

## What is pedagogy?

Pedagogy is often thought of as the art or science of teaching. Some would say that this is a somewhat limited viewpoint, since in its origins and derivation (paidagogous = guide of children) pedagogy is a much broader concept, relating to the development and all round development of the child. The distinction was put very clearly by Immanuel Kant -

*Education includes the nurture of the child and, as it grows, its culture. The latter is firstly negative, consisting of discipline; that is, merely the correcting of faults. Secondly, culture is positive, consisting of instruction and guidance (and thus forming part of education). Guidance means directing the pupil in putting into practice what he has been taught. Hence the difference between a private teacher who merely instructs, and a tutor or governor who guides and directs his pupil. The one trains for school only, the other for life.*  
(Kant 1900: 23-4)

Although in practice the distinction is not always clearcut, the art of teaching is probably more accurately characterised as **Didactics** - a term which is much more common in continental Europe than in the UK. The concept is far from new, and is related in particular to many of the thinkers of the 16th and 17th centuries who clearly separated the activity of teaching (method) from both the content of what is taught (syllabus) and the organisation of education. One of the most important proponents of didactics was John Comenius, the great educationalist and linguist. In his *Didactica Magna* (1648) he sets out some basic principles for teaching, many of which are still relevant.

- *Teaching must be in accordance with the student's stage of development. (Comenius identified four important stages of learning. In the first, senses play an important role, in the second, imagination and memory, in the third, understanding and knowledge, and in the fourth, judgment.)'*
- *All learning happens through the senses. This makes induction, visual means, and experiences important for learning and teaching*
- *One should proceed from 'the specific to the general, from what is easy to the more difficult, from what is known to the unknown.*
- *Teaching should not cover too many subjects or themes at the same time.*
- *Teaching should proceed slowly and systematically. Nature makes no jumps.*  
(cited by Gudem - "VIVAT COMENIUS: a commemorative essay on Johann Amos Comenius" in Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 1992. 8.1 p 54)

Another important figure in the development of a discipline of pedagogy was Johann Friedrich Herbart, (1776-1841) although his influence was felt more after his death and in particular at the turn of the 19th century. He argued that education was more than the accumulation of knowledge and that the development of what he called character was primordial. He strongly believed that all children are born with unique potential and that abilities are not innate. He also developed a framework for teaching (the process which he also distinguished from the content)

- 1 **Preparation**—*relating new material to be learned to relevant existing ideas (memories) to stimulate the student's interest (prepare students to be ready for the new lesson)*
- 2 **Presentation**—*presenting new material in the form of actual experience of concrete objects (present the new lesson)*
- 3 **Association**—*comparison of the new idea with existing ideas to find similarities and differences and thus implant the new idea in the mind of the student (associate the new lesson with ideas studied earlier)*
- 4 **Generalization**—*procedures designed to take learning beyond perception and experience of the concrete into the realm of abstract concepts (use examples to illustrate the lesson's major points)*
- 5 **Application**—*using the newly acquired knowledge so that it becomes an integral part of the life of the student (test students to ensure they learned the new lesson).*

Although interest in pedagogy and didactics remained high in continental Europe, this was far less so in England and the UK. It has been argued that education in England has been far more about containment than about intellectual growth, and that there has been little concern with or understanding of educational theory (Brian Simon 1981 "Why no pedagogy in England?" ) which was discussed in an interesting [article by Robin Alexander](#) in 2004.

Robin Alexander has also convincingly maintained that the dominance of the curriculum and

“delivery” and testing resulted in pedagogy (however understood) being relegated to a less important role. On the other hand it should be recognised that there was a re-emergence of interest in pedagogy in the English speaking world in the late 20th century, associated for example with the work of Bernstein and Bruner . This has however been complicated by continuing confusions about the role of pedagogy, and a definite tendency in England to see Pedagogy as a control mechanism, not least through the activity of Ofsted.

An interesting discussion on some of these issues by Mark Smith can be found on line [here](#)

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