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COMMENTS ON THE FUNDAMENTAL DIDACTIC FORMS:
SOME NOTES ON ADULTS AND CHILDREN LIVING TOGETHER

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Typical of the series of major works by F. van der Stoep is his wrestling to loosen himself from schooling's domination by a largely eclectic didactic education in the RSA that characterized it in the 1960's. Within the mainstream of the phenomenological approach it was clearly he who searched for the universal foundations and origins of the didactic that could serve as the point of departure for a genuine scientific study of educative teaching. Typical here is the question of the universal foundations of methodology--a much more fundamental question than the mere systematization of methods of teaching.

From his first work on, a recurring theme that had already been brought up much earlier in didactic education (see Hordt, 1939), Van der Stoep busies himself with fundamental didactic forms and devotes his attention to this issue in at least six of his major works, a reflection of his attempts to phenomenologically more clearly ground and broaden didactic pedagogics by breaking out of the stifling effect of limiting teaching to schooling (his last work is devoted entirely to non-formal teaching!).

Already in his first work, *Didaktiese orientasie* [Didactic orientation] (together with O. A. van der Stoep, 1968), there is a first sense that there are fundamental forms of teaching which can serve the teacher as "teaching possibilities" (p 225), because "The phenomenon that is generally known as teaching is given with being human and does not arise merely because people establish schools" (p 37). Because an investigation of the origins of the fundamental forms and a comprehensive description of them is still missing in this publication, his determination of them is so conspicuously unsatisfactory that he doesn't return again to them: programmed instruction, project teaching, team teaching, exemplary teaching and conversational teaching. Especially because

a clear description of terms is missing, it is difficult to compare the validity of his determination with, e.g., that of Klafki (1963) who specified something entirely different. However, what is already striking is the inclination to think about the fundamental didactic forms in terms of the cognitive, perhaps as a consequence of his view that the task of schooling emphasizes “allowing a child’s consciousness to develop” (p 28).

His *Didaktische Grundvorme* [Fundamental Didactic Forms] appeared in 1969, in which, against the background of a fundamental analysis of the didactic categories (with the correlated criteria, principles and categories of learning), special attention is given to grounding, determining and describing the fundamental didactic forms as well as describing their relations with teaching methodology.

It is clear to Van der Stoep that the fundamental didactic forms already appear as “primordial forms” in a person’s “spontaneous life world” and manifest themselves as “a spontaneous, initial, primary life-form of a person” within which the spontaneous primordial learning intention of the child as well as the spontaneous helping or teaching activity of the adult manifest themselves (pp 50-51). The spontaneous forms of expression of a child’s learning intention are: perceiving, playing, speaking, imitating, fantasizing, working and repeating. The forms of expression of the accompanying teaching intervention of the adult are: pointing out, showing the child how to play, prompting, demonstrating, narrating, giving assignments (setting tasks) and repeating. Van der Stoep calls attention to the surprising agreement or correlation between these two sets of activities from which the unity of the activity structure stands out so conspicuously (p 59) that apparently by only matching the two sets of activities with each other, he is able to determine the fundamental didactic forms as: play, conversation, example and assignment (p 103). Thus, he grounds the fundamental didactic forms in the “basic life-forms” of humans as learning and guiding persons and finds the unity of the different activities of the child and adult in the essential bi-polar unity of teaching itself (instructing and learning) to which he is intuitively attuned. So, for example, an adult’s narration and a child’s listening find their didactic unity as the fundamental form of conversation in their mutual directedness.

However, it is conspicuous that there is still a degree of ambiguity and unclarity with Van der Stoep's formulation: In spite of the extensive exposition of learning and the spontaneous expression of the learning intention, still he ultimately gives the impression that the fundamental didactic forms are an ordering of the spontaneous ways an adult provides assistance (p 103). In spite of his emphasis on the fundamental forms as functional in the spontaneous life world, still he finds a "clear indication" also of another kind of fundamental didactic form, namely, "that which is purposefully created with the aim of giving a deliberate and responsible course to the conscious learning intention in formal situations" (p 103)-- something which, however, he does not further clarify at all and which appears to be in conflict with his own preceding grounding (see also p 139).

Although Van der Stoep sees that the forms of expression of the helping intention are not necessarily, as life forms of the adult, limited to the didactic but on occasion also are used for that purpose (p 140), it is conspicuous that he does not think about any other life forms of adults that also are used for didactic purposes (e.g., admiration). The reason for this perhaps lies in the fact that he has not maintained firmly enough the categorical unity of teaching and learning. Therefore, he looks away from the expressions of learning and teaching intentions and then passes the two matters by each other.

