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Spaces of Activity of the Academic Teacher and Student in Light of Engaged Didactics

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to describe how the activity of an academic teacher is integrated with that of pedagogy students/future teachers. The reference point for the analysis is engaged didactics, which is based on the integration of the cognitive/intellectual and axiological spheres with personality and developmental change from the perspective of subjectivity and autonomy of creativity within academic education, especially of students in terms of integration.

In engaged didactics, the key concept is commitment, which is understood as a certain type of research discourse practice that primarily takes into account the emancipatory needs of specific groups of people. Researchers participating in this discourse engage themselves in projects aimed at social change, and not only at improving the position of the disadvantaged. On the other hand, the essence and boundary conditions of this practice is the sense of subjectivity of both the researchers and participants of social situations who voluntarily and with a sense of satisfaction participate in this type of activity.

"Engaged didactics" is defined as a group of subjective didactic activities of an academic teacher and students that consists of developmental changes built on interpersonal communication, mutual trust,

KFYWORDS

involvement, engaged didactics, person, academic teacher activity, student activity

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and service which trigger creative activity. The basis of these activities is the integration of knowledge acquired by the student, focused on the integral development of the person individually and socially. The perspective of the academic teacher and students is the integral development of the student as the primary goal of the school and the optimization of the conditions for its implementation.

Engaged Didactics: An Outline of the Issue

Teaching is generally defined as

learning about education and self-education (self-improvement), where the notion of education encompasses both the cognitive/intellectual sphere and the personal sphere, mainly related to shaping students' attitudes and their system of values. As one of the pedagogical disciplines—next to general pedagogy, the theory of education, and the history of education—it is one of the basic pedagogical sciences; it also serves to foster the development of the students' personalities. (Bereźnicki, 2001, p. 12)

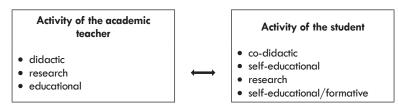
This definition can be partly used to define engaged didactics for training prospective teachers. In this respect, the integration of the cognitive, intellectual, and axiological spheres with the personality sphere is noteworthy. However, this notion does not include the issues of pro-development change—of personal and social transformation from the perspective of the subjectivity, autonomy, and creativity of the recipients of academic education—especially university students—with respect to integrity.

The "core" of engaged didactics is the integral development of the student or pupil as the leading goal of the school. This goal defines the further prospects of full developmental changes for the student and the academic teacher, the development of the school, and improvement of the teaching and research process of the academic teacher integrated with the learning and project-based processes of the students. The point of departure for engaged didactics is the vision of pro-development change of the students—future teachers—in terms of integral development and the vision of changing the functioning of the school and the implementation of paradigms, didactic theories, and practices based on unity—of pedagogical thinking and action in the educational and didactic dimension, of theorizing and research

(Červinková & Gołębniak, 2010, p. XV). In this theory, the identity of the teacher and student is focused, as in a lens.

In engaged didactics, theory is integrated with didactic practice, which is expressed in the didactic, educational, and research activities of the academic teacher and the co-didactic and self-education activities of students on the basis of the research process and their project-based activity. This structure is illustrated in the diagram below.

Figure 1. The Process of Integrating Theory with Didactic Practice in Engaged Didactics



These activities of the academic teacher and students are carried out on the foundations of a research discourse which prioritizes the creative needs of these two subjects. The following premises have been adopted in the theory and practice of academic didactics in educating students with a teaching specialization:

- 1) The student should have a chance to acquire holistic, integrated knowledge, which encompasses knowledge from various fields and disciplines, including specialized disciplines.
- 2) At university, a young person/student should have favorable conditions for integral and dynamic development of different spheres of life and human functioning, for integrating them with each other, and for research in this field.
- 3) A young person's time at university is a time for developing and pursuing a fuller answer to the questions "Who am I?" and "What I am like?", entering into relationships with others, building interpersonal relationships in terms of understanding others, and increasing awareness of searching for areas of self-realization, self-determination, and self-confirmation in the process of gaining independent judgment and autonomous decision-making.
- 4) The university should be a forge of human resources and mature and responsible ideas.



Individualization in the education of students, based on a dialogue between the students and the academic teacher, is able to shape these two subjects as sensitive people, free to search for the truth while being responsible for themselves and fulfilling their professional mission.

