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From Critical Theory of Education to Post-Critical Pedagogy (in the context of the Montessori method)

The critique of critical pedagogy

What seems to be pivotal for critical pedagogy is the relation between social change and disclosure; naming areas of enslavement, oppression, and exclusion, as well as critical reflection regarding educational practices, constitute the imperatives of pedagogical research disguised as critical¹. These scientific investigations, in accordance with the premises mentioned above, expose, name, and critique, or – in other terms – demonstrate how and why educational institutions (or culture, in a broader sense) amputate the mind of the student², and train him/her to fit the roles established by the neoliberal world order³, and reproduce social⁴ and gender⁵ inequalities.

These unmasking activities are indispensable to pedagogy and their cognitive value is inestimable. They represent not only testimony to the sensitivity and the perspicacity of the researchers but furthermore to the paradigmatic maturity of critical pedagogy as a scientific discipline. Simultaneously, it may be worth noting that its conceptual apparatus is becoming increasingly sophisticated, nuanced, and hermetic. Critical pedagogy is becoming a form of intellectual play⁶ while the

¹ J. Wink writes: “To do critical pedagogy in the classroom, we must first stop and critically reflect upon the educational processes that we are living and perpetuating daily”. J. Wink, *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*, Longman, New York 1997. Cf. T. Szkudlarek, *Po co nam dziś pedagogika krytyczna?* [What Do We Still Need Critical Pedagogy for?], [in:] H. Giroux, L. Witkowski, *Edukacja i sfera publiczna. Idee i doświadczenia pedagogiki radykalnej* [Education and Social Sphere. Radical Pedagogy Concepts and Experiences], “Impuls”, Kraków 2010.

² D. Klus-Stańska, *Mitologizacja transmisji wiedzy, czyli o konieczności szukania alternatyw dla szkoły, która amputuje rozum* [Mythologisation of Knowledge Transfer. On the Need to Seek Alternatives for a School that Amputates the Mind], “Problemy Wczesnej Edukacji” [“The Problems of Early Education”] 2008, nr 2 (8), pp. 35–44.

³ E. Potulicka, J. Rutkowiak, *Neoliberalne uwikłania edukacji* [Neoliberal Entanglements of Education], “Impuls”, Kraków 2010.

⁴ P. Bourdieu, J. C. Passeron, *Reprodukcja: elementy teorii systemu nauczania* [Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture], PWN, Warszawa 2006.

⁵ It needs to be added that feminist pedagogy does not focus exclusively on the critical approach to the *status quo*, but also offers certain solutions.

⁶ P. Zamojski, *Utrzymywanie się w żywiole myślenia jako zadanie pedagogiki* [Staying in the Realm of Thinking as the Task of Pedagogy], A paper delivered during the conference: “Kondycja Pedagogiki – dzisiaj. Kontynuacja, inspiracje i wyzwania pedagogiczne z perspektywy Gdańskiej” [“The State of Pedagogy Today. Continuation, Inspirations, and Challenges from Gdańsk’s Perspective”], University of Gdansk, 06.05.2005.

project of a revolution – which it was supposed to contribute to – has turned into a kind of opium of the intellectuals⁷.

However, the process at work is aberrant in character. On the one hand, this can be explained by the fact that the critical theory of the first and the second generation of the Frankfurt School has defined certain forms of individuals' enslavement by the structure. These forms in question, from today's perspective, had an easily identifiable character. Owing to the above, critical theory – and critical pedagogy along with it – unmasked areas and manifestations of the structure's oppression, all the while maintaining their transformative potential through communicability to various actors of the educational and, in a broader sense, social reality.

In search of different/further dimensions of exclusion, identity building, or oppression, the subsequent generations of critically-oriented social researchers turned to deeper, more shrouded and camouflaged forms of violence, which had to result in the use of a more sophisticated conceptual apparatus. The paradox of this situation comes in the form of tension between the search for ever more perfected methods of studying oppression and the loss of communicability with a more general public, resulting in the reduction of the transformative potential of critical pedagogy. This moment necessitates the first question into the very aim or goal of scientific investigations undertaken by "certain" critical researchers. One of the hypotheses can be briefly described using a metaphor: "revolution as opium of the intellectuals", or: the radical transformation of schools as the opium of critical pedagogues. It is a situation in which the said opium/catchphrase not only becomes an irrelevant *cliché*, but also intoxicates and thus weakens the critical approach to one's own efforts (including those of a scientific nature)⁸. The researcher distances themselves from the very subjects they were supposed to aid, and entrenches themselves within the confines outlined by a given discourse society⁹, whose task "is to maintain or create discourses, but only so that they circulate in a confined space [...]"¹⁰.

