

## Competence Levels of Didactic Practice for the Learning of the Unknown

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### Abstract

The research objective of this article is to identify didactic practice and its competence levels and discuss possible differences and common traits within these competence levels. Furthermore, the paper seeks to develop an understanding of didactic practice which is led by an educational interest related to the learning of an unknown future or that which is unforeseen. In search for a framework of such a didactic practice one of the findings of the paper is that hermeneutics falls short as this theory mainly revolves around understanding. If we are to take questions of the unknown and unforeseen seriously, so we argue, there is a need for another didactic approach. We suggest that *ironic questioning* may be complicit. Irony is about concealing and withdrawal of knowledge, so as to creating space for silence, doubt and reflection. Thus we argue that the ironic questioning may emerge as a complement to different competence levels of didactic practice, including planning, conducting and evaluation of teaching, and discussion of teaching and curricula or research, towards renewed didactic theory.

**Keywords:** Didactics; Unforeseen; Practice; Ironic questioning

### Introduction

A significant and underlying question in this article is: What is meant by didactic practice for the unforeseen? We assume that there is a relatively big difference between teaching that is steered by predetermined policies, with clear objectives for both the academic content and evaluation, and teaching that is intended to help students develop skills to cope with unforeseen events. The latter kind of teaching must create room for spontaneity whilst deviating from clear objectives and planned activities.

Now, if we refer to the relevant literature, we will find that, the concept of practice is often used in a simplified manner, without a precise definition. Furthermore, it may be thought that theory should often designate normative guidelines on what practice should be about. This is where we adopt a different approach. Although we still assert that didactics is a normative discipline, we contend that it is necessary to understand the concept of 'normativity' in new and different terms, when the intention is to learn for what is unknown. This is substantiated by the fact that didactic practice has an enigmatic basis that cannot fully be anticipated or completely understood. Consequently, there exist subtle differences within didactic practice. In certain situations, it may be possible to make predictions based on experience. Nonetheless, this may not be feasible in other situations in which, for example, learning for the unforeseen is prominent. When such situations direct didactic practice, they extend beyond the predetermined and, at the same time, rebel against every form of predefined frame of reference. Therefore, didactic practice should be seen as transcending its traditional and theoretical role, in which norm-determining and rational ways of acting in didactic situations are developed.

The research objective of this article is to identify didactic practice and its competence levels and discuss possible differences and

common traits within these competence levels. The paper is divided into two parts. The first section attempts to clarify what we mean by 'didactic practice', while the second attempts to explain what is understood by the term, 'ironic questioning'. The goal is to develop an understanding of didactic practice which is led by an educational interest related to the learning of that which is unknown or unforeseen.

### Didactic Practice

To clarify what is meant by didactic practice, we will now look closely at three of its characteristics: (i) its intrinsic value, (ii) its time perspective and (iii) its enigmatic or mysterious basis.

#### The intrinsic value and tact of didactic practice

How can the transition from theory to practice be understood and legitimised? Alternatively, which comes first, theory or practice? How often have we not failed to encounter such a line of enquiry in the field of pedagogy or in didactics? Nonetheless, we maintain that such questions lead to unfortunate understandings of pedagogy and didactics; unfortunate in the sense that didactic practice results in being derived from a norm, whether it is theory or practice that develops such a norm. Therefore, we propose that we cease to challenge theory using practice or vice versa. We will attempt to demonstrate this by using two examples taken from the history of pedagogy.

