

Liberating Education: What From, What For?

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Emancipation and/or Education: Challenges and Frictions

We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
Teachers leave them kids alone
Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone!
All in all it's just another brick in the wall.
All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

(Lyrics by Roger Waters, *Pink Floyd*, 1979)

The relations between emancipation, society and education have been fraught with tensions throughout history. More than 40 years ago, the release of Pink Floyd's rock opera album *The Wall* shook up the school and political landscape in Great Britain. As Rogers Waters explained in the interview for the Rolling Stone magazine in 2015, he wanted to express his own feeling of alienation (Greene 2015). It was not to "accuse" teachers of the educational shortcomings as they would always be an "easy target". The song

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did have a significant emancipatory and education “life”. Soon after it was released, it was banned in South Africa in 1980,⁵ as it supported school boycott against racial inequities in education under apartheid.

Education may lead to emancipation, but it may also be precisely what one should emancipate oneself from. Even though we are the inheritors of the emancipatory potential of the Enlightenment, never before have these been under such rigorous critical scrutiny as from various intellectual traditions of the second half of the 20th century, such as postcolonial and decolonial studies, post-structuralist thought, feminist critique, posthumanism, etc. But precisely because the classic educational emancipatory ideal appears both outdated and still current, there is a great need for rethinking the idea of emancipation, along with the role and the aim of education.

Some of the insufficiently considered issues are immediately imposed: Who is the subject of emancipation? Emancipation from what? What does emancipatory education look like in practice? Does the education that emancipates today differ from the ones before? How can we criticize ideological, normalizing, conformist functions of education and still argue its emancipatory role? What are the possible helpful tools and methods of emancipation through education, how and with what purpose should they be used? How can technology be emancipatory and what makes it anti-emancipatory? How can the relation between educators and the educated contribute to the growth of personal and social freedom? Ultimately, what does it even mean to be or to become emancipated? And doesn't setting emancipation as the main, or the most desirable goal of education already assume an unacceptable instrumentalization of education?

This volume gathers original contributions to these and other related issues and questions. The primary objective of this book is exploring the intersection of emancipation, society and education, from

5 The New York Times 1980.

critical and theoretical lenses. In making the selection, we also cared about their contemporary currency. Today's world brings with it specific challenges: e.g. new distributions of geopolitical power, the crisis of democracy, the rise of new technologies. Thus, we wanted this volume to bring a fresh perspective on the ways in which the existing educational practices should be challenged. The overall ambition is to present studies that could contribute to the ongoing discussion and debates around the role of emancipation in the 21st century, from educational perspectives.

There is a healthy body of scholarship around education and emancipation in the current literature. The schools of critical theory, critical pedagogy, poststructuralist feminism, critical race theory, and decolonial studies have especially contributed to the debate.⁶ Although the texts enclosed in this volume refer to these authors, we didn't limit ourselves to one school of thought. Instead, we decided to remain open to diverse philosophical approaches, adding fresh perspectives from several other disciplines as well, including sociology (Petkovska), pedagogy and philology (Pavlović & Ilić Rajković), and art theory (Jankov).

Even though the body of published articles and chapters is considerable, collections dealing explicitly with the relation between education and emancipation, especially those considering this topic simultaneously from a variety of theoretical perspectives, such as this one, are scarce. We believe that researchers interested in these issues can benefit from a rich collection devoted explicitly to this topic. We

⁶ Jacques Rancière (Rancière 1991), Walter Dignolo (Dignolo 2000; Tlostanova & Dignolo 2012), Michael Apple (Apple 2004; Apple 1982), Henry Giroux (Giroux 1983), Peter McLaren (McLaren 1997), and Gloria Ladson-Billings (Ladson-Billings 1997; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV 1995), in addition to having produced well-known classics, are still contributing new analyses, providing the main references for the contemporary debate, which is actively continued, deepened, and taken to the next level by Antonia Darder (Darder 2002), Gert Biesta (Biesta 2008; Bingham & Biesta 2010; Osberg & Biesta 2020), Stephen Ball (Grimaldi & Ball 2021; Ball 2003), and Noah De Lissovoy (De Lissovoy 2008; De Lissovoy 2015) among others. In addition, more recent notable contributions to the debate include Neil Hooley (Hooley 2020), Michel Alhadeff-Jones (Alhadeff-Jones 2018), Greg Wiggan and associates (Wiggan et al. 2014), and Chris Sarra (Sarra 2014).

hope to have shown through this collection how by asking about the relation between education and emancipation, we ask about the very purpose of education. Articles are grouped around three main themes: the relations between educators and the educated, the use of educational tools and practices in an emancipatory way, and the role of education in emancipating individuals and societies from the constraints and injustices imposed by the existing social structures.

Educators and Educated

The three chapters of this thematic whole address several challenges that arise out of the relation between students and teachers, those who are educating and those who are educated. Can the authority of teachers and the autonomy of students be reconciled? How does a more egalitarian education look like, and how can it contribute to the emancipation of students and the society as a whole? Finally, how can we become emancipatory educators of ourselves?

