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Restrained Teaching: the common core of Didaktik[1]

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ABSTRACT *Didaktik* is at the centre of most school teaching and teacher education in Continental Europe, but at the same time almost unknown in the English speaking world. The article gives a brief outline of the history and the common core of Didaktik, of its current situation, and of the basic differences compared to the Anglo-American concept of 'curriculum and instruction' and the French 'transposition didactique'. The common core of Didaktik is characterised as 'restrained teaching', based on (a) a commitment to Bildung, (b) the educative difference of matter and meaning, and (c) the autonomy of teaching and learning.

> Ask any teacher of the elementary or secondary schools in Germany the reason for any particular method or practice, and you will find him ready with an answer. (John Tilden Prince, 1892, p. 232)

When the American educator John Tilden Prince travelled German schools in the late nineteenth century in a mission on behalf of the Massachusetts Board of Education, he was most impressed by the level of teacher knowledge and education:

> Less difference in the quality of teaching and greater uniformity in the results, than with us are observable. Few teachers will be found who have not a definite object in all their work, and who do not strive to reach that object in a systematic and methodical way. ... they have well studied opinions, both in regard to the object to be reached and the means to be taken to reach it. (1892, p. 75)

Prince moves on to describe exemplary lessons, typical teaching materials and examples of classroom practice, all of them seemingly grounded in a joint base of a highly developed 'pedagogical content knowledge', as Lee Shulman (1987) would put it nowadays. Basically, Prince's book was a thorough description of the state, content and function of general and subject matter Didaktik as it was perceived in most of Continental and Northern Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. Some of his contemporaries (like Dewey) were well aware of and much inspired by this continental tradition. However, it never made its way into the mainstream of American teacher education. There, it was replaced in the early twentieth century by concepts like Dewey's own 'curriculum' and Thorndike's 'educational psychology'.

To understand Prince' fascination with the subject, and to understand how Didaktik differed from 'curriculum' then and now, one has to understand the common roots of Didaktik in history and presence, and the shared fundamentals of Didaktik theories across different schools of thought. Nowadays, this common core of Didaktik is challenged by changing conditions of schooling, which leads to the question, whether it should be replaced by other approaches. By dealing with these points, I will try to answer the question put forward by the organiser of the 2007 European Conference for Educational Research at the University of Geneva, Bernard Schneuwly: how one could characterise the common core of Didaktik and how knowledge transformation is different within a Didaktik approach compared to both the Anglo-Saxon tradition of speaking about 'curriculum and instruction' and the French 'transposition didactique'. As this is meant as an

invitation to share a specific viewpoint, I will abstain from any special emphasis on the inner divisions and limitations of Didaktik, and rather focus on how Didaktik wants to be seen within its own traditions.

To outline these points, I will mainly use material from a dialogue project about 'Didaktik and/or Curriculum', which I created together with Kurt Riquarts (Kiel), Ian Westbury (Urbana-Champaign) and Bjørg B. Gundem (Oslo) in the 1990s and which resulted in quite a few comparative efforts (see, for example, Hopmann & Riquarts, 1996; Gundem & Hopmann, 1998; Goodson et al, 1999; Westbury et al, 2000 for more detailed accounts). In addition, I will refer to research carried out in connection with a current comparative project effort on 'Achieving School Accountability in Practice', which is developed in cooperation with colleagues from Austria, Norway, Denmark, and the USA (see Hopmann, 2006). Of course, no comprehensive description of Didaktik is intended, only a rough sketch of what could be said to be the common core of Didaktik.

1. Common Roots

The modern understanding of Didaktik is more or less an invention of nineteenth-century teacher education in Germany and in some neighbouring areas, not least in the Nordic countries. However, right from the beginning, as for instance exemplified by the first European success model of a teacher education primer, August Herman Niemeyer's *Basic Principles of Education and Teaching* (Grundsätze der Erziehung und des Unterrichts, which ran to many editions 1796 et seq., and was translated into many languages; see Landsheere, 1998), this included creating a history of the field, starting from Plato and Aristotle, continuing with the Apostles, the church fathers like Augustine, the medieval scholastics, Luther and/or Canisius, Comenius and Ratichius, and finally the emerging field of teacher education since the first teacher seminary at Halle in the late seventeenth century, where Niemeyer himself was firmly rooted.

Within this history, three distinctive phases can be discerned, dealing with Didaktik as a matter of (a) order, (b) sequence, or (c) choice (see Künzli, 1986, 2002).

(a) Order

The word Didaktik itself stems from Classical Greek, the group of words connected to 'didaskein', i.e. teaching, showing something, playing out a drama (didaktikos, didaskalia, didache, etc. [2]). Plato's *Meno* can be taken as the founding document of what Didaktik as a formation of knowledge was about. There is a scene where Socrates while teaching the slave boy, turns to Meno and says: 'Do you observe, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but merely asking him each time' (*Meno* 82 E [3]). Even though Socrates stresses here and in the following that he does not teach (didasko), what he actually does is teach Meno about teaching by in his presence teaching a boy how to double a square. This seemingly self-contradictory stance has been one of the cornerstones of Didaktik ever since. The whole argument of the Meno is about whether and how teaching is possible by restraint, and Socrates' well-known answer is built around the concept of student activity as recollection. The teacher does not overpower the student with knowledge, but helps him to develop his own access (see Figure 1). Plato develops the argument further in his vision of a state (*Politeia* [4]), as does his disciple Aristotle later on in his rather sceptical version of the same issue (*Politika* [5]). Both in Greek and in Roman teaching, a quite coherent understanding of the concept of Didaktik developed, as an approach to explain teaching by the order of contents taught and the ways and means of instruction and learning applied to this task (e.g. Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria,* around AD 90 [6]).