However, the question is whether the essential unity of "didaskhein" cannot be better maintained if not the life forms of the child and (/ or) adult are taken as the point of departure but rather the joint life forms of the child and adult in the spontaneous life world. In other words, without hypothesizing categorically about either teaching or learning, can a grasp of the fundamental didactic forms be achieved if there is a search in the joint forms of interaction of adult and child with the world for joint life forms within which (on occasion) the learning as well as teaching intentions make their appearance. If this path is followed, then, e.g., Klafki (1963) (a work that appears in Van der Stoep's references) once again deserves careful consideration: joint play, conversation, celebration, traveling, etc. Although all four of the fundamental forms identified by Van der

Stoep clearly are also forms of living together (that is, forms of jointly interacting with reality which become unified in the collective directedness of the participants), it is important to question whether the list of fundamental didactic forms is complete since his description of especially Example (p 122) does not allow, e.g., for the inclusion of didactic joint admiration, joint celebration or joint travel. This omission is all the more surprising because a person as Mitsein not only is essentially categorized as homo ludens (player) or homo loquens (speaker) but equally as homo orans (worshiper) and homo viator (traveler). The result (or perhaps the origin?) of Van der Stoep's limiting the fundamental didactic forms to the four of concern is, however, an extreme accent on the cognitive that, in itself, leads to a serious attenuation of didactic pedagogics itself.

Although Van der Stoep shows how the different methods of the school are connected with the fundamental didactic forms (p 141 ff), still he appears to be incorrect about the meaning (i.e., the relevance) this has for methodology. What deserves to be spelled out clearly is just this: the sum of the criticisms against any methodology as such is its rigidifying effect, the deadly and mechanistic loss of the dynamic which is the soul of what is genuinely didactic. This dynamic will be lost to the degree that the essential characteristics of the original fundamental didactic form(s) from which they originate are lost. Without exception, the decrease in the didactic effectiveness of a given method can be traced back to the loss of critical characteristics of the original fundamental forms. In other words: only a good understanding of the essential characteristics and nature of the fundamental didactic forms of the spontaneous life world can prevent the critical dynamic from being lost in the necessary formalization of methods. For example, any variant of the method of play that does not take into account the fact that consciously obligatory participation is contrary to its nature is bound to die. The question of stimulation now becomes one of the core problems of didactics: just as the responses to the content questions are sought in the elemental and the fundamental, etc., so one of the fields of response to the formal questions are to be found in the theory of the fundamental didactic forms.

In 1972 *Didaskein* appeared in which finally it is clarified that “to talk of fundamental didactic forms implies a theory of the practice of the original experience [of teaching] and an evaluation of its possibilities for implementation in the secondary (i.e., school in contrast to the primary or family) situation” (p 80). Thus, there can no longer be mention of fundamental didactic forms that are designed for the formal situation. Nevertheless, Van der Stoep still has not overcome the duality of “teaching” and “letting learn” with his remark that “the fundamental didactic forms are...a form of actualization of “letting learn” and other categories connected with the original meaning of the experience” (p 81).

Die Lesstruktuur [The lesson structure], written in collaboration with C. J. van Dyk, W. J. Louw and A. Swart, appeared in 1973. Here van der Stoep accentuates the “complementary relation” of forms of teaching and forms of learning as a person’s forms of living (p 22) in the life world in which the forms of teaching are directed to the child’s forms of learning--”The adult takes the life forms that he knows from his experiences and lived-experienced world and uses them to present to a child in the educative situation the contents he considers important” (p 23). Once again he places the seven forms of expressing the learning intention (perceive, play, talk, imitate, fantasize, work and repeat) along side of the seven forms of expressing the teaching intention (point out, play with/for, tellsay, demonstrate, assign, repeat) and then concludes “these seven forms fall conspicuously into the four mentioned fundamental forms of play, conversation, example and work” (assignment) (p 62). However, what is once again obvious is that what has been said about “demonstrating” and “imitating” as life forms does not square in any way with his explanation of exploration as a fundamental form (p 76 ff) because it is specifically and only in the latter that the general appears in the specific which it revolves around.

In 1976 *Inleiding tot die didaktiese pedagogiek* [Introduction to didactic pedagogics], co-authored by W. J. Louw, appeared in which there was a complete return to the 1969 position that there “are really two kinds of fundamental forms that an adult can use, namely, those that harmonize and link up with the spontaneous learning and teaching as one encounters in the life world and forms of teaching or fundamental forms that are created purposefully with

the aim of providing a child's purposive intention to learn a suitable and accountable course" (p 72). Just as earlier there is nothing more said about the two kinds of fundamental forms that are "purposefully created", which gives the impression that there is still some uncertainty about the nature of the relation between the formalized, purposefully created methods of teaching and the fundamental didactic forms.

