



---

## PEDAGOGY OF THE OTHER

---

## OR, THE CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND THE IMPOSSIBLE

---

## EXCHANGE

**DUŠAN RUTAR**

---

### **ABSTRACT**

In our rather short study, we have introduced three indispensable basic concepts that are needed if we want to understand what critical pedagogy is. The concepts are: 1) the concept of alterity or otherness; 2) the concept of critical literacy; 3) the concept of simulaera. Our thesis is that Paulo Freire, Jean Baudrillard and Emmanuel Lévinas have provided some very strong theoretical and practical tools which can be used to radically change the institution which has been called the school. In our view the pedagogy should be an ethical enterprise, and the problem-posing pedagogy which we argue for is that ethical enterprise.

**KEY WORDS:** otherness, other, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, problem-posing pedagogy, ethics

We would like to start our short article about critical pedagogy and its role in post-modern schools at the beginning of XXI. century with a thesis that seems rather strange and even unnecessary: Paulo Freire was, and still is, one of the most convincing educational activists, teachers and scientists in the world. We believe that his theoretical work and his activism were basically oriented toward very complex ideas about the other, although he never developed the concept of the other. His work is therefore strongly connected to the ideas of Emmanuel Lévinas and Jean Baudrillard.<sup>1</sup> Today, we would like to contribute some theoretical remarks to this connection because we believe that we, as teachers, should read together the works of Freire, Lévinas and Baudrillard.

The pedagogy of the other is certainly a philosophical and epistemological concept which is totally unknown in our schools. For example: even when school teachers talk about pupils as human beings with their right to become fully human members of communities or their right to become so called fully human beings, they don't use the ideas or concepts of

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Clarence Joldersma (1999). The Tension Between Justice and Freedom in Paulo Freire's Faith-Full Pedagogy. [<http://www.calvin.edu/~cjolders/WHAM99paper.html>]

Paulo Freire, Donaldo Macedo, Henry Giroux, Emmanuel Lévinas or Jean Baudrillard, if we mention only some of the authors that have developed the strongest concepts about this very complex idea: pedagogy of the oppressed, critical literacy, problem-posing pedagogy, the other.<sup>2</sup>

---

## **PART ONE: TOWARD THE CONCEPT OF THE OTHER**

---

The basic idea of Paulo Freire was that every child has the right to become a creative human being. The purpose of every educational praxis is therefore to establish institutionally conditioned situations where the children will have at their disposal all necessary opportunities to become fully creative. This must be understood strictly philosophically, not psychologically. And Emmanuel Lévinas is the philosopher who has created some very strong concepts about this ethical, not ontological, position of every possible human being.

First of all, Freire was convinced that today an average school doesn't really provide, set up or organize good conditions for the development of autonomous and creative [young] people. He also recognized that education isn't an institution which is genuinely interested in social justice. Instead, Freire realizes that much of education is dehumanizing, taking the form of what he calls "banking education".<sup>3</sup> Hence, young people, through the years of their schooling, don't become creative human beings. Instead, they slowly become more and more dehumanized human beings.

Ethics precedes ontology, said Lévinas. He began his thinking about the human being with an ethical »I« which is not a psychological being, personality, ego or self. This is very important, because nowadays there is too much psychology present in the classrooms [and everywhere else, too]. For Lévinas, the self is possible only if it recognizes itself as something other than itself. This recognition [in the other] carries basic responsibility toward what is irreducibly different. And »the self« is the first thing that is different (from itself). There is something strange inside every human being because a woman or a man is not identical with herself or himself. There is no such thing as a homogenous self-identical self inside human being.

And knowledge, continues Lévinas, must be preceded by an ethical relationship. It cannot be otherwise: knowledge is not a tool for our ethical (or non-ethical) behavior. It doesn't tell us what to do to improve the quality of our life. The ethics is also the very condition of every possible [future] knowledge and the quality of life.

For Freire, the task of education is to promote the liberation of children. The liberation is the only way for a human being to become fully aware of society and itself. And every human being has the duty to become fully aware of himself/herself and his/her surrounding environment. But first of all: our ethical duty is to recognize and understand the nature of the other.

The other is not our neighbor, is not our fellow human being, because the idea of the other is something that applies to every possible human being. That means that every human being is — ethically and ontologically — in a position to recognize the other which

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Emmanuel Lévinas (1987). *Time and the Other*. Duquesne University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Douglas Kellner. *Critical Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, and Radical Democracy at the Turn of the Millennium: Reflections on the Work of Henry Giroux*. [<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/GIROUX-CSART.htm>]

is the other of every one. Alterity, the otherness of the other, gives radical and ultimate obligation, said Lévinas. Alterity now traces itself across the face of the other person and is something that we cannot recognize at the first sight. This is not possible because the other is not something that we would ever look at. The other is a concept of radical alterity and even more: the other is a direct connection between a human being and god.

