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Building resonance axes in a time of alienation

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is marked by pervasive experiences of alienation, yet it is also the period in which long-term ‘resonance axes’ begin to take shape. Drawing on Hartmut Rosa’s account of the dialectic between alienation and resonance, this paper argues that schools play a decisive role in determining whether adolescent estrangement becomes corrosive or instead contributes to later resonance. I first examine how educational institutions can welcome alienation by creating curricular, linguistic, institutional, and relational conditions that allow students to articulate and interpret experiences of disconnection. Such conditions can transform inevitable episodes of alienation into opportunities for dispositional resonance. I then address a tension within resonance theory: its sharp critique of competence-based education and evaluation. While Rosa warns that skills, assessment, and competition are structurally alienating, competences also function as necessary resources for entering and sustaining resonance axes, and some evaluation is pedagogically unavoidable. The task is therefore to redesign assessment so that its alienating tendencies are mitigated by strong pedagogical relationships. I propose distinguishing between ‘alienating alienation’ and ‘resonant alienation’ to clarify how schools can convert short-term disconnection into long-term resonance potential. Ultimately, cultivating resonance in a time of adolescent alienation requires investing in teachers’ relational and institutional conditions.

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Adolescence is marked by forms of alienation that are not merely pathological but developmentally significant. Drawing on Hartmut Rosa’s ((2016 2019)) account of alienation as a mute relation to the world and of resonance as transformative responsiveness, this paper argues that schools can help convert inevitable teenage self-estrangement into long-term resonance potential. I first show how schools can welcome alienation by creating shared spaces in which students interpret and articulate experiences of estrangement in their own voices. I then address a tension in Rosa’s educational thought: his critique of competence-based schooling and evaluation sits uneasily with the fact that skills, like resources, can be conditions for sustaining resonance axes. While evaluation and competition often intensify alienation, they need not do so. I argue that schools can reconfigure skill development and assessment so that they preserve, and sometimes restore, the possibility of resonant relations.

Alienation at the heart of resonance

Two particularly interesting moves characterize resonance theory's conceptual edifice, built on the fundamental opposition between resonance and alienation. Hartmut Rosa, with the help of Rahel Jaeggi ((2014 2016)), identifies alienation as the red thread running through the history of critical theory. The concept is able to capture the core preoccupations of social philosophers from Marx to Honneth, providing a semblance of unity to an otherwise fragmented tradition. Rosa's foundational move is to define resonance against alienation as a responsive mode of relation, thereby fleshing out a picture of the good life as being populated by regular experiences of transformative contact with the world. This pushes resonance theory beyond previous endeavors in the same critical tradition (e.g. Honneth (1992 1996)), which instead limit themselves to determining the conditions under which one could formulate and pursue their own conception of the good life. For Rosa, resonance involves being affected by otherness, responding in one's own voice (personal efficacy), mutual transformation, and an element of unavailability (letting go of total control). However, in a second surprising move, Rosa also insists that 'resonance and alienation are not simply opposites, but [...] even prove to be correlative' (Rosa (2016 2019), 189). Thus, unlike recognition, resonant relationships *constitute* a good life instead of simply enabling its pursuit; unlike contingent instances of misrecognition, disrespect or injustice, which *may* motivate recognition-seeking actions, alienation constitutes a necessary steppingstone on the way to sustainable resonance.

Rosa addresses the dialectic of alienation and resonance on three levels. First, only 'that which is foreign or alienated' (186) can be adaptively transformed; impenetrable otherness forms the backdrop of any resonant life, whose positive experiences only stand out because most of the world is experienced as silent. Second, openness to the world is identified as the common source of heightened potential for both alienation and resonance; it is the only way to truly resonate, but it is also how we get deeply hurt. Finally, Rosa claims that experiences of alienation may even increase our capacity for resonance: 'the depth of the indifference or repulsion one experiences seem also to define the potential depth of one's resonant relationships' (188).

