

BEGRIPSVORMING BY GESKIEDENISONDERRIG: ENKELE DIDAKTIES-PEDAGOGIESE VRAAGSTUKKE SOME DIDACTICAL-PEDAGOGICAL PROBLEMS RELATED TO CONCEPT-FORMATION IN THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

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"Let us think like men of action, and act like men of thought" (Bergson)

1. INTRODUCTION

In as much as we teach children **History**, (if this subject is in any way related to the science or discipline of History), History is, by definition, a conceptual structure (King & Brownell p. 95). In as much as we teach **children** History, (if this subject is in any way related to our educational endeavour). History is, by definition, an experiential leading of the young towards living proper lives in a properly constituted world — as adults do.

2. ON THE GENERAL NATURE OF CONCEPTS

(Carroll, 1964)

A. In spite of the accumulated experience of millennia relatively little is known about either aspect of our problem:

(a) The considerable body of experimental research on inductive concept learning/formation, and the surprisingly small body of experimental research on deductive (i.e. verbal-explanatory) concept "transmission" have not yet produced any conclusive evidence on how schools can and should teach history (or the concepts of any other subject for that matter) with any certainty about the pupils' learning what is taught. It has not yet been shown what the significance of laboratory research is for teaching, because these experiments are almost exclusively inductive, and deal with tremendously simplified concepts (viz. "a red triangle").

(b) The education of children towards a responsible and "proper" adulthood, and in our context the exact role History is to fulfill in this process, are still matters which, in spite of all psychological claims to the contrary, belong to the domain of conjecture; educational aims, and system-thought.

The more every teacher is conscious of the problems related to concept formation and the possible function of that conceptual structure which we call History in the educational framework, the more effective, we believe will our teaching become.

B. The teaching of words, and of the meaning and concepts they designate or convey (and, sometimes "embody") is likely to remain one of the principal tasks of the teachers of History for the foreseeable future, and at all levels of teaching. This entails teaching the meanings of unfamiliar words, recognizing unfamiliar ways of using familiar words, recognizing the possibility of ambiguity and the role of context in resolving it, shaping entirely new concepts in students' minds, and explaining new words in familiar terms.

C. (a) Concepts seem to

be the abstracted and often cognitively structured classes of "mental" experience learned by humans in the course of their life histories.

(b) Concepts seem to be largely common to humans, at least in part, because of the continuity of the experiential environment (of which any school system is a vital part).

(c) Concepts tend to acquire names, through language learning, and because of this they can be shared and diffused.

(d) One necessary condition for the formation of a concept, at least inductively, is that the individual must have a series of experiences that are in one or more respects similar (= positive instances), preceded, interspersed, or followed by experiences which are negative instances.

(e) As the complexity of the concept increases, there is a greater necessity for an appropriate sequencing of positive and negative instances in order to ensure adequate learning of the concept. Concept learning from verbal explanation must, as it were, put the learner through a series of vicarious experiences of positive and negative instances.

(f) Apart from the number, sequence, and timing of the instances presented, the learner's orientation ("set"), and the amount of reinforcement are probably vital factors in the acquisition of concepts.

(g) Concepts probably develop by way of "evolution" and progressive differentiation towards ever finer distinctions (viz. "weight/mass"!)

(h) In spite of their intersubjective similarity, concepts are nonetheless essentially idiosyncratic because individuals do, after all, differ in their experiential becoming.

(i) Every concept usually retains, amongst others, those emotional elements, motivations, etc, which formed part of the experiences themselves.

(j) When a concept is learned inductively, it seems that there is some sort of reinforcing condition that brands a word as being associated with a given concept. When a concept is learned deductively the word is paired contiguously with the concept as an experience. The connection must then work in either direction: the word must evoke the concept and the concept must evoke the word. Thus, the problems of paired-associate memory are added to those of concept learning itself. Concept and word probably often form that insoluble unity which is

called "the speaking word", and which plays such a considerable role in human thought (as against the role played by "the spoken word" in human speech).

