
CONVERSATION | RAZGOVOR

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**THE POETICS OF EDUCATION
IN CONVERSATION WITH ANDRZEJ WIERCIŃSKI'S
*HERMENEUTICS OF EDUCATION***

Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education (2019b) is an uncompromising book of inviolable tenor and significance in the field of hermeneutic education. It is also an unprecedented and exceptionally far-reaching voice in the scholarship on education in general. Its problematic not only inspires the reader to reconsider the exigencies of hermeneutic education in today's academic milieu, whose growing alienation from lived experience is a challenge for teachers and students alike, but invites us to respond to education's many and disquieting voices in the true spirit of Gadamerian hermeneutics as the art of conversation. A response to these voices is skillfully teased out, bit by bit, in the compelling diversity of the book's chapters that range from Gadamer's view of the lingual nature of human existence and his insistence on language as conversation, via Heidegger's crucial notion of calculative and non-calculative/contemplative modes of thinking (*berechnendes* and *besinnliches Denken*), right through to rich insights into Ricoeur's anthropology and phenomenological hermeneutics, and to pioneering reflections on Hegel and psychoanalysis, to name but a few of its central issues. The polyphonic nature of the book accounts for the intimate liaison and connectivity between speaking, thinking, and understanding,

conversation

which Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, in their inimitable yet complementary ways, recognize as being central to a hermeneutic investigation.

362 Wierciński's book is an unparalleled meditation on what it actually means to be a human being, whose being-in-the-world is, for that reason, a presence that is characterized by a restless search for understanding, wisdom, and growth, and thus for education as an ontologically corroborated mode of existence. It is only *in* and *through* this unflagging pursuit to understand reality, the Other, and the self, that our being as a human being comes to its full realization. Education is thus an expression of our humanity. In its embracement of this uniquely human quest for development, *Hermeneutics of Education* engages us to see and to understand that it is the hermeneutic welcoming of the heterogeneity of being a human being and of our being-in-the-world that creates a true possibility to view education as a mode of being, and to benefit fully from a thus defined stance. Assisting us on our journey through philosophical hermeneutics, hermeneutic anthropology, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis, as well as inviting us to appreciate poetic artistry and theological reflection, Wierciński makes us dwell in the depths of this rich reservoir of human thought and follow the hermeneutic recognition of the indispensability of such diverse, but also intersecting, paths of thinking that are brought together in the creative act of reaching out to what it means to be a human being. It is the reaching out for understanding of who we are as human beings that advances Wierciński's hermeneutic research. Reaching out for an understanding of *who* I am necessitates the orchestrating of many voices, as Wierciński does in his book, to the effect of edging nearer to answering the question about our humanity (and therefore also the educational project) in light of it.

Ever since the times of Aristotle, the stark differentiation made between the poetic and phronetic modes of being has marked what we understand by the imaginative (creative) impulse and provided the practical discernment for our understanding of reality (Aristotle 1962, 5–6). The tension between *phronesis* and *poesis* situates itself within the horizons of dichotomous thinking. Being in conversation with Wierciński's *Hermeneutics of Education* encourages us to grasp that it is only through thinking-the-difference (*das Differenzdenken*)

that we can understand reality's phenomenality more fully (cf. Wierciński 2019a, 61–91). Thinking-the-difference embraces such an understanding of what is on the other side of the divide that it does not make us stop at the dichotomous partition of the ways of thinking, does not lock the difference up in its differentiating propensity, and does not thereby coerce us to succumbing to the totality of its powerful differentiation. To employ thinking-the-difference in a response to Wierciński's book grants the reader a unique opportunity of experiencing this thinking's empowerment (*die Ermächtigung des Differenzdenkens*), and enables us to recognize the poetic pole of the educative venture as a legitimate space for an in-depth understanding that education embraces our reaching out for an understanding of a human being in its being-in-the-world. Thinking the two sides, thinking-the-poetic-pole, as reflected in the title of this review—"The Poetics of Education"—ensues from the conviction that, when we remain within the horizon of the inevitable tension, we can follow, as evidenced in Wierciński's book, to best advantage pedagogy's opposing paths of practical wisdom and creative (imaginative, poetic) ability.

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Being in conversation with *Hermeneutics of Education* encourages further reflection on the opposition between *phronesis* and *poesis*. Viewing Wierciński's book in light of Ricoeur's re-articulation of *phronesis*, which encompasses a less extreme approach to the demarcation lines between *phronesis* and *poesis*, sparks off a recognition that the poetic is one of *phronesis*' irreducible constituents. Ricoeur contends that *phronesis* engages with the fundamentally tragic situation of moral incommensurability and responds to this tragic situation by means of the creative act of devising appropriate solutions, appropriate—that is—in the circumstances (Ricoeur 1991b, 23–26; cf. Wall 2005, 75). Education is the *bona fide* locus of unpredictability and risk-taking. If we want to truly learn, we must understand that education is *not* about an accumulation of knowledge, and is *not* to be awarded to our lives as if it were a fine ornament (which can even make us vain, conceited, and narcissistic), but that it is about what we learn impacting the entirety of our lives, not leaving us as we were before. Education is a life-changing enterprise which listens to the incommensurate voices, enhancing a phronetic and, as we may say, also a creative (imaginative) response—which rests on Aristotle's *poesis*. Education is

a highly creative rejoinder to the endless possibilities of being that open up before us when we participate in Being. In its creativity, education nurtures the human being's fundamental need of interpreting and understanding. Dialoguing with *Hermeneutics of Education* in the perspective of the propinquity of *phronesis* and *poesis* to us, allows us to open ourselves to the unmapped, formerly unrecognized spaces of the educational enterprise *per se*.