However, this turn differs from the previous identification of the child's learning activities. Now the spontaneous learning activities of a child are stated broadly as perceiving, experiencing, objectifying, thinking and languaging (and) the spontaneous assistance that corresponds also are stated broadly as indicating, showing, prompting, demonstrating, narrating, giving assignments and repeating" (p 73).

This difference is already suggested in 1969 in Didakiese Grondvorme [Fundamental didactic forms] by "especially three basic forms of activity ... namely, perceiving, experiencing and objectifying", identified as the foundation of learning. On the one hand, earlier it was viewed that three of sixteen categories were more significant than the others (viewed from the theory of categories according to which each is essentially valid); on the other hand, it seems strange that categories (which normally describe the essential nature of a matter) are viewed here as activity forms.

However, if there is a move to the systematic pronouncements (p 131 ff) of the fundamental didactic forms, then the "ways of expressing his achieving consciousness by a child's learning activities" (p 139) once again are identified as perceiving, playing, talking, imitating, fantasizing, working and repeating which, in connection with the earlier determined forms of expression of the teaching intention, lead to the already familiar fundamental didactic forms (play, example, assignment and conversation)--although it is said with justification that the fundamental didactic forms are the activity forms for "allowing learning" (p 69).

Here the reader cannot escape the impression that uncertainty prevails regarding the nature of the differentiations and connections between the "expressive forms" and "categories" of

learning, and between the “learning activities” and the “modes of learning”. In *Die Lesstruktuur* specific modes of learning indeed are identified as perceiving, thinking and remembering that show a prima facie correspondence with the later determination of the learning activities as perceiving, experiencing, objectifying, thinking and languaging, while there also is conspicuous agreement with the categories of the activities of learning.

In 1984 a radical revision of *Inleiding tot die didaktiese pedagogiek* appeared in which the fundamental didactic forms are considered once again. Here it is stated clearly that the origin of the fundamental didactic forms is in the life worldly adult “allowing learning” although at the same time this certainly can also be the forms of a child actualizing learning (p 59) and the earlier mentioned “two kinds of fundamental forms” are repeated unchanged. However, an interesting difference is the following: “Should one state broadly the spontaneous learning activities of a child as perceiving, experiencing, objectifying, thinking and attending” (note that languaging has been replaced by attending), the spontaneous assistance that corresponds to these, also broadly stated, are indicating, showing, prompting, demonstrating, narrating, giving assignments and repeating. It is obvious that if one orders these seven forms of assistance, they can be divided into four larger structures (p 62), namely, play, conversation, example and assignment. No other mention is made of the “expressive forms of the learning intention” that appeared in the principle work (1976). And finally, what in 1968 were called fundamental didactic forms (team teaching, programmed instruction, etc.) now are called teaching strategies.

The results of Van der Stoep’s struggled thinking are uncritically followed by Harmse, H. J. (1982), Stuart, J. F. et al. (1985), Steyn, I. N. (1982) and Louw, W. J. et al. (1983) and mainly by Gous, S. J. (1972) where perhaps erroneously “self-doing” is typified as a fifth fundamental form. However, none of these authors have continued to build on Van der Stoep’s basic work--which in itself is an indication of the formidable nature of his work. Cawood, J. et al. (1980) state, without sufficient discussion, “when the interaction between the teacher and learner in relation to the learning content is used as a criterion, it is axiomatic that there are three basic

methods, namely, lecturing (one-directed communication), conversing (two-directed communication) and self-doing (the learner's self-activity)" (p 24). And also without sufficient discussion, Strydom, A. H. (1981) distinguishes among "general methods of teaching", namely, lecturing, conversing, self-doing and experience-directed methods (p 113). However, "self-doing" has to be doubted as a didactic category until the essential complementarity of this activity (that is, the didactically directed co-doing of adult and child) is clearly indicated and if it isn't it is merely an "assignment" or child exploration (which does not display the didactic category of teaching/allowing learning/unlocking reality).

It seems to be clear that didacticians feel a need for principles of ordering for systematizing teaching methods but only Van der Stoep made an effort at a radical ordering that simultaneously can be a grounding and a vitalizing for didactic pedagogics and for didactic practice.

