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To Apply, to Debunk, to Perform. Types and Uses of Educational Theory¹

With this article I wish to express my gratitude to Tomasz Szkudlarek for the numerous gifts received from him, which resulted in the story conveyed by the argument below. His were the gifts: of inspiration regarding the intersection between humanities and education studies, of various opportunities to reach out to the world of the anglophone educational theory and philosophy of education, and of demand to stay critical in the most radical sense of the term, i.e. also towards critique itself. The other gifts were innumerable, and there is no space here to even enlist them.

Introduction

The very idea of writing the *Manifesto for a post-critical pedagogy* (Hodgson et al. 2017) stemmed from the experience of a new kind of theorising education that was, and still is, emerging – at least in the anglophone world – in the field of educational theory and philosophy of education, testifying to a change of today's *Zeitgeist* in this field of research. Hence, in this article I want to explore what kind of educational theories are possible to be thought of today, or, to be more precise: in what ways – on a meta-theoretical level – one can theorise education in relation to the potential

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use of theory? Naturally, my focus is on the way of theorizing education which could be called 'post-critical'. Therefore it is my aim to investigate a manifold of possible ways to theorize education, and simultaneously add some clarity and substance to what we called 'post-criticality'.

In the end, the following argument is nothing but a story developing a particular typology of theorising education. It is a typology, and I will speak of types using Max Weber's (1958) understanding of ideal types and their function, as well as their relation to the empirical types, as a point of reference. In other words, the following exercise is not about making empirical claims about particular theories, but about gaining an orientation in the recent transformations of the field of educational theory. The story leads to the emergence of the post-critical – called also "affirmative" and "performative" – type, i.e. focusing on *how*, *why*, and *what* started to emerge. Since it is a story, it shall not and simply *is* not intended to function as an exhaustive typology of all possible ways in which one can theorise education.

The gist of the story is that one can distinguish three types of educational theories – technical, critical, and affirmative/performative – and each of these facilitates a different use of a theory of education.

Technical theories of education

The type of technical theories of education emerged against the background of attempts to theorise education in line with the idea of modern science. It is therefore instructive to go back to this idea at the very moment it was conceived. In 1620 Francis Bacon (2003) publishes his *Novum organum*, where he makes the case for the pursuit of knowledge that could be advantageous to humans by bringing nature under human control. He literally claims that we should aim at knowledge that will give us power over nature. The third aphorism reads:

Human knowledge and human power come to the same thing, because ignorance of cause frustrates effect. (Bacon 2003: 33)

The knowledge Bacon aims at is therefore a tool, or it can easily be turned into one. *Knowledge* refers to an effective action, whereas *ignorance* means an inability to produce a particular, desired result. Therefore, he claimed, we need knowledge that would describe with highest precision and modesty the causal relations that rule a particular domain of the natural reality, so as to be able to render such a description of these mechanisms into a relation between means and ends. Knowing how a particular domain of the reality works, one can use that knowledge to change the reality in the way one wishes to (of course, within the limits of what is possible, i.e. within the limits of the mechanisms that are about to be discovered). Seventeen years before Descartes did, Bacon puts an enormous emphasis on the research procedure (i.e. the method) and human inclinations to ruin it by taking various shortcuts

(what he calls *idols*²). Finally, he invents and carefully describes the rigid procedure of an experiment – which is central for the sciences to this day, and in which we put enormous trust, especially in the times such as the recent pandemic, when we all hoped for a tool that would overpower nature and give us control over the virus.

Putting aside the well-known and widely discussed problems of the social and political dimension of such an understanding of science, nature, knowledge, and truth (cf. Horkheimer & Adorno 2002), in this article I shall focus on what kind of understanding of educational theory (and with it also education as such) is facilitated by the post-Baconian idea of modern science.

Within this imaginary, educational theory aims to determine the mechanisms ruling the reality of education, where this reality is being usually rendered in terms of a process or multiple processes. This type of theory describes how these processes work. The description is made in order to be used, i.e. to function as a tool for achieving particular goals. These goals, however, are not indicated by the theory itself, which is neutral and focused purely on describing how the educational reality works. In other words, such an educational theory aims to be an instrument that could be easily applied in educational action, making this action effective. If a theory describes causal relations ruling the process of education, it allows for designing actions that would insert a particular cause into the particular state of affairs in order to produce expected outcomes.

