

Donald S. Seckinger

The Teaching of Social Foundations: Didactic, Heuristic, or Philetic?

I

In a recent article in *Educational Theory*, as well as in his book *The Real World of the Public Schools*, Professor Harry S. Broudy distinguishes among three major styles of teaching.¹ These are, first, the *didactic*, which has as its aim the transmission and reinforcement of knowledge and skill; second, the *heuristic*, which is intended to stimulate creativity in problem-solving situations; and third, the *philetic*, which involves the teacher in relationships of loving concern in a community of learners.²

These distinctions are useful in examining the introductory survey course in Social Foundations of Education. With disturbing frequency, this kind of course, whatever its label, is characterized by disorganization and dissonance. As teacher educators we aim to provide would-be teachers in the schools with vision and perspective which goes beyond narrowly technical concerns. In attempting to do this in Foundations courses, however, we soon encounter the resistance of many post-adolescents to any knowledge which seeks to go further than immediate experiencing. We struggle also to make sense out of a composite of course materials which often are uncritically derived from a series of parent disciplines or educational issues.

Teaching these materials didactically, in order to lay a groundwork of knowledge and skill, may well result in accusations of presenting irrelevant information. On the other hand, heuristic teaching, which organizes content around problems and issues in education, and which should be of vital concern to all students, too often results in superficial treatments of commonplace social situations with which most students are al-

ready familiar. Yet a third way of doing Foundations involves the philetic facilitator of knowledge, who may become very popular with some of his students who seek him out for therapy, but who is rejected by didactic or heuristic learners as lacking in authority or in specific solutions.

My own experience, certainly shared with many other faculty members, has included cases of students who complimented me after a fashion by saying they would like to take me for a course more relevant to their future teaching needs. I take this to mean philetic success and heuristic failure, and the less said about measurable results of didactic learning the better. Under these conditions it is not very effective simply to admonish students at the beginning of a Social Foundations course that one is not teaching the methods of instruction of a particular subject matter or a specific grade level, much less to disillusion them with the notion that even methods colleagues will not attempt to provide recipe book answers to all the contingent human situations of teaching and learning.

There is clearly a serious and continuing problem in the teaching of Social Foundations of Education as an introductory survey course to undergraduates. In this essay I propose to employ Broudy's distinctions among the didactic, heuristic, and philetic to unravel the components of the problem. It must be emphasized at the outset that these are, of course, analytical categories and that in practice the teacher of Foundations will blend or combine them in various ways. The final section of this paper, in fact, suggests some possibilities along these lines.

The reader must further bear in mind that I am operating under three crucial assumptions which delimit the scope of the present study. These are, first, that it is not an acceptable solution simply to wait until after a student has accepted full-time employment in a school before attempting to teach him any of the facts, concepts, and skills involved in the Social Foundations; second, that it is inadequate for an instructor of Foundations that students may be satisfied only with the philetic aspects of his personality aside from what he might have taught them; and third, that it is not enough to give over the didactic teaching of facts and skills to programmed instruction so that the teacher can concentrate exclusively on heuristics and philetics.³

With these limitations in mind, we may turn to the distinctive characteristics of these types of styles of teaching as they apply to Social Foundations. We shall begin with didactics, the most prevalent form of teaching any subject matter in the

schools and colleges, then work our way into heuristics, and finally into the realm of philetics.

II

Teaching Social Foundations in the didactic style would involve the deliberate dependence of the teacher on the content of the parent disciplines, most commonly History, Philosophy, and Sociology. If additional disciplines in the social sciences are brought in, widening the scope of Social Foundations, it is usually in the context of heuristic teaching. Didactics typically means a considerable amount of lecturing, accompanied perhaps by supplementary discussions and the occasional use of heuristic devices such as audio-visual aids and visiting resource persons. Didactic evaluation takes the form of written examinations, term papers, and possibly some student oral reports.

There are at least three major strengths associated with didactic teaching: (1) Students enrolled in the introductory survey courses are used to this kind of teaching and many of them therefore feel secure with a specified schedule of academic assignments and examinations; (2) Teachers can more readily anticipate what is going to happen in the classroom and can therefore use their own didactic preparation to transmit what they have learned to their own students; and (3) The parent disciplines offer structure, substance, and focus in what would otherwise be an amorphous "area" of the study of education. Didactics might just as well be taught by a team consisting of representatives from the Departments of History, Philosophy, and Sociology who have expressed an interest in educational policy issues and practices and who have some public school experience.