Rosa identifies puberty as humanity's alienating rite of passage, 'the paradigmatic example of this dialectic between resonance and alienation' (188). Leaving behind a seamlessly meaningful experience of union with one's surroundings, teenagers focus their attention on the boundaries between themselves and the world; for the first time, they begin to reshape those boundaries with intention. And yet, the turbulence this produces can be profoundly valuable. Adolescents need to leave an unchosen comfort zone to discover life arenas that they can experience as resonant. Thus, while establishing alienation as a counter-model to his flagship concept, Rosa is careful to insist that it is both inescapable and potentially edifying, especially during the transition from childhood to adulthood.

There is considerable tension in Rosa's treatment of the dialectic between resonance and alienation. On one hand, he claims that alienation 'born of indifference and repulsion must first become palpable before resonant relationships to the world can be developed' (88). And yet, he also states that alienating experiences can 'produce resonant relationships only when the existential foundation of one relation to the world knows at least one deeply resonant moment, thus allowing what we might call *dispositional resonance*' (190)

or a ‘fundamental *faith in resonance*’ (189). Such a disposition is precisely what defines childhood in Rosa’s eyes; we are ‘anthropologically disposed to resonance; infants and young children are resonant beings’ (248). The tension between these assertions isn’t necessarily indicative of contradiction: developmentally, early resonant episodes establish a basic form of trust that allows later alienation to become formative rather than corrosive. Such preparation helps teenagers avoid lasting damage and, ideally, lays the groundwork for sustainable resonance axes.

Resonance theory’s critical force lies in specifying these axes, which represent the stable architecture that ensures regular resonant experiences whose emergence would otherwise be left to chance. While resonant relationships cannot be forced into being, the conditions for their appearance can be intentionally cultivated. School represents an especially important sphere of resonance architecture since it heavily conditions access to all others by either amplifying or suppressing children’s natural dispositions. At the same time, following Rosa’s comments on adolescence, we should expect nothing else than secondary schools filled with alienation that, to a certain extent, they had no part in creating.

The issue is therefore not one of eliminating alienation. Painful moments can later enable resonance by clarifying values, widening opportunity for adaptive transformation, and intensifying longing for a world that answers back. Educators must handle the inevitable carefully – avoiding aggravation and, where possible, leveraging it to help build enduring resonance axes.

Welcoming alienation in schools

Secondary schools are brimming with young people wrestling with the universal experience of the world as indifferent or hostile. Sometimes, this alienation is expressed rather obviously through behavior or clothing that demonstrates feelings of disunity with one’s surroundings. Just as often, however, it is either repressed or expressed in ways that are less conspicuous. Think, for example, of students who excel in academics or sports. While some of these students are thriving, some are pushed too hard by parents whose love feels conditional, and others push themselves past their limits in an attempt to prove something to whomever they feel underestimated by. When unsuccessful, such struggles for recognition are deeply alienating and, depending on whose recognition one is after, the outcome may depend very little on the one making effort. Alongside these outward expressions of alienation, many teenagers choose to suffer silently as their family lives and support networks are upended, wary of spoiling their social image with home drama.

Despite being an anthropological constant, today’s hybrid on/offline lifeworld raises the stakes, making traces of adolescent alienation more visible, public, and sticky; it therefore constitutes a pressing challenge to educators. In what follows, I develop the hypothesis that, beyond any residual dispositional resonance from childhood, *how schools receive adolescent alienation* largely shapes its long-term impact on resonance potential. As recognition theorists have pointed out (Renault (2004 2019)), experiences of injustice that are not recognized as such by the wider community become grounds for a second experience of injustice; it is as if society has sided with one’s aggressor in denying one’s right to respect. Similarly, experiences of alienation become doubly alienating when they can’t be communicated and heard. Teenagers who do not find a compelling way to express episodic disconnections from their bodies and environments, or who do not find

a willing ear, may end up closing themselves off from the world in an existential posture of defensive pessimism.