364 The book offers a hermeneutic answer to the queries raised in contemporary educative literature and the practical problems discernible in today's educational practices. Wierciński places his reflection on education within the tradition of Wilhelm von Humboldt's notion of *Bildung* (formation). His pondering on *Bildung* shows some affinities with today's other widely read scholars in the field of hermeneutics and education, Jean Grondin, Nicholas Davey, Babette Babich, Graeme Nicholson, and Ramsey Eric Ramsey (cf. Fairfield 2010). However, upholding the Gadamerian elucidation of the primacy of conversation as our mode of being-in-the-world, the book situates the *formative* aspect of education within an exceptionally wide range of areas—so far uncharted—in which it widens the scope and testifies to education's *transformative* dimension, and thus makes us fully appreciate Wierciński's one-and-only voice. His insights into education's concerns, as afforded by philosophical hermeneutics, endorsed with a keen investigation into theological thought, and substantiated with finesse in his appreciation of poetry (as diverse as that of Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert, T. S. Eliot, Friedrich Hölderlin, Wisława Szymborska, C. V. Cavafy, and Rainer Maria Rilke), can be picked up by us as Wierciński's distinctive hallmarks. This book stimulates its readers to stay in a productive dialogue with the abundance of meanings it proffers while they follow the exhilarating path as carved out by the author's true companionship in understanding (*mane nobiscum*). Wierciński's exquisite fidelity to the hermeneutic investigation's ultimate openness to the unexpected invites us to make it our own *conversatio morum*, in which we find ourselves entering new and inconceivable realities. The author's hermeneutic reflection not only enthralls us to follow St. Bonaventura's plea to expand on our contemplative work (*contemplata tradere*), but makes it happen (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*).

Compounding philosophical and theological research, Wierciński's *oeuvre*, as exemplified by *Hermeneutics of Education*, gives testimony to the universality

and versatility of hermeneutic endeavor. His astute drawing from the wealth of Christian theology is an enactment of interpretation, as hermeneutics' primary goal *par excellence*. Interpretation makes the paths of philosophy and theology converge: it really cannot help it! Wierciński explains the theological basis of interpretation thus:

Interpretation is an event, an encounter (*Begegnung*), where the human being is addressed by a Thou, a God, whose veiled face is looking at the human face in the eternal now, in the inviting gesture to converse (*conversare* means to turn around). In this turning around lies the secret of attentiveness, the sensitized awareness of someone else's presence even if this is a silent presence, not manifested in vocal communication. (2019b, 85)

Following the overlapping paths of philosophy and theology is engrained deeply in hermeneutics. We can call upon Heidegger's sincere admitting to the theological origin of his philosophy: "Without this theological background I should never have come upon the path of thinking." (Heidegger 1971, 9–10) It is hard to overestimate theology's and philosophy's intersecting routes. Essentially, the etymology of "to contemplate"—Latin *contemplāre*, to look at fixedly, observe, notice, ponder—marks pointedly the human being's capability of pondering, which breeds philosophical and theological contemplative work alike. Underwriting his pedagogical reflection with Heidegger's distinction between *calculative* and *meditative thinking* (cf. Heidegger 1968, 8; Heidegger 1966, 44–56; cf. also Wierciński 2005, 413–432), the author maintains that it is the contemplative (non-calculative) mode of thinking that predisposes us to a genuine recognition of what happens to us and in us when we teach and learn. It is the non-calculative thinking that enables us to appreciate the true value of educating and being educated, against the outrageous policy of measurable ends and reckless concentration on the efficacy of educational systems.

Theological thinking, which Wierciński employs as an aid in explaining the crux of education's *forming* aspect (St. Augustine's teaching), is embedded in an impressively broad perspective of education's trans-*formative* potency. It is the focus on the application (*An-wendung*) of a dialogic encounter, in its vital

openness and an inevitable *metanoia*, as professed by Gadamer (1986, 188), which makes Wierciński's voice reverberate strongly in a time of incessant dissatisfaction with the pedagogical performance as offered by the academia, and a devaluation of education's main precepts. Re-conceptualizing our beliefs about the very core of what we understand by education, he finds in the inconclusive, surprising, and unrepeatable character of the dialogic encounter, which happens between the educator and the educated, a true possibility to respond to the problems faced by today's educational systems.

