

THE STATE OF PEDAGOGICAL STUDY
IN MODERN TIMES*

By

Prof. Dr. F. van der Stoep

With the autonomy of pedagogics as a science no longer in doubt, thinking about the practice of this science certainly runs the risk of substituting the settled question about its autonomy with the self-evidence of its many other aspects (e.g., methodological). Beyond all doubt, the matter of an autonomous science, to some extent, announces itself as something self-evident. This question of scientific self-evidence also is comforting because experience, i.e., the lifeworld, shows the practice [of educating] to be its area of focus. No matter how true and valid pronouncements of this nature might be, one still must understand clearly that the relationship of practice and science proclaims itself as obvious only as a scientific attitude. Practice announces science only as a possibility which thrusts reality, as educating, on us. The experience **is**, while the science **can be**. This implies that someone who experiences or has experienced practice, possesses experiences regarding educating, but this does not qualify him/her as a scientist or pedagogician. The history of Western culture indicates that, although educating belongs to the most primordial [i.e., originary] of all human experiences, pedagogics cannot be considered as one of the oldest, autonomous sciences. This is a categorical proposition and, since a history of philosophy, to some extent, also is a history of pedagogics, it is a proposition open to dispute. However, the fact is, on careful analysis, the fervid struggle for the autonomy of pedagogics is incomprehensible and difficult to justify in the light of the above pronouncements about experience. This has to do with the historical judgment of *fudamentalia*, which are thoroughly pedagogical in nature, being described as and/or called philosophical. And, if this claim also sounds categorical, contemporary pedagogical study, in its broad focus, offers good evidence in support of it. When an aspect of educating is referred to as fundamental, i.e., is understood as an essence and is described

* *Pedagogiekstudies* (1972), No. 69, pp. 1-15. Edited November 2022.

as essential (also regarding method), this is referred to as philosophy, as it should be, as a striving for wisdom, but just because of this, the reality of the pedagogical becomes excluded. With this, educative essences are placed in another area of knowledge, the autonomy of pedagogics is logically denied, and its scientific structure merely is typified as self-evident. Understandably, here there is the danger of scientific obviousness: by the nature of the matter, science is nothing more than a broadened and expanded explanation of an experiential structure—and, as already indicated, at the very least, is self-evident. The word "self-evident" does not yet mean responsible, in the sense of being accountable. Indeed, experience speaks for itself, but the experience is not science. Science gives an account of the experiencing as a matter of reality. This pronouncement holds for all sciences, among which are history, sociology, physics, etc. And this is best shown by the modern rise of the so-called applied sciences.

Understandably, in today's lifestyle, fundamental thinking is not very popular. The times are one of doing, of producing rather than of thinking and understanding. But, in the course of time, the forms of expression of societal tendencies, which include the practice of political policies and industrial expansion, are intensely dependent on educative practice. The entire becoming of persons and world still cannot be planned outside of the course of educating, with the consequence that a great variety of educative practices are attended to and are titled and named differently. In the light of the pragmatic life attunement and gluttonous living, especially of the Western world, this specialization in education, as the pursuit of practice, is thoroughly recognized, but not the understanding of it. This has to do with the incredible expansion of educative facilities of all sorts to deliver its fruits, or what can or ought to be delivered to society. The consequences for science are clear. Science is only in the field of play to the extent that it can contribute in some way, especially in its applied respects, to the dividend aimed at. Science, as such, is meaningful in so far as it can be studied by a few for and in expanding its application. The remainder simply is thrown overboard as nonproductive excessive weight without which one can manage. And that, in its application, it can affect science is seemingly self-evidence--and in this case, this means the word really is superfluous. Unfortunately, in many respects pedagogics is viewed and interpreted nowadays as an applied science. Its findings

are applied for societal expansion. I quote Hans Schaefer* (freely translated from the German into Afrikaans): "Science earlier had the effect of filling the community spirit with a standard-ideal of the community. This ideal existed equally in the knowledge of such standardized contents as classical mythology, poems, products of art, etc. Today, these standards are no longer accepted, and to teach them guarantees neither the forming of character nor social achievement."

