

## **“Allgemeine Didaktik” (“General Didactics”) and “Fachdidaktik” (“Subject Didactics”)**

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### **Abstract**

*This chapter discusses the relationship between “Allgemeine Didaktik” (General Didactics) and “Fachdidaktik” (Subject Didactics) and draws particular attention to the importance of the conception of “Bildung” in German pedagogy. With regard to Bildung this is seen to be central to the “anthropological basics and foundations” of educational sciences (“Erziehungswissenschaften”). The chapter discusses the nature of Didaktik which can be seen as the science whose subject is the planned (institutionalised and organised) support for learning to acquire Bildung.*

### **Introduction**

Educational sciences (“Erziehungswissenschaften”) form the anthropological basics and foundations of German/Austrian teacher education in which a good deal of the professional knowledge for teachers is traditionally represented and taught in the field of “Didaktik”. Recent developments in teacher education have released a discussion on how to reform and redesign programmes. In this situation there seems to be an urgent need firstly, to develop “Fachdidaktik” as disciplines of specific research and theory, and secondly, to clarify the relationship between “Allgemeiner Didaktik” and “Fachdidaktik”.

To initiate discussion some opinions are presented. It is hoped that they will initiate critiques and proposals for amendment and supplement, or raise resistance and opposition.

The word “Didaktik” is not commonly used in English educationists’ language. A broadening discussion has taken place in the last decade to clarify the appropriate translation of this term (cf. Kansanen 1995).

The special meaning of the German word “Didaktik” cannot be understood without reference to another special concept of German pedagogy, that of “Bildung”. Some remarks on the anthropological basis and foundation of education seem to be unavoidable. It should be a matter for discussion whether the English words ‘formation’ or ‘erudition’ (cf. Kansanen 1995, Hopmann 1992) are appropriate translations of “Bildung”.

### **Anthropological basics and foundations in educational sciences (“Erziehungswissenschaften”)**

Human beings are born into a culture, a cultural environment, including a social system. Human personality is developing and shaping in a lifelong process. This development encompasses physical

learning processes in interaction (maturation and decline) as well as psychical learning processes in interaction with other human beings and in dealing with cultural phenomena such as objects, institutions, ideas, sciences etc. The acquisition of, and dealing with, cultural objects may be conceived as a major part of “Bildung” as a process, which represents a cluster of learning processes. I will use the German word.

The concept “Bildung” may also be conceived of as an (intermediate) actual state in the process of personality development. In this sense “Bildung” may be seen as the subjective state of becoming a part of the culture.

The learning processes are supposed to lead to an integration of knowledge and rational thinking (as a basis for the competence to judge), of volition (as a prerequisite for the readiness and ability to decide) and of competence (conceived of as capability to act in an efficient and responsible manner in social terms). In this meaning “Bildung” may be seen as an ideal norm. In this perspective theories of “Bildung” (cf. Derbolav 1970, Klafki 1963) talk about a connection of “materiale Bildung” and “formale Bildung” to a concept of “kategoriale Bildung”.

Those processes of learning, which in their entirety represent the process of “Bildung”, receive their impetus from dealing with people and experiences with objects. They occur occasionally and may be seen as accidental and disordered. In more complex and developed societies and cultures these learning processes are viewed as insufficient to help (young) people to become responsible and competent members of society in the sense of educated personalities (“Gebildete”). It then seems necessary to establish institutions and professions which have to promote organized, designed learning processes. Spontaneous and situational learning has to receive support and be supplemented by planned intentional teaching.

The promotion of learning processes, relevant to acquiring “Bildung” by teaching, relates to two components:

- (i) selection and provision of cultural components as goals and content of learning
- (ii) support for learning processes as regards their efficacy and success

The overall aim may be defined as the educated personality (“Gebildete/r”) described above. In modern democratic societies this aim may be specified as follows:

- (i) in an egalitarian sense it has to apply to all citizens;
- (ii) as regards content, it relates to central problems of living and
- (iii) is relevant to everybody and may be called “key problems” (“Schlüsselprobleme”);
- (iv) as regards the human potential it relates to all human capabilities (cf. Klafki 1985)

This leads to the concept of “Didaktik”, which may be understood as the science whose subject, whose topic, is the planned – that means institutionalized and organized – support of learning to acquire “Bildung”.

