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The Critique of the Critical Critique of Critical Pedagogy Freire, Suchodolski and the Materialist Pedagogy of Emancipation

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Abstract

*The primary purpose of this article is to present the critique of critical pedagogy in analogy to Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels's critique of critical critique and through the materialist theory of education developed by the Polish philosopher of education and Marxist Bogdan Suchodolski, whose work, *Fundamental Ideas of a Materialist Theory of Education*, was a great source of inspiration for Paulo Freire while writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Critical pedagogy has reached an impasse when it has departed from Marxism and started to depreciate the matter of social class and class struggle, which is best reflected by Henry A. Giroux's damaging statements about the Marxist theory of education. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that North American critical pedagogy was strongly influenced by Paulo Freire, who was, in return, affected significantly by Bogdan Suchodolski, as Jason Mafra demonstrates convincingly. Thus, the article examines to what extent Marx's and Engel's idea of dialectical materialism is visible in Freire's pedagogy of emancipation. The analysis of materialist theory of education combined with the analysis of Freire's concepts from the period of great literacy campaigns in Africa (especially São Tomé and Príncipe) reveals a possibility of resolving the impasse of critical pedagogy through a transition to emancipatory thing-centred pedagogy since both the valid critique of ideology and permanent social change have a material form.*



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Introduction

This article is an attempt to provide a critique of critical pedagogy in order not to destruct this current of thinking within the theory of education but to present possibilities of resolving the impasse which critical pedagogy has reached. Recent research on economic inequality in the world demonstrates clearly the growing social inequalities and the absurdity of capitalist market economy (see, for example, Piketty, 2014; Dowbor, 2004; 2011; 2018; OXFAM, 2016; 2017), in the face of which the last several decades, from the beginning of the 1980s, were wasted from the perspective of humanistic care of human empowerment. Therefore, if the essence of radical and critical pedagogy is to question the existing concepts, pre-assumptions, propositions and institutions and at the same time to develop attachment to the ideals of democracy and to think about education as a practice of developing the empowered citizens, the last time was lost, as Henry A. Giroux, a prominent representative of this paradigm, states (Giroux, 1993, pp. 10–11). If we take into consideration Giroux's statement (1993) that "It goes beyond critique to elaborate a positive language of human empowerment," (p. 10–11) the last decades are not only dissipated for critical pedagogy, but also to some extent by critical pedagogy itself.

The critique that is to be presented in the article has its roots in the critique of critical critique that was expounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1956) in *The Holy Family*. Through the materialist theory of education developed by the Polish philosopher Bogdan Suchodolski (1957) and the idea of emancipatory popular education developed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (see, for example, 1975; 1978a; 1978b; 1979; 1989; Freire, Macedo, 2005), this critique is connected to and, more importantly, is concerned about critical pedagogy. The first inspiration is Suchodolski's materialist pedagogy that influenced Freire during his work on *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (published in English under the title *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), as Jason Mafra indicates (2010). The second source of inspiration behind the critique of critical pedagogy is Freire's thinking and the activity that he conducted primarily during literacy campaigns in Africa where he made use of Suchodolski's materialist theory of education. The critique of critical pedagogy presented in the article is founded on the materialist interpretation of Freire, which constitutes a Gordian knot in terms of theory because Freire's thought, with critical pedagogy as its "stepchild" (McLaren, 2000, p. xxv), in fact, ruins it. This article should not be perceived as an empty gesture of critique since the solutions I suggest correspond to the solutions of pedagogy of emancipation and also result from the paradigmatic crisis that theory of education has reached with a definite turn towards thing-centred pedagogy (see, for example, Biesta, 2010; Vlieghe, 2016; Chutorański, 2017).

Therefore, the first part of the article is a short description of relationship between Marx and Engels' (1956) critique of critical critique, Suchodolski's (1957) concept of materialist pedagogy and Freire's (1975) concept of the pedagogy of the oppressed and its application into the São Toméan conditions (Freire, 1989; Freire, Macedo, 2005). Next, the article discusses critiques of critical pedagogy that preceded and inspired the critique I present here. In the third part, it explores a revised version of the critique of critical critique whose object is critical pedagogy. The fourth part of the article is a synthesis of materialist pedagogy and emancipatory popular education based on the example of a literacy campaign conducted in the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP). In the conclusions, there is a suggestion to go back to the future in education, which means returning to the abandoned project of materialist pedagogy that focuses on materiality and education for the future.

Marx, Engels, Suchodolski, Freire and Dialectical Materialism

The idea to find a solution to the impasse and powerlessness of critical pedagogy in Freire's educational activity is based on the key motifs of dialectic materialism that are observed in the interpretation of thought of this Brazilian philosopher of education. Therefore, a question of interpretative character arises: Does dialectical materialism lie at the root of Freire's concept or is it merely a creative yet functional reinterpretation? Like Wayne Au (2017), but using different sources (for example Mafra, 2010), I find it impossible to read Freire in isolation from the fact that he drew inspiration from Marx's and Engels' dialectical materialism. I even think that removing these inspirations from Freire's works or downgrading them to the role of historical idiosyncrasy leads to the domestication of Freire's concept of popular education. To put it simply, deprived of dialectical materialism, Freire offers only another didactical concept that functions as a reproduction of the oppressive reality of late capitalism.

In his detailed analysis of the presence of Marx's and Engels' philosophy in Freire's works, Au (2017) concludes:

There is significant evidence that Freire was a materialist in terms of how humans understand and interact with the reality of our world, expressing in multiple places that the world existed objectively outside of human consciousness. He often framed this in terms of an *objective social reality...*, *objective conditions...* and general references to human interaction and transformation of *reality* or the *world...* (Au, 2017, p. 174)

I have been convinced by a Marxist interpretation of Freire's works not only by analyses similar to the one performed by Au but also by the fact that Freire was writing his *opus magnum*, that is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, while reading *U podstaw materialistycznej teorii wychowania* by Polish Marxist and philosopher of education Suchodolski (1957). As Mafra (2010, pp. 37–38) notices, the Spanish translation of Suchodolski's work, *Teoría marxista de la educación*, that Freire had in his book collection, contains his handwritten notes that relate to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Although I do not want to comment on plagiarism accusation, which is made against Freire by Rich Gibson (2008), it should be admitted that the concepts of conscientization, *praxis*, autonomy, alienation, revolutionary action and practice, oppression, exploitation, history or, finally, humanization of the world are used with the same meaning and in the same context in both *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *U podstaw materialistycznej teorii wychowania*.

Therefore, I perceive Freire's activities performed in the period after the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as an attempt at putting the materialist pedagogy derived from Marx's and Engels' dialectical materialism into practice. In particular, I refer to the period of literacy campaigns in Africa, where Freire's concept became a framework for an educational policy whose goal was full decolonization through universal literacy tuition.