The first chapter of this collection, “Emotional Base of Educational Process: Beyond Care for Wellbeing” by **Igor Cvejić**, treats in the last few decades a very prominent topic of emotional investments and transfers in education. Relying on the family model and the works of Shapiro and Helm, the author finds that asymmetrical recognition of learners’ autonomy and emotions are not enough. That’s what the term ‘beyond’ from the title stands for. Mutual or joint engagement between the educator and the learner, care of all actors in the educational process, their union in recognizing each other as ‘one of us’ - these are noble and valuable suggestions that conclude this analysis of the feelings that underlie or surround education.

The chapter by **Aleksandar Milanković** “Interactive Teaching as a Component of Social Emancipation” presents interactive teaching method and argues convincingly for its vast emancipatory potential. With a background in social constructivism, teaching and

learning are here understood and practiced as processes of communication and interaction. The aim of interactive teaching is not just the transmission of knowledge, but a comprehensive personal development in partnership with others. That is why, Milanković argues, this method is suitable for developing relations between educators and the educated that are based on equality, participation, communication, dialogue, cooperation, and solidarity, rather than the hierarchy inherent in the traditional *ex cathedra* teaching. When applied to subjects such as civic education, philosophy, sociology, history, literature, media, etc, this method exercises “active detection of modes of coercion, power, indoctrination, and manipulation”, motivating students to “transform, change, and improve their social surroundings”. By stressing the importance of communication between equals, the paper shows the way towards schools as true communities of learning.

Marija Velinov ventured to analyse the Stoics’ (primarily Seneca’s) relationship to education through the prism of Foucault’s understanding of Stoicism. *Stultitia*, *Askesis*, and related ancient concepts have been put to the test in their connection to listening, reading, and writing as educational practices. Emancipation emerges convincingly and inspiringly out of the discussion of the liberating claim of the ethics of the self to appropriate the truth and the becoming of the subject of truth-telling. It turns out that subjects primarily need to become independent and free of themselves – in order to become emancipated. Foucault evokes and interprets this wisdom of antiquity in an exceptional way – Velinov concludes – finding it instructive for contemporaneity as well.

Emancipation for and from the Society

The largest thematic whole consists of five chapters, exploring the complex relations of education and emancipation in the broader social context. The papers reflect the problematic status of the Enlightenment ideal, with some defending (Smajević Roljić; Nikolić), or assuming it (Šoć), and others criticizing it (Ostojić; Petkovska). The

negative effects of contemporary neocolonial and neoliberal society on education are analyzed and proposals for countering them are offered.

In the chapter “An Interpretation of the Educational Process from the Perspective of Kant’s Philosophy of History and Legal-Political Theory” **Milica Smajević Roljić** outlines Kant’s understanding of education in its appropriate social framework. One of the standard accounts of goals of education in Kant emphasizes their ethical function. Accordingly, the main goals of education should be seen in personal (moral) growth. Smajević Roljić stresses the importance of historical-political processes, more precisely, the overlapping of Kant’s understanding of history and legal-political theory with his account on education. Besides the fact that goals of education and historical processes are one and the same (according to Kant), the article reveals the dependence of possibilities of the emancipation from the state of development of society, i.e. the socio-political conditions which affect not only society as a whole, but also every individual person.

In her chapter “Emancipatory and Ideological Functions of Education”, **Olga Nikolić** traces the development of scholarly thought on emancipation through three canonical texts: Rousseau’s *Emile*, Kant’s *What is Enlightenment?* and Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. She juxtaposes the key ideas of emancipation in these texts with neoliberal ideology of education in the present day. The chapter argues that emancipation should be concerned with worthy ideals for society and education, but it can hardly eradicate ideology, which neoliberalism falls under. Emancipatory thought and action will always be critical of ideologies, striving towards an emancipatory ideal, which may or may not turn into or be abused through ideology-in-practice. The major contribution of this study is in making a conceptual distinction between *ideology* and *ideal*, in response to the critics arguing that the Enlightenment ideal had itself become ideological and had instrumentalized education.

Relying on the strong input of contemporary empirical research,

Andrija Šoć in his chapter “Deliberative Education and Quality of Deliberation: Toward a Critical Dialogue and Resolving Deep Disagreements” proposes standards that can empower deliberative education. Šoć uses empirical evidence taken from various countries to reveal problems that arise in the quality of deliberation. Against top-down approaches and building on Steiner, Šoć advocates for an optimistic bottom-up solution in education. The significance of Šoć’s account lies in the proposal of the two-dimensional approach for formulating goals and practices of deliberative education. Descriptive aspects inform us (*post-hoc*) about the quality of education and its malfunctioning. However, the description doesn’t suffice to address the question of how we can improve it through education. For this purpose, Šoć argues, it is better to combine descriptive aspects with the normative ones contained in Grice’s cooperation principle. In this way, the emancipation of citizens could be enhanced not just as a realization of the ‘dare to think’ maxim, but also in such a way that citizens will be ready to be proven wrong by the strength of a better argument.

