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The didactics tradition in South Africa: a reply to Richard Krüger

LESLEY LE GRANGE

There has been a growing interest in the European *Didaktik* tradition as part of a process of ‘internationalizing’ curriculum studies. Krüger provides useful insights into some aspects of *Didaktiek* in South Africa. However, the essay does not contextualize this tradition within the broader history of South African education. This reply contends that *Didaktiek* was interwoven with ‘fundamental pedagogics’ and as a consequence played a role in reproducing apartheid ideology—it did not provide a language of critique or possibility. This is one reason why the tradition has seen its demise in post-apartheid South Africa. I argue that curriculum theory, which crucially deals with the relationship between schooling and society and highlights the socially constructed nature of schooling, offers a more useful alternative for critiquing apartheid education policy and for charting a process of transformation of education in South Africa.

Keywords: didactic theory; fundamental pedagogics; history of education; radical curriculum theory; South African education

Introduction

My response to Krüger’s (2008) essay is not aimed at dealing with the specifics of ‘elementals’ and ‘fundamentals’ in relation to didactic theory, but rather at sketching for the international reader the context in which the didactics (*Didaktiek* in Afrikaans) tradition developed in South Africa. My aim is to provide a more nuanced understanding or interpretation of Krüger’s essay. At the same time my response may help to explain the demise of the didactics tradition in South Africa and why its resurrection there is unlikely. Understanding this is important in view of the prominence given to *Didaktik* in the past decade in *JCS* as part of a process of internationalizing curriculum studies.¹ I begin my essay with a brief autobiographical account.

A brief historical and autobiographical entry

Until the middle-1980s the South African higher education system was divided, based on ethnicity. Separate universities existed for different

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population groups as categorized by the apartheid state's Population Registration Act. There were several well-resourced universities for white students, but separated into English-speaking (such as the University of Cape Town, Rhodes University, the University of Natal, and the University of the Witwatersrand) and Afrikaans-medium institutions (such as the Rand Afrikaans University, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, University of Pretoria, and Stellenbosch University).² There was one university for those classified Coloured, one for Indians, and several universities for Africans mainly located in the separate homelands created by the apartheid government. A black³ student could only study at a so-called white university if he or she was granted a permit. A strict condition for applying for such a permit was that the student wanted to register for a course/module that was not offered at a university designated for him or her. Faculties of education in universities together with colleges of education were responsible for the professional education of teachers. The colleges of education were governed by 19 separate education departments and were also divided on race, ethnicity, and language.

This information is significant because where a student did his or her initial and further teacher education determined whether he or she was inducted into the didactic or the curriculum studies traditions. Didactics was taught and promoted in historically Afrikaner (white and Afrikaans-medium) universities and black universities and colleges that were dominated by Afrikaner academics. The curriculum studies traditions characterized education faculties at white English-medium universities and a few English-medium colleges of education. As mentioned in his essay, Krüger did his studies at the University of Pretoria where the European Didaktik tradition had been wholeheartedly embraced and given a 'South African' flavour.

I did my first degree at the University of the Western Cape (designed to be an ethnic university for Coloureds). When I completed my studies the permit system had been abolished and so I decided to do further studies in education at the University of Cape Town (UCT). At UCT I was inducted into the curriculum studies tradition and exposed to, among others, the works of Freire (1972), Illich (1971), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Giroux (1979, 1983), and Apple (1979). At institutions like UCT didactics was a pejorative term and seen as a delinquent cousin of Christian National Education (CNE) and fundamental pedagogics (FP). I shall elaborate on the relationship between CNE, FP, and Didactics later.

After some work at UCT, I met a faculty member from the Department of Didactics at Stellenbosch University. We had a common interest in environmental education and were involved in the organization of a conference there in 1996. He invited me to do some part-time teaching at the university and I also enrolled at the institution for doctoral studies. In 1999 a colleague and I were the first black academics to be offered full-time positions at Stellenbosch University. Ironically, I was appointed in the Department of Didactics and my doctorate was registered in didactics, even although my area of specialization was science and environmental education.⁴ Moreover, when I was appointed to a personal chair in 2003 it was in didactics. These developments were ironic because I had not been educated in this tradition, and was in fact critical of it.

