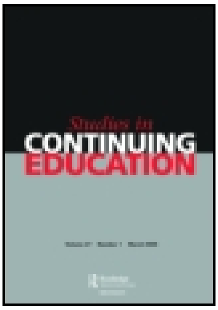

Studies in Continuing Education
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csce20

Reflections on the emancipatory potential of vocational education and training practices: Freire and Rancière in dialogue

Gisselle Tur Porres[a], Danny Wildemeersch[a] & Maarten Simons[a]
[a] Laboratory for Education and Society, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium
Published online: 16 Apr 2014.

Studies in Continuing Education, 2014
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2014.904783

Reflections on the emancipatory potential of vocational education and training practices: Freire and Rancière in dialogue

Gisselle Tur Porres*, Danny Wildemeersch and Maarten Simons

Laboratory for Education and Society, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

(*Received 16 April 2013; final version received 24 November 2013*)

This paper focuses on the issue of emancipation in education practices in general and in vocational education and training (VET) in particular. The principal aim is to contribute to the discussion of particular traditions of emancipation in education in connection with VET practices. The exploration of ongoing educational debates on VET policy-making and the issue of emancipation in VET reveals that, ultimately, emancipation in VET is understood as a specific function for socio-economic integration. The paper discusses this functionalist orientation and contrasts it with a vision on emancipation as a feature of an educational process rather than an educational outcome. Freire's and Rancière's core concepts of emancipation guide the discussion regarding the latter interpretation of emancipation in VET practices.

Keywords: education; VET; emancipation; P. Freire; J. Rancière

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the question of emancipation in education has been associated with critical reflection and conscious awareness (i.e. critical pedagogy tradition) as opposed to the qualification and socialisation perspective of education (Biesta 2009a, 2009b). VET practices have been mainly associated with 'preparation for employment'. Thus, they have been principally identified with employability discourses that may move students away from critical engagement (Grubb and Lazerson 2005). Additionally, the notion of utilitarian education or productivism in education in general, and higher education in particular, as a phenomenon and expected outcome in neoliberal markets and societies, is identified by many scholars as the 'vocationalisation' of education (Giroux 1994, 1999; Beach and Carlson 2004; Grubb and Lazerson 2005; Anderson 2008). This tendency reflects the assumption that vocational education is basically a synonym for productivist discourses in education for global market integration or, as stated by Farrell and Fenwick (2007), 'educating [for] a global workforce'. In this sense, education in general and VET in particular gain special relevance for knowledge-based economies, in which education/knowledge is seen as important means for economic growth (Farrell and Fenwick 2007). Indeed, there is an emphasis today on the central role of VET in the sustainable growth of societies, under the framing of an instrumental skills-based education (Maclean and Fien 2010; UNESCO 2010; UNESCO-UNEVOC [Global Network for Technical and Vocational Education and Training] 2005). Given that VET is increasingly understood as an educational sector that aims to train students with job-

*Corresponding author. Email: gisselle.turporres@ppw.kuleuven.be

specific skills for social inclusion, and to adapt to labour market needs, our attempt to investigate emancipation in VET is not evident. However, from our perspective such investigation is crucial. We can identify three reasons for why this is the case. First, because this educational sector receives much attention in current policy debates with an emphasis on 'work and social inclusion', and hence, where some kind of emancipation, or at least 'empowerment', is claimed. Second, in exploring these current debates in VET policy-making, the focus is often on the role or function of education, and hence there is little focus on educational practices as such. In line with this, our objective is to open the black box of 'emancipation in education' and consequently in VET by addressing it as an educational practice in its own right, and hence, as a 'potential' emancipatory practice.

To date, VET seems to be mainly understood in the light of a socio-economic utility-seeking approach. According to Rosefielde (2002):

> (t)he utility sought … is conceived as a set of psychic benefits like pleasure derived from consumption', hence, 'economic utility-seeking is considered rational if it is dispassionate and makes people feel better, or enhances their well-being, whether they spend their money on dental care, laundry services, or gourmet delights. (9)

The understanding of emancipation in VET also tends to be restricted to a utility seeking view; i.e., to achieve economic and social inclusion in society as it stands. Against this background, we aim to broaden the understanding of emancipation in VET beyond socio-economic utility-seeking. Moreover, we question the assumed opposition between a humanist form of education which will essentially lead to critical reflection and emancipation, and an education which culminates in a qualification orientation leading to the reproduction of the current sociopolitical and economic order. We argue that such a binary opposition reproduces a dichotomised way of thinking about education, in which vocational and technical education will prepare students to become employable and to adapt in society as it stands, while general education will enable critical awareness. In this regard, we must discuss various levels of argumentation regarding emancipation, and in particular, concerning the emancipatory potential of VET.

We first propose to study the concept of emancipation in general and in VET in particular. Second, informed by Freire's and Rancière's work on emancipation in education and their pedagogical approaches, we problematise a utility-seeking understanding of emancipation in VET. While the perspectives of these authors on how to construct appropriate pedagogical environments to facilitate emancipation in practice differ, there are many reasons why both Freire's and Rancière's work is interesting as 'lenses' to examine VET and to discuss emancipation in VET. First, Freire has been emblematic for the hope of social emancipation and liberation through education. His provocative ideas on education, which in his days contrasted with most traditional models, have been a longstanding source of inspiration for education and educational researchers in Latin America and beyond. Second, regarding emancipation in education, Rancière is also an important author whose work has recently received much attention. Rancière's inspirational view of equality and intellectual emancipation enables us to see, to think and to be attentive to educational practices in quite a different way than Freire. Third, both authors reflect on emancipation as part of educational practices; they start from empirical observations and reflect on concrete practices to articulate/theorise what emancipation in education is about. In the last stage of this paper, we will use insights from both authors (i.e. Freire–Rancière) to formulate suggestions on how to further direct the attention to concrete educational practices. We assume that both authors, each in their own way, can help us to clarify the question of what emancipation in VET is about and perhaps most importantly, why it is significant.

