

# THE PARENT-CHILD EDUCATIVE RELATIONSHIP AS A FOUNDATIONAL PROTOTYPE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION\*

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## Introduction

At the 1989 conference held at the University of Illinois to reexamine the social and psychological foundations of teacher education, three<sup>1</sup> of the presenters explicitly questioned the appropriateness of the foundations metaphor. I agree with their concern because, although the so-called social and psychological “foundations” are important and relevant to teacher education, they are not and cannot be truly foundational of it. One reason is that, according to Tozer and McAninch, their point of departure and concern are mind and culture<sup>2</sup> which are on a more macro level than “educating” a child. Also, I believe that on a concrete level of specific actions, interactions and aims, any foundation of “education” must have a greater degree of isomorphism with the event of educating than does mind and culture. From this line of thought, I suggest that the essential structure of the parent-child educative relationship provides a foundational prototype for teacher education that is missing from our dialogue.

To this point I have left unspecified what I mean by “education”. However, I will explicate that meaning after commenting on why it is that this possibility as a fruitful foundation has tended to be overlooked or to be viewed as not particularly relevant.

## A Brief History of the Social Foundations According to Tozer and McAninch

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These authors begin their very useful historical account of the social foundations of education by noting, “there is little consensus about what undergraduate foundations courses are or what they should be.”<sup>3</sup> Is this lack of consensus possibly an indication that these courses are not foundational? Interestingly, the motivation for writing their historical account is **not** to consider why this lack of consensus prevails but rather to gain historical perspectives on and insights into the origins of the social foundations in order to “examine our assumptions and beliefs about criteria by which today’s instructions and textbooks might be evaluated.”<sup>4</sup>

However, given the documented long-standing sorry state of the social foundations of teacher education,<sup>5</sup> this search for criteria, and a desire to “find out if the values we hold for social foundations courses had some historical precedent”<sup>6</sup>, should not be pursued in an uncritical manner. This is because it seems that the seeds of our current problems were sowed at the very inception of the field of social foundations; consequently, the criteria that Tozer and McAninch wish to derive from this history may serve only to perpetuate our current difficulties.

Specifically, I believe a major source of the current problematic nature of the social foundations is the concerted and multi-disciplinary focus on “the origins, purposes, and functions of school in society”<sup>7</sup> taken some 60 years ago by the Kilpatrick discussion group at Columbia Teachers College and subsequently pursued at the University of Illinois and other institutions. In fact, the so-called social foundations represent the study of the various contexts within which schooling occurs from political, philosophical, anthropological and other perspectives appropriate for the study of such contexts.

In saying that the theme of school in society is related to our current problems, I am not denying its legitimacy, importance and necessity. Rather, it seems that this focus has led us to bypass a more fundamental question, namely, what is the meaning of “education” viewed in terms of human existence, and what is the connection between this basic, existential meaning of “educating” and schooling? A serious consideration of this question is conspicuous by its absence from our literature.

Some consequences of the early and abiding focus on schooling in society are that educating is viewed *through* schooling (as if schooling were a primary phenomenon in human existence rather than one derived from educating in the sense of guiding a child to adulthood), and the application of perspectives that are external to educating and schooling are invited (e.g., social, psychological, political, historical, philosophical perspectives)—all of which are helpful for understanding the multiple contexts within which schooling occurs but none of which provides us with an educational perspective, as such.

A heritage of this study of schooling in society is that without a truly educational frame of reference or foundation, we have no recourse but to turn to the various perspectives external to schooling and educating to provide us with a basis for an integrated and coherent view of the “foundations” of schooling and thus of teacher education. But these perspectives do not and cannot provide this needed foundational frame of reference for the simple reason that, even though potentially relevant, they are not rooted in the phenomenon of educating or schooling, as such.

