

# THREE SITUATIONS OF RELEVANCE TO TEACHER EDUCATORS: THE SOURCES OF AND THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE<sup>1</sup>

George D. Yonge  
School of Education  
University of California at Davis

In this paper I describe three situations of particular importance to teacher educators for clarifying the primordial source of educational "theory" and "practice" as well as their harmonious integration in the activity of guiding a child to adulthood in the formal situation of schooling.

**A distinction between a philosophy of and a philosophy for education** helps me develop my thesis. As used here, a philosophy of education is a phenomenological disclosure and explication of the essential, universal **form** of educating, where a philosophy for educating is a source of and justification for the specific **content** necessary for that form to be "enlivened" or implemented. See Van Rensburg & Landman (1986) and Yonge (1991) for a discussion of this distinction.

To base teacher education and, thus, the practice of formal schooling on an accountable foundation, what situation should be one's primary focus of study? An obvious answer, given time and again, is that one should focus on the nature and dynamics of the classroom and on the methods judged to be effective by criteria such as achievement test scores. However, the formal classroom as a focus of study cannot provide an accountable theoretical foundation for a teacher education program because it is a derived, second order, institutionalized situation rooted in a primordial, more fundamental one. That more fundamental situation ought to be our primary focus or, at least, our point of departure for our quest for

---

<sup>1</sup> Modified (January 2025) version of an Individual Paper presented at the American Educational Studies Association Convention, Kansas City, Missouri, October 26, 1991.

an accountable theoretical foundation. (Also see Van der Stoep, 1972).

Of course, the concrete reality of the classroom is what a teacher must deal with. But, following Landman, I suggest that a fundamental insight into the **educative** nature of a classroom situation requires an understanding of the essential structures of the more fundamental situation of which it is a focalization. Without such understanding, the classroom tends to be viewed **exclusively** as a learning/teaching situation at the expense of its educative dimension and purpose (see Van der Stoep & Louw, 1984). But one might ask, aren't learning and teaching synonymous with educating? **No**. They are **necessary** for it to occur, but they do not capture its essential meaning. For example, learning and teaching are much broader than educating and are **not always positively normative**, in the sense that one can learn/teach contents which hinder a child's becoming a responsible adult. However, educating is essentially a **positive normative** enterprise because responsible adulthood is its **inherent** aim<sup>2</sup>. As is noted, educative teaching-learning only occurs in an adult-child educative relationship, but a teaching-learning event occurs outside an adult-child educative one in a child-child, child-adult, and adult-adult situation of effective teaching and positive learning effects.

Before discussing this primordial or more fundamental educative situation (of upbringing), it is important to note that even though schooling is rooted in it, schooling cannot be reduced to this primary educative situation. Some of the reasons why this reduction is not possible are noted in the following paragraphs.

To understand "educating" in its most basic meaning of guiding a child to responsible independence or to adulthood requires that one focus on those situations within which this phenomenon first arises spontaneously during the course of human existence. Following the terminology of Landman and his coworkers (e.g., Landman et al., 1982), this primordial situation is called an **educational situation**. Beginning with a child's birth, it is constituted by adults (usually the

---

<sup>2</sup> Note the word "education" is derived from the Latin **educare** that refers to the phenomenon or event of bringing up or rearing a child to adulthood. It is not derived from the Latin **educere** meaning to draw or lead out (as in educe) even though many authors effortlessly play on this meaning as a metaphor for educating; however, in doing so, often unknowingly, they mistake this meaning for the phenomenon of educating and this tends to obscure and distort that phenomenon.

child's parents) who spontaneously and intuitively guide him/her with the aim of helping and supporting him/her to achieve his/her own adulthood. This does not mean that the child's adulthood, as aim, is or must always be explicit; indeed, the adult is often focused on an immediate problem, such as the child being inconsiderate to others.