Schaefer draws two conclusions:

1. Scientific forming, in the traditional sense of the word, no longer is valued as forming for community.
2. The progress of the community is still determined by knowledge:

The question only is what knowledge and what sort.? The search conspicuously is not attuned to fundamental study, but to producing techniques which turn the wheels and increase the curves of profit. The consequence for pedagogical study is far-reaching: Educating is reduced to a particular technique. Pedagogics embraces the study of this technique. Finally, teaching is the practice of this technique. If this is dismaying to a pedagogue, the image of the natural sciences does not offer a rose-colored picture: today, chemistry and physics mainly are studied with the aim of the possibilities of their application to other areas.

The questions thrust upon the scientist by these few indications are relatively simple: Is the knowledge which is assumed by science reconcilable with this? Is knowledge, as such, equivalent to technique? Is technique, as such, possible when knowledge is lacking? Is fundamental knowledge transferable in any respect?

In the search for an answer to these questions, in so far as they refer to the state of contemporary pedagogical studies, two aspects deserve prior consideration because of their far-reaching influence. I choose them as examples to make the *fundamentalia* discernible:

1. For many centuries, the study of pedagogics was viewed as a matter for encyclopedias. By virtue of its history, the

* Schaefer, A., Bildung nur durch Wissenschaft? in **Bildung: Die Grundlage unserer Zukunft**. Piper Verlag: Munich, 1968.

pedagogical encyclopedia was part of the larger encyclopedia of philosophy. Since many other areas of knowledge eventually detached themselves from philosophy and which also had, and do have, relevance for pedagogics, this encyclopedic pedagogics became kaleidoscopic in nature, precisely because the total image of "the pedagogical" continually was described as something essentially different from what is revealed by pedagogical essence-thinking. In an historical respect, this variegation led to a long delay in recognizing the autonomy of pedagogics as a science. The intuitive resistance to this autonomy by figures such as Comenius and Pestalozzi, the revolutionary explication of Rousseau and the intense thinking of Herbart, and later of Dilthey, all are glimpses of the search for fundamentals, i.e., the pedagogical, which only came to light much later. Consequently, the past few decades have left out of consideration what traditional pedagogical study, as historical pedagogics, discerned by adding and borrowing knowledge from other areas [e.g., psychology] on credit. The great deficiency in the encyclopedic approach (even taking the historical into account) is that the fundamentals never came to the surface--despite Pestalozzi's pronouncements about the idea of the "elemental". This is not to imply that the encyclopedic study of the pedagogical is not fascinating and valuable. I do assert that it cannot respond to the important criterion that pedagogical thinking is essence-thinking. It also is a very recent shift in historical pedagogics that it has turned to the historical disclosure of pedagogical essences, also with respect to their chronology.

The implication of the above for the mentioned questions is found in the pronouncement that an encyclopedia, as such, never works structurally. Pedagogicians continually turned to other subject areas [e.g., ethics, psychology] to disclose the essences of their area of knowledge by which pedagogics, understandably, became viewed as a field of application for all subject sciences [e.g., applied sociology]. Much of the knowledge in the past two decades has been traded in for technique, and the encyclopedia has been swept off the table without the pedagogical essences ever really coming to the surface. The resistance against the encyclopedia is that it hinders the general development and acceptance of structure-thinking, which has become possible in an ontological respect in accordance with the phenomenological movement and its epistemology. It is as

if the essential pedagogical was conceived well, especially on the Continent, but never could be brought to birth. Here, I clearly exclude a few fundamental thinkers, among whom are Litt, Weniger, W. Flitner, Spranger, Langeveld, A. Flitner, Klafki and their followers. However, the European situation is still such that these attempts at structural pedagogics summarily are dismissed as being a continuation of a theoretical tradition which today no longer holds true. This agrees with Schaefer's pronouncement.