The second question that should be posed, refers to the manners in which we may understand the goal of the process of education. In his book titled *Pytanie o cel kształcenia – Zaproszenie do debaty* [The Question of the Goal of Education. An Invitation to a Debate]¹¹, Piotr Zamojski addresses this issue. The author puts forward a suggestion of approaching the goal in a tripartite manner. The first two approaches perceive the goal as something external to actions. "The goal is a descrip-

⁷ R. Aron, *Opium intelektualistów* [The Opium of the Intellectuals], Muza, Warszawa 2000.

⁸ E. Domańska points to the same issue while describing the conflict between the American Marxists and the representatives of the so-called French Theory. The Marxists claim that "it [i.e. the French Theory] converted specific social problems into debates set around texts, having reduced the idea of the conflict to a metaphor, while the 'class, racial, or gender conflict' was substituted by conflicts between texts". E. Domańska, *Co zrobił z nami Foucault?* [What did Foucault Do to Us?], [in:] *French Theory w Polsce* [French Theory in Poland], E. Domańska, M. Loba (eds.), Wyd. Poznańskie, Poznań 2010, pp. 66–67.

⁹ M. Foucault, *Porządek dyskursu* [The Order of Discourse]. The opening lecture at College de France on 2 December 1970, *słowo/obraz/terytoria*, Gdańsk 2002.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹ P. Zamojski, *Pytanie o cel kształcenia – Zaproszenie do debaty* [The Question of the Goal of Education. An Invitation to a Debate], Wydawnictwo UG, Gdańsk 2010.

tion of an ideal order of things, towards which and because of which we undertake a given activity"¹². This tendency of thinking about the goal has two varieties that differ in terms of the attainability of this goal. In a situation where "such an ideal order is impossible to attain [...], we are bound by utopian finalism"¹³, whereas if such an ideal order of things could indeed be turned into reality, we would rather refer to "eschatological finalism"¹⁴.

It is worth noting that in accordance with the aforementioned forms of finalism, education prepares for a world that is yet to be. Therefore, the goal is something external, an entity that is separate from the *subiectum*. Approaching the goal is this way (especially in its utopian variant) is precisely characteristic of (but perhaps not limited to) critical pedagogy¹⁵.

Processism¹⁶, on the other hand, offers a radically different way of thinking about the goal of education. In this approach, the goal is perceived as the sense of the action¹⁷. The author writes:

The goal understood as something that happens (that which proceeds) cannot be considered in isolation from the action, within which it occurs. The goal always happens within some action, and cannot be separated from it¹⁸.

In this approach, the setting of a goal for a pedagogical action is a sense-ification of an interaction occurring between the participants of the education process. It represents the rationality, or the horizon of that action. This line of thinking about the goal of education ceases to be a mere set of instructions, whose purpose is to direct towards some defined, achievable point¹⁹ (which, to a certain extent, coincides with eschatological finalism, as well as with the premises of conservative and liberal pedagogy), nor does it constitute a utopian vision of a better World (utopian finalism), characteristic for critical pedagogy²⁰. We consider that processism, as a principle of thinking about the goal of education, should be approached as a **post-critical** perspective, which allows for pedagogical designs and actions that, on one the hand, will be inspired by critical pedagogy (whose premises we perceive our own horizon of actions) and, on the other hand, will be capable of overcoming its impotence, which we have described above.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 301–302. Emphasis added by the author.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

¹⁵ This concept has been recently developed by Zamojski in, inter alia, a paper on the relation between philosophy and education. See: P. Zamojski, *Educational Theory as Rationality of Action. Towards a Post-critical Relation Between Philosophy and Educational Practice*, A lecture delivered on the 9 June 2012 during the conference titled "The Second Biennial International Theorising Education Conference" – University of Stirling, Scotland.

