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## Ideological alchemy: the transmutation of South African didactics (and fundamental pedagogics) into ‘apartheid education’

GEORGE D. YONGE

In his response to Krüger, Le Grange claims that: (1) the South African discourse of fundamental pedagogics was closely allied with Christian National Education and functioned as a powerful educational doctrine in the service of the South African policy of apartheid education; (2) fundamental pedagogics bracketed political discourse; (3) the connection between fundamental pedagogics and Christianity promoted an authoritarian approach to education; and (4) because didactic pedagogics and fundamental pedagogics were so intimately intertwined, South African didactic thinking also was used to serve and perpetuate the policy of apartheid education. This paper evaluates these claims and concludes that they are untenable in light of the history, nature, and purpose of South African fundamental and didactic pedagogical thinking. In his effort to link fundamental and didactic pedagogical thinking to apartheid education, Le Grange has lost sight of the profound influence of the tradition of European (Dutch/German) *Didaktik* on didactic thought in South Africa during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Keywords: apartheid education; didactic pedagogics; educational ideologies and doctrines; fundamental pedagogics; South Africa

In his response to Krüger (2008), Le Grange (2008) is not primarily interested in the contents of Krüger’s essay, but rather he aims to elucidate the context in which didactics developed in South Africa so that he can ‘provide a more nuanced understanding and interpretation’ of Krüger’s essay. In this way, he hopes to contribute to an explanation of ‘the demise of the didactics tradition in South Africa and why its resurrection ... is unlikely’ (p. 399).

Le Grange addresses Krüger’s paper only in a passing, incidental way, and he does not provide the promised nuanced explication of its contents. This suggests that he is using Krüger’s paper, because of its South African origin, as a platform to espouse his own ideological agenda with respect to didactic and fundamental pedagogics. It is revealing and instructive to see where his reasoning tries to take us:

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<sup>1</sup> was a component of the apartheid (ruling) ideology (pp. 5–6).

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Is Le Grange not suggesting that there is a historically necessary connection between fundamental pedagogics and didactic pedagogics, on the one hand, and apartheid and Christian National Education on the other? To do so, he has to engage in a bit of revisionist history<sup>2</sup> in that neither fundamental pedagogics (Roos 2000) nor didactics (Mentz 2000) emerged until almost two decades later. More specifically, in 1945 B. F. Nel was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria and over the next few years he succeeded in introducing the faculty to the psychology of thinking of the Würzburg School and its didactic implications as advocated by Ph. Kohnstamm of Amsterdam (Sonnekus 1998, Mentz 2000). This focus guided the didactic thought of the faculty for almost the next 20 years and amounted to applying a psychology of thinking to teaching (instead of studying teaching as such). This approach delayed both a linking with German *Didaktik* thinking as well as an engagement in a full-fledged phenomenological disclosure of the essences of educative teaching until F. van der Stoep became head of the Department of Historical and Didactic Pedagogics in 1965 (Louw 2002). This history clearly shows that the faculty's efforts were not focused on or directed by Christian National Education and the policy of apartheid.

Le Grange says:

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 educational faculties of historically black universities that were *dominated* by Afrikaner lecturers (p. 402; emphases added).

Is this ideological rhetoric? This question not only invites but demands a consideration of the reason for using the phenomenological method. The phenomenological method (supplemented by dialectic, hermeneutic, and contradictory methods) was used by members of the faculty of education at Pretoria to verify the 'essence' status of the aspects of educating they disclosed and to protect themselves from lapsing into any kind of ideological thinking (doctrine), knowing that such thinking would blind them to seeing, disclosing, and describing the essences (categories) of educating and their relationships (structures) (Landman 2004, 2005). For fundamental pedagogics to be a doctrine, it would have to be untrue to the phenomenological method and thus to its own essential nature; it would not be fundamental pedagogics but something else.

To engage in fundamental pedagogical or didactic pedagogical thinking one begins with the original, pre-scientific phenomenon of spontaneously accompanying a child to adulthood where the participants are engaged in an *educational situation* and where their philosophy of life or ideology (educational doctrine) permeates their activities. To study this educational situation phenomenologically, one views it theoretically and brackets ideological commitments to guard against them distorting or colouring the disclosure of the essences (ways of living) and their relationships (structures). The described essences are called 'categories' and can be used to illuminate additional essences (Landman 2005).