It is frequently recognised that such a type of educational theory assumes a deterministic understanding (via behaviourism or neuro-sciences) of human cognitive and psychological functioning (cf. the critique delivered by Biesta 2007). However, I would like to emphasise that this way of theorising, when applied to education, shapes an understanding of education as such, i.e. it reduces education to a production process. Education – within this imaginary – is a process that leads to clear, distinguishable, graspable, and measurable results or products.

But, what kind of products can one speak of in the case of education? The only possible answer is: people with certain properties. If education is a production process, it produces a particular set of properties in people that undergo this process. This has – at least – two consequences.

Firstly, on the level of sociological assumptions, this type of educational theory is always implicitly grounded in sociological functionalism. Ultimately, the recurring

² Bacon's concept of *idola mentis* referred to the implicit distortions of human cognition caused by four different kinds of causes (2003: 40–45). Idols of the Tribe stem from the tendency of the human mind to deform the image of perceived things by following preconceived ideas about these things. Idols of the Cave refer to the individual preferences that influence the perception of things. Idols of the Market Place refer to the deformation of one's cognition caused by commonly shared convictions, ideas, and concepts. And finally, with the concept of the Idols of the Theatre, Bacon refers to the danger of academism. According to him, it is exactly through the careful examination of empirical data, and a scrupulous and unhurried induction, that one is able to overcome these idols.

questions here are “What kind of people do we need to produce?”, “What functions will they perform in this particular society?”, and “What properties will they need for these tasks?”. Let me just briefly mention here that this functional way of thinking seems to be very attractive to people regardless of their ideological orientation (Zamojski 2017). There are various stances on what education is for, but all of them can be reduced to the question of what education should produce. Some would claim schools should produce skilful workers of the knowledge economy (creative, flexible, entrepreneurial, etc.), while others would claim schools should produce conservative patriots (ready to make sacrifices, subordinated to the community and its leader). Yet another idea would be schools producing critical and engaged citizens, or producing obedient militants of some great cause. While politically all these are opposing each other, they nevertheless share the same functional understanding of education.

Secondly, if education is understood in terms of a production process, then it can (and will) be assessed against its efficiency. Schools, as institutions that organise education, will be, therefore, required to maximise their outcomes measured against the a priori designed standards. This is the moment when the issue of the quality of education emerges: the products achieved by the school have to match the design.

But who is designing the desired properties of pupils? This is not done by educational theory, as it focuses solely on describing the causal relationships governing the production process. Therefore, technical theories require an external intervention of some ruling instance that will determine the aims of education, meaning: the results schools, teachers, and students should attain. This is the dominant understanding of ‘aims of education’ within the official state documents (like National Curriculum in the UK, or Podstawa programowa in Poland), but also the transnational documents issued by the EU, UNESCO, or OECD (like EQF, GEMR, or PISA reports).

This leads to the most interesting fact about technical educational theories. It occurs that by the virtue of their form, the very way they are designed, they assume three (and only three) positions one can take within the process of education. First, within this imaginary, education requires legislators – in the meaning Zygmunt Bauman (1987) has introduced some time ago, albeit in a different context. This is, education requires people who design and determine the desired properties of pupils or students to be produced by the process of education. Second, education requires executors, that is people who will apply educational theory in their doings, in order to produce effectively and efficiently the desired properties determined by the legislators. It is rather obvious that this is exactly how teachers are positioned within such an imaginary. And finally, education requires human material to be processed, people that are to be equipped with the desired properties – i.e. pupils or students.

This means – obviously – that theories of a technical type reify pupils and teachers, since both are required to subordinate themselves to the will of the legislators

and to do so as efficiently as possible. They are to be subordinate and thoughtless in regards to the aims they are set to achieve. This is exactly why technical educational theories facilitate instrumental rationality: they frame education in such a way that shies away from any ethical considerations about education, focusing solely on the matter of its effectivity and efficiency (cf. Giroux 1983).