- (k) By means of the words a person is allowed to use (rules of usage) society maintains a "quality control" on the referential meaning of words — even if it means that people (and pupils) are often credited for concept attainment merely on the strength of a word used. The teaching problem then, is twofold, the pupil learns to attach societally-standardized words and meanings to the concepts he has already formed, or he learns new concepts that properly correspond to societally-standardized words and meanings.
- (l) Concept attainment becomes more difficult as the number of relevant attributes increases, the number of values/attributes increases, and as the salience of these attributes (complexity) decreases.
- (m) Concept attainment becomes more difficult as the information load that must be handled by the pupil in order to identify the concept increases, and as the relevant information is increasingly carried by negative rather than positive instances.
- (n) Concepts learned in school often depend upon a network of related or prerequisite concepts.
- (o) Further, the attributes on which school-learned concepts depend are frequently verbal, depending on elements of meaning that cannot easily be represented in terms of simple sensory qualities (as used in concept formation experiments).
- (p) Although most concept teaching at school is deductive (verbal-explanatory), it is not clear to what an extent the actual learning in such a situation is similar to inductive learning. It is well-known that purely deductive, verbal procedure are frequently insufficient to help pupils attain concepts and it seems safe to surmise that the deductive teaching short-cut does not radically alter the basics of concept learning.
- (q) Verbal teaching of concepts seems to be either
 - (i) by way of verbal equivalents which hope to evoke an already formed concept to which the defining words stand in the same relationship as the word defined, or
 - (ii) by way of **genus et differentia**, showing how it corresponds to and differs from other experiences, (positive and negative instances), or, closely related to it;
 - (iii) **by way of definition, identifying and describing all the criterial attributes that are likely to be relevant for a concept. Obviously, such a definition is successful only to the extent that it identifies and describes correctly, to the extent that the prerequisite network of concepts has been adequately attained by the pupil, and to the extent that it communicates the proper values and relationships of the criterial attributes to the pupil. In most cases such teaching must be followed by sufficient reinforcement.**
- (r) Concepts, then, should be viewed as relation structures and themselves part of larger, hierarchical conceptual schemes. Unorganised information on both levels are highly perishable.

And assimilation of new information into the existing conceptual scheme has to result in a corresponding reshaping of the conceptual scheme by way of progressive differentiation (Piaget's "accommodation"). If not, the maturation of thought is positively retarded. This also means that new information can only be meaningfully acquired by the pupil to the extent that it can be subsumed, (Ausubel) into the existing conceptual scheme. If not, it is either perishable or meaningless or both.

- (s) All learning experiences teach "sets to learn". Depending, amongst other factors, on the teaching procedures employed, pupils may learn to look for the structure of the problems set by the tack of learning a new concept, or for arbitrary procedures. They may acquire a disposition to search for the relationships, patterns, and values of the criterial attributes (ideas, facts, etc.) that characterize the concept or conceptual scheme, or they may acquire the disposition to look for single "right answers". (Taba and Elzey (1964) give the following example: asking pupils to name **the important cities in the Balkans**, without revealing the criteria for importance, or without developing such a criterion with the class, leaves them no alternative but to guess what the teacher wants or to recollect memoriter what the book listed. **Repeated experiences like this cause students to adopt irrational and arbitrary modes of thinking and a dependence on memory rather than on judgement, inference and conceptual schemes/structures of a coherent and intelligible order.** "Right answers", as words which do not actually refer to concepts of sufficient quality, are on par with conditioned vocalization and bear no relationship to either History or education. **The acquisition of conceptual meaning, on the other hand, is what both History and education is about!**
- (t) It seems, then, that there is a clear "genetic interdependence" of the structure and the meaning which is the concept. (Werner and Kaplan, 1950).
- (u) In order to be meaningful, then, verbal teaching must transform the word into an experience, which, as representative of a class of experiences, must be isolated, (set apart from its experiential background), identified (characterized as to its criterial attributes), and named again in order to ensure proper concept formation (Van der Stoep, 1969).
- (v) In the child's becoming, it seems important that the emotional component of the concept, viz. the proper attitude towards this constellation of meaning, should be as clear as its cognitive component. Without clear guidance the concept is still ambivalent on a point which is vital for the way the child is to integrate the concept into his praxiognostic view of life.
- (w) If it is true, then, that a concept is not only useless, but actually meaningless unless it appears in some relationship to other concepts in that large conceptual scheme which is the discipline of History, then, it seems, teachers should clearly teach:
 - (i) the concepts,
 - (ii) the relationship between concepts, and
 - (iii) the language for expressing all these.