Although I do not want to discuss criticism levelled at Freire, there are some critical voices regarding his dialectical materialism used in popular education that I find particularly valuable. Firstly, they concern the course of literacy campaigns based on Freire's method. Such a critical voice (in the spirit of dialectical materialism) is presented by Linda M. Harasim (1983), who analyses how the literacy campaign in Guinea-Bissau was conducted. The failure of Freire's literacy campaign in this country is confirmed by many sources, including official government materials (Pereira, 1989). To some extent, Freire himself admits the lack of success

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in Guinea-Bissau (Freire & Fanudez, 1998); however, he seeks the causes in different elements than Harasim's analysis, founded on dialectical materialism, suggests.

On the other hand, Harasim notices that there were structural economic obstacles to conduct a general literacy campaign that resulted from the dysfunction of Portuguese colonial capital that was not favourable to develop productive forces in Guinea-Bissau, did not make the division of labour more complex or increase the level of technical culture (Harasim, 1983, p. 850). The fascist Portuguese country with its bourgeoisie did not work as modernising and integrative forces in Guinea-Bissau. In this article, I present the case of São Tomé and Príncipe where the literacy campaign ended in spectacular success, which can be related to a different linguistic and ethnic situation and also to the fact that STP was more politically stable and had a higher level of productive forces (due to its presence at the global coffee and cocoa markets) than Guinea-Bissau.

Here, I should also mention arguments put forward by Flavio Brayner (2017), who accuses the followers of Freire of making the mistake of *petitio principii*. Moreover, Brayner writes about the personality cult and doctrinal faithfulness to Freire's works, which he defines as Pauloferreianism, that is a secular theology with the miracle of Angicos – or a “Jerusalem of Pauloferreianism” as Brayner calls it (2017, p. 869) – in the centre. However, more important is the fact that such a hagiographic interpretation of Freire's work and life does not, in my opinion, conform with his philosophy. Having written these words, we have already fallen into the trap of interpretation: if Freire's words are the revealed truth and can be interpreted in many ways, the problem lies in interpretations and interpreters and not in Freire himself who, after all, preaches truth with a capital T. In order to avoid this trap, one needs to realize that contrary to the popular narrative that “Freire's method” was unailing, it brought about different effects.

Similar accusations against the followers of Freire are made by Gibson, who states that “a little publishing cabal flourished with uncritical praise for Freire” (Gibson, 2017). His criticism, however, is far more trenchant since he accuses the Brazilian philosopher and educator of being logically inconsistent both on a personal and conceptual level. Therefore, Gibson underlines that the source of the problem with Freire is the fact that he called himself Marxist Catholic, later also postmodernist, and that he autocratically stated that his literacy method might lead to justice or even cleanse the original sin of injustice and oppression (Gibson, 2008). Gibson also criticizes Freire's bourgeois mentality and makes a bitter accusation that “Freire was usually a revolutionary wherever he was not – or after the revolution was won – and a liberal reformer wherever he was...” (Gibson, 2008). Finally, the accusations focused on the conjunction of theoretical works, practical activity and being the icon of critical pedagogy are, in fact, accusations of surface radicalism that was only an element of Freire's identity. I could comment on these accusations making a reference to Suchodolski who, having experienced the oppression of backward capitalism in the prewar Poland, then the Nazi occupation and finally, the state terror in the Stalinist period, was aware of dialectics of conformist adaptation and creative emancipation in everyday life of every human being (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 22).

The most severe accusations that Gibson makes against Freire regard the functionality and capitulation of Freire's concept in the face of demands for national economic development, which is a strictly capitalist demand. The same fate suffered the thought of Marx to whom Gibson refers. A similar process of dialectics of the political and the pedagogical that is governed by interests and translates into self-interested interpretations and the operation of political system alludes to different pedagogical concepts (Szkudlarek, 2016). Another important accusation that is difficult to face is the accusation of logical inconsistency between

– as Gibson defines it (2008) – “the objective idealist Freire” and “the mechanically materialist Freire.” In the end, Gibson announces *The Dead End at Freire*, whereas I state that Freire’s concept of popular education is a chance to mark a new beginning and break the impasse of critical pedagogy. However, I can agree with Gibson on one thing – dialectical materialism is a key to change education and this is how I perceive Freire and his concept based on dialectical materialism borrowed from Suchodolski as well as Marx and Engels.

The history of this borrowing is quite unclear. On the one hand, Freire could know *The Holy Family* by Marx and Engels (1956), but on the other hand, he certainly drew great inspiration from Suchodolski’s concept of materialist pedagogy that used dialectical materialism as a foundation for theory of education. In other words, for the purpose of this article I reject Gibson’s accusations against Freire – I read the works of the Brazilian educator as if it was based on dialectical materialism and I push the accusations related to logical inconsistency into the background. In my opinion, however, Freire is not a representative of mechanical materialism and objective idealism simultaneously since his opinions constitute a productive synthesis of those two perspectives that led him to dialectical materialism. It should be added that this mental synthesis is borrowed from Suchodolski and that the source of this thought was Marx and Engels.

Suchodolski’s project was designed in quite a minimalistic way and consisted of adopting Marx’s and Engels’ philosophy for theory of education. Its starting point was the critique of critical critique presented in *The Holy Family* (Marx & Engels, 1956). Since I assume that this work is known to the readers, I will focus on its crucial assumption, which was a radical parting with the Young Hegelian trend through the critique of the substantialization of knowledge and speculative character of critique. The human world is a place of needs that create relations between the members of the human community and not a place of ideas and ideal relations. A critique of critical critique – that is, a critique of critique from the position of idealistic objectivism – constitutes the germ of materialistic comprehension of history. History is not a separate being – it is a history of the human community in which a specific, living and real human lives in a relation with the material world and members of the community who are, in this respect, similar to him. The alternative that Marx and Engels proposed is a choice between real humanism and speculative idealism.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that the activity of Marx and Engels was provoked by the empirical experience of situation which the proletariat had to face in the second half of the 19th Century. Similar crucial experiences shape next generations of researchers and social activists who do not agree with the odium of capitalist exploitation. In their critique of critical critique, Marx and Engels managed to perceive a social change, attaching importance to a material foundation of historical processes and human consciousness. As a matter of fact, they fixed up that which was upside down in the thought of the Left Hegelians and utopian Socialists since – as Suchodolski writes (1957, p. 11) – the future does not arise from good intentions of people. Summarising Suchodolski’s observation, it should be underlined that the task to reform the world through the reform of consciousness is doomed to fail because if consciousness depends on its material conditions, the only valid form of critique of ideology is to change those conditions. Changing social conditions is always related to an intentional act, that is work, which is a humanizing activity, although perceived as alienated in the conditions of capitalism.

Adapting dialectical materialism for the purpose of pedagogy, which is done by Suchodolski, can be summarised in a few words. Firstly, the real world exists beyond human

consciousness; therefore, a crucial problem of education is humans' attitude to the environment and humans' activities that head for transforming that environment (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 26). Secondly, in the historical process, a human becomes more human by creating more human conditions (Suchodolski, 1957, pp. 15–16). Finally, education is perceived in the categories of human emancipation (Suchodolski, 1957, 16), in which a human is both subject and object. According to Suchodolski (1957, 26), presenting education from the perspective of historical materialism opposes the fatalism of bourgeois adaptive education and the futility of idealistic utopian pedagogy as well as comprehends the education of a person as a prospective, active and social process that is deeply rooted in the materiality of human life.