On the other hand, alienation that is *heard* – that is recognized in its contextual individuality without judgment or hostility – can become a catalyst for both episodic and structural resonance. In the immediate term, finding out that *someone understands* a deep form of pain that has been withheld from public view can be incredibly cathartic, allowing for an immediate experience of transformative connection. This is a point Rosa makes several times regarding art and music in particular: ‘abysmally sad music is more likely to lift people out of depression than push them into it’ (290), since the product of someone else’s pain becomes an internalized dialogue partner for our own. In the medium to long term, resonant experiences structured around mutually understood alienation may also provide scaffolding for stable resonance axes. A common form of this is found in friendships that outlast whatever alienating circumstances facilitated the initial connection. More generally, repeated experiences of alienation transformed into resonance may nurture a dispositional resonance that is relatively hardened against the shocks of life. Finally, if the person who lends a caring ear is an educator, they may orient their suffering student to a realm of activity that proves to be sustainably transformative, if not decisive, in their life trajectory. This could be accidental – when a student thinks, ‘*Ms. L really gets me, and she seems to find peace in pottery. Maybe there’s something to it*’ – or explicit – when a teacher offers, ‘*You’ve got a knack for tinkering; maybe you should look into a trade.*’

Such experiences are often fragile (and in many contexts too rare) in typical contemporary schools, where teachers’ attentional bandwidth can be stretched paper-thin. Moreover, as students move into their teenage years, they tend to become alienated from school itself, cognitively and emotionally distancing themselves from teachers, classmates, and even learning itself (Hascher and Hadjar 2018). Some of this disengagement is the inevitable result of adolescent alienation from the total lifeworld, but some of it is preventable by making schools into a more welcoming environment for the disaffection that nearly all teenagers experience. Due to alienation’s polymorphous nature, there will never be a single recipe for its healthy reception, but it is possible to outline a few conditions. I organize these into four categories – time and space, language, institutional sensitivity and relational quality or atmosphere – before turning to the issue of their practical implementation.

The most basic condition concerns the time and space that are explicitly allocated for attending to alienation in the classroom. This certainly does not need to take the shape of forced self-disclosure. Teachers can usefully tackle the phenomenon in the classroom upstream of any personal sharing by identifying elements in the curriculum that express or embody alienation and by turning the latter into a theme for reflection. While art and literature offer easy pickings, this could be accomplished with some creativity through virtually any subject matter: the history of colonialism, the economics of inequality, or simply disenchantment in the age of social media and AI. There are endless possibilities for addressing the fundamental human experience of becoming disconnected from oneself and the world as a curricular theme without making students put their own estrangement up for public display.

Second, drawing attention to latent instances of alienation in existing curricular topics would also provide students and teachers alike with a richer vocabulary for expressing

their own experiences of alienation and understanding those of others. Transforming one's alienation into resonance through dialogue requires not only terminology that captures a complicated social-emotional dynamic well enough to feel like one has 'put words on it,' but also a conviction that such discourse has currency within one's community. Thus, on a smaller scale, curriculum could be leveraged for something akin to Rosa's own academic endeavor of lending social legitimacy to the language of hearing and being heard, describing alienation's myriad facets in developmentally appropriate doses and contexts.

Teachers will not find such topics compelling – or speak them with conviction (Rosa (2016 2019), 245) – without first grasping the issue and its stakes. Schools are, of course, full of caring educators who are already attentive to the forms of alienation that they know and recognize. Alienation takes many forms, however, and there is value in increasing teachers' sensitivity to it at a relatively high level of abstraction. To the extent that teachers are systematically enculturated into an institution that collectively and competently cares about this ubiquitous ordeal, they will be able to better discern instances of it and handle them delicately, either by addressing a student directly or by putting them into contact with someone whose experiences are likely to resonate.