(x) Bruner (1960) believes that, considering that concepts can be taught not merely in the symbolic mode (typical of school teaching language), but also in either the iconic (by way of images) or the enactive mode (by way of action), it is possible to teach any child any concept (at least in some meaningful way). The important concepts would then, naturally, be those ideas that are considered to be the fundamental ideas of a discipline. (Would longitudinal time and human action as sufficient reason for subsequent human events in a temporal context qualify as two such fundamental concepts in the teaching of History?)

(y) Curiosity, wonder at the mystery of at least the contingency of the world, and a belief that the world is intelligible, at least in part, probably lie at the root of man's need to know. Belief, therefore, seems to be a condition of propositional concept formation. If nature abhors a vacuum, as it sometimes said, might it not be said that the mind abhors an event without a cause. If not, the occurrence of events are rendered purely fortuitous; all events are transformed into a mere random, unintelligible sequence.

3. ON MEANING

- (a) If being is equated with meaning, it means that historical facts, events, dates, etc. are only what they mean.
- (b) In the child's quest for meaning (i.e. understanding) knowledge progressively differentiates (i.e. the pupil learns new concepts) by way of
 - (i) making what is obvious problematic, and
 - (ii) finding an answer which satisfactorily solves this problem (even if both quest and problems are completely implicit).
- (c) If the effectiveness of concept learning depends on its meaningfulness, (Mursell 1954) it means that the degree, level, extent, and mode of meaningfulness of the concept determine the usefulness and permanency of the concept both in its subject context and in its life context.
- (d) It must be clearly understood that the child's quest for meaning is both for the objective, intrinsic meaning of the concept and for its existential meaning, i.e. the relevance of this understanding for his personal life situation. **While the "pure" historian might, possibly, be interested in teaching only the objective meaning of the concept, the teacher-educator must necessarily also care for the subjective meaning of the concepts he transmits to the children.**
- (e) If we learn only what we live, in the degree that we live it and to the extent that we accept it to live by (Kilpatrick, 1951), then authentic learning is a factor of how the pupil experiences (i.e. lives) the teaching of the concepts. Verbal meanings never really grip a life unless they tie in with factors of the self that are other than cerebral. Where there is no real depth and width of meaning, concepts are shallow, without real understanding, tend towards "empty verbalism" and are highly transient; there is little transfer, rote memory plays an undue role, intrinsic motivations is weak, there is little joy and wonder, and extrinsic motivation remains preponderant.
- (f) There are obviously limits to the way repeated usage of a word, even in context, induces the

discovery of meaning. Brown & Berko (1960) found that this ties up closely with age and the child's developing appreciation of syntax. Werner and Kaplan (1950) underscored this in their findings on the increasing sophistication with increasing age which makes contextual clues to the substance of concepts increasingly effective with increase in age and schooling.