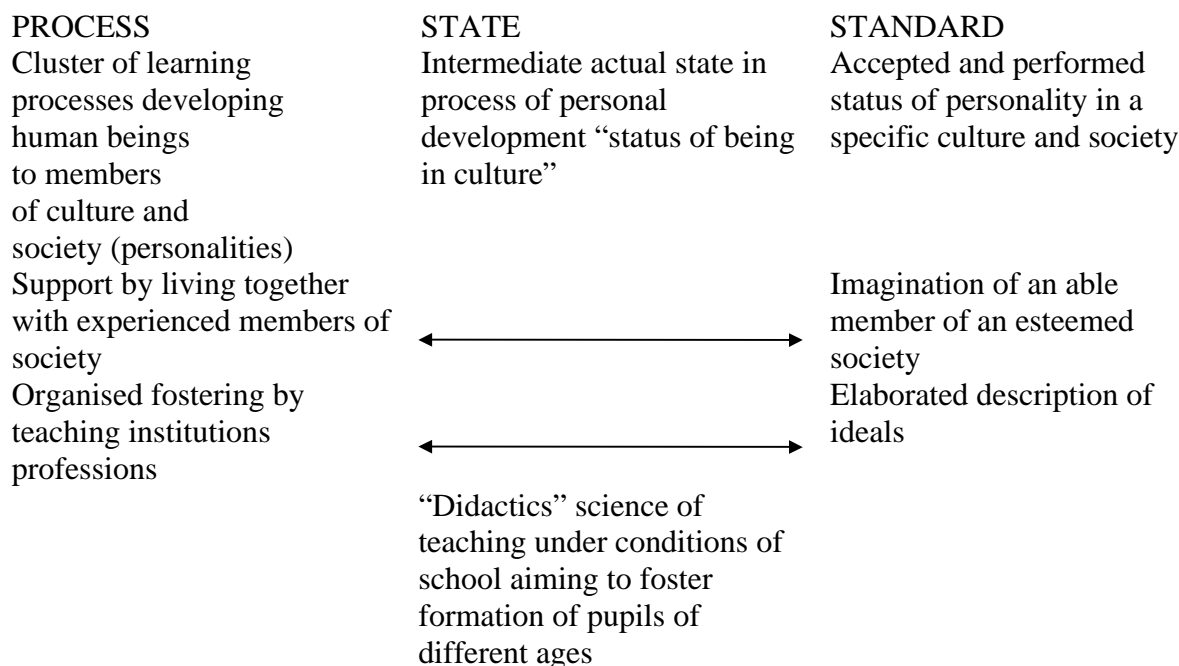
### **Some reflections on the concept “Didaktik” (“Didactics”)**

“Didaktik” (“didactics”) may be conceived as the science whose subject is the planned (institutionalized and organized) support of learning to acquire “Bildung”. “Didaktik” may be concretized in relation to different institutional contexts (cf. Schulze 1993). In this paper it will be

related to the learning formation “school”. “Allgemeine Didaktik” (“general didactics”) of teaching in schools deals with the following topics:

- (i) problems of the pedagogical aims and objectives as well as task areas of the institution or school in particular social contexts
- (ii) given conditions and available means to reach defined aims and objectives
- (iii) problems of learning under the institutional conditions of school