This is the **ONLY** situation within which fundamental pedagogics functions (Landman 2005). It is a science aimed at disclosing the essences

and structures of the activity of educating. The resulting descriptions of these essences and structures are general and lifeless. To implement these essences, i.e. to educate a child by allowing them to guide and shape educative activities, they have to be enlivened by a philosophy of life or an ideological contents, and particularized for a concrete educative situation. These contents are *not* provided by fundamental pedagogics. This implementation is a post-scientific matter and the participants (adult and child) involved are in a *pedagogic situation*. That is, the original, naïve ('pre-scientific') educational situation has been transformed into a ('post-scientific') pedagogic situation by implementing the findings arrived at in the pedagogical (scientific, phenomenological) setting.

Le Grange says 'During the scientific phase the pedagogician brackets extrinsic aims and beliefs ... [T]he political therefore becomes forbidden speech' (p. 402). Indeed, during the phenomenological (scientific) phase, political criticism *is* irrelevant to the fundamental pedagogical function of disclosing essences of the phenomenon 'educating'. However, there is no reason why a pedagogician cannot engage in such criticism when *not* pursuing the main function of fundamental pedagogics, i.e. when not engaging in essence thinking.

Contrary to Le Grange and his colleagues, there are no necessary links between fundamental pedagogics and Christianity. For example, consider his reference to De Vries' (1986) book. The first part is 'Analysis of the phenomenon of education'. It presents a description of essences of education phenomenologically (scientifically) disclosed and described by fundamental pedagogics. The second part is 'Evaluation of particular educational schools of thought'. From a post-scientific (post-fundamental pedagogic) perspective, De Vries considers various doctrines and explicates how each might enliven or provide contents to the various lifeless essence of educating.<sup>3</sup> The specific quotation that Le Grange refers us to from De Vries (1986: 211) has nothing to do with fundamental pedagogics, but with how the essential relationship of educative authority might be interpreted and used by a Christian. Note that the quotation begins with 'The Christian educator ...' and not with 'The fundamental pedagogician ...'. Consequently, there is no substance to Le Grange's claim that 'The links between pedagogy and Christianity under the "philosophy of fundamental pedagogics" provided a justification for authoritarian educational practices in South Africa in the apartheid era' (p. 403). Furthermore, the relationship of authority is described in fundamental pedagogics as sympathetic, authoritative guidance and not as authoritarian.

Le Grange's comments regarding the inferior curriculum made available to Black learners in South Africa's apartheid period is not something derivable from fundamental pedagogics or didactic pedagogics but is an expression of an ideology/policy that has nothing to do with the results of a phenomenology of educating or teaching. That is, learning contents are not derivable from the essential forms of educating and teaching.

What is the presumed connection between fundamental pedagogics and didactic pedagogics?

Through being inextricably bound up in fundamental pedagogics, *Didaktiek* in South Africa 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 is one reason why departments of didactics at historically Afrikaner universities have been pressured to change their names (pp. 403–404).<sup>4</sup>

In other words, Le Grange implies that didactic pedagogics became associated with the apartheid ideology through its relationship with fundamental pedagogics. If what I have noted above about fundamental pedagogics is valid, this cannot be.

Yet there *is* a necessary connection between fundamental pedagogics and didactic pedagogics that needs to be understood. Both use the pedagogical perspective and both see the reality of educating as an area for radical (*radix* = root), i.e. scientific, investigation. According to Landman (2005: 3):

The *fundamental pedagogical* reflects on and considers the *total* reality of educating with the aim of disclosing *fundamental* ways of living of a child-in-the-reality-of-educating (child with educator).

The *didactic pedagogical* approaches (= brings closer) the *total* reality of educating with the aim of showing how a child's *didactic life* (meaningful didactic ways of living) is actualized in that reality. In other words, the didactic pedagogical is involved with the *didactic ways of living* of a child-in-the-reality-of-educating (child-in-education).

The terms *fundamental pedagogical* and *didactic pedagogical* indicate that both concern themselves in different ways with the same total reality of educating a child. And according to Van der Stoep and Louw (1979, 2005):

The reader must continually keep in mind that here the concern is with the didactic-pedagogic, i.e. situations in which an adult and a child ... establish particular relationships (Van der Stoep and Louw 2005: 46).