Understanding emancipation[1]

To think of emancipation in education means to think of important questions concerning the achievement of freedom, autonomy, social justice and the construction of the self. In this way, the contribution of critical social theory to thinking about emancipation and specifically their focus on education is important. Adorno ([1963–1970] 1998) sees education as a field of permanent conflict between the achievement of autonomy and the adaptation to an existing social order. This central tension has certainly influenced authors of the critical pedagogy tradition, such as Freire, Giroux and McLaren, who consider, albeit in different ways, individual emancipation to be part of the struggle against institutionalised and structural forms of submission/oppression. From this perspective, the idea of emancipation in education has been mainly understood as a process of gradual liberation/humanisation, combining individual formation with social transformation (Freire [1968] 2000).

Against this classical background, it is interesting to observe how the idea of emancipation, understood by critical pedagogy as part of social transformation, nowadays amalgamates with the notion of empowerment. Empowerment is understood as a transition process from ‘being powerless’ towards achieving a relative control over one’s reality, which is usually associated with a functional and social practice of economic utility-seeking as described above. Currently, there is a tendency to frame emancipation in education as empowerment, mainly associated with employability practices aimed towards economic and social integration (Inglis 1997; Grace 2007; Galloway 2011; Wildemeersch and Olesen 2012). As suggested by Wildemeersch (2011), ‘empowerment’ is viewed as a contribution ‘to one’s own competitiveness and the competitiveness of the state and the continent in a globalised economy’.[2] Inglis (1997) elaborates on both concepts – emancipation and empowerment – stating that:

> empowerment involves people developing capacities to act successfully with the existing system and structures of power, while emancipation concerns critically analysing, resisting and challenging structures of power. (4)

Interestingly, Wildemeersch and Olesen (2012) suggest paying attention to the ‘movement from emancipation to empowerment’ associated with a switch from the tradition of critical theory to current discourses on lifelong learning. In the first tradition, emancipation has mainly been associated with the awareness of power relations that play a role in the living conditions of the individuals and in the organisation of society. In the second tradition, the emphasis is on empowerment, in terms of the individual responsibility to develop a lifelong learner attitude and to adapt to rapid changes in a competitive societal context (Wildemeersch 2011). In this view on empowerment, little attention is paid to the question of power and how it frames our subjectivity and how it is enacted in personal and social relationships.[3] These issues have been central in the classical conceptions of emancipation and social transformation. Rowlands (1997) also suggests that we must be careful with the notion of empowerment. Elaborating on how the term empowerment has been used in different contexts and by different ideologies, she invites us to think about how it might be possible that radically different political discourses [left, (neo)liberal, right parties] use and defend the same concept. Are all these political ideologies referring to the same concept, or is it that 'empowerment' has become permeable to all ideologies and hence has become meaningless, at least to a certain extent? Accordingly, in current education policy-making, the terms emancipation and empowerment are frequently used interchangeably. For some authors, this is a sign of the shift (in educational discourses) from emancipation as liberation and social transformation towards empowerment as a functional and individualistic approach to adapt to society. For instance, in her analysis of education in the era of lifelong learning, Torres (2003) describes this shift as a switch from 'education to promote change to education to adapt to change' or from 'education for emancipation to education for integration'.

In considering these debates concerning emancipation and empowerment in education, it is helpful to draw upon Biesta's framework on the different (overlapping) functions of education, for this allows us to rethink and to (re)contextualise our understanding of emancipation in VET. Biesta (2009a, 2009b) elaborates on tensions in educational debates related to three different perspectives on education: *qualification, socialisation and subjectification*.[4] First, *qualification* refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that 'qualify' individuals for a particular task, e.g. training for a specific job or qualification for the labour market. This perspective has become very relevant in knowledge-based societies in which the acquisition of knowledge and skills, supposedly, create opportunities for individuals to become active members of society. Second, *socialisation* is about the ways in which 'individuals become part of an existing sociocultural, political and moral order' (Biesta 2009b, 360). According to this view, education is oriented towards the adjustment of individuals to a particular existing order and its reproduction. For Biesta, it is, however, important to account for the interplay of active and passive ways of adaptation into an existing order. Here, 'active' refers to individuals who are capable of finding ways to become independent from such orders. In this view, Biesta proposes *subjectification*, which requires those who are educated to not merely adapt to an existing identity in an existing social order, but rather, to develop a singular identity that cannot be 'forced' or 'produced' (Biesta 2009b, 2013). In Biesta's (2006) words:

> education is not just about the transmission of knowledge, skills, and values, but is concerned with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their 'coming into the world' as unique, singular beings. (27; emphasis in the original)

