

The Creative Force of Wonder

- *'the voice of being' is also connected to the ontological voice of the subject matter (0307)*

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Introduction

In contemporary phenomenological research in higher education there has been for some years a concern about how to give voice not only to vulnerable students, who have difficulties participating in higher education – but also to give voice to the experience of what is seen as the essence of being in an *educational* (Bildung) process on a university (Thomson, 2001, Dall'Alba, 2005, Batchelor, 2006, Barnett, 2007). How can the search for *wisdom* again become an important part of the researcher's momentum?

Contemporary universities experiences a growing demand from economical and political systems to increase standardization, efficiency, and 'knowledge production' in research and teaching, which is first of all pragmatic and utilitarian in its orientation. Some describes this development in positive terms as a new kind of 'Mode 2 knowledge', which will create a greater awareness of the importance of practice epistemology and practice research (Gibbons et al, 1994). But there are also other 'voices' in this debate, which focus on the need for a 'Mode 3 approach', where more ontological and existential aspects of learning, teaching and research are taken up. To become an critical creative and educated student (or teacher) one should not only be able to hear '*the voice of knowing*', '*the voice of doing*' and '*the voice of control and marketing*', that is the professional epistemological voice, the practical and technological voice and the voice of the Systems. One should indeed also hear '*the voice of being*', that is the ontological voice.

I agree with Denise Batchelor and Ronald Barnett that the ontological voice is fundamental to those three other voices. But when they describe the ontological voice as a listening to the question: *Who am I?* instead of *What do I know?*, *What can I do?* *What should I do (to become successful)?*, I miss an important part of the ontological voice.

The ontological voice is, in my view, not only about engaging with the students as persons and helping them finding their own 'personal voice' in the choir of the epistemological, practical and systemic voices. The ontological voice is also a listening to the call of "the thing it self"(die 'Sachen selbst'). In the existentialistic Sartrean idea of self-becoming we are not encouraged to listen to the Call of the Thou or Being as Martin Buber, Gadamer or Heidegger describe in their philosophy. They would say that to authentically become oneself one must step aside to be grasped by life itself in the moment. This demands a fundamental kind of openness, humbleness and existential vulnerability and a 'not-knowing-attitude'. An attitude or way of being, which exactly is not found in the attitude of the knowing, curious or problem-solving person!

The American phenomenologist Steen Halling (2008) talks about *transcendence* as the moment that might happen in genuine conversations – not with our selves but precisely in conversations with other persons. Seeing the other for the first time, or seeing the common world as if for the

first time, is in his view a moment of transcendence. He briefly mentions ‘wonder’ as a way of being, or an opening towards life, which might best characterize these precious moments.

I want in this paper to go deeper into the phenomenology of wonder to see or hear better ‘the sounding of wonder’ (Sallis, 1995). What are some of the things that sound in wonder? Why might it be necessary to make a fundamental distinction between on the one hand the way Aristotle and Hegel talks about wonder, and on the other hand the way Plato and Heidegger talks about it? What does it mean to be in wonder, or as the German phenomenologist Eugen Fink describes it: ‘to visit the ground of things’, and why did Fink find a close connection between being in wonder and original theory (*Theoria* in Greek sense)?

These are some of the questions, which I am troubled by but also encouraged to stay and patiently live with, in my attempt at my university to create an university pedagogy (if that is possible at all!) which can give voices to creative wonder, that I find is the most basic element in the educational (*Bildung*) process on a higher education.

So, to conclude and point some perspectives and directions out that we in this moment are working on at our university, I want in this paper also to give some experiences that we have done on our university, in trying to create an educational environment where a ‘Community of Wonder’ is called upon in the concrete teaching and educational guidance. Our questions have been: “*How do we create an attitude in the students as well as university teachers to be more in wonder and risk a situation where they, so to speak, ‘stand in the openness’? What kind of higher education pedagogic can we develop so that ‘the voice of being’, in the two understanding that I have displayed, will be heard?*”

We imagine that wisdom has something to do with this ‘being-dimension’ and kind of wondering longing and Socratic eros for listening to that which we experience as important but nevertheless cannot grasp or articulate in directly proportional forms of knowledge. A researcher’s ‘*poetics*’ is as important as his or her scientific ‘*logic*’. Without this ‘poetic’ side of research and academic work higher education will not be able to create learning places for creative, critical and original thinking. And we have experienced that “wonder” (and the phenomenology of wonder) seems to be a key for getting into that movement and momentum (Hansen, 2009, 2010).

Three research projects are described, where we have worked in higher education settings with fostering a Community of Wonder: that is, in a teacher college, a design college and at two master classes at University of Aarhus.