The last category concerns the relational quality and atmosphere of schools and classrooms. Such relational conditions are both the slipperiest to define and the hardest to guarantee. Rosa confidently asserts that education becomes resonant only when students are free from fear and anxiety, when they 'don't have to defend themselves against possible teasing, disparagement, malicious remarks, bullying, etc.' (245), though he acknowledges that 'this condition cannot simply be automatically fulfilled in every situation' (245). If schools are to welcome alienation, a cornerstone of psychological vulnerability, it will be doubly important for them to secure spaces of trust. This is no easy feat, especially since trustworthiness is highly subjective and different students will feel safer in different contexts.

This raises the obvious question: how feasible is any of this? The curricular aspects are fairly straightforward: material that thematizes alienation in existing subjects can be made available, and teachers who feel capable could eventually also organize activities to tackle the issue head-on in bite-sized portions. Such material, alongside the professional training surrounding its use, would provide not only appropriate language but also explicit permission for teachers to dedicate some attention to the issue. This already accomplishes a great deal, since alienating experiences are one of the few things that almost all adolescents have in common, though this can be difficult to grasp when the substantive details of each person's experiences are highly dissimilar. Improving collective fluency in the grammar of subjective isolation could contribute to a classroom's relational quality by giving everyone sharper conceptual tools to grasp each other's struggles to adaptively transform themselves and the world.

Concerning collective attention or institutional sensitivity, some progress may be achievable through the usual levers: training days, mission statements, staff meetings, school-wide events, etc. Some researchers, however, are attempting to further increase such institutional awareness through the conception and dissemination of tools to measure school alienation (Morinaj et al. 2017; Morinaj, Hadjar, and Hascher 2020; Vafa, Azizi, and Elhami Athar 2021). To be clear, these measurement tools are focused on students' alienation *from school*, not their experiences of the world as mute or hostile.

Nevertheless, they represent the interesting, albeit certainly controversial, possibility of a ‘diplomatic marriage’ between existing audit cultures, which are relentlessly focused on individualized outcomes (Taubman 2009), and relational pedagogy. Indeed, while such measures could never replace the attentive listening of a trusted adult – survey-style questionnaires typically do not contain fields for bearing one’s soul – they may play two important roles of their own. First, they can give an (imperfect) overview of a population’s overall state of relational health; with their limits kept in mind, the information they offer points toward wider trends that may merit institutional response. More importantly, measurement signals that an institution prioritizes relational quality, offering teachers psychological permission to invest in it.

Such measures may thus constitute a first step toward the improvement of relational quality in schools, which constitutes the most important condition for welcoming alienation. Indeed, students are unlikely to be receptive to a teacher’s lesson on the topic if they do not already feel a positive connection with those around them, and they certainly won’t share their experiences of alienation in earnest unless they expect to be heard with compassion. As such, authors like Gravett and Winstone (2020) promote relational pedagogies focused on fostering authentic connection as the solution to alienation. While such pedagogies may indeed usefully inspire practice, their implementation depends heavily on many institutionally determined parameters, such as teachers’ attentional bandwidth (Cuneen 2021) and their perception of institutional priorities. Their ability to connect with students is also hindered to the extent that they themselves are alienated by institutions that reduce them to fungible tokens within a depersonalized learning-production mechanism (Aksakalli 2024; Biesta 2010). Ultimately, due to education’s deeply contextual nature (Hickey and Riddle 2023), the sustainable improvement of pedagogical relationships leads to the issue of teachers’ collective control over their working conditions. Widespread fluency in the language of relational ideals such as pedagogical resonance may help teachers argue for and thus secure better professional conditions by bolstering the perceived legitimacy of their (already legitimate) relational needs (Cuneen 2025).

Competence, evaluation and competition

So far, we have discussed how schools might best respond to alienation that ‘walks in the front door,’ so to speak. Here, I want to address a type of alienation that schools tend to create, in order to reflect on how it might best be handled.