Taking Biesta's dimensions/functions as a point of departure, the 'qualification and socialisation' perspectives can be aligned with empowerment, while 'subjectification' can be aligned with emancipation (Galloway 2011). In line with this distinction, an important question is whether VET includes or can include processes of subjectification. However, there are two remarks that have to be taken into account when further elaborating the idea of emancipation through subjectification. First, in making a distinction between qualification and socialisation (empowerment) on the one hand, and subjectification (emancipation) on the other, one runs the risk of immediately framing emancipation (and related terms such as subjectification) as a specific aim or function of educational practices. Emancipation in VET then becomes a matter of reaching certain aims or fulfilling particular functions, and not, for instance, a characteristic of the educational process and pedagogical practices at stake. Second, it is important to elaborate upon the precise mechanisms and processes at work in subjectification. It refers to a process of developing a singular identity that simultaneously includes an engagement with issues of (in-)justice in the social order. Elsewhere, we introduced the concept of subjectivation, including a distinction made by Simons and Masschelein (2010b). According to these authors 'political subjectivation', close to Biesta's 'subjectification', always implies an engagement with the (in-)justice of the existing social order, whereas 'pedagogic subjectivation' refers to a process of (trans-)formation that is not necessarily linked to or engaged with particular sociopolitical issues. Pedagogic subjectivation refers to the emancipatory potential of educational practices without immediately considering these practices as part of a sociopolitical project. Instead, political subjectivation, and related forms of social and political emancipation, could neutralise pedagogic subjectivation and hence its typical form of emancipation. Below, we will elaborate more in detail on the relation between political and pedagogic issues in emancipation. Both Freire and Rancière will offer conceptual tools for this, but we will first take a closer look at the VET scene. At this stage, we stress that in the first place we do not consider emancipation as a function of VET.

The VET scene

In the new global economy and knowledge based-societies, VET is expected to become a key educational sector that provides students with the required skills and competence to meet demanding labour market needs (UNESCO 2001).[5] There is a common assumption that VET trains job-skill workers to acquire vocational-specific skills over a lifetime (Oketch 2007). Willis, McKenzie, and Harris (2009) points out that in a world where knowledge is required to become an active member of society and skills development is the key for employability, VET gains a relevant role in educational policies to prepare citizens with valuable skills for the labour market. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in VET policy-making with a particular focus on specific skills and competence training for employability and economic growth. Also, the European Commission (2010) identifies VET as vital to prepare individuals for today's society and ensure Europe's future 'competitiveness' and 'innovation'. The Bruges Communiqué (2010) suggests that:

> initial and continuing VET share the dual objective of contributing to employability and economic growth, and responding to broader social challenges, in particular promoting social cohesion. (4)

In a similar way, UNESCO (2001) demonstrates that VET has become a valuable tool for the inclusion of marginalised sectors of the population as well as 'an update tool' for developing countries to become competitive on a global scale.

In Latin America, there is also an increasing interest in VET with a focus on job-skill and technical training (Wilson 1996) and on competency-based approaches (Jacinto 2010).[6] Creating links between VET and the labour market is considered to be a challenge for Latin America and as a means to promote labour and social inclusion among the disadvantaged population and to increase equal employment opportunities for all (ADEA 2008).[7] There seems to be an assumption that the existing inequality in educational backgrounds leads to unequal job opportunities and hence to social exclusion. It is widely assumed that inequalities can be reduced through enhancing employability, and therefore, VET policies are regarded as a facilitator for the social inclusion of the most disadvantaged groups in society. This understanding of VET related to socio-economic inclusion illustrates a tendency to understand emancipation as equivalent to 'economic empowerment'. Thus, emancipation (in VET) is considered to be a socio-economic outcome, which seems to express the 'production logic' of policy-makers. Of course, we encounter different alternatives to this economic empowerment approach. One example is the work of Velde (1999) who stresses competences' development in VET from an 'interpretative-relational approach' in which the personal development of the student/worker becomes central. In addition, Winters et al. (2012) stress the importance of a personal reflectivity regarding one's biography through 'vocational training conversations'. Billet (2001) considers learning at work as an important component of an individual's lifelong development. These authors engage in the development of 'meaningful learning environments' that allow students/workers to (re)orient their vocational career (in society as it stands) along with the demands of developing a lifelong learning attitude connected to a lifelong employability attitude (Winters et al. 2012). Therefore, these alternatives (although enhancing a personal reflectivity) do not seem to interrupt the dominant empowerment and employability logic described above and is still far removed from the 'subjectification' dimension, as elaborated by Biesta (2009a, 2009b). These vocational (career-)conversations become a complementary strategy for economic empowerment, with the surplus of enhancing peoples' own historicity, rather than questioning the presumed equivalence of the terms training/employability and emancipation/empowerment. Therefore, there is still a need to expand the understanding of emancipation in education (beyond the idea of economic empowerment) and to further explore the emancipatory potential and the 'potential subjectification' at stake in VET practices. For this, we will rely on Freire's and Rancière's work on emancipation. Each of the authors, in his own way, discuss emancipation as a moment/process of educational/pedagogical practices, disregarding a functional perspective on emancipation in their theory and practice. It allows one to move beyond the idea that VET is emancipatory since it promotes social integration through economic empowerment, and hence the idea that VET is reduced to a process of integration into an existing sociopolitical order.

Freire's and Rancière's emancipatory and pedagogical approach

Freire's and Rancière's core concepts of emancipation are interesting to guide our further research vis-à-vis VET practices. As previously indicated, both authors start from concrete practices rather than from a general theoretical approach to discuss emancipation and education. Moreover, their understanding of education and emancipation goes far beyond a socio-economic/utility-seeking approach, thereby challenging the idea of adaptation to an existing sociopolitical (hierarchical/regulating) order.