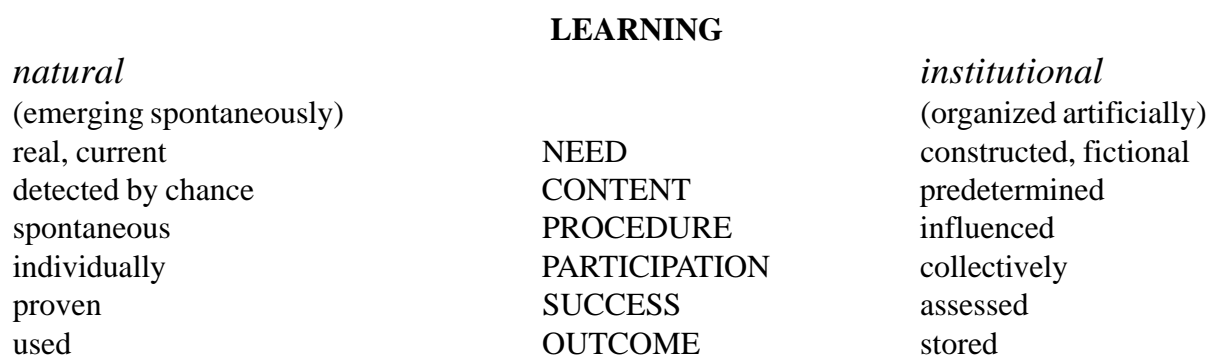
### Formation/Erudition



*Figure 1*

A theoretical approach towards “Didaktik” based on theories of learning suggests the adaptation of teaching to the learning processes of students. Based on knowledge of psychological processes of learning, this approach aims at analysing and detecting those teaching procedures which seem to be most appropriate to promote the learning processes of students (cf. Aebli 1983).

Contrasting “natural learning” and “learning in the institution school” some problem areas of “Didaktik” may be outlined:



*Figure 2*

“Didaktik” may be specified in relation of different institutional contexts. On this occasion it will be related to the institution school. “Allgemeine Didaktik” of teaching in schools deals with the following problems:

- (i) Selecting content to be learned
- (ii) Providing learning occasions
- (iii) Structuring learning procedures
- (iv) Providing opportunities to participate in learning for every individual student within the class
- (v) Giving feedback on learning outcomes
- (vi) Ensuring learning outcomes
- (vii) Preparing transfer of learning

“Spezialdidaktiken” (“special didactics”) of teaching in schools may relate to problems of teaching in different types of school, to particular age levels of the students or to specific domains of content (subject disciplines). A major type of specialization may be called “Fachdidaktik” (“subject didactics”).

“Didaktik” as a theory of teaching at school has to deal with problems of content and procedures of teaching in the classroom. A theory of syllabus (“Lehrplanteorie”) – I avoid the use of the word curriculum – may be situated in the centre of questions on

- (i) Legitimation and structuring of learning areas
- (ii) Selection and definition of learning goals and learning subjects
  - Foundation of responsibility for man and world
  - Possibility of fundamental experimental experiences in important dimensions of culture and nature
  - Initiating and supporting of problem solving learning processes
  - Fostering abilities in independent thinking, judging, deciding and acting

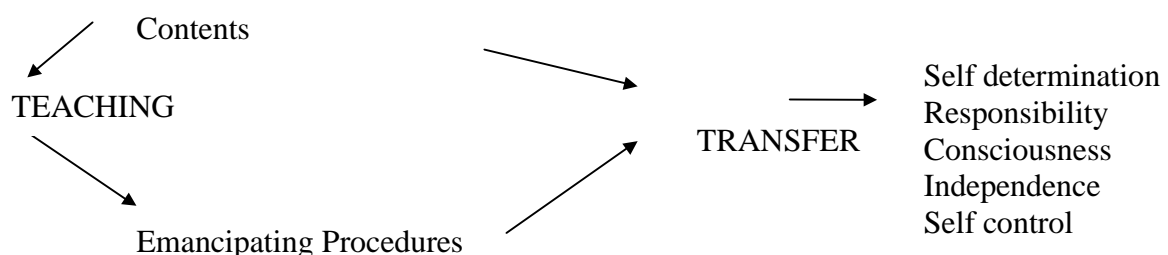


Figure 3

Tasks of “Allgemeine Didaktik” traditionally focus on problems of content of teaching and problems of procedures of teaching. The principles of prototypical (“exemplarisch”) learning and of genetic (“genetisch”) learning are of major importance in this context.

