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Jacques Rancière on Radical Equality and Adult Education

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“Universal teaching is above all the universal verification of the similarity of what all the emancipated can do, all those who have decided to think of themselves as people just like everyone else” (Rancière 1991, 41).

Abstract

French philosopher Jacques Rancière's (1940-) has furthered the idea of radical equality in his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991) in which he studies his countryman's Joseph Jacotot's (1770–1840) ideas on teaching and learning without authorities entitled the basic statement being as follows: “teach what you don't know.” In particular Rancière criticizes sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's reproduction thesis as too deterministic and French reformist educational policies in general. More positively Rancière develops and defends an enlightened idea of radical equality, which is useful in re-evaluating the overall project of modernity in terms of education as one of its grand narratives as well as developing new autonomic spheres of learning and participation.

Free and Chained

The philosophical strands of adult education are many but in the following I divide them in two. In this division there is ‘a philosophy of the order’ which has usually been ‘a tamed philosophy.’ The tamed philosophers have felt content in the lap of power in examining usually politically neutral and innocuous questions including such themes as active citizenship, which has shown the possibilities of the philosophy of the order: “be active but only within given limits and with given forms.” The philosophy of the order serves the police (police order); it is a philosophy without philosophy. On the other hand there is ‘a living philosophy of adult education’: it has been susceptible to the ‘non-philosophical’ social effects representing an organic – ‘sparking’ or ‘flaming’ – philosophy.

In the following I read Rancière's work through two traditions of thought: those of living philosophy and critical pedagogy, both of which are anchored to social action and revolutionary practice and to such political thinking as anarchism, syndicalism, communalism, and Marxism. Learning is defined in these critical traditions of education above all as a political, critically reflective action (cf. Brookfield 1995), a change in meaning perspectives (Mezirow 1995), or a revolutionary praxis (Freire 2005). In terms of learning revolution can be defined using Ian Parker's (2007, 148) words as “an opportunity for discovering new ways of living, of bringing to the fore aspects of human creativity and hope that are usually suppressed.” Along these lines, the social criticism and promotion of the political change are central features of radical education besides critical research and reflecting teaching (see also Lawson 1996, 142).

Living philosophy of adult education is not restricted only to big leaders or to trendsetters and to their effects, which have been conveyed, but refers to the ordinary people's existence as bodily and experiential beings reflecting their active being in the world: this may be forgotten in an apparently learnt but often unlearned academic namedropping of the philosophy of the order. The living philosophy of adult education is based on an ontological fact, which states that "there is only one human species and only one nature related to the flesh and skeleton, and to the bones and skin as long as at least a modest breath moves the beings. The truth about the human being is her own living body" (Onfray 2004, 34). On the other hand, the living philosophy of education (or a philosophy of the first-person) respects peoples' experiences, their own voice, and points of view. This means that all their experiences, including thinking and feeling, willing and loving, believing and hoping, are taken seriously as starting points for the rigor critical analysis of the current condition. But as Billington (2003, 318–319) reminds us, it is often forgotten especially in the Western philosophy of education. (1)

The traditions of the living philosophy and critical pedagogy offer a ground to study French philosopher Jacques Rancière's idea of a radical equality. In his book entitled *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991) (originally published in French as *Le Maître ignorant* in 1987) he presents his critique of critical educational theory leading to emancipatory learning and aiming at radically equal society Rancière has radicalized the educational thinking of the Enlightenment with a claim that equality is a foundation both for the democratic politics and democratic education, and not their objective or ideal end result. He also has examined such educational culture which is based on self-learning (or self-education) without external authorities. According to this rationale *one can teach what one does not know*. This obscure thought Rancière has adopted from the private thinker Joseph Jacotot who lived in France and the Netherlands in the years 1770–1830 developing what was then called as 'universal' or 'panecastic' teaching method. This idea of teaching what one does not know serves as a cornerstone of Rancière's suggestion of radical equality.

The philosophical foundations of 'universal,' or more appropriately, an emancipatory method, are in close resemblance to the ideas criticizing both liberal democracies and state-based schooling systems as watered forms of equality. Rancière instead emphasizes the ordinary people's possibilities to function as social subjects and maintains the significance of self-learning to reach humanity through radical equality. In this respect his thinking is useful in reflecting the functions of the individual in the history of civilization, the roles of expertise in society, the meaning of politics and democracy, and the preconditions for the economic, political, and social change. In addition Rancière's thinking is of special interest to those concerned in the relation between forms of education in terms of transformative and revolutionary change in an equal society.