The first example is taken from Schleiermacher [1], who had a significant influence on modern pedagogy, particularly in regard to German hermeneutic pedagogy [2]. In his renowned lectures on pedagogy from 1826, he emphasised that "[p]ractice has intrinsic value"[1]. By this, he meant that practice possesses its own value, which cannot be determined by theory beforehand. However, this does not mean that practice takes place more or less independently of theory or that practice must come first, before our experiences from

practice have been related to theory. It would be incorrect to interpret this as practice having preferential status; that it presupposes that practice precedes theory. If that were the case, practice would be norm-determining; with the result that theory would become inherently dependent on practice for its legitimisation. It follows that practice would be reduced to a generic and universal phenomenon, after which there would be a risk of overlooking that which practice demands. Admittedly, Schleiermacher added that, “practice becomes...more tangible through theory” (ibid, our translation). However, this does not mean that pedagogy, on a theoretical and normative basis, will be able to point out or provide clear signals regarding practice. Neither the theorist nor the practitioner bears the final responsibility for managing the situations that may arise in practice. By contrast, theory and practice are integrated. This means that theory is not located outside the sphere of practice, often with the result that theory exerts pressure on practice, which thereby becomes objectified and marginalised. Instead, theory and practice are connected, albeit in an internal manner but not in an external manner, as is the case when oil and water are poured into the same glass.

The second example is taken from another pedagogue who has been influential in modern pedagogy: Herbart [3]. By examining Herbart’s lectures on pedagogy from 1802, it can be seen that he holds that any practitioner which forgoes theory has to undertake practise which is based on chance and uncritical assessments. On the other hand, we understand that the practitioner who makes use of theory as a normative guideline for practice is necessarily obliged to describe conditions which are far removed from practice situations, during which time the person concerned will be unable to gain the specific details that practice produces [4]. Herbart solved the problem of theory and practice using his concept of “pedagogical tact” [3]. According to Benner [5], Herbart’s concept of tact can be understood as operating between theory and practice, and can be seen as an action. Didactics is thereby made flexible, which means that tact can be adjusted and changed in such a way that theory is not divorced from practice or that practice is reduced to a question of chance.

Schleiermacher and Herbart offer two alternative understandings of practice and theory, and the relationship between them. Although they are different, they are alike in the sense that they both challenge the view that theory must be unambiguously norm-determining in a sense that is explicit and clearly formulated in such a way that it serves as a benchmark. Where Schleiermacher emphasises the intrinsic value and dignity of practice, Herbart stresses the concept of tact. Neither of them place theory or practice in opposition to each other. From both of these perspectives, it is impossible to apply a normative guideline or form of schematic thinking in practise on account of its unpredictable and heterogeneous nature. By way of example, a secondary school teacher may have two year-ten classes in English as a subject. Even though the teacher has a goal of following the same programme in both classes, the teaching will differ to a great extent because of differences between individuals, situations, etc. Therefore, every action which the teacher undertakes is different and requires a completely unique approach, which no theory can grasp fully. It follows that didactic practice is foreign to symmetric situations as well as being a revolt against theory, understood as a normative calculation. Accordingly, the danger of identifying practice with the help of theory is that practice may easily be reduced to theory, whereby the theorist becomes entangled in his own norm-determining system of definitions, or he only sees what lies in theory itself. Altogether, this line of reasoning leads us to a new understanding of time, which underlies didactic practice.

Overall, Schleiermacher and Herbart [1,3] introduce two levels of competence, that is, the planning and conducting of teaching. In modern didactic theory of practice, however, it is more common to construct didactic practice by way of three levels of competence. For example, the late Norwegian professor of didactics Dale [6,7] is outlining three practice levels of competence (C), which are related to each other. These are: “to teach (C1), to plan or evaluate lessons (C2) and to critically discuss lessons and teaching plans (C3)” [6]. The third level of competence, C3, also involves research in which the aim consists of constructing theory [7]. Not unlike Dale [7], we establish as an underlying principle that didactic practice has a normative foundation, developed through practice, theory and empirics. Nonetheless, our position differs from that of Dale [7] in various ways. This entails, for instance, that we focus our attention elsewhere, namely on the notion that didactic practice can, in addition to more traditional aims, also stimulate pedagogical interest related to the unknown and unforeseen. Therefore, we ask whether didactic practice is in need of an aid or a supplement to: Teaching itself (C1), planning (insofar as possible) of the teaching based on the above interests (C2) and discussion of teaching and teaching plans or research, and/or development work, which may lead to a renewal of didactic theory (C3).