Throughout their work, Freire and Rancière have explored education and emancipation in diverse domains such as schooling, art, aesthetics and politics. In this paper, we will consider the works in which both authors have explicitly elaborated on concrete pedagogical practices and that functioned as the material for their theoretical accounts. These practices are not treated as illustrations of their theoretical work, but their theoretical work is approached as an articulation of these pedagogical practices. It is important to not limit Freire's and Rancière's work solely to schooling. Concepts such as 'banking education' and 'stultification' can be interpreted not only as oppressive mechanisms in schooling, but rather in connection with specific sociopolitical issues they were engaged in. We will develop their particular views on education and emancipation, principally from Freire's ([1968] 2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and from Rancière's (1991) *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. In both manuscripts, respectively, Freire and Rancière have developed their work while reflecting on and engaging with concrete educational practices. However, both authors' reflection on educational practices actually leads to a striking conceptual difference on their understanding of emancipation in education. Therefore, it is necessary to present some of the differences between the central conceptualisations of these authors regarding emancipation as well as their pedagogical approach. This process of contrasting allows us to further develop the conceptual tools to start thinking about emancipation in relation to VET practices.

Freire's emancipation through liberation

First and foremost, Freire develops an intimate connection between education and politics. According to Freire ([1968] 2000), education is never neutral. Thus, it either works as a means of adapting people to a given existing order (consciously or unconsciously) or it becomes a practice of liberation in the transformation of the present conditions. He draws our attention to the relations emerging from these contrasting types of educational practices operating in society, fluctuating from the reproduction of a particular social structure to actions of change. His line of argument goes hand in hand with the approach of 'actions of change', i.e. the development of education practices in view of freedom for the oppressed population, particularly, for the impoverished population. In his pedagogy, Freire ([1968] 2000) proposes a reconsideration of the traditional models of education framed by a dominant teacher-student relationship. Freire proposes 'liberatory education' as an educational practice that aims at overcoming oppressive conditions and as a pedagogical practice that allows for the abolition of the central contradiction of the teacher 'who knows everything' and students 'who know nothing', which reproduces a relationship of dependence and uncritical obedience between the oppressors and the oppressed.

For Freire ([1968] 2000; Freire and Macedo [1987] 2001), the use of words may enable transformation, for by naming the word/world, we will be able to reflect on it and thus act upon reality in a transformative way, in a process of (de-)codification of reality as developed in the 'culture circles'. In this approach, the word enables people to reconstruct their world through the word. In his pedagogy, Freire elaborates on three different central phases suggested in his culture circles dynamics (Freire [1968] 2000, [1973] 2002). First, it is necessary to explore the specific context where people live in order to find a common vocabulary and identify the problems experienced by the population (a thematic universe). Second, there is a phase of selection of the words/themes that belong to the common vocabulary found in the first phase. The words/themes to be chosen are the so-called 'generative words/themes' because they enable students to generate other words/themes. The latter words/themes should have both a meaningful and emotional content. Third, he describes the process of (de-)codification of the living and oppressive conditions of the population. This interplay of images, words/themes, codification/(de-)codification of reality mediated by the use of images and dialogue leads to the conscious awareness of students, thereby enabling conscientisation.

The notion of dialogue is crucial in this process of conscientisation; hence, dialogue means engagement with the content of education. It is through dialogue and critical awareness of one's present conditions that Freire defines the concept of conscientisation. Becoming conscious of one's social reality becomes central for individual emancipation (individual liberation of an oppressive situation) as well as for social emancipation (liberation of the collective towards social change). Through his pedagogy, Freire ([1968] 2000, [1973] 2002) develops a sense of awareness that contributes to changing current living conditions. He indicates a political engagement within educational practices and identifies emancipation as an outcome of education that should ultimately lead to social transformation. Accordingly, through education, an individual should become emancipated and her/his emancipation process should direct her/his action to a broader social struggle, with the ultimate aim of achieving social emancipation.

The commitment to the transformation of reality is embedded in a struggle 'of becoming more fully human' (Freire [1968] 2000, 84). To overcome oppression one must first become critically aware of one's oppressive reality. It should also be possible to translate this awareness into an active struggle for liberation from oppression. This struggle requires a commitment towards true liberation. Therefore, the act of overcoming oppression should not result in the oppressed becoming oppressors themselves, but rather in achieving a humanist liberation, beyond the categories of oppressors and oppressed. Once oppression is transformed 'the pedagogy of the oppressed' should become 'the pedagogy of all the people in the process of liberation' (Freire [1968] 2000, 53–54). The task is not only for the oppressed to liberate themselves but also to liberate the oppressors, who find themselves in a struggle for power that neither allows for the liberation of others nor of themselves. Liberatory education raises students' consciousness, preparing them to engage in larger social struggles for liberation. Education as a practice of liberation implies a social and political responsibility, and hence an individual and a social emancipation.

Rancière's emancipation through the verification of equality

In the *Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991), Rancière re-writes Jacotot's work. Joseph Jacotot was a French professor who taught French to Dutch-speaking students in Belgium without speaking Dutch himself (Rancière 1991). To overcome this difficulty, he gave his students a bilingual translation (French/Dutch) of the *Télémaque* by Fénelon. Jacotot then asked them (with the assistance of a Dutch speaker) to memorise some phrases in French and to compare them carefully with the Dutch version. Furthermore, he suggested that they repeat this action daily, memorising a little more every day. In addition, Jacotot confronted students with the challenge of writing their thoughts about the reading in French, using the words already presented in the text. Jacotot was surprised by the progress of the students who, without help (and without Jacotot's mastery of the text), managed to recall the story correctly. This act has challenged the logic that students need the explanation of a superior intelligence, that of the master, to understand a text, book or educational content. Inspired by Jacotot, Rancière (1991) elaborates on this practice, regarding it as similar to the acquisition of the mother tongue. The fact that each person has acquired her/his mother tongue without a particular explanation allows us to also rely on the equality of intelligences of human beings and to realise that 'the same intelligence is at work in all the acts of the human spirit' (Rancière 1991, 18). Rancière argues that Jacotot teaches students without imposing his intelligence and knowledge on them, but rather by directing their *attention* to the content ('to a thing in common', which in this case is the book by Fénelon) in order to observe, to compare, to translate and to repeat what they see.