Didactic teaching often is criticized for the following weaknesses: (1) Students consistently express boredom and perceive as irrelevant the logically organized academic surveys of any subject matter, and this is especially the case when Social Foundations are taught as derivative aspects of the parent disciplines; (2) Teachers find it difficult to deviate from highly structured lessons without causing anxiety in themselves and in their students that the material will not adequately be covered; and (3) The parent disciplines are themselves undergoing revisions in the academic departments and therefore it is not clear which approach to these subject matters should be considered as paradigms to be applied to the study of education. Philosophy, for example, is being *done*

quite differently in the systematic, analytical, and existential modes of thought and it does no good simply to treat these as addenda to traditional or modern systems.⁴

Teaching Social Foundations heuristically is to deal with one's materials and methods as the Social Studies of Education. As in the case of public school Social Studies or university Interdisciplinary Studies, the parent disciplines become the supportive disciplines and the range of knowledge is expanded to include such social science resource areas as Anthropology, Political Science, Economics, and Social Psychology. Lecturing and discussion would be only two methods employed in a constellation which would include a great deal of student committee work, interaction with local schools and social welfare agencies, and a general democratization of classroom experiences. Heuristic evaluation would go beyond paper and pencil examinations to involve the consensual validation⁵ of student projects by the participants, as well as such devices as micro-teaching and diaries which all students would keep of their field experiences.

The strengths of heuristic teaching are evident to the progressivist or reconstructionist minded teacher and student: (1) Students are pleased and at the same time challenged when they discover that they have an actual voice in determining their own pattern of participation in a curriculum which is geared to the interests and commitments of youth in a post-industrial culture; (2) Teachers are freed to share their own enthusiasms for psychological and social democracy as they participate in the joint creation of learning experiences with their students; and (3) The end result of this participatory and reformist experience is the reconstruction of Foundations as a distinctive enterprise in which the boredom and irrelevance of *telling* about the future applicability of subject matter is replaced by practical and personally rewarding action research *in* the subject.

As appealing and exciting as this approach may be to the socially activist teacher and student, it does have some definite weaknesses when carried into practice: (1) Most undergraduate students, as the result of their post-adolescent personal insecurities and preconceptions of teachers as authority figures, feel tremendously threatened when called upon to play decision-making roles and present materials of their own creation to their peers; (2) Many teachers fear the unanticipated outcomes of situations over which they may lose control, including violent arguments over controversial issues and negative student reactions to inept presentations of some of

their peers; and (3) Without the practice of having to work through the intellectual complexities and demands imposed by organized disciplines, students who attempt to employ these disciplines as supportive areas for heuristic purposes do so in superficial and often prejudicial ways. It could be argued, therefore, that most undergraduates are not prepared to apply ideas which they have not fully learned and in fact they have not accepted anything that comes near to an ideology of participatory democracy.

Philetic teaching of the Social Foundations is an act of love. The teacher does not direct, as in the didactic style, nor does he begin by raising social issues which are intended to excite students, as in heuristics. His task is to bring forth, and then alleviate, the anxieties and fears and insecurities common to the human condition. The master of philetics does this in low pressure classroom or personal counseling sessions which take on a therapeutic character. He is engaging in a kind of unlearning process in which barriers are removed from the inner self like so much scar tissue, so that genuine healing can begin to take place. In order to understand and to help others, so the reasoning goes, one must be able to find and actualize his own selfhood. Evaluation, of course, must ultimately be self-administered, and all threatening aspects of external grading systems removed.

The strengths of philetic teaching should not be minimized, for they center on very legitimate demands for humanizing education in an era of technocratic standardization which encroaches upon all of our personal lives. These strengths include: (1) Students are accepted on their own terms as human beings and given a chance to explore their own personalities before they are asked to relate themselves to any organized subject matter or series of social problems; (2) Teachers are liberated to become human friends and helpers, facilitators of learning in contrast to authority figures or propagandizing social reformers or even manipulators of peer group pressures; (3) Subject matter may then emerge from the shared concerns of students where they are in their spiritual and psychological lives, rather than where they are thought to be in the eyes of the didactic or heuristic teacher. For the master of philetics, a reorganization of pre-existing subject matter and even a re-orientation of methodology are not enough for learning to take place. There must be, in the first instance, a change of heart in both teacher and students.

