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editorial: vaccination!

On Education

Public debates about the pros and cons of vaccination are highly emotionally charged and polarised. This is also the case in the context of contemporary controversies about proper responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fears of a potential compulsory vaccination against the virus express themselves, among others, in public protests and demonstrations all around the world as well as the widespread dissemination of conspiracy theories concerning the alleged malign agenda of pharmaceutical companies, states or NGOs.

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Public debates about the pros and cons of vaccination are highly emotionally charged and polarised. This is also the case in the context of contemporary controversies about proper responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (Drerup & Schweiger, 2020). Fears of a potential compulsory vaccination against the virus express themselves, among others, in public protests and demonstrations all around the world as well as the widespread dissemination of conspiracy theories concerning the alleged malign agenda of pharmaceutical companies, states or NGOs.

Already before the COVID-19 outbreak the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that opposition to and skepticism about vaccination is a threat to global health (WHO, 2019). Historically vaccination hesitancy is certainly not new. Vaccination was accompanied by criticism from the very beginning of its widespread implementation. Whether for religious, political, ethical or ideological reasons, there were always movements against vaccination (Durbach, 2005; Porter & Porter, 1988). By contrast, the advocates of mandatory vaccination argued and still argue for the necessity of an immunization of society and therefore wanted to ensure the highest possible vaccination rate through state coercion (see for the recent debate for instance: Bester, 2017; Flanigan, 2014; Giubilini, 2020; Pierik, 2018; Thießen, 2016). From this standpoint skepticism concerning vaccination is often interpreted as being rooted in educational deficits. Thus, information campaigns and school education are considered by some as effective ways of increasing the number of immunised children.

Vaccination is therefore not just a medical and political but also an educational issue in several respects. First, the discussion about vaccination and a possible mandatory vaccination deeply concerns the rights and well-being of children as well as the educational responsibilities, interests, and rights of parents. Secondly, there is a constant tension in vaccination debates between the call for the use of coercive measures by the liberal state and softer, more ‘educational’ means such as information, persuasion and schooling. Third, the disputes over vaccination are of educational interest because they are indicative of more general social developments of individualization, the actual or supposed lack of solidarity with others, and the construction of a national society as a

community of shared fate, which all speak to broader educational debates about moral and citizenship education, national curricula, and identity development.

The contributors to this issue of *on_education* discuss these and related issues concerning the politics and ethics of vaccination and its manifold relationships to education, both from a historical and contemporary perspective.

The Editorial Team

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