And further:

[I]n light of the indissoluble unity of educating and teaching, it is justifiable to accept that the pedagogical categories have relevance in establishing pedagogic-didactic situations, such as in a school. Because this is a purely didactic-pedagogic situation, findings about the validity of the pedagogical categories are justified only for this situation (Van der Stoep and Louw 2005: 46).

And finally:

a didactic situation in which only adults are present cannot be described by these pedagogic categories. In other words, pedagogical-didactical categories are not necessarily relevant to a purely adult (andragogical) didactic situation (Van der Stoep and Louw 2005: 46).

Fundamental and didactic pedagogics are necessarily entwined because they are two among several part-perspectives of pedagogics, the science of the reality of educating. The primary thing that fundamental pedagogics has to offer didactic pedagogics is its categories describing the essences of the reality of educating a child. It has no educational ideology or doctrine to present. If these fundamental pedagogical essences are absent from a Didactic situation then it is something other than a didactic *pedagogic* one.

An additional point from Van der Stoep and Louw (1979, 2005) is worth noting:

When we speak of teaching as such, we are dealing with something that is universally valid. As soon as contents arise, we are in the realm of the specific and what is particular, especially in as far as the contents appear in the life- and world-view of a particular society, group, or nation. All findings about teaching, *as such*, therefore, must be universally valid. As to *what* must be taught (contents), understandably, there are a great many opinions. This is why every country or region compiles its own curricula to insure that those contents (aspects, of reality, norms, values, etc.) deemed to be important are taught systematically (Van der Stoep and Louw 2005: 11).

Le Grange, following Enslin (1990: 88–89), indicates 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 (p. 405).

Most certainly, the social-political context of educating can be fruitfully studied from these and many other perspectives, but viewing educating through a liberal or Marxist lens cannot disclose its essences, as such. Fundamental pedagogics limits itself to studying what educating is *at its very core*. It does not study the social-political contexts in which it occurs. For this reason, fundamental pedagogical thinking can and must be supplemented by studying the various contexts in which educating occurs. Indeed, various educational ideologies and doctrines should be studied pedagogically and in other ways because, as already mentioned, all educative practice occurs in light of some ideology, something particular; but the nature, structure of educating, its form, is universal. In this context, ideology is not pejorative but necessary.

For over a decade before its demise in South Africa, there was a vigorous attempt to construct pedagogical thinking as ‘Apartheid Education’ (Beard and Morrow 1981). This transmutation finally took hold, more for political than intellectual reasons, after the African National Congress was brought to power in the 1994 election and after the faculties of education at Pretoria and other universities *and* their curricula were significantly reorganized to eliminate pedagogical thinking because it was deemed to be apartheid thinking.

What has been lost by ideologically dismissing pedagogical thinking by equating it with apartheid? The Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria during the 1960s through the 1980s succeeded in studying the phenomenon of educating a child as a regional ontology (Stewart and Mickunas 1990). That is, they engaged in disclosing and describing the essences, the categories that make it possible for the region of reality called ‘educating’ to be what it *is* and that distinguish it from other regions such as the psychological; a regional ontological study also tries to verify, via the phenomenological and kindred methods, the essence-status (ontological-status) of these categories. This was not done merely as an academic exercise but to contribute to the improvement of the practice of educating. Every department participated and there was a fundamental-, psycho-, didactic-, socio-, ortho-, historical and comparative- and vocational orientation-pedagogics at Pretoria during the heyday of its pedagogical



thinking. In the current study of education in South Africa, there appears to be little or no acknowledgment that the 'Pretoria school of educational thought' ever existed. Their important theoretical and practical descriptions and findings are relentlessly being pushed into the past.

### Notes

1. Possibly the only educational policy in South Africa deserving the label of 'Apartheid Education'. Fundamental pedagogics and didactic pedagogics are *not* 'kinds' of education but attempts to disclose the nature and essences of educating as such—irrespective of particular ideological commitments.
2. I am relying on my familiarity with the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria during its pedagogical heyday in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. This should not be a problem because during this time Pretoria was generally acknowledged as the centre of pedagogical thinking and its development in South Africa.
3. Elsewhere, I (1990, 1991) have indicated how easily this strategy can be misunderstood.
4. The important connection between South African didactic pedagogics and the European (German/Dutch) *Didaktik* tradition is completely glossed over by Le Grange. For example, in their classic book, Van der Stoep and Louw (1979, 2005) list 336 references, five of which concern fundamental pedagogics and 115 the German/Dutch *Didaktik* tradition.

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