

On Curriculum, Bildung and the Dialogue Seminar

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ABSTRACT

A teacher is in a sense a guide that points the way. By following the signs students are lead towards a goal. Obviously the students need to believe in their hearts that the signs are point-ing correctly and will take them to a destination worth while. Finding the correct signs is ef-fective pedagogy. It requires two way communication and a teacher that constantly wants to learn more about the art of sign design. We begin this paper with a brief overview of the his-tory of education, and focus particularly on the difference between the American-Saxon cur-riculum and the German Bildung (Didactic). We also describe the Dialogue Seminar as a means to enhance Bildung and teacher development and to enrich the educational process and teaching profes-sion.

Keywords: Curriculum, bildung, research on teaching, dialogue seminar

1. Introduction

“A positive school culture has been found to be associated with higher student motivation and achievement, improved teacher collaboration, and improved attitudes of teachers towards their job (Stol & Smith, 1995)”

Globalisation is widely understood to be a market driven concept and, in today’s global economy, prosperity depends on scientific and technological strength. One might state that education and training have increasingly gained in importance and are today a major industry in their own. Education however still remains a privilege unobtainable for many, though since the education itself has become increasingly commercialized and it is being marketed through advertisement like any other product, the quality is also under the loupe. Questions arise on how to provide the best possible education for the paying people. One important aspect of offering a highly competitive and qualitative education is of course related to the teachers providing the lectures. [3] It is here that such notions as pedagogy and didactics make sense. As a teacher possessing a great amount of knowledge and mastering ones topic is of paramount importance and the very material of work, though this is but one of the ingredients for success.

Of even larger importance is the ability to convey the knowledge to students peaking their interest. A teacher is indeed defined by his/her ability to guide students in the right direction making complex concepts accessible

for all, not only the bright and talented. The teacher’s commitment, dedication and skill are fundamental in motivating students.

A short historical overview will also be presented explaining the different concepts that we nowadays take for granted. How did it all start, evolve and what kind of educational future are we moving towards? Furthermore, the role of the teacher is a focal point. What defines and motivates a prominent teacher, and how can students be engaged by moving away from the traditional rigid and yet still dominating teaching style where students have a passive role?

2. The rise of pedagogics and didactics

From classical Greece we can see that pedagogues were responsible for the upbringing of male children related to the initiation, framing or positioning within an initial set of cultural practices. On the other hand we can see that the didaskalos (teacher) was responsible for other educational practices and focused on taking children who had already been framed and relocate them into new positions within the social construct. (Kennell, 1995; Atherton, 1998, p229). [6]

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the relationship between pedagogy and didactics began to evolve with a new set of entries in the educational lexicon. These entries were the contemporary well known syllabus, curriculum and method.

What really is didactic? Before the sixteenth century, the social practices of teaching and the knowledge transmitted through teaching were synonymous. Formalised medieval teaching was merely the faithful inherited doctrine. According to Grafton & Jardine [1], by the early sixteenth century the teaching of doctrine (code of beliefs) became problematic and indigestible.

Leading to the reassessment of medieval education, this put forth the reworking of the key assumptions and methods of early humanists. Revolutionising secondary school and faculties in Renaissance Europe (Grafton & Jardine), a bifurcation was created. On one hand, we had the doctrine which was reconstituted through the identification, mapping and representation of knowledge giving birth to curricula, meaning the way in which to identify, portray and compile the knowledge. On the other hand we had the teaching that was also reconstituted through the identification of procedures for the efficient transmission of received curriculum knowledge, meaning how to efficiently present and transmit the knowledge further by following a set of instructions, in other words didactics or instruction. Through didactical approaches, purpose and efficiency ties to the logic of the knowledge transfer i.e., by methodizing the teaching itself was to increase its efficiency, creating shortcuts to knowledge.

3. The German art of teaching

Modern conception is that didactics or the art of teaching, if we emphasise the normative side of it, had origins in the methodisation of doctrinal delivery. Thus, in Germany Wolfgang Ratke (1571-1635) reacted, projecting didactics as a dynamic view of instructions advocating as a result a passive view of learning. The idea was to develop a general method of teaching and didactic was a practical and normative doctrine. The best known presentation of the early characterisation of didactics a.k.a., the art of teachings can be found in *Didactica Magna* by John Amos Comenius (1592-1670).

During the coming centuries the position of didactics began to change. A various number of versions and variations coexist for contemporary German Didactic. Furthermore, teacher education in Germany has also always been in interaction with didactics, encouraging; philosophical thinking, theorising and the construction of theoretical models.

