

## A Three-dimensional Model of Resistance in Education

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### Abstract

The article attempts to systematize the issue of resistance manifestations in the context of education. The analyses presented in the article are an introduction to designing a three-dimensional model of resistance, which enables to examine acts of resistance from the angle of their three intertwined aspects: action, space and motivation. They are basic layers determining the analysis range of particular displays of resistance in education and society. These dimensions were developed based on the analysis of theoretical and empirical literature regarding the issue of resistance and on the author's own research on this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** *three-dimensional model of resistance, action dimension of resistance, motivation dimension of resistance, space dimension of resistance, education*

### Introduction

As indicated by numerous publications (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Raby, 2005; Johansson & Vinthagen 2014), resistance is a complex and multidimensional category, which means it is difficult to grasp and interpret. On the one hand, it is a disadvantage resulting from a definition of the notion being either too broad or too narrow, but on the other hand, it is an advantage showing the significance of resistance as an analytical category, a tool for interpreting reality, and/or a mean of changing the existing order.

The aim of the article is to present a three-dimensional model of resistance in education, a result of an analysis of the respective literature and the author's

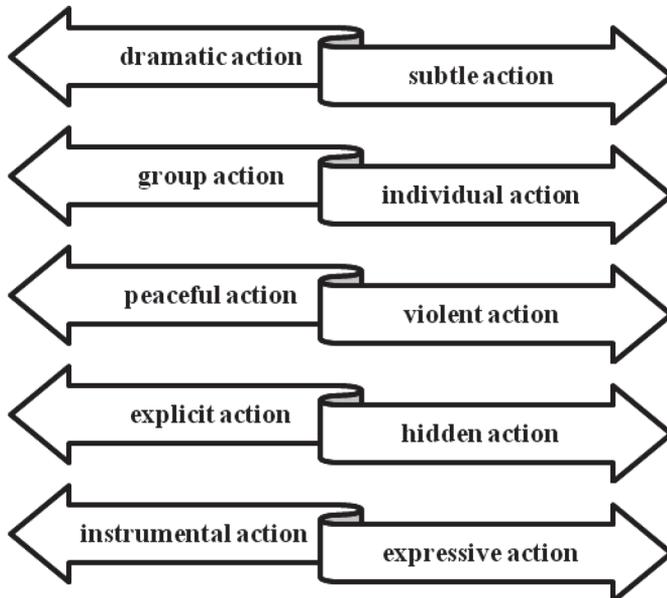
own research. The presented outline is an attempt to create an analytical tool for describing acts of resistance that occur mostly in educational space. The model proposed in this article extends beyond the existing models of resistance because it does not focus solely on the relation between the subjects participating in the act of resistance, as in the model by Hollander and Einwohner (2004), it is not only limited to the affective aspect being the primary aspect in the analyses of opposition actions, as in the model by Hynes (2013), and it does not limit defining resistance dimensions in the context of power, as in the concept of multidimensional character of resistance by Johansson and Vinthagen (2014). The model in this article is an attempt to combine and develop the aforementioned proposals. While introducing the category of the polarization of acts of resistance, the dialectics typical of this social phenomenon was taken into consideration. Polarization makes it possible to present how different continuums of resistance intertwine, to show its multiple aspects, and to conduct a complex analysis. The continuums of resistance in the aspect of action, motivation and space that are presented in this article do not constitute a closed list but are intended to show its multiple dimensions.

### **Action – a fundamental aspect of resistance**

Despite the multiplicity of approaches to defining resistance, researchers agree that action is the core of this phenomenon (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). It is worth noticing that acting, being a key sociological category crucial for describing and explaining social life, is also fundamental to understanding resistance as a phenomenon constituting the social world of an individual. For the purpose of analyses, the article assumes Arendt's understanding of 'action'. The author derives her concept from the Greek and Latin etymology of this word. "To the two Greek verbs *archein* ('to begin', 'to lead', finally 'to rule') and *prattein* ('to pass through', 'to achieve', 'to finish') correspond the two Latin verbs *agere* ('to set into motion', 'to lead') and *gerere* (whose original meaning is 'to bear'). Here it seems as though each action is divided into two parts, the beginning made by a single person and the achievement in which many join by 'bearing' and 'finishing' the enterprise, by seeing it through" (Arendt, 1998, p. 189). According to Arendt, people distinguish themselves from others by acting and speaking. This is how they reveal "their unique personal identities" (p. 179) and appear in the world, thus beginning their own story.