Philetic teaching too has great difficulties, as even the so-called "existential" psychologists and philosophers have dis-

covered.⁶ Among the major weaknesses of attempting to teach in a philetic style are: (1) Student interests, experiences, and perceptions are so varied that it is extremely difficult to create a community of interests and a sense of cohesion or wanting to relate to others; (2) Teachers are treading dangerous ground by acting as therapists, implicitly promising students more than they can deliver and ultimately leading their students to sense a betrayal as they try to counsel their young friends into contact and compromise with the larger society; and (3) Subject matter tends to lose its objective meaning and devolve into an arbitrary collection of subjective and passing concerns which are not relevant to the social side of university education. This is a special difficulty in the teaching of Social Foundations. One might well ask that if there are so many prospective teachers who are themselves insecure as persons, then how can we as teacher educators expect to transform them into the kind of humanistic, caring individuals who will be able to assume leadership roles with their own students? Should we not identify and eliminate students who manifest personal anxieties before they have a chance to make mistakes in their own classrooms, rather than playing at therapy? One might then argue that philetics uncovers weak personalities but does not prepare strong teachers.

III

Each of these teaching styles has its own particular appeal, yet when observed in practice all of them issue forth under severe handicaps. Some educators may use this as an excuse to follow the conventional wisdom of the schools, namely, to teach didactically and let that be enough. This is not so much because didactics are visualized as an ideal form of schooling, but rather that the demands imposed by heuristics and philetics are too heavy for most teachers and learners to bear in the social and educational systems as presently constituted.

But what of another alternative which is followed by a minority of teachers who are creative in one dominant style of teaching which suits their personalities and whose creativity rests in the fact that they consciously or unconsciously bring in elements of the other styles? And what of teachers who are frustrated in their style and limited in their effectiveness because they have never considered bringing in some elements of other styles? Here is where it is possible to suggest some modification strategies.

The didactician need not change his basic world view of

subject matter as being essentially logical in organization and the concept that the order of knowledge precedes the order of learning. Even the didactician, however, will insist that the ultimate aim of understanding in his subject is some degree of increased effectiveness or appreciation on the part of his students as human beings and as professional persons. The Social Foundations are supposed eventually to issue forth in the lives of teachers with vision and the power to make intelligent decisions and compassionate judgments. This can be accomplished in the didactic style, complete with formal retrieval systems of examinations and papers, if heuristic and philetic elements are taken into account.

Social Foundations subject matter is laden with possibilities for issues and problems which directly bear upon the lives of undergraduate students in contemporary universities. If the teacher believes that certain concepts in philosophy, for example, are essential prerequisites in dealing with problems teachers in the field must face, then he can have his students *do* at least a limited series of exercises in philosophizing as they are studying *about* both traditional and modern philosophical systems. In like manner, the didactic teacher may select concepts from academic sociology which have profound educational bearings, as in the work of George H. Mead, for example, and his symbolic interactionism. Heuristics need not violate the integrity of subject matter if they proceed from a carefully worked out academic conceptualization.

Didacticians also can introduce a philetic element into their teaching of the Social Foundations, and in a quite natural manner. The use of personal experiences both of the teacher and his students, lightly touched with a low-key humor which often accompanies the absurdities one encounters in the schools, is a good means of humanizing didactic subject matter. Even some otherwise lifeless historical materials may be enlivened, though this must be done cautiously, by stressing the experiences of real people who live on through their letters and journals. The didactic teacher may even be tempted to engage ultimately in simulation experiences which are both heuristic and philetic, such as deliberately segregating his students on some absurdly arbitrary basis and then treating them differently on an oral examination to show how it felt in Calvinist-inspired schools — what it feels like to be in a racial or religious minority in some local communities today.

The heuristician often overlooks some basic realities in the excitement of problems and issues teaching. One of the paradoxical elements involved in his style concerns the nature of

choosing for educative purposes. This teacher rightly perceives the desirability of maximizing the conditions under which students will have opportunities to select their own learning activities. The didactic problem was pinpointed by a student in a Social Studies methods course, and it applies to Social Foundations when taught as a form of Social Studies: the majority of students typically choose what they perceive as less threatening, loosely structured kinds of social activities. The heuristic teacher, therefore, might well profit by the introduction of didactic exercises such as the construction of written examinations or the creation, testing, and modification of interviewing models in which students *do* social science in such a way that they must work their way through academic disciplinary materials in order that their activities meet with success.

When it comes to philetics, the heuristician is often more receptive to this affective side of the learning process because he has attempted to democratize the classroom. Social Foundations students will have been organized into autonomous task forces for action research and field experiences. The issues and problems will have been raised in class and discussed in an open atmosphere. However, the philetic pitfall against which the heuristic teacher must be ever alert is taking at face value the consensual validation of students and teacher operating in the classroom as a public forum. It is easy to get swept up in the enthusiasms of a vocal minority of articulate students while overlooking the private concerns of the many who suffer in silence. Private counseling sessions and individual projects which may or may not become the occasion for the public test are very much in order for the heuristician over and above his primary emphasis on social sharing and common experience.