Who's Jacques Rancière?

Jacques Rancière (born in 1940) was a star pupil of philosopher Louis Althusser during the first half of the 1960's in Ecole Normal Supérieure in rue d'Ulm, Paris. But in the end of the decade he made a sharp intellectual distinction with his teacher accusing Althusserians of their structuralism, which, as Rancière claims, tends to serve the power elite only (Hewlett 2007, 84). According to Rancière's critique Althusser underestimated the significance of the individual in the political and social change, collapsed to the elitism in trying to make a difference between scientific and other conceptualizations of Marxism and in claiming that the educational process is based on absolute inequality of knowledge and ignorance (ibid., 93).

Although it is hard to pigeonhole Rancière's intellectual work it is fair to say that it is

connected to the rich and turbulent traditions of French Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics (Dillon 2005, 430; Hewlett 2007). His academic carrier Rancière served in the University VIII of Paris in 1969-2000, last ten years as Professor of Aesthetics and Politics of actions. He got his own political education as part of the long 1960's and as a consequence of the events in Paris in May 1968. The communists' groups departed and Rancière ended up in the party fraction (Gauche Prolétarienne) whose members emphasized revolutionary action instead of theory in the times of political uprising. Among the members were Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault who tried to get rid of the Leninist type vanguardism, and to abolish the division between intellectuals and workers, and intellectual and manual labor. Their ultimate objective was students', intellectuals' and workers' alliance and a united battlefront against conservatism and reformist politics (Reid 1989, xvi xvii).

There is at least three distinct periods in Rancière's work. After the influence of Althusser he first concentrated on historical studies and then devoted himself to social and political philosophy. The political philosophy has later been connected to the philosophic analysis of aesthetics and the media. These research subjects are motivated by the interest in the questions of social and political control and their relation to the concept of emancipation. Rancière believes it is not philosopher's task to give voice to the silent and oppressed but to add her own voice into other voices: more than to interpret and write theory a philosopher's duty is to hear and listen. And this way a philosopher helps voices to echo and adds power of the silenced. (Ibid., 137; Hewlett 2007.)

As Jean-Philippe Deranty (ibid., 136) puts it, "Rancière was out of place in the 70s, when Althusser's brand of Marxism was the official dogma of French intelligentsia. He was out of place in the 80s, when the utopian moment was weeded out of political philosophy. He is out of place today with his neo-Hegelian aesthetics and his reading of literature focused on proletarian emancipation." Initially Rancière had been impressed from Marx but later distanced himself from Marx's core ideas; he is an existentialist but given up the concept of the self-assertion; postmodern theoretician who judges the language philosophy of Jean-Jacques Lyotard; students of the social order who reacts critically to Michel Foucault's definition of power; sociologist and historian interested in the misery of the world but critical towards Pierre Bourdieu's interpretations of the theme; theorist of the confession rejecting the concept of understanding; an expert on Gilles Deleuze whose political thinking is however geared around the notion of the subject. (Deranty 2003, 136.)

First and foremost Rancière is a theorist of political philosophy and equality to whom the central question seems to be "the absent presence of the equality"; to him no social order neither guarantees nor creates equality; it cannot be required either. According to Rancière, equality is an origin for political and other action, not the other way around, since equality is always practiced and verified in social practices (Dillon 2005, 430–431). This way it is possible to understand Rancière's interest in educational processes, and teaching methods as democratic exercise of power. The school is an establishing 'transmission force' of the individuals and the political system in the modern societies. Its definitiveness is concealed in its ability to appear in the disguise of democracy (Rancière 1995, 52). The school presents itself as the level honoring form of democracy, although it serves capitalism as a diploma mill and an examination automat. It has been celebrated as the ultimate apparatus of equality with its meritocratic possibilities (2), but for Rancière this does not meet the demands of the radical equality.

Critique of the System Logic of Education and Radical Equality

The equality of social and educational possibilities has often been considered as the

general objectives in the theory of the critical theory and critical pedagogy (see McLaren & Kincheloe 2007). These objectives have been striven for with different welfare political means such as progressive taxation, universal health care, social security, publicly funded schools and so on. “One of the real achievements of modern society is to remove the opposition between *mass* and *mental*. Educational institutions have improved standards of numeracy and literacy on a scale which the Victorians could not have imagined,” writes sociologist Richard Sennett (2007, 85). Even though the social mobility has risen steadily, the sociologists of education have however noticed that the objective of the social and educational equality has been achieved only partly even in the wealthy West.