The analysis shows that Dale’s didactic theory includes more levels of competence than the classic theoreticians, Schleiermacher and Herbart [1,3]. Whilst these classics to a lesser degree discuss their competence levels in relation to continuity and causality, Dale adds a timeframe for didactic practice, by way of distinguishing between competence levels that are interdependent; namely, planning (C2), conducting and (C1) reflection (C3) of teaching. Thus far it looks as if Dale’s theory of didactic practice may work as a tool for predictability and control, without any tools to grasp unforeseen and enigmatic situations in practice. By this we see that the concept of time is relevant for the analysis of didactic practice.

### **Didactic time**

Didactic practice has traditionally been based on an understanding of time in which the beginning, ending and intervening period can be located on a straight line, on which the old and new progress according to a (pre)determined process and in consecutive order. In other words, we are presented with a quantitative understanding of time, which is characterised by a homogenous and successive composition, which makes it entirely possible to measure what occurs within the give timeframe [8]. Contemporary pedagogy and didactics are located in what many have referred to as “the age of measurement” [9], where the focus is on measuring the gains from teaching and similar fields. In the age of measurement, evidence-based research plays an important role; research that aims to base its findings on evidence, which can then be applied more or less directly to the field of practice. In other words, it is desirable to ensure that research leads to sound knowledge of the didactic field of practice. In this way, we adopt a positivist approach to research, whereby the researcher believes that reality can be grasped as it appears. It is with this perspective that modern educational researchers concern themselves with the reliable and the precise, with the result that the psychologist often represents a role model for pedagogy and didactics. In the same way that psychology appears to secure specific and tangible results, the educational researcher seeks to gain sound knowledge but also that which is regarded as having utility. Therefore, everything that falls outside the framework of utility is regarded as being without use. For instance, ambiguous discussions concerning attitudes and values have little or no utility in terms of a

positivist mind set. Instead, what occurs is an affirmation of the faith that research data can reflect reality in such a way that these data can be applied directly to didactic-practice situations. This line of thought thereby becomes an instrument or tool whereby robust public policy, often combined with effective organisation, can anticipate and master a predetermined future scenario. In general, as a result of an enormous focus on tangible results, schools have been guided by non-pedagogical principles based on homogeneity and quantity, which are reflected in what appears to be education's most fundamental question: how should pupils be educated from immaturity to maturity/ from child to adult/ from below the age of legal responsibility to legally responsible/from uneducated to educated?

Such questions are bound together by an understanding of time which is based on the idea of succession and sequence. However, on closer examination, we can see that that pedagogy and didactics, as interpreted is not necessarily concerned with these questions [10]. Kierkegaard did not restrict himself to an interpretation of time as a straightforward sequence of development in the way that developmental psychology and progressive pedagogy, led by thinkers such as Piaget and Dewey, have done. Until recently, it has been thought that the task of pedagogy and didactics has consisted of the education of an individual into something specific, for example, into a democratic citizen. In doing so, it presupposed that the pupil lacked something from the outset, which the teacher-through didactic processes-should impart to the not-yet-mature individual. By contrast, Kierkegaard adhered to a different understanding of time. In effect, time was understood as a qualitative and heterogeneous factor. Instead of using the pupil's lack of something as the point of departure, Kierkegaard assumed that it was necessary to take something away. He thereby put more emphasis on interruptions, unforeseen events and, quite simply, everything that interferes with mankind's existence in a surprising and incalculable manner. Meanwhile, he refrained from examining issues that are germane to psychology, sociology, namely that man should develop himself in a process of continual self-improvement, desirably from an epistemological and moral perspective. This line of thought is actually similar to the basic tenet of sports, according to which an athlete trains intensively in order to develop and improve his abilities. Instead, Kierkegaard focused on what could turn pupils away from prejudices, false misconceptions and egocentric compulsions, etc., and thereby challenge pupils, without knowing where the results would lead [10]. In this regard, didactic practice is linked to another concept of time, in addition to the homogenous variant; one that is required in certain situations but not in the form of an overriding and guiding concept, as modern didactics presupposes.

