EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Luka Nikolić, Assist. Prof.
Dr. Aleksandar Tadić, Assoc. Prof.
University of Belgrade (Serbia)

Abstract. Drawing on the standpoints of Critical Pedagogy and the Emancipatory view of education, this paper addresses the issue of developing alternative educational practices that can lead to a change in relationships in the classroom and possibly in the broader social context. In relation to some of the contemporary pedagogical views, some alternative pedagogical models are presented that promote changes in the relationships between teachers and students, and between students themselves. In an effort to create a more democratic environment, we address the question of how these models can also be establisheded in contemporary schools. Starting from the promotion of didactic teacher strategies that support student autonomy, some theoretical and practical pedagogical implications are highlighted that can encourage teachers to actively and cooperatively change the classroom and wider social relations and conditions with students. In addition, the paper provides an overview of contemporary education and gives a general recommendation for education workers who want to actively work for education based on ideas of emancipation.

Keywords: emancipation; critical pedagogy; teacher education; didactic strategies; democratization; classroom management

Critical and Emancipatory Pedagogy as a Theoretical Background

Based on Critical Theory, which was established in the first half of the twentieth century through the work of the Frankfurt School, modern pedagogical approaches have been developed that are defined as critical or emancipatory. However, critical pedagogy does not stand for the implementation of critical theory in a pedagogical context, but for a synthesis of critical theory viewpoints with the theological ethics of liberation and progressive pedagogical ideas (Abraham 2014). Within this pedagogical approach, emancipation is seen as one of the fundamental educational goals and through the development of critical self- and social-awareness (McKeran 2013), the position of all educational parties is illuminated with the aim of

understanding and offering practical measures that can liberate individuals from the repressive structures of society. Values associated with emancipation such as democratization, development of egalitarian and more humane relationships in the school context, assumption of responsibility for the actions and agency of teachers and students are relevant today and represent important research questions and practical aspirations of the representatives of this pedagogical approach. Insisting on the value of agency aims not only to create a better educational context, but to work towards changing society and relationships within society by insisting on democratization and values such as equality, solidarity, mutual respect and appreciation. In realizing these values, teachers should be critical of the education system, which has a manipulative character that is contrary to the publicly and secretly propagated values of efficiency, competitiveness and individualism.

The critical pedagogy of the Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire is an indispensable starting point for considering emancipatory theories of education. His emancipatory theory of education embodies a paradigmatic shift in the approach to pedagogical problems and a shift from the interpretative approach and the postmodern paradigm, which aims to analyze and diagnose problems, to a critical paradigm, which aims to bring about a change in pedagogical and social reality, with the goal of creating more egalitarian relationships for all pedagogical and social actors. Achieving egalitarian positions through liberation is one of the main goals of Freire's pedagogy, whereby the subordinates are not to create a world in which they take the role of oppressors, but to build an equal society together with them (Freire 2018). Values such as equality, mutual respect and participation are woven into the principles on which teaching should be based. He criticizes traditional didactic starting points and believes that knowledge cannot be taught, but that teaching should provide space and opportunities for the construction of knowledge (Freire 2017). Turning away from the traditional, banking model of education, in which the teacher is the unquestioned authority responsible for imparting knowledge and has a monopoly on teaching in terms of time and content, he turns to the concept of problem-posing education, which aims to discover and understand the world without neglecting the ethical imperative that implies respect for the autonomy and dignity of each individual (Freire 2017, 2018).

By understanding the class position of all educational participants and turning his pedagogical positions towards classical Marxism, Peter McLaren shifts the focus from the 'pedagogy of desire" to the 'revolutionary critical pedagogy" (McLaren 2010, p. 9). The task of his pedagogical standpoint is to change the social order in such a way that it leads to the economic emancipation of both teachers and students, rather than emphasizing that the main goal is for both teachers and students to feel "good about it (McLaren 2010). On the basis of "revolutionary love" and the search for different possible ways of emancipation, he proposes building a new relationship between teachers and students based on values such as solidarity,

equality and mutual help in the division of labor (McLaren, 2010, 2021). In this context, the term work would refer to the development of a dialectical approach and material-historical analysis, fostering critical thinking and consciousness-raising skills, and taking responsibility for becoming an active participant in changing the educational and social order (McLaren 2021).

