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—

doc. RNDr. Antonín Jančařík
Vice Dean for Research
Faculty of Education
Charles University (Prague)

Dear colleague,

— In reply to your letter dated 20/06/2024 I hereby write back to you with my assessment of the doctoral thesis of M. Luiz do Valle Miranda, entitled *Unveiling Educational Potentials: On Post-Critical Affirmation, Non-Formal Practices and Online Technologies*, supervised by Prof. Piotr Zamojski.

The thesis is innovative and deals with a highly relevant topic, viz. the threat to education involved in the way digital technologies are mostly used today in contexts of teaching and learning. Luiz do Valle Miranda's work is also timely in that it contributes to theory development within the domain of philosophy of education, viz. applying post-critical thinking to the context of non-formal digital education. It is clear that the candidate has a good understanding of major theoretical frameworks connected to this topic and that he is able to communicate these effectively. The dissertation is clearly written and delivers what it promises: an argument that problematizes a blind and instrumental use of digital means and that supports the value of developing and using alternative digital means in the context of non-formal education. As the disciplinary lens of this work is theory and philosophy of education the used methods are certainly appropriate, viz. a combination of constructing arguments in dialogue with a rich tradition of educational theory on the one hand and phenomenological analysis of existing educational practices on the other hand. At the same time, this piece of work is not just a theoretical exercise, as it offers signposts to practitioners and policymakers for how to deal with a pressing societal-educational issue. It invites us to rethink how we relate to the digital sphere and gives us criteria for setting apart educationally relevant and educationally devastating uses of the digital technologies. Some of the theses are thought-provoking and give rise to further discussion and the possibility of further scientific exploration.

These things said, I believe that this important research project could have been carried through in a much more elaborate and substantial manner. The three case studies that are put forward for the phenomenological analyses are rather minimalistic and they don't seem to play the crucial role that Valle Miranda claims them to have. Strangely enough, the two more elaborate cases discussed in the last part and which should underline the need for developing new non-formal practices, are taken from the sphere of formal education. This seems contradictory. Also, the theoretical tenets (Masschein and Simons, and Vlieghe and Zamojski) that grounds the main claim about the importance of the informal

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is actually making the opposite point, viz. that for true education to take place formal school conditions are inevitable. The use of Husserl's argument on the origin of geometry and his distinction between formal and informal is completely beside the point. Likewise the use of Friesen's work does not fit in well with the argument the PhD candidate wants to make. Very often examples are used that are completely inappropriate and if the candidate had given things some more thought, this would have been clear to him, e.g. on p 77-78 where a non-digital example is used to make a point about the digital. I furthermore wonder whether digital non-formal practices are as bottom-up and 'spontaneous' (p. 52) as do Valle Miranda claims them to be: I find it really problematic that many assumptions are made here without further discussion. Although I do appreciate the thesis the PhD candidate makes with regard to the 'double replication' (one of the most innovative points of this research), I don't find the argument completely convincing: this only works IF we assume that formal education is by definition instrumentalizing and anti-educational in nature. To make this point, do Valle Miranda should have based his argument on critical pedagogy rather than post-critical pedagogy. I also find his analysis of our digital present lacking: it seems to mix-up an analysis in terms of surveillance capitalism (a rather banal argument about monetization) with an analysis in terms of instrumentalization. Whereas the real issue at stake seems to be individualization and personalisation. The candidate seems to entertain a quite shallow understanding of what the digital is and how it works and he makes many assumptions that are highly questionable. I also wonder how his thesis that objects become things on digital platforms relates to Byung-Chul Han's opposite argument that the information we consume there regards non-things. The author also seems to just accept that certain infrastructure (e.g. bMOOC) just exists, without giving any consideration that this is a pedagogical practice that is actually developed by a teacher who has based this practice on pedagogical principles and who has given strict orders to her students to use it and how to use it.

In spite of the critical comments I laid out above I find that Luiz do Valle Miranda's doctoral thesis meets the criteria of a PhD in philosophy of education, and therefore, I motion for a public defense of this project to take place.

Please feel free to contact me if you would require more information.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. dr. Joris Vlieghe