Critical theories of education

The domination of instrumental rationality is exactly what Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) have warned us against in the middle of the last century. People who are used to reduce ethical matters to technical problems are willing to accept any goal imposed on them by – what I call here following Bauman (1987) – the legislators. In other words, the domination of instrumental reason enables ordinary people to participate in radical evil.

Horkheimer and Adorno's (2002) response to this was that selection of means to an end does not exhaust the capabilities of reason, which has also other dimensions. Critical reason can function as a fuse, a safety mechanism, practice that could make us unable to take part in radical evil. This is so, firstly because critique always discloses the complexity of things, and secondly because it exposes the ethical dimension of our ways of dealing with things and with others. We should therefore engage in social critique for the sake of what Adorno (2004: 365) called as *the new categorical imperative*, that is, making sure to “not let Auschwitz happen again”.

A crucial note Adorno adds to this: critique has to be a never-ending task. The dialectic that critical reasoning is involved in is relentlessly negative: it can never be resolved into some kind of positivity. Exactly when we want to say: *Now, we finally won! We have gained freedom! We have reached equality!*, a new regime is born. Similarly, in the exact moment we would develop a positive project for the society – the danger of new totalitarianism would arise. Hence, we simply have to remain critical forever.

This stance later became equipped with very powerful tools for performing critique due to the contribution to the critical paradigm made by French post-structuralism. These tools (e.g. Foucault's genealogy, Bourdieu's field theory, or Derrida's deconstruction) translate the aim of eternal critique into firm reality. I would like to focus here on two consequences of using these tools.

First, these are post-structural means, and hence, they are playing with the opposition between the surface and the deep structure. Critique is therefore understood and performed as debunking: revealing the hidden layer of things, which is actually the fundamental layer. The general assumption of such critique is that people live at the surface level, and if only they would see underneath, they would understand how things really are – they would realise their own enslavement, the inequality

and the radical injustice that characterises the societies we live in and their own complicity in perpetuating such status quo.

Second, such critique is radical: it goes right to the bone, to the very roots (*radix*) of the status quo. Hence, the hidden structures revealed thanks to critique are enormous, supra-individual, overwhelming, and – what is crucial – ontologically necessary. Acknowledging the conceptual apparatus of Bourdieu's (1984) theory of society (i.e. field theory), one has to recognise that a flat social field is simply impossible within that perspective. Positions of social agents are defined here by their *situs* – that is, their place in the unequal distribution of capitals. Inequality is, therefore, imprinted into the fundamental assumptions of this vision of society. A similar story could be told about Foucault (2005). If one embraces this conceptual apparatus, it is impossible to think about social relations that are not power relations. Power is a gargantuan structure which is also dispersed, etheric, and sustained by the multitude of the overpowered, enslaved in every possible dimension of their life, even the internal life of their consciousness (which is guided by pastoral power).

Naturally, these radically critical perspectives enabled plethora of eye-opening research, producing immensurable and priceless knowledge about the dangers of the hidden layers behind our educational practices. Due to these interventions many things became apparent, such as hidden curriculum, or the fact that in spite of our intentions, we – as educators – contribute to the reproduction of inequalities in society, impose class distinctions, and support the dominant order of things, etc. However – as Giroux (1983) rightfully argues – education has a bipolar potential: apart from being an effective mechanism of enslavement and reproduction of inequalities, it can also emancipate. Therefore, education is at the same time the object of critique, as much as its medium.

Indeed, to conceptualise educational theory within the critical paradigm is to see it as a form of social critique taking education as its object, revealing its hidden layers responsible for inequality, injustice, and enslavement. But – Giroux (1983) notes – it is more than that. Firstly, it expands the perspective of understanding education, adding to the surface (technical) dimension many other layers: economic, political, cultural, racial, gender, etc. Within the critical type, educational theory opens up education as a multi-dimensional human practice that cannot be reduced to its technical side. Secondly, by putting emphasis on the revolutionary potential of transforming consciousness (Freire 2005), education can foster the ability to decode the dangers of the social world, and to use knowledge in order to strengthen one's ability to self-govern, i.e. to be autonomous. In that sense, education is a process of liberation, and hence, educational theory is a revolutionary theory: a theory of emancipation of the enslaved. It aims at facilitating critical reasoning of teachers and students that would lead to their liberation, and consequently, to the transformation of the human world.

