Didactic Reasoning in Academic Teacher Development: Towards a New Understanding of Teacher Training for Academics

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Academic teacher development is an educational meeting place for academics already practising the art of teaching. Yet, it is in courses for this development that academics are supposed to be taught how to teach and how to improve their teaching skills. In my article I propose a new conceptual methodological framework for teaching teachers how to teach – Didactic Reasoning. Its foundation can be traced to pragmatist philosophy and interfaith dialogue in theology. The key aspect of Didactic Reasoning is to make university teachers better teachers by the development of a didactic voice and the courage to try this voice in teaching activities. This is done through intersubjective meetings between academics to develop a respect for the 'teaching-other' in their colleagues and through the use of practice-focused themed conversations led by teacher educators.

Keywords: academic development programmes, didactic reasoning, intersubjectivity, interfaith dialogue

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Introduction

Teacher training for academics is a curious and difficult phenomenon. In other teacher training programmes students learn how to teach before they can practise their skills and need an undergraduate level of knowledge in the subjects for teaching, while in academic teaching development it is most often the opposite case. Although participants in academic teacher training are already lecturing in their fields and have the highest levels of education in their subjects, pedagogy and didactics on a theoretical and methodological level are for most of them something new – at least as a subject of its own. All of these course participants bring their own practices, theories and experiences and share these in thematic strands of pedagogical and didactical issues. They are not new to teaching and cutting-edge knowledge in their fields, and the ambition of teacher training is to enhance these skills and introduce a theoretical and methodological level of reflection on how and why education can be achieved for undergraduate and postgraduate students in their own fields.

In my conceptual article I intend to construct a didactic framework for the education of university teachers in academic teaching development. In focus is the training of academics as teachers and not the teaching of students. It is, in my opinion, necessary to see university lecturers as competent pedagogical subjects that need further development in their teaching skills and reasoning in didactic matters – not to start from scratch in spite of their existing teaching practices. This framework for establishing a new kind of academic training development could be understood as 'Didactic Reasoning' and its roots stem from pragmatic philosophy, and from the theological interfaith dialogue method of Scriptural Reasoning. Didactic Reasoning should, however, not be understood as 'the' new way to train university teachers, but as an important method in the training of academics to become better university teachers. The construction of didactic reasoning will be made through the establishing of four principles for the training of academics in the art of teaching.

Teacher Training for Academics in Sweden

Before any remarks can be made regarding the construction of didactic reasoning, it is necessary to describe how teacher training for academics is practised in Sweden. The outcome of my article is, however, significant beyond the Swedish educational system.

Since the 1960s academics have been trained as teachers in Sweden (Roxå and Mårtensson 2008; Lindberg-Sand and Sonesson 2008; Åkesson and Falk Nilsson 2010), but only at the beginning of the twenty-first century did it become a requirement for all academics, and the courses in teacher training have formed the educational institution in Swedish Higher Education that we see today. The required training consists of courses in Higher Education Teaching and Learning (HETL, in Swedish *Högskolepedagogik*) for either 7.5 Higher Education Credits or 15 HEC,[1] while optional courses are sometimes also available for specific issues such as postgraduate supervision. The courses are organised and examined by each university as academic teaching development and must be re-evaluated by a university if a person moves from one Swedish university to another. Often, these courses are administered and managed by educational development units (EDU) – for example, at my own university, the University of Gothenburg, this is done by Unit of Educational Development and Interactive Learning (PIL). The educational principle for these courses is that of interdisciplinary teacher training, where PhD candidates, lecturers, senior lecturers, assistant professors and professors meet. Participants in these courses for teacher training thereby come from a broad variety of disciplines and teaching experiences, and this juxtaposition of disciplines and teaching experiences makes HETL a positive challenge not only for the participants, but also for the teacher educators working with these courses (Roxå and Mårtensson 2008).[2]

Principles for Didactic Reasoning

In order to provide a methodological and philosophical framework for academic teacher development I propose a new method of didactics – Didactic Reasoning (DR) – founded in pragmatist philosophy and the theological method of Scriptural Reasoning (SR) as an approach to interdisciplinary

meetings with a shared material but different understandings and practices.

With the memory of devastating wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, interfaith dialogue rose as a way to avoid further conflicts and cause people of different religions to talk and engage with each other without mission and conversion in mind. It is in this perspective the method of SR must be understood (Ford 2006; Ochs 2006).

