

Editorial: Open Issue

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In this 9th issue of *Confero*, our focus centers on critically examining the role of education itself amid current global challenges. This open issue presents four compelling essays that challenge paradigms, scrutinize the importance of social movements, emphasize the classroom as an inclusive space, and explore the role of education within the context of sustainable development – leading to the main guiding questions of whom education is, or really could be, for. Critiquing contemporary learning discourses and impacts of education is vital as we face turbulent times – particularly in relation to questions of ecological distress, social conflicts, and a challenging of democratic values. This point of departure is shared amongst the contributions, although in various, complementary ways.

Each essay invites readers to embark on a critical take through the complexities of the educational landscape, shedding light on its transformative role from within, and in relation to four different, but intersecting contexts. Firstly, Majsa Allelin explores affective relationships imbued by questions of reciprocity as an integral part of the classroom experience. Secondly, Kai Heidemann discusses systemic, influential arrangements between social, grassroots movements and educational change. Thirdly, Ali Erol performs a historically situated critique towards contemporary notions of liberal education and the idea of classrooms as an apolitical space. Fourthly, Simon Wessbo, Hampus Björk and Ebba Mellberg couple the fields of environmental sustainability education and L1 language learning to digital literacies and representations of human-nature interactions.

As an intersecting engagement, these contributions add to a growing body of knowledge that approaches the classroom and educational processes as complex phenomena imbued by power relations and ideologically situated structures. The reader may be surprised, even provoked, by the outspoken connection between education and politics in this issue. But as the authors suggest, we cannot afford to uphold the classroom as an apolitical, culturally isolated and individualized arena, but instead recognize that education is inherently political. Only when we embrace the fact that power dynamics and societal needs influence every kind of educational space can it become a catalyst for fostering informed and prepared citizens capable of navigating in and through troubled times.

In the first essay, *Lack of understanding and the desire for recognition*, Majsja Allelin argues for creating a supportive, and reciprocal learning environment. Allelin examines the layer of student understanding – and the lack thereof – in educational settings. In this empirical article, the author presents three ontological domains of comprehension and their affective implication towards oneself in relation to educational expectations brought on by individualization, measurability, and marketization. Through interviews with students, Allelin shows the vulnerability associated with admitting “a lack of understanding” in a neoliberal result-driven educational system. The article highlights the importance of the teacher confronting and approaching lack of understanding as a central component rather than only viewing it as a tolerable aspect of learning. In forming a space of trust where students can, and want to, seek help in a manner that allows them to move beyond pure result-driven dynamics. Through this, Allelin contributes methodological insight for educational processes and educators who recursively set out to establish open and inclusive classroom spaces.

In the second essay, *Pathways of Education Reform ‘From Below’: Theorizing Social Movements as Grassroots Agents of Educational Change*, Kai Heidemann delves into the dynamic relationship between social movements and educational systems. He proposes four distinct pathways of actions that social movement actors might undertake to bring about educational change: working from

inside; inwards and along the edges; from the outside and in; and building alternative educational programs that challenge the status quo. With global cases from school systems across the world, Heidemann illustrates the different approaches giving educators, students and activists empowering strategic insights into how schooling systems can be transformed “from below”.

In the third essay *Liberal Education? A Critical Reflection on Classroom as Apolitical and Ideologically Ambiguous Spaces*, Ali E. Erol draws on the historical chapter of higher education within the United States of America in an effort to reflectively challenge two central claims forwarded by liberal education. Firstly, that *classrooms should be apolitical spaces*, and secondly, *that educators need to occupy an ideologically ambiguous stance in the classroom*. By drawing from Paulo Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy Erol shows the unavoidable power dynamics of the liberal classroom in relation to critical pedagogy and its potential to reshape learning experiences into inclusive moments shaped through solidarity. The article offers an exemplification of “pockets of resistance” within higher education, as a way of providing a critical toolset for educators. The essay takes the reader on a journey that unequivocally shows the linkage between institutional historicity, academic structures, and liberal claims; presenting five practical key components for educators wanting to take action and challenge specific conceptions of liberal education in an effort to promote social justice from within education system.

The authors of the fourth essay, Simon Wessbo, Hampus Björk and Ebba Mellberg, highlight the power of stories as an important component of learning for sustainable development. Analyzing the game *Valheim* with an ecolinguistic framework, the authors explore how ideologies underpin unjust and unsustainable societies. In an effort to address environmental sustainability education in the context of L1 language education, the essay underscores the significance of fostering reflection on humanity, the individual, and society, as well as recognizing the active role different entities can play in societal transformation towards a more sustainable world.

This issue sheds light on the nuanced dynamics within educational contexts. Through different analytical lenses, these essays collectively illuminate the profound influence that education wields on the lives of children and youth, underscoring the transformative potential inherent in rethinking and reshaping our educational practices to face a rapidly changing future. As we navigate these educational frontiers, these articles converge to challenge, inspire, and envision the transformative power of education. Join us in redefining the narrative, critiquing established paradigms, and envisioning a sustainable and liberated future through the lens of education.