Let me publicly admit that I hold this perspective dear. In terms of my academic life, I was raised in this tradition (via Szkudlarek 1993a; 1993b; as well as Rutkowiak 1995), and it still informs my understanding of being an academic.

Having said that, at a given moment it became clear to me that some of us involved in critical educational research with time became rather dogmatic in applying this perspective, and schematic in using the critical tools it offers. I felt that this goes against the absolutely fundamental call of Adorno (2004: 365): “if thinking is to be true [...] it must also be a thinking against itself”. Are we critical of the critical paradigm itself, then? And what would that entail? Obviously it cannot mean abandoning critique! On the contrary, the critical insights formulated against critical theory, critical pedagogy, or the critical paradigm altogether are stemming exactly from the very centre of Adorno’s call.

There are quite a few powerful critiques of critical pedagogy (e.g. Ellsworth 1989; Gur-Ze’ev 1998) and of critical paradigm as such (e.g. Sloterdijk 1987; Latour 2004; Felski 2015). Displaying these in detail – a much needed work – would require a separate article, if not a book. Let me, therefore, briefly recall only a few of such attempts.

One of the most powerful critical interventions that the project of critical pedagogy has ever received was the seminal article by Elisabeth Ellsworth from 1989, *Why Doesn’t This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy*. Ellsworth took Giroux’ call seriously and tried to be a critical pedagogue in her teaching at the university, but she quickly noticed that putting the principles of critical pedagogy in practice actually entailed nothing else than what the practice should liberate people from: relations of domination and repression. This is, because she was taking part in “essentially paternalistic project of education” (Ellsworth, 1989: 306) being involved in “the institutionalized power imbalances”, she quickly recognised that “[s]trategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact” (Ellsworth, 1989: 306). The basic assumption that the critical pedagogue can help emancipate the student, i.e. that a teacher is necessary for the liberation of pupils only reinforces the oppression it aims to fight. Ellsworth notices:

As an Anglo, middle-class professor [...] I could not unproblematically “help” a student of colour to find her/his authentic voice as a student of colour. I could not unproblematically “affiliate” with the social groups my students represent and interpret their experience with them (Ellsworth 1989: 309).

Hence, Ellsworth abandons not only the idea of critical pedagogy, but also the practice of teaching altogether, engaging with her students directly in political actions. As Joris Vlieghe and myself read it: being radically consequent in following the imperative of radical critique leads to abandoning education altogether in favour of politics (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 152). However, for Ellsworth, as well as for

scholars like Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (1998), the key problem lies in the repressive structure of an educational endeavour designed to emancipate the enslaved, liberate the oppressed, empower the powerless.

How such a repressive structure emerges out of these noble goals is put on display by Jacques Rancière (1991), who argues that, if we assume that our students/pupils are oppressed and enslaved – that is, if they are positioned as unequal (and this is exactly what we have to assume if we want to liberate them) – then our own doings as teachers will make this assumption become true: within the very practice of education aiming at the liberation of students we will deal with them as with oppressed, enslaved, and unequal, making them appear as oppressed, enslaved, and unequal – and hoping that this will change in the future as a result of our educational intervention. However, if we hold dear the call for relentless radical critique, the realization of this freedom and equality is just a dream. While being critical one can never say: “now finally we reached equality and freedom for all” – that would be either pitifully naïve or hypocritical. This will never happen. There will always be the oppressed, enslaved, and unequal. Therefore, the goal of emancipation is deferred *ad infinitum*. Hence, the only way to establish equality and to emancipate, Rancière argues, is to treat our students/pupils as equal from the outset. To assume their equality, and to act in line with this assumption. In such a way – while being treated as equals – *hic et nunc* they *are* equal. This assumption, however, goes against everything our critical knowledge is telling us about them and the world. It is a fictional assumption – yet it makes equality happen in the classroom. Here and now they are equal, they experience their equality – and they can take that experience further with them. Such an experience of something that seems impossible within the horizon of radical critique is indeed emancipatory. This discovery functions as a key inspiration for many of the new educational theories that might be called post-critical.