Teaching which aims to foster, to advance, to support, the process of “Bildung” under the conditions of school as institutional framework is the topic of “Allgemeine Didaktik”.

Two problems on the procedures of teaching seem to be substantial:

- (i) How has the process of teaching to be structured so that students find optimal conditions for their learning? It seems to be necessary to find structures or “gestalt” of teaching based on and compatible with structures or “gestalt” of (active) learning.

- (ii) How have learning situations in the social context of a classroom to be arranged, so that students find ample opportunity for individual and active learning? An optimal support of the learning processes of each student by the teacher may be defined as the aim of these efforts. A balanced relationship between autonomy of the learner and external guidance by the teacher has to be found.

Following gestalt-psychology, learning processes of students may be conceived as problem-solving processes, which have to be evoked and guided. Learning as problem-solving may support intrinsic motivation and offers students opportunities to acquire procedures (methods, heuristics) relevant for learning at school and in everyday life. Students may experience the relevance of inquiry and research as well as thinking and reasoning. Teachers who arrange learning situations following a problem-oriented approach seem to fulfil the pedagogical goal of reducing the difference in competence between teacher and student and therefore of helping students to emancipate (cf. *To “Didaktik” based on gestalt-psychology* Roth 1957, Seel 1983, 1997, Winnefeld 1957).

### **The fields of studies and their educational impact**

Some comments on “subject disciplines” (this term is used for the fields of studies in the school curriculum: “Unterrichtsfächer”, and should be further discussed) will be helpful in this situation.

Subject matters within the syllabus or curriculum considered important for youth take shape in the form of subject disciplines. By means of these subject matters realities important for living in a particular society are represented. In this way the student acquires behavioural patterns and norms that make her/him a critical and productive member of society.

The selection of (content) areas, topics and the subject matters (disciplines) that are part of a school system, depends on the particular societal-cultural situation. The traditional educational canon of our school system is neither a historically compelling nor a systematically homogenous one nor is it a universal one with everlasting validity. It developed due to the interplay of cultural-historical tradition and current societal needs and is the result of a balancing of interests in the field of educational policy. How well these fields of studies (subjects, “subject disciplines”) actually represent the fields of life has to be evaluated from time to time. “Subject disciplines” – even if they may have the same name – are by no means parts or extracts of sciences. They differ in goals and extent. “Subject disciplines” and modern sciences also differ in their particular aims and goals. In the following discussion the more common word “subject” will be used for “Unterrichtsfach”.

The subject of Geography, for example, also includes contents from the fields of geology, mineralogy, meteorology, astronomy etc. This incongruity becomes even more evident if no science exists with the same name. The subject of Economics, for example, covers parts of economics, business, finance, economic policy, history of economics etc. On the other hand important areas of German, are not dealt with by the science “German philology”. This means that subjects developed earlier than modern sciences. The teaching of languages in schools is still strongly oriented by the mediaeval trivium (grammar, rhetoric and dialectics), in any case more strongly than by philological sciences.

Subjects, in their original sense, are skills, “arts”, or knowledge. They represent independent teaching material for the introduction to connections and codes of conduct important for life. Accordingly subjects and sciences also differ in their particular goals. Science aims at a complete and methodically appropriate comprehension of, and a systematic approach to, all facts within a defined reality. Subjects represent specific forms of encounter and dealing with important dimensions of reality. They aim at the opening up of certain fundamental experiences influencing behaviour. The fundamental

experiences can be defined as the educational impacts of the subjects as such. Subjects may be seen as selected knowledge and skills. They represent teaching complexes relevant for the introduction to life in culture and society.

