

**THREE SITUATIONS OF RELEVANCE TO TEACHER
EDUCATORS: THE SOURCES OF AND THE CONNECTION
BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE¹**

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In this paper I describe three situations of particular importance to teacher educators for clarifying the sources of educational "theory" and "practice" as well as their harmonious integration in the activity of guiding a child to adulthood (i.e., educating a child) in the formal situation of schooling. A distinction between a philosophy **of** and a philosophy **for** education will help me develop my thesis. As used here, a philosophy **of** education is a phenomenological disclosure and explication of the essential **form** of educating, whereas a philosophy **for** education is a source of and justification for the **content** necessary for that form to be "enlivened" or implemented. See Van Rensburg & Landman (1986) and Yonge (1991) for a discussion of this distinction between a philosophy **of** and **for** education.

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 more fundamental one. That more fundamental situation ought to be our primary focus or at least our point of departure for our quest for 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 I suggest that a fundamental insight into the **educative** nature of a classroom situation requires an understanding of the essential structure of the more fundamental situation from which it is derived. Without such understanding, the classroom will tend to be viewed **exclusively** as a learning/teaching situation at the expense of its essential 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 **not normative** in the sense that one can learn/teach contents that promote or hinder a child's becoming a responsible adult. However, educating is essentially a **normative** enterprise because responsible

adulthood is its **inherent** aim². Before discussing this more fundamental situation, 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 in the course of human existence. Following the terminology of Landman and his students (e.g., Landman et al., 1982), this primary situation is called an **educational** situation. It is constituted by adults (usually the child's parents) spontaneously and intuitively guiding a child with the aim of helping and supporting him to achieve his own adulthood. Of course, this does not mean that the child's adulthood, as aim, is or has to be always explicit; indeed, the adult more often than not might be focused on an immediate problem such as the child being inconsiderate to others.

Even though an **educational** situation only is constituted periodically, it is an essential aspect 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 mainly are the adult's own naive experiences and intuitions that are, to some degree, informed by the ways his educators brought him up. Consequently, 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 **always** are implicated in the **practice** of guiding a child to adulthood.

² 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.

The educational situation, as a universal human occurrence, can be "driven" mostly by or prescribed to by any particular ideology. However, since the **sources** of these philosophies for educating, these ideologies, are **external** to the phenomenon of educating, it sometimes is the case that "educational" practices motivated by a philosophy of life, in fact, may be in conflict with the scientific (phenomenological) necessities 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 or philosophy for educating, however implicit or vaguely formulated it may be. Often this prior commitment means that the ideology guiding the educative situation functions implicitly, i.e., it simply is taken for granted. [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 or is not **pedagogically** accountable and, at this point, a dialectic synthesis of scientific necessity and philosophy of life permissibility arises that needs a resolution].

Since a classroom situation is a formalized **educational** one, it too shares many of the above characteristics. Even though more formal and planned, classroom activities also are prescribed by various ideologies such as idealism, pragmatism, existentialism, and behaviorism. Furthermore, the **sources** of all of these "isms" are outside of the phenomenon of educating and do not capture [and even distort or hide] its essentials. 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).

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

What then is the importance of taking the educational situation as one's primary point of focus? The importance is that this situation, and not schooling, is an essential aspect of human existence. There is no educational situation more concrete and basic. But, if so, the urgent question is how one can transcend this ideological-practical **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 descriptive of the phenomenon 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 himself in what Landman et al. (1982) call a **pedagogical** situation. This amounts to doing **phenomenological** studies of **educational** situations as well as of formal classrooms, as secondary formalizations of the primary educational one. The purpose of being in a **pedagogical** situation is to disclose and describe the essential structure or **form** of any educational situation in a way that transcends its uniqueness, particularity, and ideological commitments. Such phenomenological studies constitute a regional ontology³ of the phenomenon “educating” 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 rather has a **theoretical** interest in the nature and structures of this phenomenon. Hence, Landman et al. (1982) refer to this situation as a **scientific** one. The resulting

³ 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.

disclosed and described structures are, according to these authors, systematized, reliable, and generally valid knowledge. To be in a position to reveal and describe the essential **form** of the phenomenon of educating a child, one must temporarily suspend or bracket one's commitment to a **particular** content as prescribed by one's philosophy for educating (i.e., one has to employ a **phenomenological reduction** called the **epoche**).

The disclosed structures and their interrelationships provide us with a "theoretical" view of the practice of rearing a child that is rooted in that practice and not imported from some external perspective or ideology. This "theory" is as relevant to the classroom as it is to the **educational** situation because, as already stated, the classroom is a formalized extrapolation of the latter and, as such, both are the source of this "theory" (i.e., the structures and their interconnections), even though the educational situation carries more weight than the classroom situation because of its foundational, primary, non-derived nature.⁴

It is important to stress that a **pedagogical** situation necessarily includes several sub-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**). However, I believe that **socio-pedagogics** also should be included because it deals with the ever-present socio-cultural factors that influence a child's education. Each of these part-perspectives is pursued only within a **pedagogical** situation.⁵

The structures and their 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 will allow the prospective (and practicing) teacher to theoretically inform his practice. They are

⁴ 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".

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

the concepts or categories (that also can be 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 involves more than learning/teaching 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 actions, interventions, and support are influenced not only by his own experiences and ideological commitments but especially by his **study** of the results (or theory) disclosed in the **pedagogical** situation. Because this amounts to applying this scientific or theoretical knowledge to the practice of educating, Landman et al. (1982) refer to a **pedagogic** situation as **post-scientific**; in this situation the educator's knowledge is phenomenologically refined/informed and systematically applied.

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 abilities, he may have to modify or at least mollify some aspects of his philosophy **for** educating in order 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 always, to some extent, will be marked by ideological nuances correlated with the educator's philosophy **for** educating that define for him those activities that are philosophy of life-permissible.

With the operation **both** of 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 needs to be 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 really is to say that this theory makes explicit the aspects and structures already implicitly lived on the level of practice. 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) that are external to and do not make explicit the essential **form** of that practice. In other words, this 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 perspective that I have presented is that it explicitly deals with both form and 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 practice; and a **pedagogic** situation is where theory and practice both are salient; it is where theoretical reflection informs and changes pre-reflective to reflective practice. When both theory and practice are salient and reciprocal, theory can inform practice and practice can inform theory.

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