In this way, both Jacotot and Rancière assert that: 'One can teach what one does not know if the student is emancipated, that is to say, if he is obliged to use his own intelligence' (Rancière 1991, 15). Moreover, 'the ignorant person will learn himself what the master does not know if the master believes he can and obliges him to realise his capacity' (15). In Jacotot's method Rancière sees a master at work, who instigates the capacity that any person already possesses, namely, the capacity to speak, to compare and to translate signs. For Rancière, the word is mainly about the act of translation and counter-translation, particularly in the sense of translating the words of others into one's words. In this way, teachers and students are considered to have equal intelligence and hence are all capable of speaking.

By describing the Jacotot experience, Rancière develops the notion of an 'ignorant schoolmaster', for whom equality (of intelligence) denotes a 'starting point' and not a goal to be reached. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991), Rancière proposes 'intellectual emancipation' as the verification of equality of every speaking being:

> There is nothing behind the written page, no false bottom that necessitates the work of an 'other' intelligence, that of the explicator; no language of the master, no language of the language whose words and sentences are able to speak the reason of the words and sentences of a text. (9, emphasis in the original)

Rancière highlights the authority of the teacher (in the pedagogical relationship) in directing the attention of the student towards the content, on a 'will to will' relationship. In paraphrasing Rancière, one could say that while the intelligence responds only to itself, and both teacher and students are equally intelligent, the will may obey another will. It is in this sense that Rancière, via Jacotot, constantly emphasises the need to support the will and the attention of students when reading, comparing and translating other people's work, and to discover, by themselves, how things work. Intellectual emancipation is to think ourselves 'equal' to others and hence to practise and verify this 'equality of intelligence'. But most importantly, intellectual emancipation is associated with the will, in the sense that we already have the capacity for intelligence but what we need is the will to use (enact) this capacity. Thus, the 'will to will' relation is associated with the teacher/students pedagogical relationship towards the content, while the intelligence emerges from the relationship (between teacher and students) with the content ('the thing in common', as 'Télémaque', in the example of Jacotot). Hence, the teacher gives instructions/directs the attention to relate to the content, to the 'thing in common'; to compare 'what is known' to 'what is yet not known'. In a teacher–student relationship, there is equality among speaking beings, or of intelligence at work. Through Jacotot's method, Rancière sees emancipation as an act of the individual as opposed to a social method of explanation. According to Rancière, equality only exists in the act and for the individuals ['only a man can emancipate a man' (Rancière 1991, 102)], since institutions already embody inequality. It is, however, important to note that Rancière (1989) elaborates on the possibility of collective practices of emancipation. But, he does not see a direct movement/translation from intellectual towards collective emancipation. Indeed, achieving equality is an independent dynamic and not 'a way' to achieve something else (Rancière 1991). In regard to Rancière's work, it is crucial to avoid a functionalist view of emancipation and especially, to verify and to practise equality in ‘a man to man relationship’. Certainly, Rancière wants to avoid a condescending and institutionalising point of view in which ‘the ignorant ones’ will find intellectual enlightenment thanks to ‘a superior intelligence’ who will explain what emancipation and learning is about (Rancière 1991). Thus, even when there is inequality of living conditions of the population, it should be possible to start from the conviction of equality of intelligence. Rancière’s assumption that emancipation can teach people to be equal in an unequal society makes sense in this regard (Rancière 1991). Rancière focuses on intellectual emancipation and warns against making social emancipation an explicit goal of education.

Table 1 Freire's and Rancière's emancipatory and pedagogical approach.

	FREIRE (liberatory education)	RANCIERE (equality of intelligence)
On emancipation and equality	Outcome of the process of critical education (from individual to social emancipation). Emancipation is only possible after the education process	Starting point: equality of intelligence (intellectual emancipation). Emancipation is the starting point of the education process, whereby an illiterate person can even teach someone else to read by directing her/his attention to the text
Pedagogical approach	• Critical dialogue relationship • Codification/decodification • Unveiling the truth • Conscientisation • Action/social struggle	• ‘Will to will’ relationship • Attention to the content (a thing in common) • Equality of intelligence • To compare ‘what is known’ to ‘what is not yet known’ • Equality: ‘to be practised and verified’
	Word = Work = Praxis reflection/ action	Intelligence emerges from the content: to observe, compare and translate.
	Teacher–student/student–teacher (mediated by the world) Acts of cognition World as the ‘cognizable object’ (it is both the object of reflection and action)	
The ‘word’	Transformation: by naming the word/ world, we reflect on it and thus act upon reality in a transformative way, in a process of de/codification of reality	Act of translation and counter-translation, particularly in the sense of translating the words of others into one’s words (teachers do not ‘unveil reality’; ‘everything is in the text’)
	Students ‘de/codify’ with the help of the teacher who enables students to ‘unveil reality’	

Note: This table summarises main commonalities and differences elaborated in this paper regarding Freire’s and Rancière’s work. In particular, we pay attention to those issues that allow us to reflect further on the implications of their work in VET practices.