Similarly, Peter Sloterdijk (1987) has cast doubt on the critical potentials of radical critique by showing that radical critique ends up ruining its own aims. This results from the fact that the more one engages in radical critique, and the more one experiences its relentless character, the more one becomes aware that oppression, enslavement, and inequality are ontological features of the social status quo. What is revealed by critique are the deep mechanisms of the world, not just some accidental and temporary ways people organise their living together. And if there is no possibility to reach the point of no oppression, no enslavement, no injustice, and no inequality, then our unhappy consciousness tries to make peace with this fact, and we become cynical. If, in principle, oppression can never be overcome, if there always going to be inequality – then why not try to make at least oneself comfortable in this tragic situation? As I read it, Sloterdijk's analysis shows that the result of the relentless radical critique is not emancipation, but cynicism.

Moreover, one should have in mind another intervention, rather recently provided by Bruno Latour (2004) in his seminal article *Why has critique run out of steam?*, the opening paragraph of which reads:

Wars. So many wars. Wars outside and wars inside. Cultural wars, science wars, and wars against terrorism. Wars against poverty and wars against the poor. Wars against ignorance and wars out of ignorance. My question is simple: Should we be at war, too, we, the scholars, the intellectuals? Is it really our duty to add fresh ruins to fields of ruins? Is it really the task of the humanities to add deconstruction to destruction? (Latour 2004: 225).

Perhaps indeed, it is high time that we start to care for the world, instead of being at war with it. It regards – after all – our common world, the only one we have, and, as we are now fully aware, its very existence is threatened as it has never been before. This would, however, require us to look at the world not through critical lens which make us sensitive to the wrongs in it, but in a different way which would make us sensitive to what is good in the world, what is worth our effort to be saved from extinction, to be studied, and passed on to the next generation (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 92–94; Zamojski 2023).

Post-critical / affirmative / performative theories of education

In view of the story sketched above and the theoretical deadlock the critical position seems to amount to, with Naomi Hodgson and Joris Vlieghe in 2016 we have started to elaborate a new way of doing educational theory that we felt to be emerging in the field already for some time. It was clear for us that the work of Gert Biesta (2010), Jan Masschelein & Maarten Simons (2013), Tyson Lewis (2013), Norm Friesen (2011), Max van Manen (1991), and many others could be classified as neither technical, nor critical theories of education. Our attempt consisted of making manifest what was common to this alternative educational thinking (Hodgson et al 2017). Undoubtedly, it must have felt uncomfortable for some of the aforementioned authors, but it nonetheless sparked a discussion³ that revealed, for example, the same theoretical developments in literature studies (Felski 2015; 2020; Anker & Felski 2017). Moreover, since publishing the Manifesto, its authors also did some further work on developing theories of this kind (Hodgson & Ramaekers 2019; Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019). Hence, we are not dealing here with a solid and homogenous current of thought.

³ See: “On Education. Journal for Research and Debate” (2020) 3(9) – a volume dedicated to the reception of the *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy* in educational studies and its dialogue with post-critical current in literature studies. *Manifesto* was also translated into Spanish (2020), Turkish (2021), and German (2022) – each time triggering a debate on post-criticality in educational theory and research.

The term ‘post-critical’ was the first attempt to find an adequate name for what was going on in the field of educational theory. But, as it often happens, once it has been invented, it started living a life of its own. Although we are not entirely happy with it, it still stays valid as a name for the type of theories we want to engage in. Let me stress it again: post-critical does NOT mean anti-critical, nor does it mean not-critical. Rather, it reflects the necessity of the next step to take after critique, when it has run out of steam (Latour 2004). In that sense, it refers to what Paul Ricoeur (1992) termed as *secondary naivety*. Knowing the importance and the power of the critical paradigm, but also being aware of the dangers it entails, we are not aiming at rejecting its heritage, but rather try to truly inherit it, and make the next step beyond its confines. Yes, from the critical perspective, it will entail naivety (e.g. of making fictional assumptions) – but it is a secondary naivety, made by those who were first trained in critique, and who are aware of its findings, strengths, and shortcomings.