366 The art of conversation in its phenomenality provides us with a possibility of understanding, and to understand always anew and differently. Conversation is the true locus of our reaching out for understanding. It is only *in* and *through* conversation that we can experience the distinct way of how understanding happens. Without *con-versing*, we would not be able to understand a particular phenomenon in the same way. The presence of the Other, our interlocutor, gives us a unique opportunity to unravel what needs to be understood. It is not through devising multiple and versatile answers to a given question, or through an accumulation of more details, that we come to an understanding. Being-in-conversation means that we can discover something that we would not be able to discover on our own. It is the communal aspect which causes that the phenomenon stands in front of us *differently*, it speaks to us *differently*. Espousing the centrality of the dialogic encounter, as elucidated by Gadamer, *Hermeneutics of Education* proves dialogue's indispensability in the educational environment and its ever-energizing, phenomenal validity in teaching and learning.

The book's introduction invites us to dwell in thinking as our true and primary commitment of our-being-in-the-world, and to remain in amazement concerning the beauty of the unpredictability of a human being's experiencing of his/her being-in-the-world. The concluding sections dub education to be the true space for a hospitality, in which the educator and the student can give and receive generously. The reciprocity of being a gift to the Other is an essential prerequisite for an effective pedagogy. Education, which treats hospitality as its paradigm, is also a risk-involving endeavor in which one's cultivation of a willingness to understand entails situations of precariousness and incommensurability.

The opening sections invite the subsequent discussion of education's manifold facets through the lens of hermeneutic sensibility. To approach them in a highly evocative fashion, in the book's opening, is Wierciński's hermeneutic, welcoming gesture to appreciate their full involvement in the corpus chapters. Explicating the eventful nature of education (which is always also a collaborative event), Wierciński affirms that education is the art of "leading forth." Education is an expression and fulfilment of human inquisitiveness and restlessness, and can, therefore, be viewed—as it looms large in Wierciński's account—as being the culture of questioning.

Upholding the event-like character of education, the author accentuates its experiential and ontological provenance: "Education is always a happening, ἐνέργεια. It is an enactment (*Vollzug*) of processes we are involved in. Thus, education is a way of being-in-the-world of the human being. This *modus essendi* is always a *modus experiendi* of Being." (2019b, 10) He asserts that education cannot be severed from the lived experience of a human being: "Education is the art of leading forth (*educere*), and, as such, belongs to the totality of human experience. In drawing forth that which is within, it cannot be separated from the experience of being-in-the-world." (ibid.) Molding and training (*educare*), although important, do not suffice, since education in its immersion in the human being's being-in-the-world encompasses much more, in fact, the whole of human existence and his/her experiencing of him/herself, the Other, and the world.

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Through thus emphatically expressed relatedness to the Other and the world, we are led to appreciate education as a collaborative event (in Latin, to collaborate means to labor together: *com-laborare*; cf. 2019b, 11). We experience our working together as a genuine opportunity for an opening up of completely new horizons. It is, as the author explains, the merging of our own horizon and that of the Other (Gadamer's *Horizontverschmelzung*; 2006, 388–389) that allows us to see novel and otherwise unattainable perspectives.

Invoking Czesław Miłosz's enticing stanzas, Wierciński muses on our possession of inquisitive and restless minds, capable of "marveling at the beauty and complexity of being a human being in the world as a condition of living in the fourfold of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals." (2019b, 12) It is the very experience of dwelling in that fourfold, thus sketched, that makes us not

only wonder about our relationship to ourselves, to others, and the world, but persist in asking questions. Through our perseverance in posing questions we build education—the culture of questioning. It is education’s magnanimous role not to fall prey to a neglectful attitude as regards uncertainty and ambiguity. As a matter of fact, it is ambiguities, the profuse, vague, and even confusable opinions that are welcomed by hermeneutic education in its fearless openness to otherness. If confidence, security, and precision are fundamental to our understanding and self-understanding, ambivalence and uncertainty go squarely into the heart of the hermeneutics of education. Such an attitude mirrors Ricoeur’s elucidation of the hermeneutic enterprise as involving a two-fold allegiance: our willingness to understand and our being earnest enough to doubt, to air our suspicion (cf. Thiselton 2009, 19).

368 In his ample scrutiny of education’s miscellaneous aspects, Wierciński joins the necessity of listening to those diverse voices to the phenomenon of the narrative nature of our lives—with our urge to tell stories and to understand our experiences via stories, “understanding un-folds as the story progresses.” (2019b, 14–15) Teaching is a gradual un-folding of understanding. It is the multiple layers of meaning, the multitudinous senses of everything that get unfurled, which make the educational activities so thrilling: “Teaching/Learning is a journey toward the complexity of the world and us in the world.” (2019b, 15) The accent on the narrative is of seminal import. In its appealing advocacy of the narrative theory, Wierciński’s book shows not only an adherence to its tenets but epitomizes its strengths. His introductory essay “Hermeneutic Commitment to Thinking” anticipates part three, which is an in-depth unraveling of the benefits of the narrative turn in education.