The Impasse of Critical Pedagogy, or How Class Struggle “Has Disappeared”

From the theoretical inspirations for the constructive critique of critical pedagogy that are adopted in this article, the readers probably know best Freire's works. This figure, as well as his activity and works that compose an epic of the pedagogy of emancipation, has played a crucial role in the shaping of North American critical pedagogy that has gradually spread over the whole world, which is not surprising if we take into consideration the dominant role of English in science. Talking about such a figure as Freire is quite complicated, which is clearly expressed by Peter McLaren:

Where Freire was implacably prosocialist, critical pedagogy – his stepchild – has become (at least in classrooms throughout the United States) little more than liberalism refurbished with some lexical help from Freire (as in words like *praxis* and *dialogue*) and basically is used to camouflage existing capitalist social relations under a plethora of eirenic proclamations and classroom strategies. Real socialist alternatives are nowhere to be found, and if they are, few have *las tripas* to make them resoundingly heard in the classrooms of the nations.” (McLaren, 2000, p. xxv)

McLaren's words concern a complex phenomenon of postmodernism in science and although the author himself underlines that “while not all postmodern theory is to be rejected,” some theories remain loyal to the capitalist way of producing and living (McLaren 2000, p. xxiv). The whole problem with postmodernism lies in the growing social inequalities. In other words, the vulgar materiality of capitalist oppression allows doubts about a more sublime matter of power of discourse to appear. The fact that power is also exercised through a linguistic system and the use of language cannot be denied. However, as it has already been mentioned, the material vulgarity of oppression brings us down to the ground level. Thus, restricting ourselves to the matter of discourses and consciousness is counterproductive if we want to access a less alienated and less alienating social reality.

Nevertheless, there is a theory that blends theory and practice and which, by the way, has played an essential role in changing society in general and science in particular. Such a theory is Marxism. However, in today's conditions it brings a significant problem, noticed by different researchers, which consists in withdrawing Marxism and other related issues of social classes in general and class struggle in particular from both public discourse in general and social studies discourse in particular (see, for example, McLaren, 2005; hooks, 2000). This phenomenon also concerns critical pedagogy in spite of its apparent theoretical connection with critical theory of the Frankfurt School (*vide* Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer) that is based on the preceding second generation of Marxists (*vide* Antonio Gramsci, György Lukács, Stanisław Brzozowski) and finally on Marx and Engels themselves.

In other words, this unusual phenomenon of making social studies less Marxist also consists in referring more easily to the representatives of the Frankfurt School or Gramsci himself than to Marx, not to mention Engels (this is even practised by those researchers who identify themselves with critical pedagogy). It should also be added that in the conditions of Central and Eastern Europe, that is in those countries that departed from “real socialism,” an even stronger tendency for removing the philosophy of Marx and Engels from social studies can be observed. Simultaneously, it should be underlined that even in the postmodern debate, the return of Marx’s philosophy is not entirely impossible since the specter of Marx is haunting social studies (Derrida, 1994). Adorno states that the specter of Marx visits us for “Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed” (2004, p. 3). He also comments on Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*, “The summary judgment that it [philosophy] had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled it in itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried. [...] Theory cannot prolong the moment its critique depended on” (Adorno, 2004, p. 3).

If the critique of ideology cannot be provided theoretically, that is if the critique of ideology cannot be successfully provided discursively, only some kind of material variation of critique remains. In the face of such an assignment, critical pedagogy capitulated at the very beginning. It is hard to withdraw from its characteristic way of thinking, which feeds on the illusion that the change of the world depends firstly, and perhaps entirely, on the change of consciousness without questioning previous achievements. Although they do not translate into practical results in everyday life of people, they indeed influenced the academic position of people who propagated only seemingly critical opinions.

My reception of North American critical pedagogy, but also the meaning of Freire’s pedagogy of emancipation for critical pedagogy, started with *Theory and Resistance in Education* by Giroux (2001), which is the reason why I respect this work so much even if it is – in my opinion – the best example of mistake which critical pedagogy has made. According to Giroux, theories of reproduction represent sociological “pessimism” that should be confronted with pedagogical “optimism.” His (Giroux, 2001, pp. 79–98) attitude to the theories of cultural reproduction presented by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990) or Basil Bernstein (2003) is moderately critical because they have included cultural factors in the process of social and economic reproduction, thus making it more complicated. However, their understanding of the school system as a privileged Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) for reproducing workforce (Althusser, 2006) or the acknowledgment that cheap and mass education produces cheap and subordinated workforce on mass scale according to the principle of correspondence (Bowles, Gintis, 1976; 2002) meets with Giroux’s opposition because of economic reductionism.

Giroux’s critique is based on undermining the determination of social processes (including education) by the economy in the last instance. For him, the economic determination in the last instance means a “debilitating,” “crushing,” “gloom-and-doom pessimism,” but above all, a pessimism “paralyzing” educational activity for changes of social reality (Giroux, 2001, p. xxi, 235, 59, 122). The article does not discuss the fact that the concept of determination in the last instance concerns only the last instance, which is not the first, and it does not *ex definitione* mean that many different forms of culture or forms of signifying that define our individual and collective life are ignored. What is more important, however, is the fact that with the critique of alleged economic reductionism, sensitivity to problems related to the concept of class struggle disappears, thus provoking the disappearance of the concept of

class struggle itself which is mainly material. Therefore, the problem of material context for educational processes is erased from the field of interest of critical pedagogy.

McLaren refutes an accusation that orthodox Marxism oversimplifies social phenomena and writes that postmodernism “fails in the main to challenge the gross ‘materiality’ of exploitation” (2005, p. 9). Therefore, it is impossible to return to a radically formulated social matter – also in education – without returning to the issues related to a material base. Critical pedagogy can no longer be critical if it continues to ignore the gross materiality of domination. It does not matter if discrimination and exploitation are based on class, sex, race, or any other reason since eventually, the principle is to make somebody do something, even if this something is both alienating and alienated.

According to the author of *Theory and Resistance in Education*, the pessimism of theory of economic reproduction is to be replaced by the pedagogy of optimism, hope and possibilities that are practically represented by Freire. In other words, the epic of emancipatory education that is personified by Freire is supposed to serve as a keystone of critical pedagogy. Giroux, however, invalidates theories of reproduction as too focused on the material foundation and ignores that the material context of the life of the oppressed is crucial for Freire who treats it as a starting point for abolishing oppression and an essential factor in the process of emancipation itself, but also as the goal of emancipatory processes. The materiality of human life constitutes a point of reference for social processes and how they are perceived. Thus, a materialist interpretation of Freire’s thought – in the perspective of Suchodolski’s materialist pedagogy – suppresses an apparent opposition between Freire’s philosophy and Marxist theory of education in Bowles and Gintis’s as well as Althusser’s works that are criticized by Giroux.