At school, or during a lesson or a break, one can encounter a wide-ranging repertoire of opposition actions of students, teachers and other members of the

school community, which can sometimes take opposite forms. This repertoire of daily acts of resistance comprising different forms, types, tactics and techniques is one of the resistance dimensions distinguished by Johansson and Vinthagen (2014). Limiting the dimension of resistance only to the repertoire of opposition actions makes this approach too narrow. For this reason, the author proposes describing resistance through the prism of its action dimension, which has a broader meaning and allows for placing a particular act of resistance in the social, political and cultural contexts that create this act. Through this, the same form of resistance might be seen as a dramatic action in one context and as a subtle action in another. What is more, the processual character of acting, which is not noticeable while analyzing resistance only from the perspective of the repertoire of its forms, is also emphasized. The processual character of acts of resistance promotes the occurrence of polarization (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Polarization of resistance actions

The first continuum is made up of dramatic actions and subtle actions. The former are of spectacular character, drawing the attention of the subject they are aimed at as well as the observers. Their obviousness makes them easily defined as opposition. Examples of such opposition actions are social movements, demonstrations, and strikes (Ølgaard, 2015).

At the other end of the discussed continuum, there are subtle actions, which occur more frequently but are not as spectacular as dramatic actions. Also, they are more often found in the actions of one person. Scott (1985, p. 29) claimed that this type of actions are examples of everyday resistance, they require little or no coordination and they avoid a direct symbolic confrontation with the subject that they are aimed at. An example of such action is everyday resistance of pupils in the classroom, including participation in activities that are not allowed during lessons, e.g., playing games or surfing the Internet on a mobile phone.

Group actions and individual actions create another continuum in the discussed dimension. The criterion for distinguishing between them is the number of people taking part in a particular act of resistance. Group opposition actions are displayed by social movements. Between them and individual actions, there are group actions reserved for a structured community, e.g., teachers. Individual acts, on the other hand, are acts of resistance performed by a single person. An example of such an action can be wearing a specific outfit that does not fit in the dress code specified by school regulations (Babicka-Wirkus, 2015).

A popular distinction in literature (e.g., Roberts & Ash, 2009) is placing resistance on the continuum created by the aspect of violence and lack thereof. Therefore, there are opposition actions which are peaceful. They occur in the situations of protests and demonstrations which are based on neither verbal nor non-verbal violence. An example of such actions can be a nationwide protest of students against the ruling party in Poland. Violent acts of resistance are also visible in the school environment. They include all forms of aggression directed at teachers or pupils. Examples of this type of resistance are dramatic events, such as school shootings (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2017), or aggression and violence occurring in the teacher-pupil relation.

Next continuum is created by explicit and hidden actions. The former are easily recognizable by the subject they are aimed at, as well as the observers (Einwohner & Hollander, 2004). The latter are more difficult to observe since they aim at expressing symbolic opposition to signs of power and dominance rather than directly confronting them. This type of resistance remains within the limits set by the authority and, according to Scott (1985), it also has potential for political change. The opposite view is presented by Genovese (1974). An example of hidden resistance can be students extending the performance of tasks that their teacher gave them, which disrupts the lesson.

Opposition between instrumental and expressive actions (Bielska, 2013) creates the last continuum in the action dimension. Instrumental actions aim at achieving a given individual or group goal. An example of such a type of resistance can

be students' loud countdown to the end of lesson, with the aim of undermining the unofficial school rule that says that 'the school bell is for the teacher, not for the student'. Expressive actions result from the internal needs of an individual. They can be a manifestation of students' moral disagreement with their teacher's behavior. Nevertheless, they often coexist with instrumental actions.

