In the following features of a critical school didaktik theory (CSD), originally developed in Uljens (1997), are described – first, the elements of the theory (section 1), second, the theoretical ideas behind the model (section 2).

Figure 1. Levels and forms of pedagogical activity according to Critical theory of School Didaktik

- The inner circle describes the dynamic developmental process of teachers’ and students’ individual and shared intentions, activities, experiences, reflection and their situated teaching– and learning–experiences
- The outer circle indicates the various contexts framing the Teaching-Studying-Learning process in the school
1. Elements of the Critical School Didaktik

Figure 1 indicates that the model consists of four commonly accepted main components. They refer to 1) the planning, 2) realization and 3) evaluation of the pedagogical process, as well as to 4) the contexts providing the framework for the pedagogical activity. The model thus identifies the constitutive elements of the teachers’ pedagogical work (planning, teaching and evaluation). Concerning the context major distinctions are made between the 1) classroom (learning situation), 2) the school as an organizational context and 3) the local society and culture as framing the pedagogical work on the first two levels.

Planning
The left wing consists of two parts, P1 and P2. P1 is planning on the collective level (e.g. national curriculum). P2 refers to the teacher’s planning activities before the actual process.

The teacher’s planning activities before a pedagogical sequence, P2, (a school year, monthly or weekly planning or planning before one lesson) contain a variety of questions. First, concerning the goals of teaching the teacher must relate the general goals of the curriculum to his/her own goal setting and personal educational philosophy. A related issue is the teacher’s beliefs about knowledge and learning within different subjects.

Second, concerning the choice of relevant content the teacher must reflect on this choice in relation to a) the goals of education (curriculum), b) on who s/he will teach (psychology of human learning and development) including the teacher’s understanding of students’ personality and c) the subject matter (content theory), i.e. how it comes that a chosen content represents the field generally (epistemological problem).

Third, the teacher must also reflect on the choice of the form of representation in representing the subject matter which again has to be done in relation to both the learners and the content. Finally, the choice of the form of representation is connected to the choice of suitable ways of working with the problems.

Finally we must differ between the teachers preparatory planning (P2) and the teachers situated planning (P3) which goes right into the heart of the model. I return to this planning in situ (P3).

Context
One might think that the teachers preparatory planning (P2) always occurs within the limits of the planning of the collective level (P1). This is, however, not always the case since the teacher may move beyond or even confront the national (collective) curriculum. Because of this the effects of the collective planning are dependent of the teacher’s sanctioning the collective planning. Yet my impression is that the curriculum is not that effective generally. Thus the teacher’s understanding of the more immediate cultural context is a context affecting much more directly the teacher’s activities. I believe it is important to pay attention to the existing educational intentionality expressed e.g. in mass media and other “pressure groups” surrounding the school. The reason for why this should be brought more into the center of educational research is that the students not only bring this context into the school but they are partly constituting this very context. In the figure above, this has been actualized by the circle surrounding the teachers’
situated pedagogical activity. It is thought that this context regulate his/her preparation as well.

Because of the collective and local interests in education teachers have to pay attention to both. In the figure this is indicated by that the field P2 is divided into two subfields. Let us call them P2(a) and P2(b), where P2(a) refers to teachers planning in relation to curriculum on all collective levels (both to national and local curriculums) and P2(b) refers to the teacher’s planning in relation to interests other than curricular on the local level. This means that the national level is represented by the national curriculum whereas the local level is represented both in form of a local curriculum (part of P1) and the local society (informal context). Thus the local society has both a formal (curricular) and informal impact on the teachers work. The formal impact is for the sake of convienance placed within P1 and includes both local curriculums and boards of education on a local, municipality level. In the model teachers planning (P2) is as a whole being placed within the field P1 since the teachers are hired by the society to do a job.