People from different faiths come together with the aim of making the world less filled with conflict. This conflict reduction is not due to a rejection of disparate truths and practices, but rather to the recognition of parallel ideas of religion and the idea that it is up to the individual believer in SR to discern the truth in a religion (Ford 2006). Therefore, differences are seen as something positive and the very foundation for Scriptural Reasoning. In fact, SR has even been described as a way to 'encourage and nurture better and more interesting disagreements' (Byassee and Goodson 2009) and 'partnerships of difference' (Ford 2011; cf. Adams 2006a:234–255; Adams 2006b). How then is this SR practised and what can be transferred into the world of academic teaching development?

The multitude of belief systems is similar to the many different understandings of what science is and how it is to be taught at the university. Religious dialogue in the shape of SR is in this term better suited as role model for didactic reasoning than pragmatist philosophy since it recognises different parallel truths rather than trying to find a reasonable path between them. Ford (2006) outlines eight maxims for SR that he considers to be the most vital, and these maxims focus both on the fundaments of SR and its outcome. The first maxim speaks of the acknowledgement of the other's beliefs and respect for what is important to him or her. The second maxim focuses on a non-exclusive final understanding of universal truths where further comments on issues can be given. The third maxim points to the fact that consensus is not the intended goal of SR but a recognition of 'deep' differences. The fourth maxim emphasises the need for argumentation as a positive means to discuss and dispute. The fifth maxim speaks of the recognition of the value of different religious resources and that these differences can unite, since themes are occurring interreligiously. The sixth maxim points to the necessity for time in order to meet and engage in SR. The seventh maxim consists of the divine

purpose of SR – to bring peace to the world. The final and eighth maxim focuses on the positive outcome of SR, arising from mutual hospitality which makes friends of people of different beliefs and confessions. Ford's maxims provide SR with a positive aim of recognition and plurality where friendship can be developed.

The ways in which the participants in SR are to respect each other through the shared discovery of differences and similarities could, in my opinion, provide a model for how similar reflections can be made in academic teaching development. Although SR, unlike academic teaching development, is developed for a particular religious setting and with a specific aim beyond the aims of university teaching, the methodology of finding a common place for group readings of different texts with a pluralistic approach to understanding and interpretation has something to offer (Ochs 2006). Here, Charles Sander Peirce's pragmatist philosophy[3] stands as a foundation for SR with its aim to improve the world through the re-reading and reinterpretation of texts and ontological propositions (Ochs 1998; Ochs 2006). Ford's outline of SR both points in the direction of acceptance of differences and places emphasis on the common goal of making the world more peaceful and less filled with conflicts between individuals, religious communities and societies. SR has, however, one major 'flaw', specifically the need for all participants to agree on a common set of rules or maxims. If common understanding is not established, SR will most probably not work as intended, and thus SR can only be practised by those interested in it and not by those unwilling to participate. This is perhaps acceptable in SR, but in academic teaching development, most participants are required to take part and the aspect of voluntariness is thereby not possible to achieve. This makes academic teaching development more diverse in attitudes towards intersubjectivity among the participants – in SR participants need to have the same goal – which in teacher training is neither required nor understood as an absolute necessity.

Didactic Reasoning (DR) is not 'the' solution to establishing ways for academics to become university teachers, but rather, is a method to enhance their development as teaching practitioners. This reasoning can be described as a 'partnership of difference' where various approaches and understandings cooperate to nurture the development and practising of didactic languages. This

cooperation is not intended to lead to unity in thought and interpretation, but rather, in unity of aims and meeting forms. In SR, maxims and rules have been chiselled out to aid the common understanding among its participants of what SR is and how it can be practised (Ford 2006; Ford 2011; Kepnes 2006). This aim of understanding could even be understood as Jürgen Habermas' striving for ideal speech situations where the speakers converse to reach a common understanding (Gosling 2000; Habermas 1982; Habermas 1984). This interpretation of the ability for human beings to come close to each other from different cultures has, however been challenged by Lovisa Bergdahl (2009), who argues that a true transmission meaning in a conversation cannot be undertaken – the cultural differences are too wide to be bridged (Bergdahl 2009). Nonetheless, one can argue for a hermeneutic approach where participants can come closer to the others in a conversation, although they may never fully understand the other (cf. Gosling 2003). For DR, a similar set of basic principles needs to be agreed upon by the participants in the terms of accepting a framework for approaching the other.[4]

Principle 1 – The improving of university teachers

The purpose of DR is to make university teachers better practitioners in their own fields of lecturing through the development of a didactic language to manifest, question and nurture their own teaching actions. The term in this context is better understood as the focus on the continuous development and change of the practice of teaching experienced by a university teacher during his or her career. The improving and activity-focused character of pragmatist philosophy – as put forward by Peirce and Dewey – is at the heart of this first principle (Peirce 1998[1905]; Dewey 1966[1916]; Dewey 1985[1933]; cf. Badley 2001). If no development can be made in the activity of teaching, then DR is of no use.