If we think about Freire, it should be underlined that his philosophy of education developed inductively in the course of many educational activities in which he participated. Therefore, it should not be surprising that his opinions changed with time. Afonso C. Scocuglia (2005) identifies four basic phases in the development of Freire’s thought. Early Freire (Freire, 1976) is more liberal and is different from Freire from the period of *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Freire, 1975; 1979) who recognizes social and material contexts of emancipatory processes. Freire from the African period (Freire, 1978a; 1978b; 1989; Freire, Macedo, 2005) flirts with Marxism to become influenced by North American critical pedagogy and postmodern discourse in his later years (Freire, 1997; 2000; 2001). However, compared with postmodern thought that developed on American campuses, Freire’s variation is still a robust and radical social progressivism.

Discussing the anti-Marxist interpretation of Freire’s thought, which was done by Giroux in the first half of the 1980s, it should be underlined that he tries to present pedagogy of emancipation as if it was more related to a discursive construction of domination and as if domination did not carry material meaning. However, it is symptomatic that later editions of *Theory and Resistance* do not include Freire’s works from the Marxist African phase (apart from short information about his literacy campaign in Guinea-Bissau). An even more questionable interpretation is presented by Giroux in the introduction to the American edition of *A importância do ato de ler* (Importance of reading act) published under the title *Literacy. Reading the Word and the World* (Freire & Macedo, 2005), in which he describes the experience of the literacy campaign conducted in STP that highlighted the material base of educational work. Giroux puts the issue of the materiality of social reforms, which were introduced simultaneously with the literacy campaign, in the background, emphasizing the notion of discourse. By extension, the question regarding how much Freire’s thought is affected by Marx (and Engels) and what are the results of it for critical pedagogy should be asked. In

other words, a critique of capitalist ideology cannot be made efficiently with the use of theory or reduced to an act of consciousness since a critique of ideology has to be of material form. Such an opinion is shared by McLaren (2016, pp. 27–28), who presents the concept of revolutionary critical pedagogy in relation to Freire’s concept of reading the word and the world. For him, this is the dialectics of mental and manual work and the dialectics of doing and thinking, that is the process that by necessity has a material form, which has been underestimated by critical pedagogy for many years.

Therefore, if we are to refer freely to Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) and try to answer the question “Why Doesn’t This [critical pedagogy] Feel Empowering?”, we have to underline that the problem lies in the notion of consciousness and the competent understanding of the emancipatory process. Based on Jacques Rancière’s philosophy (1991), Gert Biesta (2010) deconstructs a repressive myth of critical pedagogy, according to which acquiring emancipatory consciousness is a necessary condition for a possibility of emancipation. Thus, the point of departure is a lack of consciousness of the oppressed. Therefore, critical pedagogy creates a repressive and classist myth that the oppressed strata are deficient, having some defects that, on the one hand, make the process of emancipation impossible, but on the other hand, they can be repaired with education. The concept of emancipation whose aim is to critique ideology and whose condition – which is the essence of this problem – is also a critique of ideology made in consciousness as a result of pedagogical activity intends to undermine the value of the culture of the oppressed and is also a sign of disrespect for its representatives. There is an easy way to resolve this impasse – it is enough to shift an object of pedagogical intervention from consciousness to the material working and living conditions. A permanent and productive change of consciousness can be produced only by changing the working and living conditions that have a material form.

Returning to the turn to materiality in the theory of education, Marxist inspirations seems, on the one hand, obvious, but on the other hand, this paradigmatic revolution has its roots in Michel Foucault’s thought (1995; 2009) as well as in Bruno Latour’s (1993; 2005) or Jaques Rancière’s (1991). Apart from Biesta’s opinion, this promising turn to things is defined in the categories of post-critical pedagogy, as in Joris Vlieghe’s works (2016). The concept of thing-centered pedagogy is also introduced in the works co-authored by Vlieghe (Hodgson, Vlieghe, Zamojski, 2017a; 2017b). Some motifs of thing-centered pedagogy can be found in Freire’s educational practice which can be called a radical, critical and emancipatory thing-centered pedagogy. Unlike Hodgson, Vlieghe and Zamojski, the author of this article would not resign from “critical” feature, but move the critique of ideology from the level of ideology to the level of material things since it is hard to reject the concept and practice of critique in the situation of growing social inequalities.

Lastly, the critique of critical pedagogy presented in this article has also been shaped by Curry S. Malott’s critique published in *Critical Education* (2017), in which he proposes a thesis that “anticommunism... has dominated critical pedagogy..., which coincided with imperialism’s counter-offensive against the global communist movement” (Malott, 2017, p. 1). Undoubtedly, critical pedagogy has shifted from the Marxist theory of education (Malott, 2017, pp. 5–6), which has made it helpless in the face of the problems of social stratification and omnipresent exploitation. There is, of course, a direct relationship between capitalism, sexism and racism (Malott, 2017, p. 2) and that these phenomena cannot be understood without class struggle being taken into consideration. However, returning to the history of the Soviet Union to find an anti-capitalist form of education that would solve the crisis which critical pedagogy has to face is a good step but in the wrong direction. Critical pedagogy did not despotically

demonise the former Soviet Union (Malott, 2017, 6). It was easy to demonise the social reality in Eastern Bloc countries since the terror of police violence, and the dictatorship of party apparatchiks are generally easy to be presented in a negative light, but at the same time challenging to be explained with some rational arguments. Therefore, we should be far more careful about looking for non-capitalist forms of education in educational practice before 1989 in the Eastern Bloc for one can find there only a limitless sea of pedagogical conservatism with a surface layer of fake social radicalism.

For a Northern American Marxist, it can be exciting and perhaps surprising to notice that original theoretical ideas deeply rooted in the philosophy of Marx and Engels were very often faced with the repressive approach of the authorities. This article discusses three such examples from Poland. The first example is *Main Currents of Marxism* (2005) by Leszek Kołakowski that was published for the first time under the Polish title *Główne nurty marksizmu* in Paris (1976–1978), then in English in London (1988) since the authorities of the Polish People's (sic!) Republic made it impossible to publish the work in Poland. Kołakowski can indeed be perceived as a revisionist, but Adam Schaff (1980), who never distanced himself from Marxism, was also unable to publish his book *Alienation as a Social Phenomenon* (*Alienacja jako zjawisko społeczne*) in Poland. Perhaps, the reason was the use of Marx's concept of alienation to analyze the social practices of people living in people's democratic countries in one of the chapters. The third but the most important example from the perspective of this article is related to Suchodolski's (1957) *U podstaw materialistycznej teorii wychowania* that would later inspire Freire. The book consisted of conclusions that the theory of education resulted from Marx's and Engel's philosophy and was published only during the Khrushchev Thaw ending the period of Stalinism. What is more important, however, is the fact that although Suchodolski's project of materialist pedagogy was never included in any education system in Eastern Bloc countries, thanks to Freire, it was implemented during his literacy campaign in STP. The author is going to seek for good practices of anti-capitalist education there, not in the Soviet Union.