If we assume that teaching has always been about the use of some particular tactics, then, without a shadow of a doubt, Wierciński’s alerting to the specificity of tactics occasioned by hermeneutic education, revolutionizes our view of effective pedagogy. Debunking the commonly believed understanding of tactics at the service of educational systems, he speaks of it in terms of “tact (*tactus*), a way of handling the difficult task of education, which involves our real touching (Latin *tactus* means touching, from *tangere* to touch). The experience of touching implicates that we are always both, touching the other and being touched by the other.” (2019b, 18) A firm conviction of the mutuality

of teaching and learning has an enormous bearing on our understanding of education, as it allows us to see what is happening to us when we teach and learn. In light of this cutting-edge *touch* on pedagogy, we can more fully appreciate Wierciński's radical hermeneutics of education and his demystifying of deep-rooted and unfortunate assertions by educational systems in existence.

While the guiding thread of the book is an avowal of the primacy of conversation in hermeneutic pedagogy, the manifold aspects that the book tackles arise from an acknowledgement of the inextricable tension between sameness and otherness in the educational context. It is the stirring otherness of the Other that is conversationally inspiring for us. Conversation is a true opening toward Being, (with)in our limitedness, finiteness, and conditionality. If education seeks to enlighten, to ennoble, to improve, it is a lack (or imperfection) that directs us to the heart of the hermeneutic education's ontological bases. Hermeneutic education does not aim to fulfill our craving for knowledge, even though it is commonly thought to be education's basic role to do so, but to make us aware of, and guide us in, our response to Being. As Wierciński reminds us: "Our experience of imperfection influences our answer to the revelation of Being; it stimulates our receptivity to the countless possibilities that Being gives us as a gift." (2019b, 76) It is the infinite possibilities that unfold before us, which make us genuinely search for self-development, and, above all, for disclosing to ourselves the meaning of our existence.

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The book's division into three main parts reflects an attentive and mindful discernment of hermeneutic education's central and pressing concerns. Chapter one, "Hermeneutics of Education as a Hermeneutics of Conversation: Education in the Horizon of Responsibility," places hermeneutics of conversation within the skyline of the meaning-laden notion of responsibility. Fore-fronting the primordial belonging together of thinking and speaking, this part of the book resorts to phenomenological hermeneutics and its ontological backdrop, allowing us to see understanding as our mode of being-in-the-world. Wierciński accentuates that it is the tension between familiarity and strangeness, sameness and otherness, that activates hermeneutic education's openness to the richness, unpredictability, and radicality of the conversational encounter between the educator and the educated. The author's unrivalled explication of responsibility-as-a-response (resting on responsibility's Latin

root of *re-spondeo*) draws us to the very heart of what it means to be a responsible human being.

Since education always aspires to make our capability of responsibility evolve and mature, the seriousness of the question of *how* to do it cannot be overestimated. Wierciński discloses to us that a genuine development of a human being can only be occasioned by engaging oneself in an act of responsibility, which is always an act of our exercising a response. Giving a response is ultimately an individual act. In its phronetic orientation, our response can be a discovery of what is already there in us and is best fitting, in particular to the circumstances, or what we are called to devise instantaneously in order to behave responsibly. The idiosyncratic nature of our answer attests not just to our individuality (it can be different from somebody else's response), but to the uniqueness of the situation we encounter and through which responsibility is activated.

370 Wierciński's sagacious approach in elucidating the unique character of hermeneutic education is expressed in a thoughtful deployment of the opulence and vibrancy of philosophical as well as theological thinking. Following St. Augustine's teaching, the author invites us to see that being too full of oneself is an essential obstacle on the way to reaching one's full potential. The unadulterated self-development requires a remarkable kind of openness to self-emptying, to answer the call for an unlimited *effata*. Hermeneutic education therefore reflects *existentia hermeneutica*, which is also a kenotic existence. Wierciński reminds us of education's kenotic aspect that lies at the center of our identification of its conversational character:

The conversation is the experience of the self-emptying (*Entäußerung*, ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, Phil 2:7). In this kenotic aspect, it is precisely the openness to experience, the readiness to accept the pain of critique and misunderstanding, which makes us aware of our limitation as radically finite human beings. (2019b, 38)

To develop fully as a human being means to allow oneself to be emptied in order to be filled up, to facilitate one's blossoming in unforeseeable and novel ways. Hermeneutic education aims to provide means to make us reach

our unique irreplaceability which actualizes itself in the lived experience as we journey through our lives. This is a bewildering self-*Bildung*, in which we participate, a conscious, creative, and responsible *Nachbildung* (*homo capax Dei*), as well as a formative and transformative *Vorbildung* (2019b, 10).

Assuming that trust is education's indispensable mode of communication—trust enables the educator and the educated to create the space for mutual expectations and fulfillments, despite the many unavoidable, and also needed situations, where suspicion makes the educational path both thorny and exhilarating—we can better understand the closeness between trust and responsibility. Following Ricoeur, Wierciński makes the interlocking character of trust and responsibility clear to us: “responsibility is the counterpart of fragility as that ‘which one exercises toward someone or something fragile that has been entrusted to us.’” (Ricoeur 1994, 25) Education is a process of entrusting oneself to the Other, and exercising responsibility for the Other as entrusted to me. The hermeneutic education's dynamics of trust (sympathy) and suspicion (disbelief) reflects hermeneutics' double commitment: the need to understand and to suspect, fostered by Ricoeur. In this light, Wierciński's clear-cut accentuation of the connection between responsibility and phronetic judgment cannot be overstated:

