

REVIEW ARTICLE

EXCHANGING IDEAS WITH STUART FOWLER*

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It was a memorable occasion for philosophers of education when the documents of Fowler were published in the Republic of South African in this and other publications. Fowler's documents originated in Australia in his struggle for the establishment of a reformed or Biblical school tradition and should be seen and understood against this background. As a result of this, the argument is very basic and the reader, as it were, is informed about the school tradition and how it was pieced together from the grass roots level upwards. It is also on account of this that there are so many reiterations and explanations in the book. But there is yet another reason for this: Various independent documents by Fowler are included in this publication. Some of these documents contain similar views which emerge in various different concepts.

Many flattering remarks may be passed about Fowler's work but that would serve no purpose. One should rather enter into discussion with him about those findings and facets in this book which one questions. Headway can only be made through disagreement and not by consensus, particularly in educational philosophy.

At the outset, the differences between the approaches of a philosopher of education like Fowler and a fundamental educationist, like myself, should be pointed out. Both make a study of education; the philosopher of education from the viewpoint of a philosopher, and the fundamental educationist from the perspective of education as a science. Because both have the educational phenomenon in mind, their findings should largely correspond, if they both

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made use of valid and reliable research methods. The differences are found in the direction of the viewpoint: Either from the viewpoint of the philosopher like Fowler, or from the viewpoint of the expert in education, the educationist (fundamental educationist).

A publication like this one of Fowler's indeed has a place in the literature of educational philosophy, because it places educational theory and practice, true to the task of the philosopher, into the broad, systematic perspective of (in this case, reformed) ontology, cosmology, anthropology, epistemology, societal (communal) theory, ethics and so on. In this respect, Fowler's work fulfils the requirements. Because of this point of departure, the approach of a philosopher like Fowler is not wholly satisfactory to a fundamental educationist. The broad framework of principles and the systematic approach of the philosopher is essential as a condition for the correct perspective on education (resp. teaching), but by far not sufficient. The fundamental educationist, in other words the expert on education, wishes to analyse, understand and fathom the educational phenomenon as such. This is what is missing from Fowler's work, even though, every so often, he does try to concretise his viewpoints with real examples from a reformed or biblical curriculum (cf., 147 et seq.) or by way of his intention of becoming momentarily "technical" (cf., p.204). The really methodical penetration of the essence of the educational (resp. teaching) phenomenon, which for example, can be attained by means of the method of structural-empirical phenomenon-analysis, is missing in this publication. This shortcoming does not, however, detract from the value of Fowler's strong fundamental line of argument.

As mentioned, many good things may be said of Fowler's work, for example, that he demonstrates how the Scriptures should be applied in the school or why cosmological and anthropological dualisms, reductions and absolutizations should be rejected in principle. In the remainder of this article, however, the emphasis will fall on points of view where dissension exists in principle; in this way to conduct the exchange between the philosopher of education and the fundamental educationist still further. The field of discussion thus lies more on the terrain of the philosopher, because this book never really moves into the true, basic terrain of the educationist (educational scientist).

First of all, it appears that Fowler (p.5) sees man only in a threefold relationship, namely, to God, the self and the environment (the world). Although man's relationship is formally stated in this way, Fowler also works with the fourth relationship of man to fellow human being.

Throughout the book the stress falls on the use of the Bible in the school and Fowler makes use of various images to explain how the Bible should be used, for instance, as a pair of glasses is used by a short-sighted individual to improve his vision, as the light of the sun is used by a person to search for something, and as a compass which gives direction. He stresses that one cannot see anything by looking straight into the sun, hence, the Bible cannot be used as a scientific manual at school or in teaching. Fowler seems to suggest that the Bible is or should only be a source of perspectives on teaching and education and that direct information on aspects of teaching and education should not be sought in it.