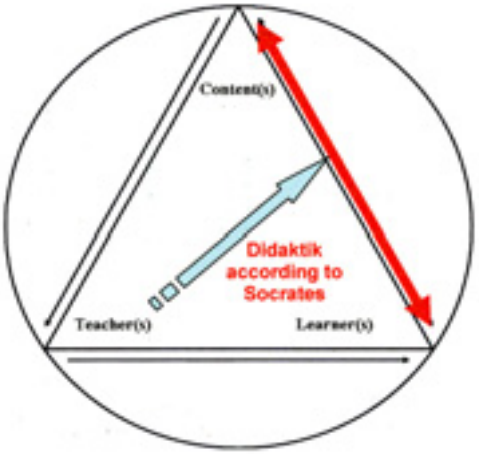

Figure 1.

However, not until the medieval development of schooling was Didaktik transformed into a coherent body of knowledge of its own. One of the first systematic accounts of Didaktik as a theory of teaching and learning was provided by Hugh of Saint Victor, a German monk teaching in Paris, in his *Didascalicon de Studio Legendi* (around 1120 [7]). Hugh called for three types of *discipline* as the core of any Didaktik, namely, (a) discipline as order of knowledge, (b) discipline as orderly teaching, and (c) discipline as a precondition of students' orderly approach to learning (this concept of discipline is later echoed by, for example, Dewey in 1916). Hugh's approach reflected the necessary difference between learning in everyday life and learning by teaching. He argues, for instance, that the order of knowledge creation in life is often different from how the best way of teaching is, as the knowledge about basic principles emerges rather late in the history of mankind's use of something, whereas disciplined teaching has to start with these principles. Another main point for him is that all learning depends on the students' preparedness for the task of learning, the discipline they bring to work. In Hugh's perspective teaching depends thus on the interaction of disciplined knowledge within a disciplined setting, i.e. teaching, with the discipline of the student's efforts (see Figure 2).

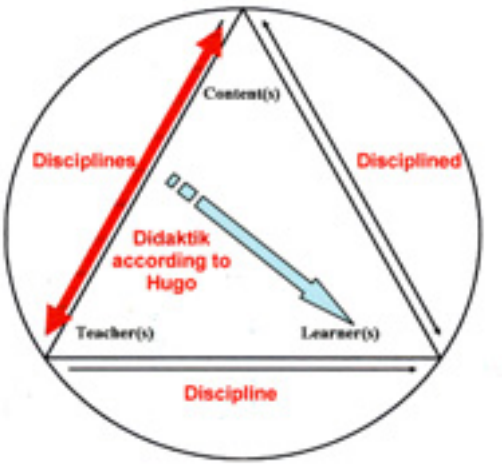

Figure 2.

Similar accounts of good teaching maybe found in other scholastic writings, as, for example, by Thomas Aquinas when saying in *De Magistro*:

> the student's ideas are the primary foundation on which is built all the knowledge gained through teaching. The student's own lights are the immediate builder, while the teacher's are the middle builder. For the teacher presents signs of the knowable things, from which the student's mind takes ideas in order to consider them. Thus the teacher's words or writings end up being like the subject of study, since the student takes ideas from both. The difference is that the teacher's words are a more direct way of generating knowledge than the experience of the subject since they are signs of the ideas themselves. (*De Magistro*, 1256 [8])

Didaktik is in this scholastic sense about teaching the order of knowledge (summa) by introducing the student to its concepts and structures.

(b) Sequence

This line of thought was continued by the emerging Didaktik of both Reformation and Counter-Reformation (exemplified, for example, by the different catechisms and their concept of teaching), and by the subsequent development of a comprehensive frame of reference for thinking about teaching, as provided, for instance, by the first truly European educator, Comenius, in his famous *Didactica Magna*:

> Let the main object of this, our Didaktik, be as follows: To seek and to find a method of instruction by which teachers may teach less, but learners may learn more; by which schools may be the scene of less noise, aversion, and useless labour, but of more leisure, enjoyment, and solid progress; and through which the Christian community may have less darkness, perplexity, and dissension, but on the other hand more light, orderliness, and rest. (1627/57; cover text [9]).

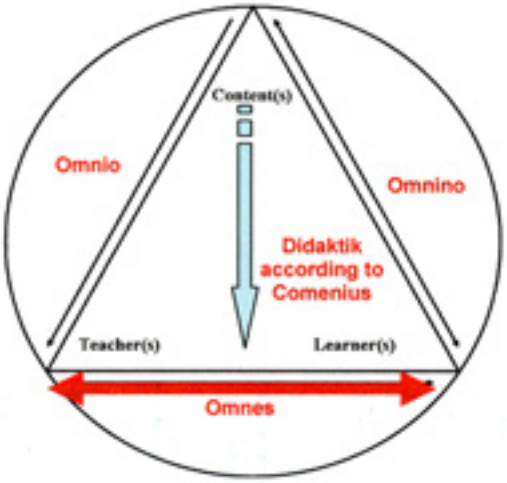

Figure 3.