Several different educational efforts can be united into a subject due to their mutual aiming at a particular fundamental experience. An example: the educational impact of the subject Geography can be seen in the imparting of the fundamental experience that everywhere in the world people are forced to deal with factors like soil, landscape and climate to guarantee life. To reveal this basic experience is a major task in the teaching of Geography. Subjects in this sense can be interpreted as “fields of concentration of methodological work”. As long as a certain subject and a special science within certain limits deal with the same topics, they do it in different ways and with varying goals. These goals are, on the one hand, determined by the higher purpose of specialized research and, on the other, by the comprehensive character forming of the students.

Only by means of establishing relations towards the human being and her/his life in nature and society does a topic turn into a subject of teaching. This important feature is emphasized by the educational impact of the subject discipline. The fundamental experiences themselves cannot be tested as results of teaching nor be assessed by grading. The existence of relevant knowledge does not guarantee that these very insistent and educationally efficient basic experiences can be achieved. As non-operational and non-controllable learning objectives they can only indirectly be strived for by means of appropriate instruction. The educational efficacy of any subject is reflected in its contribution to the development of the realm of responsibilities under which a human being has to learn, to take decisions and to perform. Even though subjects in this sense cannot be understood as diminutives or preliminary stages of sciences, school still works on the principle of an orientation towards science. The purpose of schools is to equip us with the necessary tools to function in a scientifically dominated world as well as to foster the ability of keeping a scientific distance from essential prerogatives of our society. In detail, this corresponds with four tasks:

- (i) Acquisition of scientifically secured knowledge
- (ii) Competence for communication and cooperation
- (iii) Competence for critical reflection
- (iv) Competence for lifelong-learning and permanent revision of knowledge.

In other words, the scientification (“Verwissenschaftlichung”) of all areas of life leads to the following consequences in the sector of general education (“Allgemeinbildung”): continuous questioning of the known, openness to new knowledge and flexibility as well as the readiness to deal with change.

### **On “Fachdidaktik” (“subject didactics”)**

“Fachdidaktik” (“subject didactics”) represents a scientific discipline dealing with the following tasks:

- (i) Constitution and legitimization of a subject (“subject discipline”) as a contribution towards achieving the general educational goal of school (not all sciences are represented among the subjects taught in school)
- (ii) Selection of educationally relevant content and its structuring
- (iii) Assurance of the standard of the academic quality of issues mentioned before (“orientation on sciences”/“Wissenschaftsorientierung” of subject disciplines)
- (iv) Development of subject-specific procedures for teaching/learning
- (v) Evaluation and securing of results of learning in the context of results of “Allgemeine Didaktik”(“general didactics”)