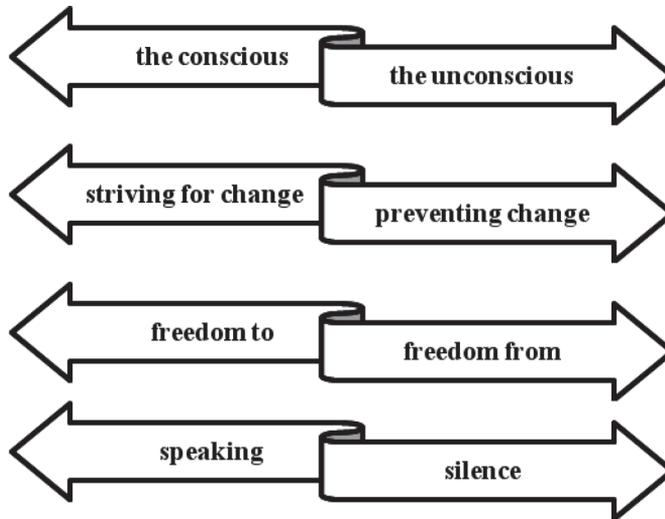
## **Motivation dimension of resistance**

A significant dimension of resistance is the motivation dimension. It shows the reasons for undertaking an opposition action, which are crucial for understanding the significance of a particular act to the person performing it as well as for the goal it is aimed at and for the observer. In a broad sense, motivation is "the general term for all the processes involved in starting, directing, and maintaining physical and psychological activities" (Gerrig, 2013, p. 298). According to Arendt (1998), a motivation to act is the individual's drive to self-realization. This approach to motivation is in line with the assumptions of humanistic psychology, which says that needs determine human actions (Fromm, 1969). As a result of social changes, new needs and fears arise, which consequently causes a change in aspirations. Therefore, motivations result from interior, conscious or unconscious, needs of an individual that are shaped by the outside world. Action, on the other hand, is a process which aims at exceeding the existing boundaries (Arendt, 1998).

The understanding of motivation presented above exceeds the affective concept of resistance described by Hynes (2013). Hynes mainly focuses on the potentiality of affect, which marginalises the aspect of action, which is key in the conducted analyses, from the deliberations on resistance, and empathizes the aspect of the "capacity to affect and be affected" (p. 567).

Within this dimension of resistance, similarly to the action dimension, there are a few polarizations presented in Figure 2.

Motivations can be conscious or unconscious. This distinction is based on attributing different developmental and social potential to conscious and unconscious acts of resistance by Giroux (2001) and McLaren (1999). Depending on the form they take, they have different meanings to a resisting individual. Conscious resistance is a deliberate action aimed at achieving some specific results. In this approach, resistance not only rejects subordination but also challenges the ideologies that maintain and support it (Weitz, 2001). Weitz gives the example of women's hairstyles as an expression of resistance against social structures that subjugate women: "Like slaves' rebellious songs, women's rebellious hairstyles can



**Figure 2.** Polarization of the motivation of opposition acts

allow them to distance themselves from system that would subordinate them, to express their dissatisfaction, to identify like-minded others, and to challenge others to think about their own action and beliefs” (p. 670). School environment constantly deals with different displays of students’ conscious resistance which can manifest itself in deliberately wearing inappropriate outfits, putting on make-up while it is against internal school regulations, or being frequently late.

Acts of resistance can be addressed from the perspective of their relation to change, meaning they can be directed against or for it (Watson, 1971). The first type is currently present in many European countries, including Poland. Examples may be the protests of teachers and parents in relation to the planned changes in the education system.

On the opposite end of the continuum, there are acts of resistance focused on changing the existing order. According to Watson (1971), change is desired by all people. It can concern improving, among other things, one’s professional, health or financial situation. However, as the author indicates (1971, p. 757), teachers are a professional group required to comply with the established norms of behavior more than any other group. For this reason, they find it more difficult to free themselves from the symbolic corset. However, recent events in Poland prove that teachers are a group that is able to rise and fight for matters significant from the educational and social point of view.