¹⁶ P. Zamojski, *Pytanie...* [The Question...], p. 312 and further.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ P. Zamojski, *Educational...*

²⁰ *Ibid.* Also see: I. Gur-Ze'ev, *Toward a Non-repressive Critical Pedagogy*, "Educational Theory" 1998, 48/4; G. J. J. Biesta, *Say you Want a Revolution... Suggestions for the Impossible Future of Critical Pedagogy*, "Educational Theory" 1998, 48/4.

Provided that the goal of the process of education constitutes the **horizon** of a given didactic system, which is understood as: “the entirety of organisational principles, the content, the methods and the means of teaching-learning that form an internally coherent structure [...]”²¹, it is necessary to point out that the question regarding the goals should be the **first and ever present** question that determines the selection of the content, the methods, and the didactic means in every pedagogical activity.

Dialectics²² as a rationality of pedagogical activities. Towards post-critical pedagogy

Should our proposition ever be considered as sort of a didactic system, firstly it would be appropriate to define a logic that would be consistent with the processualist understanding of the goal of education, then to focus on the content, the methods, and the means of teaching and, eventually, on the teacher, so as to create an internally coherent structure of education. The didactic system that we present is based on the dialectics proposed by Moacir Gadotti²³, in agreement with which education

attempts to capture the connection, unity and movement that engender, oppose and make the contradictory elements clash, that break them or surpass them²⁴.

Such education must, therefore, be characterized by four principles. The first one is **totality** – meaning that all the elements of the world are interconnected and they should not be considered in isolation, but, as the author puts it, in their concrete totality. The second characteristic is **movement**, which in this case is seen as an immanent quality of all the dimensions of the reality. This premise is the rebirth of Heraclitus’s *pantha rei* concept. All the elements of the reality are not only interlinked, but also perpetually moving and undergoing **changes** (the third premise). The last premise refers to the contrasts seen as a game of **contradictions**. A contradiction – writes Gadotti – is the fundamental law of a dialectic education²⁵.

When discussing the structure of any given didactic system we have postulated that the goal of the educational process effects that system continuously at

²¹ Cz. Kupisiewicz, *Podstawy dydaktyki ogólnej* [The Basics of General Didactics], PWN, Warszawa 1974, p. 35.

²² We set aside the semantic differentiation of this notion, since it is not the purpose of this presentation. We also do not refer to the critique against the dialectic logic from e.g. the perspective of formal logic.

²³ M. Gadotti, *Pedagogy of praxis. A dialectical philosophy of education*, State University of New York Press, New York 1996. Polish literature on the subject of the dialectical concept of education also exists; however, its understanding differs from the one we wish to present in this paper. See e.g. R. Łukaszewicz, *Dialektyczna koncepcja kształcenia* [Dialectical Concept of Education], Wyd. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1983.

²⁴ H. Lefebvre, *Formal Logic, Dialectical Logic*, Civilizacao Brasileira, bmw, 1975; quoted from: M. Gadotti, op. cit., p. 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

every level. At this point, we present a hypothesis where, in a processualist interpretation, it is the goal of education that can be portrayed through the qualities used to describe dialectic education in Gadotti's approach. The totality of the goal of education is reflected in the notion of the rationality of actions. "The thinking in which we act"²⁶ is omnipresent in pedagogical activities in a sense that it constitutes a form of a filter or a lens, without which it is impossible to act reasonably.

A goal understood in this way is, of course, mobile. It rather **happens** than **is**. Sense-ifying actions, i.e. setting a goal – as Heidegger himself puts it – "[...] itself is a way. We respond to the way only by remaining underway"²⁷. This mobility of the goal is linked to its transformability.

Therefore, the transformability, imposed by non-algorithmic educational situations, which we face as pedagogues, must imply a qualitative change of the goal under specific conditions, in an interaction with a specific person, and in an interpretation of a specific event.

This redefining takes places when the meaning of an action that we temporarily recognise meets with the meaning of an action of other participants of the interaction. This, however, is not a simple substitution of the teacher's goal with that of their student's (as some champions of anti-pedagogy or the representatives of certain liberal pedagogy currents would wish) or vice-versa (transmission pedagogy). It is more an issue of the creation of a jointly recognised sense that transcends particular senses.

Referring back to the didactic system that we have defined earlier and the qualities of a dialectical education, we need to address the content of the process of education, the methods, and the didactic means it implies. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to begin with a caveat.