The concept of the other is a result of radical human inversion, which means that human beings can only recognize their relationship to themselves as something that enables them individually to become fully aware of their own human nature. That nature is not “inside” one’s body or soul, it is radically “outside”. Through this inversion we recognize that we have lost our ties to any possible “origin” of our “nature” and because of that we find ourselves to be utterly alien. Hence, the other is “outside”. Finally, we understand what it means to be the other of oneself. The human being is therefore not himself/herself but is the other [to himself/herself]. We can say, following Hegel, that our human identity is difference. Or, as Derrida would put it: the other is *différance*.

Who, then, is the other? The other is not the self or ego. It is not the positive and substantive inner I of the human being. It is not “something”, it is nothing positive or substantive. The other is a difference between the human being and himself. It is a difference between the world and itself, it is *différance*. It is the ultimate or absolute goal of every possible way of thinking; it is the border of every possible world.

With this basic insight into the problem of human identity we can proceed.

---

## **PART TWO: TOWARD THE PROBLEM-POSING PEDAGOGY**

---

Our second thesis is very simple: we need a problem-posing pedagogy. This is not a traditional pedagogy of a teacher who knows everything and of a pupil who knows nothing. It is a pedagogy as a process of the creation of the very possibilities for the production of knowledge. What we really need today in the classroom is a dialogue. And when we talk about the concept of dialogue we would like to emphasize the basic dimension of it: a dialogue is only possible between extremes and not between two different positions.<sup>4</sup>

A dialogue is a discourse. And there is no dialogue without the other. The other is not our fellow human being, as we said before; it is something radical — the other is radical otherness. The concept of the other is indispensable if we want to talk about a dialogue in modern schools. There can be no dialogue without the otherness. When we develop or create the concept of the otherness we can try to explain what we call the real world. We are not really able to explain the world without the concept of otherness.<sup>5</sup>

Critical pedagogy is thus a praxis. It is a radical praxis. The praxis is a critical and radical return to the signifying practices of the human being. A human being is namely a signifying being. His basic tool to understand the world is language.

The language itself generates signifying practices which are not transparent. It demonstrates the very nature of the world and the human being. Because of the language,

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dialogic Response in the Culture of Silence: James Berlin’s Social-Epistemic Rhetoric and Freirian Politics as a Means to Student Voice in the Contemporary English Classroom.[<http://www.uwplatt.edu/~ciesield/berlinfreire.htm>] Presented at The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, a conference on Paulo Freire, at the University of Nebraska, Omaha, April 18, 1997

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.* Contemporary education must be aimed toward a real-world discourse/dialogue..

the human being is always the other, and the world or reality is never self-identical. There is always the other world. When we talk about the world, we are ipso facto able to talk about the other world.

In the classroom we need a dialogue. We don't need static knowledge because there is no static knowledge and there is no static world. There are only illusions and there is the truth of every illusion and the truth of every static knowledge. We need that truth.

Our pupils (and teachers, of course) need interpretative tools, interpretative skills and interpretative praxis in order to become able to understand the truth of everything that is. They need to learn how to use interpretative skills, they need to learn how to use language in different [other] ways. We need critical inquiry into our present world, history and static knowledge. We need new cultural and symbolic practices, procedures. We don't need the simple maintenance of static codes and institutions. We need problem-posing (not solving) pedagogy. We need new [productive] questions and new problems.

Let us put this in a different way: we need historical investigation, rhetorical repositioning, i. e., social-epistemic rhetoric.<sup>6</sup>

In our schools there are too many obstacles to inquiry, there are too many ideological boundaries of discovery. We need critical literacy.<sup>7</sup>

With critical pedagogy, problem-posing pedagogy, critical inquiry and critical literacy we can change the artificial environment of the classroom into the very real situations of a real-world existence.<sup>8</sup>

Without critical inquiry and critical literacy we will remain forever trapped in what Freire called the culture of silence. We will remain silent and obsessed by positive and static knowledge, we will be the slaves of the illusions of the "real world". Even more: we will remain dependent upon modern digital technologies and obscure traditions.

Giroux thus argues that pedagogy needs to see the importance of cultural studies. It needs to recognize how important is its commitment to radical democratic social transformation. The primary goal of pedagogy, therefore, should not be the formation of young people who will be later able to use and enjoy popular culture, its goal should be to develop fully aware young people who will understand that culture. Educationally, this leads Freire to develop his central notion of critical consciousness or conscientization.<sup>9</sup>

We are, of course, fully aware that right now many people eagerly want only static knowledge, discipline and order, but in the long run they will understand that they are only members of the culture of silence. They will recognize that they were all their lives dependent upon authorities, spectacles, digital technologies and simulacra. And some day in the future they will understand what is cultural maturity and what is the difference between the culture of silence and cultural maturity.

