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Critical education as an attempt to question the dominant habitus through the educational system

**Edukacja krytyczna jako dążenie do zakwestionowania
dominującego habitusu poprzez system edukacyjny**

Abstract: In the article, I analyse the role of education in the prevailing system of neoliberal capitalism. On the one hand, it is used by the dominant culture characteristic for the upper classes to imprint appropriate ideological assumptions in the minds of students. On the other hand, there is strong resistance to the practices of subordination and implementation of the logic of the prevailing system. Illich's concept of deschooling society recognizes that compulsory education should be abolished. Critical educators such as Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren argue that the resistance present in the school testifies to the possibility of using the school to shape critical citizens capable of defending democracy. In my article, I argue that it is possible to partially free oneself from the logic of the dominant culture and to partially emancipate the habituses characteristic of the lower classes. However, it is not my goal to illustrate the ideas present in the theories under analysis by referring to specific examples in the field of a particular educational system.

Keywords: neoliberalism, capitalism, critical pedagogy, resistance, ideology, democracy.

Anarchism or Emancipation? Critical education in the face of the challenges of the global world

Education in the modern world is increasingly subordinated to the requirements of the world of big business. It is to be measurable and quantifiable and fit in with specific market trends. Building a society in which the primacy of the common good, and not the accumulation of capital, will prevail, requires that educational networks or other new forms of organization be directed at using the developmental potential of those who participate in them.

In a democracy, individuals are needed - we can call them transformative intellectuals (Aronowitz and Giroux, 2003, pp. 23-43; Giroux and Witkowski, 2010, pp. 67-80) capable of a critical view of social mechanisms and independent thinking, self-education and carry out various types of corrective actions on oneself and within the community. This is a great task facing critical pedagogy and other alternative movements to contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

[C]ritical pedagogy needs to be renewed—yes, it needs to bring itself face-to-face with the moment of the revolutionary. This time it has to be concerned with the problem of reasserting human action, and of finding forms of organization that facilitate human development. The depredations of progressive (i.e., left liberal) pedagogues have often subordinated praxis to the realm of ideas, theory, and the regime of the episteme. But critical socialist pedagogy recognizes the pivotal role of public political action, what has been called „public pedagogy.” It’s a pedagogy of revolutionary praxis. And here I would argue for a decolonizing, anticapitalist pedagogy (Leban and McLaren, 2010, p. 92).

It is debatable where and in what form such public anti-capitalist pedagogy will be introduced. Aiming at developing a radical alternative to the current system, it will have to define the relationships within the classroom in a completely different way and specify what kind of new relationships are to extend between theory and practice. It will certainly have to be a more partnership, libertarian relationship in which both individuals will participate more on the basis of free will than institutional coercion (Monchinsky, 2008, pp. 121-123).

A certain proposition is that the funds for education should go directly to the interested parties. This is a proposal that appeared in the postulates of neoliberals and resulted in the intensification of the social selection effect

(Potulicka, 2014, pp. 167-203). The very abolition of public education, already postulated by Illich, does not result in the abolition of the socio-cultural logic of reproduction. Abolishing state education, or replacing it with private education, may result in the intensification of the selection effect and replacement of one form of oppression with an even worse one.

If there were centers of knowledge or public schools in the form of Summerhill (Neill, 1964) it would indeed be carrying out a revolution in education and in wider social structures. For knowledge would break out of its commodification completely and become a common good in which everyone could participate. What must be de-economized and democratic again are the very procedures for producing knowledge in the conditions of school practice (Paraskeva, 2010, p. 178).

Educational curriculum should be processed in such a way that they really serve to shape the democratic sphere of public space, in which various previously oppressed voices may arise. They cannot correspond to academic disciplines educating specialists cut off from the issues of community life. It is necessary to restructure both of them in such a way that they will cease to be a tool in the hands of the ruling elite, limiting both the epistemological and ethical possibilities of the subjects they influence (Paraskeva, 2010, p. 177).