A vast array of analysis of the educational inequality has been presented; probably the best known among them is sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction. It states that the production and reproduction of social relations takes place in the area of formal and informal education; especially it is the core function of the schooling system. According to the theory of reproduction, the education maintains the existing social order and individual differences. Even with new political correction movements, it has not been possible to remove different learning obstacles and to weed educational or other so-called disadvantages. One should keep in mind that these anomalies – unequal opportunities, dropping out phenomenon, and disadvantages of various sorts – are qualities of capitalism and its schooling system; in other words they are social issues, not individual problems (as C.W. Mills once taught us). Furthermore, the social and educational problems caused by the global supply of labor (“race to the bottom” as Capitalism looks for labor wherever labor is cheapest), by automation and by the management of ageing have arisen in modern societies; together they have caused what have been labeled as “the fear of uselessness” (Sennett 2007, 86–103). Massive school and social bureaucracy and respective ‘governmentality’ have been founded to take care of the social ill, guaranteeing political consensus and taming dissidence.

However, in Rancière’s view of radical inequality these analyses presented by the benevolent educational sociologists and their suggestions for corrective actions in educational policy, are wrong and inadequate in reaching radical equality. In the pursuit of radical equality one must grasp the roots of the problem (“and the root of the human being is a human being itself”, as Marx maintained) without trusting too much to the fact that the system would carry out equality for all. In this instance this ‘grasping the roots’ means among other things theoretical work around the notions of equality, and empirical work in the participating institutions of socialization. Radical equality is based on the announcement of everyone’s similarity, and everyone’s ability to voluntary thinking. As Rancière (1991, 41) puts it: “Universal teaching is above all the universal verification of the similarity of what all the emancipated can do, all those who have decided to think of themselves as people just like everyone else.”

From the beginning of the 1970s Rancière has criticized Bourdieu’s reproduction thesis and its application in educational policy making. In his opinion, Bourdieu has built an idea of the intellectual aristocracy, of “sociology kings,” who always know the people’s matters and their life situations better than themselves. In its determinism Bourdieu’s sociology of education thus presents ‘the philosophy of the police order’ serving the dominating power whose representatives do not even hear the ordinary people’s voice but consider it as meaningless nonsense (Hewlett 2007, 90, 91–97) but on the other hand one can claim that Rancière has used Bourdieu as a stroll man in developing his own points of view. (3)

According to the criticism, Bourdieu assumes that people are more or less ignorant; people from the working-class will be excluded from the educational system just because they do not realize, or are not aware of the real reasons for the exclusion. This

ignorance, in turn, is a structural consequence of the apparently democratic capitalist system, which closes them out in the first place. In Bourdieu's thinking the system stays erect because people do not realize its proper functions and because it reproduces its own existence by staying unrecognized again and again within its own processes (Ross 1991, xi–xii). However, Rancière does not want to sign or accept this circle logic of reasoning but stresses that the matters are as they are, and remain unchanged, partly because of these so-called social facts. In other words, Rancière wants educational sociologists to be more than neutral observers and gatherers of social facts; they should not only explain but also change the world of education.

In other words, they should try to be more critical and abandon their God's eye view and technically detailed analysis legitimating their own expertise and leaving the real sufferings of the world untouched and intact. Furthermore, they should reject their will to power, or as Rancière (1995, 52) remarks, their lasting hunger to "win every round." Probably this critical position against the fellow philosophers and sociologists dealing with educational issues is among the reasons why Rancière once got interested in Joseph Jacotot's 'intellectual adventure,' and his suggestion that humanity could be better off without state-governed schooling system. In Rancière's thinking the deschooled world without teachers, who always know better than their pupils, that is, the world in which teachers and pupils alike can learn together and every participant's contribution is important and valued, is something to reach for.

Rancière has also made his case against the reformist, social democratic left, and its views on educational equality and equal opportunities. The reformist left has used Bourdieu's notions in watering the possibilities of the radical equality and creating new educational reform after reform, building all sorts of helping systems for the marginalized and unfortunate, and special education for the disabled. In the words of Rancière, the reformist system of apparent equal opportunities has only strengthened the 'police order' of the society. At the same time it has created conservative public pedagogy that retains social hierarchies between people and experts (such as a hierarchy between a sociologist-king, a teacher-servant and a pupil-slave). Furthermore, educational reformers have established an educational system from above in which teachers are reduced to as mere technicians. This system has also been used to arrange population into unquestioned and conventional classes both in the society (social classes) and in the classrooms (by age). Rancière's fellow countryman and brother in radical philosophy Michel Onfray writes in a pointed way:

"Even if the whole schooling system had been disguised to rags of educational sciences or any other enlightened teaching practices, its only task would still be what is called 'adapting to the society' so that it would not be named otherwise: bending, subjecting, spraining of the backbone, obeying or even skill of lying and sanctimoniousness." (Onfray 2004, 76.)