It is on the language and basic notion of Didaktik of Comenius' work, on which every later attempt to define what Didaktik is, relies. It differs from contemporary concepts of curriculum (like Daniel Morhof's *De Curriculo Scholastico*, 1688) in that it is not just the structure of a content itself any more or an argument on what is valid knowledge within a given structure which creates the realm of teaching, but an understanding of how a student meets this knowledge based on his or her own being. Comenius supposes an inherent continuity from the micro-cosmos of the student to the macro-cosmos of the world, allowing for a natural sequence of learning from the near to the far, from the simple to the complex, etc. Again we meet the basic idea of *restrained teaching*, already familiar since Socrates, but now transformed into an argument of how teaching can provide for better learning by reducing itself to the least necessary intervention to inspire and promote 'solid

progress' of the student. The same idea figures prominently in both the pietistic Didaktik of the inventor of teacher seminaries, August Herman Francke, around 1700, and in the following philanthropic Didaktik of the late seventeenth century. What they all had in common, in spite of different approaches to the ontology of being and the psychology of learning, was the basic assumption that Didaktik is about how teaching can instigate learning, but learning as a content-based student activity, not as swallowing a sermon or a monologue or otherwise one-sided knowledge distribution by a teacher.

(c) Choice

Of course, this rather selective outline does no justice to the theories mentioned, nor to the many other contributions to the history of Didaktik from ancient times onwards. Its main purpose is to sketch the normative self-concept of teacher knowledge about teaching, as it dominated the scene throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and as which it became functional for the construction of school governance by the emerging nation state (see the following as well: Hopmann, 1988, 2000a, b; Künzli, 1988).

The basic problem of the emerging national schools systems was, right from the beginning, that there is far more 'between heaven and earth' than any school curriculum can manage. Even in the right sequence, it is actually not possible to teach everything as Comenius had maintained, but some choice of what it is important to include, and even more so, what it is important to avoid, was necessary. The basic invention of Prussian school governance in the early nineteenth century in this respect was a move from former types of content regulation by school laws and ordinances (Schulordnungen) towards separate syllabi (Lehrpläne), which contained quite rough outlines of what to teach and what not. Indeed, the very first of these written curriculum guidelines, the Prussian normal plan of 1816, was more concerned with the question of what not to teach than any kind of micromanagement of what actually should happen in schools.

The basic division of labour between the new curriculum guidelines developed at the state level and the local lesson planning was shaped by the construct of 'pedagogical freedom' or 'freedom of method', which put into the single teacher's hands the planning of how to enact which part of the curriculum, where and when. Like a driving licence, the teaching licence of the guidelines prescribed general rules of what to deal with, i.e. the main topics of instruction, but no specific ways and means how to achieve that.

For both the teachers and the state administration this division had quite a few advantages. State policies could point to the contents and intentions of the written curriculum, and blame any shortcomings on poor choices made by the schools. Teachers, on the other hand, could free themselves from the close scrutiny of local stakeholders. If challenged by parents or a superior, all a teacher had to do was to prove that the content chosen was not outside the limits of what the curriculum was asking for. But as long as the content taught could be considered as being within this frame or being at least equivalent to the tasks required there, to do so was up to the teachers themselves and their professional assessment of the specific situation prevailing in their classroom. Of course this required well-educated teachers, so it was no coincidence that new and tougher rules for teacher licensing were introduced in Prussia at about the same time.

Within this frame, Didaktik became the main tool bridging the gap between centralised planning and local practice, and at the same time a tool for creating space for local teaching by providing interpretative tools for dealing with state guidelines on a local basis. In the teacher seminaries as well as in the emerging teacher journals and associations, Didaktik became the subject of concern, widely discussed, often with many competing approaches and ideas of how to teach a certain subject matter, with different concepts of what a certain content was about, and different aims of what students should acquire by dealing with this or that content (see Hopmann, 2000a). In line with Tilden Prince's above-mentioned description, one can thus see Didaktik as the core of the identity of a new breed of qualified professional teachers emerging from the teacher seminars and colleges.

It is no wonder, then, that among the chief claims of the teacher movements of 1848 was the introduction of such curriculum guidelines in all German states. In fact the concept spread through most of Europe in a couple of decades and became routine practice in most places between the

1830s and the early twentieth century at the latest. It is no wonder, too, that the political backlash of the 1850s (like any other efforts to regain state control later on) tried to limit the teachers' curriculum choice, not least by prohibiting Didaktik as an independent subject of teacher education and/or by including method prescriptions into the curriculum, thus reducing the space for 'pedagogical freedom'. Finally, it is no wonder that from then on the teachers started to criticise state or national curriculum guidelines for being out of touch with classroom reality, claiming that it should be Didaktik, and Didaktik alone, which decides on what to teach to whom. Both the very first theory of the state curriculum, the Lehrplan, by Dörpfeld (1873) and the first theory of curriculum making by Rein (1896) emphasised this turnaround. It was this kind of thinking that Tilden Prince met when he visited Rein and his students in the early 1890s: good teachers know to make their choices and they have Didaktik as a professional tool for doing so and for legitimising these choices within a give curricular frame.