Taking up pressing social problems must become both an element of school and academy, they should not function alongside and allow their mission and activities to increasingly become an interpretation of right dogmas, and knowledge becomes only a product that gives appropriate qualifications on the „free” labor market (Giroux and Witkowski, 2010, pp. 76-77).

Critical pedagogy wants to lead to the fact that schools become agendas of democratic discourse, and not passive mechanisms reproducing the situation favorable to the class power of the current financial and political elites (Giroux, 1991, pp. 13-37). This requires an active fight against neoliberal hegemony in education, as well as the organization of new projects in the socio-political space opposing neoliberal capitalism.

There is always resistance, the only question is how to organize it so that the elite cannot channel it in a way that is safe for them. Thus, critical education goes beyond the vision of the school as the vestibule of the factory (Giroux and Murchland, 2010, pp. 82-83). It is supposed to lead to the empowerment of a man who turns from an object into a subject of history, capable of self-creation of the surrounding reality.

Such an individual is not easily indoctrinated by dominant ideologies, striving for a critical scrutiny. A school that educates critical citizens

becomes a form of life that prepares for participation in a democratic universe (ibidem, p. 83).

We find ourselves at a kind of crucial moment in history that may decide what kind of society we will live in. Will we continue to focus on bureaucratic capitalism, the economic paradigm of which is starting to cause increasing social inequalities, pandemics, depletion of our planet's natural resources and its increasing pollution (Polanyi, 2016).

We have to move away from the neoliberal model of „development”, but the question is what can replace it. A continuing novelty in Illich's mind despite the passage of so many years is that we must begin changes with school as the main element of the mechanism of the system that keeps it going. The point, then, is not that reforms in education take place under the influence of systemic transformations, but that changes in education may favor a social revolution that even such a flexible capitalist system cannot resist:

„In this way, the financial crisis becomes a kind of a possible means of understanding what is happening to us, opening our eyes, a mental turn, a regulator of change, in which one has to rethink the models of economic policy, as well as the model of globalization. It mainly concerns theoretical issues: questions about a properly entrenched new economic paradigm, which would replace the discredited doctrine of M. Friedman and the activity of the ubiquitous, and until recently effective Chicago Boys - implementers of the fundamental principles of neoliberalism, as well as about relatively predictable socio-cultural consequences for such a change. **For educators, the concepts of changes in the area of education, which are the consequences of systemic changes, would be of particular interest**” (Rutkowiak, 2012, pp. 29-30; bolded by the Author)

For J. Rutkowiak, the system is a problem and it needs to be changed first. I would be more careful here. I do not believe that a change within it will automatically lead to an educational transformation. This process is more complicated. Especially because education also influences the shape of the society in which we live. Illich also mentioned it that despite the fact that social systems are changing, such as e.g. fascism, dictatorship, communism, etc., it is surprising that education remains essentially the same, i.e. it retains its indoctrinating and programming functions (Illich, 1971, pp. 73-75).

Perhaps, however, Illich is right, which is also confirmed by Pierre Bourdieu's analysis (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) that education itself is

the strongest bastion of the present system of neoliberal capitalism. Here I understand habitus in accordance with Henry Giroux's interpretation:

[H]abitus refers to the subjective dispositions which reflect a class-based social grammar of taste, knowledge, and behavior inscribed permanently in the „body schema and the „schemes of thought” of each developing person. The habitus, or internalized competencies and sets of structured needs, represents the mediating link between structures, social practice, and reproduction. That is, the system of „symbolic violence” does not mechanically impose itself on the oppressed; it is at least in part reproduced by them, since the habitus governs practices that assign limits to its „operations of invention” (Giroux, 1983, p. 89).

If this is true and the hidden curriculum (Wróbel, 2006, pp. 89-95) all over the world smuggles in a pattern of dependence on institutions, imprints the hierarchy of power and obedience to it, and the need for continuous production and respect for the richer and stronger – in such case we really have dealing with an extremely serious problem.

Pedagogy then appears as a depraved revolutionary science, the true nature of which has been camouflaged as deeply as possible to prevent the free choice of one's own views and interests. It is a discipline torn between its indoctrinating and emancipating functions.