Irrespective of the goodwill or strong mind of the individual teachers the modern system of education has served state politics almost without exception. And even though the politics has had many aims and goals in the escorting of the history, it has usually "aimed at changing of the individual into the subject" (ibid., 38):

"the monarchists have appealed to the king as the figure of divine right and the superterranean representative of the heavenly unity principle; the communists have inclined to calmed, harmonious, classless, warless, and consensual society; on a resolutely monotheistic society body in short; the fascists have thought of the homogenized nation, of the militarized and healthy native country; the capitalists have been possessed by the law of the market, the mechanical control of the liberty of its money currents and its advantages. And among the positivists,

scientists and certain sociologists there are eager helpers next to the orthodox and next to the dogmatists." (Ibid., 79.)

Higher and Lower Intelligence

In the meritocratic society a potential capability and the so-called talent has replaced the social advantages and possibilities given by the inherited place in the society. In the meritocracy those who know (or those who have the opportunity to set the standards of knowing) considered as experts have needed those who don't know and the ignorant in reproducing and legitimating their own privileged expert positions. These structural processes of legitimation belong to what Rancière describes as the pedagogical myth. The pedagogical myth divides the world into two by supposing a socially constructed division of power, as well as a lower and higher intelligence. As Rancière (1991, 7) points out:

[The pedagogical myth] "says that there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one. The former registers perceptions by change, retains them, interprets and repeats them empirically, within the closed circle of habit and need. This is the intelligence of the young child and the common man. The superior intelligence knows things by reason, proceeds by method, from the simple to the complex, from the part to the whole. It is this intelligence that allows the master to transmit his knowledge by adapting it to the intellectual capacities of the student and allows him to verify that the students has satisfactorily understood what he learned."

Rancière's main objective is not to criticize sociological theories of education such as Bourdieu's, but to develop a political theory that could be used in re-evaluating the concept of equality and build a theory of radical equality. In this effort he takes as his source insights presented by the philosophers of the Enlightenment who maintained that human beings are born equal irrespective of their estate, family or other social background, and instead stressed the revolutionary power of education and self-education. As Immanuel Kant put it in his famous treatise on Enlightenment: lack of Enlightenment is not due to their lack of intellect, to think for themselves, but lack of courage (Kant 1984/2007, 87). His often-cited definition of Enlightenment is as follows:

"Enlightenment is man's emergence from self imposed immaturity (Unmündigkeit) for which he himself was responsible. Immaturity and dependence are the inability to use one's own intellect without the direction of another. One is responsible for this immaturity and dependence, if its cause is not a lack of intelligence, but a lack of determination and courage to think without the direction of another. Sapere aude! Dare to know! is therefore the slogan of the Enlightenment." (Kant 1784.)

However, Rancière formulates these theses of the Enlightenment anew with the help of Joseph Jacotot by dissociating emancipatory education off all kinds of system logic aiming at students' subjection and obedience. "The duty of Joseph Jacotot's disciples is thus simple: They must announce to everyone, in all places and all circumstances, the news, the practice. One can teach what one doesn't know. A poor and ignorant father can thus begin educating his children: something must be learned and all the rest related to it, on this principle: everyone is of equal intelligence." (Rancière 1991, 101.)

The state cannot produce or allow this kind of progressive pedagogy because education in the employ of the system only expand the distance which it promised to destroy in the name of equality. (Rancière 2004, 223.) The following quotation captures the core default included in Rancière's concept of the radical equality: "Equality is a

presupposition, an initial axiom – or it is nothing. And this egalitarian axiom subtends in the last instance the inegalitarian order itself. It is in vain that the superior gives orders to his inferior if the inferior does not understand at least to things: first, the content of the order, and second, that he must obey. But for the inferior to understand this, he must already be the equal of the superior.” (Ibid., 223.; see also Dillon 2005, 433.)