Eventually in Germany didactics was reinvented as a human science, distinct from natural sciences. Educational thought and practices was to be built upon an analysis of the lived experience of practitioners. Furthermore, didactics could not be reduced to a set of teaching methods. It embraced both the so called small and large didactics of the seventeenth century, so it begun to be associated with an expanded conception of instruction described as “didactic analysis”. [1] The small and large didactics are different views upon didactics at the time, still in existence today in some European contexts. Small didactics refers to classroom handicraft conducted by artisans, while large didactics is the responsibility of specific educational planners. These system architects have the overall responsibility for designing, constructing and steering the schooling systems.

Especially Humboldt’s view of education has had a great impact on the German schooling system. Humboldt’s view of education and an educational system is a confrontation between pupil and the world as a result of history.

“Education or as it is now expressed, Bildung, is centred on the individual; the world around him and also state affairs are or should be just the stuff for forming a human being from the organic inside (Humboldt’s, Theorie der Bildung)”

4. Research on teaching in the US

Even though, the German tradition of research on teaching and on curriculum development are far older still the American method, can be traced back to pragmatism and spokesmen such as Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and William James (1842-1910). Teaching effective-

ness is researched and connected with teacher education. Concentrating on finding the teachers who can obtain the finest and most promising results, the research on teaching has been empirical and with quantitative methods testing the results in real situations. Certainly, such methods develop certain kinds of knowledge: such that can be measured quantitatively.

Most of the early American research was based on empirical analytical foundations, and the majority of it was conducted with the so-called process product model. Since research methodology is the foundation for research problems, the latest developments have paved the way to alternative approaches, greatly increasing the number of studies with qualitative research methods.

Didactics which is also known as research on teaching is a model of how to visualise the teaching and learning process as well as a theory devised to analyze theoretical systems, where different models can be compared with each other. [6]

In German speaking countries or countries having cultural relations with Germany didactic came to play a more prominent role along side pedagogics. Thus nowadays didactic is a well know term in Central Europe or Scandinavia though practically unheard of in the Anglo-Saxon communities, due to the sustained Anglo-American reaction against instructional turns. Eventually in the 1970s the German didactic analysis resurfaced in the English-speaking world as pedagogic analysis substituting pedagogy for didactics even though doing it under a different name. [1]

The American pedagogic serves to instruct and inform meaning, it is interpretive by nature assuming and accepting that there are different pedagogies with different outcomes. The task of a teacher is recognised to be deliberate, making it possible to choose amongst the various different ways to reach an outcome.

“Pedagogy refers to the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom

strategies and techniques, and evaluation, purpose and methods. (Basil Bernstein p165)”

Educational psychology encloses both the psychology of education and didactic linking the two together. Two particular parts of teaching are tangible, one where the method or practical part comes in and another one where we focus on theoretical references meaning the theories of curriculum. In order to understand this we need to analyse both of them.

5. Curriculum

In its broadest meaning the curriculum term is composed of the sum of experiences during the time the school is responsible for the pupil (Jackson 1992, p 4-12). The notion of curriculum emerged from Renaissance and Reformation revisions of medieval thought and it was in the beginning included in both German and English. [4] In fact the first recorded use of the term curriculum appeared in the *Professio Regia* from 1576, which provided teachers with a series of procedural templates to steer their teaching. Since then it has remained in Anglo-Saxon educational literature terminology, though being displaced in German during the 18th century and not returning until the previous century in the late sixties. The curriculum term was then readopted through American influence as a better version of a teaching plan (*Lehrplan*). [6] Progressively the word curriculum has become equivalent to Didactic with a particular emphasis of its own. During the 1970s and early 1980s didactic and curriculum theory were considered as parallel areas of the same subdiscipline.

Curriculum is in general not easily defined due to its many semantic contents and nuances. According to Reisse (1975) the term is strongly cultural bound making comparisons across linguistic bounds next to impossible. Nowadays the aspects of curriculum seem to have integrated into didactic thus rendering the relationship discussion between didactic and curriculum mute.

Certain differences persist to date between the German and American way of classifying edu-

cation. In Germany education consists of pedagogics and its subdiscipline didactic with several sub-areas of its own (Röhrs 1969). In the Anglo-Saxon classification, a sub-area of didactic seems to be lacking, meaning the problems of teaching and learning are held together without any theoretical model building according to the American research of teaching.

