

Hanno Hortsch: A didactic concept based on act theory

In vocational education, no matter if vocational or further education, it seems to make sense to put the **usability** of the **occupational activity** to be acquired into the foreground. This does not intend to polemise against the term “vocation” as the vital category of German vocational education. To acquire a trade means more than gaining qualifications. Trade means a holistic acquisition of reality as regards activities in potential employment. The effects for vocational education are that topics are not only restricted to realistic/matter-of-fact/objective aspects but also include social, ecological or legal aspects that are to be borne in mind as regards the assessment of possible consequences. Nevertheless are vocational qualifications the rational core of the acquisition of a trade.

The term **qualification** in this sense is to denominate a Disposition of personality traits aimed at certain vocational activities.

Accomplishments, for example the accomplishments of a craftsman/skilled worker, are made possible by qualifications when the competency of acquired qualification(s) are recognised and become functional in work-related situation.

The ability to identify competency as regards vocational acts and to let qualifications become functional is called **vocational 'Handlungskompetenz'**.

This makes it evident that the volitional disposition, besides the required knowledge and skills for vocational acts, is a precondition for vocational 'Handlungskompetenz'. In this sense 'Kompetenz' (competence) should not be divided into 'sub-competences' as social competence, competence concerning learning, facts, values, etc. 'Kompetenz' is holistic complex and needs to be applied to the performance of an act. The vocational act “ordering material” for example can't be divided into objective/matter-of-fact/realistic, social, learning or other acts. But the act “ordering material” has components that are social, objective/matter-of-fact/realistic, and so on. For this reason it is sensible to speak of **components of vocational 'Handlungskompetenz'**. There certainly are numerous components. For vocational acts only the components to be cultivated are of importance, in this case social, factual and methodic components.

The **factual component** constitutes the informative precondition for a vocational activity. The **methodic component** intends the subjective possibility for an activity. This also includes the necessary 'provision' of the possibilities. The **social component** puts forth a subjective necessity for an activity. This includes, among other things, the evaluation of social relationships.

If one sees the initially made theoretical disquisitions as a basis, the demand for instruction based on Act Theory becomes apparent. Figure 3 shows the positions of teacher and learner in such a process of acquisition.

Applied to the process of instruction one can act on the assumption that there is a relationship between the teacher as subject and the object 'learner'; this activity connected to this relationship is denominated 'teaching'. The intension of this relationship –on the basis of instruction based on act theory- is the creation of a relationship between the learner and the object of acquisition, once again a subject-object-relation. The activity connected to the second relationship is denominated 'learning'.

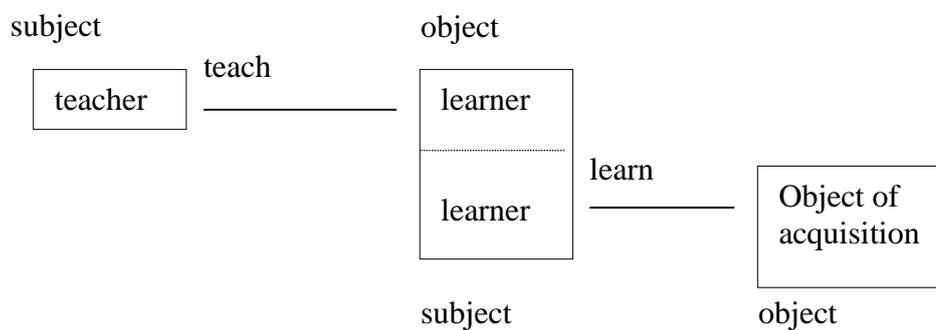


Figure 3: Basic didactic relationship

The basic didactic relationship clarifies the purpose of teaching and thus the function/role of the teacher. The task of the teacher when designing instruction/learning is to create conditions that allow the development of the second subject-object-relationship.

It is possible to construct a model of the functions of the teaching/learning process based on act theory on the basis of the basic didactic relationship. This is to be illustrated didactically simplified below as an explicit description of the models would take too much time. (Figure 4)

As the intension of the activity of the teacher is to initiate learning in the sense explained above, the second relation of the basic didactic relationship should serve as the factual core of the model.