Michel Serres is the main character of **Aleksandar Ostojić’s** chapter “Knowledge Versus Production”. And the former found a good interpreter and successor in the latter: they are both wholeheartedly opposed to the reduction of knowledge through rigorously imposed frameworks and goals, and to the measuring of education by the scale of efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, and other economic categories. The culprit is found in the discourse of methodocentrism, not only for ‘bad’ science but also for colonial and imperial politics with its single vision of emancipation. Serres’s efforts are instructive in this regard, insofar as they “open the ways to knowledge” and the “roads of discovery”. The hierarchy, norms, and reproduction of knowledge are unequivocally opposed in favour of free, divergent thinking, and a completely open dissemination of knowledge. In other words, Serres and Ostojić warn that modern knowledge nurtured in schools is rather a dogmatic suspension of knowledge than its inheritance, and advocate for alternative pathways of knowledge – oriented towards innovation.

Starting from the thesis that in the contemporary world, plagued by divisions and injustices, students' understanding of their position in the global market and the global division of geopolitical power significantly contributes to their emancipation, the paper by **Sanja Petkovska** "Decolonial Emancipation on the Postsocialist Peripheries and the Future of Critical Pedagogy" defends it by discussing the main tenets of decolonial education. First, the author traces the historical emergence of decolonial education in the context of the crisis of critical pedagogy. This is followed by an overview of the main concepts of the decolonial option in the work of Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo, summed up in the call for "learning to unlearn". Finally, Petkovska presents two postcolonial educational theories, by Chela Sandoval and Iveta Silova, in order to exemplify how the field of decolonial educational studies can contribute to emancipation in the classroom. Particular value of this chapter lies in calling attention to the postsocialist spaces, often neglected in this context, as being in need of decolonization and emancipation.

Educational Tools of Emancipation

This thematic whole demonstrates by means of concrete examples how educational tools (textbooks, art, technology) can on the one hand be used to emancipate, but also how they can be ideologically abused and serve as means of control.

In the chapter "Educational Technology: From Educational Anarchism to Educational Totalitarianism", **Mikhail Bukhtoyarov** and **Anna Bukhtoyarova** explore the relation between educational technology and educational ideology with regards to an ever-increasing use of technology as an educational tool. They provide a detailed and original analysis of educational ideologies on the spectrum between educational anarchism and educational totalitarianism, with respect to the use of technology in education. They focus particularly on the growing risks of the abuse of technology in the context of social change brought by the lifelong learning paradigm in education. They

observe the tendency of even the technologies originally supported by anarchist ideas to become tools of totalitarianism when implemented throughout the educational system and warn against the dangers of justifying the use of technologies to track students' personal data.

Sonja Jankov's chapter "Social Turn and Operative Realism: Two Emancipatory Methods of Contemporary Art Practices" discloses the critical potentials of novel artistic practices. Choosing to exemplify her thesis with the work of two artists, the installation *What Else Could We Talk About?* by Teresa Margolles and the long-term project *Disputed Histories* by Vahida Ramujkić, Jankov reveals emancipatory potentials of the social turn in arts and operative realism. In spite of the differences between the two approaches, the authors mentioned combine them both. By pointing out their relational character toward the world and the specific mode of knowledge production, Jankov concludes that such socially engaged artistic methods could initiate new forms of sociability that emancipates participants. What is crucial is that these artistic methods can produce perspective-shifting and critical distancing in such a way as to enable participants to take an emancipated view of the world, providing both openness to other's perspectives and the capability to approach problems from a 'global' stance.

In the final chapter of the collection, **Aleksandar Pavlović** and **Aleksandra Ilić Rajković** follow the routes of the neo-romantic discourse in educational policy from the constitution of the modern Serbian state in the second half of the nineteenth century to the breakup of communism as the official Yugoslav ideology and the rise of nationalism from the 1990s onwards. Thoroughly laid out basics and main landmarks of the Romantic-national ideas of education are compared, in this particularly striking review, with the current Serbian history readers for primary and secondary schools. The author's diagnosis concludes that we are "still far from the emancipation of pupils and the education system from the neo-romantic idea of nation and national identity". The proposed therapy is to include and respect

different sources and views on the same events in the teaching process, whereby students would be able to gain a more comprehensive view of both their own past and their neighbours' through active learning. Thus, this approach can “contribute overall to a more realistic, nuanced and reconciliatory perception of their present problems”.

The questions posed in this volume were originally shaped through discussions within the Edulab: Laboratory for Educational Strategies, a group of researchers and practitioners of education coming from the fields of philosophy, pedagogy and education studies, literary theory, art history, and political science. Edulab was formed at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade, with an aim to offer a fresh theoretical perspective on education through interdisciplinary scientific research. Additionally, Edulab aims at making educational themes more present in the public and finding ways for the results of the theoretical work and public engagement to be applied in practice.

We believe that this collection contributes to these goals.

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