

I'm back!

By Professor Jan Willem de Graaf

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Just over a year ago, our regular columnist Professor Jan Willem de Graaf suffered a burn-out and has spent the last year recovering his health. He has now retired from Saxion University and starts the New Year with a very welcome return to Education Journal. His often unique view of politics and education from a continental European perspective brings original comment to us. We are delighted he is back healthy and raring to go.

A year ago it stopped. Head or heart? I had completely merged with my head. The connection with my feelings, the essential, was suppressed. What I had not thought possible happened: I ended up in a burn-out. In life we go through many transitions, from child to parent, or from student to teacher, from young to old, from lively to tired.

Unlike the caterpillar that becomes a butterfly, in which the stages are clearly separated, we often cannot indicate exactly when we're still typical students, for example, and when we have become young professionals. It happens gradually, but at a certain day no one sees us as a young and upcoming talent, or as young at all. During our lives, more or less dominant identities can be recognized successively. Between these characteristic 'identities', there are transition periods, in which we can more easily lose our balance.

These periods offer opportunities, to explore new directions. The moment I dropped out coincided with the transition period from working to retired, I was 64 years old. In the transition from young to adult, I wrote music, which appeared on the album *Whirling Dust* (Jim Rensson and the Crew) in 1983.

In the past year I have recovered by seeking connection with the young man I once was when I wrote *Whirling Dust*. One of the songs on the album is *Funeral's Wedding Day*, about the funeral of who I was at the birth party of who I would become. In the past year I discovered, that the child I once was, is the father of who I have become. By remixing and adding to the album, I have found myself again. And what you truly experience with your heart has more authority than what you discover with your mind. As of January 1, 2025, I will retire as a professor and become the artist I once was, but with the life experience and scientific knowledge I have acquired.

Recording the album

When we recorded this album over 40 years ago, it was about embracing life and love, which I saw as a beautiful wealth, in a world that was becoming increasingly mechanized, where we were part of economic/technocratic machinations that were increasingly suffocating the ecological and dignified world. How can you keep hope, and embrace the beautiful phenomenon that is life, while you see that technocracy suffocates all of this? When I started the *Whirling Dust* '24 project during my burnout last year, I almost lost my eye for the beauty of nature, life and the spiritual! Today I turn away from the populist call for ever more technology and convenience, and I am amazed by the beauty of life!

It is striking that just before my burnout I actually still looked at the ever expanding and suffocating system order in the same way as I did then, in 1983. Now I see it completely differently. Yes, technocracy rules and destroys much. However, technology is a consequence of the in itself completely understandable fact that we as self-conscious beings cannot accept our suffering and ultimately our finitude. We have the need to build safety and protection around us, and we are able to give that shape technologically: making coats, controlling fire, building huts, etc. In this way we can certainly postpone our finitude somewhat. But in the meantime we no longer accept that we are mortal, and we sacrifice much of our natural habitat - Mother Nature - to our artificial habitat, including cement, plastic, asphalt, copper and fiberglass. As a result, the human-made mass on our planet is now much greater than the mass of all life on the planet combined. However, now I see so much more clearly that we are infinite precisely in our finitude, that there is hope and perspective, precisely if we dare to leave duality....