As Dorota Klus-Stańska indicates, there are times when the process of education in didactics is understood through methods, which points to the difficulty/impossibility of transformation on the level of the concept of a human being (here: the student and the teacher)²⁸. In other words, it is the methods, the content, and the didactic means that are mobile, whereas what remains immutable (and let us add: static) are the goals of education and their underpinning concepts of an individual. Therefore, modifications of the methods, the content, and the means serve exclusively the purpose of reaching the pre-established goals of education (which are external to the process itself).

In an attempt to avoid such a reduction, we emphasise once more the manner of understanding of the goal of education that we assume. If the didactic proposal we present in this paper is to be an internally coherent intellectual structure, we cannot afford to build it exclusively (or even predominantly) through changes on the level of the methods, the content, and the means.

²⁶ P. Zamojski, *Myslenie, w którym działamy (przeciw kawitacji mitycznej ogólności pedagogiki)* [The Thinking in Which We Act (Against the Cavitation of the Mythical Generality of Pedagogy)], "Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny" 2005, nr 4 (198).

²⁷ M. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York 1968, pp. 168–169.

²⁸ D. Klus-Stańska, *Dydaktyka wobec chaosu pojęć i zdarzeń* [Didactics in the Face of Chaos of Terms and Events], Żak, Warszawa 2010, p. 106 and further.

Occasionally, the contents of education are defined as basic skills and the information that the students are expected to acquire during their stay at school²⁹. This implies that they have already been established, closed, and remain objective in reference to the subject that attempts to comprehend them. Clearly, such an interpretation of the content does not conform to our conception of education.

The contents of education is not a set of information that needs to be acquired (although, of course, information is indispensable), but rather represents the procedures of handling the information³⁰.

This interpretation of the content implies certain didactic methods. In this case, also the definition proposed by e.g. W. Okoń³¹ does not seem to be in line with the didactic concept that we describe. In this case, we would need to consider as a method the creation of a learning environment in which the student would have the possibility to construct and reconstruct their knowledge using didactic means, which provide such a possibility³². "Although in the traditional approach the didactic means served to illustrate the content, within the framework of the interactive-cognitive concept, these means serve rather to manipulate, transform, and experiment with this content"³³. We believe that this aligns with what J. Kruk calls an open-ended didactic aid³⁴.

As can be seen in the considerations above, our didactic proposal is neither our own, nor is it new. The reader, who will quickly notice its conformity with the constructivist vision of education, may ask the following question:

What should differentiate the supposedly post-critical pedagogy from the well-known constructivism-based pedagogy?

Our aim is, after all, not to side with **some sort of** constructivism, but to openly identify ourselves with the critical-emancipatory version³⁵ and, let us add, build a positive didactic project.

The last question that remains is: what teacher could implement such a didactic idea? It seems that it would be a person who gives meanings to their actions, who does not avoid controversial social, moral and political issues³⁶. Such educa-

²⁹ Cz. Kupisiewicz, *Podstawy dydaktyki ogólnej* [The Basics of General Didactics], Warszawa 1976.

³⁰ D. Klus-Stańska, *Konstruowanie wiedzy w szkole* [Constructing Knowledge at School], Wyd. Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 2000, p. 95 and further.

³¹ W. Okoń, *Zarys dydaktyki ogólnej. Wersja programowana* [The Outlines of General Didactics. The Programmed Version], PZWS, Warszawa 1970, p. 194. The author writes: "A method is a systematically applied manner in which the teacher and student work and that enables the student to acquire knowledge along with the capacity to use it practically, as well as developing skills and intellectual pursuits".

³² J. Kruk, *Przestrzeń i rzeczy jako środowisko uczenia się* [Space and Objects as a Learning Environment], [in:] *Pedagogika wczesnoszkolna – dyskursy, problemy, rozwiązania* [Early Education. Discourses, Problems, and Solutions], D. Klus-Stańska, M. Szczepka-Pustkowska (eds.), Wyd. Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2009, p. 487 and further.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

³⁴ See: J. Kruk, *Dziecko w świecie przedmiotów: studium projektowe pomocy dydaktycznych* [Child in the World of Objects: Design Study of Learning Aids], "Impuls", Kraków 2002.