Notwithstanding the differences between the thinkers who are oriented towards critical pedagogy, one of the common themes is how to build more democratic relationships in education and in society, and so they consider changing the teacher-student relationship. In analyzing this relationship, they criticize the traditional pedagogical view according to which teachers have the right answers and their main task is to transmit this knowledge to students who are in a position of ignorance. Jerome Brunner can also be seen as a representative of such a pedagogical understanding. He insists that conceptual changes in education are necessary and that education should move away from the understanding that the teacher should mold students from the position of possessing knowledge and pass it on to students who "know nothing" (Brunner 2000). Jacques Rancière also joined in the criticism of the traditional teacher-student relationship. He negatively values traditional teaching practices that focus on the teacher whose job it is to explain to the student and adapt his teaching methods to achieve the desired results, which are measured by whether the students have learned the content. Rancière's emancipatory theory is based on trust in the strengths that each individual possesses and on building a relationship of "equality of intelligence" between teachers and students. He believes that it is necessary to move from the "traditional" to a modern model of emancipation. The new model of emancipation is characterized by its reliance on the individual and their strengths in discovering the world, rather than implementing the practice where teachers "lift the veil" of ignorance and simply reveal the hidden meanings in the world (Biesta 2017; Ranciere 2010). He criticizes the "pedagogical myth" that implies the existence of higher and lower, superior and inferior intelligence, and argues for an emancipatory education in which teachers and students make joint intellectual efforts to acquire knowledge and create different meanings in the world that surrounds them (Rancière 2010).

Contemporary attempts to conceptualize a new idea of critical pedagogy (postcritical pedagogy), which moves away from a more "traditional" approach to critical pedagogy that insists on changing the world through the collapse of the capitalist order of oppression, also insist on changing the static nature of the teaching profession and conceiving of the teacher as a "protector", someone who has successfully emancipated themselves and who has the task of emancipating others by revealing to them the hidden meanings that exist in the world. (Hodgson, Vileghe & Zamojski 2017, p. 84).

Critical pedagogy not only represents a new pedagogical perspective, but also designs a new paradigmatic approach to education and therefore looks at the teaching

profession in a new way. Within the critical paradigm, a shift in the perception of the role of the teacher is advocated, moving away from the traditional pedagogical paradigm and seeing the role of the teacher as someone whose main task is to pass on the content and values set by the official curriculum to the students in a passive position, or as modernist, where the teacher insists on student engagement to achieve the set educational outcomes of the curriculum (Radulović 2016). The teacher is a mediator of pedagogical theory and practice, someone who analyzes and uncovers problems together with the students. Moreover, he tries to discover the true social situation and the factors that influence it, opening spaces together with the students to resist manipulative influences and to change social relations. Within the framework of this pedagogical orientation, teachers do not act as a repressive authority towards students, do not create the only true picture of the world, and do not spread defeatism about the possibility of change. Rather, based on the concept of "revolutionary love" (McLaren 2010), the promotion of mutual respect and equality, they open the space for the creation of a democratic society without considering the current contextual reality as the only and unchangeable entity.

In considering the various approaches to critical pedagogy, mentioning Henry Giroux and his theory is inevitable. Drawing on the pedagogical starting points of Paulo Freire, he insists that education is understood as a kind of "libertarian practice" that aims to empower students to challenge entrenched narratives and values presented as immutable realities, to strengthen their skills and abilities, and to insist that they then take an active approach to changing the world around them (Žiru 2013). He believes that critical pedagogy should contribute to the "project of social democratization" by enabling educators to redefine and change the discourse of language, entrenched meanings and beliefs, and material power relations in order to restore trust and open spaces for the creation of a democratic public life (Giroux 2004). He sees teachers as "intellectuals" who should critically engage with the curriculum by raising questions about the learning content from the perspective of their intellect and the values they hold, refusing to reduce their own role to technicians instrumentalized to deliver the content of the program (Giroux 2002). Teachers are not seen as passive intellectuals, but as transformative intellectuals willing to seek out spaces for practical action and to openly critique economic, political, and social inequalities both in schools and in society (Giroux 2002). The pedagogical basis of emancipatory education programs is seen as "a political project that creates the conditions for personal autonomy and sets the liberation and cultivation of libertarian practices as a general goal" (Žiru 2013, p. 226; Tadić & Nikolić 2020). Referring to Freire's alternative pedagogical approach, he states that "any progressive vision of learning must include pedagogical principles characterized by a tendency toward dialog, questioning, and communication" (Žiru 2013, pp. 59 – 60; Tadić & Nikolić 2020).