Summary

By way of a synthesis, we present an overview of the main features of the work of both authors, including their contrasting positions. We aim to create an approach that allows us to look at VET practices in another way, that is, to explore the emancipatory potential of VET with a focus on the pedagogical practices and not simply by considering its functions and aims. Despite obvious differences, each of these authors' elaborates on concrete educational practices with a focus on pedagogical issues. Both Rancière and Freire conceptualise, in a very specific way, the pedagogical relationship among teacher (teaching methods), students and the content. Fundamentally, the authors enable us to challenge the role of the experts that silences the claims expressed by the so-called non-experts, i.e., the ignorant ones or the oppressed. Freire and Rancière help us to become more attentive to egalitarian relationships, yet, they differ in how these relationships are (and should be) enacted in, or promoted by pedagogical relationships (Table 1).

Conclusion

We have observed that in ongoing debates on VET policy-making, emancipation is mainly considered as a specific function for socio-economic integration. We have identified two dominant positions in the discussion on emancipation in education: (1) emancipation as socio-economic empowerment and (2) alternative models in VET practices that enhance 'meaningful learning environments' to become truly emancipatory. However, despite the differences, both positions suggest that VET is primarily about qualification and socialisation, and they barely focus on critical engagement. How, then, could one focus on critical engagement/emancipation in VET? We suggest approaching emancipation from an educational perspective, not as an aim or function, but rather, as a process/moment occurring within pedagogical practices. In this sense, both Freire's and Rancière's work is helpful; at least when taking into account the pedagogical practices they have in mind in articulating their ideas on emancipation. Both authors help us to understand that thinking about emancipation in VET practices necessarily implies starting from empirical observations. The work of both authors (though different) informs us, first, to start from concrete (empirical) VET practices; second, to conceptualise/theorise on VET pedagogical practices; and third, to focus on that conceptualisation, specifically, on the differences between individual/intellectual and collective/social emancipation. In our view, the latter aspect constitutes a major difference between these authors. Their insights on emancipation and pedagogy can expand the discussion on emancipation in VET, i.e., now dominated by policy-makers in terms of socio-economic integration (qualification and socialisation). For this reason, we do not aim at deciding a priori whose approach (Freire/Rancière) may be better when it comes to deciding on the existence of emancipation in VET. In line with Freire and Rancière, this issue should also be addressed as an empirical question. Moreover, by using the concepts of both authors as heuristic tools, we can examine educational practices beyond the rhetoric of functions and aims. We consider it essential for research to purposefully observe and interpret VET practices in terms of the pedagogical relationship among teachers, students and what is actually taught (the content). Freire and Rancière are two authors who offer concrete suggestions for engaging in such activity.

There are two additional issues that we want to link to this perspective and a future project, both of which we will discuss briefly as part of the conclusion. First, it will be interesting and relevant to connect these empirical observations and theoretical elaborations with contemporary authors who elaborate on education and emancipation practices, as discussed earlier (i.e. Biesta 2009a, 2009b; Simons and Masschelein 2010a, 2010b; Weil, Wildemeersch, and Jansen 2005). Second, it could be relevant to approach the issue of emancipation and VET at a broader and more general level: the distinction between intellectual and manual labour, and the common tendency to disqualify manual labour when it comes to thinking about so-called 'true emancipation' (and humanisation). Freire and Rancière certainly question this distinction and the widespread and persistent hierarchical thinking connected with it.

In regard to the former, it is important to engage in a discussion about the precise scope of the emancipatory process in education, and in VET in particular. An important issue in this discussion seems to be the distinction/relation between (socio)political and pedagogical issues, and more broadly, the relation between educational and political emancipation. It is possible to make a distinction between political and pedagogic subjectivation; the first process implies a questioning of the given sociopolitical order (connecting the transformation of society with processes of self-transformation), while the second refers to an educational process that primarily engages with the capacity of the self (keeping the socio-economic order 'outside' as a condition for this emancipation; Simons & Masschelein 2010a, 2010b). The process of political subjectivation is in fact close to Biesta's (2009a, 2009b) concept of 'subjectification', as indicated earlier, for it implies a process of developing a singular identity in an engagement with issues of (in-)justice in the social order. Given that Freire ([1968] 2000) understands liberatory education as a tool for sociopolitical change, his understanding – though different – can be related to a process of political subjectivation and subjectification. Pedagogic subjectivation is closely related to Rancière's focus on intellectual emancipation (1991), and hence, to his attempt to look at emancipation primarily as an educational and pedagogical practice, partly bracketing immediate sociopolitical concerns. Rancière explicitly criticises the tendency of intellectual emancipation in education to become instrumental to any kind of social emancipation. In our view, in regard to emancipation, it is necessary to continue the discussion concerning differences, relations and possible tensions between educational and political issues. Moreover concrete applications of Freire's and Rancière's work in VET practices are also open to, and even require, further study. In line with our main argument, this should not only be a theoretical and conceptual discussion, but it necessarily requires an empirical engagement with VET practices.

Second, we want to raise the question whether current debates about emancipation in VET actually go back to or bear the mark of the classical hierarchical distinction between 'manual' and 'intellectual' work. VET and training/qualification are often used almost as synonyms, and mainly by scholars who are critical of VET. It is often argued that VET is about a training that prepares job-specific skilled workers to adapt to the needs of the labour market, which does not include 'intellectual labour' required for questioning this adaptation and the suggested needs. In this line of thought, emancipation can only be part of a kind of general and foremost 'intellectual' education. It is important, however, to further explore these classical dichotomies (manual vs. intellectual work, general vs. vocational education) for they still have an enormous impact on how the issue of emancipation in VET is addressed, or more precisely, not addressed at all. Here, both the work of Freire and Rancière is relevant, for they question the presumption that 'education for work' equals 'social inclusion/adaptation' and that 'manual labour' equals 'non-intellectual work'.