Put otherwise, these kind of theories are affirmative⁴. Post-critical theories make attempts at rediscovering or reclaiming educational practices, phenomena, and experiences that are suppressed, marginalised, or obliterated by the dominant ways of understanding education. To be clear, the term ‘dominant ways’ refers here to both the technical and the critical understanding of educational theory.

Teaching – to give an example – has become an object of contempt from both the perspective of the Life Long Learning discourse and the perspective of critical pedagogy. For the former, it is just a practice of secondary significance (unlike the process of learning) that can both facilitate as well as hinder learning. For the latter, it is a practice of domination: it consists in the objective violence of imposition of meanings (Bourdieu 1990), and hence it would be better to practice something different than teaching – something like *engaging in collaborative inquiry and dialogue* (Freire 2005) or *fostering critical democracy and social justice* (Giroux 2005: 186).

It is precisely this kind of practices, suppressed from all sides, that post-critical theories want to affirm. There is something intrinsically good, beautiful, and worthwhile in teaching (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019) and upbringing (Hodgson & Ramaekers 2019), as well as in studying (Lewis 2013), lecturing and notemaking (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2021), in school as such (Masschelein & Simons 2013), and many other practices, phenomena, and experiences that we share when educating, in spite of them being condemned or neglected by the dominant discourses concerning education.

⁴ However, not in the sense that Dietrich Benner (2023) develops. For Benner affirmation is a pre-critical phenomenon (cf. Benner 2015: 159), where education is subordinated to external (political, religious, or ideological) ideas. Affirmation, in such a vocabulary, refers to a particular vision of the past or the future, under which education is supposed to be subsumed. It goes without saying that the post-critical stance fully embraces Benner’s point that such a subsumption is unacceptable. Contrary to him, however, we argue that education is itself something in need of affirmation, and that educational practices essentially *are* an affirmation of the common world as worthy of the effort of being studied.

To put it differently: what a post-critical approach is willing to affirm is education as such. Education is good in itself, and does not require any external justification. What both technical and critical discourses tend to do is to position education as a means to some economic, societal, or political goal. What those who claim that education should contribute to the knowledge economy and those claiming that education should equip students with the capacity to resist the demands of transnational capital have in common is the conviction that education is the means to secure these opposite goals. Affirming education means treating it as a separate and autonomous sphere of life (Arendt, 1961) that should not be subordinated to neither economy, nor politics (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2020; Korsgaard 2019).

Precisely because of this, affirmative educational theory aims to be immanent (see: Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019: 63–77; Agamben 2007). That is, it aims to articulate the meaning of educational practices on and in their own terms. It is the attempt of asking educational questions about education as opposed to sociological, psychological, historical, economic, or political questions about education (Biesta 2010). If education is a separate and autonomous sphere of life, then it has its own intrinsic logic which is neither political nor economic, but – exactly – educational. Affirming education would therefore mean engaging in attempts to express this logic. This entails: speaking and theorising about education from within, finding for it its autonomous language, speaking out the suppressed parts of our educational experience and making them recognizable as something essential that needs to enter the public discourse on education.

Essentially, education itself is a form of affirmation. It is an affirmation of the common world. If there would be nothing in the world that we would consider worthy of the effort of study, we would have no reason to educate. But this is not how things stand. By putting something on the table (to use Masschelein and Simons' expression) we affirm this part of the world as something that we want to pass on to the next generation, something we think is important, beautiful, or interesting (or all of that).

But what can one do with such theory, which tries to articulate education from within? It is obvious one cannot just simply apply it – as it does not provide any tools. It cannot be used, either, to debunk some hidden layer of our practices and doings as oppressive – as it affirms these practices instead of engaging in critique. In that sense, it is appropriate to refer here to Jan Masschelein's (2010) idea of a *poor pedagogy*. He writes that:

A poor pedagogy does not promise profits. There is nothing to win (no return), no lessons to be learned. However, such a pedagogy is generous: it gives time and space, the time and space of experience and of thought (Masschelein 2010: 49).