It must self-critically approach its own achievements and re-create the idea of education, which I understand here as teaching and learning, as it were, intertwined with a lifestyle, being an immanent part of culture, and not a privilege of one particular institution, such as school:

The hidden curriculum of education everywhere instills in the citizen the myth that science-based bureaucracies are efficient and benevolent. The same program everywhere instills in the student the myth that increased production leads to a better life. And everywhere it develops the habit of pointless consumption of services and their alienating production, as well as a tolerance to institutional dependence and respect for institutional rankings. In this way, the hidden curriculum, regardless of the prevailing ideology, works against the efforts of teachers (Szkudlarek and Śliwerski, 2010, p. 25).

Ideology has an overwhelming power to influence the external and internal manifestations of human life. In the existing structure of power and knowledge, teachers play the role of guardians of morality, protecting against

an element that, from the point of view of the present system, is dangerous for it. At the same time, they are convinced that they do everything in their power for students from disadvantaged classes to improve their situation (McLaren, 1992, pp. 39-44).

However, any oppression raises a reaction, it is true that schools in some way determine the future of students and enslave them within the theoretical framework defined by the dominant cultural arbitrariness, but it also creates a counter-ideology. This often unconscious will to oppose the rules of the game perceived as unfair triggers strategies of some educational resistance (ibidem, pp. 19-38).

It is precisely this type of counter actions, which are inherent in school culture that allows Giroux to build a category of resistance. This category can serve as a tool for organizing opposition of the marginalized in the process of teaching students. Their resistance can be used to become a „material” for building a new school that is actually a place where public debate based on a democratic basis will take place (Szkudlarek and Śliwerski, 2010, p. 25).

This way of thinking is a kind of complement to the concept of Illich, because American critical pedagogy also aims at social change through education, but does not consider school a completely failed project. Giroux claims that it has a certain range of internal mismatch, a space where the discourses of hope and domination collide, which creates a plane of resistance, which allows the transformation of the school into an institution based on democratic, and not neoliberal, ideals (Giroux, 1991, pp. 61-62).

Surprisingly, it will perform a „similar” function to Illich’s educational networks, except that it will retain its institutional form, which will prevent it, as a public property, from becoming a victim of the expansion of market rules.

This understanding of school as a place where there is also opposition to unfair principles, makes it both a center for transmitting culture and creating it. Education is therefore a kind of open space which, despite its indoctrinating and violent nature, is not completely immune to change. It can be used in building democratic social capital focused on promoting a civic culture that is contrary to the interests of the class elite. The pedagogy of resistance deals with how to combine these various centers of social protest manifested in the school space and create from them a real force capable of giving voice to previously marginalized social groups. Organized resistance is in opposition to the phenomenon of cultural reproduction (Szkudlarek and Śliwerski, 2010, p. 26).

Classes subordinated to the dominant cultural arbitrariness resist educational symbolic violence, striving to preserve their particular identity,

which prevents them from reaching the higher levels of the social ladder. The working class ethos in the UK also has a specific plane of opposition to protect its own specific habitus. The paradox is that such actions do not allow members of this group to free ourselves from the logic of systemic subordination.

Szkudlarek refers here to Paul Willis's research on children from working-class families, discussed by Giroux. Peter McLaren also refers to this research (McLaren, 2016). These are classic studies showing how the phenomenon of cultural reproduction takes place. It turns out that students with working-class origins did not have imprinted in themselves a sense of inferiority towards the intellectual class.

Simply by using Bourdieu's terminology, they had a different original habitus built into them, and based on that, they interpreted the surrounding reality. Their rebellion, however, did not get them anywhere, because they had no intellectual tools to operationalize it and explain the world around them in Marxist terms, e.g. a false consciousness concealing real social relations from them.

White boys who created the so-called the gang of „homies” actively used their habitus to defy the norms and rules of their school. They knew how this system works, but they did not want to submit to it, choosing the path of its conscious contestation through constant skirmishes with teachers (Giddens, 2009, pp. 839, 842-844).