I briefly illustrate the lack of an educational perspective by commenting on two points in the article by Tozer and McAninch. First, they rightly stress that “the integration and coherence of foundations instruction depend importantly upon the point of view informing and shaping it”<sup>8</sup>. This notion is repeated a few times but it remains undeveloped. They do mention “a broad commitment to *democratic ideals* and to the effort to understand what that commitment means” (my emphasis)<sup>9</sup> as one of the ways in which an articulated point of view was used by the Kilpatrick group to integrate and organize the content they studied. The problem is that “democratic ideals” are not essentials of the phenomenon of educating and for that reason they cannot sustain a strictly educational frame of reference. In fact, as ideological, philosophy of life content, such ideals can be and are being used by some professors to encourage an “uncritical acceptance of ‘moral relativism’”<sup>10</sup> by their students, for example, by telling them “to make up (y)our own minds when it comes to beliefs and values.”<sup>11</sup> Also, the lack of integration and coherence generally found in social

foundations courses can be viewed as a symptom of the *absence* of a frame of reference that is rooted in the essential nature of educating.

Second, the criteria that Tozer and McAninch derive from “a description of the character and aims of social foundations of education as an element of teacher education”<sup>12</sup> also are not rooted in the phenomenon of educating and thus do not provide the needed educational point of view. Indeed, even their fourth criterion, “help students develop informed, normative points of view regarding society, schooling, and education”<sup>13</sup>, does not specify what these normative points of view should be founded on (I suspect a “commitment to democratic ideals” is a strong candidate).

It is evident that the social (and psychological) foundations of teacher education lack an *educational* perspective in terms of which the potential contributions to teacher education of external perspectives such as the philosophical, psychological and historical can be evaluated from and coherently integrated into a strictly educational perspective. If the theme “school in society” does not give rise to such a frame of reference, what focus will? My purpose now is to present such a focus and to provide a sketch of part of its resulting educational perspective and currently missing criteria.

### **The Adult-Child Educative Relationship**

Whatever one calls it, the phenomenon I take as my point of departure and in which my educational frame of reference is rooted is the everyday reality that no child is born an adult and that every child eventually must become an adult. For this to occur in a way that allows a child to become an independent, morally responsible person (i.e., an adult) requires that she be guided, supported, shown the way to this form of being human by someone who already is there.

The support and guidance rendered to help a child become an adult are what I refer to as educating, and this meaning is consistent with *educare*, the Latin root of the word “education” (meaning to rear or bring a child up to adulthood). Thus, when I refer to “educating” I mean the relationship within which an adult helps a child become

an adult. Of course, peers, toys, pets and other formative experiences can and do contribute to a child's becoming an adult, and necessarily so. However, peers, toys and pets do not necessarily project an image of adulthood, the direction in which the child must move. Adults, too, sometimes fail to exemplify an image of adulthood to the child; even so, only an adult is in a position to do so. Thus, it is under an adult's guidance that what a child learns (experiences) from interacting with peers, toys and pets can lead to his own adulthood. Without an adult's accompaniment a child's path to this destination can be vague, hazardous and perhaps even hidden. An adult's accompaniment should provide beacons for orienting his child to become what he ought to be and can be. But a child also must be willing to accept this guidance because the adult cannot travel this path for him.

From the above it is seen that by educating I mean the special adult-child *relationship* entered into with the aim of helping that child become an independent, responsible person. This event is an essential (ontic) aspect of human existence; every child needs such guidance and support and usually it begins between parent and child. I suggest that the nature of this event provides a foundational prototype for teacher education. That is, this event is the primordial, fundamental example of educating. As such, it is at the root or foundation of schooling that is a formalized, institutionalized *extension* of it. Thus, to properly understand the roots of schooling, we need to clarify the structure of the primordial event of which it is a formalized nuance.

Of course this formalization shifts schooling into other contexts than the original event of educating and it forces us to confront new additional questions, issues and problems. But to the extent that schooling is viewed as educative, as guiding a child to a certain kind of adulthood, to that degree, the original event of educating is foundational to it. This is because, in this light, formal and planned *educative* schooling is not so much a transformation of but rather an extension of the adult-child relationship and the aim descriptive of the informal and spontaneous event of educating as *educare*.

To this point I have considered very sketchily the question of the meaning of educating and its connection with schooling. This is the

question left behind when the pioneers of the social foundations turned to “school in society” as their focus. It seems that their failure to consider this question more thoroughly has left a void at the very core of the social foundations, and this void still plays a central role in sustaining the diffuse character of the field.

From the above, I believe the social foundations, as we now know them, are premature without an explication and description of the educative event that they presuppose. That is, without such an explication, the “foundational studies of philosophy, history, sociology and anthropology of education; educational studies; and comparative, interventional, and multi-cultural education”<sup>14</sup> will lack coherency.