Rancière's concept of radical equality is practical in nature; it is the praxis – a mix of theory and practice – which verifies radical equality. Radical equality means the opening of all the imaginable possibilities and opportunities to everyone. This requires the politics of critique and the politics of hope. They address the question of social reality as given and provide pile of new ideas. In this sense the politics of radical equality share the same objectives as the arts: to organize the accepted pictures of the social reality anew and to struggle against the denial of recognition experienced by the controlled. (Deranty 2003, 137.) The politics promoting radical equality includes the announcement of messianic hope that overcomes politics by retaining ‘irreversible’ and ‘excess’ as fundamental principles of life sustaining practices (Dillon 2005, 433–444). Or, as the famous May 1968 graffiti put it: “Be realistic, demand the impossible!” (4)

Emancipatory Method

And in these thoughts of the radical equality are a source for Joseph Jacotot's emancipatory teaching method which Rancière studies in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Emancipatory method is the method of teaching and learning, which “looks for the totality of human intelligence in each intellectual manifestation” (Rancière 1991, 39). It is assumed in the emancipatory teaching that 1) everyone has similar intelligence, 2) everyone is able to teach herself, and 3) everything is in everything (“All the power of the language is in the totality of a book”) (ibid., 26).

Jacotot has probably adopted the idea of equal intelligence from the philosophers of Enlightenment even though already Descartes (1994, 9) reminded of the matter at the beginning of his *Discours de la méthode* (1637) as follows:

”Good sense is, of all things among men, the most equally distributed; for every one thinks himself so abundantly provided with it, that those even who are the most difficult to satisfy in everything else, do not usually desire a larger measure of this quality than they already possess . . . For myself, I have never fancied my mind to be in any respect more perfect than those of the generality; on the contrary, I have often wished that I were equal to some others in promptitude of thought, or in clearness and distinctness of imagination, or in fullness and readiness of memory. And besides these, I know of no other qualities that contribute to the perfection of the mind; for as to the reason or sense, inasmuch as it is that alone which constitutes us men, and distinguishes us from the brutes, I am disposed to believe that it is to be found complete in each individual; and on this point to adopt the common opinion of philosophers, who say that the difference of greater and less holds only among the accidents, and not among the forms or natures of individuals of the same species.”

Jacotot was born in Dijon in 1770 and at the age of nineteen, in the year of the conquest of Bastille, he was nominated as Professor of Latin in his hometown. Later he was recruited to the army participating in the war against Belgium as a captain; after the counterrevolution he fled to the Netherlands, returned to France in 1830, and died ten years later. In the Netherlands Jacotot was hired as the teacher of the French language in the university of Leuven. Teaching was difficult from the start for few of Jacotot's students spoke French; most of them knew only their native language, Dutch or

Flemish. Despite the difficulty, students were interested in learning with Jacotot, so a way had to be found, the smallest common denominator that would help moving on. At that time in Brussels a 24-volume didactic-utopian story entitled *Télémaque* by the author Fénelon was published as a bilingual version in French and Flemish. Jacotot took these editions into use, and through the interpreter asked students to start to translate the text. The task was to translate the text from French with the help of the Flemish language text and to know a French text eventually so well that it would be possible to read it aloud from beginning to end.

Thus the students started the foreign language and learnt gradually without the teacher, crossing their teacher's expectations. – Why did the students take this task that at the outset seemed so difficult? Was it the mere fact that at the time in France pupils were expected to take their teacher's lessons more or less as doctrines? Was it perhaps against this background that Jacotot's students were allowed to study themselves, and that they were trusted to study without their teacher's unquestioned authority? This would imply that Jacotot's teaching (without teaching) was a significant learning experience for the students.

At least to Jacotot to himself the students' achievement was an epoch-making learning experience (a turning point experience). He experienced an intellectual awakening after having realized that the teacher did not have to know better than his pupils. The thought challenged a Platonic idea of the pedagogic relationship where there is an intellectual and moral distance between a teacher and the pupil even in a dialogical situation. From the point of view of emancipatory teaching and learning this kind of a distance is as useless as is the evaluation of that distance (or the level of the understanding defined as a 'talent', a 'skill', or an 'ability') between the teacher and her pupils. The will to learn is the most important thing. The will to learn precedes the intelligence: the intellect enters into the service of the will of learning; intelligence is in the service of the will to learn. This thought deviates radically from the modern pedagogic thinking where it is usually leaned on the ideology of equal opportunities and teacher's intellectual and administrative authority. Rancière states after Jacotot, that "what an emancipated person can do is to be an emancipator: to give, not the key to knowledge but the consciousness what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself" (Rancière 1991, 39).