To sum up, the biggest problem is not the anti-communist character of critical pedagogy understood as a critique of social practice in the former Eastern Bloc, but the fact that critical pedagogy has resigned from the philosophy of Marx and Engels, which can also be connected to the removal of the question of social class and class struggle as a pedagogical matter. Such an intellectual attitude also consists in acknowledging that any social change depends on a change of consciousness. This approach to the problem of social change places the power of discourse higher than the power that materiality has over individual and collective life.

The situation of critical pedagogy and, in general, the theory of education is, of course, an expression of a broader process of political economy that in both Northern America and Europe, especially Eastern Europe, leads to the obliteration of class struggle from the society's field of view. Social classes and class struggle have not disappeared, but they have been covered with the ideology of economic growth, free trade and the identification of the common good with the good of capital holders. Such a situation has provoked growing tensions that are this time covered with the ideology of nationalism, chauvinism and trade wars, but in the end, the common good is again identified with the good of capital. In principle, education and theory of education mainly correspond to political needs of capitalism. The rejection of Marx's and Engels' philosophy in Western European countries, both in science and politics, has acquired a caricatural form of moral panic. In Poland, for example, after the amendment of the penal code that was carried out by the parliamentary majority, the possession of Marx's *Capital* is punished with three-year imprisonment. At the time when I am writing these words, nobody

has been sentenced under article 256, but the new penal code has been in force for almost two weeks.

Critique of Critical Critique: Materialist Pedagogy of Emancipation in Theory

As Suchodolski writes, the research project that resulted in the work *U podstaw materialistycznej teorii wychowania* was supposed to answer the question: “To what extent Socialist pedagogy is a continuation of the historical development of educational theory and practice and to what extent it examines and resolves new issues – this is a basic question asked by scholars as well as crowds of teachers and educators” (Suchodolski, 1957, p.5). The answer given by Suchodolski was based on “a detailed analysis of the theoretical and practical activity of Marx and Engels” since they “created a new concept of culture and history, society and man” (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 5).

Concerning Suchodolski’s interpretation of *The Holy Family*, the problem of critical pedagogy consists in the fact that its confident representatives only promote bold ideas and, pleased with their boldness, refrain from taking any action (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 25). Theoretically, this impasse can be resolved with Suchodolski’s philosophy of education, practically – with Freire’s emancipatory popular education.

The point of departure in Suchodolski’s analysis of relations between the concepts of culture, society and humans and their history is arbitrary since these elements are inextricably linked with each other. Therefore, materialism in Suchodolski’s pedagogy does not indicate reductionism. He writes about the human:

... everything in man, from his speech to his opinions, is produced during a process of interaction with a specific environment, during a process of development of sense organs provoked by his activity in a specific environment, during a process of consciousness transformation related to living conditions and work. It does not happen by itself; a human being does not discover his self “out of nothing,” but this self is being formed during processes that can be examined, whose underlying reasons can be revealed. The emergence of any human characteristic should be understood as emergence of something specific from something specific and by something specific. (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 316)

The idea behind the emergence “of something specific from something specific and by something specific” applies to particular concepts that describe social reality. Thus it concerns a human being – as in the quotation – as well as culture, ideology, social relations, ways of producing or material conditions of everyday life. At the same time, it is crucial to underline the active role of a person who, although living in a network of dependencies, shapes his living conditions himself. According to Suchodolski (1957, p. 104), work is the most human activity of humans, since its goal is to remove opposition between humans and nature, and through work that includes changing the world, humans becomes more human in the human world (Suchodolski, 1957, pp. 220–222). Therefore, work is a human form of expression of being a human and only when the world created by a human invades their inner life, can we deal with alienation (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 22). The subject of alienation is, of course, one of the most critical issues in *U podstaw materialistycznej teorii wychowania*, and although there is no space to develop it in greater detail in this article, the division into material alienation and spiritual alienation should be underlined. Following Marx, Suchodolski (1957, pp. 134–135) states that

when one finds out that he leads an alienated life, he starts to live such a life, criticizing the idealistic critique of ideology in which mental life is recognized as more real than material life:

Alienation is not only overcome, but it is retained and wrapped in the falsehood that it has been ostensibly overcome. The existing contradictions, which consist in the fact that a man is not aware of his actions and his works, are complemented with another contradiction – he is not aware of the nature of his consciousness and treats conclusions as the reality itself. Thus, the real alienation is obscured by a fact that it has been ostensibly overcome, which... means man's inner dissociation into real, submissive, alienated life and conceived, free and deceptive life. (Suchodolski 1957, p. 135)

A simple conclusion that can be drawn here is that we are not alienated, in the first place, because of ideology, since alienation has a specific and material form that relates to our individual and collective everyday life. Not only the mental critique of ideology constructed upon alienated life does not end alienation, but also, paradoxically, strengthens alienation since, due to its ostensible abolition, petrifies both ideology and its material base. An idealistic critique of ideology, that is a critique that omits the materiality of social processes, results in passivity. Thus, a discursive critique of discourse power does not produce the expected results and may be a reason behind the expansion of social passivity.

A question about a philosophical and pedagogical program that would constitute an alternative for an idealistic critique of ideology appears. The answer is to turn towards materiality and specificity of the real life of people – the life of people, albeit inhuman life (Suchodolski 1957, 133–134). Suchodolski (1957, 133) describes realistic humanism in the following words: “Therefore – according to Marx – if we want to truly define what man creates and how he succumbs to his products and how he can really control them, we should turn towards the field that is a real human life, towards material products and economic situations that are related to them” (Marx qtd. in Suchodolski, p. 362).

If human work, which remains inhuman in capitalism being the main reason for people's unhappiness, is a humanizing factor, then the human work of people plays a crucial role in the historical process of humanizing the world. Therefore, if the problem of division of labor and alienation of people from their work is only a figment of the imagination, but has its practical and material causes, they should also be overcome in a practical and specific way (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 25). How? “If a man is created by circumstances, circumstances should be created in a humane way” (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 26).

Realizing that Freire read *U podstaw materialistycznej teorii wychowania* while writing his *Pedagogia do Oprimido* creates a strange effect of hindsight bias concerning his works. Although not realized before, the places where two theories meet seem apparent now. Mafra (2010) indicates some of them, but also other similarities should be included: the concept of artistic creation; the dialectical relation of humans towards the world; the philosophy of history with a liberation of humans as a central point of history; the acknowledgement of work as the principle of pedagogy; the recognition of class interest in educational processes; the acknowledgement of impossibility of neutral education and necessity to politically support either side of the social conflict; the appreciation of the oppressed being an emancipatory class; the critique of ideology. It is interesting to notice, however, that in *U podstaw materialistycznej teorii wychowania*, references to a possible method are very modest and defined by Suchodolski with the concept of revolutionary practice. Humanely creating circumstances, in general, and in education and pedagogy, in particular, meets with the reaction of ruling classes,

“The education of people is, therefore, a huge process of self-creation of a man during his historical creative work. However, the process – as historical materialism claims – is not smooth. On the contrary, it takes place in the course of fights and contradictions” (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 59).