4. OOR STRUKTUUR

- (a) Die kind se soeke na sin-in-die-werklikheid, is tegelyk 'n soeke na orde-in-die-werklikheid. Was dié ordening van die werklikheid onmoontlik, dan was die synsuniversum 'n onoorsigtelike chaos van partikulariteite wat ontoeganklik vir die menslike gees was en waarin enige vorm van menslike lewe onmoontlik was. Dit is juis in die strukturering (d.w.s. die verbandlegginge) van die begrip waarin die gelykblywende, die konstante, die algemene kwaliteit van die werklikheid toeganklik word vir die menslike greep.
- (b) Alle leer en geheue (Van Parreren), insig (von Hiele) en intelligensie (Kwant), intuïsie (Bruner) en leerdink (Kohnstamm), probleem-oplossing (Dewey) en waarneming (Ausubel) is sake van verbandlegging.
- (c) Begrippe kom dus slegs tot stand vir sover dit gestruktureerd is en op die wyse (d.w.s. met die inhoud) waarop dit gestruktureer is.
- (d) Daar bestaan 'n bykans onoorsigtelike groot aantal wyses van strukturering, wisselend vanaf die mees starre, strakke, insiglose wyses soos klank, ritme, e.d.m. tot hoogs abstrakte, simboliese en insigtelike wyses.
- (e) Waar die onderwyser nie die ordeningstrukture duidelik en optimaal aan die kind stel nie, word die kind gedwing om terug te val op die karige ordeningsmiddelle waaroor hy wel beskik, en wat waarskynlik ver te kort skiet by die insigtelike, fyn-genuanseerde, en "korrekte" ordeningsraamwerk van die begrip wat die onderwyser in gedagte het (maar nie oordra nie).
- (f) Die mees gewensde ordeningsprinsipes van skoolse leer is dié wat veral redelik en logies is, wat in die taal uitdrukking, identifisering, benoeming en permanensie vind, en wat op omvangryke ordeningsbeginsels gebaseer is.
- (g) In dié lig moet alle begrippe wat aan die kind geleer word, gesien word as begrypingskategorieë waardeur die wêreld van sy loutere partikulariteit bevry word tot 'n veilige woonplek vir die kind, vanweë die begrypbaarheid van dinge, gebeurtenisse, ens.
- (h) Deur die verbandhoudende struktuur van die kriteriale elemente van die begrip te beklemtoon, word die **begrypbaarheid** van die begrip dus beklemtoon.
- (i) Begripsvorming in die onderrig van Geskiedenis, is dan presies die begrypbaarmaking van die Geskiedenis deur dit verbandlegend te struktureer.
- (j) Strukturering is dan die aantoon van die organiese eenheid van die patroon (= plan, beginsel, verhoudings,) van die begrip, en Mursell (1954) dui aan dat dit presies is wat hy met fokus bedoel, dit gee doelgerigtheid aan die leergebeure, inhoud daaraan, en organiseer of rig die kind se soeke na betekenis.
- (k) Strukturering moet nie met blote sistemativering verwar word nie. Sistemativering sonder ver-

bandlegging kan bloot 'n meer sistematiese (maar nog steeds 'n onbegrypbare, en dus betekenislose) verbalisering ten gevolg hê. Dieselfde geld ten opsigte van die opeenvolging van die begripsinhoud: die volgorde moet in sigself betekenisvol en verbandlegend wees.

5. OOR BEGRIPSVORMING IN DIE ONDERRIG VAN GESKIEDENIS

(a) Om die verbalisme te vermy wat in die voorgaande herhaaldelik ter sprake was, mag dit wees dat dit in die onderrig van Geskiedenis gaan om ondermeer die volgende begrippe wat tot 'n ordeningstruktuur saamgeweef moet word: longitudinale temporaliteit, kausaliteit van die fisiese en die gebeurtenisse t.o.v. menslike idees, ruimte en historiese ruimte, gebeurtenisse as menslik geïntendeerde en bedoelde handelinge, persone in hul histories-kulturele plasing, die ideale in sy temporale, kulturele en historiese oorsaaklikheid as 'n wordingsgebeure.

(b) "Belewing van **tyd** beteken belewing van 'n veranderende wêreld en daarom ook van verandering van sigself, dus **wording**. Bergson wys in hierdie verband daarop dat tydsbelewing beteken belewing van **gebeure** in die tyd. Wat gebeur, gebeur in die hede, dog die hede wys heen op dié toekoms, en gebeure in die verlede beteken historisiteit, d.w.s. belewing van verhoudinge in die verlede. . . Daarom beteken belewing van die tyd basies wording, aangesien daar geen leë momente vir die mens bestaan nie, maar alle momente gevulde momente in die tyd beteken" (Sonnekus 1968, p. 60). Hierin is die subjektief-patiese vertrekpunt duidelik aangedui.