### **The Adult-Child Educative Relationship and Teacher Education**

In explicating the adult-child relationship within which educating in the above sense is actualized, by its very nature, many perspectives intrinsic to it are required and thus they are called “educational”. In order briefly to describe and unfold the rich and multiple dimensions of the phenomenon of educating, one needs, at a minimum, to take a fundamental pedagogical<sup>15</sup> (*Educational philosophical*) perspective with a concern about the essences/structures of this relationship, why it is necessary and possible and its aims, among other things. A psychopedagogical<sup>16</sup> (*educational psychological*) perspective also is required, not to apply psychological theories to this event but rather to disclose and describe the nature of accompanying a child’s psychic life and learning within this relationship. Also, a didactic-pedagogical<sup>17</sup> perspective (on *teaching*) is necessary within which the selection, reduction (to key ideas in forms manageable by the learners), and presentation of the content are considered along with the four basic forms of teaching (play, discussion, example and assignment). The aim of guiding a child to adulthood implies that teaching results in a change in the child’s way of relating to reality; thus, from this perspective teaching is viewed as an *achievement* rather than a *task* word (event).<sup>18</sup>

These three perspectives are unified because their origin is in *distinguishable* but *not separable* moments of the phenomenon of guiding a child to adulthood. Of course, there are other possible perspectives (e.g., the historical, vocational orientation, educational-therapeutic) but they need not be considered here. The fundamental-, psycho- and didactic-pedagogical perspectives are the *sine qua non* for an educational frame of reference and for a unified foundation of teacher education and thus without these, other perspectives such as the historical cannot be rooted in the phenomenon of educating; they are rooted in, e.g., the historical and thus are external to the educational.

At this point it is worth stating that for any perspective to be truly foundational, it must be rooted within or emerge from the adult-child educative relationship and not, e.g., from academic psychology. This is a reminder of the error of our foundational pioneers who structured the field of social (and psychological) foundations such that perspectives external to the educative event *had to be* applied to it because they were the only perspectives available—given the absence of an educational perspective. But even worse, the “educative event” was taken to be schooling rather than the more existential, fundamental activity of an adult accompanying a child to adulthood.

In agreement with Strasser<sup>19</sup>, I believe the task of the practical “science” of education is to understand the everyday practice of guiding a child to adulthood in order to improve it. However, to be in a position to do this, one needs criteria as guidelines for engaging in this practice, for judging and evaluating its quality and for indicating any problematic aspects of it that need to be “straightened out”. Each of the three inherently educational perspectives noted give rise to such criteria and together they provide an educator with a comprehensive, unified educational frame of reference or perspective as a guideline for parental and for teacher educative action and its improvement, if needed. Since this frame of reference is grounded in the phenomenon of an adult or parent entering a relationship with a child in order to guide that child to adulthood, the title of this paper is, “The parent-child educative relationship as a foundational prototype for teacher education”.

## **Some educational criteria**

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide examples of criteria from all three educational perspectives, let alone criteria derived from the moments of the adult-child relationship other than the relationship structure. Thus, I exclude criteria derived from the sequence, activity and aim structures of this relationship<sup>20</sup>.

Mutual trust, understanding and authority and their adequate implementation are preconditions for the educative accompaniment of a child to take an effective course. For the sake of brevity I will not present the descriptions of each aspect or moment (I have done that elsewhere).<sup>21</sup> Rather, I will list some criteria (evaluative questions) that I have derived from the nature of educative trust, understanding and authority. As far as they go, these criteria reflect an educational frame of reference.

### **Trust**

- Do the adult and child accept each other?
- Does the adult help the child feel confident and secure?
- Does the child feel emotionally ready and willing to explore and learn?
- Does the adult respect the dignity of the child?
- Does the child accept the adult as a model?
- Does the adult act in the best interest of the child?
- Does the child (temporarily) commit herself and her future to the adult?

### **Understanding**

- Does the adult understand the child as someone in need of guidance?
- Does the child feel understood by the adult?
- Is the child responsive to the adult's understanding and knowledge?
- Does the adult take responsibility for selecting and clarifying aspects of reality for the child?