This reveals an ambivalent function of education in the class society in which, on the one hand, education is a weapon to fight against oppression and, on the other hand, a weapon in the hands of ruling classes (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 50) that use it to maintain domination and oppression. Hence, the postulate to draw education and pedagogy from the influence of the ruling class, otherwise the education of the privileged strata will be filled with falsehood and ideological hypocrisy, and the education of the oppressed will be alienating and alienated (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 143). A similarly conflictual image of education and pedagogy is presented by Freire (1975) in *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, in which he recapitulates his experiences from the period of agrarian reform in Chile. I intentionally underline that the literacy campaign in which Freire was engaged took place simultaneously with the agrarian reform since this fact is sometimes forgotten, although combining the literacy campaign with ambitious programs of social and economic reforms constitutes the essence of Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy, being at the same time an excellent example of materialist pedagogy in action. However, the culmination of his materialist approach towards people education and socio-economic reforms can be observed during the African phase.

While tracing the relationship between Freire’s and Suchodolski’s philosophy, it should be remembered that the Chilean experience (in chronological order) is only a translation into the language of Suchodolski’s materialist pedagogy, whereas the African experience is the most extensive exemplification of the application of materialist pedagogy since it was used to plan the whole undertaking. Also, it should be underlined that the transition from *Pedagogia do Oprimido* to the African phase is characterized by a severe modification of Freire’s paradigm, which is supported by his abandonment of the use of the concept of conscientization (Romão, Gadotti, 2012). This modification was not only provoked by the experience gained in STP but also due to the reading of *U teoretycznych podstaw materialistycznej teorii wychowania*.

Discussing *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, the recurrent motif of the material context of human life should be underlined, which in the case of societies founded on oppression means, as Freire claims, a specific situation in which both the oppressing and the oppressed find themselves (Freire, 1975, p. 61–71). In the famous chapter on banking education, Freire mentions (1975, p. 81–107) that education and pedagogy are ideologized and influenced by the ruling class. He treats a dialogue between a teacher and students who play the role of teacher and student in turns, remaining in symmetrical relations, as a solution for emancipatory pedagogy (Freire, 1975, p. 111–119). At this point, the fundamental postulate of materialist pedagogy appears: education should be related to praxis; however, this is not only innovation at an educational level since it has serious political implications. The concept of revolutionary practice (Portuguese: *ação revolucionária, praxis revolucionária*) – characteristic of materialist pedagogy – emerges in the place where Freire writes about dialogue in the context of connecting it with social practice to create a list of generative subjects (Freire, 1975, p. 119–123). Another essential similarity that can be found in *Pedagogia do Oprimido* is a dialectical perception of humans and world relations, which is reflected by the list of generative subjects (Freire, 1975, p. 123–142). Finally, in the book, Freire (1975, p. 235–261) recognizes the educational significance of the community-oriented transformation of the material world – this is how Freire’s “dialectics-dialogics” is formed. The inclusion of object which mediates into

the practice of education is the essence of the paradigm of the pedagogy of the oppressed for the Subjects of educational exchange that at the same time participate in transforming the world, in humanizing it, relate to such an object (Freire, 1975, p. 188).

Critique of Critical Critique: Materialist Pedagogy of Emancipation in Practice

The best example of the application of Freire's dialectics-dialogics is the literacy campaign conducted in STP. The islands of STP were discovered and settled by the Portuguese in the second half of the 15th Century. From the beginning of the 16th Century, they started to play a shameful part in the Atlantic slave trade (Caldeira, 1999, p. 22–24; Siebert, 1999, p. 17–21). From about 1515 to the abolition of slavery in 1869, STP was a labor camp and a concentration camp for Africans kidnapped from the continent who were either forced to work on local plantations or sold as slaves to work in America. Due to the issue of land ownership, official state-driven racism and the support for national apparatus of oppression, the quasi-slavish forms of government existed until the fascist regime in the metropolis was defeated (Higgs, 2012; Frynas, Wood, Soares de Oliveira, 2003) thanks to the national liberation movements from Lusophone Africa (Romão, Gadotti, 2012). Before regaining independence, the territory of STP, except the area that belonged to the country, was divided into 84 plantations (Freire was wrong to state that there were 75 plantations) owned by the Portuguese (Pape, Rebelo, 2013, p. 26–33; Freire, 1989, p. 28).

Such an absolute social inequality was reflected in the colonial language policy and the organization of school systems. In the period of the colonial government in Lusophone Africa, there was strict rationing of education for Africans; the educated Africans usually formed a working “middle class” (Torres, 1996, p. 130–131). Since it is difficult to find statistics on STP, one should examine the data from different African countries under the Portuguese fascists' rule to realize the results of the policy of intentional negligence. In Guinea-Bissau, in the years 1961–1964, only 16.4% of the cohort was enrolled in primary schools (Torres, 1993, p. 128). The status of *assimilado* (assimilated), which was an official classification of literacy skills confirmed by the colonial administration, was granted to only 1,478 Africans (almost 0.3% of the population) living in Guinea-Bissau in 1951 (Piłaszewicz, Rzewuski, 2005, p. 100). When Angola regained independence, 85% of the population was illiterate (Comissão Nacional de Alfabetização, 1984, p. 7).

The situation in STP was the same. The scale of literacy campaign was massive: almost every São Toméan had contact with the literacy program either as a student or as an educator. The program was successful and, as Heinz-Peter Gerhardt (1996, p. 165) underlines, during first four years of the campaign, 72% of adult illiterates finished the course and 55% of them “were not illiterate any more.” The campaign in STP is often compared to the one conducted in Guinea-Bissau which met with failure (Torres, 1993; 1996; Freire, Faundez, 1998). The choice of Portuguese as the language of literacy campaign was considered to be the most crucial factor behind such a situation (Torres, 1993, 135; Torres, 1996, p. 141; Freire, Faundez, 1998, pp. 62–63). It is interesting to notice that the literacy campaign in STP was also conducted in Portuguese but due to bilingualism (Freire, Faundez, 1998, p. 65, 71–72) caused by the necessity to use Portuguese as a vehicular language the results of this campaign were far more satisfactory.