2. Common Places

At the time Tilden Prince visited Germany, but one brand of Didaktik seemed to dominate the scene, Herbartianism, and this is clearly reflected by the book and the extra chapter Prince wrote dealing with this line of thought (1892, pp. 183ff.) This focus fitted nicely with the Herbartian movement of the time in the USA (cf. Dunkel, 1969; Cruishank, 1994). Herbartian Didaktik focused on lesson planning and on the order of subject matter underlying teaching. But already at this time, the first signs of differentiation could be seen, if one took a closer look at what was going on outside the Herbartian universe, e.g. at teacher seminars or the reform minded schools. The Herbartian perspective was widened to a critique of the prevailing 'book school' and calls for a 'school of life' or a more 'child-centred' pedagogy. What developed here was later on subsumed under the label of 'reform pedagogy', the Continental or German brand of progressive education, albeit with a more distinct flavour than, for example, Deweyan progressivism (cf. Oelkers, 1995). Whereas Dewey and the international progressive movement were looking for new frontiers in modern education, the German reform pedagogy was especially concerned with how to maintain the distinctiveness of the Didaktik approach in times of rapid modernisation and industrialisation. For instance, whereas internationally child-centred progressivism was spelled out as educational psychology – measuring, experimenting, and controlling the learning process – the reform pedagogical approach to child-centred was a view of the child as a natural learner and a born leader of his or her own idiosyncratic learning. Back to nature, back to the roots, back to authentic communication – all this was not necessarily a conservative movement, as schooling had never exactly been that way before, but a move back to what was considered to be the core of Didaktik (cf. Nohl, 1935).

This search for a common core of Didaktik has never stopped since. There are almost innumerable variations available, for every purpose and taste (Figure 4).

Modes of Didaktik					
Foundations			*Substance*		
Reference	Methodological	Normative	Institutions	Clients	Actions
Philosophical	Hermeneutical	Catholic	Nursery	Children	Education
Anthropological	Phenomenological	Jewish	School	Adults	Instruction
Psychological	Experimental	Marxist	University	Handicapped	Training
Sociological	Empirical	Ecological	Company	Parents	Teaching
Educational	Constructivist	Humanistic	Prison	Minority	Playing
Etc.	Etc.	Etc.	Etc.	Etc.	Etc.

Combine any two+ of these examples, and you will get to the core of at least one existing school of Didaktik!

Figure 4.

However, in spite of this seemingly unlimited variety of scopes and foci, most of these modes of Didaktik share the same common places to describe what Didaktik is about, namely, (a) the concept of Bildung, (b) the embedded differentiation of matter and meaning, and (c) a concept of

the necessary autonomy of teaching, thus continuing the above mentioned problems of order, sequence and choice within their respective frames of reference.

(a) Bildung

As is the case with 'Didaktik', the word as well as the concept of 'Bildung' is hardly translatable to English. Stemming from medieval mysticism and romantic *Weltanschauung*, the word combines elements of education, erudition, formation, experience, and whatever else is used in English to denote the process of unfolding individuality by learning. The Didaktik tradition connects to the whole development of this concept, from Socrates' innate ideas to first and foremost Wilhelm von Humboldt's understanding of Bildung as 'grasping as much world as possible' and as 'contributing to human mankind' by developing one's own unique self (Humboldt, [1792] 2000; cf. Gonon, 1995; Klafki, 2000a; Lüth, 2000). Bildung is more than mastery of contents or development of competencies and abilities, more than 'knowing something' or 'being able to do it'. Humboldt speaks about the risk of alienation, if getting stuck with what the object of Bildung is in the outer world. In Bildung, whatever is done or learned is done or learned to develop one's own individuality, to unfold the capabilities of the I (cf. Humboldt, [1792] 2000). The purpose of teaching and schooling is in this perspective neither to transport knowledge from society to a learner (curriculum), nor a transpositioning of knowledge from science or other domains to the classroom, but rather the use of knowledge as a transformative tool of unfolding the learner's individuality and sociability, in short: the Bildung of the learners by teaching.

Thus, Bildung cannot be achieved by Didaktik. The only thing Didaktik can do is restrain teaching in a way opening up for the individual growth of the student. As probably the most influential model within current teacher education in Germany, Wolfgang Klafki's 'categorical Didaktik' sees it, this can be described as a dialectical process by which teaching 'opens up a world for the student, thus opening the student for the world' (Klafki, 1959, 2000a, [1958] 2000b). Klafki's way of putting what Bildung is about is categorical, which is in his perspective provides students with categories, i.e. exemplary concepts, languages, tools, etc. to open up the world and to open up themselves. This is fundamentally different from, for example, Dewey's and other pragmatists' instrumentalism, as it does see these instruments not only as a legacy of mankind which has to be acquired and developed (as with Dewey), but at the same time as an unfolding unique individuality (which Dewey does not put into instrumentalism, at least not as explicitly as Klafki does within his Didaktik).

Of course, there are as many versions of the concept of Bildung as there are versions of Didaktik. Like Didaktik, it can be understood in different philosophical, methodological, normative perspectives focusing on different institutions, clientele, and actions. For instance, one can speak of catholic Bildung as well as of Bildung in a constructivist perspective or of Bildung within the setting of a prison. One can combine these or any other mixture of approaches to refine one's own brand of Bildung. In the late 1960s, this openness led to complaints that it was too unclear what Bildung is about, and that it therefore would be better to replace the concept of Bildung with the one of curriculum, at least in as much as teaching is concerned (e.g. Robinsohn, 1967). However, the vagueness, even ambiguity, of Bildung was never due to a lack of conceptual clarification, but a necessary feature of the concept itself. Indeed, it has always been one of the advantages of the common place of Bildung that it is not confined to but one type of theorising on education, but rather is indicative of a core aspect of something, which any Didaktik has to deal with, i.e. the student's individual access to 'the world' (as Humboldt puts it) and the outcome of this meeting. Bildung reminds us that the meeting itself and its outcome are not embedded in the content or given by the teaching, but only emerge on site, then and there where the meeting between a particular student and a particular content happens. Then, Bildung is what remains beyond this situated engagement.