This first principle is central to DR since, without action in teaching, the need for DR and reflexivity is just a theoretical conception without implications in practice. It is not a way to establish consensus of the best methods and theories of university teaching, but rather, a common understanding and respect of different teaching practices. As well, it is not intended as a simple scale from bad to good, but is seen in terms of an ongoing interest in the

improvement of teaching to meet the different students through disparate and alternating societal contexts. The teachers are, in DR, understood as practitioners and it is in each teacher's practices that nourishment for DR is retrieved. The focus on different practices makes DR pluralistic in terms of what constitutes the different fields of education, and it is not up to participants from other fields to discern what the fields are.

The development of a didactic language is central to DR, and can be understood as a discourse of how to think and express teaching on a meta-level, which in turn needs to be put into practice through the activity of teaching. This didactic language can be seen as a common discourse for participants with differing disciplinary dialects (cf. Nixon *et al* 2001), and can manifest itself through implicit and explicit reflections by the teacher, in relation to both the student and to other teaching colleagues, responding to the fundamental didactic questions of how, why and what. The didactic language can also be facilitated to question one's own, students' and teaching colleagues' conceptions of education in order to enhance the quality of education through a reasoning and reflexive teaching. Moreover, this language can be used to nurture teaching in the sense of providing a language to express and think in terms of education and teaching skills.

DR does not, however, automatically lead to reflexive action. The development of a didactic language as university teacher and the providing of a methodological platform for such development does not in itself make university teachers into better teachers. Reflection must lead to action, and the experimentation as a consequence of the reflection in education has the implications to lead to the development of a better education for students (Rodgers 2002; Dewey 1985[1933]).

Principle 2 – The training of a didactic voice

The establishment of a didactic voice through the acknowledgement of the 'teaching-other'. Education is a meeting between subjects that leads to the coming into presence through the development of an independent voice (Biesta 2006). Without this intersubjectivity no such development can be accomplished. This understanding could be described as three layers that need to be taken into

consideration in order to establish a foundation for intersubjectivity between university teachers. The first layer is the realisation of meetings between subjects as a core element of education. Realising that education cannot be done on an individual basis and without the encounter of the other is necessary for education – something which is particularly important in academic teaching development (cf. Biesta 2006). Human beings are fundamentally relational beings and therefore, we become who we are in relation to other human beings. This realisation implies the need for the other in order to come into presence (Biesta 2006). A realisation of this understanding does not necessarily, however, imply the realisation of one universal understanding of education. A self needs the other in order to become an individual, thus putting an emphasis on both the self and the other. When university teachers meet in didactic conversations, such as in academic teaching development, the other comes into presence as well as oneself through these meetings, which can be very different in attitude and both negative and positive for the individual, since social roles become established there. The meetings can also be hierarchical and horizontal, making intersubjective meetings something disparate and heterogenous. In academic teaching development practising university teachers come together to develop their own didactical voices through these intersubjective meetings, and the onus is on both participants and mentors to establish a healthy atmosphere where all participants can feel accepted as both the other and the self. This realisation of an intersubjective meeting is the core element of education, since it impacts on the attitudes towards the other – creating and establishing a reflective and respectful intersubjective space (Biesta 2006). This intersubjective atmosphere of respect for the fellow human beings participating is essential for effective academic teaching development (cf. Giesinger 2012[5]). This does not, however, imply that everyone should agree on all arguments and that no critique can be presented. Instead, this environment creates the opportunity to debate and give critique – knowing that it is both oneself and the other who come into presence in this dialogue.