Much fuss has been made about skill- or competence-based education. Though such approaches were originally promoted as a way to ensure the transferability of learning outcomes in a job market characterized by regular, rapid upheavals (Chauvigné and Coulet 2010; Tuxworth 1989), critics have vehemently decried the neoliberal threat of purging whatever lacks economic value from the curriculum in the name of competence (e.g. Del Rey 2010; Tardif and Desbiens 2014). Rosa ((2016 2022)) has now joined their ranks with his own criticism, whose argument proceeds in three steps: pedagogical overfocus on skills leads to their evaluation; excessive evaluation begets competition; competition is antithetical to resonance. For Rosa, the main problem isn’t occasional or playful competition but *institutionalized competitive logics* that crowd out the vulnerability and reciprocal address that resonance

requires. While he admits that skills can help us enter into resonant relationships (122), he insists repeatedly that skill development inhibits resonance among learners and vice-versa (123–129). Rosa's remarks have been recently echoed by other sociologists asserting that overemphasis on competence feeds alienation precisely because 'a skill is experienced by the practitioners themselves purely for its instrumental value [and is] marked by a lack of sustaining feelings of meaning and connection' (Guhin and Klett 2022).

While there is merit in the overall judgment that a disproportionate focus on skills and their evaluation may be harmful to resonance and pedagogical relations writ large, Rosa's strong allergy to competence-talk may itself compromise *resonance's* transformative potential. Skills have a legitimate place in the world of education, and a closer look at Rosa's reasoning will help us define the boundaries of that place. Leaving aside Rosa's contestable (Nelson and Dawson 2017) contention that all skill evaluation leads to competition, I therefore address three problematic dimensions of Rosa's argument – pertaining to skills, evaluation and competition – before examining what might be done about the issue.

First, some skills are necessary foundations for sustainable resonance axes. Competences function as resources, thanks to the transferable nature of the problem-solving power they confer. Following a capability approach, skills provide people with real, positive freedoms to achieve resonant lives. Every single resonant experience mobilizes competence, without which there would be no self-efficacy, and every resonance axis requires skills to develop and maintain. Emotional skills (Mikolajczak 2009) are crucial in nearly every domain, as are basic linguistic and dialogical skills. Advanced networking skills are central to resonant political participation, just as physical coordination skills are indispensable to object-relations and many fields of work. Even the vertical resonance axes mobilize advanced skillsets such as meditation (spirituality), outdoorsmanship (nature) or critical information processing (history). Resonant artistic experiences require a large range of skills from both the artist and the public, whose aesthetic education conditions their appreciation. The musician's ability to produce resonant connection with a listener depends on their musical skill as well as their authentic emotional investment, but the ability to perform a piece of music well while also allowing oneself to *feel* the music *is itself* a skill – a novice must remain relatively stoic to execute the movements adequately. Therefore, skills themselves cannot be the core obstacle to resonance, which emerges only when we introduce evaluation into the structure for their development.

And yet – second problem – some grading is necessary for schools to meet various legitimate objectives. Evaluation does many things (Sievertsen 2023). Most basically, it provides extrinsic motivation and a target for learning, which obviously can be overdone but is not perverse in itself; though we wish for all students to overflow with intrinsic motivation, a push from the outside is helpful to sustain momentum in valleys. Second, it gives both students and teachers feedback on what is and isn't working; while formative feedback may be decoupled from certificatory evaluation, the latter still provides useful information. Third, grading enables schools to play their role as selection mechanisms, since orienting young people towards contexts where they are more likely to thrive requires an understanding of their capabilities and affinities. Finally, on a system-wide level, evaluation done right can play a role in educational quality and equity by providing relevant information to decision-making bodies.

Evaluation can also confer subtle psychological benefits to the students being evaluated, under the right circumstances. In preparing for an important evaluation, motivated students sharpen their skills and strive to put the best of themselves on display. When they manage, their performance can anchor their sense of self-efficacy by making their ability visible to all. Evaluation may also play a role in responsibility development, which entails paying attention to the contextual ethical value of one's actions. Evaluations draw students' attention to the value of their work and may, under certain relational conditions, foster lasting dispositional attention to the value of one's conduct.