I was keen to see the name of the department change, as were a few other colleagues, and over a period of about 4 years, the name of the department was seriously debated. The department was renamed the Department of Curriculum Studies in 2005. There was, of course, not only pressure from inside due to new ideas brought by new appointees, but also from outside because most departments of didactics at historically Afrikaans-medium universities had changed their names. Interestingly, I was the last person to be named a professor of didactics at Stellenbosch University; in October 2006 the first professor of curriculum studies was appointed.

There are two reasons why Krüger and I do not know each other. First, in 1975, when he published his original essay (Krüger 1975), I was a grade 6 learner, so we are not contemporaries. Secondly, had we been contemporaries we would probably not have even met because we would have lived in different worlds and interpellated⁵ into different educational/academic traditions. My critical comments on the didactic tradition in South Africa reflect a different, or alternative, perspective. I am not offering a critique of the didactic tradition in general, or of the specifics of Krüger's work, but rather on how didactics was (mis)appropriated in South Africa, and what some of the effects were.

The relationship between CNE, FP and didactics

Both fundamental pedagogics and didactics were embraced by faculties of education at Afrikaans-medium universities in the immediate years following the Second World War. This is significant because the National Party came into power in 1948 and introduced its policy of apartheid. Christian National Education was a component of the apartheid (ruling) ideology.

Enslin (1984: 139–140) argues that although the Christian National Education Policy of 1948 purported to be policy for white Afrikaans-speaking children, it also had far-reaching consequences for the education of all children in South Africa. Enslin (1984: 140) points out that, according to CNE policy, education for blacks should have the following features: be in the mother tongue; not be funded at the expense of white education; by implication, not prepare blacks for equal participation in economic and social life; preserve the 'cultural identity' of the black community (although it will nonetheless consist in leading 'the native' to acceptance of Christian and National principles); and must of necessity be organized and administered by whites. Enslin (1984: 140) elaborates on the latter feature:

The final point reflects a significant paternalistic element in the policy. This is particularly evident in articles 14 and 15, entitled 'Coloured Teaching and Education' and 'African (Bantu) Teaching and Education' respectively. Black education is the responsibility of 'white South Africa', or more specifically of 'the Boer nation as the senior white trustee of the native', who is in a state of 'cultural infancy'. A 'subordinate part of the vocation and task of the Afrikaner' is to 'Christianize the non-white races of our fatherland'. It is the 'sacred obligation' of the Afrikaner to base black education on Christian National principles. Thus, revealingly, 'We believe that only when the coloured man has been Christianized can he and will he be secure against his

own heathen and all kinds of foreign ideologies which promise him sham happiness, but in the long run will make him unsatisfied and unhappy’.

Enslin (1984: 140) sees CNE policy as inherently statements of beliefs (‘We believe’ appears frequently), which purport to constitute the life- and world-view of the *Afrikanervolk*. It is clear that the CNE policy, as an expression of aspects of the ruling ideology, was intended to justify a separate and inferior education system for blacks. Enslin (1984: 141) further notes that, since 1948, CNE has been the obvious candidate for critical scrutiny by educational theorists. It is in this context that the responses of fundamental pedagogics are particularly significant.

Although fundamental pedagogics did not aim to replace CNE, it became the centre of attention in certain academic circles in South Africa. Fundamental pedagogics can be traced to Langeveld’s *Beknopte Theoretische Pedagogiek*, published in the Netherlands in 1945. The first publication in South Africa was Oberholzer’s *Inleiding in die Prinsipiële Opvoedkunde*, appearing in 1954. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s fundamental pedagogics was a powerful doctrine at Afrikaans-medium universities. It was also a powerful doctrine at black colleges of education and in education faculties of historically-black universities that were dominated by Afrikaner lecturers. Fundamental pedagogicians argued that the ‘scientific method’ was the only authentic method of studying education. For them, the scientific method that was particularly appropriate for studying education was phenomenological (Landman and Gous 1969, Viljoen and Pienaar 1971, Gunter 1974).