The next continuum of motivation for acts of resistance consists of ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’. According to Foucault (1990) and Hoy (2004), resistance would not be possible without the existence of some degree of freedom provided by the authority. It happens because the restrictions imposed by the authority are never absolute. However, this freedom can be understood in a different way. ‘Freedom from’ can be identified with resistance which is about saying ‘no’ (Hoy, 2004, p. 6). It is seen as freedom from restrictions and orders, and it constitutes a goal in itself. There is no perspective of reflection on the consequences of unrestricted freedom here. ‘Freedom to’, understood as ‘resistance for’, results from critical reflection (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2006). The aim of this type of resistance is to gain access to new areas and rights of freedom.

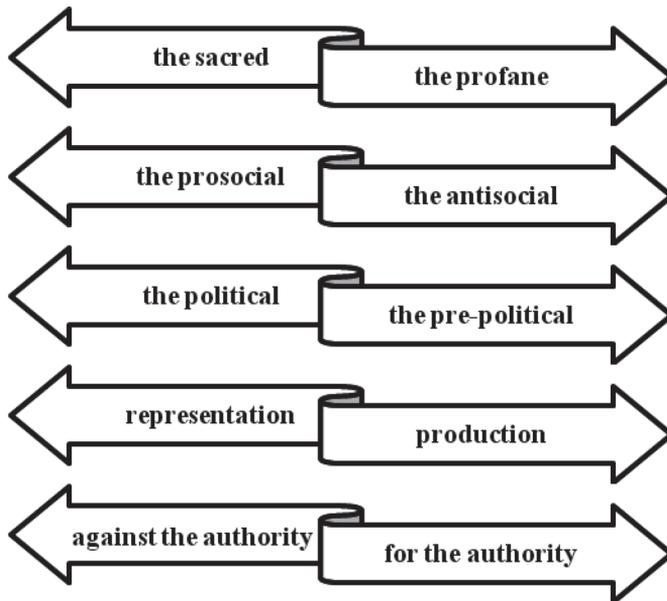
Resistance can also be considered as a verbal act or silence. In the former case, it is about students, teachers, and parents participating in discussions on the matters that are important to them. Such action requires courage to face the consequences of one’s action because it directly shows the views of the resisting individual or group. It can take various forms, from adventurous to factual presentation of one’s arguments. In the classroom, there are often situations where opposition is displayed in the form of teasing, ridiculing, or making fun of teachers by students, or the other way round. Silent resistance is a form of symbolic opposition (Scott, 1985), either conscious or unconscious. Lack of verbal reaction to the teacher’s request or question can lead to resistance actions, aggression, or indifference (Zembylas & Michaelides, 2004; Ollin, 2008). Consequently, students’ silence is a violation of the teacher’s dominant position (McLaren, 1999) by introducing discomfort which results from the aforementioned lack of reaction.

### **Spaces of displaying opposition acts**

The next dimension of resistance is created by the space where opposition actions are displayed. According to Hall (1990), space is linked to other components of culture in various ways. Therefore, it is impossible to exclude this dimension while discussing school culture. Arendt also indicates the significance of space for revealing oneself: “(...) action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me (...)” (1998, pp. 198–199). The space of displaying resistance strongly determines its manifestations, which is also emphasized by Johansson and Vinthagen in their studies on resistance dimensions

(2014). Opposition actions take different forms and scopes depending on the real or symbolic space they are displayed in as well as on the availability of these spaces to the resisting individuals. What is more, according to hooks, resistance develops mainly in the marginalized spaces. “[T]he space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no to downpressor, is located in the margins” (Hooks, 1990, p. 341). While referring to the concept of ‘Third Space’ by Bhabha and Soja, Johansson and Vinthagen stress that resistance occurs mainly in the space that enables creativity and openness (2014). Paradoxically, such spaces in schools include restrooms, hallway corners and changing rooms, where students are not directly controlled by their teachers.