Even though an **educational situation** is constituted only periodically, it is an essential aspect or moment of being human; when required, ordinarily it spontaneously occurs wherever adults and children are living together. Landman et al. (1982) refer to this situation as **pre-scientific**, in that the sources of knowledge of this event are mainly the adult's own naive experiences and intuitions which are informed, to some degree, by the ways his/her educators brought him/her up. Hence, the nature of this knowledge tends to be unsystematic, unreliable, and idiosyncratic. Further, the activities engaged in, and the view of adulthood are prescribed by the educator's philosophy of life; this philosophy of life amounts to a philosophy **for** educating the child in terms of a hierarchy of values and norms, i.e., in terms of an **ideology** or **ideologies**, to which the educator is committed. That is, values, outlooks on life, ideologies are **always** implicated in the **practice** of educating or guiding a child to adulthood.

The **educational situation**, as a universal human occurrence, can be "driven" mostly by or prescribed to by any ideology. However, since the **sources** of these philosophies **for** educating, these ideologies, are **external** to the essential structures of educating, it sometimes is the case that "educational" practices motivated by a philosophy of life, in fact, may conflict with the phenomenologically disclosed categories and structures required by the nature of the reality of educating itself. This is understandable because one cannot begin to guide a child without **already** being committed to some philosophy of life being adopted as a philosophy **for** educating, however implicit or vaguely formulated it may be. Often, this prior commitment means the ideology guiding the **educational situation** functions implicitly, i.e., it is simply taken for granted and lived. [As noted below, pedagogics, as a science of the phenomenon of educating, provides criteria for determining whether a particular practice based on an ideology is **pedagogically** accountable and, at this point, a dialectic synthesis of scientific necessity and philosophy of life permissibility arise and which must be resolved].

Since a classroom situation is a formalized **educational one**, it shares many of the above characteristics. Even though more formal and planned, classroom activities also are prescribed by various ideologies such as pragmatism, existentialism, and behaviorism. Furthermore, the **sources** of these "isms" are outside the phenomenon of educating, there is no guarantee they will not distort or hide its essentials, which are intuitively lived in an **educational situation**. Indeed, the curricula of many teacher education programs involve a study of "isms" (in the foundations courses) along with **ad hoc**, eclectic classroom management procedures and methods of instruction (in the methods courses).

This is encouraged when one's point of departure is the classroom, viewed as a teaching/learning situation, informed by various "isms" and techniques originating from sources **external** to the educative structures of an adult helping a child become a responsible adult. Although of practical value to a prospective teacher, a careful **empirical** description of educational and of classroom situations **do not** provide the theoretical foundation sought. This is because an empirical study describes what is in evidence but does not distinguish what is essential to the phenomenon. In contrast to the empirical (what is), the theoretical foundation sought must specify what is essential (what must be) for an **educational situation** to even be possible.

What then is the importance of taking the **educational situation** as one's point of focus? The importance is that this situation, and not schooling, is an essential aspect or moment of human existence. There is no **educational situation** more primordial and basic. But, if so, the urgent question is how one can transcend this ideologically-practically imbued **educational** situation, this spontaneous, mostly pre-reflective guidance of a child to adulthood. How can one move from a philosophy **for** educating, based on some ideology external to the phenomenon, to a philosophy **of** (a theory of) educating rooted in and description of the mostly implicitly lived structures of the **educational situation** itself? The answer to this question is important because this move is virtually absent from the Anglo-American literature on the foundations of education, and the reason for this absence is contained in the answer.

The move from an ideological-practical to a theoretical-descriptive perspective requires that the educationist place him/herself in what Landman et al. (1982) call a **pedagogical situation**. This amounts to

doing **phenomenological** studies of **educational** situations as well as of classrooms, as second order formalizations of the original educational one. The purpose of being in a **pedagogical** situation is to disclose and describe the essential structures or **form** of any educational situation in a way which transcends its uniqueness, particularity, and ideological commitments. Such phenomenological studies constitute a regional ontology<sup>3</sup> of the phenomenon “educating as upbringing” and they are conspicuously absent from the Anglo-American literature.

One in a **pedagogical situation** is **not involved in** educating [bringing up] a child but has a **theoretical** interest in the nature and structures of this primordial phenomenon. Hence, Landman et al. (1982) refer to this situation as a **scientific** one. The resulting disclosed and described structures are systematic, reliable, and generally valid knowledge. To reveal and describe the essential **form** of primordial educating, one must temporarily suspend or bracket one's commitment to **particulars** prescribed by one's philosophy for educating (i.e., one must employ a **phenomenological reduction** called the *epoche*), followed by an **eidetic** reduction (i.e., the method of free variation for disclosing essences).