Two comments may be made about this. Firstly, it is well-known that a theological philosopher like B. Duvenage and a theologian like C.J. Malan are of the opinion that the Scriptures, apart from supplying the perspectives on teaching and education, also furnish direct data on these matters. It requires particular expertise on the part of the theologian, through the process of hermeneutics and exegesis, to make use of the latter or else an individual may cause the Scriptures to "ventriloquize" and be used as a manual. Possibly, Fowler tries to remain on the safe side by concentrating on the perspectives. But then the second comment becomes relevant: He consistently refers to specific Biblical texts to substantiate certain viewpoints which he uses, but without indicating the perspective nature of the references. It seems as if Fowler, therefore, uses the Biblical utterances as direct Scriptural data and resultantly, in direct contradiction to his own viewpoint on the place of the Scriptures in science and education. Clarification on this point is required from Fowler.

Fowler ends Chapter 1 with a remark which rather leaves the principle suspended when he says that the manner in which form is given to the commitment to Christian education, teaching and school in actual practice, depends on circumstances. As previously indicated, it is characteristic of Fowler's technique of only stating the principle and leaving positive application

to others, like a parent group. In itself, there is nothing wrong with this. However, Fowler creates the expectation that at some or other time he will arrive at guidelines for educational and teaching practice as well as for the Christian school. The title of Chapter 2, "The Contours of a Christian Education", strengthens this expectation but disappoints in this respect. It goes no further than broad statements on the principles of Christian education and the characteristics of a Christian school and teaching - the so-called "distinctives" to which the title of the book refers. The vagueness of the actual educational implications of the broad principles which Fowler spells out are felt by Fowler himself when, at the end of Chapter 2 he says: "Maybe the shape is still not as distinctive as it ought to be" and then promises once again to refine (polish) the matter in the following chapter(s). This promise is never kept, however, or not in any case, in the way the expert educationist would expect it to be done.

In his effort to demonstrate what Christian education and teaching is, Fowler proceeds in formulating a Scriptural epistemology in Chapter 3. To a great extent the latter agrees with the postulation of J.A.L. Taljaard and H. Dooyeweerd. The law for the epistemological activity (Taljaard) is prominent, as well as the process of systematic analysis (Dooyeweerd and the educationist, P.G. Schoeman). On p.21 Fowler distinguishes between three types of knowing, namely, "religious knowing, concrete knowing and analytical knowing", the first being knowledge of God through belief in Him through His self-revelation. Later on, however, he demonstrates that "religious assumptions" precede the acquisition of analytical knowledge. It appears, therefore, that Fowler sees "religious knowing" as a separate kind of acquired knowledge, but then - anomalously - also as the kind of knowledge which is seen as a presupposition for analytically acquired knowledge. Apparently the problem lies in the use of the English word "religion" which has two meanings here: In the first place, it has the meaning of the Afrikaans word "godsdienst", which implies indirect service to God through everything man does, including the acquisition of knowledge. Secondly, it also means something to the effect of "the basic direction of the heart", anastatically directed at God or apostatically away from God. The latter sense of the word points at religion as determining and forming the suppositions in the process of acquiring knowledge. Such religious presuppositions lay the foundations of cognitive norms and point them in a direction. It is exactly these directive religious

presuppositions in one's own knowing activity and in that of others which should be exposed (p.46).

It appears that Fowler purposely does not make use of the the acknowledged philosophical terminology when he expresses the tension in the humanistic viewpoints between the scientific ideal and the personality ideal. He uses the words "scientific view" and "free person view". Deservedly, he exposes the humanistic character of this dualism by pointing out that they both place the law for the acquisition of knowledge in the knowing subject. Likewise, he does not refer to the fathoming process of the underlying religious motive and the religious presuppositions in the acknowledged term, namely transcendental critique. The reason for this appears to be an effort to transmit these complicated philosophic procedures to the reader as simply and in the most popular scientific way. Although he transmits the technical concepts receptively and perceptibly simplified, he does not succeed in demonstrating how these procedures work in practice. The practicing educationist in particular and the teacher in practice would be interested in the latter.