(b) Matter and Meaning

To make this happen, teaching has to deal with content in a certain manner. As Rudolf Künzli puts it:

> A didactician looks for the prospective object of learning ... and he asks himself what this object can and should signify for the student and how the student can experience this significance. Education (Bildung) is a code in traditional Didaktik and its concern is to synthesize everything that occurs within instruction into a consistently coherent whole ... All other questions – other than the significance of the learning content – such as class management, individual and social learning, learning control, individual learning speed, appropriate representation, etc. – are subordinate to this central concern and gain significances only when the question of educative substance (Bildungsgehalt) is at issue. (2002, pp. 40f.)

One can hardly overestimate the importance of the implied distinction between the content as such and its 'educative substance' for the construction of Didaktik (cf. Roth, 1952; Klafki, 1958; Künzli, 1980; Hopmann & Künzli, 1994; Hopmann, 2002a). Teaching deals with contents, may it be the 'Great War', basic arithmetic, or singing a song. But in a Didaktik perspective this is not about knowing history, being able to count, or being able to sing a certain song. All this may or may not be a part of the outcome, but it is not what Bildung is about. Didaktik asks, for instance, what can we learn

- about mankind by understanding the course of the Great War?
- about numbering the world by counting?
- about my inner being by mastering a song?

But again, this is not in the sense that what is learned about mankind, the world or my inner being is inherent to the subject matter at hand, but in the sense that the meaning of these learning experiences emerges within the learning process itself, based on the meeting of a unique individual with a matter at hand. Thus, the difference of matter and meaning is not simply one of facts and beliefs, of objects and interpretations. If this was the case, then facts and objects would be seen as a given, whereas the beliefs or interpretations would be seen as something individually attached, which is not decisive for the quality of learning outcomes and which can be changed at will. In fact it is the other way round: in the perspective of Bildung and Didaktik there are no facts or objects of teaching as factum brutum, but they are what they are by the substance meeting the teacher and the student while meeting the content. Any given matter (*Inhalt*) can represent many different meanings (*Gehalt*), and any given meaning (*Gehalt*) can be opened up by many different matters (*Inhalt*). But there is no matter without meaning, and no meaning without matter (see Figure 5).

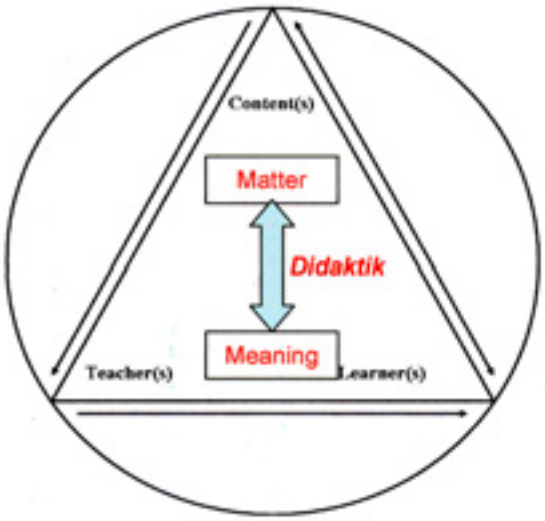

Figure 5.

This rather philosophical argument has an important practical side to it (cf. Hopmann, 1988, 2000b; Nesje & Hopmann, 2002). It reflects perfectly the differentiation of the written state curriculum and the actual teaching, as described above by the licensing principle. The traditional state

curriculum, as developed in Europe in the course of nineteenth century, lists the subject matter of teaching, but not the educative meaning attached. Meaning is what emerges when the content is enacted in a classroom based on the methodological decisions of a teacher, i.e. his or her pedagogical freedom. Accordingly, the Didaktik parameter of good teaching is not the degree to which the students master the content as delineated in the curriculum, but rather the question if and how the educative substance could be opened up for the students as intended; more exactly, if and how it became open in their individual meeting with the content in the given teaching process. Different levels of mastery do not necessarily dignify different qualities of teaching, but rather reflect different approaches to one and the same subject matter based on the different possibilities to unfold an educative meaning for different learners. In some cases mastery will be the core, while in others a basic level will be sufficient to meet the educative goal in view, always depending on why one is supposed to learn something about wars, arithmetic or songs.

(c) Autonomy

Of course, again, there are as many ways and means of delineating the difference of matter and meaning as there are models and patterns of Didaktik and ways and means of teaching (cf. Hopmann, 2000a). For a Quaker the story of the Great War will have a different sound than for a soldier; in a Creationist perspective the issue of numbers will have rather different repercussions for Bildung than in a scientist's approach, etc. Didaktik and Bildung require normativeness, but they do not force submission to just one set of norms or beliefs. Rather, they challenge the teacher to be aware of the unavoidable normativeness in every dealing with whatever subject matter. The question is then: Do I want to be (mis)understood in a Creationist or a soldier's perspective, or do I want my teaching to allow for other meanings to unfold in dealing with the matter.