The second layer is the admitting of the existence and eligibility of the other. Having realised the first step to the teaching-other, further steps need to be taken. At the second step, admittance is essential – here the individual must not only accept the intersubjective meeting, but also respect the other and admit the value of him or her. Admitting, in this sense, means to put the

other on the same level as oneself and accept the other as relevant and necessary for the development of an individual didactical language. If one were to look down on the teaching-other in terms of educational development, the other's voice would become less important in the intersubjective meeting, thus causing the dialogue to falter and thereby hindering the development of oneself as a university teacher. The other must be accepted to exist in the presence of oneself, an acceptance of existence which is mutual and requires a state of mind that is necessary for academic teaching development. Similar to this acceptance is the acceptance of the eligibility of the other. The selection of eligible persons for teaching at the university is not made by the same people participating in academic teaching development, and thus the decision of the other's eligibility must be accepted by those participating in such teacher training. This situation could be complicated if someone has an impression of a colleague as being a 'bad teacher', yet in academic teaching development is forced to surrender this impression in favour of a more accepting attitude towards the other. Still, it is only in a respectful intersubjective space that the ability to develop a didactical language can be trained. It is necessary, therefore, to put aside such negative considerations. In academic teaching development it is not the research qualifications that are being developed but the teaching abilities.

The third layer is the acknowledgement of the other as a competent university teaching practitioner, that is, as the teaching-other. This acknowledgement goes even further than realisation and admittance, since it ascribes a positive value to the other – the self needs to acknowledge the other in order to come into presence, as the other in similar terms has to acknowledge you as well. This mutual understanding shapes the dialogue of academic teaching development. The acknowledgement of competence of the other is not an easy task to begin in a community of critique and takes time to develop.[6] Such time must therefore be provided in intersubjective spaces of academic teaching development. Giving the other the ability to have competence is not only conferring respect, but is also the granting of an opportunity to speak and develop a didactic language. It is not only oneself that has ideas of how to teach, but the other as well, through his or her competence as a teacher. In terms of academic teaching development, this does not mean that all teachers are the

best of teachers, but that they are practising university teachers and thereby have competence in teaching their own subjects. This emphasis on practitioners is important, since it is in these practices that the university teachers nurture their teaching abilities and also bring experiences of these practices into the dialogue of academic teaching development (Nixon *et al* 2001). Teacher training in academic teaching development through DR is thereby rooted in the practices of teaching and is not something which must be learned first in order to be used. The strong focus on teaching practices makes it necessary to develop further the term 'other', and to attach a 'teaching' to it, similar to the term 'significant-other'. It is in the practising of teaching and the didactic reasoning of this teaching that the other becomes the teaching-other – the colleague who also teaches at the university and with whom you develop as teacher in an intersubjective meeting. Unless the person who is to undertake academic teaching development through teacher training accepts that, in order to learn, one has to come into contact with the other, no development can be made. This, however, does not imply the acceptance of one universal understanding of this meeting, but rather an acceptance of difference (cf. Gosling 2000; Bergdahl 2009).

Principle 3 – The performance of didactic reasoning

The interdisciplinary and intersubjective meeting as a source of different teaching experiences and practices. Through different disciplinary practices the foundations for a didactic reflection can be met. Each discipline has its own methods of education and practices that are best understood by those from that particular discipline. This does not, however, indicate that these practices cannot be reflected upon by participants from other disciplines, as it is in the intersubjective meeting between practising participants from various disciplines that the didactic voice can be developed. In this perspective, Higher Education academic teaching development is hard to achieve without interdisciplinary and intersubjective meetings, with the source of discussion and reflection being the different practices as presented by the participants. This approach makes the role of the teacher trainer more of a mentor than a teacher for teachers, since his or her purpose is to aid the participants in finding their own

individual didactic voices through these interdisciplinary and intersubjective meetings.

In SR, dialogue meetings consist of the reading and reasoning of sacred texts (Kepnes 2006; Ford 2011). The sacredness of these texts is not shared, but is respected by the participants , while the believers of the specific religion to whom the text is sacred hold the primacy of interpretation. Nonetheless, these sacred texts can be read together and reasoned upon (Kepnes 2006).

In teacher training for academics, the foundation for DR ought to be the disciplinary and individual practices of university teaching in which participants of DR could reflect both on the role of the teaching-other and on the similarities and differences to one's own teaching practices (cf. Haigh 2005). The role of teacher education would then be to organise these DR meetings and to bring theoretical and methodological perspectives from the field of teacher training to these reasoning meetings. Through the introduction of themes of education theory and method, the reasoning could be both vitalised and provided with a foundation in educational research – providing teacher training for academics with a methodological platform. Still, the very organisation of these meetings should vary in different times and places due to the disparate teaching practices.