³⁵ *Pedagogika wczesnoszkolna – dyskursy, problemy, rozwiązania* [Early Education. Discourses, Problems, and Solutions], D. Klus-Stańska, M. Szczepka-Pustkowska (eds.), Wyd. Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2009.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

tion would require “[...] the teachers to possess intellectual-reconstructive competencies and pedagogical boldness”³⁷. H. Giroux quite accurately describes the idea of the teacher as a transformative intellectual³⁸.

Montessori pedagogy as post-critical pedagogy?

Our attempt to interpret the achievements of the famous Italian in the framework of post-critical pedagogy may seem rather audacious. The first challenge is, as the authoress herself phrased it, the origin of the method.

Firstly, the Montessori method is rooted in the New Education movement and is sometimes associated with the romantic current of liberal pedagogy, i.e. the pedagogy that was vehemently criticised by the representatives of the New Sociology of Education.

Secondly, the method is accused of focusing on motor and sensory development, i.e. those key competences that are part of critical pedagogy, when children acquire knowledge about the world³⁹.

Thirdly, the limited freedom proposed by Montessori is an artificially prepared learning environment in which the student cannot fully decide on how to manipulate their developmental material, and thus, is deprived of the opportunity to act spontaneously, rendering the declared freedom of choice an illusion.

Finally, on some occasions Montessori’s excessive faith in psychological associationism is brought to attention. The conviction that all the complex mental acts arise through associations⁴⁰ is a factor which cannot be defended in any way from the constructivist standpoint.

Naturally, the above list is not exhaustive and it could easily be extended with more arguments. Still, although we do not intend to devise counterarguments, we would like to note that they remain valid exclusively within a certain manner of understanding of a pedagogical text.

Jolanta Kruk, when addressing the issue of the understanding of texts⁴¹, pointed to the fact that the vast majority of her respondents considered texts to be “a closed and complete form of written or spoken statement”. Such understanding of a text is not only a certain narrowing⁴², but also, in a way, blocks its interpretation. The dominance of unambiguousness, manifested in the pursuit of definite

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³⁸ H. Giroux, *Teachers as intellectuals – Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, Bergin & Garvey Inc., Westport, Connecticut – London 1988, p. 121 and further.

³⁹ See e.g. S. Hessen’s critique of Montessori. S. Kot, *Historia wychowania* [The History of Education], vol. 2, Zak, Warszawa 1995, p. 338.

⁴⁰ B. Nawroczyński, *Zasady nauczania* [The Principles of Teaching], ed. 3, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1961, p. 181.

⁴¹ Kruk, *Pedagogiczne znaczenie rozumienia tekstu – między jednoznacznością a interpretacją* [The Pedagogical Significance of Understanding Texts: Between Unambiguousness and Interpretation], doctoral thesis under the supervision of J. Rutkowiak, Gdańsk 1997, p. 202.

⁴² Taking into account e.g. the observations of P. Ricoeur. See. P. Ricoeur, *Język, tekst, interpretacja: wybór pism* [Language, Text, Interpretation: Selected Writings], PIW, Warszawa 1989.

uncovering of the idea of the author⁴³, destroys the chances for its contextualisation⁴⁴ in a given place and the historical moment.

To put it slightly differently, the “dialogue” with the thought of an author or the critique of their texts functions, as Wanda Frankiewicz observes, on the level of applying theory in practice – in which the theory is evaluated based on its universalistically understood veracity⁴⁵.

Both Frankiewicz and Kruk demonstrate that interaction with a text can occur in a radically different manner⁴⁶. Although one cannot put what the first authoress defines as an inspiration on a par with what the latter calls an interpretation, both of them share the idea once expressed by B. Skarga:

One needs a master not to obey them throughout their entire life, or to sustain the master’s solemnity at all times even against the pervading facts of a new reality, but rather to be able to surpass them. Once one learns what the masters taught, one should rebel and move on⁴⁷.

Therefore, we treat the texts of Maria Montessori as an inspiration, which we critically interpret in each pedagogical act. We believe that this interaction with the text of the Italian pedagogue opens the possibilities of its post-critical lecture.

From the idea to practice (step one) or the piling up of problems and doubts

The intention of this part of the paper is to describe the educational practices in which we participate, the practices whose horizon is the didactic concept outlined above. At this point we would also like to share with the reader our doubts and dilemmas – both normative and those related to realisation. Nonetheless, we do not venture to offer a conclusive perspective of the presented educational reality. We rather see this section of the article exclusively as an invitation to think together, as an exercise in “weak thought”⁴⁸. This way of thinking, therefore, ought to be preceded with a description of the perspective from which we express our opinion.