Again, being Creationist or being critical or being constructivist, etc. is nothing which is decided by choice of the matter itself, but by how the teacher chooses to enact a given content for a given audience of students under given circumstances, i.e. by which world is at hand seen from the a student's perspective embarking on a journey into the content's affordances and limits. Even if the curriculum asks for something because of a certain expectation to substance (e.g. because something is seen as important for a Christian, civic, social, etc. education), this does not guarantee that the same meaning resurfaces, when the chosen content becomes subject matter in a classroom. In fact, the substantive outcome can be directly opposite to the expected or required one (as was often the case in many socialist countries), or barely coupled to the substantial expectations of the written curriculum and/or the teacher's expectations (as is often the case in Western classrooms). What comes out in terms of Bildung is indeed often not visible at all, at least not right away. It depends on what remains after the hurly burly of teaching is done, the battle of minds is lost or won, and the student comes to terms with his or her own world.

Such a concept of teaching requires a considerable amount of autonomy for both the teachers and the students. Or more precisely: it presupposes the existence of such an autonomy in all teaching irrespective of its official status. Why this? As the connection of matter and meaning is no ontological or ideological fact, but rather an emerging experience which is always situated in unique moments and interactions, there is no way to fix the outcome in advance. Of course, with experience, one can expect that certain contents meeting certain students within a certain age range and under certain living conditions will often lead to this or that emerging substance. If there was no chance of expecting specific patterns as more or less probable, there would be no Didaktik. However, neither would there be a Didaktik if the pattern was fixed in advance. Didaktik is the necessarily restrained effort to make certain substantive outcomes possible, while knowing that it can always turn out completely differently from what was intended. Like in the case of Bildung, this is not a lack of technical or didactical sophistication on behalf of the teacher, nor a question of doing too much or too little, but a necessary ambiguity of the teaching process itself. Substance in the sense of Bildung is never given. It emerges whenever we meet, and meet something, in teaching as in life, and it can change again and again, even a long time after the original meeting took place. This is the promise and the predicament of Bildung, whatever its specific composition is.

3. Common Challenges

The common places of Didaktik delineate a space for educative teaching (Künzli, 2002). As any other space, it can be well used or misused, developed and destroyed. It is not the concepts which allow for or prohibit one or the other outcome, but the enactment which decides. There is plenty of good teaching without knowledge of Didaktik, and no less bad teaching just because one knows how to argue one's case using didactical phrases. In fact, as taught in teacher education nowadays, Didaktik is often reduced to an art of being innocent of whatever comes out of the instruction delivered. By pointing to the subject matter, the students, or the circumstances as being decisive for the mishaps, we are excused. Such Didaktik often starts with an 'if only', the 'only' being a non-achievable condition of the given situation.

However, it is true that Didaktik depends on the structures and situations given, for instance, the amount of leeway built into the licensing principle or the substantive restraint of the state curriculum (Hopmann, 2003, 2006). What if basic conditions for the Didaktik understanding of teaching are not given or get lost, e.g. by conceptual or structural changes? Again the differentiation of order, sequence, and choice may be helpful to pinpoint the common challenges.

(a) Order

The notion of Bildung, as developed in a Didaktik perspective, sees Bildung as an individual outcome, not as a programme for education. It depends on keeping the difference of matter and meaning alive and allowed. This is not so in current programmes to enhance schooling by national or international testing. These programmes depend on a notion that the meaning of a matter is fixed, if not universally, then at least within the context of schooling. The tests present tasks which in most cases have but one solution, which is said to be the right one. In terms of Bildung, the problem with that is not only that other, especially non-cognitive solutions are systematically neglected (e.g. intuitive or aesthetic approaches, cf. Meyerhöfer, 2005), but rather, that the outcome of the dealing with subject matter is reduced to certain forms of mastering (whatever kind of mastery is preferred). The educative substance, the meaning in the sense of lasting Bildung, which may or may not have been actualised by the current teaching, does not play a crucial role for such tests or their results. Bildung becomes a collateral damage of mastering subject matter as required.

Test constructors are aware of the inherent problems of this approach. Different contents may have had different space and prominence in different settings. Different cultures may value a specific matter differently. Different languages make it more or less easy to articulate certain types of mastery; etc. The advanced answer to these problems is 'latent class analysis' of the competencies underlying the mastering of a certain matter (cf. Rost, 1996). Simply put, one assumes that different levels of mastery can be proven by different tasks, i.e. by dealing with different matter, if one can calculate a scale of needed abilities in doing this or that task. Such competency levels may, for example, move from basic knowing about something beyond practical mastery to the ability of critical appraisal (Klieme et al [2003], continuing the Bloom taxonomy). Based on such ideas, the argument goes that if it is possible to calculate the underlying amount of competence necessary to master a certain task, one can easily compare across different cultures and languages, across different subject matter and contexts. For example, one could assume that a certain mastery in an everyday context corresponds with the same mastery in a school context, at least in terms of the competencies involved. Based on such reasoning, quite a few European states (e.g. Norway, Austria) are dropping the former content-based state curricula in favour of competence-based curricula, listing sequences of tasks and abilities which are to be achieved at certain stages. As they see it, this gives schools and teachers additional freedom to work out which matter suits the competence development of their clientele best.

If not familiar with Didaktik, this could easily be mistaken for a modernised concept of Bildung (which has happened; Klieme et al, 2003). However, it is rather the direct opposite of the Didaktik idea of Bildung. As shown above, in the Didaktik tradition Bildung is what comes out of the unique meeting between students and contents, whereas the generalised subject matter of the curriculum is only used to instigate the process. Not the shared contents, but the unique process of Bildung is what counts as important. Gaining competence is but one of the many potential

meanings which can be achieved by a given matter. Moreover, there is not one single competency necessarily attached to a given matter. For instance, what seems to be a reasonable approach within science does not necessarily have the same meaning in an everyday context or in another subject matter. What in one case would be an important competency may in another setting turn out as displaced.