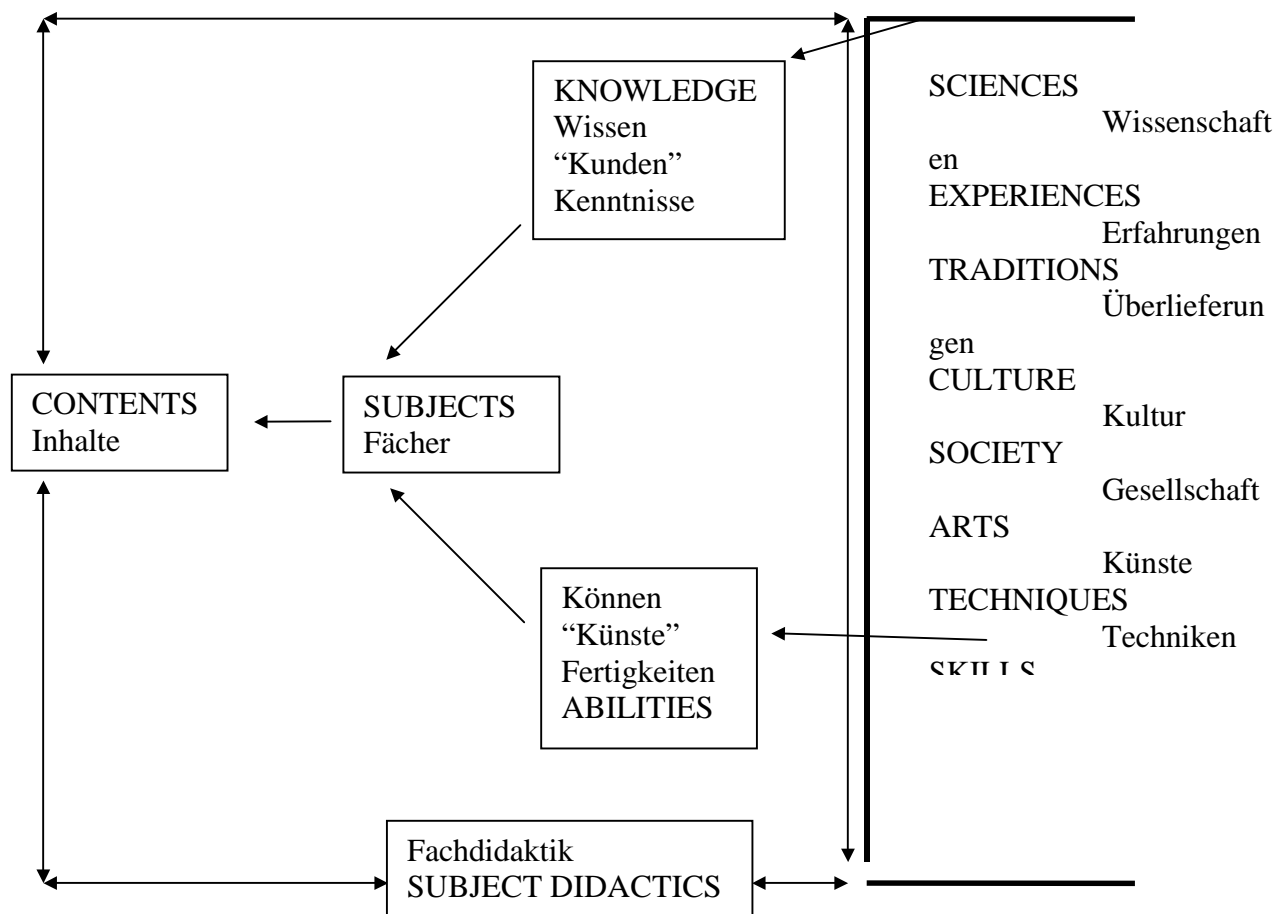


Figure 4

“Fachdidaktik” (“subject didactics”) should be regarded as the relevant discipline in initial teacher education at colleges of teacher education and at universities. It seems to be indispensable that “Fachdidaktik” (“subject didactics”) has the opportunity to exercise influence on those academic disciplines providing academic knowledge relevant to teaching particular subjects. This influence seems to be necessary so that the needs and expectations of initial teacher education (e.g. selection of topics and methods) can be met adequately by the programmes of the other academic disciplines. If the other academic disciplines are not in a position to provide adequate programmes, they have to be developed by “Fachdidaktik” (“subject didactics”) additionally and independently.

**The relationship between “Allgemeine Didaktik” (“general didactics”) and “Fachdidaktik” (“subject didactics”) and their influence on the teacher education programme**

Figure 5 demonstrates the structure of the programmes in both fields:

Allgemeine Didaktik	Fachdidaktik (subject didactics)
1. Matters relating to the teaching process	1. Matters relating to the teaching content of subject teaching
Learning under conditions of school	
* teaching process	* educational purpose of a subject
* arrangements of classroom interaction	* science-subject relationship
* media	* syllabus of subject
* evaluation	* subject matters and content
	* learning objectives

Materials	Fachdidaktik (subject didactics) Formation
2. Matters relating to the teaching content	2. Matters relating to subject specific teaching processes
* general education (“Allgemeinbildung”) as task of school	*teaching structure and process
*subject disciplines as areas of learning	* teaching methodology
* canon of subject disciplines	* media
* principles of teaching	* evaluation
* theory of syllabus	
* lesson planning	

Figure 5

## References

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