## Authority

- Is the adult's intervention authoritative rather than authoritarian?
- Is there dialogue between adult and child within which the adult exemplifies a valued behavior to the child?
- Does the adult indicate to the child (by example) that he behaves in accordance with the same norms and values (behaviors) he is asking the child to follow?
- Is a transition from a docile obedience to an independent obedience to internalized norms and values being promoted?

All of this may seem trivial, but I don't believe it is. Also, keep in mind that I am only presenting criteria relevant to establishing and sustaining the adult-child educative relationship, and I have not touched on the psychopedagogical and teaching perspectives and their criteria or evaluative questions.

Evaluative questions such as the above are not trivial because they allow one to be aware of and explicate to oneself and to others the nature and quality of what needs to be *done* to establish and sustain an educative adult-child relationship. They also allow one to evaluate such classroom management procedures as assertive discipline<sup>22</sup> from an *educational* frame of reference. An issue such as the use of a reinforcement technique, e.g., the Premack principle, can be and has been evaluated from an educational perspective by means of such questions.<sup>23</sup> Also, in light of the application of these and other evaluative questions, parents and teachers can be given advice on how to improve a less than adequate (by these criteria) adult-child educative relationship.

The power of such evaluative questions as these for teacher education is that they provide the future teacher and the teacher educator with an evaluative frame of reference that stems directly from the reality on which schooling is based and not on external academic points of focus. Consequently, this explicitly educational frame of reference should allow for a meaningful integration and coherent organization of the theoretical and practical contents of a teacher education curriculum. In fact, this perspective also can be

used to evaluate what should or should not be included in a teacher preparation curriculum in light of the nature of the reality of educating on which schooling is based and thus on schooling itself as a formalization of that more primordial reality. Finally, such a frame of reference provides a basis for evaluating and reinterpreting what perspectives external to educating and schooling (e.g., psychology and philosophy) have to offer the practice of accompanying a child to adulthood.

## Notes

1. L. S. Shulman, "Reconnecting foundations to the substance of teacher education". Teachers College Record, 91, 3, 1990; J. F. Soltis, "A reconceptualization of educational foundations", Teachers College Record, 91, 3, 1990; P. L. Peterson, C. M. Clark and W. P. Dickson, "Educational psychology as a foundation of teacher education: Reforming an old notion", Teachers College Record, 91, 3, 1990.
2. S. Tozer, T. H. Anderson and B. Armbruster, "Psychological and social foundations in teacher education: A theoretical introduction", Teachers College Record, 91, 3, 1990.
3. S. Tozer and S. McAninch, "Social foundations of education in historical perspective", Educational Foundations, 1, 1, 1986, p. 5.
4. Ibid., p. 6.
5. K. A. Sirotnick, "On the eroding foundations of teacher education", Phi Delta Kappan, 71, 9, 1990.
6. Tozer and McAninch, op. cit., p. 6.
7. Ibid., p. 6.
8. Ibid., p. 10 and p. 24.
9. Ibid., p. 10.
10. Sirotnick, op. cit., p. 711.
11. Ibid., p. 711.
12. Tozer and McAninch, op. cit., p. 24.
13. Ibid., p. 24.
14. R. R. Sherman, "Second call for papers", AESA News and comments, 20, 2, 1990, p. 1.
15. See W. A. Landman, C. J. G. Kilian, E. M. Swanepoel and H. C. A. Bodenstein, An introductory reader in fundamental pedagogics for the student and the teacher (Cape Town: Juta, 1982).

16. See B. F. Nel, Fundamental orientation in psychological pedagogics (Stellenbosch: University Publishers and Booksellers, 1974); M. C. H. Sonekus, Ed., Learning: A psychopedagogic perspective (Stellenbosch: University Publishers and Booksellers, 1985).
17. See F. van der Stoep and W. J. Louw, Didactics (Pretoria: Academica, 1984).
18. See G. Ryle, The concept of mind (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949).
19. See S. Strasser, Understanding and Explanation (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985).
20. See W. A. Landman et al., op. cit.
21. See G. D. Yonge, "Educare: A neglected dimension of educational thought", Journal of Pedagogics, 12, 1, 1991.
22. See L. Canter. Assertive discipline: A take charge approach for today's educator (Seal Beach, CA: Canter and Associates, 1976).
23. See G. D. Yonge, op. cit.