(b) Sequence

In the testing community, however, the generalised competencies are a given, whereas the matter attached may vary depending on situations, contexts, and tests, as long as it necessarily engages the same types of competency (cf. Rost, 1996; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2001; Klieme et al, 2003; Maag Merki, 2003). Indeed, the whole testing approach relies on this turn. No harm done, if one accepts the basic assumptions of the latent class analysis, i.e. that there is a more or less hierarchical sequence of competencies, which can be inferred from the test data. However, that requires a pre-modern structure of knowledge with stable relations of matter and meaning, a concept which Didaktik has left behind since the days of Hugo (see above) by accepting that the order of knowledge in science and society and the order of knowledge within the realms of teaching and learning are not the same. If no fixed linkage between certain tasks and generalised competency levels could be assumed, if these tasks could be met by different patterns and levels of competency as well, if competencies are different depending on the context of Bildung they are a part of, then a comparison of competencies across settings and different matter compositions would be impossible, or more exactly, meaningless.

The same goes, of course, for any assumption concerning what should be learned when and in which sequence. In the competency perspective of modern testing, one has to assume that there are discernible levels of achievement, which are consistent across time and place (cf. Maag Merki, 2003). This would fit nicely the naturalistic cosmology of a Comenius, which is build around stable sequences between the micro and the macro, the individual development and the development of mankind. But one wonders how this fits in modern (constructivist) understandings of knowledge, which would stress, for instance, that there are huge cultural and individual differences in the construction of knowledge, or that taking a valid critical stance does not necessarily require cognitive mastery of a task (otherwise democracy would be impossible), or that intuitive solutions can be as good as technical analysis, or that tacit knowledge can match or even surpass explicit mastery, or that distributed knowledge is often more than the addition of individual competencies, etc.

Even worse is the implied understanding of Bildung and knowledge for society at large – on the one hand, because it makes the level of (cognitive) expertise the one and only parameter of good teaching, and even more so, because it insinuates that the degree of a specific type of mastery is what counts for your ability to participate, to have your own voice, to achieve your own Bildung, your own legitimate Weltanschauung. You are above or below average only according to your ability to match a certain sequence of matter and competencies. Again this fits with a pre-modern understanding of Bildung as a hierarchical structured sequence of knowledge hierarchically distributed in society. But what about, for example, children with special needs or students with minority and other non-fitting backgrounds? Within the realms of modern comparative assessment they can only count as liabilities or are simply excluded as non-fitting entities (cf. Koretz & Barton, 2003; Hörmann, 2007). To respect as valid other patterns of competency or meaning than those put into the test constructions would undermine the possibility of clear-cut results, and thereby the political and scientific reasons for having such assessments.

(c) Choice

Didaktik, as presented here, would not fit into this test environment. Therefore it is not by chance that the field of assessment is more or less occupied by educational psychology, and to a lesser degree by people coming from subject matter research, both constructing the meeting between learner and content as a process determined by the inputs, their conditions and constraints, not as an open event of intertwining matter and meaning. Accordingly their models of schooling and

school research construct teaching as a multilayered figuration of factors, not as a situated meeting which creates its own meaning and internal relations based on the decisions of those involved (cf. Krauss et al, 2006). This difference has contributed to the thick walls which currently exist between the empirical research on schooling and the Didaktik discourse. Both General and Subject Matter Didaktik feel that the uniqueness of professional teaching gets lost in the one-sided focus on generalised competencies and constraints, whereas the researchers with good reason complain that their results are not taken into account in schools and by most teachers, even if they match the specific task at hand.

Advanced test specialists would refrain from any claim of covering the whole of Bildung, only maintaining that what they cover is an important part of it, which deserves attention, and fits with, for example, results from research on (multiple) intelligence and learning (cf. Rost, 1996). Would that really help to find a common ground? Not within the frame of traditional Didaktik. Put away the difference of matter and meaning and the other elements not compatible with a generalised competency approach to Bildung, and no Didaktik would be left. If many politicians and researchers argue that national testing combined with reducing the state curriculum to competency expectations would enhance the autonomy of schools and teachers (cf. Munin, 2001; Klieme et al, 2003), this is – plainly speaking – educational rubbish, at least from a Didaktik perspective. The only thing which happens is that the responsibility for matching the required patterns is moved to the classroom, thus reducing the local leeway for restrained teaching, for a teaching allowing for many different kinds of meaning and matter to blossom side by side (cf. Stecher et al, 1998; Whitford & Jones, 2000; Watson & Suppovitz, 2001; Hopmann, 2006). In this case the autonomy of the teacher to associate different meanings with given matters, and the autonomy of Bildung emerging in a situated meeting between a learner and a matter would get lost. However, it makes sense in a perspective defining the classroom as a place to distribute given sets of competencies irrespective of their educative value, because it challenges the teachers to work out which subject matter would serve this purpose best under the conditions at hand (Koretz, 2002). The freedom to choose matter instead of meaning, however, would not really help in the long run, at least as long as testing requires specific combinations of matter and meaning as being universally valid.