A form of analysing the curriculum, a system for thinking about its problems so to say is through didactical approaches, according to Ian Westbury [11]. These types of approaches to teaching and learning have always referred, in one way or another, to a doctrine to be taught to students making them grow and pushing them to learn. This can be said to be an overall systematisation or schematisation of instruction – a way to frame curriculum planning by distinguishing the assumptions and values involved. The interest is focused on how teaching is going to be accomplished with educational methodology and not towards the inner content of what is going to be taught (Nerici, 1969:18). [9]

6. Teaching crossroads

In Sweden educationists have struggled with ideas that relate to both German and Anglo-Saxon curriculum. Today we find ourselves at a critical point, standing at the intersection and trying to find out which way to go, bringing the teaching into the technological age of the 21st century.

Having seen the historical development of two prominent perspectives on teaching has helped us in gaining a deeper and more fundamental understanding of what the teaching profession really enfolds. This now allows us a further educated decision on what to opt for, which aspects should be considered and what curriculum introduces the biggest advantage and should be favoured and build upon.

In the Anglo-American classification a relatively strong formal control of the teachers is enforced by the school system. The ability to teach the curriculum is central, and profes-

sionalism can only be achieved by training and certification. In essence, American curriculum is a complex and difficult topic to pin down. Being layered and highly eclectic, it is subject to interpret and reflects the models of instructional delivery used. The development of American education was best explained by Walter Doyle and Ian Westbury (1992, 138-145), referring to the structure of governance in the system of schooling. The local boards of education have the responsibility for the effectiveness of the school and the role of the superintendent is central.

On the other side we have the German *Bildung* (a core concept of German didactics) where the ability to make independent decisions is sought for, encouraging a larger professional autonomy for the teacher, i.e., in interpreting the curriculum. [8]

By not having to follow the institutional framework and teaching methods too rigidly, a more open and creative environment is achieved, making it easier to adapt the education to the changing needs of the students and society. Today it is widely recognised that traditional lectures place students in a passive role, failing to engage them in their own learning. Old myths that impede have to be put aside, paving the way for fresh ideas and innovative curricular.

From this viewpoint it stands clear that (the German) “*Bildung*”, encouraging a larger professional autonomy, is a concept easily favoured. It makes it easier to reform the educational system, bringing it into the technological age. Even though this seems to be a straightforward conclusion, it does not describe the whole picture.

Naturally, there are advantages of having a strong formal control of teachers and curriculum. One of them is the fact that a certain minimum quality is guaranteed when teaching is done according to specific rules of conduct. Otherwise, the skill of individual teachers is of great importance in addition to content knowledge, the essential substance is pedagog-

ical content knowledge. In other words: by not having a strong formal control to govern the teaching method as for instance in the German concept, a high qualitative lecture is not only a matter of mastering the topic (content knowledge), but also a matter of mastering the art of teaching (pedagogical content knowledge), i.e., how to present and transfer the knowledge to others.

7. Teaching attitudes

Another important topic in the educational system is the teacher's commitment and attitude towards teaching. [7] By viewing teaching as the means for being allowed to conduct research, it inevitably becomes a reluctant must. Teaching itself needs to be brought forward, taking the first row and leaving the shadow cast upon it by teachers and researches attitudes. Independent of which curriculum is used, nowadays teaching implies a much higher challenge due to the diversity of students. Different students, of different backgrounds and culture, have different learning styles, thus forcing a continuously re-evaluation and improvement of things.

It is no longer accurate to assume that all students can perform well by being taught the same way. New teaching practices are consequently required and teachers should be aware of different perspectives avoiding eventual frustrating conflicts. Thus, a teacher of today needs to be able to learn and listen to different perspectives more than before.

8. The Dialogue Seminar

In 1980ies the Dialogue Seminar evolved, which is a method for professionals to listen and learn from different perspectives, and thus promote their professional knowledge. It has evolved partially as an answer to problems during the computerization processes of most work environments that have been going on since the 70ies. In this process, possibilities as well as limitations of computers have gradually become clearer. It is a rule rather than an exception that the total work performance after computerization has not risen as much as expected – sometimes performance even has

deteriorated. It is now rather undisputed that many tasks for the foreseeable future cannot be computerized. These tasks have to be handled by people, albeit often supported by computers. A substantial part of professional knowledge in most professions cannot be formulated and quantified in such a way that a computer program can handle it efficiently. One may ask: it is possible to describe or learn this kind of difficult-to-formulate but important knowledge? The Dialogue Seminar has evolved as a means for professional groups to do that.