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It is instructive to consider Ricoeur's notion of responsibility in the context of *phronesis*. Practical judgment is a reflective act of reasoning, enabling us to recognize the call to act and to respond adequately to that which calls us to action. Practical judgment depends on the perceptiveness and responsibility of the individual self. (2019b, 123)

Inasmuch as hermeneutic education orients itself toward practicing responsibility for the Other, it concerns also a self-trust and self-responsibility, responsibility for one's self. Elucidating Heidegger's differentiation between calculative and non-calculative (contemplative) thinking, Wierciński demonstrates the gist of Heidegger's hermeneutics of responsibility, which rests on taking responsibility for oneself, by an act of which one partakes in Being's self-disclosure. To guard what is disclosed, delineates the trajectory of a responsible action. Although Ricoeur's and Heidegger's approaches seem

to differ substantially, Ricoeur's admission of the Heideggerian legacy in his thinking can be traced in "Entretien" (Ricoeur 1994, 25). Wierciński contends that Ricoeur's and Heidegger's views on responsibility, although inimitable, can also be seen as entwining with one another. He calls upon Ricoeur's understanding of responsibility: "The responsibility has only a temporal significance, new developments and new perceptions call for a new discourse. But this responsibility is cosmic responsibility, bound to the human existence to preserve the dignity of man *per se* as ever-transcendent possibility." (2019b, 131) The complementariness of Ricoeur's and Heidegger's approaches to responsibility is expressed in the hermeneutic education's concern with the care for the self, the care for the Other, and the care for the self as the other.

372 The book's second part puts the human person as the capable subject at its center. By engaging with the tenets of anthropology, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, as well as drawing on the recent findings of carnal hermeneutics, it participates in the ongoing debate on the holistic approach to education with its emphasis on the soul's and the body's cultivation. This part takes full cognizance of the human being's fundamental capabilities in the process of education and self-education, understood as a *formative* and *trans-formative* venture. The chapter's concerns are encapsulated in its telling title: "Cultivating the Hermeneutic Eye and Ear: Education as the Care for the Self." Part two is an apt and inspiring evocation of the hermeneutic care of the self. Wierciński's wide-embracing approach makes space for the issues of the cultivation of the soul (*cultura animi*), hermeneutic hospitality, as well as a phenomenological investigation of the manifold psychological states of being under the thought-provoking caption of "the disease of the soul." Rounded-up with a reflection on the convergences between hermeneutics and psychoanalysis, part two also sheds light on the inescapable limitedness of possible interpretation—with which we need to make do, any time we attempt to understand our human predicament.

Tackling various aspects of our existential journey through life, "Cultivating the Hermeneutic Eye and Ear" convinces us that: "The art of living human life consists in mastering the art of being with oneself and the other. It is the art of facing life." (2019b, 148) This "facing of life" calls us to recognize our experiences in the entirety of their incomplete and unsatisfactory character,

and thus to feel *pro-voked* (*vocatio*) into searching for meaningful changes and growth. Re-orienting, re-directing, and re-locating ourselves in life, we give an answer to the transformative call of Being. It is our indispensable openness and suppleness of partaking in Being, our tenacious following of the path of life, through which our humanity has a chance to fully transpire. Not stifling the often-confusing voices predisposes us to respond to Being's call for an authentic existence. Wierciński accentuates that it is vital not to neglect, disregard, or dismiss the often contradictory, competing, and even threatening voices that we hear in ourselves, as it is exactly through a very patient and thoughtful discernment of those voices that we can reach for an understanding of our existence, as well as being capable of choosing wisely while exerting our response to the ethical issues we are confronted with. For Wierciński,

[...] there is no voice which can be suffocated if we want to live a human life. It is essential never to be at peace with conventional answers but always patiently learn to listen to the voices, which often bring about great confusion rather than the simple clarity. This surrendering to the voices of human life without manipulating them uncovers the potential of being different. It is an answer to the transformative call of Being, which requires our re-positioning in life, our *con-versio*. (2019b, 144)

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Drawing extensively on the intrinsic tension between human capability and vulnerability, as rendered in Ricoeur's notion of the subject as an acting and suffering person (*l'homme agissant et souffrant*; cf. Ricoeur 1992, 21–23; cf. also Thomasset 1966, 195 and Wierciński 2013, 18–33), Wierciński makes it explicit that in our sincere search for self-understanding, as acting and suffering subjects, we are called to admit that we are both “inherently open and unable to come to a final closure.” (2019b, 192) Thus we can experience ourselves as being molded, chiseled, and polished in the creative and joyous acts of self-*Bildung*, with no “lasting satisfaction,” no “stable resting place,” (2019b, 162) staying open to newness, to the unending process of becoming (*Zuwachs an Sein*; cf. Gadamer 2006, 135–136). As the author suggests, it is the human being's openness and essential capability of a continuous astonishment which propel phronetic education's versatility and agility in its comprehensive

recognition of the human existence's potential. Following Ricoeur, Wierciński maintains that, as human beings, we face the unwavering call of Being to shape and re-shape our existence hermeneutically. In an incessant quest for understanding, instigated by an unflagging awe, we experience a *metanoia* of the ego in the detours to the self via the richness of signs that have been deposited in culture.