The masters of philetics as primary teaching types seem to be few in number and suspect by many of their colleagues as scholastic draft evaders at best, charlatans at worst. Pseudo-existentialists may be discovered on ego trips in which they become the center of dependent love for many of their students in search of a missing mother or father figure. Even authentic and selfless masters of philetics, however, need to come to terms with both the didactic and heuristic aspects of the Social Foundations, although not necessarily in that order.

Heuristic consequences are perhaps only a step away from the philetic style and may be gently suggested by the loving guide whom students have come to trust. Exercises in self-realization within the comforting confines of the classroom community may carry over into projects which involve

going out into therapeutic agencies in the local community. It may well be possible to link the sense of discovery of self to the altruistic ideal of service to others in carefully arranged situations where the philetic teacher has set the stage by contacting his spiritual and psychological soul brothers who are in positions of authority in selected social welfare agencies.

Sooner or later, nevertheless, these loving and helping activities will have to lead out into the real world of the schools in which the prospective teachers enrolled in Social Foundations will ultimately have to function. Moreover, as one moves from didactics to heuristics and now into the realm of philetics it becomes increasingly clear that the teaching combinations of styles being suggested will have to go beyond the confines of any one course or any one teacher, no matter how charismatic a personality that man or woman may be.

The master of philetics, then, for the love of students and for the sake of what they might be able to do for humanity, will have to expose them to a world in which didactics is a not always pleasant but inescapably necessary means to an end. To help people, one must know them. To reform institutions, one must encounter them both in their loving and in their frustrating and miseducative aspects. In the classroom, the philetic teacher will find it necessary to deal with didactic subject matter to explain why the world as we find it is such a complex and apparently tough-minded place. And as far as field experiences are concerned, the master of philetics will take his students by degrees into school situations which are less and less in tune with the way he and they want the world to be. If this is done with the compassion and understanding of which the philetic teacher is capable, it need not be a shattering or disillusioning experience. And if some students with philetic styles of learning find they can enjoy the sunshine but not endure the shadows of human existence as people struggle in the schools, then it could well be that the life of teaching is not for them.

All three teaching and learning styles have their place in any educational program and in any course of study. The Social Foundations of Education is one of many areas which could profit by a careful consideration of the consequences of an overemphasis on the didactic, the heuristic, or the philetic. The arguments seem to boil down to the fact that most students and teachers are not yet accustomed to the styles of democratic living embodied in heuristic education and at the same time a great many of us fear the exposure of private anxieties implicit in the philetic approach. And so we go on in

most school situations, not even with didactics *per se*, but with taking the mechanics of didactics as the whole of what formal education can be.

It is the contention of this essay that education, even in more or less formalized systems of schooling, need not be what it usually has been. We were created to be more than narrowly didactic, machine-like creatures in our classrooms. In the teaching of Social Foundations in particular, it seems ironic that so vast and exciting a field lies before us, with so many possibilities in all the styles and realms of teaching and learning. The question is, do we dare to take up the challenge of incorporating even modest elements of other styles into our own practice? It could make a difference, and perhaps more than we can even now imagine.

references

1. See Harry S. Broudy, "Didactics, Heuristics, and Philetics," *Educational Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer, 1972), pp. 251-261 and Harry S. Broudy, *The Real World of the Public Schools*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, especially Ch. VIII, "The Fallacy of Misplaced Relevance," pp. 176-198.
2. See Carl R. Rogers, "The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning," in *Humanizing Education*, Washington, D.C.: A.S.C.D., 1967, pp. 1-18.
3. Broudy, "Didactics, Heuristics, and Philetics," pp. 256-257. Although he differentiated between the *mechanics* of didactics, which may be handled by machines, and the human explanatory functions of didactics, Broudy's argument could lead heuristic and philetic teachers to neglect the necessary attention they need to devote to this often unpopular and uninteresting task, thus this warning is designed for them in the context of practice.
4. See Wayne J. Urban, "Social Foundations and the Disciplines," *The Record*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (December, 1969), pp. 199-205, for examples of basic disagreements among academic social scientists which in turn generate problems for didactic teachers who look upon these as parent disciplines.
5. The term is taken from the writings of Theodore Brameld, especially *Patterns of Educational Philosophy*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.
6. For the recognition of the trials of the existential teacher, see Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965, pp. 100-101; and Carl R. Rogers, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-18. Rogers especially sets out cautionary qualifications for the would-be facilitator, but believes the difficulties are worth what he contends is often the end result: self-initiated learning.