Yet there has to be a return to an observation made earlier: the strong cognitive accent of Van der Stoep's orientation and description of the fundamental didactic forms. Just as he retains objectifying as a category of the activity of learning (after he has rejected the clearly invalid "scholasticized" (?) categories of 1969 in his 1976 work) indicates that he has not yet completely unroot himself from his earlier scholasticizing so also his descriptions of the fundamental didactic forms show how he has a primarily cognitive focus on the didactic. Therefore he can think about neither the learning nor the teaching activities outside of the cognitive. And consequently, he does not think didactically about important forms of living together such as admiring and celebrating: by their nature they are directed rather to pathic involvement than to objectifying and thinking. In this respect, Van der Stoep's (perhaps not universally valid) view of the nature of the activity of learning have even placed particular limitations on his thinking.

It has to perhaps be accepted that in addition to play, conversation, example and assignment there also are other primary forms in the primordial situation of adult and child doing things together within a teaching situation where the adult's teaching intention and the

child's learning intention find expression. Should these forms be disclosed the methods anchored in them possibly can work more strongly against the loss of an existential dynamic that so often characterizes the modern school. In this respect it serves to emphasize how ineffective the methods of the modern school often are for bringing about bonding--bonding to values, ideas, matters and even persons.

If the primordial situation is viewed analytically then it is conspicuous that very often adults purposefully make use of participatory forms of living (in addition to play, conversation, assignment and example) by which a child participates by spontaneously learning. The difference between these forms of living and examples (such as assignment and conversation) is that the child is not an objectifying perceiver and does not join in by thinking and/or languaging but as a non-objectively involved participant. Although Van der Stoep shows an intuitive attunement to this (see 1973, 22) he cannot reconcile this systematically because of his inability to think didactically about the non-objective and non-cognitive. Certainly valid in this respect is celebrating (see Hordt, 1939 and Horney, 1963), while Klafki's (1963) addition of traveling and esthetic creation deserve further investigation--each viewed as a primordial form of living as doing things together. It is ironic that the only one of his fundamental didactic forms in which non-objective learning sometimes has a prominent role, namely play, is also the one that is continually described in such a way that it is the adult's joining in (i.e., playing for [showing] which functions best as playing with) which is inadequately described didactically.

Finally, there is appreciation for Van der Stoep's insight that the fundamental didactic forms can only be grounded in the primordial forms of living and in this way can fruitfully influence methodology, and for his determination of conversation, play, example and assignment as such fundamental didactic forms and also for describing these forms in their essential nature. In addition, there is appreciation for his pioneering trailblazing with respect to founding the didactic in a scientific way and for the way in which the fundamental didactic forms are placed within the context of categorical descriptions of teaching as well as learning; yet the last word about this has not yet been spoken. There has to be a fresh

look at the fundamental and life worldly nature of all of the forms of living together within which the didactic can come to expression and its meaning for enlivening the teaching methods of the school have to be spelled out so the preconditions for the purposive design and use of the various methods can finally be ascertained.

In this way this didactic theory can come to fruition in those “experiential contexts ... that, because of the nature of the matter, are the only way in which an original practice can be described for execution” (Van der Stoep, 1972, 160).

Summary

The theory of the fundamental didactic forms (German: Grundformen, Afrikaans: Didaktiese grondvorme) is a recurring theme in the works of F. van der Stoep. This article traces the development of his treatment of this theme through his six major works from 1968 to 1987.

Appreciation is expressed for his formidable attempts at founding school teaching methods universally in the primary teaching-learning activities of the life world of persons, as well as for the possibility it opens to counteract the loss of dynamism which occurs all too frequently when teaching methods are necessarily formalized. Van der Stoep started from an intuitive feeling for the existence of such fundamental didactic forms and eventually finds that the primary teaching activities of the adult (namely, pointing out/at, playing with/for, telling/saying, demonstrating, assigning and repeating) correlate well with the primary learning activities of the child (namely, perceiving, playing, talking, imitating, fantasizing and repeating). These primary teaching activities can be condensed to four fundamental didactic forms, namely, play (Afrikaans: spel), conversation (Afrikaans: gesprek), assignment (Afrikaans: opdrag) and example (Afrikaans: voorbeeld).

It is, however, suggested that Van der Stoep probably made two fundamental errors, restricting the range to largely cognitive forms (definitely in their description), and taking the teaching activities of the adult as his point of departure. Instead, the range of teaching should also include the non-objectifying modes, and the starting

point should be those primary activities in which adult and child sometimes conjointly engage for didactic purposes. Thus, it becomes possible to look anew at those fundamental didactic forms that appear in the pre-Van der Stoep literature such as Hordt (1939: celebration: holiday and ceremony) and Klafki (1963: joint travel, joint artistic enterprises, etc.).

In this way methods may be developed for those areas in which schools are traditionally weak (e.g., bonding) and existing cognitively oriented methods may be enlivened and thus strengthened.

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