⁴³ J. Kruk, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

⁴⁴ J. Rutkowiak, *Uczenie się w warunkach kultury neoliberalnej: kontestowanie jako wyzwanie dla teorii kształcenia* [Learning in Neoliberal Cultural Conditions: Dissent as a Challenge for Education], [in:] E. Potulicka, J. Rutkowiak, *Neoliberalne uwikłania edukacji* [Neoliberal Entanglements of Education], “Impuls”, Kraków 2010.

⁴⁵ W. Frankiewicz, *Naśladowanie – stosowanie – inspiracja – jako możliwe odmiany dialogu z pedagogiką Celestyna Freineta* [Mimicking – Applying – Inspiration as Possible Types of Dialogue with Célestin Freinet’s Pedagogy], [in:] *Pytanie, dialog, wychowanie* [Question, Dialogue, Education], J. Rutkowiak (ed.), PWN, Warszawa 1992; also see: M. Szuksta, M. Mendel, *Współczesne tendencje w nauczaniu inspirowane metodami M. Montessori, C. Freineta, R. Steinera* [Contemporary Trends in Teaching Inspired by Montessori, Freinet, Steiner], Iwanowski, Płock 1995.

⁴⁶ Cf. L. Witkowski, *Wyzwania autorytetu* [The Challenges for Authority], “Impuls”, Kraków 2009.

⁴⁷ B. Skarga, *Przegląd filozoficzno-literacki* [Philosophy-Literature Review] 2007, nr 3–4 (18), <http://www.pfl.uw.edu.pl>, accessed on 27.05.2012.

⁴⁸ G. Vattimo, *Dialektyka, różnica, myśl słaba* [Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought], “Teksty Drukie” 2003, nr 5.

We are English teachers at a private language school. We work with children, youth, and adults on different levels of linguistic proficiency.

The primary dilemma of our practice is described by the notion of **linguistic genocide**⁴⁹. The principle arguments in favour of teaching the English language (especially at schools established specifically for that purpose) were, and continue to be, the subject of critique for the representatives of the critical linguistics⁵⁰, who deem them to represent the hegemonisation and neo-colonisation of the culture of specific groups of persons – in our case it is the students, whose voice remains unheard, as it does not operate in the school's preferable code. Here, in slight contrast to B. Bernstein⁵¹, the code determines the belongingness to the English language culture. Following this reasoning, we should recognise our work as a colonising practice, and we should see ourselves as operating in the roles of functionaries of the Centre⁵².

The above-mentioned dilemma is also linked to another issue, which is the non-egalitarian nature of the school. Perhaps it is precisely here where the representatives of the privileged social groups move even further away from the peloton of those in a rush for success and position. If this is so, then the teachers who work here could be, in fact, perceived as persons supporting divisive processes.

Furthermore, being a private entity, in order to exist, the language school must generate profit. This, in turn, may result in organising actions so as to please particular interested parties. For students, for instance, these could include classes organised along the lines of "here I am – amuse me", i.e. a form of an easy and simple entertainment or, in a different scenario, classes aimed at building the careers of particular individuals.

In other words, they would represent education saturated with the qualities marking learning in the neoliberal context, thence and therefore filled with instrumentalism, polarisation, unilaterality, simplification, infantilism, and passivisation⁵³.

On the other hand, for the parents this would mean observable effects in the form of the "improvement" of grades at the schools the students attend, scoring a larger number of points on subsequent external exams, or obtaining specific certificates to confirm a given level of linguistic proficiency, which would also conform to the hypothesis on the "educational programme of the corporate economy", characteristic of neoliberalism⁵⁴.

⁴⁹ The term "genocide" was coined by Rafał Lemkin, by coupling the Greek *genos* with Latin *cidium*. The complementary word *linguistic* was added by the critically-oriented linguists. See e.g. R. Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, 1992; A. Canagarajah, A. Suresh, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁵⁰ In this case we think of e.g. R. Phillipson. R. Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*...

⁵¹ B. Bernstein, *Odtwarzanie kultury* [Cultural Reproduction], PIW, Warszawa 1990.