2. If today, knowledge is traded in for technique, there also are two considerations which deserve mention. There is a tendency to look at pedagogics from various perspectives in terms of the emerging philosophy of Existence. Without trying to undermine the contributions which this philosophical movement has made to pedagogics, still a few consequences are of interest regarding the stated problem. During the early decades of the previous century, the Romanticism of Goethe was excellently switched over to the then currently arising German streams of philosophy which followed the close of traditional German Idealism. In this connection, one especially thinks of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who replaced romantic melancholy with a relatively direct pessimism. This transition was clearly the portal for the emergence of Existential philosophy which, from the the theological Kierkegaard, placed personal existence above and beyond any fixation on ideas and abstract concepts (metaphysical pronouncements). Interesting enough, the course of this philosophy also had a far-reaching influence on our perspective through its popularization from literature (Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Sartre and Kafka). If one now keeps in mind the radicalization of the phenomenological movement with the transition to an age in which a methodological approach figures, and especially keeping in mind a phenomenological anthropology and psychology, the account of pedagogical thinking shows a clear inclination to labeling, especially in two respects. On the one hand, pedagogical pronouncements merely are reduced to anthropological conceptions by which pedagogics and anthropology become equated. On the other hand, pedagogical pronouncements are placed in congruence with Existentialism, something which is impossible for pedagogics because of its nature. Also, regarding the general consequence of the criticisms, one stands out relatively clearly: As a science, pedagogics had lost

a great deal of its accountable results and, as in the previous case, also its earlier acquired autonomy after the effectiveness of its arguments were lost in various respects. Especially from a life-view oriented side, contemporary pedagogical thinking came under severe criticism, while the strong socialistic images of thinking of the post-war period, without hesitation and immediately, had proclaimed dialectic materialism, in one form or another, to take its place.

As the matter unfolded, the latter view increased in popularity with students by which also traditional Christian thinking, along with those from overseas, mostly had stayed in the battle. With this, I do not wish to assert that the right-minded pedagogician adequately distanced him/herself from Existentialism, but two aspects of the after-effects were still clearly noticeable: After the course of its scientific development, pedagogics hesitatingly threw out the baby with the bath water with the result that it was not given the time to put in relief the *fundamentalia*, as well as the methodological, in a formal sense. Especially, there was not sufficient time to candidly criticize the relief itself and strip it of its limitations and present itself as more academically comprehensible. In the interactive East-West wave of dialectic materialism, it looked as if fundamental pedagogical thinking had reached the epoch of its end. The battle cry of the empirical, direct verifiability, the demand for results were allowed little room under the banner of structural pedagogics. The stream of thought, which still was involved in clarifying and understanding, before a practice could be established, seemingly was covered up before it had properly risen. On the Continent, it now is fashionable to characterize structural thinking as insignificant chatter. Pedagogics had to make room for pedagogical, technical thinking.

Amidst this storm, the Faculty of Education, under the leadership of B. F. Nel and C. K. Oberholzer, had taken an academic stand, at least in one respect: They had kept themselves thinking, researching and publishing without following the fashion. They consistently refused to trade science for, identify it with or present it as technique. The consequence was intensive pedagogical research, and a stream of publications by the "Work Community for the Advancement of Pedagogy as a Science", among others, which certainly has made no small contribution to the appearance of a science of education in this country, but also, to some extent, to establishing and maintaining it world-wide. I do not believe it is an extravagant

claim to contend that the University of Pretoria, previously and still today, represents one of the strongholds of fundamental thinking in a pedagogical respect. One will have difficulty in finding in any European University a more substantial structural foundation than what has been built up here over the past few years. Also, we have much to learn from Europe about technique, but little about pedagogics.

Considering the state of pedagogical study, here the Faculty of Education and the Work Community had a clearly indicated academic responsibility. I also believe that, especially as far as its personnel were concerned, it was equipped to accept this responsibility and continue on the trail which was followed in the past. Some immediate tasks became evident:

The extensive work of the previous few years, especially regarding the fundamental aspects of all the [part-] disciplines, certainly had to be continued and broadened. I mean that the docents of the faculty, separately and in collaboration with their senior students, had the task of showing the way to scientific practice. However important practice might also be, it is impossible to come across it in a discussion if the theory about the practice is not to some extent already written. Concluding the matter, one first must know *what* and *why* things progress in practical situations before one can make pronouncements about *how* they do.