Word daar nou van die patiese tot die meer gnostiese beweeg, soos in die Geskiedenisonderrig behoort te gebeur, dan is dit belangrik om daarop te let dat die begrip van tyd essensieel 'n ruimtelike begrip is waarin temporale opeenvolging omskep word tot ruimtelike opeenvolging van distansies op 'n tydlyn. Maar vir die kind vloei tyd nie in 'n reguit lyn nie, of, wat dit betref, in geen rigting nie, behalwe miskien rondom die horlosie se wyserplaat in 'n sirkelvormige dimensie! Daar sal eers moet wees: belewing van tyd-intervalle (wag op iets vir 'n sekere tyd), dan 'n ruimtelike oorplasing ('n sypaadjie, eindeloos na beide kante toe), dan 'n kognitiewe struktuur van die intervale (minute, ure, dae, maande, jare), dan 'n gebruikmaking van skaal om die ver verlede (eeue) tuis te bring, maar eers sal die begrip van skaal in sy relasionele uitbreikbaarheid duidelik moet wees (d.m.v. kaarte van die onmiddellike omgewing in verskillende groottes, d.w.s. volgens verskillende skale). Pas eers nadat so 'n kognitiewe begrip van tyd tot stand gebring is, kan daar enige hoop bestaan dat die kind 'n outentieke begrip kan vorm van: Jaar, eeu, 1652, Middeleeue (in 'n tydplasing), ens.

Die vraag ontstaan of daar naastenby genoeg aandag gegee word aan die opbou van dergelike fundamentele begrippe wat inderdaad vóóronderstellinge is vir geweldige strukture van begrippe wat hierop gebou word in die sillabuse. Omgekeerd: is 'n groot deel van die didaktiese mislukking wat hom openbaar in geklike verbalisasies wat spreek van totaal in-outentieke begripvorming (eksamenflaatirs) nie te wyte aan onvoldoende strukturering van basiese begrippe nie. Immers, buite of sonder 'n voldoende begripsraamwerk word alle begrippe begriploos.

(e) Verder moet dit onthou word dat dit nie gaan om die opbou van begrippe as "kennis" van die werklikheid sonder meer nie, maar dat dit altyd gaan om 'n sekere perspektief op die werklikheid, in hierdie geval die historiese werklikheid. Dit is so dat elke vak die werklikheid anders tematiseer, d.w.s. struktureer. 'n Strukturering (relasionele verbandlegging van kriteriale attribute) wat eg histories wil wees, kan daarom alleen deur die historikus gedoen word, of dan, minstens die onderwyser wat tot op 'n sekere peil óók 'n historiese insig het. **We' eger belangrik is, is dat die historiese werklikheid vir die kind tot egte ervaringswerklikheid gemaak moet word voordat daar van insigtelike begripvorming sprake kan wões.** Hierdie ervarings moet sterk, aansprekend, aansteeklik, aktueel, eenvoudig en veelvuldig wees.

(f) Soos aangedui in die voorbeeld van die opbou van 'n tydsbegrip, moet alle begrippe in die onderrig van Geskiedenis uitdifferensieer uit die kind se bestaande begripstruktuur (van die bekende na die onbekende). Begripvorming **de nove** is onmoontlik. Dat daar te dikwels meer aandag aan die logiese en sistematiese progressie gegee word (soos dit in die historikus-onderwyser se omvangryke begripstruktuur logies is) as aan die uitdifferensiering tot die historiese begrippe is ook een van die probleme van die onderrig van Geskiedenis.

(g) Alhoewel dit waar is dat verbale onderrig 'n magtige instrument tot begripvorming is, lê daar tog 'n verdere gevaar in die verbale onderrig: óf die onderwyser vereis 'n inhoudelike sofistikasie van die begrip waartoe die kind nog nie in staat is nie, (denkvlak) óf die onderwyser vereis 'n ekspressie van begrippe waartoe die kind nog nie in staat is nie (taalbeheer). Dat die onderwyser dikwels op sowel 'n denkvlak as 'n taalvlak beweeg wat te ver bo die peil van die klas is, gebeur ook dikwels. Dit skyn belangrik te wees dat die onderwyser juis van sy taaleleenthede moet gebruik maak om 'n korrigerende terugvoering (vraag en antwoord) te verkry waardeur hy die relasionele inhoud van die begrippe wat hy onderrig gedurig noukeurig kan bekijk. Daar moet gewaak word teen te veel klem op die verbale response van "regte antwoorde" wat die sinledigheid van die begrippe self verberg.

