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Do philosophers of education dare be inspired by forerunners such as Nietzsche? – Transformation of the mind towards an affirmative and generative awareness

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What comes after postmodernism and how will this affect educational theory and, I would add, educational practices? I will take up these challenging questions by interpreting present times as a period of transformation towards a new kind of awareness. Nietzsche—for some the father of postmodernity, for me a visionary thinker who ‘presenced’ what was coming—has already explored this transformation.

Warning: I will argue that not only our intellectual frameworks but also thinking itself—and thus we as philosophers and the way we do philosophy—are at stake.

Nietzsche elaborates three transformations of the spirit [Geist] using the metaphors of the camel, the lion and the child (Nietzsche, 1988a). In the camel phase, the human spirit was a group mind. ‘Du sollst’ permeated individuals’ minds. Tradition and group interests dominated. Nietzsche notes that this herd thinking enabled mankind to survive in difficult circumstances.

The lion stage revolves around the motto ‘ich will’. In this phase, human consciousness starts manifesting itself as a problem according to Nietzsche. When one becomes conscious of something, one translates one’s purely individual and unique experience into a shared, conceptual framework. Becoming an individual mind requires the destructive power of the lion.

To what extent are camels and lions present in today’s educational discourses? Educational thinkers offer words co-constituting practices. Probably, most thinkers understand themselves as lions, but the obsession for efficient solutions is tenacious (Blake, Smeyers, Smith, & Standish, 1998). Moreover, as we are in the business of words, the herd perspective is constantly luring.

Contemporary higher education seems to resonate with the transformation of the camel into a lion. My Nietzsche-inspired PhD research focused on the question what it means to educate students to become professionals able to strive for better in a world where ‘better’ changes. In retrospective, I was gripped by Nietzsche’s mission to create room for individuals to escape dominant social forces. In the Netherlands and Belgium, this research received a good amount of attention from philosophers and educators. Lion minds were triggered.

Nietzsche uses the metaphor of the child to refer to the third transformation. Was the lion characterised by a ruthless ‘no’, the child is characterised by a wholehearted ‘yes’. *Bejahung*, (not playfulness!) is the central category. It refers to an heightened awareness of belonging in the world and an openness for whatever is ‘be-coming’, be it self-destruction, prosperity or confusion. The child

encompasses a more 'sensing' awareness and it is able to 'see something that [...] still cannot be named even though it is lying right before everyone's eyes (Nietzsche, 1988b, 517; translation author)'.

The vast majority of today's scholars are novices as for the postlion era. It is a risky undertaking to embrace Nietzsche's motto 'Let's try it!' and endure the creative tension of 'not knowing'. From predominant neo-liberal perspectives, these endeavours are dismissed as irrational and untimely. There are, however, pioneers including Scharmer with Theory U (Scharmer, 2007). Furthermore, small scale, 'sensual' educational experiments are conducted among which creative, transformative writing (Lengelle & Ashby, 2017), and 'sparks of innovation' in educational contexts (Thölke, 2015). To what extent do we dare be inspired by these forerunners?

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