In reflecting on the impact of the curriculum on the classroom activities we should not forget that the collective, formal and institutionalized regulating activities are not limited to indirect regulation trough curriculum. For example, from a teacher education perspective it is evident that the criterias for what is required of a teacher are set on the collective level. This results in more or less degrees of freedom both for the institutions educating teachers and for the active teachers.

Further, it is on the collective level decisions are made concerning, for example, the economical resources the teacher has access to as well as, to some extent, the materials to be used in the schools. Nor is it the teacher (or the students) who decide about what subjects should be taught or studied, nor the time that should be devoted to the different subjects. And it is not the teachers who decide about the content of matriculation examination in the gymnasium (in Finland). In this sense the collective levels interferes quite directly with the level of pedagogical action. In other words, when discussing how the formal level regulates educational reality it may be more through these kind of activities than through the curriculum. The curriculum should maybe more be viewed as a political document sending general signals to the field.

In the model presented these regulating activities are dealt with in terms of the "school as context". The pedagogical activities taking place within a institutionalized school are special because of the organizational structure this type of school represents. Some of the organizational features were indicated above in relation to decisions made on the collective level.

It is of importance to notice that the present model works on three principally different but completing levels; the collective, the individual and the interactional level. Questions related to choice and treatment of content are dealt with on all three levels but in different ways.

**Evaluation**

A similar differentiation to the one concerned planning (P) is possible to make with respect to evaluative activities (E). There is the continuous situated evaluation during the teaching process (E3), as well as the teacher’s evaluation after some kind of pedagogical sequence (E2). Evaluation after a sequence covers both evaluation of the students results
in relation to the goals as well as the teacher’s evaluation of his/her own activities like the choice of relevant content, form of representation etc. Finally, E1 refers to evaluation on the collective level (e.g. national evaluation, IEA, etc.).

**The process**

Finally, the model explicates the pedagogical process itself. Two aspects of this process have already been pointed out; situated planning and evaluation. The question is now how these aspects may be related. It seems as if a relatively simple model of human action may serve as a point of departure in this matter. The teacher’s situated planning may be conceived of as a special case of human planning or intentionality in general. We thus get the following scheme describing the reflective process:

1) A teacher has continuous experiences in a pedagogical situation.
2) Parallel to these experiences the teacher has specific intentions (one or several).
3) As a result of continuous comparison of a past or present situation with a potential future state of affairs, the teacher tries to realize his/her intentions through the continuous pedagogical acts.
4) The student experiences the teacher’s activities and responds to them or acts irrespective of these for some other reason.
5) The teacher experiences the student’s activities.
6) It is these experiences the teacher evaluates in relation to his/her intentions. Evaluation means here to reflect on the experiences the teacher has of the effects (student behaviour) of his/her activities.
7) The result of this process may be called the Situated Didactical Experience. This experience constitutes the pre-understanding from which the teacher continues his/her intentional and reflective activity.

**The students**

It is important to notice that the model contains a similar cycle from intention to situated experience both for the learners and for the teacher. Also the learner has specific intentions in the teaching-learning situation which, naturally, result in specific actions. And like the teacher, also the student has experiences (Erlebnis) which are considered to be resulting from the mentioned activities. The student, like the teacher, reflects on these experiences and the result may be called the Situated Learning Experience (Erfahrung). It is of course important to include the learner in a model that aims at a clarification concerning the conditions of the pedagogical process. In this model the learner is identified both as an active agent in the very pedagogical situation as well as a subject constituting the local community surrounding the school.

**Conclusion**

To conclude it should be observed that this theory of didactics accepts and defends an interdependence concerning decisions in the practical pedagogical situation with respect to content, method, media, goals and context/student. The approach is not method centered or only content centered nor mainly centered at the aims or media of education. The model emphasizes that every pedagogical situation must be analyzed with respect to all these dimensions.
2. Theoretical assumptions concerning of the model

a. Critical School Didaktik as the science of the Teaching-Studying-Learning process

Critical School Didaktik is defined as the science of the Teaching-Studying-Learning (T-S-L) process. T-S-L process refers to three traditional key concepts of education: (a) recognition, (b) summons to self-activity and (c) Bildsamkeit. All three concepts are fundamental for the post-kantian modern educational theory and philosophy that was developed, among others, by Fichte, Herbart and Schleiermacher (Uljens, 2002).