This was a protest against school rules reflecting the dominant cultural arbitrariness. Unfortunately, their revolt, as Szkudlarek aptly notices (Szkudlarek and Śliwerski, 2010, pp. 26-27) was only a harmless game, not removing the barriers set up for them by the educational system from their paths. This is what distinguishes organized resistance from blind rebellion. The former is aimed at changing the rules of the game, breaking the logic of the ruling system, and thus aimed at the emancipation of the subordinates from their current social roles. Positive maladjustment as a sociological category will manifest itself here in a conscious lack of adaptation to the applicable rules of the game and crossing them through a deliberate rebellion that even those in power will have to take into account.

A given class, stratum or group must fight for a place in the public space for their postulates based on understanding the essence of social relations in which they find themselves. Education can facilitate this by becoming an open space for debate on the future shape of society:

When viewed as an important democratic public sphere, education can provide opportunities for educators, students, and others to redefine and transform the connections among language, desire, meaning, everyday life, and the material relations of power as part of a broader social movement to reclaim the promise and possibilities of an open society (Giroux, 2019, loc. 448).

Is liberation from the dominant habitus possible?

If there is no organized resistance, conscious of the existing social conditions, there is a situation in which the entire cycle repeats itself, and the members of the dominated group may only perceive too late that path they have taken was wrong and only caused them to get stuck in the same system, which they did not accept as young people (Giddens, 2009, p. 843).

However, this choice cannot be placed here as dichotomous, i.e. either I will adopt the habitus represented by the dominant cultural arbitrariness or I will keep my own and occupy a subordinate position in my own society. One can risk such a statement, which I am doing here, that it is rather about partial emancipation of one's own habitus and creating a place from school where this partial abolition of the logic of dominant cultural arbitrariness would take place.

The aim here is to make it a free sphere similar to the space of the old university, in which different views on life would clash and which would depart from the function of diversifying students, striving to create in them their own critical view of the existing reality. Training for work and the associated fees would be transferred by the state to private entities managed partly by their own employees.

According to Illich's wish, taking up a profession in such a „deschooled” society would be largely related to the passion and abilities of a selected individual, not to a social position. He himself proposed radical solutions, such as creating a certain educational credit (Illich, 1971, p. 90-91) for all citizens. However, I think that this is a questionable issue, surely the systemic changes alone will not lead to a change of school, and it is the same other way around.

Coordinated action in both education and economics must be undertaken to reverse the progressive social stratification and restoration of class power among elites (Harvey, 2005). This, in my opinion, cannot be done in one smooth step. This requires comprehensive preparation in the socio-political and educational areas.

Teachers in the face of the neoliberal habitus

Teachers cannot be indifferent to the fact that schools now serve the neoliberal hegemony of capitalism to reproduce inequalities and limit the social advancement of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Both American (Hill, 2010; Potulicka, 2016), Polish, English (Gmerek, 2011), German (Nowosad, 2013), and Russian (Gmerek, 2013) schools operate in this way - they deliver success in line with the cultural, symbolic and economic capital possessed by students. It is influenced by the organization of school teaching and the way in which useful and useless knowledge is defined in it (Smyth, 2010, p. 194). Education that only brings success to the privileged class is not a real social institution, it is merely a parody of it. Educational companies produce the class elite and alienate the rest of the community. This imposes on teachers who are aware of the ongoing process a moral obligation to oppose to this systemic logic (ibidem, p. 195).

If they lend their hand to a competitive race in which unprivileged pupils are doomed to failure, they betray the basic assumptions and ideals of their profession, the purpose of which is to serve the development of students, and not to fulfill the role of prison guards of the ruling system.

It isn't coincidence that rap from black ghettos is not present in the school space, while classical music occupies a privileged place in them. Decolonization pedagogy reveals these false treatments of the current regime of power and knowledge and recognizes that we live in a socially structured environment in which the United States and other imperialist cultures employ practices that neo-colonize large masses of people (Radice, 2005, pp. 91-98).

