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To the Introduction

(Non-)Educational Visions for the 21st Century

Are visions forward-looking fantasies and illusions or delusions of better times past? Are they exclusively linked to the literary and artistic genre or to hagiographic readings of “wise old men” (and women) like Plato, Meister Eckart, Teresa of Ávila, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and many others? And are they, in this regard, expressions of long outdated or non-scientific approaches? Or do visions, seen retrospectively as well as prospectively, have a potential that can and should be used by humanities and social scientists in the present?

An educational vision – so the tenor of the volume – implies the idea of an educational image (Bildsamkeit) of human beings, and it implies the idea of the evolution and humanization of society(ies). Both focuses contain opportunities as well as dangers that must be taken into account. Visions can also be viewed as “non-educational” both in the sense of stepping back from far-reaching, even 'overreaching' dogmatic claims and demands, and in the sense of the necessary limitation of the educational perspective by including further disciplinary perspectives.

This volume shows that current debates in the humanities and social sciences on topics such as ecology, interreligious dialogue, identity learning, health education, digital participation, (world) peace, sacrotourism, cultural management can be revitalized through visionary perspectives. In this way, by remembering forgotten discourses or neglected traditions, boundaries can be crossed and new horizons opened up. At the same time, the visionary view enables the critical educational (related to Bildung) and socio-political embedding of current debates.

Based on current time diagnoses, many societies seem to undergo quite groundbreaking changes. Such dynamics are reflected in different life areas, scientific disciplines as well as across these areas and disciplines, and globally – here, meeting diverse disciplinary explanations and answers.

The belief in a steady advancement of Humanity, such as proposed in the “great narratives” of Enlightenment, are today no longer fully convincing. The dogma of the 'one and true' story is just as little valid as simple stories of civilization progress, or decay. However, from a cultural-historical point of view, to be human always involves supra-individual ideas and structures such as desires, dreams or utopias, even designs of humanity and development of society, in short: visions of a different, a better life together that take various shapes (in texts, images, etc.).

This counts especially for education (Bildung).

Around 30 scientists from Germany, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Sweden and China were asked some (key) questions in advance, which could be answered by way of example:

What can be described as a visionary perspective in education? Is your point of view more theory-related, more socially or idea-historically coined, or does it reconstruct reality/experience? How does knowledge from other disciplines or areas contribute to a visionary perspective in education? How realistic is the implementation of this perspective to be seen or how could the chance of feasibility be increased?

In the individual contributions, a more exemplary and topic-specific approach was preferred than comprehensive and context-related in order to avoid duplication. Overarching historical classifications and systematizations of the relationship between social utopias, political ideals and educational visions are reserved for the first two articles in the volume. The last article closes with an “anti-vision” as a rejection of the modern search for meaning and world improvement.

The volume is supplemented by a foreword by one of the currently best-known German legal scholars as well as an explanatory contribution to the cover picture “Spiral in the Beginning” by the artist himself.

Our thanks go to all the authors who, in this volume, have taken the risk of diverse visionary drafts for the new millennium, which is still at the beginning, and in this way contributed to overcome national borders and to promote an interdisciplinary exchange of topics and science.

Erscheint in: B. v. Carlsburg, A. M. Stroß (Hrsg./eds.): (Un)pädagogische Visionen für das 21. Jahrhundert. (Non-)Educational Visions for the 21st Century. Reihe: Baltische Studien der Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaft, Frankfurt u.a.: Peter Lang 2021 (im Druck).