Fowler's view of the Scriptures is acceptable because it acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of the Word of God. He places the main emphasis on the multi-faceted nature of God's Revelation of Himself, inter alia, in the Holy Scriptures. Therewith he teeters on the brink of the views on the Word of God held by philosophers like Kuyper (in his *E. Voto*), J. Olthuis and B. Duvenhage and which is so useful to the educational philosopher, namely, that the Word of God is distinguishable in the forms of his Creative Word, his Word of Providence and Observance, his Incarnate word (Jesus Christ) and his Scriptural Word (the Bible). This view of the Word of God furnishes a particular deep perspective on education, as a phenomenon and an activity.

In this chapter (p.76 cf.) Fowler makes a most welcome contribution by applying the principles which he expounded in the preceding pages, practically. In this section he demonstrates how teaching content in Politics (Government and Authority) receives a deeper meaning when viewed in the light of the Scriptural (-vd W) World of God. The same practical contribution in the Scriptural approach is presented on page 155-166).

The title of Chapter 4 (Christian Educational Distinctives) also awakens expectations that practical reformed teaching is now to be introduced for discussion, especially when Fowler calls educational theory the "tool" with which the educational teaching task should be tackled. The practical contribution of this chapter is limited, however, to an exposition of the principles of theory of societal relationship on the basis of which one can distinguish between the areas of competency and authority of the parental home (family) and the school, and on the basis of which co-operation and a partnership should be arranged between them. Although this exposition is particularly valuable, Fowler does not get around to show what the (educational) teaching implications of his views are in the respective areas of competency of the family and the school. On p.96 the implications of the logical-analytical destination of teaching are spelt out in terms of the modal development ("unlocking") of the pupil. On p.97 there is an opportunity of linking up with the thoughts of Wolfgang Klafki on education as "double developmental unlocking".

The fact that only one word is used in English for teaching and education, namely, education, causes considerable problems from p.101 onwards when Fowler tends to shift his argument imperceptibly from teaching as a narrow concept to education in the broader sense, whilst using the word "education" all the time. On p.101, without more ado, the teacher's task is extended to education, when it is stated that he should guide the pupil to submit himself to the Word of God, to responsible decision-making and responsible initiatives. On p.104 it is stated that the "office of the teacher is an educative office", but then again it is said that his authority is limited to the "teaching-learning situation". Fowler is not being accused of careless terminology, but attention is drawn to the fact that the English word "education" can be used for both a "series of teaching-learning situations" as well as for the idea of "equipment for example of a child by an adult". Confusion of these two uses of the word can land one in a nasty predicament (cf., also on top of p.105).

Broadly speaking, one can agree with the manner in which Fowler describes the relationship between the parent and the teacher but not with his "insistence on the theory of parent-delegated authority for the teacher" (p.109). The teacher does not as a matter of principle, receive his authority from the parent. The teacher receives his authority in the same way as the parent: Directly from God. God delegates authority to the parent and to the teacher, to each

in his own way. The authority of each one is qualified by the purpose (destination) of the societal relationship in question in which the individual performs his vocation: The parent in the family, the teacher at the school. The parent's authority is ethically qualified, the teacher's is logically and analytically qualified. The teacher receives his authority, on the strength of his competency as a trained and professional founder and institutioner of the teaching-learning situation; the parent, by virtue of his vocation as parent. The authority of the teacher is therefore not derived from the parent; the teacher is independently self-determining in the execution (answering) of his vocation by God. To insist, as Fowler does, that the teacher receives delegated authority from the parent, makes the teacher a kind of "parent" (parent substitute?) and is detrimental to the professional status of the teacher.