#### **Didactic practice and its enigmatic basis**

To allow for the possibility of regarding time as a qualitative and heterogeneous factor, it is necessary that the practitioner of didactics takes practice's unpredictability into account as it will never be mastered, either before or following didactic practice. Accordingly, one is faced by an aporia, which effectively acts like a blind alley [11]. Therefore, aporia can be understood as an unceasing phenomenon, as is the case with arithmetic in schools – and, as aporia is distributed in the eternal, didactic practice implies, both for the teacher and pupil, a means of experiencing something that cannot be experienced. For instance, this may apply to teaching that is interested in questions of the unknown. This form of teaching can be compared to giving a gift, albeit not in a traditional sense. In this case, it is concerned with the teacher's task of giving something he or she neither predict or control.

Consequently, this is [im] possible as it is not feasible to give away something one does not possess. It is equally [im] possible to receive such a gift because, in reality, it does not exist. It is entirely possible that the teacher may be aware, to a limited extent, of the gift's content and how it is to be received; however, it is [im] possible for this to be fully predicted. Therefore, both teacher and pupil can be said to experience the [im] possible through didactic practice.

It is entirely impossible to experience aporia, this intractable enigma, which characterises the fundamental structure of didactic practice. It follows that didactic practice is far removed from the calculated symmetry of theory. Instead, it is far closer to aporia's absolute asymmetry. If, on the other hand, the didactic action simply consists of applying a normative rule, setting in motion a programme or performing a calculation, theory may well be applied in such a manner that practice changes, in which case it would occur in a somewhat naïve sense. This is because didactic practice goes beyond norms, rules, programmes and expectations, etc. By way of example, it is possible for a teacher to plan learning and teaching in a traditional didactic manner. However, when dealing with the unforeseen, which always occurs in a practice situation, classical didactic models and theories prove to be inadequate, for example Klafki's [12] theory of formation. This is related to the notion that the unforeseen follows a heterogeneous time perspective, in contrast to the teleological or linear view of time in classical didactics, according to which the future is regarded as something that merely lies 'ahead' and waits to be fulfilled. On account of the unforeseen, didactic practice's heterogeneous time perspective implies that it has a tendency for continually arriving and, accordingly, consists of incommensurable or incalculable elements. For this reason, the practitioners of didactics must restrict themselves to the possible in regard to practice. Consequently, didactic practice cannot be controlled using norm-determining and calculating theories.

Nonetheless, the solution does not lie in abandoning theory. Although didactic practice can never be fully understood, there will always be questions of interpretation in regard to practice. This means that hermeneutics, which has had a strong influence on both hermeneutic and modern pedagogy, must not be rejected as a theoretical 'tool.' For instance, Dilthey [13], as well as his successors, held that it would be instructive to examine the historical record in an attempt to interpret and understand how earlier ideas on education and teaching had been put into practise. Secondly, this understanding may shed new light on one's own time and its problems and challenges in connection with education and teaching. The objective lies in learning from that which has worked and that which has not worked, as well as adapting earlier approaches related to development and teaching to one's own time and context. However, this is a hermeneutic and formation-oriented approach, according to which cultural and historical values play a central role. As far as didactic practice is concerned, different rules apply for learning of the unknown. In such cases, hermeneutics will fall short of the set requirements precisely because this type of practice establishes demands that exceed the purpose of hermeneutics, which is principally concerned with coming to an understanding [14].

We thereby assume a different position to Dale, who asserts the following: "We associate pedagogical practice in the schooling of pupils with comprehension-orientated communication. Interaction between teachers and pupils is related to mutual behavioural expectations concerning intelligibility in the use of language, veracity in behavioural expression and validity of content" [6,7]. However, we will argue that pedagogical and didactic practice needs to encompass more than

merely arriving at an understanding. What then? Should we turn to critical theory, as is postulated in critical didactics?