The faculty had progressed greatly in its fundamental structure with the aim of scientifically explaining educating: Perhaps they progressed further than any other faculty or institute whose work now is known. We can and already have come to definitive conclusions from various points of view regarding the practical situations which are followed in the present and will be in the immediate future. Various important publications appeared this year in a variety of disciplines [part-perspectives of pedagogics]. The extent of postgraduate research now is almost overwhelming: There are approximately 100 M. Ed. and D. Ed. students. Thus, there is no lack of schooled co-workers. The faculty gave these students the greatest consideration in holding out to them the scientific traditions of the past. It also is our intention, by good teaching, at the postgraduate level to make the most of this exceptionally rich source of research, and to introduce the contributions which they make as far as we can. The Work Community serves this aim, and we appeal to all students to become and remain members of this community.

On the other hand, we must jointly engage in consolidating and integrating. The situation of the faculty is unique in that we all take different perspectives on one subject and, thus, we work on one scientific structure. Each contribution is a contribution to pedagogics as a science. It is a-logical and unthinkable that the various disciplines are not mutually and thoroughly integrated so that eventually their findings can be implemented in practice, especially in [teacher] training. This training in every respect is our bridge to practice. Thus, our theory building must be relevant and our pronouncements of a scientific nature must be verified empirically, and there must be real evidence. Also, in this respect, the Work Community, in the future as in the past, can contribute by making the literature available in the Afrikaans language, which can serve as the basis for such training. Finally, now the disciplines [part-perspectives' of pedagogics] are theoretically able to take up their underlying mutual relevancies in academic pronouncements and implement them in training.

In the immediate future, this will involve research, publications and training, as the three main directions to be attended to. The research, which forms the base of this triangle, certainly has a two-fold, but parallel role in this perspective. In the first place, the fundamentals of the idea of "the pedagogical" must be disclosed and described comprehensively. With this, a primary task is given to fundamental pedagogics--but not only to this discipline. Each practitioner of the other [part-] perspectives has his/her own obligations regarding the total spectrum of the pedagogical. Still, the basic insights into the scientific description of an everyday slice of experience are carried by the thorough ways in which fundamental pedagogics succeeds in disclosing the origins and methods of educating scientifically, i.e., in terms of their essential, knowable structures.

In general, there is an obvious confusion about the sources of knowledge, especially regarding teacher training, by which "the pedagogical" can be disclosed, understood and described. This confusion often stems from misunderstandings in a variety of areas. Procedural and methodological pronouncements are confused with points of view (in the sense of scientific *a priori*); essential consequences of radical thinking are mistaken for a life- or world-view perspective because life-forms and the life-contents are so closely intertwined in the origin of the educative phenomenon

about which scientific distinctions seem like strict separations, knowledge preferences or irreconcilable postulates about a piece of everyday experience. Since this piece of experience, by its nature, does not bring forth authentic knowledge (in the same way that a field of grain does not itself fill bread pans) there must be intensive and methodologically accountable work (thinking). When such a method is missing, the pedagogical spectrum becomes a kaleidoscope in which all the colors and forms indeed are present but are in disarray. Such a kaleidoscope offers the practitioners of the subject a good opportunity to talk past each other and to interpret it for students in unworthy ways and even dismantle it. What, in this respect, is a charge of fundamental pedagogics also holds for each of the other disciplines [i.e., part-perspectives]. The historical, psycho-, socio-, didactic-, comparative-, physical- and ortho-pedagogical all are areas for fundamental thinking. A clear soprano voice does not make a choir. Not one of these perspectives on the pedagogical is an area of application of fundamental pedagogics, per se. Within the framework of the insights regarding educating, each has its own disciplinary autonomous problems which must be examined essentially and disclosed. However, when they are involved with the same origins or sources of knowledge, two consequences are logically expected: A moderate overlapping will be noticed where one area extends into the other, and the one indicates additional areas of research for the other. In neither of these cases is there a violation of area, an attack on disciplinary autonomy or planning for tendencies of application. Today, the terrain of each discipline is delimited, and its area of application is unique. What ought to occur regarding writings and training is that the areas be integrated, the mutual relevancies of the separate perspectives must be indicated so that the student can acquire a total view of “the pedagogical”. The eventuality of studying “pedagogics” is the pedagogical. Today, no one contends that pedagogics is reducible to one or another of its disciplines. Today, deliberation in *planning* research and training is just as important as the research and training itself.