In every teacher there is a small Socrates (a master explicator) leading the pupils in the right, given or determined direction. This way students might learn many things (and to repeat their teacher's knowledge like parrots) but this pedagogy does not emancipate (Rancière 1991, 29). An ideology of the equal opportunities emphasized in the modern era doesn't tell anything about the intellect, it neither admits nor forbids it, nor the will to learn. Emancipatory method instead is a method of the will. It states that it is possible to learn independently, without the seer, if one wants to learn. In turn the will to learn is promoted by a desire to know; a desire exceeds the situation and the demands set by the given social conditions.

Modern nation states have believed in schooling and they still do. Rancière is however susceptible to the grand narratives of education and modernization from which the school and education as we know it are paradigmatic examples. In Rancière's measures the modern belief in the system training is not only deceiving but also an illusion in that it doesn't fulfill its promise as a bedrock of democracy. Modern schooling is directed from above and fastened on the goals appointed by the ideological state apparatus. There is no actual freedom inside the system not to mention the promotion of radical equality. The grand narratives like education cover to their shades pedagogic and other such insights which are formed as part of ordinary people's activities and which can be of major significance when people strive towards the radical equality.

Therefore Rancière has studied 19th century working-class history in bringing up those small narratives, which have not been suitable for the elites' triumphal march of the history of the progress. The example of this is his book *Nights of Labor* which reports the ordinary people's writing hobbies in France in the first part of the 1800's (Rancière 1989). In this work Rancière's objective has been to bring out the ordinary people's voices and interpretations under the established history. "It is a statement both of the right of the ordinary person to be listened to and a celebration of the profound usefulness of learning from what the ordinary person has to say, unmediated as far as possible by the intervention of the more powerful" (Hewlett 2007, 86). Emancipatory educators participate for their part for this 'excavation work' of the historical and present forms of oppression especially in the spheres of informal learning in which their teaching can be radically frightening both to students and teachers (as well as the power elite) because it can emancipate them both (Dillon 2005, 444).

Some Applications of the Emancipatory Method

For Rancière significant studying and learning take place as self-learning and collaborative learning organically in the natural environments, without outside authorities. The very same issues Rancière has raised in the context of political philosophy have been widely discussed among the philosophers and theorists of radical adult education. Progressive educators (Counts, Dewey) have dealt with the question of democratic schooling and education whereas theorists in community education have developed the ideas of local educational practices and forms of working-class education (see Willis, 2007). In these an attempt has been made to build a theory for a democratic society based on democratic educational activity. Alike insights have also been developed in a child-centered pedagogy (see Gadotti 1996, 135–138). But above all the liberating agenda of the living philosophy is connected to the spontaneous learning activities which restores adults' self-autonomy in their voluntary study activity in the formal learning institutions, social movements, in culture work and in art, in trade union training and in peer-to-peer-learning as well as in ordinary peoples' self-education. (5) In these traditions of the living philosophy learning has linked organically to adults' needs to theorize their educational realities and facilitated them to reflect their living conditions (see Merriam & Elias 2005, 6). At best in these learning processes people create collaboratively the sense of solidarity and the consciousness of democracy. Thus the democratization of educational situations does not stay halfway; actually, as Stephen Brookfield (1995, 136) has noted, democratic education only partially is as impossible as to be pregnant only partially. And as he further states:

"Once you commit to working democratically, you have to take the leap of faith that says that people will make informed choices. And you must trust that if they don't make the choices that you think in the short term are the best ones for them (like attending every class), in the long run, the experience of being in control will make them more responsible the next time they are able to exercise power." (Ibid., 137.)

There are several educational theories and practices, which resembles Rancière's ideas. Among the most known, popular and obvious ones are Ivan Illich's (1971) idea of a deschooled and convivial society, Paulo Freire's (1990) critical educational theory of the oppressed, and Erich Fromm's (1990) ideas of the sane society. Or let us think of the Zapatista pedagogy in Chiapas Mexico. It is not another top-down educational model lead by the state, but exemplifies dialogical and democratic principles of emancipatory education, especially those emphasizing localization of education and government by calling for "a move beyond solidarity to a consideration of the possibilities for linking multiple, heterogeneous struggles as well as for transformations between and within

sectors and locales” (Bahl & Callahan 1998, 24). In the case of Zapatistas and their leader Subcomandante Marcos, the question has been how to change the world without taking power (Holloway 2005).