The Dialogue Seminar was developed mainly by Bo Göranzon, Maria Hammarén ([10]) at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden. It became a graduate study program 1995. According to the founders, its purposes are to (i) create a practice for reflection, (ii) formulate problems from the dilemma, (iii) work up a common language, and (iv) train the ability to listen. This allows participants to learn to alter perspectives and discover connections between their own area and other areas. It is based on the epistemology of practical and professional knowledge, and has been used for leadership education at computer software companies as well as in music education.

From a practical point of view, a typical Dialogue Seminar series consists of eight participants and five six hour sessions during five months – one each month. Each seminar is prepared by that everybody at least a week before the session reads one out of a set of texts, the impulse texts, and writes a short reflection, a reflection text, from the individual experience. During the session, all participants have a copy of each reflection text. Each is read aloud, and a dialogue follows. The leader should broaden the reflection by analogues to literature, history or other areas, which broaden the views on the individual experience expressed in the reflection text. The dialogue is written down as a protocol. This protocol is the result of the session. As a research area it is not merely evidence based, but is based on case studies.

Due to its construction, the Dialogue Seminar attempts to find the most relevant questions for teachers, while traditional research in pedagogy answers questions, which may not be those that actually are the most relevant for teachers. While traditional research stays within its field, the Dialogue Seminars crosses borders. Cooperation between mathematics teachers and musicians, for example, have proved to be very valuable for both.

Thus, the Dialog Seminar is a way to share knowledge and ideas amongst trained professionals, and to find essential dilemmas. Essential knowledge in the form of experiences of other participants is brought forth, captured and shared. This far the Dialog Seminar method has been shown to produce very satisfactory result in both public and private sector. By its wide perspective it is somewhat related to the German Bildung tradition.

Below, we have shortlisted a few proposed approaches that could be used for teaching students with a wide variety of backgrounds. The list is composed both from own teaching experience but also from the teaching experience of others, into which I got an insight while attending Dialog Seminar sessions.

- Always insist on academic values, such as the code of honour and ethics
- Show respect and concern for all students and their learning
- Define clear goals for the course
- Set up clear learning outcomes
- Set up clear rules for assessing and grading the students
- Follow a red thread in the material presented by relating it to what has been presented as well as to other references and material in other courses
- Balance abstract concepts with concrete information
- Balance material related to fundamental concepts with practical problem solving methods
- Being prepared is to be able to leave your plan of the lecture if you discover

that it is needed for the learning of the students

- Provide concrete examples from real life situations and implementations
- Study sometimes video records of your lectures
- Use assessment and feedback from students regarding the quality of teaching, this being a central point in multicultural classrooms
- Make it possible for people to improve themselves by giving them a second chance after understanding their mistake, for instance when it comes to plagiarism which is far more accepted in some parts of the world

Furthermore, it is also good to keep in mind that we are in reality not teaching students on how the model really works, but on our shared conception on how the model works. We need to help students to build up in their minds similar concepts already shared by the rest of the engineering community, teaching them to be critical in their way of thinking and learning.

9. Conclusions

The cornerstones in the construction of modern schooling were the intersection of pedagogy, curriculum and didactics. The recent Anglo-American usage of pedagogy reflects the mainland European use of didactic, since the German didactic analysis resurfaced in the English-speaking world as pedagogic analysis substituting pedagogy for didactics. Furthermore, since pedagogy refers to the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and since didactics is a form of analysis, a system for thinking about the problems of the curriculum, it can easily be deduced that curriculum analysis relates to the fields of both didactical and pedagogical analysis.

We can conclude that all of these fields originally arose as part of an instructional turn nourished in the social, political and confessional circumstances of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

Becoming a skilled teacher is harder today than ever. It is no longer enough to rely on

traditional concepts and methods for achieving good results. Basic concepts as the American or German curricular are solid places to start, though adaptations are necessary due to today's globalisation and technological age. Education has become a global market forcing teachers to deal with new problems, thus flexibility, clear goals, patience and curriculum adaptation are key factors for a successful academic program because of the wide range of abilities and readiness levels of students. There are no secrets, for a successful teaching career very much depends on personal preferences and inclinations, and most importantly a passion for the subject and the profession. Furthermore, to improve teacher performance, the work environment must enhance teachers' sense of professionalism and decrease their career dissatisfaction. The Dialogue Seminar is one means to do this in an organized way, in which the professionals themselves formulate the agenda while taking advantage of existing research.

"For more general information regarding related topics, see articles [2] and [5] in the references list"

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