The tension between human capabilities and the corresponding vulnerabilities of the human being compels us to take a closer look at the human person as the suffering subject. An insight into what happens when we help the Other as the vulnerable and wounded self, leads Wierciński not only to delve into the meanderings of the human soul (melancholia, depression, sadness), but to present healing as the genuine process of taking care of the soul. Wierciński's involved approach prompts him to reflect on the apparent intersections between psychoanalysis and education, which is his ingenious contribution to the meditation on education as the care for/of the self. The author's unprecedented take on psychoanalysis in light of Hegel's notion of unhappy consciousness and situating it in the wide spectrum of his discussion of hermeneutic education, opens up the possibility of new forays into an understanding of education's and psychoanalysis' interweaving paths.

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The novelty of Wierciński's approach lies in unveiling to us that the psychoanalytic *con-versation* as *con-version* enacts a model of an educational encounter. Psychoanalysis can be seen as mirroring and enacting an educative paradigm. The gist of the psychoanalytic conversation rests on its educative aspect for both sides: the analysand and the analyst. It is not the know-how, a set of hints or ready-made answers of how to get out from the quagmire of one's predicament that counts in successful treatment, but the creation of a space for the analysand to uncover a unique path and to recognize it as just the right one and unrepeatable path towards regaining one's integrated self. Assisting the wounded self in his/her own untangling of the knot, facilitating him/her on the way to integrative maturity, is what the effective treatment consists in. Undoubtedly, such an approach displays a hermeneutic (phronetic) sensibility. In this light, psychoanalysis is an exercising of practical wisdom. Furthermore, a psychoanalytic dialogic encounter entails the analyst's self-education. It precipitates not only the analysand, but the analyst, into taking part in self-

education. The dynamically interchanging roles of the analyst (educator) and the analysand (the educated) manifest what is happening in the psychoanalytic conversation. This unusual interplay of being analyzed and analyzing the Other is a prerequisite of an effectual cure. Education impacts both the student and the educator, and similarly, the psychoanalytic conversation affects not only the analysand but also the analyst. The paradigm of educating and being educated is mirrored in the psychoanalytic encounter. The psychoanalytic conversation, when seen as reflecting an educative process, but also education, when viewed as modelled on the psychoanalytic conversation, confirm the interlocking and reciprocal relationship between psychoanalysis and education.

In light of the above, we may notice that even if the section on phronetic medicine and the phronetic doctor in “The Disease of the Soul and the Imperative of the Care for the Soul” can be, at face value, considered as far-fetched, a closer look at it affords an appreciation of a highly observant meditation on the all at once staggering awareness of the body’s import in today’s world and an impasse in bringing forth the prudent treatment of our bodies. As Wierciński claims, it is the hermeneutic approach to a human being’s ailments, as well as to medical systems, that is capable of reinstating a conscientious cultivation of the body that encompasses an existential and integrative change. He wins us over by claiming that: “Healing is rather a new way of existence of the patient, in which not only the condition of the patient changes but, and primarily, the patient oneself.” (2019b, 179) And so the passage on phronetic medicine (which, in fact, attests to the need of our being in dialogue with all voices, and which perplexes us on first reading, in an even more involved way), convinces us further that it is the self-*change* (the patient’s, i.e., the analysand’s *metanoia*) that the healing process (be it medical or psychoanalytic) occasions, which truly answers the need of a return to an existential *equilibrium*. Inserting a thus elucidated viewpoint on phronetic medicine in his meditation on education as reaching out for an understanding of who we are, Wierciński leaves no doubt about its significance for our understanding of the centrality of *con-version* in the patient, the analysand, and the student alike.

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Discussing the hermeneutic hospitality of a human being, which makes it possible to face the Other, and the self as the other too, both with gratitude, and in the wholeness of experience, part two of the book also gives us an

important insight into the issue of translation as “one of the most compelling hermeneutic gestures,” (2019b, 214) thus deepening our awareness of the inimitable connection between translation, interpretation, and our ardent need for effective communication. Taking an understanding of interpretation’s and translation’s intimacy to its fullest degree, Wierciński postulates that the unmatched strength of hermeneutic education rests on its full recognition that the horizon of interpretation is just the one that we have, and that by dwelling in it we can, not only uncover for ourselves the best ways of responding to our being-in-the-world, but continually re-interpret, and understand anew what we have already understood (Gadamer’s indefatigable dictum of *Immer-anders-Verstehen*: “Wir verstehen immer anders, wenn wir verstehen;” 2006, 297). Wierciński asserts that:

376 [...] all human life, all experience, thought, and language are interpretation/translation. In fact, to be human means to interpret/translate. The art of being human is the art of interpretation/translation. To exist is to be situated in the hermeneutic horizon in which translation is a model of hermeneutics. (2019b, 215)