⁵² On this side, we should also add that the problem of the English colonisation of other languages also touches the academic milieu in which a Polish author writes a paper on a famous Polish pedagogue for a Polish journal intended exclusively for Polish readers in... English. On the surface it may seem that the only goal of this practice is to accumulate more points, but the players in this game are the members of the academia, and the game itself is a manifestation of linguistic imperialism.

⁵³ J. Rutkowiak, *Uczenie się w warunkach kultury neoliberalnej...* [Learning in Neoliberal Cultural Conditions...], pp. 165–166.

⁵⁴ J. Rutkowiak, *Czy istnieje edukacyjny program ekonomii korporacyjnej?* [Does the Educational

In an attempt to face the challenges that were indicated above (which have been inevitably selected⁵⁵) we were forced to specify our intersubjective normativity. This is because we consider acting as the functionaries of the colonising Centre unacceptable. J. W. Goethe is reported to have said that “those who know nothing of foreign languages, know nothing of their own”⁵⁶. In Goethe’s statement it is possible to find the argument that taking away the students’ chance to learn the English language means, in fact, depriving them of the opportunity to use certain elements of the symbolic culture of the contemporary World, regardless of our opinion of it. Zbigniew Kwieciński, while presenting the potential of the category of “lack”, and simultaneously referring to P. Bourdieu, offered a distinction between the “taste of freedom” and the “taste of necessity”⁵⁷. The “taste of freedom” is the true choices typical of the middle class, which are based on the possibility to perceive the spectrum of opportunities (and understandings) of the day-to-day existence, while the “taste of necessity” “can only be defined in the negative, in terms of a lack, through the unavailability of other lifestyles”⁵⁸. Getting acquainted with the English language as a certain area of symbolic culture would, in this case, (also) represent the attainment of the cultural literacy indispensable for a critical view of the world and to make the possible changes⁵⁹, i.e. potentially developing the taste for freedom.

Moreover, the students’ voice – often drowned out during English classes at their schools – is mediated through the cultural illiteracy in this respect. In this context, our actions may be seen as giving the students the opportunity to express themselves, in a way, from within the discourse. We do assume, in fact, that change in the symbolic culture of the school is possible exclusively from the inside, i.e. in order to change or challenge the meaning of the rules of the game, one needs to know them. This is all the more so since over 70% of the participants of our classes are not the leaders of the race, but rather the tired, hard-peddalling cyclists at

Programme of Corporate Economics Exist?), [in:] E. Potulicka, J. Rutkowiak, *Neoliberalne uwikłania edukacji* [Neoliberal Entanglements of Education], “Impuls”, Kraków 2010, p. 33.

⁵⁵ At this point we withdraw from characterising other problems, one of which is the school. The students that attend our classes, who are tamed to conform to the culture of silence and passive reception, initially face enormous difficulties in “finding their place” in situations that require participation in the process of education (and its planning). They do not know how and often are unable to take responsibility for their learning, which inevitably results in various educational and didactic issues. Another problem is the uninterrupted period of student’s independent activity, which M. Montessori advises to extend to at least 3 hours, as only such a period of individual exploration will initiate spontaneous forms of students’ activity. Maintaining such working time in the conditions, which we have described earlier (the specificity of the functioning of language schools, i.e. offering afternoon, extracurricular classes; the imperceptible grip of neoliberalism, etc.) is somewhat difficult.

⁵⁶ <http://quotationsbook.com/quote/22375>, accessed on: 14.09.2012.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Z. Kwieciński, *Między patosem a dekadencją. Studia i szkice socjopedagogiczne* [Between Pathos and Decadence. Socio-pedagogical Studies and Essays], Wyd. Naukowe DSWE TWP, Wrocław 2007, p. 143.

⁵⁹ H.A. Giroux in an interview with Manuela Guilherme formulates a similar argument: global citizenship requires not only the capacity to understand the language of the new technologies and to search for information, but also the ability to display trans-boundary commitment, learn, understand, and take responsibility for the matter of differentness and diversity. H.A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*, Continuum, New York 2011, p. 170.

the back of the peloton⁶⁰. To stop or turn the peloton around, they need to become the key players in the game – thus their voice will be harder to ignore. To put it differently, we see the chance for a transformation in the macro context, through changes on the micro level, and only from within the game. In any other case, their voice will be reduced to an insignificant *gobbledygook*.