The disclosed structures and their coherence provide us with a "theoretical" view of the practice of rearing a child which is rooted in that event and not imported from some external perspective. This "theory" is as relevant to the classroom as it is to the **educational situation** in focus because, as stated, the classroom is a formalization of the educative structures of primordial education (i.e., an educational situation) and, thus, both are the source of this "theory" (i.e., the structures and their interconnections), even though the **educational situation** carries more weight than the

---

<sup>3</sup> To study “educating” as a regional ontology means disclosing and describing the essences, the categories that make it possible for this region of reality called “educating” to be what it **is** and that distinguish it from other regions such as the psychological; a regional ontology also tries to verify via the phenomenological **method** the essence-status (ontological-status) of these categories. Landman (Landman et al., 1975), following Heidegger (1996/1927), asserts that “Ontological understanding only is possible phenomenologically”, that “Phenomenology only is authentic when it leads to ontological understanding” and further that “Phenomenological thinking is categorical thinking” (p. xix). These assertions may appear to be dogmatic and possibly one-sided. However, they merely reflect the position that an ontological study is a rigorous attempt to **disclose, describe** and **verify essences** and that the phenomenological **method** has been designed and refined to accomplish these very aims. Hence, it is the most suitable if not the only method for studying any region of being ontologically.

classroom situation because of its foundational, original, non-derived nature.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to stress that a **pedagogical situation** necessarily includes several part-perspectives. According to De Vries (1986), three of these are essential for a comprehensive, unified "theory" (or a regional ontology) of education to emerge. The three are a philosophical pedagogical perspective (known as **fundamental pedagogics**), a psychological pedagogical perspective (called **psychopedagogics**), and a perspective on educative teaching (or **didactic pedagogics**).

Each of these part-perspectives is only pursued within a **pedagogical situation**.<sup>5</sup>

The structures and their modes and interconnections disclosed within a **pedagogical situation** should become a central part of the academic curriculum of teacher education because these results, these essences are precisely what allows a prospective (and practicing) teacher to theoretically inform his/her practice. They are the concepts or categories (which also are used as criteria) required for **reflectively** evaluating and for improving the practice of guiding a child to adulthood in terms of the structures or nature of educating itself. These results also make it evident that a classroom must involve these essential structures to be **educative** teaching-learning and, in fact, the adult-child **educative relationship** is at its very core.

**Now to the third situation:** Where the **educational situation** is described as pre-scientific and practical, and the **pedagogical situation** is viewed as theoretical and scientific (i.e., phenomenological), according to Landman et al. (1982), a **pedagogic situation** also is practical. But, unlike the **educational** one, the practice carried out in a **pedagogic situation** is informed by the "theory" disclosed in the **pedagogical situation**. That is, the educator in a **pedagogic situation** is **actively guiding** a child to adulthood, but his/her actions, interventions, and support are

---

<sup>4</sup> There is a tendency to think of essences, structures as being mere abstractions and not as having practical implications. Not so. These structures, essences are qualified as "real" by Landman (Landman, Van Zyl, & Roos, 1975) not because there also are "unreal" essences but to emphasize that essences are descriptive of a reality itself; they map out the possibilities and limitations of an activity or practice such as "educating".

<sup>5</sup> It is clear that Reagan (1990), in his criticism of fundamental pedagogics, does not appreciate this; I have responded to him elsewhere (Yonge, 1991).

influenced not only by his/her own experiences and ideological commitments but especially by his/her **study** of the results (or theory) disclosed in the **pedagogical situation**. Because this amounts to this scientific or theoretical **knowledge** informing the practice of educating from which it originates, Landman et al. (1982) refer to a **pedagogic** situation as **post-scientific**; in this situation, the educator's knowledge is phenomenologically refined/informed and systematic.