A usual definition of recognition is to see it as a reciprocal acknowledgement of the others freedom. This would mean that nobody has the right to execute ones own freedom if it violates the others freedom. (Uljens, 1998, s. 179f.). The Hegelian tradition more strongly point out the “fight for recognition” on different levels (family, civil society and working life) i.e. emphasizing the individual as being in need of recognition and therefore dependent on the Other. Recognition is thus a social process, but to recognizing is not education (see e.g. Axel Honneth).

The concept of summoning to self/activity is important in order to understand how and individual becomes a cultural being.1 As I see it, the individuals potentiality to cultural productive freedom only can be made real by summoning (Aufforderung) the other to make use of his freedom. The birth of the individual’s empirical awareness of himself as free is thus made dependent of, first, recognizing the Others freedom, and, second, on the summoning this Other to make use of his freedom. This is a position that was initiated by Fichte and later developed by Hegel including all such positions in our own days inspired by Hegel, like Axel Honneth. Also in contemporary Vygotskyan cultural historical psychology (activity theory) of today you can see traces of the concept of Summoning in that this psychology accept the necessity of pedagogical intervention.

The german concept of Bildsamkeit means that the principle of Summoning to self-activity recognizes the individual’s potentiality to reach cultural freedom and to move beyond herself but that this potentiality is made real by the individual’s own activity i.e. by self-determination. But the principle of Bildsamkeit also means that the Other (learner) cannot be controlled or determined from outside. In this sense the Other (the learner) is and remains something beyond my reach but also something that the I is connected to. Cultural intersubjectivity and subjectivity are complementary. From the beginning there is not only a shared world or an individual world – there is both a shared world and an individual world. In this respect the self is simultaneously both free and dependent both with respect to herself and others.

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1 An example of summoning to self-activity is when a parent talks helps the small child to learn to ride a bike. The parent “challenges” the child to do something that the child cannot yet do. There is a risk of failure. But the summoning is not enough – the child’s own activity is necessary. To talk to the child represents the same process – only by being talked to and tries to talk herself the human learns the language.

However, I cannot in this lecture go deeper into the paradoxical nature of this process which on the one hand assumes that the child both is free in order for instruction to be meaningful, and on the other hand becomes culturally free only through instruction – this the modern version of the pedagogical paradox.
b. Critical School Didaktik as a non-affirmative theory of education

In the history of educational theory we can identify various models of how education should be related to societal interests and development. Variations of at least the following models may be identified.

First, a pre-modern way of thinking understands education as being located within the existing society or culture. This socialization-oriented model of education emphasizes that the task of education is to prepare the individual for the already existing society and culture. In this model societal practices and norms function as the guiding principles. In this model education is subordinated to societal practices. Education does not have any developing role with respect to society, instead the school follows the development of and is always oriented to prepare individuals for the existing society. In this model the power of societal transformation is not connected to education. Education is reduced to socialisation.

Secondly, in contrast to the reproduction-oriented model just described we are, since Rousseau, familiar with the idea of education as a revolutionary or transformatory force with respect to societal practices. In its most radical form transformation-oriented education is not only disconnected from society, but also super-ordinate with respect to societal interests. According to Rousseau there is not much idea to educate for an existing society if this reality is not considered acceptable. Education would then only reproduce unfavorable constellations. Rather the role of education would be to develop something that does not exist or to work towards ideals, which may, in the future, become real as a new generation enters society after having received education. In this model education is super-ordinate with respect to societal interests.

