

Roman Bartosch (Ed.)

Towards Transformative Literature Pedagogy

Roman Bartosch und Andreas Köpfer (Hg.)

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In 'Interesting Times': Classroom Diversity and the Great Transformation

Roman Bartosch

"May You Live in Interesting Times" – the motto of the 2019 Biennale Arte in Venice used this ostensible Chinese curse to speculate on art's potential to playfully engage with the semantic ambivalence of "interesting". The word, it was argued, can be read as expressing a menace and as "an invitation to always see and consider the course of human events in their complexity", as the exhibition's president, Paolo Baratta (2019, 22) put it. I have been thinking a lot about my trip to Venice that year, which has been both an exciting encounter with wonderful and challenging art and a disquieting experience of crazy weather events in Europe, with a heat wave in my native Germany that was menacing indeed and with my staying in a city perennially endangered by relentless waters, slowly but surely on the rise over the last years. Little did I know then that this ambivalent notion of "interesting times" will be with us for months and probably years to come in yet a different way still. Italy was affected terribly by the virus whose global spread in the following year created a pandemic that threw into sharp relief a number of issues we knew would make for 'interesting times' indeed but had so far only be connected in rather abstract ways: climate change and the rising risks of zoonoses, the need to rethink resilience and vulnerability, digital technologies and socioeconomic as well as -ecological dimensions of education and participation, and the fact, more generally, that our current ways of living are unsustainable, if anything.

That we are living in times of tremendous change has been recognised in numerous recent publications and projects calling for the transformative potential of education. One key benchmark comprises UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals, an exhaustive list of 17 long-term goals ranging from quality education and gender equality to climate action, sustainable development of cities and forms of consumption as well as inclusive societies, as part of UNESCO's Agenda 2030 (UNESCO 2017a). An equally ambitious plea for social transformation and call for educational innovation to support this end has been formulated by the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) in their expert report on the "4 Capital-I's" – innovation, investment, infrastructure and inclusion – all of which seek to align demands for greater justice and participation with challenges of present and future threats of environmental

catastrophe and its sociocultural ramifications (WBGU 2016). In another publication, the WBGU demands no less than a "new social contract" the constitution of which requires overcoming national and other legal boundaries, enabling participation and equity on a global scale, recognising the environment as a player in socioecological contexts and civic as well as scientific engagement in policy-making and political action (WBGU 2011, 8). These documents not only claim fundamental change in almost every aspect of modern life to be necessary; they moreover never tire in underscoring the key role of education in this Great Transformation (cf., e.g., UNESCO 2017b).

By pointing to the interconnectedness of concepts of socioecological change, literacy, participation and educationally aspirational attempts at taking seriously and appreciating learner diversity, policy-makers on a global as well as more local level of national educational politics call out educational theorists and educators alike to join in the effort of transformation that involves an unprecedented rethinking of educational systems and objectives. The notion of a 'Great Transformation' may thus appear daunting and overwhelming. This is partly because such a transformation, even and especially if envisaged on the rather abstract level of 'education as such' is in dire need of subject-specific and interdisciplinary conversations on approaches, models and methods available for (re-)thinking educational practice in such daring times. This book is an attempt to make a step in this direction by scrutinising the potential of literature in dialogue with literature-pedagogical interventions supportive of literacies and competences helping students across a spectrum of diversity to reflect and act upon transformation. This is necessary because calls for reform that address all disciplines and subjects alike pay too little attention to the role literature and arts in formal education, even though the importance of visionary and value-based change is recognised repeatedly.

Not only is this crucial because of the documents' repeated insistence on the role and significance of values, especially cultural mentalities, imaginaries and affects (cf. UNEP 2021). It also matters because subject-specific pedagogies are required to be more vocal in pointing out what they bring to the table of transformative educational endeavours. In emphasizing the participatory nature of transformation and the key role of change agents and drivers of change, these documents attest to the fact that educational efforts in creating more inclusive and more sustainable learning environments must be thought of as a unified endeavour. Yet, each discipline has different means to this end at its disposal. The task is thus not only in exploring yet another field in need of attention but in rethinking and redesigning institutionalised education in ways that are attentive to matters of inclusion and sustainability in equal measure and in diverse ways. In other words: Because implementation takes place on the more local levels of