These theories are needed as well, among other reasons, in order to discover the critical issues that concern practice. The weakness of critical didactics, from Blankertz [15] to Schäfer et al. [10], Klafki [12], is that it often involves an alternative or reciprocation to the person making the criticism. For example, it can entail criticising the teacher's role for being too authoritarian, when the teacher should be acting as an advocate for freedom. Alternatively, it may be concerned with criticising or replacing traditional forms of imparting knowledge, with dialogue as an alternative. It may be thought that this approach serves the interests of didactic practice, but this approach is just as problematic. The reason for this is that the new, which in our case is the focus on freedom and dialogue, is firmly rooted in a normative basis. In other words, the new is introduced without either critical instructions or descriptive, empirical research.

Both hermeneutic pedagogy and critical didactics will, on account of its strong normative signals, cause an immunisation of the unexpected, the uncontrolled and the surprising, which characterises didactic practice. Owing to its enigmatic foundations, this form of didactic practice rebels against the framework and postulates of theory, and the issue at hand is how one can 'solve' the question of didactics' normativity.

In other words, we have shown that both the classic and the modern approach to didactic practice are incomplete, in their own ways. As for the modern approach, we find that there is a missing link which may justify modern didactic thinking by taking into account discontinuous and unpredictable structures of didactic practice. The characteristics of such thinking are that didactic practice must include a certain form of controllability while still creating space for that which is enigmatic, surprising and unpredictable in practice. It is here Kierkegaard's understanding of irony may be a contribution, functioning as the missing link between the three competence levels of didactic practice and thus complement the modern approach. In the following section, we will therefore outline some basic thoughts concerning what we will refer to as ironic questioning, which as we will argue-will shed new light on the issue of the normativity of didactics.

## **Ironic Questioning**

In a didactic-practice situation, the teacher may, in a countless number of ways, convey the notion that the pupil is correct, while the former is incorrect. This is a clear example of how irony can be applied in a didactic-practice situation which is based on reality. This method of using irony will now be explained in the following paragraph.

By starting with the etymological term, it can be seen that irony has its origins in the Greek word *eironeia*, which pertains to concealment and the pretence of ignorance. Through the use of irony, elements are kept hidden, partly by allowing for silence in what is expressed orally. However, this does not involve concealing the notion that something will be revealed, for example, by giving the opposite meaning of what is said. This is a vulgar form of irony, which constitutes a hazard in regard to didactic practice. It owes partly to the fact that irony, when directed towards a receiver who does not understand irony, will cause the individual to feel unintelligent, with the result that the pupil becomes constrained and excluded, instead of being educated. In opposition to vulgar irony, we aim to focus our attention on a form of irony which intervenes without having to be understood, in contrast to hermeneutics as well as Dales [7] understanding of didactic practice.

Neither is the user of irony naive in the sense that she pretends that she does not know, while, in reality, she is fully aware of the circumstances. Nonetheless, the user of irony is naive because she doubts her own opinions as well as the others' points of view. This is also one of the reasons that this form of irony is compelling enough to break apart prejudices, misconceptions, biases, etc.

Indeed, the ironic questioning starts by destabilising, complicating or provoking doubt and, not least, paradoxes. In such a way, this form of irony is unequivocally problematic in terms of practice's scope for tension between its calculable and incalculable facets. It is also striking that this form of irony has the ability to transcend the traditional understanding of normativity. This occurs through posing (often indirectly and in silence) a question without either prejudice, knowledge or, as Kierkegaard states, "At the moment we ask, we know nothing". In this sense, irony is 'normative'. However, in equal measure, it cannot be seen as an entirely calculable guideline, similar to a calculating matrix. Rather than envelop oneself in common sense and the rationality of theory, as Dale [6] does in using his concept of "reason in didactic action", this form of irony should be seen as being closer to the irrational, even though this is also somewhat inaccurate. In this sense, irony is a form of enigma; anything other than the theories which proceed in a straight line, without detours or distractions. Instead, Irony is located on the middle of the spectrum between the determinable and indeterminable. Irony constantly moves between these two extremities, which is thereby characterised by instability. Therefore, irony does not correspond to the demands that a conventional theory poses. Instead, it disregards the attributes of theory, such as precision and truthfulness, by avoiding every conventional and transparent approach-whereupon all form of rational thinking ceases.