What is characteristic of such engaged didactics is the emphasis placed on the human person, understood as a bodily and spiritual unity, in the process of academic and educational and didactic education. The student and the pupil are the points of departure and arrival in academic teaching, so we can say that such work is "person-centered." The development of the qualities of a person (dignity, rationality, wisdom, freedom, responsibility, the ability to love, creativity, and transcendence) becomes the starting point and the overarching goal of academic education for the student—a future teacher who in the future will help their own students achieve full humanity.

In nurturing the student's development, it is important to be open to values. They fulfill many functions in human life, including cognitive, motivational, informational, and culture-forming ones. Due to the multifaceted meaning of values, we need to thoroughly prepare students for pedagogical activities which will be strongly rooted in axiology. The main goal is to equip the student with the ability to recognize values, awaken their axiological sensitivity, motivate them to choose values, discover values by acquiring knowledge, build appropriate structures of preferred and realized values, and encourage others to undergo this process. The purpose of engaged didactics is not only to prepare prospective teachers for their profession; its ultimate purpose is to fully develop the student intellectually, socially, and spiritually, leading to responsible and creative pedagogical activity, creating multi-faceted opportunities for the integral development of both the student and the academic lecturer, and in the future, of the student, teacher, and the culture of the school itself.

In this context, the task is to integrate the student's personality and develop their maturity, so that in the future they can be a creative teacher who will be able to contribute to the development of the intellectual, social, moral, cultural, spiritual, and religious lives of the students under their care. These pro-development changes focused on the student, academic teacher, pupil, and school can be achieved thanks to interpersonal communication and dialogue between the

student and the teacher and discussions on the creative vision of the future pedagogical activities. Dialogue plays an important role in engaged didactics by determining the humanistic, personal relationships between the subjects of education, expressed in honesty, openness, respect, understanding, care for other people, and discovery of the potential of pedagogical possibilities. Didactics defined in this way consists of the following:

- the person and their attributes,
- the identity of the academic teacher and the student,
- the school culture,
- pro-development change and guiding this change,
- cognitive experience/pedagogical thought,
- project-based activities, and
- value judgements.¹

Selected Areas of Activity of the Academic Teacher and the Student

The scope of activity of the academic teacher and the student in three areas is 1) the qualities of a person; 2) human identity; and 3) school culture.

A Person and Their Attributes

The answer to the question "Who is the human being?" is the source of the goal, essence, and course of educational processes. According to Franciszek Adamski:

The personalistic response underscores the two-dimensional existence of the human being: a person with value *in se*, that is, an ontological value. According to this theory, every human being is a person—this is also true before they are able to achieve full autonomy (so they possess this value from the moment of conception); they have immanent dignity and value which belong to them by nature; is the highest, absolute value—in the world of created beings they are the only reality that has value *per se*; by being a value *per se*, a person has their own goal, which is to improve

¹ For more on this topic see Chałas (2019, pp. 69–80, 94–120), from which the above-mentioned guiding thoughts were drawn.



in one's existence—they cannot be treated as a means to an end of another person or society. For the human being, improving means turning to good and achieving a higher and higher degree of participation in it. This orientation towards good is a special challenge for a person: through self-improvement, we conform to the fullness of Good, Truth, and Beauty. Striving for perfection is a person's moral duty arising from within. It also springs from being aware of the need to strive for perfect lasting, which exceeds the barriers of time and space. (Adamski, 2005, pp. 13–14)

In the context of engaged didactics, the attributes of the human person—dignity, rationality, wisdom, freedom, the ability to love, and the ability of transcendence—determine the areas of activity of the academic teacher and students, as well as the activities, attitudes, and values that the students imbibe. This issue will be briefly presented below.

In the context of engaged didactics, the qualities of a person constitute important goals conditioning the didactic process. The personal dignity given to men and women obliges the academic teacher and the student to respect their own dignity and the dignity of the other human being. Rationality and wisdom condition the learning and choice of truth and living the truth. First, the truth about myself, about "who I am and what I am like," in which the truth about changing one's teaching predispositions and competences is significant. An important issue is the discernment between right and wrong. For an academic teacher, this discernment is focused on the selection and structure of education, ways of working with students, and the didactic added value in terms of optimizing opportunities for the holistic development of students. Orientation towards the good that guides one's own scientific research becomes important. Rationality and wisdom guide the student towards the value of academic knowledge perceived in terms of good. They oblige the students to work on their own development, to acquire teaching competences, and focus on good, which they will help their students to make happen in the future.