Finally, while *excessive* competition is very certainly detrimental to both education and society, *some* competition is an inherent part of life, regardless of economic structures. We struggle for whatever goods and resources are limited, including food, money, and jobs, but also love, attention, and recognition. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any possible utopia in which we are still recognizably human and all competition is nonexistent. Competition does a few good things for us. Canonically, it pushes each rival to do their best, motivating performance and innovation. More discretely, it socializes all to the expectations of others and the local range of capacity. This can help each student understand the extent of her own talents and relative shortcomings and reveal affinities that can translate into friendships built on shared or complementary strengths. Regardless of legitimate criticism, competition is a fact of life that young people must learn to adapt to – even if we aim to drastically reduce the ever-pervasive socio-economic competition driving our planet headfirst into a wall (Rosa (2005 2013)) – and so there may be 'morally valuable lessons to be learned by exposing people to the heat of competition' (Morgan 2006, 105).

Keeping these three complications in mind, Rosa is right that the evaluation and competition that surround skill development can be alienating experiences for students and teachers alike. Any performance of a skill is a snapshot of a dynamic and context-sensitive capacity. Echoing Sartre, students who feel like they have not been able to show the best of themselves may feel eternally defined by their poor performance in the eyes of someone whose evaluative perspective counts for them. Moreover, individual and collective perceptions of relative competence – who's better than whom at what – can exacerbate dynamics of bullying and harassment. This can go both ways: you can face ridicule for having the best grades or the worst. Teachers may also feel deeply alienated by evaluation practices, especially ones that they have not themselves chosen or consented to. On a basic level, grading and its documentation consume a massive amount of mental energy and attention, which then cannot be given to the students themselves. To the extent that *they* are evaluated based on their students' performance, teachers also may feel pressure to ignore the things that they believe are important for their students to hear, in favor of whatever will appear in their superiors' preferred metrics. Finally, grading reduces a teacher's appreciation of their students to a number, infringing on what is primarily a qualitative, human relationship.

What, then, can be done to reduce the alienating potential of evaluation? An obvious first step is to reduce the quantity of standardized testing and keep the stakes as low as possible for as long as possible, as in the Finnish model where the first high-stakes exam occurs at the end of secondary school (Sahlberg 2007). Their minimalist-leaning approach to evaluation – later and lower stakes – extends to school inspections and rankings, which can put competitive pressure on teachers, while maintaining system-level monitoring (OECD 2024). Without assuming simple policy portability, it stands that evaluation must

be done sparingly to be done well. The things that make evaluation less alienating require time, effort and attention: listening to the student's account of learning (struggle, wonder, accomplishment), contextualizing the purpose of the evaluation, giving detailed feedback, etc. During oral exams, for example, a caring teacher will spend an enormous amount of energy closely examining and contextualizing skill mastery, providing appropriate emotional support (either by regulating their own visible emotional reactions or by offering verbal reassurance), taking notes for feedback and accountability, and finally translating their holistic assessment into a number or letter grade. Such moments must be exceptional.

With fewer tests to give and presentations to grade, there are several things teachers could do to improve the situation. Much of it begins with awareness. Cultivating sensitivity to potentially alienating dimensions of evaluation – self-image/social comparison, fear of reprisal from parents, bullying, emotional disconnect, apparent irrelevance to one's life, race and class issues, etc. – doesn't mean that teachers are going to make their evaluation 'alienation-proof,' but they may be able to limit the preponderance of locally common aggravators. Evaluation may inevitably beget implicit competition, even when 'objective' criterion-referenced assessment is designed to prevent this (Sadler 2005), but teachers may not realize this and thus remain blind to its effects on student relationships. Once aware, they can take this into account and adapt competitive activities 'to create more equal opportunities, which would enable students to have positive and edifying experiences, or students can be asked to choose which activities to participate in, as well as their level of challenge' (Aggerholm, Standal, and Hordvik 2018).