While we examine how irony can give us new insight into the question of the normativity of didactics, it is warranted to ask what results from the ironic questioning. If we direct our attention to contemporary, evidence-based, educational research, to address the issue pointedly, does it have as its goal the production of clear results, an advantage or, at least, something valuable; something which can be used constructively in a didactic-practice situation? This may, for instance, relate to research on methods of assessment, the results of which should preferably be applied as directly as possible to didactic practice. By itself, irony produces no tangible results. Instead, we will, after the application of irony, be confronted with both differences and disagreements, rather than unambiguous conclusions, concurrence and consensus. Irony will never lead us to a position from which it is possible to say that something is accomplished and overcome, as though we have attained a synthesis between the definite and indefinite. If we are to attempt to be more precise and systematic, we should draw on three conditions to which irony can 'contribute' in a didactic situation where learning for the unknown has a central place.

### **Destruction and dissolution**

Firstly, irony has the ability to release something that has been locked, put question marks next to or destroy unproductive perspectives, courses of action, etc.

Let us examine this in a teaching scenario (C1). How should, for instance, the teacher interact with secondary school pupils who are strongly influenced by violent computer games; attitudes which are expressed in both speech and actions? In broad terms, it is possible to imagine two possibilities where the teacher's pedagogical-normative interest is related to the pupils' existence, which is unforeseen. The first



possibility is that of interacting with the pupil directly using various forms of moralising, which are predetermined or known beforehand. Such a method would likely lead to two intractable positions, rigidly opposed to one another. The other possibility involves interacting with the pupil indirectly using irony as a mirror, with which the pupils can see themselves and possibly also re-examine their own attitudes. However, it must be added that the potential for nothing to occur is present when irony is used, and it should also be used with caution as a series of problems may arise [10].

It is important to emphasise that irony must not be equated with criticism. In contrast to a critic, irony allows the pre-existing to remain as it is. However, by acting in a passive-active manner, irony will be able to destroy the pre-existing. Provided that the user of irony had had a wish to overcome the existing, for instance, the aforementioned secondary school pupil's negative attitude, what then? She would have seen a weakness in the existing from the perspective of something new; she must have had a predetermined norm or idea to be used as a comparison, just as if she had had an understanding of the future at her disposal. This is not the case for the user of irony because she poses questions without having the answer beforehand. However, when the user of irony has the new under her control, then we must ask how she is able to destroy the existing. Kierkegaard refers here to John the Baptist, who was not "he who was to come. He was not cognizant of what should come, and he therefore destroyed Judaism. He did not destroy it using the new per se, but he destroyed it using its own self." Here we have a clear example of irony as a 'normative concept' being associated with the concept of time as arriving. In essence, John the Baptist was concerned with the arrival of the Son of God. He followed what may be regarded as a messianic understanding of time, which is similar to the heterogeneous time perspective, according to which one is open to the future's arrival without knowing what, is that, will arrive. The issue at hand concerns an entirely surprising future scenario which arrives on the basis of that which exists, and whereby that which exists is destroyed at the moment the new, (which in reality has never existed), arrives.