Enslin (1984: 141–142) points out that it was believed that through this method the fundamental pedagogician would learn to know the phenomenon of education through ‘radical reflection’ on the educational situation. She states that the pedagogician describes the essence of the educational situation in terms of pedagogic categories, and the corresponding criteria derived from them. Advocates of fundamental pedagogics such as Landman and Gous (1969) and Gunter (1974) have argued that practising pedagogics as science frees it from metaphysics, dogmatics, and ideology. In their textbook entitled *Fundamental Pedagogics*, Viljoen and Pienaar (1971) distinguish three stages in scientific research:

- the *pre-scientific* (pre-reflective) life-world in which the original phenomena reveal themselves, and which arouse the wonderment of the scientist;
- the *scientific reflection* on the phenomenon and the universal, verifiable, logically systemized body of knowledge offered by such reflection; and
- the *post-scientific* meaningful implementation of this body of knowledge.

According to Enslin (1984: 142) the distinctions made by Viljoen and Pienaar are significant: during the scientific stage values are excluded whereas in the pre-scientific and post-scientific stages values or life-views play a prominent role. During the scientific phase the pedagogician brackets extrinsic aims and beliefs. Enslin (1990: 82) states that the political therefore becomes forbidden speech, as it has no legitimate place in the realm of science. The problem of fundamental pedagogics was that no room was made for critically examining the question of values in the pre-scientific and

post-scientific stages, such as in CNE policy in the South African case. Instead of being ‘universally valid’ knowledge about education, free from ‘metaphysics’, ‘dogmatics’, and ‘ideology’, fundamental pedagogics played a role in reproducing the ruling ideology by legitimating CNE policy. In fact some fundamental pedagogicians such as Viljoen and Pienaar (1971) and De Vries (1986) made explicit links between fundamental pedagogics and Christianity, claiming that Christianity is the only doctrine on which education can be safely based (for details see Viljoen and Pienaar 1971, De Vries 1986, Enslin 1990). As De Vries (1986: 211) writes:

The Christian educator acknowledges that the child is conceived and born in sin and consequently is inclined to evil. He also knows that the child cannot be educated without authority, but acknowledges that God is the absolute authority and that all human authority is therefore only delegated authority.

The links made between pedagogy and Christianity under the ‘philosophy of fundamental pedagogics’ provided the justification for authoritarian educational practices in South Africa in the apartheid era. As Enslin (1990: 87) writes:

Central to the content of the educational doctrine endorsed by Fundamental Pedagogics, as distinct from but complementing its methodology, is the claim that education is, universally, the leading of the helpless dependent child to adulthood by the adult pedagogue. Out of this claim emerges the justification for authoritarian practices.

Fundamental pedagogics also provided limited possibilities for transforming education in South Africa. Enslin (1990: 78) notes:

Fundamental Pedagogics is the dominant theoretical discourse in South African teacher education. It provides little illumination of the present social and educational order, of possible alternatives to that order or how teachers might contribute to transformation. By excluding the political as a legitimate dimension of theoretical discourse, Fundamental Pedagogics offers neither a language of critique nor a language of possibility.

Didactic theory in South Africa was closely intertwined with fundamental pedagogics. This relationship is evident in Krüger’s opening discussion of ‘a new pedagogy’ that inspired him when he registered for his master’s degree at the University of Pretoria in 1970. He writes:

All thinking not concerned with essentially *human* existence and *human* learning ... was disfavoured, and there was a search for a ‘fundamental pedagogics’, that is, an educational theory as an independent human science with its own terminology, its own points of departure, its own methods of investigation and verification based on the premises of educational (pedagogical) essences, that is, the essential characteristics of the teaching–learning phenomenon.

Significantly, the list he gives of the members of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria at the time that he read his master’s degree includes many protagonists of fundamental pedagogics.

Part of the life-containing essences (elementals) was to teach the white Afrikaans-speaking child that he or she was part of a superior nation that had to seek self-determination and live separately from, but at the same time, Christianize the heathen blacks who were still in cultural infancy. In the

intended curriculum for black learners, for example, map-work and related contents were left out of school syllabuses so that black children would not develop spatial perception. They were deliberately given an inferior education (reflected in subject contents as well) so they could fulfil their role as labourers in the Afrikaner *volkstaat* (nation state). The ‘fundamental’ in the scientific reflection phase is concerned with the bracketing of beliefs and values. Thus the political became forbidden speech, and so no opportunities were provided to critique the apartheid ideology. Through being inextricably bound up in fundamental pedagogics, *Didaktiek* in South African played a key role not only in reinforcing Christian National Education but also in reproducing it. Its close association with apartheid ideology led to the demise of *Didaktiek* in post-apartheid South Africa and it is one reason why departments of didactics at historically Afrikaner universities have been pressured to change their names.