Theory in that sense forms a conceptual space within which one can think, design, experience, and practice education. It is “a pedagogy which helps us to be attentive, which offers us the exercises of an ethos or an attitude” (Masschelein 2010: 49).

It describes educational practices from within, offering in this way a symbolic horizon within which one can practice and understand one's doings (Zamojski 2015). These are theories to be performed, in the meaning of performative arts. They give an account of what needs to happen (what kind of attitudes people can take, in what kind of state they need to put themselves, what assumptions have to be made and practiced) in order for education to take place. Assuming equality of intelligence, focusing attention, exposing oneself to the thing of study etc., all of these are *poor means* – as Masschelein calls them. They are “insufficient, defective, [...] lack signification, do not refer to a goal or an end” (Masschelein 2010: 49). Still, one can try to practice them in order to make education happen.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to give account of the story behind the emergence of a new way of theorising education. For that purpose, three types of educational theories were distinguished. Theories of the technical type aim to describe the mechanisms governing educational processes in order to deliver tools that can be used by educational practitioners and make their actions effective and efficient. Critical theories aim to disclose the hidden layers of educational practices and their entanglement with various social, cultural, and political phenomena in order to make educational subjects (as well as other political actors) aware of the bipolar potential of education (i.e. potentiality to oppress and to emancipate). Finally, the currently emerging post-critical theories aim to give an affirmative and immanent account of these educational practices which are neglected or marginalised by the hegemonic discourses on education. The point of making such redescriptions or reinventions of these practices is to open up a symbolic horizon, through which people engaged in education could recognise and appreciate their own doings and experiences, as well as a horizon within which they could perform education.

Crucially, the main intention of the argument presented here is not to suggest abandoning the technical and/or the critical types of theory altogether, but to justify the engagement in developing the post-critical type which is only emerging.

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Summary

In this article I perform a metaanalysis of a particular moment in the development of the field of educational theory. I do this by distinguishing three (ideal) types of educational theory, and indicating the way these induce particular uses of a theory. Technical educational theories aim at describing causal mechanisms governing education, in order to give efficient means that would make education productive. Critical theories of education offer knowledge on the role of education in perpetuating inequalities, oppression and enslavement, simultaneously stressing education's emancipative or revolutionary potential. Post-critical, affirmative or performative theories try to make a next step after radical critique, that would indicate and express educational phenomena and practices which are marginalised and suppressed by the dominant discourses on education. These theories create a symbolic horizon within which one can practice education. These theories are performed in order for education to happen.

Keywords

post-critical pedagogy, Rancière, critical pedagogy, educational theory

Streszczenie

Stosować, demistyfikować, performować. Typy i użycia teorii edukacyjnych

W niniejszym artykule dokonuję metaanalizy określonego momentu rozwoju pola teorii edukacji, wyodrębniając trzy typy (w sensie typów idealnych) teorii edukacyjnych, które facylitują trzy sposoby używania teorii (tj. wiązania jej z praktyką edukacyjną). Techniczne teorie edukacyjne, skupiając się na opisie mechanizmów rządzących procesem edukacyjnym, próbują dostarczyć skutecznych narzędzi działania pedagogicznego, tzn. skutecznych środków, które czynią edukację produktywną. Krytyczne teorie edukacyjne oferują wiedzę demaskującą rolę edukacji w utrwalaniu społecznych nierówności, opresji i zniewolenia, jednocześnie kładąc nacisk na jej emancypacyjny czy rewolucyjny potencjał. Po-krytyczne, afirmatywne czy performatywne teorie próbują zrobić kolejny krok po radykalnej krytyce, który polegałby na afirmatywnej ekspozycji i ekspresji zjawisk i praktyk edukacyjnych spychanych na margines przez dominujące dyskursy edukacyjne. Teorie tego typu tworzą symboliczny horyzont, w którym działanie pedagogiczne staje się możliwe. Takie teorie performuje się.

Słowa kluczowe

po-krytyczna pedagogika, Rancière, pedagogika krytyczna, teoria edukacji