Freedom conditions autonomy, which is the core of "engaged didactics." It manifests itself in the autonomous activities of the academic teacher and student, in liberating oneself from the well-established patterns of conduct, in disagreement with the current state of affairs and events; it orients them towards innovative solutions for

developmental good here and now as well as in the future. The ability to be creative gives didactic activities (didactic cooperation) a new glow in content and form. It strengthens individuality and creates new parameters for it.

Responsibility obliges the university teacher to work on himself/herself, to develop academically, building a didactic process focused on enhancing the teaching competences of students, educational love, and the need to improve oneself in the perspective of integral development; it obliges the student to work on himself/herself in terms of learning and developing his/her talents and the ability to design a vision of their future professional work, in which pedagogical innovation will occupy a significant place. An important issue in this regard is building pedagogical authority, an exemplary role model of personality, as the basic condition which protects against disadvantaging, marginalizing, and objectifying others in professional work. Love determines the relationship between the academic teacher and the student, which should be characterized by friendship, trust, respect, care, mutual service, and responsibility, in which respect for dignity is especially noteworthy.

The capacity for transcendence is an essential condition for the success of academic teachers and students, both in the process of their academic education and in their future teaching work. Transcendence explains the meaning and beauty of pedagogical work. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec stresses this importance of transcendence in human life and functioning:

The human person is a potential personality, that is, one that perfects, constructs, and fulfills oneself through action, in other words, reaches his/her full potential. In all these acts, the human person needs matter; but the purposes of such "complementation" go far beyond material, and are delineated by the nature and laws of matter. The goals of a person are internal, personal: to enrich cognition, to enrich love, to obtain a higher state of freedom in relation to all determinants, both internal and external. Through this type of inner enrichment, the human being transcends nature, although he/she is present in it through his/her life acts, especially mental acts. A person performs self-confirmation and development mainly through developing a way of being "for another person." Ultimately, however, they actualize their personal potentiality through the moment of death. (Krapiec, 2005, p. 40)



The areas of activity of academic teachers and students are presented in Table 1.

 $\begin{tabular}{l} \textbf{Table 1}. Activities of the Academic Teacher and the Student in terms of the Qualities of a Human Person \\ \end{tabular}$

A human person's qualities	Academic teacher	Student
The dignity of a person	respect for oneself and the student/others	respect for oneself and the academic teacher/others designing pedagogical activities in which the value of dignity will be realized
Personality dignity	taking actions that are morally valuable implementing moral values	taking actions that are morally valuable implementing moral values
Rationality/wisdom	 searching for, discovering, and proclaiming the truth understanding good and evil realizing the value of the good in scientific research the process of educating students 	searching for, discovering, and proclaiming the truth understanding good and evil realizing the value of the good in involvement in self-education involvement in their research and school development projects involvement in self-education/development designing pedagogical activities which teach for wisdom
Freedom	undertaking autonomous activities in research and teaching implementing innovations and experimental activities	developing and implementing the concept of individual education and learning designing original pedagogical approaches
Responsibility	working on oneself undertaking scientific activity with a view towards dynamic development building the teaching process in terms of excellence, creativity, and professionalization of the students' teaching work building one' own authority as a role model worth emulating	taking on the work of a creative teacher and a personal role model worth emulating designing pedagogical activities in which the value of responsibility will be imparted

A human person's qualities	Academic teacher	Student
Love	building interpersonal relationships with students in which the following will be realized: friendship, respect, trust, care, gift of self, and responsibility designing pedagogical activities in which the value of love will be imparted	building interpersonal relationships with an academic teacher in which the following will be realized: friendship, respect, trust, dignity, and responsibility combining the teaching and research process
Transcendence	internal enrichment in carrying out the job of an academic teacher setting ambitious goals and tasks and committing to their implementation exceeding oneself	 inner enrichment in fulfilling the role of a student setting ambitious goals in the study process and in future professional work

Identity

Creating the identity of students, including their professional identity, with an eye towards the future, is an important task of an academic teacher because—as Agnieszka Cybal-Michalska notes—"the issue of identity crystallizes the problem of individual trajectories of careers and of the construction of the subjects' professional identity" (Cybal-Michalska, 2018, p. 126). Lech Witkowski's pedagogical implication of Jürgen Habermas's theory of identity deserves mention, as it is a perspective of engaged didactics. The starting point for theoretical analysis is the answer to the question

what determines that a person who is changing (physically, mentally, and socially) or a social whole is still the same being, who exists holistically and is perceived as such, not because of the directly recognizable body shell or other trivial identifiers (e.g., their name or ID). This question essentially serves to show the plane in which the quality and durability of the particular process of qualifying a human being as a social being are decided. (Witkowski, 2010, p. 111)

This plane is a three-level, horizontal identity profile consisting of three scopes: competence \rightarrow concept \rightarrow condition (Witkowski, 2010, p. 143). This triad determines the triple-range epistemological basis of the concept of identity: the sense of identity, the condition of life, the identity of locations, the concept of the world, and identity



in terms of being the agent acting in that world (Witkowski, 2010, p. 146).