John White looks at the role of education in improving social cohesion (the kind consistent with democracy) and notes that the main problem is the lack of equal mutual respect, the understanding of others in the community as essentially similar to us, with the same basic needs that must be met in order to live a fulfilling life. The equality of respect is at the core of the democratic ideal and is considered its key value. In order to promote these values in school, we need to incorporate them into school educational goals from the beginning and develop appropriate structures and learning activities that contribute to the achievement of these goals (White 2013). Mutual respect among students as equals in school and in the classroom means that no one sees himself or herself as superior or inferior to others. In addition, teachers and students should be educated to be active members of a democratic community where others should be treated as equals. The grading system, tests and exams reinforce this separation, as does the division of children into different categories according to their abilities (successful/unsuccessful, capable/incompetent) or the division into different types of schools according to their academic abilities. On the contrary, the ideal of a democratic school, a school for a democratic community, implies that people are enabled to lead fulfilling lives, the possibility of choice being a prerequisite for this.

With regard to the subject of our work, in addition to presenting and considering different theoretical approaches with emancipatory foundations, it is important to consider the acquisition and development of equality, which is inherent in the concept of emancipation. Promoting the development and cultivation of equality between students and teachers, as well as between students in the classroom context, represents a path to emancipation for all involved. A teacher who adopts a non-authoritarian position is considered one of the prerequisites for the development of students' emancipation. By using a dialogical method as the basis of teaching, teachers and students can strive for the dialectical approach and engage in arguments in the construction of shared values and meanings. Creating an atmosphere in the classroom characterized by free expression, mutual respect, and the opportunity to participate in the interpretation of various issues initiated by either the teacher or the student is considered a necessity. Such a classroom, which becomes a place of learning and community with a proactive social approach, can contribute to the development of each individual as well as to the development of actions with a greater social impact.

Alternative pedagogical models developed on the basis of emancipatory pedagogy

In the following section we will mention some practical attempts to develop alternative pedagogical practices that, in the words of important contemporary educators, give hope and justify the positions presented in the visions of the authors of the emancipatory orientation.

A cooperative school culture implies the active role of students in decisions that are important to their schooling. Jerome Bruner cites as an example a school in Oakland, California, attended by children from the ghetto beginning around age ten (Bruner 2000). The program implemented at this school exemplifies some of the principles Bruner considers essential for children to develop a sense of participation in a *supportive community*. A particularly important aspect of this project is a kind of collaborative school culture it creates for its students and teachers. In order to teach through the exchange of ideas, students develop lesson plans, making several proposals that can be practically anything concerning different topics. They knew that the other students would listen to them and not make fun of their ideas. This way of working is especially important for disadvantaged children because it is "a specific way to mitigate the pernicious effects of alienation, helplessness, and aimlessness" (Bruner 2000, p. 87). There is a need to build school cultures that function as mutually supportive communities of students who work together to solve problems. Such groups are not only a place of instruction, but also a focal point of identity formation and work, where there is mutual help. These schools are meant to be a place for the practice (and not just the promulgation) of cultural reciprocity" (Bruner 2000, p. 91). Without such practices, schools begin to resemble countercultures – centers where a new way of looking at life in a modern society is cultivated.

