education, it is essential that this part discipline of pedagogics be placed in the right perspective. A study of education in which didactics is a subdivision is necessary for the prospective teacher to be made aware of his vocational responsibility. Part of this responsibility involves helping the becoming child discover the sense and meaning of his world and to develop his abilities and potentialities so that he can assume his life task with proficiency and responsibility. If the teacher can awaken the child's trust in human existence and can appeal to him to become the person he ought to be, the right attitude can be awakened for developing his potential abilities. Further, if the teacher's disposition toward work is carried by a motive for service, an intention will be awakened by which teaching becomes a meaningful intervention between the adult and the not-yet adult.

Didactics continually confronts us with the question of how these proposed objectives can be realized. In what way should a child be guided to the awareness of the character of obligation, the demands of propriety and the acceptance of responsibility that are contained in life? How can he be helped to meaningfully assimilate his opportunities for contributing to being human? Teaching is not merely an intellectual activity that aims at examination results; it involves effective teaching as a form of influencing behavior that will have a lasting meaning for personality and character. Therefore, it is necessary that any teaching methods or procedures be pedagogically accountable.

1. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

To avoid conceptual confusion, it is necessary to clearly define some concepts that are the technical vocabulary of pedagogics. Then we can understand each other and coordinated pedagogic thinking can

be pursued. Since one is not dealing here with the exactness of the natural sciences, in the area of education, there is not always a consensus among experts regarding the definition of concepts. Consensus is not easily attained and, as Perquin says, because educators are still in search of pedagogic thought, one finds that all writers do not define concepts in the same way. There is a need for greater consensus and clarity with respect to the use of concepts in the area of pedagogics.

1.1 Pedagogics (The study of educating)

This is the human science that studies the phenomenon of educating (bringing up, rearing). The data gathered are systematized and interpreted, and this is a source of nourishing the practice of teaching. In English, the comprehensive concept “education” is used to include teaching, upbringing and the study of educating [also schooling and learning of any variety--G.Y.]. Consequently, there is a need for the distinctive use of the term “pedagogics”. The pedagogician is the authority in the domain of pedagogics. He can enjoy a lofty theoretical and academic reputation without necessarily being a successful educator.

1.2 Educating (Upbringing)

Educating is the conscious intervention of an adult with a not-yet adult to purposefully help him on his way to adulthood with the expectation that he (the educand) will attain independence and give preference to the norms that are held before him. As a process of elevating or improving, this means that the child is not left to haphazard formative influences but that the teacher (adult) intervenes in order to give his development a particular course by encouraging some actions and by discouraging others. Thus, there is mention of being directed to a higher aim. This cannot be forced because norms, as a prevailing authority, have to be accepted, acquired and emulated through personal choice. Educating is limited to the tender years and is concluded by approximately 18 years when the educator becomes redundant and the educand accepts greater independence and responsibility.

1.3 Teaching

Teaching is directed at making facts known, at learning skills and at acquiring intellectual insights. In doing this, it necessarily takes acceptable values into account or aims at conscience forming.

Not all teaching is educative and, besides, an able teacher might fail as an educator. Yet it is important that teaching and educating not be separated from each other.

1.4 Didactics

Teaching and the art of instructing are the domain of didactics, which also is known as the science of teaching. Reflection about the teacher, the pupil, learning material, methods, aids, school, educative circumstances, etc. are of importance to didactics. The didactician is the authority who studies this part discipline of pedagogics.

2. THE PLACE AND ROLE OF DIDACTICS IN PEDAGOGICS

Didactics is one of five* part disciplines of pedagogics that together form a unity and are not separated from each other:

Fundamental Pedagogics (Philosophy of Education) investigates “all educational questions of a theoretical, normative, subjective [i.e., anthropological--G.Y.] and fundamental nature.” This part discipline, for example, studies the aims of the educative intervention in which support has to be given to a child.

Empirical Pedagogics (Psychopedagogics, Educational Psychology) investigates especially the empirical facts and data regarding the becoming child with his needs, potentialities and limitations.

Sociopedagogics studies the child in his attachment to family and community and related matters and questions.

* Orthopedagogics is a sixth, but it is not on the same level as the others in that it uses the categories, findings, of the five mentioned disciplines to identify and correct DYSFUNCTIONAL educative situations. [G.Y.].

Historical Pedagogics tries to fathom the sense of the historical development of the theories and practices of teaching and educating. Without this historical connection, the sense of the direction of the present to the future cannot be grasped.