In the context of this article, the ability to act deserves special attention, as it is an important goal when educating students. An important notion here is the level of identity, defined as the post-conventional level. It is characterized by the perception of the world as a constant task to be created, i.e., in terms of change, making choices, critically evaluating, and creating new values.

The level of post-conventional identity is constituted by an openness to innovative changes, creativity, the ability to disagree, opposition to the existing reality, coming into conflict with the existing system, designing alternative solutions, subjective involvement in changes based on one's own projects, realizing values, and building and implementing an axiological context. These tasks also await students, or future teachers. These components are the desirable features of a teacher as a reflective practitioner, innovator, guide for sociocultural life, and committed researcher of the educational process. This context allows us to define the scope of activity of an academic teacher and a student (Table 2).

Table 2. Activities of the Academic Teacher and the Student for a Post-Conventional Level of Identity

Post-conventional identity: the competence to act			
Academic teacher	Student		
 searching for new research areas designing new research areas designing new educational programs designing and implementing didactic innovations designing and implementing programs for integrating teaching and research designing and implementing programs to involve students in their own research encouraging students to do science 	academic teacher's participation in the research process designing research with ambitious goals searching for innovative ways to self-educate designing innovative didactic and educational programs based on strong axiological foundations		

At the core of this spectrum of activity lies the involvement of the teacher and the student. Individual and social commitment is expressed in the attitude of commitment that determines the building of individual and collective good, which enables autonomous and creative activities. The goal is primarily engagement at the post-conventional level, which is conditioned by actions seeking to eliminate deficiencies in lived values. The factors that trigger involvement at this level are opposition to the limitations of subjectivity, opposition to the current patterns of behavior, and courage.

School Culture

In the context of educating future teachers, the school, its functions, and its culture act as interest centers in the process of academic education and research. When we talk about school culture, we mean the culture of the school as an organization. Organizational culture, according to Edgar Schein, is

a pattern of basic assumptions—thought of, developed, or discovered by a group in the course of learning how to deal with the tasks of external adaptation and internal integration—tested in action in order to be considered appropriate, and thus passed on to new members as the correct way of perceiving thinking and feeling when faced with these tasks. (Schein, 1990, as cited in Tuohy, 2002)

In this context, school culture develops on the basis of meanings shared by teachers. These meanings are rooted in the history and goals of the work of teachers. This development is conditioned by two factors: 1) freedom of free choice from among numerous possibilities, especially in terms of goals, curriculum content, and methodological concepts in terms of the development of the teacher, the students, and the school, and 2) ways of reacting to external factors and independent circumstances (Schein, 1990, as cited in Tuohy, 2002). As David Tuohy claims,

These reactions are verified and considered accurate if their results bring satisfaction to the group. In order to maintain a high level of satisfaction with how the group responds to reactions, the group looks through the prism of a common habit that is passed on to others, especially new members, because "this is how it is done here." Thus, the assumptions made in the culture of an organization include knowledge, emotions, beliefs, and attitudes. (Tuohy, 2002, p. 24)

School culture is comprised of a dynamic exchange between theoretical pedagogical knowledge—integrated with philosophical, psychological, sociological knowledge and knowledge from other fields



related to the performance of the school's functions—and practical knowledge, between what is ideal and achievable, between strategic planning and implementation strategies (Tuohy, 2002, p. 24). The culture of the environment in which the school operates, and the challenges it poses as well as the tasks set by the educational authorities determine new goals and self-assessment of the possibilities and current strategies, i.e., answers to the following questions: To what extent is the school prepared to cope with the new tasks? In what direction should we go and when should we begin to improve the existing solutions in terms of adapting to external needs combined with internal integration? The answers to these questions presuppose a new configuration of meanings within the school. Committed didactics serves to show the path to building and developing school culture on the basis of these two processes. A goal appears: to search for new ways of building rituals, performing roles, and observing norms in terms of the integral development of the person and the student, and the creative development of the teacher, establishing the axiological basis of the educational, personality-forming, and didactic process and its principles (Tuohy, 2002, p. 24).

