

Abstract

Hartmut Rosa's Concept of Resonance and its Significance for Education

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The pioneering and widely discussed works of the leading German sociologist Hartmut Rosa offer an encompassing framework in which education can be viewed today. In his extraordinarily wide-ranging book "Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World" (2019), first published in German in 2016, Rosa explores the importance of resonance in all facets of life as a basis for the transformation of both the individual and society. Thereby, he provides a broad sociological perspective from which educational questions can be viewed.

For Rosa, resonance is a holistic and existential experience that profoundly affects the entire physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions of human existence. It is the experience of resonance that becomes the basis of an openness to different forms of experience, particularly with respect to relationships to others. In an educational context, it is Rosa's understanding of the resonance or lack of resonance that pupils experience in school that is particularly relevant. He sees this forming of a person through their experiences in school as having less to do with the curriculum than with the relationships and interactions that take place. He explores what young people most wish for from school and takes into account the books, songs and films they are attracted to. His conclusion is that there is a general and pronounced longing for more meaningful, resonant and humane school experiences. In this context he also explicitly refers to an image going through his entire book; the role of the teacher as a 'tuning fork' which through its own vibrations and resonance then creates vibrations and resonance in a second tuning fork. From this perspective he is critical of the idea of a teacher as a kind of neutral moderator or mediator: "In my view, however, this underestimates the importance of the teacher, who functions as a first tuning fork, i.e. as a source of inspiration and momentum. The world begins to sing for students through the impact of their teachers." (Rosa 2019, 246)

Rosa concludes his discussion of the role of resonance in education with a biographical perspective in which he considers its longer-term consequences for inner attitudes and emotional dispositions; how one views and interacts with the world – the degree of openness and interest, or of resistance and distance one goes through life. In a more recent work "The Uncontrollability of the World" (2020), he takes his concept further by viewing an acceptance of uncontrollability as intrinsic to the experience of resonance. "The basic mode of vibrant human existence consists not in exerting control over things but in resonating with them, making them respond to us – thus experiencing self-efficacy – and responding to them in turn." (Rosa 2020, 31; emphases in original)

The possible consequences and questions arising from the Covid-19 pandemic make Rosa's concept appear more relevant than ever in considering future educational developments. Among the crucial questions that will need to be addressed are the following: In the periods of childhood and adolescence, does the experience of resonance that Rosa has elucidated depend on the mutual, physical co-presence of pupils and teachers? What possibilities of resonance exist through digital learning and in online lessons? What relevance could the concept of resonance have for teacher education?