

editorial: frontiers of solidarity

On Education

Like all crises, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the topic of solidarity – and the lack of it – to the forefront of public debate. Educational debates, however, rarely engage with solidarity directly, explicitly, and deliberately. With this issue of On_Education we wish to open a discussion that explicitly engages with solidarity in and through education at its various levels: from the early years, through schooling, university, and beyond. With their vastly different perspectives, the authors of this issue engage with and widen current discussions of solidarity in education across disciplines, topics, and sociopolitical contexts.

Keywords: editorial, solidarity

Solidarity is one of those multifarious ideas that appears to gain popularity in times of crisis – and is called for by politicians, the media, celebrities, and the general public, (sometimes) from diametrically opposed ideological positions (Chouliaraki, 2013; Lahusen, 2020; Wallaschek, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has provided us with compelling examples: amid a global race for vaccines, flattened curves and efficient use of medical equipment, wearing a face covering became the ultimate sign of solidarity with vulnerable *others*. The closing of schools and nurseries became, in the various phases of lockdown across the globe, a symbol of solidarity with those more likely to suffer serious health consequences from the virus, and putting the education of young people on hold thus became the lesser of various inevitable evils. The manifold ensuing crises revealed (once more) not only the world's interconnected fragilities in the face of a microscopic virus but also the need for increased global cooperation, not least in matters of education. As the pandemic painfully uncovered where global solidarity fails and where education becomes an 'essential' service to society, populist messages, conspiracy theories and socio-economic and educational injustices persisted and even grew. It may thus seem paradoxical that a common threat with the potential to unify has actually polarised societies further and has brought such unforeseen challenges to education worldwide.

Considering the world's fragility and interdependence – in sickness and in health, in *this* crisis as well as in *the ones that are yet to come*, what is the role of education in reconfiguring the bonds of solidarity, both those that unite and those that break apart? If educational institutions are to some extent societal microcosms where people learn and practice how to be and (inter)act with others, then solidarity must be a component of *any* debate about the aims of education, its organisation and structures, its content and everyday practices. Anchored firmly in philosophy, law, political science, international relations and sociology, debates on solidarity, however, rarely touch on education, and when they do, educational institutions usually receive only passing attention (e.g., in comparison to the church, political parties or the media). In dominant discussions, the beneficiaries of solidarity through education are children at risk of poverty, minorities, migrants, refugees, or other vulnerable

others generally located overseas. Debates on education rarely engage with solidarity directly, explicitly, or deliberately. Instead, the topic seems to be a by-product of broader debates on the aims, content, structures and practices of education, which engage with the global moment and the power relations that underpin it (e.g. Brehm & Silova, 2010; Jimenez et al., 2017; Meyer et al., 2010).

With this issue of *On_Education* we wish to open a discussion that explicitly engages with solidarity within education and through it at its various levels: from the early years, through school, university, and beyond. What is the role of education in teaching, learning, creating, and practicing solidarity, knowing that it is an elusive and hard-to-define concept that has a variety of historical meanings and uses (Bayertz, 1999)? And what kinds of solidarity are promoted via various forms of education? Are we growing more together or more apart in the current intersecting landscapes of educational individualism and privatisation, informal and non-formal learning, media populism, anti-democratic tendencies, and a growing ‘society of the spectacle’? Where are the frontiers of solidarity? With these questions, and others, in mind we hope, through the contributions gathered here, to widen current discussions about solidarity in education across disciplines, topics, and socio-political contexts.

The Editorial Team

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