The second task of engaged didactics is to prepare students to explore school culture, and thus its products, assumptions, and values. The third goal is to support students in designing the school culture based on previous insight into the culture of the school that they attended at different stages of their education. In this regard, the following issues deserve attention: relationships between the school and the environment, the nature of human activities, human nature, and relationships between people (Tuohy, 2002, p. 25).

Each school functions in a specific sociocultural and natural environment, which has its own expectations and constitutes either an opportunity for development or an obstacle to it. The links between the school and the environment open up a space for creating a post-conventional identity, and thus for building a significant position of the teacher in the school community—his/her authority—create opportunities for emancipation understood as a process "of the conscious construction of one's own identity by distinguishing its essential elements and taking steps towards achieving them" (Tuohy, 2002, p. 25). It is "a process of consciously rejecting stereotypes and

myths, overcoming obstacles caused by human activity and by the forces of nature" (Tuohy, 2002, p. 33).

This pro-development perspective of the school's relationships with the environment influences the assumptions about the nature of human activities. This concerns building the axiological basis of the educational and didactic process, leading to integral development, full humanity, and attitudes conditioning the personal development of the students and the environment in which they live and function. It is vital to support students in implementing their own, proper hierarchy of values, shaping an active attitude towards values, fostering activities with measurable effects, developing a critical attitude towards their own situation/position—both here and now and in the future—strengthening their self-esteem and self-confidence, building ambitious goals and life plans, and boosting their leadership, interpersonal, and social skills. This concept of the student obliges the teacher to take on a specific attitude, to change their role from a teacher who imparts knowledge to that of a guide or companion on the paths of physical, cognitive, socio-moral, cultural, and spiritual development. These attitudes and orientations should become the objectives of the academic training of future teachers. The didactics involved in educating future teachers is meant to show how to mold such a personality of a student, which educational situations should be created, how to evaluate and reward the students (later teachers) in order to meet this task.

Accordingly, students may be asked the following questions: How can we help our students discover the objective truth and to love that truth? How can we construct the students' experiences as a source of knowledge about themselves and the surrounding reality? How can we nurture cognitive abilities, talents, and interests as well as a creative approach to problem-solving? How can we support our students in self-education and trigger their need for lifelong learning? How can we support our students in formulating goals and life plans and equip them with predispositions to achieve them in the perspective of integral development?

The starting point in building the school's culture is the concept of human nature and the view that man is naturally good, evil, or "so-so" (Tuohy, 2002, p. 33). It becomes crucial to adopt a specific concept of a human being. So the following questions become important:



Who am I? What kind of person can I become? What kind of person should I be becoming? The answers to these questions must not lead to a reduction in the value of a person or their humanity.

School culture is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that takes various developmental shapes. In the above context, the scope of activity of academic teachers and students is presented in the diagram below.

Figure 2. Activities of the Academic Teacher and the Student in terms of School Culture

The school environment and culture		
Academic teacher	Student	
undertaking research on the culture of the school in a historical, contemporary, and future perspective conducting research in action on the development of school culture including students in the research process	 designing an original, experimental school designing an original, experimental class designing solutions to the complex problems of teaching, upbringing, and care in the perspective of school development designing one's own professional development academic teacher's participation in the research process 	

Conclusion

The theoretical basis of engaged didactics is the integration of

- 1) the theory of general didactics, 2) academic/university didactics,
- 3) personalistic pedagogy, 4) the integral development of the individual, 5) social learning, 6) school culture, and 7) the identity of the individual and of the school as an organization.

At the center of engaged didactics is the academic teacher and the student; their integrated activities focus on 1) their own integral development, the structure of tasks mutually oriented towards the development of skills in creative work, 2) axiological orientation towards realizing one's own, proper hierarchy of values, 3) discourse, dialogue, conversation, care, and friendly attitude, and 4) cooperation, especially in terms of designing the research process.

In terms of teaching, the basic strategy is education through individual, group, and joint projects with the academic teacher. This mainly concerns research projects and projects related to future professional work, especially building a school culture that could be described as a creative school. Engaged didactics requires detailed theoretical and empirical research. It should focus on scientific foundations, with an indication of detailed exemplification in practice, and on the personality and sociocultural conditions of implementation in the education of future teachers.

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