From p.112, when Fowler pays attention to the role of experience in teaching, he attempts to say something of "immediate practical significance for the teacher". The importance of experience in teaching is not denied, but it is questionable whether a theoretical discussion (philosophic argument) about the role of experience is really relevant to practical teaching. The transcendental critique of theories on experience which Fowler presents, and his effort to determine criteria for a viewpoint on experience which will be of educative nature, are in themselves very valuable and noteworthy to the teacher, but then it must not be supposed that these are of crucial importance to the teaching-learning situation. The criteria given by Fowler from p.121 are of educational-philosophical value and of particular significance in drawing up curricula or restructuring them. The teacher must, however, be shown the possibilities of applying the criteria. In other words, it should be realized that there are various levels of teaching praxis: the real teaching praxis of the teacher in the classroom (Fowler seldom moves onto this terrain); the praxis of curriculating and re-curriculating (Fowler sometimes moves onto this terrain); the praxis in the initial situation which is analysed by the teaching planner (most of the time Fowler does not enter this area), and then the praxis of the philosopher of education (the terrain which Fowler apparently sees as the praxis on which his thoughts are topical). The question that remains, is whether Fowler can remain loyal to his own demand when he says: "For effective teaching in the school this (the thought that everything should be viewed and judged in the light of the Scriptures) cannot be a vague (,) idea in the back of the mind. It must be an understanding that the teacher can

clearly articulate, first of all, for himself, and then, in terms suited to their age, for the learners". Because he apparently realizes that he has not yet penetrated his concrete, articulated level, he says that he has only endeavoured "to point the way toward a Christian set of criteria for evaluating the learning value of experiences for the school" (p.124-125).

In considering the role of the school as a societal relationship (human societal structure) which is directed at the teaching-learning situation Fowler says, *inter alia*: "... it appears that the distinctive nature of the school is that it is an organisation of pedagogical power in a communal bond of love for learning" (p.204). In this sentence, two premises are made which are questionable. In the first instance, the school is not an "organisation of pedagogical power" *per se*; the school is not a pedagogical body in the first instance. It is a teaching-learning body in the first place, which also has a pedagogical aim and task in the second (secondary) place. The teaching-learning situation in the school must be employed for pedagogical aims. The second premise which can be questioned is that the school reveals a "communal bond of love for learning". The word which is problematic here is the word "love" (in this case for "learning"). Two objections can be raised: Firstly, it is not normally true that all the individuals involved in a school gather there because of their love for learning. If that were true, compulsory education and the manifestation of drop-outs would be unknown. Secondly, the idea of love as a basic element of the aim or destination of schooling preferably pertains to the parental home or family as a societal relationship. In the case of the school the ethical aspect (love), is only a coherent sphere of the logical-analytical function of the school, and it finds expression in the school in, for example, the love of teachers for teaching, their "liking of" (or dislike of) pupils, camaraderie between parents and pupils and so forth. The aspect of love thus plays a very important role in the school, though not the central and primary role which Fowler suggests.

In conclusion, one other opinion of Fowler's needs to be discussed. In connection with the achievements of pupils, he avers: "They should learn that the greatest achievement is not to outstrip their fellows but to work together as a team in the service of God. (...) Children should learn in the school that we do not serve God by each doing his own thing but by communal action in which the gifts of all are valued and complement each other. (...)" and, he adds, "the contribution of each is recognized" in the "true sense of community"

(p.207). Although Fowler tries to maintain a balance between "community" and "individuality", he places great emphasis on the former. It is not clear on what principle he does this. The correct approach lies in the exact equilibrium between the two. It is possible that he places the emphasis in this way because he wishes to counteract the tendency in the Western world of over-emphasizing individual achievement. It may also, however, be an unwitting concession to the school critics who oppose the idea of individual achievement which often extends to the disadvantage of the whole of humanity.

In spite of the preceding critical remarks about Fowler's views, he must be welcomed as an important ally in the practice of reformed education. He has succeeded in taking up the cudgels for reformed education quite fearlessly in an environment far more hostile than that in educational circles in the Republic of South Africa, and has also drawn up guideline for the principles of practical teaching. But it is as a result of this that there are questions about Fowler's claim that he is not being vague but practical. Perhaps the practical side of education has progressed further in the RSA than that which Fowler regards as "practical" but is in fact on a level which is still highly theoretical (philosophic).

The great value of Fowler's views lies in the fact that as educational philosopher he can act as conversational partner for the fundamental educationist and as a result, reformed education can progress a few steps further.