Another good example of this is provided by Kierkegaard himself when he was faced with the problem that Hegel had created an all-encompassing system, of which it might be said almost, swallowed everything that it came across. How was he to respond to this system? If he had chosen to respond with either criticism or a rebuttal, what then? He would have been swallowed whole, becoming part of Hegel's system or simply a footnote in the wider system. Therefore, Kierkegaard had no choice other than to respond to Hegel's system with a device that was irreproachable. We must assume this was the reason that Kierkegaard, in this instance, chose irony (and similar rhetorical devices such as humour, etc.) when he was able to see the faults in Hegel's system and, at the same time, take it apart and destroy it, while smiling and laughing at its ostensible perfection yet without being reconcilable himself. As incredible as it may sound, this process of destruction occurred without anticipation, criticism or rebuttal from Kierkegaard.

### Hyper-intensifying change

Secondly, it is not possible to use irony as method to change practice in such a way that disharmony becomes harmony, balance and equilibrium. If we wish to discuss change as a result of ironic questioning, we must address a hyper-intensifying change, which is in a state of constant flux and tension.

This owes to the nature of irony, which does not "contain the element of reconciliation..., but rather *reinforces* the vain in its vanity. It makes the mad even madder". As such irony can reinforce the violence aspect of computer games, which may cause doubt. Thus irony has no need whatsoever to create harmony, but instead creates a space that allows the enigmatic to produce the basis for its existence. Wherever the hermeneutical is in danger of limiting, reducing or even distorting our understanding of the unknown and the new, by the affirmation of making the unknown proximate, tangible and known, the ironic perspective allows for the strengthening and anticipation of tensions and movements. Again, this is related to irony's capacity to intervene without the goal of wanting to understand, which stands as a stark inversion of the aims of hermeneutics and of traditional didactics. The typical hermeneutic would be of the opinion that one expresses oneself, either in writing or verbally, in order to be understood. The user of irony, by contrast, has no intention of being understood, and seeks neither unity nor reconciliation.

However, what if we set a goal of wanting to understand? This would result in reconciliation or in a universal synthesis of one form or another. Therefore, for the user of irony, the questions are more important than the answers which, in a weak sense, are questioning and doubtful, just as much in relation to their own opinions as to those of others. By posing questions in didactic settings, it is also possible to challenge what we accept as true in traditional terms (for example a students' perception of reality), but never that we arrive at an understanding or a clear answer. The user of irony is always left in an aporetic state, in an impasse. In equal measure, this ironic-aporetic attitude is a didactic condition, a premise, required to enter into relations with the unknown's difference and distinctiveness. This stands in contrast to the hermeneutic who, paradoxically, loses both himself and everyone else because the parties in the moment of reconciliation turn out to be speaking the same language.

### Self-education

Thirdly, the use of irony can make possible the education of the person deploying irony as an alternative, aid or supplement to the critical didactic evaluation level (C2) and to the research and development level (C3). This point has often been overlooked in academic literature on pedagogical-philosophical issues<sup>1</sup>. Instead, attention has been directed towards the educative effects of irony on the receiver, without accounting for irony's educative effect on those who make use of irony themselves. Kierkegaard is an exception when he speaks of "Governance (SKS 4:80)." Kierkegaard's Governance has his authorship as his principle abode in such a way that what he himself has written represents a potential for an education for him.

<sup>1</sup> Rorty R (1989) Contingency, irony, and solidarity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Nehamas, Alexander (1998) The art of living: Socratic reflections from plato to foucault. Berkeley: University of California; Vlastos G (1991) Socrates, ironist and moral philosopher. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Vasiliou, Iakovos (2002) Socrates' reverse irony. Classical Quarterly, 52(1), pp. 220-230; Smeyers, Paul (2005). Idle research, futile theory, and the risk for education: Reminders of irony and commitment. Educational Theory, 55(2), pp. 165-183; Goor, Roel van & Heyting, Frieda (2006). The fruits of irony: Gaining insight into how we make meaning of the world. Studies in Philosophy and Education, 25(6), pp. 479-496; Lear, Jonathan (2011). A case for irony. Harvard: Harvard University; Smith, Richard (2011). The play of Socratic dialogue. Journal of Philosophy of Education, 45(2), pp. 221-233.