In the realm of the Internet, or the Wikiworld (Suoranta & Vadén 2008), collaborative, peer-to-peer practices are flourishing as social media. These communities of practices utilize people’s ‘general intellect,’ common knowledge and voluntary participation. Criteria of the emancipatory teaching and learning method will become fully operational after an open access principle and free software applications are combined with free and open studies and education in places like the Wikiversity in the Internet, or free universities and other free learning associations. For, in these evolving worlds of free studies, an interest is not in the ‘potential capability’ or talent but in everyone’s access to participate and learn equally, to take according to one’s needs and to give according to one’s abilities. This way the promises of equal education are also redeemed as universal human rights. At best collaborative practices in the Internet present new forms of internationalism, common will and the power of the people. *If we want, we can!* Rancière sheds light on his own idea as follows:

“From my point of view, the Internet is similar to what writing was at a certain moment. It meant the circulation of words and knowledge which could be appropriated by anyone. It is not a question of giving knowledge to everybody, it is a question of having words circulate in a free and desirable way, and I think that this is what's happening with the Internet. That is probably why some reactionary people are so angry with the Internet, saying it's horrible that people log on to the web and they can find everything they want, that it is against research and intelligence. I would say no, it is the way intelligence, equal intelligence, works. You wander randomly in a library the same way you surf randomly on the Internet. This is, from my point of view, what equality of intelligence means.” (Lie & Rancière 2006.)

Finally

Jacques Rancière’s idea seems to be that education and learning are means to participate in politics, or more precisely, they are forms of political socialization; the way education is arranged has significant political and social consequences. Methods and forms of education can be used either for supporting of the system or for changing of it. In the modern nation states overall political goals in social and economic policy set also the aims of education. Emancipatory education is not suitable for a training system of the modern state, but points to the possibility of a totally different social order; and maybe also to necessity of the altogether different world.

What is especially interesting in Rancière’s thinking is its dialectical and partly antagonistic tone, how he stresses the necessity of resistance towards an existing order. This position is based on his conviction that the essence of politics is not consensus but dissensus, not agreement through ideal speech acts as in Habermas, but disagreement. And this holds true in the basic level of language use, for as Rancière thinks the use of language defines one’s position in different social hierarchies. To him, “Words are not simply words with inherent, context-free meaning, but are received very differently according to who is uttering them and where they are uttered” (Hewlett 2007, 97). But on the other hand, it gives a change to disagree and contest the predominant meanings and power positions. As Hewlett (2007, 99) reminds us, for Rancière “human beings are political, then, precisely because they are literary, because the meanings of words are contested and struggled over in disputes between the powerful and the powerless, those who have to date determined the meaning of words and those who have not.”

Rancière is an important figure pertaining to the living and radical philosophy of education since he has tackled some of the elementary questions of education in his works, among them the following questions: The relation of an individual and community and role of the individual in the human history: is the individual an object or a subject, a target or an agent? What are the significance of philosophy and educational sciences in terms of expert training and the legitimation of the given social order? What is the meaning of radical politics from point of view of political control, equality, democratic processes and social transformation? How can adults use their democratic rights in changing the world into better? Is there a place for equal educational processes in that change? What is the genesis or origin of the political and social change? Does education have any role in it?

Rancière himself sets an individual before a community or a system and criticizes ‘the philosophy of the order,’ and social sciences, from supporting the expert power turned into a lapdog of economic and political elite. To him politics is ruptures, cracks and disagreements in the world of business-as-usual and political trade-offs. True politics consist of the dissidence and revolutionary participation; it is the voice of the multitude, of the ordinary people. The equality promoted and supported by the reformist left is nothing more than eviscerated and lost equality compared to the radical equality in which the equality is an origin for the politics, not the goal or an end result of equal politics. The radicalism of the equality is a solution to the problems of the meritocratic system in the sense that it reminds of the possibility of such the world in which it is possible to learn according to one’s needs and to educate, to teach, and to give according to one’s abilities.

Where some theorists of critical education have answered negatively – or at least are doubtful – a question whether critical educational practices can be tools for changing the world (see Holst, 2002, 78–79), Rancière answers the question affirmatively. And furthermore, the question has been wrong posed from his point of view since education, society and politics are always inseparable; they are intertwined, or woven into each other as far as human beings are literate. The question is only how they and their complex, ideological and hegemonic relations are defined. For Rancière the emancipatory practice of education is the birthplace of radically equal society. It fulfills the following principles: *You can what you will and teach what you don’t know – learn what you want to learn!* In sum I am inclined to claim that not only is Rancière’s notion of radical equality a partial challenge to the Enlightenment’s principles of progress and emancipation, as Hewlett (2007, 94) thinks but more than that: it poses an extreme radicalization of the fundamentals of the Enlightenment. And therefore Rancière’s notions on radical equality and education should belong to the key readings of all students of critical education.