4. Comparing Didaktik

The problem is, of course, that testing and assessment are not just inventions of an overachieving educational testing community, but common features of modern societies' governance (cf. Hopmann, 2006). Whatever educationists believe about them, they will not go away or loosen their grip on contemporary schooling. If Didaktik does not fit this situation properly, why not use other approaches, which seemingly fit better to the task, as for instance provided by educational psychology, the Anglo-Saxon curriculum tradition, or the French *transposition diactique*? After all, Didaktik shares with these traditions the notion of the classroom as a transformative space in which knowledge is created.

Like Didaktik, each of these approaches has its own advantages and limits. Educational psychology would be a good choice if the goal is the training of capabilities as used by the competence models. But traditionally, educational psychology has not dealt with the specifics of subject matter, or even higher order competencies, beyond very basic processes, nor has it a concept of Bildung which would allow these competencies to be fitted into a 'consistently coherent whole' (Künzli, 2002). Within its frame, it would not even be possible to observe the multitudes of meaning which can emerge from situated teaching and learning.

Within the Anglo-Saxon context, educational psychology and curriculum research had throughout the twentieth century a division of labour in which the curriculum experts dealt with the subject matter which the psychologists had left out (Doyle & Westbury, 1992; Westbury, 2002). This division came under pressure and still is in distress, when on the one side the testing community moved into defining more and more of the curriculum by standards (Linn, 2000; Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Braun, 2004; Berliner, 2005), and on the other side a reconceptualised curriculum theory (Pinar et al, 1990) lost its interest in actual classrooms and became more and more interested in the political and philosophical implications of the curriculum as a social fabric (Davis, 2002). Right now, one wonders if the 'moribund' status of curriculum research, as

diagnosed by Joseph J. Schwab in the late 1960s, indeed has ended with the final demise of curriculum inquiry (Schwab, 1969). What is presented as curriculum research now, is empirical research on teaching, not much different from the educational psychology tradition (e.g. Mercer, 2006), and without any trace of a historical or institutional understanding of schooling in general (cf. Westbury, 2002), and the promise of Bildung especially, at least without any common place for subject matter, as provided by Schwab or the pretty similar Didaktik differentiation of matter and meaning (cf. Pereira, 1984; Schwab & Roby, 1986). Even in its most advanced formats, as for example, Lee Shulman's model of pedagogical content knowledge (1987), it systematically fails to reconstruct subject matter as open space for the invention of future meaning, as, for instance, even Dewey (1916) had done.

This is different for the newest kid on the block, the French research on 'transposition didactique', as it has emerged since the late 1960s and early 1970s (cf. Chevellard, 2006). The prime focus of this research has always been the question, what happens to content when it is transpositioned from one field of knowledge and understanding to another, namely, from science or everyday life to the classroom, and which space of understanding is given to students by certain ways and means of positioning the matter. Much of the work within this tradition has been closely knitted together with subject matter issues, looking into order and sequence of specific topics in, for example, science, mathematics or language teaching. But again, this is rather different from the subject matter concept of traditional Didaktik. The French transposition concept assumes that meaning and matter are context-specific interwoven, that the problems stem from the different fabric of this interrelation in different spaces, e.g. in science and in science teaching. The transposition didactique has to provide the knowledge of the differences and ruptures embedded in the move from one to another knowledge position, thus enabling the learning of the appropriate meanings of matter.

Of course, Didaktik could as well gain something from knowing more about both the American and the French tradition, as they could profit from knowing more about Didaktik. The empirical research done within the two other traditions could challenge quite a few dearly loved Didaktik beliefs on how dealing with content actually evolves, e.g. if and when it actually moves beyond the mastery levels as described within the competency perspective, and how often it does no more than paying lip service to the prime goal of Bildung. The other way round, Didaktik could enhance and widen the scope of the others as well. For instance, Didaktik could reread their empirical results, which would probably show that many inconsistencies of, for example, the competency concept may stem from the non-linear emergence of meaning within teaching and learning. Didaktik could help to place the testing results where they belong as important aspects of education; however, as being far from giving a complete picture of the impacts of teaching, let alone of Bildung.

But whatever a productive interaction between the traditions may be, there is no way for Didaktik to fall in line with the other's approach to teaching. Neither the curriculum and instruction tradition, nor the French transposition didactique imply a concept of restrained teaching. They do not require the three sine qua non's of Didaktik, namely, an irreducible commitment to Bildung, a founding belief in the educative difference of matter and meaning, and a strong conviction that teaching and learning are necessarily autonomous activities. The others could do without – Didaktik cannot!

Notes

[1] Revised version of a keynote speech at ECER 2006. The author wants to thank Linda Allal and Bernard Schneuwly for the invitation to Geneva and the wonderful challenge, and Ian Westbury (Urbana-Champaign) and Karen Beth Lee Hansen (Kristiansand) for editing an earlier version. The argumentation owes quite a lot to many years of cooperation with Ian Westbury and Rudolf Künzli (Aarau). Finally, I want to dedicate the article to my great Norwegian teacher and colleague, Bjørg B. Gundem (Oslo), on her eightieth birthday in 2007.

[2] See http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/resolveform

[3] See http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1643

[4] See http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/150

[5] See http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/6762

[6] See http://honeyl.public.iastate.edu/quintilian/index.html

[7] See http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/hugo.html

[8] See http://www4.desales.edu/~philtheo/loughlin/ATP/De_Magistro/De_Magistro_11_1.html

[9] See http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupid?key=olbp34684

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