Didactic Pedagogics or the science of teaching searches for ways and methods which can be followed to attain the educational aim. Didactics reflects on this in light of the data made available through the other part disciplines. Coetzee calls this practical education because it is here that the practice of teaching and of educating meet.

These five part disciplines should always be viewed as an indivisible whole with the pedagogic as the point of departure. Absolutizing any one of them will shift the accent off center. Thus, the application of methods, plans, techniques, aids, etc. have to always be pedagogically founded and accountable. If this is not the case, the application of methods and techniques can result merely in training, coaching and conditioning. A degree of overlap can be expected among the different disciplines of pedagogics but one should always try to let the accent fall on that aspect which serves as the point of departure for the subject under consideration.

Didactic pedagogics is that discipline of pedagogics whose terrain is the investigation of the nature of providing purposeful assistance to a child in order guide him on the path to adulthood and thus to bring him up. This is accomplished by the content, methods and aids used so the child can learn. In this way, and with the help of the purposefully supportive effort of the educator, the possibilities of action are revealed to the child through teaching. Through educative action, the educator presents something to the child to learn and to attribute value (e.g., his cultural inheritance). He will accept the meaningfulness of this content if the educator has addressed him and if the encounter between them is meaningful. Here learning means more than committing to memory or intellectual understanding. It means accepting a norm or principle of decisive importance for the learner's way of behaving. This is accomplished by purposive intervention aimed at encouraging particular ways of behaving and by giving a particular course or

direction to the child's becoming; in this connection, a study of methodology will help determine the nature of pedagogic action. However, didactics does not arrive at this point by fixed formulas.

In its turn, didactic pedagogics can be divided into general didactics, particular (or subject matter) didactics, methodology and orthodidactics. We will explicate briefly why these subdivisions seem to be necessary.

2.1 General Didactics

The terrain of didactics is limited to the purposeful, systematic guidance of a child over a long period of time by experts using procedures intended for this. General didactics deals with the theoretical aspect of teaching and reflects on the circumstances under which effective didactic action can occur. Perquin describes didactics as the "theory of teaching".

The teacher's actions in the classroom are in all respects viewed as part of the child's total educating and becoming. If the teaching situation in the classroom is viewed as an isolated incident, the educational ideal becomes lost. All learning is not dependent on deliberate teaching; even so, the child should not be left to haphazard learning experiences.

In order for the child to be able to effectively participate in life, it is expected that he will accept and live by the norms and standards exemplified to him by the teacher. Thus, the school provides life contents in terms of which he can orient himself. Consequently, didactics reflects on the nature and scope of these life contents. The didactic situation is where this orientation to life occurs. Therefore, it is important that didactics study this situation thoroughly.

The didactic situation is comprised of teacher, pupil and learning content in a close relationship of interaction and interdependence which are in continual accord with the aim of the teaching event. General didactics broaches the teaching intention through the relationships among teacher, pupil and learning content (where the learning content is the theme of the dialogue which is aimed at the child becoming adult).

To find answers to the questions originating in a teaching situation, didactics necessarily borrows from the knowledge made available by the other part disciplines of pedagogics. This is necessary to insure that didactic procedures remain accountable in terms of the general demands of pedagogics.

2.2 Particular or Subject Didactics

General didactics leads to particular or subject didactics that is anchored in and influenced by general didactics. The primary difference between them is that subject didactics continually investigates and proposes practical ways and means for accomplishing the aims of general didactics. In the practical teaching situation, the focus is on a particular subject area. Subject didactics considers the presentation of a specific subject in which a general principle such as, e.g., experimenting, is applied in a specific subject area. While subject didactics involves general matters, methodology attends to the particulars of presenting the subject. Thus, there aren't clear separations among general didactics, subject didactics and methodology; they are interrelated and interdependent.

Basically, learning can be viewed as a way of going out to reality and in modern pedagogics this is referred to as the child constituting a personal life world. The teacher continually presents reality to the child with the hope that he will react to it meaningfully. Here, the child is directly involved with life and creates a personal life world for himself. When he has assimilated the particular religious, moral, social, economic and other principles of the learning content, he has oriented himself to life reality. Through a variety of subjects, he becomes acquainted with different dimensions of reality and has the opportunity to construct, in due course, a hierarchy of values and priorities. The teacher is the initiator of didactic activities and how the didactic situation develops depends on what demands he places on his pupils.