Questioning these still broadly presumptions is, in our view, a prerequisite to start understanding the emancipatory potential of VET.

Notes

1. We aim to explore what is meant by emancipation in education and pedagogy; consequently, we refer to the critical theory and critical pedagogy tradition and the relation emancipation–education. However, it does not mean that the above-mentioned approaches represent the only possible way to discuss emancipation, but they are certainly appropriate for the aims of this paper.
2. In more recent works, Biesta focuses on civic learning and he refers to the classification of socialisation and subjectification (Biesta 2011). However, we consider 'qualification' as a core concept for our research in VET practices, thus, we take his previous texts (Biesta 2009a, 2009b) into consideration, specifically, where he uses the classification of qualification, socialisation and subjectification on education.
3. See Rowlands (1997); Luttrell et al. (2009), for an in-depth development of the term empowerment.
4. See Rowlands (1997) and Foucault (1979) to grasp the concept of power in personal and social relationships and Foucault's studies on 'governmentality'.
5. 'Thinking education in economic terms' (under the framing of knowledge based-economies) can be identified with an omnipresent global policy and practice in education, rather than with an exclusive aim in VET (see Masschelein and Simons 2002; Dale 2005; Robertson 2009a, 2009b; Popkewitz 2011).
6. Beech (2002) provides an in depth analysis of educational reforms in Latin America during the 1990s. He argues that, regarding VET, there is a similar trend in educational reforms within the whole continent. The common pattern is an employability and competency-based approach, as also pinpointed by Jacinto (2010).
7. Biennale of Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Uruguay, 2008.

References

ADEA. 2008. "Beyond Primary Education: Challenges and Approaches to Expanding Learning Opportunities in Africa." Biennale on Education in Africa, Maputo, Mozambique, May 5–9.

Adorno, T. W. [1963–1970] 1998. *Educación para la emancipación* [Education for Emancipation]. edited by G. Kadelbach, translated by J. Muñoz, and S. L. Morata. Madrid.

Anderson, D. 2008. "Productivism, Vocational and Professional Education and the Ecological Question." *Vocations and Learning*, 1: 105–129. doi:10.1007/s12186-008-9007-0.

Beach, D., and M. Carlson. 2004. "Adult Education Goes to the Market: An Ethnographic Case Study of the Restructuring and Reculturing of Adult Education." *European Educational Research Journal* 3 (3): 673–691. doi:10.2304/eerj.2004.3.3.9.

Beech, J. 2002. "Latin American Education: Perceptions of Linearities and the Construction of Discursive." *Comparative Education* 38 (4): 415–427. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3099544.

Biesta, G. 2006. *Beyond Learning. Democratic Education for a Human Future*. London: Paradigm.

Biesta, G. 2009a. "Good Education: What It Is and Why We Need It." Inaugural Lecture Professor Gert Biesta. The Stirling Institute of Education. http://www.ioe.stir.ac.uk/documents/.

Biesta, G. 2009b. "On the Weakness of Education." In *Philosophy of Education*, edited by D. Kerderman et al., 354–362. Urbana, IL: Urbana-Champaign.

Biesta, G. 2011. *Learning Democracy in School and Society Education, Lifelong Learning, and the Politics of Citizenship*. Rotterdam: Sense.

Biesta, G. 2013. "Learning in Public Places: Civic Learning for the 21st Century. Chap. 1." In *Civic Learning, Democratic Citizenship and the Public Sphere*, edited by G. Biesta, M. Debie, D. Wildemeersch, 1–13. Berlin: Springer.

Billet, S. 2001. "Learning Throughout Working Life: Interdependence at Work." *Studies in Continuing Education* 23 (1): 19–35. doi:10.1080/01580370120043222.

Commission of the European Communities. 2010. "The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the Period 2011–2020." Communiqué of the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European