Critical pedagogy or problem-posing pedagogy, in order to develop critical inquiry in the classrooms, needs the other human being as its ethical (and pedagogical) goal. If we want to liberate people we must teach them how to use language as a strong interpretative

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibid.* Critical literacy is important here because it offers students the skills to see their experience as readable text, something that can be interpreted and evaluated through many of the same critical processes once reserved for canonical texts and classroom oriented situations.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Douglas Kellner.

tool.<sup>10</sup> We don't need more science literacy; on the contrary: we need more critical literacy. We need it because we must understand what is going on around us.<sup>11</sup>

We are basically symbolic and political beings and our freedom, our knowledge and our critical inquiry are also political. Hence, we must dare to set up political knowledge, critical literacy as political, historical and economical literacy.<sup>12</sup>

---

### **PART THREE: TOWARD THE CONCEPT OF RESPONSIBILITY**

---

Our responsibility, as teachers, is first and foremost ethical responsibility. As symbolic and ethical beings we (as the others) must create new opportunities for the liberation of human beings, of every human being.

Why do we really need this responsibility? On the one hand, we need it because it is the basis and the core of our "nature". On the other hand, without ethical responsibility we are not able to change anything in the world. And when we talk about the world we don't only name it. This naming process is never neutral with respect to reality. So, if we are naive and we believe that our world is an "objective whole" and that we only "neutrally" describe it, we already share a prejudice against its alterity.

When we talk about the critical investigation of the world, we try to articulate the truth about it. By the same token, we try to articulate the modern human "nature", which is today over-coded by the language of digital technologies and simulacra.<sup>13</sup> The world is therefore not "objective" and "neutral"; it is always already overcoded.<sup>14</sup>

Freire was one of those who claim: When men lack critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know reality.<sup>15</sup>

Traditional education was mainly the system of indoctrination. It suffers from so called "narration sickness". That sickness means: The teacher talks (narrates) about ("objective") reality and the students listen.<sup>16</sup> Education is therefore only a system or a movement which has become a very strong partner in the process of post-modern production of simulacra. Be honest: from the outset, students must cope with the banal. Through the years, their education becomes synonymous with boredom, a bulimic pedagogy consisting of the mass accumulation of "objective" facts and then examinations, the process interrupted rarely by so-called "experiments" where the results are predestined and the work tedious.

---

**10** Cf. *Dialogic Response in the Culture of Silence: James Berlin's Social-Epistemic Rhetoric and Freirian Politics as a Means to Student Voice in the Contemporary English Classroom.* To know language as a tool for investigation and dialogue rather than simply as a way to say "yes teacher" and repeat the correct information, is the major goal of a liberatory education.

**11** This cultural turn is animated by the hope of reconstructing schooling with critical perspectives that can help us to better understand and transform contemporary culture and society in the contemporary era (cf. Douglas Kellner).

**12** Cf. *Dialogic Response in the Culture of Silence: James Berlin's Social-Epistemic Rhetoric and Freirian Politics as a Means to Student Voice in the Contemporary English Classroom.* Freire's own "conscientizacao," a term which refers to one's "learning to perceive social, political, economic contradictions and to take action against oppressive elements of reality".

**13** The simulacra are basically the post-modern digital hyperrealities.

**14** Paulo Freire has believed that objectification of the world is nothing but a form of domesticating the world as other, by getting it to surrender, forcing it to "lay itself open to grasp".

**15** Cf. *ibid.*

**16** Cf. *ibid.*

Conclusion. Only the dialogue, which requires the human being as his/her otherness can create the otherness. And the otherness is the main predisposition for the constitution of the communities of libertarian life styles. The "objective" and "neutral" digitally over-coded world needs its alterity which has been denied for a long time.

Jean Baudrillard taught us that today we are more and more dependent upon artificial global simulacra and not upon the "objective" and "neutral" world. The lives we live right now in that global simulacra are only possible because impossible exchange took power over the world. Impossible exchange is a bizarre procedure that replaced the uniqueness of the human being with something new and impossible: digital simulation of his/her uniqueness.<sup>17</sup> And that is the ultimate reason why we need the critical pedagogy or problem-posing pedagogy which requires critically thinking [young] people.

And if there is a lack of critically thinking people in digital hyperrealities we certainly must create them. With a little help from the critical pedagogist we will succeed.

### **POVZETEK**

*V naši precej kratki študiji smo se lotili treh osnovnih in nepogrešljivih konceptih, ki so potrebni za razumevanje kritične pedagogike. Ti koncepti so: 1) koncept drugosti ali alternativnosti; 2) koncept kritične pismenosti; 3) koncept simulakrov. Naša teza je bila, da so Paulo Freire, Emmanuel Lévinas in Jean Baudrillard razvili nekaj zelo močnih teoretičnih in praktičnih orodij, s katerimi je mogoče korenito spremeniti šolo. V tej perspektivi moramo kritično pedagogiko razumeti kot etično pobudo. Pedagogika-ki-zastavlja-vprašanja je taka etična pobuda, za katero se zavzemamo v pričujočem besedilu.*

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** drugost, drugi, kritična pedagogika, kritična pismenost, pedagogika-ki-postavlja-vprašanja, etika

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jean Baudrillard (2001). Impossible exchange. London: Verso.