Based on Rancière's understanding of emancipation in the school context, Ivana Momčilović (Momčilović 2010), using the example of the francophone community school in Limerle Belgium, (fr. Projet d'école différence en Communauté Français), gives her opinion on the answer to the question of whether the word democracy can be written without quotation marks in the phrase of schools of democracy. Their conclusions are very optimistic in this regard. This project, which is a different kind of school from the ordinary one, is based on a new kind of organization and thinking. It promotes thinking through action and organization, thinking in a new kind of social and collective participation and design. This project did not aim to explain, but to research in practice, and was developed after observations of similar schools in France. It analyzes the new relationship between school and democracy and practically justifies the visions of a school for all. The first self-governing school of this kind was opened in September 2009 as part of a philosophical, political and pedagogical project supported by the Belgian Ministry of Education.

John White (White 2013) also sees an alternative to the traditional school in basing the school on the principle of equality. He states that the school should aim to create a society of people who are different from each other, but who respect each other as equals. Consequently, the societal priority is to create appropriate structures and learning activities that help achieve this goal (White, 2013). He believes that schools really can be a *wonderful tool* for improving social cohesion, and cites as an example a small elementary school (consisting of one class with

thirty students in each year group; the children attending are aged between four and eleven; a compulsory school operating within a conventional framework – the existing national program) in Hertfordshire, north of London. The School's operation is fully consistent with the vision of democratic schooling that it supports. The school believes that students' intellectual abilities are not limited and always upholds the principle that learning should be not only individual but also collective. It builds a community for acquiring knowledge and encourages children to support and help each other. In White's words, "Relevant, meaningful, and fun program activities encourage children to be dedicated to what they are doing... Learning in collaboration with others can not only be fun-it also reflects in microcosm the virtues of living together in a liberal democratic community" (White 2013, p. 276).

Since early 2001, Laurence Tan has been developing an alternative model of instruction based on emancipatory principles in the Los Angeles Public Elementary School. Working with fifth grade students, Tan sees the need to offer them a new perspective on education and develop their skills for social engagement before they continue their formal education in high school (Edweek 2012). His pedagogical approach is based on 5 fundamental principles (5 E's of Emancipatory Education) that guide his classroom work and curriculum design (Tan 2008). Based on the idea of empowering students for local and global social change, it insists on: Building a climate conducive to learning, mutual understanding of the specific context from which students come, developing academic skills and critical review skills, learning through experience, empowering students and instilling hope that change is possible, and developing skills for planning concrete social action (Tan 2008).

For the affirmation of emancipatory practises in compulsory schools

The ideas and principles of various theories of emancipatory orientation have been translated into a number of requirements for educational practice (Brantlinger & Danforth 2006). One of the examples is the promotion of a sense of equality and community among students, rather than fostering a competitive spirit and emphasizing school and social hierarchy. Students need to feel safe in the classroom community without fear of physical or emotional violence, failure, ridicule, abuse, rejection, humiliation and labeling. Creating a productive, democratic class community requires a capable and committed teacher. In such a community, rules are set cooperatively and responsibilities are shared, which helps students perceive the class as their community.

Autonomy-supportive interpersonal strategies of teachers' pedagogical work (Tadić 2019) are recognized in pedagogical literature through themes such as influencing, coping, sharing responsibility, talking, collaborating, understanding other people's perspective, empathic response. Active student participation is highlighted as an important factor in the quality of teaching and learning. Active participation "not only plays an important role in developing students' autonomy

and responsibility, but at the same time gives them practical experience of life in a democratic society" (Pšunder 2012, p. 13). Hence the need to build democratic relationships in the classroom based on respect for needs, equality, conversation and understanding of each other's opinions, values and feelings, and shared decision-making, with the aim of promoting the overall development of the students in the atmosphere of a caring, good and fair community: self-determination, self-discipline, responsibility, care, compassion, trust, etc. All the above features promote the principles of emancipatory education and imply equality of positions for all participants in classroom interactions.

A favorable classroom climate is linked to democratic, socially inclusive forms of teacher behavior, which are important for the development of skills and abilities for democratic behavior and relationships, such as: Communication skills, understanding the perspective of others, cooperativeness, social responsibility, etc. (Lalić 2005). Building democratic relationships in the classroom is based on the belief that the basic human need is for social connectedness and a sense of belonging to the community (Englehart 2009). A democratic teacher plans and makes decisions together with the group, encourages group participation and is open and enjoys helping students. This style of teacher behavior leads to students supporting each other and taking responsibility for their behavior and learning.