The media, entertainment, literature and art are used in this, all in order to subordinate the consciousness of people alienated from participation in the profits that the current system brings. The consent to their actions that the transnational capitalist class obtains by using an aggressive ideological offensive is therefore undoubtedly forced (Leban and McLaren, 2010, p. 93). Pedagogical decolonization practices are not aimed only at creating and contemplating some abstract concepts, but are directed at real application. They are designed to create a connection between the alienation experienced by students and the relations of production and consumption that apply in the social structure (ibidem, p. 231).

The point is, therefore, to teach them to go beyond the applicable systemic restrictions and to understand how to decipher the other bottom of the reigning hegemony and not to allow their own humanity to be appropriated by the system of meanings overdetermined by the state (Althusser, 2014 pp. 232-272) and the capitalist class using its services. In short, such education

is to undermine the legitimacy of dominant practices and encourage their transgression (Leban and McLaren, 2010, p. 93).

Thus, decolonizing pedagogy opposes the prevailing neoliberal paradigm and undermines the validity of its semantics, allowing the oppressed to unite in a gesture of opposition to the prevailing class relations.

An important role here is played, among others, by music of subordinate minorities, not yet fully domesticated by the authorities. It shows her the middle finger in a gesture of rejecting the legitimacy of her postulates, opting for being in spite of the current system of power, i.e. the so-called thug life. In my opinion, you can even find here in the so-called thug life certain inspiration - rather unconscious, drawn from the now absent tradition of the Black Panthers, who do not hesitate to fight in an armed struggle to defend the rights of the black people of the USA.

For instance, some radical educators such as Jeff Duncan Andrade and Ernest Morrell are teaching high school students to become radical sociologists that can analyze their own schools as institutions of domination, colonization, and social control. They call their approach, „thug life pedagogy” after the late hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur. Here critical pedagogy constitutes the building blocks [reference to Gramsci – D.Ch.] for a relation with other people. In doing so, critical teaching helps hope resume its odyssey of struggle against the obstacles of fear, ignorance, and self-doubt (ibidem, pp. 232).

Revolutionary pedagogy as a new holistic proposal of understanding education and society

What is revolutionary pedagogy about? It wants to prevent neoliberal capitalism from using education to create the totalitarian society of the future that is already beginning to emerge in the United States. It is a world empire getting richer by plundering its neighbors, unfair trade - imposing such restructuring that weaken other countries, capturing the best scientists - „human capital”, exploiting their natural resources. USA is even creating a reserve army in their own prisons, keeping unwanted disposable populations under control (Wacquant, 2009; Mora and Christianakis, 2013) and using them as competition to cheap labor from China, India, Bangladesh, etc.

It is therefore a global parasite-state that has little to do with the name democracy. It owes its development not only to the potential extracted from its own citizens, but also to plundering practices (Harvey, 2003; Harvey, 2005, pp. 5-63).

This industrial-military complex treats public education as a means of educating cheap labor, to this end it breaks up the middle class so that there is no opposing force, etc. The elite schools exist to educate the privileged classes and are inaccessible to the general public. It shows what neoliberal capitalism in its purest form leads to.

What can the education postulated by revolutionary critical pedagogy offer us? First of all, it gives us the tools to understand the tragic situation in which modern school and society have found themselves. Thanks to the neo-Marxist analysis, it sees the holism of the entire project of restoring the class power of the elites and knows how important education is in it, extending not only to a typical school space, but to the entire society, its media and broadly understood culture, because modern life is permeated with open and hidden education.

Anti-capitalist pedagogy understands these broader dependencies, not limiting itself only to a typical school perspective (this includes, for example, the ability to use media critically and create counter-hegemonic alternatives by students) (Van Heertum, 2010, pp. 224-226).