The author’s explication of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self, of his state-of-the-art notion of narrative identity (cf. Ricoeur 1991a, 73–81; Ricoeur 1987, 249), as well as the discussion of the implications of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of capability for an understanding of “who we are” (in part two), is a conscious move to focus on the demonstration of the application of Ricoeur’s philosophy of the self in the educational environment in the book’s subsequent part. As a result, part three offers a novel approach in showing the fruits of the Ricoeurian hermeneutics, with the exigency of the narrative understanding of human existence as its pivot. The author’s original voice in this respect is summarized in the part’s title: “Narrative Turn in the Hermeneutics of Education. Toward a Hermeneutics of Lived Time.” Resonating with the ground-breaking significance of the hermeneutic turn (the linguistic turn) in cultural, literary, biblical, and, as a matter of fact, all other fields in the humanities, as well as in the natural sciences (medicine, law, etc.), Wierciński’s focus on the narrative turn in the hermeneutics of education is undeniably a one-of-a-kind explication of endless

possibilities of the employment of narrative theory in the praxis of education.

Demonstrating the import of the narrative turn in the hermeneutics of education, part three accounts for the necessity to see education as the locus of lived experience that happens in time, is aware of its processual nature, and impacted by time's existential demands. Education, viewed as reflecting the narrative character of human existence, involves both the satisfaction of self-development and the risk of failure, and, insofar, becomes challenging as a rewarding project that situates the human being's striving for self-improvement in the enticing ambit of narrating and re-narrating the story of one's life. This part's first section, "A Healing Journey toward Oneself: Paul Ricoeur's Narrative Turn in the Hermeneutics of Education," is a convincing appeal to risk entering upon the journey of understanding, and is also emblematic for the entirety of the themes embraced by the author's investigative grasp of the phenomenon of an understanding of our lives via a narrative.

The chapter's first subsection, "Narrative Mode of Understanding: Education as the *Bildung* of the Humanity of the Human Being," proposes a remarkable shift in educational paradigms. The narrative turn in education allows us to release the obsessive concentration on the achievement of the best educational goals to see "people in their full integrity as the *raison d'être* of any educational system, and, as such, as a vital part of the possible solution." (2019b, 234) It is a twisting from an understanding-from-the-outside to an understanding-from-within-the-inside, in which the human being stands firm as education's true target. Instead of the slavish obedience to a set of prescribed rules and the frenzied pursuit to meet measurable ends, education (when freed from its achievement paradigm) is capable, according to Wierciński, of creating a hospitable place for ambiguity, plurivocity, and heterogeneity for an unforeseeable development of a human being's full potential.

Hermeneutic education topples the falsity of the portrait of a well-educated person as confident of his/her "own intellectual treasures toward an optimally orchestrated self-reliance and independence," (2019b, 233) often haunted by unhealthy pride and arrogance, and helps "discover the full spectrum of what it means to be a human being and how to 'live a good life in just institutions,' including all insecurities and weaknesses, not by masking and covering them up, but by humbling ourselves in the most profound

sense of humility.” (Ibid.) The movement from arrogance to humility is the only effective way of our self-*Bildung*, of building the humanity of ourselves as human beings, contrary to the dehumanizing politics of effectiveness and the race to success.

378 The narrative turn in education is a genuine response to the call of Being and the phenomenality of narrative as an all-embracing and universally valid mode of expression. We are always already in stories, we find ourselves to be telling stories, and, as story-tellers, we are the first to be astounded by how and what we narrate: “We live surrounded by our stories and the stories of others, and from the very beginning of our existence, we learn to see everything in and around us through these stories.” (2019b, 234) I agree with the book’s claim that our lives are not fully intelligible to us. We need narratives to be able to capture the fragmentary and often highly tangled “hi-stories” of our lives. The constant re-configuring work that we do, when trying to dismantle the complexities of our lives and enigmas, bespeaks the plurality of voices that grant meaning to our existence. We continually construct and re-construct (Ricoeur’s three-fold *mimesis* that accounts for pre-figuring, configuring, and re-configuring of reality’s representation; cf. Ricoeur 1984, 52–87). Narration does not delimit itself to its constructing role. And the narrative’s age-old cathartic function still does not exhaust its countless propensities: the narrative can also camouflage and distort covering up the displeasing elements by using stratagems and producing covert, evasive, and deceptive statements.

The narrative turn in education is fed by the narrative’s manifold functions in its encouragement of questioning the homogeneous world view, by making it possible for us to position ourselves in different and surprising horizons. Every attempt to narrate reminds us also of the incomplete, insufficient, and even inadequate nature of our rendering of reality, also the reality of our lives. The illusoriness of the reliability of our accounts attests to the mirage of a total intelligibility of ourselves and of the world.

The narrative grants us with an exceptional possibility to work through our experiences (the Freudian *Durcharbeiten*; cf. Freud 1950, 155–156). Wierciński picks up on this propensity of the narrative to assert that the narrative turn in education provides us with an irreplaceable possibility to meet our need

of understanding our wounded self. Setting off on an educative journey is also embarking on a healing journey. It is the dialectics of remembering and forgetting (which Ricoeur discusses in his influential *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) that activates, as Wierciński elaborates, our meaningful return to the whole. We can thus attain an integral maturity:

Education can help us to see the horizon of our healing, despite the clouds on that horizon. It encourages discovering the meaning of pardon on the way to make this horizon into the horizon of healing. If the pardon is a healing of memory, then remembering is necessary to pardon with forgiveness, which is an experience of healing the past in order to make us whole again for the future. (2019b, 246)

Attaining integral maturity means growing in wisdom. It is our educational gain. Paradoxically, our losses, wounds, and traumas become our most precious gains.