An additional aspect covered by subject didactics is how the teacher explains his field of study, his approach to this task and his plan of action. Here general didactic principles are applied in the form of

specific didactic practice. Fundamental principles such as individualization, authority, freedom, activity are the primary ones applied in subject or particular didactics. Further, there are a variety of methods and techniques from which to choose or which can be integrated with each other. Particular didactics has to describe these possibilities for teaching.

In subject didactics, ordering and arranging the learning material is of great importance. The learning material can be presented following different patterns or procedures, e.g., concentric, symbiotic, chronological and how it is arranged is important for individualizing and programming it. With his particular aims in view, the teacher, in compliance with the general principles, now takes into account the teaching possibilities of the learning material, methods, aids and arrangement in order to attain the best results with his particular lesson structure or lesson plan. It is the teacher's task to digest, evaluate and then use all of the information available to him about the situation of his particular subject area.

2.3 Methodology

The Greek word *methodos* means the "way", i.e., the way or procedure to follow in order to attain a particular aim. When a method is considered, it is assumed that the aim has already been chosen and that its attainability has been determined. Methodology describes a particular guideline for achieving a particular aim and in the case of subject methodology it is directed to a particular subject matter area. The teacher knowingly anticipates general teaching procedures such as demonstrating, questioning, experimenting but their application to such subjects as Chemistry and Geography will differ. Thus, general methodology has to be interpreted in terms of subject-directed methodology since a teaching method is determined directly by the nature of the learning material. General and specific methodology both address the question of how a particular teaching situation should be implemented. When a teaching methodology is planned, it is necessary to take into account the circumstances of the situation when working out a plan of action.

There is a danger that methods can become inflexible recipes and thus lose touch with the underlying didactic principles. It is essential that a teacher see the connection between didactic principles, which are directed at the aim of adulthood, and methods, which provide an immediate, concrete and real contribution to attaining that aim.

In applying methodology, the teacher looks for positive and meaningful ways to organize his teaching practice. To accomplish this, he has to think of ways and methods that will allow the learning content to make a lasting impression on the pupil. There is no doubt that the methods used by the teacher will influence in particular ways the teaching and learning activities. The teacher should insure that the methods link up with the subject he is presenting in such a way that the pupil can acquire adequate knowledge and control of his subject area. Using a particular method should not be a matter of routine. Rigid recipes should not be used and the methods should continually be adapted and adjusted to the pre-established aim. The teacher has full responsibility for what takes place in the classroom and, in this light, the methods have to be chosen and planned in responsible ways.

2.4 Orthodidactics

When the didactic event goes wrong for one or another reason, the didactician has to deduce what has given rise to the difficulty and make recommendations for neutralizing and eliminating the factors restraining the teaching/learning event. This aspect of didactics is known as orthodidactics. Remedial teaching is part of orthodidactics just as methodology is part of didactics, and it also should be viewed against a pedagogic background. A learning difficulty is the joint effect of all restraining factors in a teaching situation and often there are a number of deeper-seated problems. Solving these problems is not limited only to the teaching situation but rather pedagogics extends much wider and permeates almost all facets of life.

Dealing with learning difficulties is significant to the didactician since in order to help with learning problems, he has to re-establish

a perspective on life. To be able to help pupils in the variety of problem situations that arise, orthodidactic diagnosis is essential. After the nature, extent and origin of the learning problem are determined, orthodidactic therapy in the form of remedial teaching can help the child overcome his problems. As initiator of the didactic event, the teacher has a key position in dealing with learning problems.

3. TERTIARY DIDACTICS (Post-secondary teaching)

There was a time when institutions of higher education paid little attention to the science of teaching and the view held was that lecturing, in itself, was the right course to follow for teaching to be scientifically based. With the increase in the number of students and also their rate of failure, along with the development of modern technology, gradually the idea emerged that much could be done to improve the effectiveness of teaching in “higher education.” During the ensuing years, this dimension of didactics emerged and many tertiary institutions now are researching this issue.

A problem at all institutions of higher education is first-year failures or dropouts. This problem is seen to be of such importance that UNESCO launched a worldwide study of it.

Lecturers who have not been specifically trained to teach at the tertiary level are often hired. The able academician is selected without considering his ability to instruct, and a good teacher at the primary or secondary school level is not necessarily a good teacher at the tertiary level.