As in the **educational situation**, one's philosophy **for** educating is operative in a **pedagogic situation** but with an important difference. In an **educational situation**, one's philosophy **for** educating, based on one's outlook on life, enjoys an almost complete hegemony because one's knowledge of guiding a child is an intuitive and largely implicit expression of this outlook or philosophy. In the **pedagogic situation**, with systematic, theoretical knowledge of the educational event at one's disposal, the operation of one's philosophy **for** educating is tempered by the demands imposed by the now **explicit structures** of the educative event itself. For example, if an adult chooses to actualize the structures of the reality of educating to the best of his/her abilities, he/she may have to modify or at least mollify some aspects of his/her philosophy **for** educating to be true to the reality of education. [Note that the structures are the preconditions for authentically actualizing the educative event]. On the other hand, actualizing these structures, to some extent, will be marked by ideological nuances correlated with the educator's philosophy **for** educating, which define for him/her those activities which are philosophy of life permissible.

With the operation of **both** a philosophy **of** and **for** education in the **pedagogic** situation, it is necessary that the educator **reflect** on the nature and possibilities of both so they can be harmoniously integrated and implemented as the **form** and **content** required to guide a child in an educatively informed and accountable way. To this end, teacher educators have the task of helping the student teacher strive for such reflection and harmonious integration.

An additional point is made regarding the uniting of theory and practice in the **pedagogic situation**. In saying that a philosophy **of** education (as a phenomenology of the educational situation) gives rise to a "theory" of educating the child is to say that this theory makes explicit the aspects or moments and structures already implicitly lived on the level of practice in an educational situation.

Indeed, this is why one can say that a **pedagogic** situation is a theoretically or phenomenologically informed **educational situation**.

In contrast to the above, what we see in the Anglo-American literature on educational foundations is the vigorously pursued and virtually impossible task of trying to unite or integrate educational practice with "theories" derived from various ideologies (or philosophies **for** educating), which are external to and do not make explicit the essential **form** of that practice. In other words, the educational foundations literature tends to focus on **contents** (ideologies) while neglecting **form**. But content cannot stand without form; **both** are essential. The merit of the line of thinking I have presented is that it explicitly deals with both form and the content.

In conclusion, the connections among theory, practice, and the three situations considered are summarized as follows: an **educational situation** is almost exclusively pre-reflective practice; a **pedagogical situation** is almost entirely reflective "theorizing" about that primordial practice; and a **pedagogic situation** is where theory and practice are both salient; it is where theoretical reflection informs and changes pre-reflective to reflective practice. It is here that both theory and practice are salient and reciprocal and, thus, theory can inform practice and practice can inform theory.

## REFERENCES

- DeVries, C.G. (1986). **Orientation in fundamental educational theory**. Stellenbosch: University Publishers and Booksellers.
- Heidegger, M. (1996, orig. 1927, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., 1953). **Being and time**. Trans. Joan Staubaugh. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Landman, W.A., Kilian, C.J.G., Swanepoel, E.M., & Bodenstein, H.C.A. (1982). **An introductory reader in fundamental pedagogics for the student and the teacher**. Cape Town: Juta.
- Landman, W. A., Van Zyl, M. E. J., & Roos, S. G. (1975). **Fundamentei-pedagogiese essensies:: hulle verskyning**,



**verwerkliking en inhoudgewing.** Durban: Butterworths. **English translation available at:** [georgeyonge.net](http://georgeyonge.net)

Reagan, T. (1990). Philosophy of education in the service of apartheid: The role of "fundamental pedagogics" in South African education. **Educational Foundations**, 4, 59-71.

Van der Stoep, F. (1972). **Didaskein.** Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill. **English translation available at:** [georgeyonge.net](http://georgeyonge.net)

Van der Stoep, F. & Louw, W.J. (1984). **Didactics.** Pretoria: Academica. **English translation of 1979 edition available at:** [georgeyonge.net](http://georgeyonge.net)

Van Rensburg, C.J.J., & Landman, W.A. (1986). **Notes on fundamental pedagogic concepts--an introductory orientation.** Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel Transvaal.

Yonge, G.D. (1991). Fundamental pedagogics: a philosophy OF or FOR education? **Educational Foundations**, 5, 87-99.