It is important to observe that both the reproduction and the transformation-oriented models are normative models because they decide, in advance, upon what is valuable and ideal in society. Therefore, these models run the risk of indoctrination. The problem is that the previously mentioned models are not focused on developing the individual’s ability to decide for him/herself upon what is valuable and they do not prepare the individual for self-reflected decision making concerning the future of the self or society. The decision of what is valuable has already been made. As the future is seen as open and as the question of morality cannot be finally decided, this reflective ability - self-awareness and self-determination - is seen as a necessary ability to be developed. Individuals have to learn to think for themselves.

In this third model education, accepted and defended by CSD is not placed either “outside” or “inside” society and is thus not either super- or subordinated with respect to society, but is balancing in between. The school didactic theory thus accepts that educational institutions are given a relative independence with respect to societal and other interests.

This last position, accepted by CSD, represents a so-called non-affirmative position with respect to norms and values (see e.g., Benner 2005, Uljens 2002). This means that existing knowledge, values or ideals are not dealt with in a confirmatory manner but reflectively. Non-affirmative education means to focus on the questions to which existing norms or knowledge are seen as answers. Through this the learner is thought to acquire an individual relation not only to given answers (positive knowledge), but also to the questions behind the answers. Of equal importance is to develop the ability to formulate the questions to be answered.
A non-affirmative pedagogy consciously avoids affirming (confirming) existing or possible ideal future states of affairs. It is a pedagogy where the teacher hesitates, stops up, and to tries to focus the questions behind answers given (questions behind positive knowledge). As a consequence the school as a societal institution is recognized as an institution that is partly allowed to stand outside society, the state, and the family. This tradition of pedagogical thinking is developed in order to meet the needs of a democratic and open society. Consequently, the concept of recognition may also be understood in relation to what education is aiming at – not only to recognize the Others initial freedom, but to recognize autonomy as the aim of education.

In this respect summoning to self-activity is to educate the will. To educate human will is thus to stimulate self-reflection by the help of reason. Education therefore includes the education of will. A developed will means to be able to evaluate what is true (epistemology), what is beautiful (esthetics) and what is valuable (ethics). Reason is a good partner when the will is educated.

c. Critical School Didaktik as a non-reductionist approach
A special feature is also the fact that the model tries to relate different levels of description to each other. The idea is that the complexity of the pedagogical reality requires complementary levels of description in order to be fully understood. The idea advocated here is that the role of didactics is to keep together these levels in a coherent system in order to give a picture of the pedagogical reality.

The idea is that different levels and perspectives (e.g. philosophical, curricular, sociological, psychological, subject–matter based, methodical, contextual etc.) should not be reduced to or explained on another level. Nor should they be regarded as equally valid for approaching every possible question raised. Different perspectives may be more or less appropriate for different sub-problems: sometimes we analyze the pedagogical reality from the perspective of the content, sometimes from the perspective of the learning process, sometimes from a curriculum perspective. Accordingly ‘didactics’ should not be reduced to an application of philosophy, psychology, sociology or content theory. The role of didactics is to help us to decide to what extent different disciplines are relevant to understanding the pedagogical process. This is called the thesis of didactic autonomy. Didaktik accepts that there is, for example, a psychological dimension of the pedagogical process but the process cannot be fully understood from the psychological perspective. But the different perspectives cannot be combined by simply adding one perspective to another. The perspectives have to form a coherent whole, and a whole that is fundamentally pedagogical.

School Didaktik disagrees with a reductionist view. The Anglo-American tradition of keeping, for example, educational psychology, educational sociology and educational philosophy, and the content of the curriculum separate from each other is not supported as it will have difficulties in developing an understanding of how classroom interaction is related to societal praxis and societal change.