(h) Eenmalige uiteensetting van die begripsinhoud is selde voldoende. Daar moet 'n veelvoud van positiewe en negatiewe gevalle aangebied word, waarin die kind 'n sekerheid van beweging kan verwerf. Hierdie gevalle moet liefsoos eenvoudig moontlik wees, sodat die verbandhoudende elemente so duidelik as moontlik sigbaar kan wees. Dit beteken veral dat die verskil in relatiewe waarde tussen die essensieële en die bloot kontingente, die belangrike en die onbelangrike elemente, besonder duidelik gestel moet word.

(i) Bowenal moet die historiese in sy **begrypbaarheid** in die begripvorming verskyn. (Die kind moet kan begryp **hoe** dat dit moontlik was dat Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 aan die Kaap geland het; hoe dat dit juis hy was, hoe dat dit juis in 1652 was, en hoe dat dit juis aan die Kaap was. Hy moet ook kan begryp hoe dat daar 'n Jan van Riebeeck kon wees, hoe dat daar hoegenaamd 'n Kaap kan wees, en hoe dat hy daar geland, d.w.s. aangekom het, en hoe dat daar hoegenaamd 'n 1652 kan wees. Dit is duidelik dat laasgenoemde vier begrypbaarhede vooronderstellings is vir die eersgenoemde drie).

(j) Daar sal opgelet word dat die belangrikste aspek in die begripvorming is nie dat daar historiese

“feite” is wat die kind moet leer nie, maar dat die “feite” eers tot die egte begrippe word wat in die onderrig nagestreef word, in die beklemtoning van die hoe. Dit is hier waar die “feit” in sy vanselfsprekendheid (soos die onderwyser die gebeure konstateer) deurbreek word tot ’n problematiese struktuur wat begryp moet word. En eers in dié problematiese-woording van die verbale konstateering van die “feit” groei dit eg tot begrip. Dit is waarskynlik die verskil tussen konstateerende onderrig wat oppervlakkige begripsvorming (wat o.m. swak in die geheue bekleeft) tot gevolg het, en denkende onderrig wat blywende insig (met relatiewe gemak vir die leerling) tot gevolg het.

- (k) Alle hulpmiddels, maar in besonder die handboek, die swartbord en opsommings, moet in die eerste instansie toegespits word op duidelike en oorsigtelike struktureringe waarin daar op minstens die beeldende (gewoonlik visuele) modus struktuur gegee word aan die begrippe wat onderrig word.

6. SLOT

Daar is aangedui dat begrippe essensieel alinguistiese betekenisstrukture is waarin die menslike gees ’n greep op die ervaringswerklikheid verkry. Deur die magtige hulpmiddel van die taal kan hierdie begrippe aan simbole gekoppel word waarmee hulle selfs één kan word.

Deduktiewe begripsvorming aan die hand van verbaal-verduidelikende onderrig hou waarskynlik ’n nou verband met induktiewe begripsvorming, daarin dat verbale verduidelikings die kriteriale elemente nie alleen kan aandui nie, maar ook die verhoudings tussen die kriteriale elemente kan aantoon, waardeur die kind in

staat gestel word om die hipotese-ontdekking-toetsing van aktuele ervarings te oorskry deur ’n plaasvervangende (deur taal ervaarde) belewing.

Die probleme wat kinders ondervind is waarskynlik te wyte, onder meer, aan die feit dat hulle die vóóronderstelde begrippe nog nie genoegsaam beheer nie, en aan onderrig-foute deurdat die begrippe te veel as verbale terme aangebied word en nie genoegsaam as omvattende, begrypsbare strukture van betekenis nie.

Dit val ongelukkig buite die ruimte van hierdie bespreking om verder te gevra het na die pedagogiese sin van die onderrig van Geskiedenis hoegenaamd.

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