In STP, Freire emphasised the post-literacy process that complemented the literacy campaign. Its goal was to consolidate the knowledge acquired in the campaign, implement the rudiments of grammar and arithmetic, deepen reading the world through reading texts with

more varied subjects and a rich content, develop the capability for critical analysis of the world and oral expression, prepare for technical training that would be free from alienation (Torres 1996, p. 137). A series of textbooks *A Luta Continua* (acervo.paulofreire.org) comprises six *Popular Culture Notebooks* and an exercise notebook. Notebook 1 encompasses the initial process of literacy that is supplemented by *Caderno dos exercisios*, that is an exercise notebook. Notebook 2 initiates the post-literacy process and is oriented at various generative subjects. Notebook 3 includes subjects related to arithmetic; notebook 4 is focused on health issues; notebook 5 on history and popular culture; notebook 6 on economy and geography; the author of notebooks 5 and 6 is Antonio Faundez (Freire, 1978, pp. 57-58; Freire, 1989, p. 23). As Freire states, the first notebook is an example of the literacy process, whereas the second is the post-literacy designed “for the people to participate effectively as subjects in the reconstruction of their nation” (Freire, 1989, p. 23). It is crucial to realize that for Freire, the African experience was of greater importance. Carlos A. Torres (1996, p. 129) underlines this Brazilian educator’s fascination with African decolonization activists. He also writes that the involvement in the literacy campaigns in African countries allowed Freire to participate in the socialist experiment and use emancipatory popular education on the unprecedented scale along with an ambitious program of social reforms (Torres, 1996, pp. 134–135):

Freire proved that programmes of adult education helped to raise revolutionary consciousness in fighters for liberation and those engaged in the process of transition to socialism. Therefore, there is need to join, in a more consistent and systematic way, the literacy process with the production process and productive work – this was one of the greatest weaknesses of the early works by Freire.” (Torres, 1996, 134)

A similar view is expressed by Gadotti, although he underlines the humanistic dimension of focusing on the material aspects of everyday life of popular classes, noticing a paradigmatic crisis that consisted in “including work as the principle of pedagogy” (Romão, Gadotti, 2012, p. 60). Gadotti adds – which is crucial from the perspective of Suchodolski’s philosophy of education – that the radicalization of Freire’s thought involved noticing the ambiguity of the phenomenon of labor which is a humanizing factor that can become a dehumanizing factor in a situation of oppression (Romão, Gadotti, 2012, p. 60).

In little-known *Letters to Men and Women Cultural Animators* (1978b, p. 7–8), Freire underlines the role of work in cognitive processes and development of human consciousness. He associates the “process of transforming the world of nature through work” with ordinary activities of the São Toméan people, such as “cleaning soil, sowing, cultivating, harvesting; preparing soil for rice planting, harvesting cacao pods; turning clay into bricks, leather into shoes, tree trunks into wooden planks, wooden planks into boats that are used to catch fishes that are sold and eaten with something far more significant than a mere adaptation to reality” since through the transformation of the material world, the social world is transformed (Freire, 1978, p. 8). If we make a travesty of Suchodolski’s opinion, the characteristics of man’s social world should be understood as emergence of something specific from something specific and by something specific. In this pattern of interrelations, the social reconstruction done by the People during the period of decolonization is identified by Freire with the reorientation of social use of productive forces (Freire, 1978b, p. 8).

If we start to perceive Freire’s method in terms of materialist pedagogy, the connection of educational processes with practice becomes essential since this is not only an empty gesture of fictional exercises in school, whose aim is to adapt to the external circumstances but a real – if we follow Suchodolski – revolutionary practice that connects radically democratic

education with radically democratic political action and the transformation of natural world and social world at the same time. Therefore, the perception of a list of generative words and subjects in the categories of students' interest is not satisfactory for it should be perceived in the categories of the involvement of students-teachers and teachers-students in an act that results in liberation (from both natural limitations and limitations that result from social oppression). As Freire writes, traditional education does not serve this purpose, "In the colonial education, educators usually transferred to us 'their' knowledge and our role was to absorb it, even though their knowledge distorted our reality, which was good for the interest of the colonizers. Colonial professors 'taught' that this was 'b' and that was 'a' and together they formed 'ba', which learners had to repeat and remember" (Freire, 1978b, p. 6).

The attitude of a teacher towards his student constitutes the essence of class adaptive education – the São Toméan literacy campaign was supposed to be completely different. Everything started in Monte Mário, a small fishing village located in the south-east of São Tomé Island. In a letter to teachers, Freire refers to Manuel Pinto da Costa, the first president of independent STP, and his speech:

One of the Culture Circles already exists on the beach of Monte Mário. The people who participate in the literacy campaign can guarantee that silence is not possible any more. Objective conditions are created due to which in Culture Circles, through practice and reflection, a permanent dialogue is established that includes generative concepts consistent with the essence of a particular person who is to liberate himself exploring his potentiality. (Pinto da Costa qtd. in Freire 1978b, p. 6)

In other words, Culture Circle is not a place where knowledge is distributed, as it happens in compensatory and adaptive education "for" the people, but a place where the local community meets, where local and national problems, as well as their solutions, are discussed, which is linguistically represented in encoded generative terms and in the decoding process (Freire, 1978, p. 14). The strategy of creating a list of generative words and subjects is characterised by the treatment of students as Subjects, the acknowledgement of their knowledge about their world and their forms of culture as well as – which is the most important from the perspective of materialist pedagogy – the departure from thinking about the curricular content in the categories of knowledge in order to think about it in the categories of the recognisable and the object. It is equally crucial that a recognizable object is recognizable in the process of the transformation of the world, that is in the process of work. Knowledge and ignorance of a teacher-student and student-teacher are defined through practice and reflection, and all this is mediated by material objects – as Freire described one of the generative words:

One time we visited a Cultural Circle in a small fishing community called Monte Mario. They had as a generative word the term *bonito* (beautiful), the name of a fish, and as a codification [a picture] they had an expressive design of the little town with its vegetation, typical houses, fishing boats in the sea, and a fisherman holding a *bonito*. ...They stared at the codification closely. Then they went to the window and looked outside. They looked at each other as though they were surprised, and looking again at the codification, they said: *This is Monte Mario. Monte Mario is like this and we didn't know it.* (Freire, Macedo, 2005, pp. 44–45)

The word *bonito* is ambiguous – as a noun it is the name of a fish; an adjective means "beautiful." Describing the method of creating the program for literacy and post-literacy

campaigns, Freire writes about encoding and decoding reality. Field research is supposed to reveal the horizon of expectations concerning the material life of people that is to be identified with specific objects in order to encode it in the form of a multimodal sign that is a juxtaposition of image and text. In the case of the literacy campaign, the aim is to select generative words (such as the word *bonito*), whereas in post-literacy campaign – generative subjects. Generative words are chosen based on their richness of themes and phones (in order to represent all syllables of a given language by the smallest number of words). The selection of generative subjects concerns only the thematic richness that results from its connections to everyday life. The process of decoding is a process of “re-reading” (Portuguese: *releitura*) the world that is supposed to invalidate the ideological influence made by the colonizers. While decoding the word *bonito*, the learners responded that “Monte Mario is like this and we didn’t know it,” which does not mean that they did not know Monte Mario at all, but they did not associate it with the fact that Monte Mario is beautiful because in the world divided by the rich into the world of mansions and the world of living quarters for farm workers, the oppressed continue to show appreciation of the culture of oppressing classes and depreciation of their own culture.

In the primer, there are twenty generative terms, always accompanied by an image, and in the second Popular Culture Notebook, there are twenty-six generative subjects, so if we look at Freire’s method only in the category of dialogue, we should realize that this is an incomplete picture since dialogue has material roots. Such a material object, an object that is recognizable in the process of the transformation of the world, is a necessary condition of radically understood democratization of social relations in education as well as social relations in general. There are two ways in which Suchodolski’s pedagogical theory, with its methodological roots in Freire’s pedagogy, brings about a revolution in thinking about education. The first one consists in looking at social relations and education in the context of materiality; the second one sees education in prospective categories. This kind of pedagogy is concentrated on the future liberation that takes place in the present, liberation which is fictional if it does not have a material form. The slogan to create reality humanely has its visible material dimension.