It is in this perspective the tradition of Didaktik offers a more fruitful path for the future. School didaktik is defined as a general model of school teaching and considers education as a discipline of its own.
**d. In CSD- theory the starting point is ethical pedagogical activity in the schools**
The School didaktik theory accepts the teacher’s moral action and pedagogical activity in
the individual school as the point of departure. When instructional theory development
has emanated from the needs of teacher education this has often resulted in ideas of how
the educational process should be planned, i.e. in “teacher education didaktik” planning is
the key question. When educational theory has a state- or a macro-perspective as its point
of departure it often results in some version of curriculum theory where pedagogical
activity in schools is reduced to a small, almost neglectable, dimension, i.e. the
instructional- and learning process tends to disappear.

**e. CSD – model of institutional education**
In addition it must be acknowledged that institutionalized education following a
collective curriculum is a special form of educational activity requiring theory of its own.
This is especially true today when learning occurs all the time and everywhere. Exactly
due to this fact we today we need theories on institutionalized schooling more than ever.
School learning in a late-modern learning society, in a post-nationalist society under
transnational pressure is in need of a theory on itself. This is why the model is called a
school didactic theory and not a model of e.g. general didactics.

**f. Critical School Didaktik covers both curriculum and the teaching method**
Sometimes didaktik is defined as theory of the instructional process (teaching) and
sometimes again defined as curriculum theory. School didaktik covers both of these
perspectives. Both at the level of curriculum construction and the teaching process
questions of aims, selection of contents and teaching methods are central. School didaktik
acknowledges that for a teacher both levels are present in the classroom.

**g. Critical School Didaktik - a theoretical frame for empirical educational research**
Psychological research starts from psychological theory and contributes to psychological
theory. Sociological research starts from sociological theory and contributes to
sociological theory. Educational research starts from educational theory and contributes
to educational theory. Didaktik theory can be used as a point of departure in research on
teaching and curriculum work. Is does not imply the use of either qualitative or
quantitative methods.

**h. Critical School Didaktik as an instrument for teachers’ pedagogical thinking**
CSD builds upon the assumption that educational theory does function as a language
through which individual teaching experiences may be expressed in a systematic /
coherent manner. By the help of such a language teachers must better equipped to argue,
motivate and explain their decisions and actions in relation to children, parents and
officials.

**i. Critical School Didaktik comprises a model of how educational theory and practice is
related**
CSD unites the heritage of a) Schleiermacher’s idea of “dignity” of educational practice
(life-world) and b) Herbart’s idea of the importance of theory (see also figure on next
page).
A. Practice

- Intention
- Reflection
- Experiences
- Activity

B. Theory

- Problematising intention
- Reflection of sc. theory in relation to subjective theory and practice

C. Theory of science

- Development of theory
- Problematising intention
- Epistemology

Circle A: The teacher’s contextual reflection on various aspects of the pedagogical process.
Circle B: The teacher’s theoretical reflection where the reflected experience is compared to a didactic theory or a colleague’s subjective theory of the pedagogical process. This reflection may result in:
   a) that the practitioners subjective theory, understanding or the like may change or that
   b) the conceptual model with which the comparison is done is required to be changed.
Circle C: Epistemic reflection on the nature of the didactic theory made use of including reflection on the nature of this theory and the nature of one’s beliefs in practice.

Figure 2. The Critical School Didactic theory for how (B) reflection mediate between (A) intentional practice and (C) didactic theory.

From the Schleiermacherian tradition CSD accepts that:
a) educational practice is a fundamental form of human culture/existence like ethics, religion, work, art, etc.
b) the relation between generations is the point of departure in didaktik,
c) all practice always include some kind of theory,
d) theory helps us to deepen our understanding of practice,
e) validity of theory is dependent of the practitioner’s experience of the usefulness of theory (pragmatism)

From the Herbart tradition CSD accepts that:
a) the role of theory is to prepare for praxis by the help of theory.
b) only s/he who has learned theory in advance can learn to teach as an artful practice,
c) we can talk about pedagogical activity only after having a concept (theory) for what this activity is about,

d) “Pedagogical tact” means to unite theory and practice, i.e. to interpret praxis sensitively by the help of theory,

e) the teacher needs theory but, paradoxically, learns the profession only through practice.

References