Different interests intersect at our school – as in every other educational establishment we work for – which implies the goals of the actions undertaken at the school also vary. We believe that the economic rationality of this institution is but one of the many horizons of its activities. Of course, its emancipatory, empowering function can stand in opposition to the said economical aspect. Although this may pose difficulties, it does not preclude the realisation of actions that we believe have such potential. Recognition of the primacy of the economical aspect, as the dominant rationality, would block all our activities. To acknowledge that the school determines every action that takes place within its premises and becomes a catalyst for its hegemony, would mean to surrender without a fight. However unsteadily substantiated, our **faith** does not allow us to passively accept such a possibility. In other words, we would describe the relation between the school and the actions taking place within it as contingent but not necessary⁶¹.

From the idea to practice (step two): a snapshot from the practice

The background, whose outline we wish to present here, depicts one of the series of classes we co-organise for younger students, although in terms of age the group is heterogeneous. When planning these classes we were inspired by both by the fragment of Maria Montessori's concept – i.e. the so-called "cosmic education"⁶² – and the English language teaching methodology based on the CLIL⁶³ approach. Nevertheless, it was the example of the French language teacher Joseph Jacotot⁶⁴, described by J. Rancière, that became our key guideline. Rancière is interesting to us in a twofold manner.

When entering into a debate concerning the deterministic and overpowering perspective taken by a significant number of the representatives of the New Sociology of Education, Rancière proposes not to assume that equality (utopian finalism as the goal of education) is something that may be achieved in an indeter-

⁶⁰ Based on the authors' own research.

⁶¹ Otherwise, any internal resistance would be futile.

⁶² We would like to direct any readers interested in this matter to: M. Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York 1912.

⁶³ *Content Language Integrated Learning* is an approach where specified aspects of the surrounding reality become the content of the classes, e.g. biology or geography, which are then imparted in the foreign language. The foreign language is not the content but a medium for learning the World. Thus, this approach integrates the foreign language with a given "object". See e.g. D. Lasagabaster, J.M. Sierra, *Language Attitudes in CLIL and Traditional EFL Classes*, "International CLIL Research Journal" 2009, vol. 1(2), www.icrj.eu/12/article1.html, accessed on: 27.09.2012.

⁶⁴ J. Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster – Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1991.

minate future. Such an understanding of equality builds a distance between the enlightened teacher and the still-ignorant student⁶⁵.

However, the moment equality becomes the horizon for our actions, when it is put into practice (the post-critical, processism-rooted understanding of the goal), thus emancipatory pedagogy becomes possible.

Moreover, it is necessary to create conditions in which both the teacher and the students are faced with the same educational challenges – or in other words – share the same ignorance. This was the case of the said teacher. He did not know their language, they did not know his. In this linguistic situation “Explication is not necessary to remedy an incapacity to understand. On the contrary, that very incapacity provides the structuring fiction of the explicative conception of the world. It is [precisely] the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around”⁶⁶.

In our case, the natural history of the world, being the content of the cosmic education, has become such structuring fiction⁶⁷. We, who do not know the natural history, need each other to explain significant moments in the history of the Earth, and in this sense, we are on a par in our ignorance. In our case, the natural history of the world, being the content of the cosmic education has become such structuring fiction.

The classes commence with a deliberation on how the world had come into being. All the members of the group, using methods of looking for information of their choice, collect information and bring to the class their “own” versions of the origins of the planet Earth, which contradict one another. Everybody creates their own story on the creation of the World, using their own code. By collecting all the versions, a circle is created. The teacher also tells one of the stories. Some students do not fully comprehend and ask questions, but the task is difficult – they speak in different tongues. Nonetheless, everyone experiments with the language, since the drive to cognition is stronger than the ignorance in a given field.

The lights go out, and in the meantime someone has inflated a balloon. Others wait in the darkness. Suddenly the balloon pops, spilling out shreds of paper. One of the participants of the class is trying to explain “the Big Bang Theory”. The fiction structuring the conception of the world.

At the beginning there was nothing...

English translation: Anna Moroz-Darska

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁷ C. D. Kaul, *Manual on Cosmic Education – An Integrated Approach to a Responsible Attitude Towards People and Nature*, MoKa Verlags KG, Tegernsee 2005.