Advocating strongly for the narrative turn in education, Wierciński contends that it is when we constructively engage with social conventions and patterns of thinking, and do not instead fulfill our wish to overcome them in haste and too easily, that we give an existential answer to the complexity and diversity (*circumdata varietate*) of our lives. A human being's experiencing of the essentiality of the existential aspect of education is expressed in one's concern with

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[...] carrying oneself through one's life. It is a special kind of carrying, carrying with happiness, εὐφορία (εὐφορος, "bearing well" from εὖ and φέρειν "to bear"). It teaches us to situate ourselves between different cultural horizons and different narratives in order to consciously shape one's identity and life story in the ambivalent horizon of in-between. (2019b, 235)

Espousing diversity as "a global spiritual language of humanity," the hermeneutics of lived time, as explicated by Wierciński, stands up against any reductionist approaches to education, any attempts to narrow it down and to

fashion it so as to satisfy some particular community's or individual pressures. Wierciński makes a strong claim in this respect:

Education cannot be reduced to an answer to the demands of individuals and society. Education is far less about duty than about engagement. By engaging the whole person, we are getting acquainted with him/her and experiencing the person from her or his underlying conviction. This kind of existential opening toward the other results in the fundamental change we undergo. (2019b, 255)

Opening ourselves existentially, we open ourselves to the other, to the other as betokening a different world view, different experiences, and a different history. It is the inescapability of our conversion (*con-versio*) which is prompted by the confrontation with otherness, and which makes hermeneutic education so entrenched in our lived experience.

380 Being in conversation with *Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education* leaves no doubt that Wierciński's illuminative contribution to pedagogical scholarship is an outstandingly abundant, varied, and multi-layered piece of literature. It will definitely impact anyone who truly searches for an answer to the recurring question of education's role and destiny in the postmodern milieu of lost certainties, axiological crisis, and existential void. The lavish and nuanced nature of the book's investigations calls us to pursue phronetic wisdom and to apply (*anwenden*) it in the educational environment.

Wierciński's book is an inspirational answer to the voices questioning the validity of the hermeneutic approach to education and allows for a fuller appreciation of the hermeneutic response to today's educational dilemmas. It proves that the alleged disconnectedness of the hermeneutics of education from empirical research cannot be taken up as a convincing standpoint. Wierciński's evocation of the hermeneutics of the lived experience in the pedagogical environment demonstrates the inseparability of any of the human experiences of being in an educative process from their existential, and also their empirical dimension. To partake in pedagogical practices means to enter a situation, each time, in which the research on educational methodology

activates itself in a dynamic and captivating way. The book's thematizing of the phenomenology of education and the filtering of pedagogical practices (exploring what happens to us when we teach and learn) through the lens of philosophical hermeneutics show that the hermeneutics of education is not an ornate addition to pedagogical studies but unveils education's real face. The veracity of the hermeneutics of education is confirmed in a human being's unrelenting search for an answer to his/her need to be educated. This interminable quest is, as a matter of fact, a hermeneutic process of constructing and reconstructing, interpreting and re-interpreting of what best suits one to fulfill the desire of being a well-educated person. Education, in its most rudimentary character, is a hermeneutic enterprise which opposes any oversimplifications or reductionist construing and tailoring of what it means to teach and learn. The inseparability of hermeneutics and education provides a fertile ground for further pedagogical research in the humanities.

All in all, to use the language of narrative theory, which is the book's unquestionable axis, I must say that thinking with Wierciński is an engrossing and open-ended *story*, which confirms that in our openness and unflinching desire to interpret and understand we are always in the position of learning more and learning anew. Education is thus our *modus vivendi*, a lifestyle.

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Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education stirs up our minds to be attentive and vigilant, while powerfully convincing us that education is about "getting at the imaginative variations of ourselves." Wierciński's elucidation of the narrative turn in education sensitizes us to the multiplicity of forms and voices that the educative narrative encompasses and makes us see the ultimate intimacy of the liaison between the narrative of education and the narratives of our lives. The narrative turn in education accounts for our unceasing educational discoveries, for reading and interpreting what is in us. In our configuring and reconfiguring of our life's narratives, we open ourselves to the hermeneutic hope of education. Following Wierciński's hermeneutic thinking through the book's impressive assembly of themes, we move forward towards a better understanding of the poetics of education.

Wierciński's book, like poetic discourse, unveils to us the hidden aspects of education's reality. By voicing them, it makes us identify new ways of

seeing them and allows for new ways of experiencing them. I am delighted to recommend this landmark piece of pedagogical literature to anyone who is capable of taking the risk of exploring and experiencing the beauty of education's unpredictability as mandatory reading.

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