What was the contribution of the curriculum studies tradition to South African education?

The key contribution of the curriculum studies traditions to South African education is captured in Hopmann and Riquart’s (2000: 4) acknowledgement that curriculum theory has taught the Didaktik tradition important lessons. Pinar (2006: 1) refers to these as, ‘the relationship between school and society, on the nature and scope of educational planning, and on the socially constructed character of schooling’. Radical curriculum theory was a source of encouragement and inspiration for academics and students who were marginalized by the dominant educational discourses of the 1970s and 1980s. As a young graduate, I was introduced to works such as Kallaway’s (1984) edited book *Apartheid and Education* and the work of international authors such as Freire, Bowles and Gintis, Giroux, and Apple.

During the apartheid regime certain voices were marginalized by dominant educational discourses because of their failure to fall into the desired political bracket. Among those who could not speak were ‘teachers not initiated into Fundamental Pedagogics; parents; students; academics who partook of other discourses; trade unions; the oppositional churches, and the private sector’ (Enslin 1990: 88). However, particularly since the so-called 1976 Soweto uprisings, these marginalized voices strengthened their resistance to the disabling strictures of fundamental pedagogics. One discourse constructed in opposition to the debilitating discourse of fundamental pedagogics was ‘People’s Education for People’s Power’. Levin (1991: 117) ‘People’s Education for People’s Power’ represented a strategic shift in the education struggle in South Africa, involving a departure from the education boycott as a tactic of struggle in favour of a longer-term strategy of reconstruction through the development of alternative education. People’s Education was a movement, which the then National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) co-ordinated, aimed at bringing about the involvement of parents, teachers, students, and other community members (‘the people’) in the government of education. Mkatshwa (1985: 14) has noted the strong links between education, politics, and social

transformation that characterized People's Education. However, in the late-1980s People's Education was plunged into crisis as a result of state repression as well as a lack of clarity over what was meant by the term 'People's Education' (see Gultig and Hart 1991, Johnson 1991, Levin 1991, Walker 1991 for more detail).

Also marginalized by dominant discourses on education during apartheid were a minority of teachers in South Africa, including a small percentage of black teachers who were educated at universities and colleges that provided alternative, critical discourses. According to Enslin (1990: 88), these were mainly the so-called open English-language universities and the University of the Western Cape. Although these universities may to some extent have contributed to reproducing the ruling ideology, through a more eclectic theoretical discourse including liberal and Marxist perspectives, critique and criticism of the dominant ideology and fundamental education was not only permitted but also encouraged. Enslin (1990: 88–89) points out that both the liberal and Marxist perspectives treat the political as central to critically understanding education and its future possibilities in South Africa. Curriculum theory contributed crucially in giving voice to these perspectives.

Conclusion

Over the past decade in particular there has been a growing interest in the *Didaktik* tradition as part of an important process of internationalizing curriculum studies. Hopmann and Riquarts (2000: 4) rightly point out that *Didaktik* can make a contribution by supporting curriculum theory's interest in reflective teaching, curriculum enactment, and teacher thinking. However, despite the attention given to discussions of *Didaktik* in prominent journals of curriculum studies, and the lessons the curriculum studies tradition can learn from it (see Pinar 2006), *Didaktiek*'s association with apartheid ideology (particularly Christian National Education) in South Africa makes its revival in post-apartheid South Africa improbable. The publication of Krüger's (1975) essay in *JCS* provides useful insight into some of the aspects of the *Didaktiek* tradition in South Africa. However, the *Didaktiek* tradition has to be contextualized more carefully in South African history for international readers.

Notes

1. For contributions to and discussions of the *Didaktik* tradition in *JCS* see, for example, Menck (2001), Hudson (2002), Vásquez-Levy (2002), and Terhart (2003).
2. The names of some of the universities have changed in the last 5 years.
3. I use the term in the generic sense to include all those who were classified Coloured, Indian, or African.
4. This was because the Faculty of Education uses the name of the academic department where the student is registered.
5. I use the term 'interpellated' instead of socialized because I contend that humans actively engage in discourse rather than being passively inducted into it.

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