Social Partners and the European Commission, Bruges, December 7. To Review the Strategic Approach and Priorities of the Copenhagen process for 2011–2020. http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf.
Dale, R. 2005. "Globalisation, Knowledge Economy and Comparative Education." *Comparative Education* 41 (2): 117–149. doi:10.1080/03050060500150906.
European Commission. 2010. *The Bruges Communiqué on Enhanced EU Cooperation in VET for the Period 2011/2020*. Trio. be Belgian presidency Education and Training. http://www.eutrio.be/files/bveu/Brugge_Communique_EN.pdf.
Farrell, L., and T. Fenwick, 2007. "Educating the Global Workforce: Knowledge, Knowledge Work and Knowledge Workers." In *World Yearbook of Education*, 13–26. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.
Foucault, M. 1979. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by A. Sheridan. Harmondsworth: Penguin books.
Freire, P. [1968] 2000. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by M.B. Ramos. 30th anniversary ed. New York: Continuum.
Freire, P. [1973] 2002. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. Translated and edited by M. B. Ramos. New York: Continuum.
Freire, P., and D. Macedo. [1987] 2001. *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. London: Routledge.
Galloway, S. 2011. "Considering Adult Literacies Education as Empowerment or Emancipation." Paper presented at the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults, Lancaster, July 5–7.
Giroux, H. A. 1994. "Teachers, Public life and Curriculum Reform." *Peabody Journal of Education* 69 (3): 35–47. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1492887–2316/11.
Giroux, H. A. 1999. "Vocationalizing Higher Education: Schooling and the Politics of Corporate Culture." *College Literature* 26 (3): 147–161. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25112480.
Grace, A. P. 2007. "Envisioning a Critical Social Pedagogy of Learning and Work in a Contemporary Culture of Cyclical Lifelong Learning." *Studies in Continuing Education* 29 (1): 85–103. doi:10.1080/01580370601146361.
Grubb, W. N., and M. Lazerson. 2005. "Vocationalism in Higher Education: The Triumph of Education Gospel." *The Journal of Higher Education* 76 (1): 1–25. doi:10.1353/jhe.2005.0007.
Inglis, T. 1997. "Empowerment and Emancipation." *Adult Education Quarterly* 48 (1): 3–17. doi:10.1177/074171369704800102.
Jacinto, C. 2010. *Recent Trends in Technical Education in Latin America International Institution for Educational Planning*. Paris: UNESCO.
Luttrell, C., S. Quiroz, C. Scrutton, and K. Bird. 2009. "Understanding and Operationalising Empowerment." Working paper 308-Results of ODI research. Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London. www.odi.org.uk.
Maclean, M., and J. Fien. 2010. "Education for Sustainable Development Lessons from the Private Sector." Chap. 11. In *A Tribute to David N. Wilson: Clamouring for a Better World*, edited by V. Masseman, S. Majhanovich, N. Truong, and K. Janigan. Rotterdam: Sense.
Masschelein, J., and M. Simons. 2002. "An Adequate Education in a GLOBALISED WORLD? A NOTE on Immunisation against Being-Together." *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* 36 (4): 589–608. doi:10.1111/1467-9752.00297.
Oketch, M. O. 2007. "To vocationalise or Not to Vocationalise? Perspectives on Current Trends and Issues in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Africa." *International Journal of Educational Development* 27 (2): 220–234. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2006.07.004.
Popkewitz, T. 2011. "PISA: Numbers, Standardizing Conduct, and the Alchemy of School Subjects." In *PISA under Examination: Changing Knowledge, Changing Tests, and Changing Schools*, edited by M. A. Pereyra, H. G. Kottoff, and R. Cowen, 31–46. Rotterdam: Sense.
Rancière, J. 1989. *The Nights of Labour: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth Century France*. Translated by John Drury. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
Rancière, J. 1991. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Translated by K. Ross. Standford: Stanford University Press.
Robertson, S. 2009a. "Education, Knowledge and Innovation in the Global Economy: Challenges and Future Directions." Keynote Address to Launch of Research Centres, VIA University College, Aarhus, Denmark, March 6.

Robertson, S. 2009b. "'Producing' the Global Knowledge Economy: The World Bank, the KAM, Education and Development." In *Re-Reading Education Policies: Studying the Policy Agenda of the Twenty-First Century*, edited by M. Simons, M. Olssen, and M. Peters, 235–256. Rotterdam: Sense.

Rosefielde, S. 2002. *Comparative Economic Systems: Culture, Wealth, and Power in the 21st Century*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Rowlands, J. 1997. *Questioning Empowerment: Working with Women in Honduras*. UK and Ireland: Oxfam.

Simons, M., and J. Masschelein. 2010a. "Hatred of Democracy… and of the Public Role of Education?" *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 42 (5–6): 509–522. doi:10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00682.x.

Simons, M., and J. Masschelein. 2010b. "Governmental, Political and Pedagogic Subjectivation: Foucault with Rancière." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 42 (5–6): 588–605. doi:10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00687.x.

Torres, R. M. 2003. *Lifelong Learning: A New Momentum and a New Opportunity for Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE) in the South*. Department for Democracy and Social Development, Education Division. New Education Division Documents no.14. Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. www.sida.se/Publications/Import/pdf/sv/Lifelong-Learning.

UNESCO. 2001. *Revised Recommendation Concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training*. Paris: UNESCO. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13145&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

UNESCO. 2005. "Vocational Education: The Come Back?" *Education Today*. Education Sector newsletter, April–June 2005. http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=40400&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

UNESCO. 2010. *Informe Mundial sobre el aprendizaje y la Educación de Adultos*. [Global Report on Adult Learning and Education]. Hamburgo: Instituto de UNESCO para la Educación a lo largo de toda la vida. http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UIL/confintea/pdf/GRALE/grale_sp.pdf.

Velde, C. 1999. "An Alternative Conception of Competence: Implications for Vocational Education." *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 51 (3): 437–447. doi:10.1080/13636829900200087.

Weil, S., D. Wildemeersch, and T. Jansen. 2005. *Unemployed Youth and Social Exclusion in Europe Learning for Inclusion?* Farnham: Ashgate.

Wildemeersch, D. 2011. "Animation and Education in Complex Societies. Exploring Critical Social-Pedagogical Perspectives and Practices." Paper presented at the 5th International Colloquium on Socio-Cultural Animation. Zaragoza, Spain, October 26–28.

Wildemeersch, D., and H. Olesen. 2012. "The Effects of Policies for the Education and Learning of Adults-from 'Adult Education' to 'Lifelong Learning', from 'Emancipation' to 'Empowerment'." *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 3 (2): 97–101. doi:10.3384/rela.2000-7426.relae5.

Willis, P., S. McKenzie, and R. Harris, eds. 2009. *Rethinking Work and Learning*. Adult and Vocational Education for Social Sustainability. Technical and Vocational Education and Training Series. UNEVOC-Springer, Science+Business Media B.V.

Wilson, D. N. 1996. *Reform of Vocational and Technical Education in Latin America*. Occasional Paper No. 2. Washington, DC: Inter-American Dialogue/PREAL (Program to Promote Educational Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean).

Winters, A., F. Meijers, M. Kuijpers, and H. Baert. 2012. "Can Training Teachers Stimulate Career Learning Conversations? Analysis of Vocational Training Conversations in Dutch Secondary Vocational Education." *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 64 (3): 333–350. doi:10.1080/13636820.2012.691536.