The development of teaching technology has occurred so quickly, is so widely received and is so far-reaching in nature that it has become necessary to train lecturers in implementing a great variety of aids. Tertiary didactics embraces a study of the deliberate and systematic presentation of knowledge, and it includes theory as well as practice. Here, general didactics has relevance for the science of instruction and the purposeful forming of the student while subject didactics is attuned to a particular subject area.

4. CONSERVATISM AND PROGRESSIVISM

During this century, there has been a gradual renovation whereby the traditional school has acquired a richer program. Sometimes there is an inclination to reject everything from the past and to welcome the new without investigating whether the renovation entails an improvement. Thus, didactics also has to deal with the problem of conservatism and progressivism. The one leads to stagnation, the other to running wild. Here, as elsewhere, the skill is to distinguish between absolute standards and relative values. Conservatism can lead to absolutizing the relative while progressivism can lead to relativizing the absolute. It is possible for the progressive tendency to strive for the new to such a degree that even abiding values are doubted and thrown overboard. The younger generation regards the new as more useful and thus better than the old.

The question is, given our quickly changing world, can a retrospective view of the history of didactics be of any value to us? It is maintained that our contemporary situation is so unique and peculiar that the past can contribute but little to didactic study. The task of the modern school is essentially so different that the normative character of the past has lost its value and has degenerated into a useless traditionalism. However, no dividing line can be drawn between the past and the present. The past has a profound influence on the present and the future. Therefore, there has to be a meaningful continuation of the past through the present into the future. Didactics of the past can still serve as the fertile ground and soil for renovation. It is a problem for the educator to retain the good, the true and the meaningful from the past without stagnating. To achieve a balance between the conservative and progressive approaches to teaching, a reassessment is required of the traditional as well as the modern ways by which our youth ought to be guided or accompanied. The choice of learning material, methods and aids all have to be accountable as didactic interventions which lead the child to a way of living by which he eventually acts as a responsible, independent adult.

5. THEORY AND PRACTICE

One of the problems experienced in pedagogics is maintaining a healthy balance between theory and practice. There is a temptation to stress one of these aspects at the expense of the other and the question is how to maintain a balance. Theoretical reflections on problems arising from practice and on ways theory can serve practice are necessary; therefore, a dialogue between theory and practice is necessary. Pedagogics has to keep up with the latest developments and assimilate the information made known by sciences auxiliary to pedagogics (e.g., psychology, medicine).

Pedagogics, however, is a practical science and often will be called upon to solve all kinds of problems in scientific ways and thus give guidance to the practice of educating. There is room for the view that the task of pedagogics is to reflect on problems of concern, express the results and bring them to the attention of the practice of teaching, without necessarily being prescriptive.

6. DIDACTICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Teaching theory, teaching practice and a view of life are closely interrelated. Didactics is not merely descriptive, it is normative; this influences not only the factual content being taught but also the values which lie hidden in the content. Thus, the aim of teaching and educating (and, therefore, teaching practice) will be influenced by the educator's philosophy of life. The aim of educating is defined by the aim of life and, therefore, the educator's view of life will influence his view of educating.

The view of life, as the total of notions about what is valuable in life, has a certain obligatory character with a normative influence and which influences the entire scope of human activities and this includes didactic work. The educator with a religiously oriented view of life accepts that this not only sets requirements for his pedagogic interventions but that it will permeate all aspects of life.

A philosophy of life and the compilation of the curriculum and syllabus also are connected. All nations accept the desirability of a core program of cultural content that is purposefully presented for forming a unique national culture. Just as all nations have their own view of life which makes living meaningful for its members, so

our view of life is assimilated into our teaching policies and is embodied in our types of schools, school organization and teaching methods.

Teaching as a whole has to be directed to a child's harmonious development and becoming adult, and it is the love and dedication of the teacher that awakens and strengthens the child's belief in the authority of the norms exemplified. In the encounter between teacher and pupil in the educative situation, one acquires the noblest forms of striving to be human when the teacher accepts the authority of the greatest Educator.

7. CONCLUSION

With this, the terrain of didactic study is delimited and it is realized that didactic insight can only be acquired when all dimensions of pedagogics are studied. Although the findings of pedagogics and didactics are general, those of educating, teaching and methodology are more particular in nature. Educating and teaching are applied to a unique child in a particular milieu and, therefore, the procedure has to be purposeful and specific. Consequently, with the necessary founding in pedagogics, we can move from the general to the specific and thus to didactics which is allowed to claim its rightful place as a part discipline of pedagogics.

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