Thomas Gordon believes that in order to build and maintain good relationships in the classroom and to ensure the success of teaching, it is necessary for teachers to exert more influence on students in the classroom to encourage their motivation to learn and to prevent undisciplined behavior. In particular. Class discussions on specific issues of concern to students are particularly important in resolving problems with student misbehavior. In addition, the teacher should "listen actively and show them that he understands and accepts their feelings and ideas" (Gašić-Pavišić 2005, p. 195). If you practice this, a living democracy will be developed in the classroom. Teachers are trained on how to hold a meeting where the rules of conduct are set in the discussion. Everyone is involved in setting the rules, both the teacher and the students, and everyone is expected to respect them. Such meetings help to improve students' motivation to follow these rules, as they are established through a joint process. Students and teachers present and discuss alternative opinions on a given topic, eliminating the solutions that do not please the students or the teacher. Gordon sees the principle of participation in action in the use of this method to resolve conflicts in the classroom, noting that "people are more accepting of decisions and more motivated to implement them if they have been involved in making them – while they do the exact opposite if they are denied the right to vote" (Gordon 2006, p. 185).

In addition to the potential of the above-mentioned interpersonal strategies of the teacher's pedagogical work, certain modalities and forms of classroom work – didactic strategies of pedagogical work – can be of particular importance for

activating students' inner motivation to learn (Tadić 2019).These strategies mean that teaching practise is geared towards the use of interactive methods (dialogue, exchange of opinions, both between teachers and students and between the pupils themselves). In addition, it involves creating classroom situations in which students actively participate (preparing and creating an environment for active learning), fostering cooperative relationships in the classroom (with much more space for the student's voice) and legitimizing differences between students (valuing different perspectives) (Pešikan 2010). Further attention should be paid to the selection of useful and meaningful teaching content, as well as to the possibility of deciding jointly on its implementation. In order to promote the emancipation of pupils, it is necessary that pupils and teachers work together cooperatively in the entire teaching process.

Conclusion

A major influence on the work of Henry Giroux, one of the aforementioned representatives of critical pedagogy, was the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, a journalist and writer whose already famous motto: "Pessimism of the mind, optimism of the will" (Antonini 2019), can serve as a guide for the reflection and development of emancipatory pedagogical practises. In the context of this paper, we can show a possible approach from the perspective of teachers' activities. On the one hand, we insist on caution, pessimism of the intellect, not "closing" one's practice with already established and tested teaching methods, and the constant questioning of one's own work through reflection and the search for new answers to fundamental questions of education and teaching. On the other hand, we also point to the need for an optimistic approach, characterized by the observation and questioning of various social trends, and aiming at a proactive struggle to eliminate or at least reduce inequality and achieve as much democracy as possible, both in the classroom by opening up spaces for students' active participation and promoting student autonomy, and potentially through efforts to let the action go beyond the classroom and have an impact on the wider social context. The development of alternative pedagogical practices based on emancipatory foundations gives us hope that there are still spaces in which we can act subversively to prevailing cognitivist conceptions of education and neoliberal economic ideology. Given the limitations that may be reflected in particularity and the potentially small reach of such changes, we continue to believe in the impact of proactivity and "small changes" that can be an initial spark for those changes that would have broader societal impact. We believe the alternative of waiting for the changes to occur on their own is a defeatist stance. As McLaren notes, all teachers and educators who see themselves as critical fighters for social equality face an essential eschatological struggle for the free world (McLaren 2021). Driven by the desire to change the context, it is necessary to search for alternative practices and reject the notion that the ones we have are the

only possible ones, they ought to take their tools, critical questioning and action, their "sword" in the fight against all those who want to stifle freedom and justice (McLaren 2021).

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✉ **Mr. Luka Nikolić. Assist. Prof.**
ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5832-5244
✉ **Dr. Aleksandar Tadić, Assoc. Prof.**
ORCID iD: 0009-0008-4200-3580
Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Belgrade
Belgrade, Serbia
E-mail: luka.nikolic@f.bg.ac.rs
E-mail: aleksandar.tadic@f.bg.ac.rs