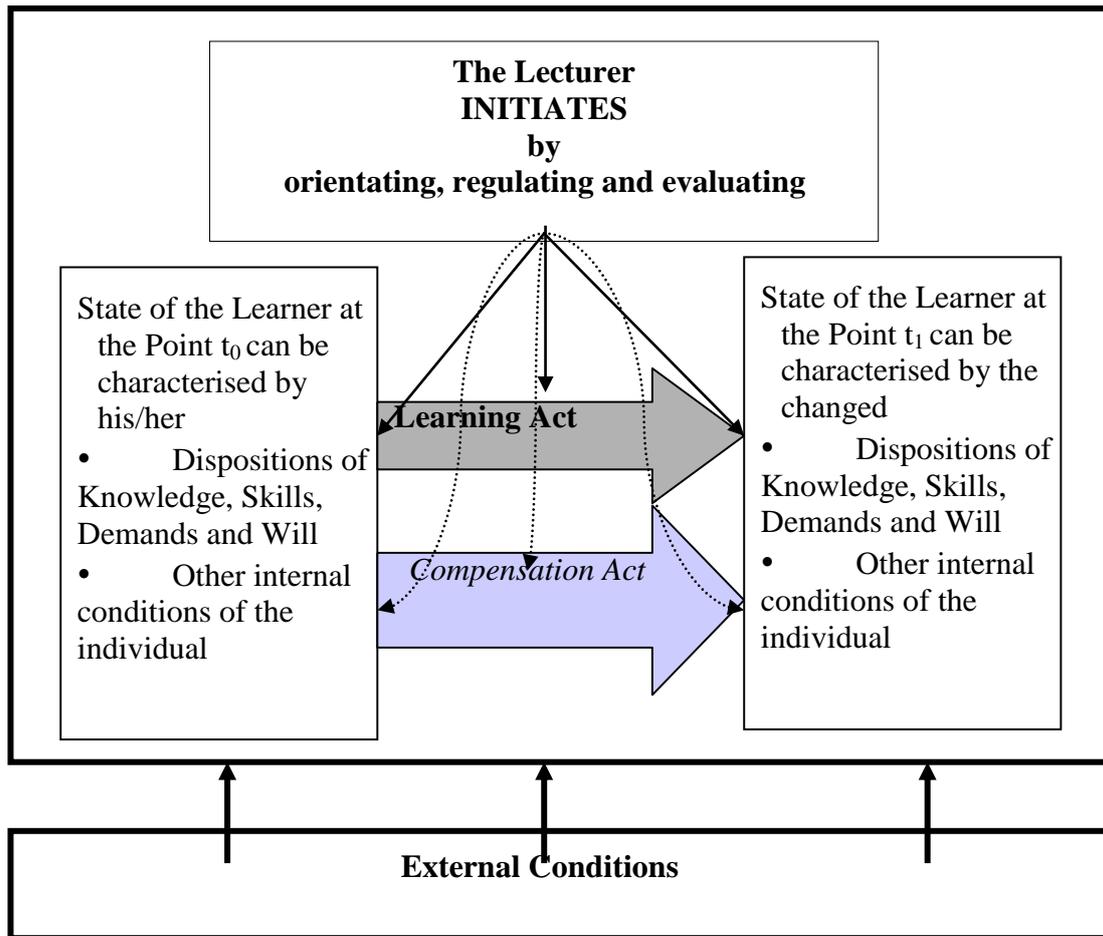


Figure 4: A Model of Technical Education

Development of personality comes about through acting. **Activity** in this sense is to be seen as the conscious dealing of humans with their environment and with themselves in order to their needs. Activity is realised by acts. Thus it seems to be of use to depict acts of learners in a model of functions. Seen from the teachers perspective these are the learning acts he initiates by creating the necessary conditions. Learning acts thereby receive orientation and, if needed, regulation and evaluation. In spite of this, anyone who has been teaching will acknowledge that every lesson is unique. Even with the help of the most elaborate structure of preconditions the teacher will not be able to avoid, and hopefully not want to avoid, a number of learners carrying out compensation acts (compare Hortsch, H. 1994).

A **compensation act** in this sense is not estimated as entirely negative. It always is a reaction to the coaction of internal and external conditions including the effects as well as the conditions the teacher creates or forms. For this reason it comprises compensation both as a reaction to a request by the teacher because of disinclination to learn and acts with the learner's own cognitive structures that do produce results, only taking a different way than

that forethought by the teacher. This second type of compensation can be negative from the teacher's perspective regarding his perceptions of learning acts intended. This perception seems to be less relevant from a didactic point of view if one brings to mind the consequences of the basic didactic relationship. On the contrary, the teacher should create options open up to this type of act. Only thereby can the learners bring in their own "ego", can they act according to their ways of learning or their own cognitive styles. It is more than a matter of speculation if one concludes:

Vocational lessons that provide a reasonable combination of learning acts planned by the teacher and scope for acts controlled by the learner are beneficial for both motivation and for the development of vocational "Handlungskompetenz".