The development of a didactic voice takes time – albeit variable between the participants – and this aspect must be considered when planning DR. In academic teaching development, participation is not always voluntary, which means that willingness to practise DR is not necessarily shared among all participants and they should not be forced into doing so. Nonetheless, some kind of didactic understanding is required of all university teachers and this is one of the reasons why some of these academic teaching development courses are obligatory. Although it may not be done willingly, it is my understanding that everyone can learn at least a few 'syllables' in the didactic language through academic teaching development. Negative attitudes can possibly be overcome by respect and recognition of the teaching-other. The discovery and nurturing of a didactic language is a long journey throughout the whole career as university teacher, and it is therefore necessary for both participants and mentors to recognise the necessity of time.

Principle 4 – The rendering of experimentation and risk-taking in teaching

An openness to create bonds of friendship between participants that will not only enrich their continuous development of DR but also bring fresh ideas from these new interdisciplinary bonds of practising university teachers. The last principle is based in the positive perspective of academic teaching development in DR. Meeting other participants in a respectful and friendly space and time can be a hotbed for new friendships among university teachers. Academic teaching development provides an opportunity for interdisciplinary meetings beyond departmental and faculty space, and as such it must be nurtured in order to exist and to continue as a ground for establishing contacts at a university level, as well for the discovery of the teaching-other outside one's own field of practice. These friendships can create new ways of understanding education and teaching for the participants and for the field of academic teaching development – fresh didactic ideas not previously considered can be discovered in these friendly bonds between teachers of different disciplines. Kylie Budge and Angela Clarke (2012) argue that teacher development created in a respectful environment can motivate participants to be willing to take risks and try new ideas. Without this feeling of being accepted this experimentation is difficult to achieve – experimentation that is so important in the development of becoming a good university teacher.

Conclusions and implications

In my conceptual article I have argued for a didactic reasoning that includes professional university teachers in the development of their teaching skills. The basis for this reasoning is the shared reflection on disciplinary teaching practices and the development of a didactic voice. It is important that these reflections and this voice be put into teaching practice through the experimentation of new didactic and pedagogical approaches. Still, it must be recognised that this didactic reasoning is not a quick-fix solution to academic teacher development, but rather is a means for establishing methods for university teachers to develop as teachers through the introduction of educational theories and the recognition of the diversity of university teaching practices where the teachers become 'teaching-others'.

In order to set an intersubjective space for didactic reasoning, four principles need to be established and accepted by the participants in courses for academic teaching development. The first principle concerns the purpose of Didactic Reasoning, that is the improving of university teachers by making university teachers better practitioners in their own fields of lecturing through the development of a didactic language to manifest, question and nurture their own teaching actions. The second principle is the training of a didactic voice through the acknowledgement of the 'teaching-other'. The third principle constructs the performance of didactic reasoning in its establishment of the interdisciplinary and intersubjective meeting as a source of different teaching experiences and practices. The fourth and final principle focuses on the rendering of experimentation and risk-taking in teaching as an openness to create bonds of friendship between participants that will not only enrich their continuous development of didactic reasoning, but also bring fresh ideas from these new interdisciplinary bonds of practising university teachers.

If didactic reasoning is being practised, it is no longer possible to consider academic teacher development as something that can be brought by non-professional staff to professional academics. Instead, an important foundation for making teacher education possible is its roots in interdisciplinary teaching practices. Through a respectful and positive view on teacher development it continues to be a curious and difficult phenomenon. But, out of these complexities and experiences of otherness, new perspectives on university teaching can be developed and university teachers may be willing to take risks to put these new ideas into practice in their own teaching.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   1 Swedish HEC equals 1 European ECTS.
2   It is in my role as teacher educator the embryo for DR has emerged – through my dual disciplinary identity as Theologian (as lecturer in Religious Studies and Theology) and as Teacher Educator (through my post at the EDU at my university).
3   With 'pragmatist' I also include Peirce's later developments of the term and the more narrow term 'pragmaticism'.
4   Nonetheless, I am of the opinion there is no possibility for a complete understanding of the other.
5   Although Giesinger has done his study on children, I am of the opinion that the aspect of respect in education is a human condition regardless of the age of a human being.
6   This critique is necessary for establishing good research environments.

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