In the space dimension, there are a few polarizations of resistance (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Polarization of resistance space

Resistance can manifest itself in the sacred or in the profane, or at the meeting point of these spaces. They determine various ways of functioning for an individual, which is emphasized by Eliade (1987, p. 14): “(...) sacred and profane are two modes of being in the world (...)”. Resistance in the sacred usually takes clear forms. In school, it is linked to festive events or spaces reserved for teachers, e.g., classroom space or teachers’ room. They are a type of sanctified places only a

few chosen ones have access to. Acts of opposition within these spaces are easily interpreted as resistance and violation of the established behavior patterns and boundaries. On the other hand, the profane is treated as a space where there is silent consent of the authority for some displays of resistance. Pupils' drawings on desks and walls in classrooms or changing rooms are an example of resistance in the profane. This sphere also includes the body, being the opposite of the soul, which is a manifestation of the sacred. According to Nietzsche (Hoy, 2004, p. 12) and McLaren (1988), resistance is personified. Thus, it belongs to the profane. The body has its own public dimension because it is constantly exposed to contact with other bodies (Vlieghe, 2010).

Another continuum consists of a prosocial space and an antisocial space. They create and are created by various resistance actions. The prosocial space encourages undertaking acts of opposition which are conscious and aimed at fighting particular restrictions. It is a space of dialogue and exchange of arguments between equal individuals. The antisocial space is a place where resistance of little emancipation potential is displayed. In this case, it is the argument of strength that counts, not the strength of the argument. Resistance in this space usually fuels conflicts and does not lead to their resolution.

According to Scott (1985), acts of daily resistance have political potential and for that reason, it is crucial to capture the continuum created by the political and the pre-political in order to understand the significance of resistance in everyday life. However, according to Genovese (1974), only some forms of resistance are of political character. He refers to them as 'real resistance', as opposed to acts of pre-political and apolitical resistance. The latter is of adaptive significance and does not lead to the violation of the *status quo*, which is the essence of real resistance. Considering this distinction, school usually deals with resistance in the pre-political sphere, which allows for some of its forms as long as they do not overstep the established boundaries.

The space of representation and the space of production (Hynes, 2013) create another significant continuum of the analysis of resistance acts. In the sphere of representation, there are acts of resistance based on language and symbols imposed by dominating structures. They fall into the margin sphere for resistance actions determined by the authority. Examples of such acts are: using a mobile phone during lesson, or asking teachers difficult (silly) questions in order to ridicule or intimidate them. In the sphere of production, symbols and meanings are created via performance. It is of key importance for going beyond and transforming the existing order.

The last continuum in the space dimension is created by ‘for the authority’ and ‘against the authority’. Resistance is, at the same time, an element of power and its consequence. For this reason, it can take the form of acts that oppose the behaviors that challenge the authority, or acts that oppose the dominating rules and norms. Ruiz (2016) uses the expressions of a ‘good’ protester and a ‘bad’ protester to describe those who support the authority (good), and those who wander among the officially established paths (bad). In the school environment, this type of resistance supporting the authority can manifest itself in the form of endearing oneself to teachers, reporting on other pupils, etc.

## **Conclusion**

The three-dimensional model of resistance, constituted as a result of the three aspects of this phenomenon intertwining, helps to avoid numerous interpretational traps by making it possible to analyze acts of resistance in the dimension of action, motivation or space. Such an approach requires a thorough analysis of the manifestations of resistance and setting them in a broader context. This makes it easier to define resistance more precisely by taking into consideration its specifics that are typical of a particular action, the forces controlling it, and its special location.

It is worth mentioning that the adherence of a particular act to a specific continuum does not exclude its adherence to another continuum within one dimension and other dimensions. On the contrary, acts of resistance can usually be defined in various continuums. For example, act of resistance can be a subtle and individual action in the profane and it can also be unconscious. Each resistance action can be described through the prism of its three-dimensionality. What is more, it can be bipolar, located in a continuum.

The interrelation between these three dimensions shows the complexity of resistance at school and enables a better understanding of this phenomenon. The continuums within the dimensions of action, motivation and space, extended between opposing poles, indicate the absence of a rigid framework assigning a particular act of opposition to its one characteristic. Different aspects of a specific action intertwine, creating a complex structure set in a certain type of action taken as a result of a specific motivation, and manifesting itself in a particular space. The theoretical perspective on resistance adopted by the researcher, which is about paying attention to those aspects of particular polarizations that are typical of a given approach, is of key importance.

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