Therefore, it seems that banning private education and introducing a new type of public schools that are spaces for free and universal social debate unfettered by the bureaucratic limitations of science is a necessary solution to prevent further introduction of the neoliberal model into education. In combination with restraining the aspirations of the privileged classes and taking some wealth from them (progressive taxation, etc.), this should result in reducing social inequalities (Stiglitz, 2012, loc. 443-450). It is also necessary to shift the costs of certification and training to the chosen profession onto private entities, despite the fact that it should be up to the state to establish the procedures and supervise whether human rights are violated in the process.

Democratic procedures should enter enterprises, forcing employers to distribute some of their profits among employees. This lays the foundation for a dignified life for the majority of citizens who can participate in the public debate in their free time.

All this is possible, however, changes must first and foremost take place in the educational space, because it will remove the instrument of indoctrination from the hands of the authorities and create generations free from compulsory submission to the rules prevailing in a given system. Then, citizens will arise who are able to organize and critically analyze the social reality in which they are function, who are actually subjects and not objects of history (Giroux, 1997, pp. 218-219).

Conclusions: Abolition of school vs educating transformative intellectuals

A student who consciously undertakes educational practice as an action aimed at liberating him from a certain position in the social structure, acts against the logic of the capitalist system, and is therefore positively maladjusted to it and adapted to a new higher level of social organization.

One can even risk a statement that this kind of education is tending to some kind of disintegration, i.e. the collapse of the old regime of power and knowledge. The goal of the transformative intellectual, which in the understanding of critical pedagogy should be every teacher, is precisely disintegration of the false consciousness imposed by the prevailing cultural arbitrariness on the student and helping him on the way of becoming the director of his destiny.

Only a subject that takes its own upbringing on itself to a large extent and perfects itself voluntarily can be a member of a new type of social organization. The very nature of learning and getting to know new information is based on the activity of the individual and the materials needed for this type of activity. If someone is internally motivated to master a given scope of the material on his own and is moderately intelligent but persistent, he will be successful. Schools and academies claim the right to control this type of practices, not to facilitate them, because they serve to maintain the current social order (Illich, 1971, pp. 12-13). Illich is partly right in the sense that consumerist educational institutions demotivate rather than teach the joy of learning. We do not learn for the satisfaction and willingness to learn about new phenomena, but in order to gain the highest position in an arbitrarily established educational ranking.

I disagree with Illich's final conclusion and the way he wants to achieve the postulated goal - abolition of the school, but I cannot deny that there is a grain of truth in his mind.

Everywhere, all children know that they were given a chance, albeit an unequal one, in an obligatory lottery, and the presumed equality of the international standard now compounds their original poverty with the self-inflicted discrimination accepted by the dropout. They have been schooled to the belief in rising expectations and can now rationalize their growing frustration outside school by accepting their rejection from scholastic grace (*ibidem*, p. 44).

Students begin to rationalize their own rejection within the existing system, not realizing that in order to get out of its institutional framework, they must revolutionize its functioning.

It is possible to partially challenge the dominant habitus, and students are not merely passive pawns under the control of capitalist ideology. In cooperation with teachers who emancipate themselves from their role of service to the dominant culture, they are able to partially challenge it. Building a new socio-organizational structure supporting the functioning of such education remains a problem. It is also extremely important to develop a new type of solutions in the field of teacher education and change their role in society, and thus change their social position. In the current pandemic world, the postulates of critical pedagogy shed new light on the process of education and upbringing, but were not able to lead to questioning the legitimacy of neoliberal society and related to it education.

It is important to add that we can modify curriculum in school in such a way which include experience and knowledge of the subordinated groups. We can also try to change way in which students are assessed in school including effort they put into acquiring new knowledge. However this will not prove easy without serious modifications of broader educational structures and will of political decision makers. There must be present certain political will to make changes. In current times we experience in Poland (Śliwerski, 2020) as well as in USA neoconservative revolution in education which makes it harder for educators to challenge existing structures of power via classroom practices.

A question that still requires further research is whether the changes to try to question the dominant cultural capital within the existing socio-educational structure are sufficient, or should we strive for more revolutionary changes making the cultural capital of disadvantaged group's part of the dominant cultural capital?

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