“I awakened to the cry / that the people / have the power / to redeem / the work of fools / upon the meek / the graces shower / it’s decreed / the people rule. The people have the power / the people have the power / the people have the power / the people have the power.” – Patti Smith, *People Have the Power*

Endnotes

(1) In the middle of the 1990's K.H. Lawson (1996, 144) estimated that philosophies of adult education have usually had only a marginal position in the research area. However, the situation has improved during in the early years of the new millennia at least (see Merriam & Elias 2005, 5). These remarks must apply to the academic philosophy of the adult education only because the living philosophy of the adult education has had tremendous effects in the adult world for ages. As Finnish Professor of Adult Education Kari E. Nurmi (2002) once stated, the history of adult education consist of both Occidental and Oriental thinkers and founders of various

traditions from Aristotle to Plato, and from Socrates to Democritus, Gautama Siddharta, and Kung Fu-Tse. These founding figures have provided inspiration to later day thinkers such as Nikolai F.S. Grundtvig, Kurt Lewin, Jane Addams, Frederick Taylor, and Antonio Gramsci; these and many others have justified, though from different ideological standpoints, the practices of adult learning needed in the overall development of the society. In addition to the ones that have been mentioned, other names could be presented from Martin Buber and Malcolm Knowles to Paulo Freire as the central players of the field of adult education theory. Furthermore many others also could be named: Desmond Tutu Malcolm X, Jesus, Martin Luther King, Che Guevara, Mother Teresa... (See also Willis, 2007.)

(2) On meritocracy and its history of ideologies (see Goldthorpe 1997); problems and critique of such concepts as potential capability and talent often used in the meritocratic language (see Sennett 2007, 99–122).

(3) For this reason Rancière does not warm from liberal ideas or formal political theories emphasizing status quo because they are too context free and stress too much a dialogue without social status and differences in the level of education (see Hewlett, 2007, 96–97). The issues of equality, fairness and freedom cannot be reduced to an equal ideal communication because ideal communication does not exist.

(3) Nearly a quarter of the teachers of regional academies were under 30 years old (Alnæs 2005, 550) at that time. Jacotot was in a favorable age in order to adopt the education philosophers' insights and ideals of the republicanism; they became key experiences mobilizing him pedagogically and also perhaps politically.

(4) There are, of course, many forms and meanings of equality. But in the critical tradition of educational research one should keep in mind that concepts do not fall from heaven but are always theoretically and ideologically laden, and so is the concept of equality. For sure it is a human invention; we, as human beings, have invented it in our natural languages, and given it different meanings and definitions. Besides that 'equality' can be seen from other angles: Biologically we are equal in terms of various nutritional, sexual and other needs as well as qualities related to Homo sapiens species. Regardless of the results in developmental and differential psychology serving the needs of capitalism (see Parker 2007, 49–53), we also share many psychological qualities. The same applies to the social realm, which, by definition, is a social construction; social reality is only partly given, and partly based on own decision making in everyday practices and in political arenas.

(5) One example of the free learning: Rancière's philosopher colleague Michel Onfray left his job as a teacher of philosophy in 2002 and Caenin established a free folk university (L'Université Populaire de Caen see <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/michel.onfray/UPcaen.htm>) in the town near its home area on all the willing ones. The establishment of the free university was on the other hand a reaction to the universities against the philosophy of the order which had nested on the other hand political act: " Onfray founded the university as a reaction to the arrival of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front party, into the second round of the 2002 presidential elections against Jacques Chirac. The idea, he said, was to fight against that happening again by "promoting and publicizing intelligence," and to try to "analyze and understand how the world functions in order to put forward alternative solutions to the contemporary negativity." Open to anyone, with free tuition and requiring no registration, prior education, tests or other course work, the concept, like his books, is also spreading beyond his home. There are now five other Popular Universities in France and one in Belgium, all of which acknowledge Caen as their model." (Spurgeon 2006.) "The son of a manual agricultural laborer and a cleaning woman, Onfray was a professor of philosophy for two decades, until he resigned from the national education system in 2002 to establish a tuition-free Université Populaire (People's University) at Caen, at which Onfray and a handful of dedicated colleagues teach philosophy and other weighty subjects to working-class and ghetto youth who are not supposed to be interested in such intellectual refinements. Onfray has never forgotten his underclass origins, and his dedication to helping the young of the left-out classes is admirable and inspiring. The Université Populaire, which is open to all who cannot access the state university system, and on principle does not accept any money from the State – Onfray uses the profits from his books to help finance it – has had enormous success." (Ireland 2006.)

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