In the second place, and especially because practice and training crop up, pedagogical thinking always turns, in an anticipatory capacity, to the general, i.e., back to the experiencing itself. All teaching about a particular practice is a promise for that practice. However, I believe that one must deal with the two matters of “practice” and “training” separately—not only because they are not identical, but also because the science of “pedagogics” has a

different relationship to the two matters. Further, the effects of research and publications on both aspects are most discernible, and here the initially stated problem of scientific self-evidence usually shows its most devastating aftereffects. If research and publications determine the task for the Faculty of Education and its Work Community, then both certainly bring up the question of practice and training. The concept “practice” has pedagogical relevance because it is an area for delimiting training. “Practice” is a matter of knowledge, of scientific caution in the indication of where the training occurs, to what the training must be directed and the focal point for the training which eventually must be carried out in practice. The training task manifests itself in the fact that insight (knowledge) and skill of practicing must be united, intertwined in a justifiable harmony, in the sense that a state of activity, of doing, is reached. “Practice” is a theoretical concept which assumes the activity or training aspect, but not actually. “Practice” is not the same as skillfulness and, therefore, also not the same as “training”. Training implies a systematic practice of and exercise in that aspect of “practice” which allows insights (knowledge) into the situation itself to be actualized.

In the light of the problem stated above, one can conclude that “practice” embodies everyday experiencing, but such experiencing cannot validly take the place of pedagogical study. In the same way, “training” implies that insights into the total experiencing, in its fundamentals, must be made available because of which such a thing as training is possible. As far as pedagogical training is concerned, it unquestionably is rooted in the study of pedagogics as a science. Such training does not occur casually in terms of generalities which cannot be explicated and which do not give impetus to those who are trained. The modern search for practical, useful, effective training is not possible without being theoretically (in)formed. The theory, as everyone knows, is not self-evident. But then, perhaps it also is not useless to the training. On the contrary, it is indispensable.

Outside of theoretical training, acting with respect to a practice is not considered because it really cannot be. Practice and training, no less than science, are self-evident. If the theory (science) is meant as fixed and sterile, this indicates that it does not describe the experiencing, as such, or that it does not view the experiencing in its consequences, or that it merely is a thought-concept having nothing to do with structure-in-function. Such a “pedagogics”, as support

for practical training, is a hypothetical science; practice or training without scientific foundation is trickery. Distance between theory and practice is not possible in the total experience of persons because the two concepts assume each other. When practice enjoys so much preference in contemporary thinking it then is in terms of it that the theoretical foundation is regarded as settled, finalized, and suitable; in this way fundamental insights are declared to be self-evident. Similarly, the training takes an obvious course, but no one can give an account of what is self-evident. When this happens, technical thinking has taken over, and science disappears. Neither research nor training can flourish in such a climate. Training remains a matter of research and research a matter of training.

The research projects now underway in the faculty involve the entire scientific spectrum of the Pedagogical. This includes research into aspects of training for which the university has taken responsibility through the faculty, and particularly the different aspects of teacher training. Didactic pedagogics and orthopedagogics have their own tasks and problems in this respect. But there are many questions to ask of the other disciplines to be able to transform their insights into skillfulness. The popular “practical” approach acquires a different phrasing here because of its view of research and training. In whichever respect training is actualized, pedagogical study remains its foundation. There is no other way to either practice or training. Neither of the two can be a matter of technique as such—practice does not speak for itself as a science.

I can proclaim that Pretoria does not plan to exchange the pedagogical for something else. I also believe that the structure building and structure thinking at Pretoria are unique in many respects and already have begun to show that they really have relevance for practice because this is essence-pedagogics. The fact is that here there is an opportunity for fundamental scientific work, irrespective of how others might differ from us. We will eagerly work together with everybody for the good of science—but we will not be labeled as this or that. We try to honestly advance the study of pedagogics as a science, also through the activities of our Work Community. We claim the title of scientific; we also view our completed studies as such. I anticipate in the immediate future developments in the structure building of pedagogics as a science, the sound integration of perspectives and justifiable

pronouncements for practice and training, all of which will indicate our capacity for scientific accountability.