This sounds paradoxical as it is he himself who has written the texts, while at the same time, the texts are given a language and content that go beyond his intentions and purposes. Through Governance's existence and counter-intuition, the authority of the author or creator is, to a certain degree, both undermined and threatened. More specifically, this occurs through the deeper meaning, which is added to the texts in an enigmatic manner. In essence, this is a deeper meaning that will influence the Creator's introspection and self-criticism [16,17].

Irony is essentially responsible for this inexplicable and mysterious phenomenon occurring because, without irony or similar rhetorical devices; the texts would lack the necessary contradictions and paradoxes. Instead, we would have at our disposal texts which are over-pedagogical, and in which the meaning would essentially be transparent. Irony avoids such rigidity in the sense that it initiates movements and applies forces which can be singular or autonomous, and they may act in another direction than that which the author had originally intended. Therefore, irony provides creative possibilities. It is reasonable to interpret Governance or the inexplicable phenomenon that Kierkegaard discusses as the enigmatic element in the text. We use the word enigmatic because it arises in an inexplicable manner, outside Kierkegaard's control.

There is something metamorphological and self-generating in irony, which is transformed into a kind of co-author or mentor and teacher to the original author. We can identify at least two 'authors': the original author is the creator of his own work, while the 'co-author' or Governance assists in recreating the author. This is supported by Kierkegaard himself when he stresses that, "it is Governance who has raised me." In addition to writing, the author is himself written. Not only is the author the source of his authorship, but the authorship is itself also the source of the author(s). Alternatively, perhaps it is the authors who write in an ironic manner with the aim of losing their selves? By this, we imply that the self is essentially lost because it culminates being steered, raised and taught by its own writing.

It is nonetheless possible, for the purpose of conducting didactic research, to look back at what one has written and review the ironic questioning and the ever-present doubt, which is an important marker of irony, in such a way that one's writing becomes so much more than an archived article, dissertation or research report. Instead, what has been presented through writing becomes a form of *Bildungsroman*, which the author himself can refer back to as an important part of his own education, and can provide new perspectives on research.

## Conclusion

In this paper, it has been argued that didactic practice is related to theory. In other words, theory and practice are interdependent and conjoined in a manner that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to separate the two from one another. Such a continuum between theory and practice implies that didactic practice itself is laden with theory through scientific theory, experiences, expectations, etc. Accordingly, the actual field of practice or pure practice per se does not exist. Nonetheless, didactic practice is not necessarily derived from theory or normative principles because it cannot encompass everything that occurs in practice. Undoubtedly, theory can aid practitioners to a certain extent by creating possibilities which practice alone can never achieve. In spite of this, the application of theory will not allow us to understand didactic practice in its entirety. This owes to the aporia of didactic practice and its enigmatic basis, whose unpredictability must

be taken into account. To avoid the risk of immunising the unknown and the enigmatic, we have introduced what we have referred to as ironic questioning. This is understood as an aid or supplement to teaching (C1), planning and evaluation (C2), and the construction of didactic theory (C3) because, amongst other reasons, it makes it possible to destabilise and complicate paradoxes, and other similar elements. Notwithstanding, didactics remains a normative discipline. However, by linking itself to the ironic questioning, it is normative without actually being normative. This leaves us with a form of didactic practice based on doubt but also with curiosity, not just in the period preceding (C2) or during the teaching (C1), but also subsequently (C3) when didactic research can represent a basis for the researcher's own education. In this way, the researcher acts as the subject understood as sub-jected, rather than as an objective observer. In other words, the researcher becomes sub-jected by his or her own research, which can allow for new thinking related to research and the construction of new didactic theory.

All in all, the ironic questioning will not only allow for the expansion and renewal of practice in schools. It will also stand as a counterweight to today's evidence-based, results-orientated, utilitarian pedagogy and didactics, while it will shed new light on the normative aspects of didactics, regarding planning (C2), teaching (C1) and research, and/or development work (C3).

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