Upstream, *framing* can make evaluation less alienating by addressing the purposes not just of the skill to be mastered, but of the evaluation itself. Deep contextualization can give meaning to intermittent unpleasant experiences; jumping through a hoop may become acceptable if it serves a broader purpose that all parties believe in. Of course, for teachers to convince students of an evaluation's legitimacy, they themselves need to be convinced, leading us back to the issue of teachers' collective control over their working conditions. Downstream, there are many good principles available for improving the receivability of feedback (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006), which provides opportunities for further contextualization and continued growth. Once again, these cost significant amounts of time, attention and effort.

Evaluations are performances before an authority. Ball (2003) claims performance leaves no room to care for each other, only for the performance. I disagree: teachers can judge mastery *and* shape conditions for students to show their best. Performances evidence growth and, when successful, bolster self-efficacy and honor the teacher's implicit promise to help students do what they could not do before. The issue is making that care visible – by giving teachers more say over grading parameters and by sharpening awareness of evaluation's alienating potential.

Such awareness does not need to come solely from professional training, which is difficult to tailor to the micro-contexts that define teachers' challenges. It can emerge organically when students are given a space to talk about their experiences of being evaluated. I do not mean an 'evaluation of the evaluation,' where something material is at stake for the teacher, but rather a moment for students to simply be heard, either collectively or individually, e.g. '*Look, Mr. B, we worked really hard on our presentation, and it hurt to see you looking at your phone while we were up there.*' To the extent that such

an alienating experience is acknowledged instead of denied, it has less of a lasting negative impact on students, all while updating teachers' understanding of what to pay attention to.

Finally, evaluation and competition are less alienating when they occur within otherwise resonant relationships. The quality of the triadic relationship (teacher–student–material) both shapes and is shaped by evaluation practices. Where evaluation is necessary and legitimate, it can foster more dispositional resonance than alienation. Recall the familiar cereal-ad promise: a bowl of flakes is 'part of a balanced breakfast.' Evaluation plays the same role. By itself, it's just the cereal; what makes it nourishing are the conditions around it: time for interpretation, space for student voice, and a relationship strong enough to hold the discomfort. While we cannot and should not eliminate skill evaluation entirely, we must invest more heavily in the relational context that makes it part of a balanced education.

Concluding remarks

I have argued two things. First, schools can *receive* adolescent alienation, so it becomes educable rather than dispositional – consistent with resonance theory's claim that alienation must be *transformed* to open paths to resonance. Second, skills and resonance must be reconciled if the theory is to matter institutionally. A blanket rejection of evaluation is both impractical and self-defeating; the task is to reshape assessment to minimize alienation and support relationships. To make itself more palatable within educational decision-making bodies, resonance theory would do well to 'abandon the fantasy of unaccountable education' (Sidorkin 2023, 144).

Going further, by recognizing the deep complexity of the dialectic between resonance and alienation, it might be useful to distinguish between 'alienating alienation,' denoting experiences that contribute to dispositional alienation, and 'resonant alienation,' referring to those alienating experiences that end up increasing our potential to develop sustainable resonance axes. Of course, foreshadowing only exists in hindsight, and we can rarely know in advance what the net resonance-impact of any event will be. Nevertheless, this seemingly paradoxical phrase might help resonance-sensitive educators conceptualize the hidden potentiality of long-term thriving within short-term disconnection – if only to soften the guilt akin to that of a parent who must avoid responding to their toddler's tantrum from behind a closed door.

The question of building resonance axes in a time of alienation leads back, time and again, to the overall quality of pedagogical relationships. This can improve by giving more space to alienation, in such a way that allows for collective parsing of this universally shared experience. Ultimately, however, the main determinant of relational quality remains teachers' collective control over conditions that make resonant relationships possible in their local contexts.

Author contributions

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