What are the cognitive results of the literacy campaign connected with an ambitious program of social reforms? What are the cognitive results of fighting against tuberculosis and malaria, fighting for universal access to health care and culture, fighting against homelessness and famine? Talking about the São Toméan literacy campaign in the language of Suchodolski (1957, 29), it should be underlined that a practical shift of the critique of ideology from a philosophical to a material plane has occurred. According to Suchodolski (1957, p. 31), a real liberation from the ideology trap can happen only when the order producing such an ideology is abolished.

In general, this is all about demystification concerning a classist statement about a low value of the culture of the oppressed as well as their inability to manage their own lives. However, the view of materialist pedagogy, derived from Marx’s and Engels’s philosophy and shared by Freire, has in its essence a symbolic, parallel appreciation of the culture of the oppressed and a belief that their practical activity constitutes a driving force of historical process that leads to the liberation of man. Pondering about the cognitive results of the literacy campaign combined with a revolutionary programme of social reforms (although the literacy campaign itself can be included in such a programme), we can give only one answer: making a person believe that through their practical activity they can think, govern themselves and live without the oppressor as we can read in one of Freire’s readers (Ministério de Educação Nacional e Desporto, p. 44). As Suchodolski states, “From now on, pedagogy should, above

all, understand life, not ideas. It should comprehend a real man in precise conditions, not ideas of man or ideas of culture. This is a true ‘Copernican Revolution’ in pedagogy” (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 190).

Therefore, if we ask where a list of generative words and subjects comes from, the answer is that it comes from the acknowledgement of the human ability to transform the world and from including such a material world in educational processes. If we ask how it is possible that the fishermen of Monte Mario were so preoccupied with the word *bonito*, we can find an answer in materialist pedagogy:

From now on, the theory of education should be constructed in a close connection to specific living conditions of a given society, including its activity and production. This theory is, indeed, based on defined assumptions, but such assumptions concern living people, existing production conditions and transformation of productive forces that lead to revolutionary activity of changing social relationships. (Suchodolski, 1957, pp. 188–189)

Concerning Suchodolski, the complete irrationality of bourgeois pedagogy arises from the dissonance between a philosophical critique of ideology and material life, the dissonance between the alienation of consciousness and the material objective alienation (Suchodolski 1958, 135–136). Such a dissonance constitutes a crucial distinction that makes it possible to distinguish a critique made in the spirit of popular education from a critical critique of critical pedagogy. To put it in a more modern language, the impasse of critical pedagogy results from an excessive concentration on discourses and an abandonment of transforming the material world. Freire succeeds in combining the foundation with the superstructure, materiality with discourse. However, it should be underlined that for him, the point of departure is the materiality of everyday life. This is the essence of Freire’s dialectics-dialogic.

Back to the Future: The Imaginarium of Emancipatory Materialist Pedagogy

Suchodolski states (1957, p. 179) that critical pedagogy in a variety practiced at university campuses cultivates a utopian illusion that education plays an extraordinary and autonomous role as if a change of consciousness could be provoked only by intellectual effort and as if the change was dependent on this intellectual effort. Thus, critical critique that is characteristic of critical pedagogy is not so different from opportunistic pedagogy that postulates conformism and adaptation to the dehumanized reality since the discovery of the illusion that a human is created by concepts, ideas or – to be more modern – discourses leads to another illusion, a “pedagogical illusion that the reform of human consciousness [...] can without reason lead to a complete transformation of a man and the total of his relations with reality” (Suchodolski, 1957, pp. 272–273). Both views (critical and opportunistic) refer to pedagogical arguments, according to which “unbearable social relations are created by bad people, so when they reform, everything will improve” (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 140). In other words, it does not matter if this is opportunistic pedagogy that places the blame on the oppressed for not understanding “natural laws of economy,” being responsible for their poor living conditions and social conflict, or if this is utopian pedagogy that identifies a literacy campaign with a social revolution since both these views are counter-productive when the goal is liberation of humans (Suchodolski, 1957, p. 141):

...the only one effective education is the one that transforms a man through a transformation of his real living conditions, real social relations that grow out

from specific forms of production. Thus, the educators become allies of the proletariat that fights for changing the existing, class conditions; they become supporters of *revolutionary practice* that grows out from living conditions transforming them simultaneously.” (Suchodolski 1957, 275)

Therefore, the concept of revolutionary practice is crucial. How does this materialist critique of ideology interwoven with revolutionary practice look like? The best example in Suchodolski’s *U podstaw materialistycznej teorii wychowania* is the speech given by Marx on the occasion of shortening the hours of work to ten hours, in which he states that “The ten hours’ bill was not only a huge practical achievement; it was also a victory of principle. For the first time, the political economy of bourgeois surrendered to the political economy of the working class” (Marx qtd. in Suchodolski, 1957, pp. 165–166).

What are the absurd illusions of capitalism in its colonial and fascist variety that were removed from the practice of transforming the human world during the literacy campaign combined with ambitious social reforms? Practically, it was negated that the problem of food shortage could be solved (such generative words as “arrowleaf elephant ear” [Creole: *matabala*], “rice,” “bonito”), that a universal health care system could be created (the generative word “health”), that the problem of homelessness could be solved (the generative word “brick”), that a universal education system could be established (the generative word “school”), that malaria (the generative word “mosquito”) or tuberculosis (the generative word “cough”) could be prevented, that a reasonable approach to drinking could be established (the generative word “wine”), that land (the generative word “plantation” [Portuguese: *Roça*]) or agricultural products (the generative word “richness”) could be divided equitably, that the value of a human was constituted by their work and that the human world is communal (such generative words as “work,” “unity,” “bowl,” “hoe”), that the oppressed are valuable people as well as their culture and products of their work (such generative words as “people,” “beautiful”).

What absurdities of capitalism that shape our everyday life are recognized as constant, permanent and visible? That the problem of world hunger is irresolvable because the food is a product like any other so its prices can be speculated with the use of futures contracts or other ingenious derivatives, which, on the one hand, leads to the famine crisis and death and, on the other hand, brings the increase of wealth. That the problem of homelessness is irresolvable even though there are many free houses and apartments on the market; the “holy property law” is more important than the life and health of people. That it is not worth fighting against the destruction of the natural environment because it would decrease the quality of life, yet it is challenging to maintain a high quality of life on Earth when its environment is not inhabitable. That historically vast and dangerous social inequalities are irresolvable since they are the result of hard work and service of the rich even though the poor are forced to put considerable effort into making ends meet.

Behind these capitalist absurdities, there is a possibility that is not realised and if Freire’s pedagogy means a pedagogy of possibilities – as long as they remain unchecked in a material way – they will be unchecked in general. The history of social development is made of events that are understood as a material examination of possibilities: checking whether the economy collapses with the abolition of slavery, after the legalization of labor unions or the introduction of unemployment benefit, full-paid holiday leave or retirement benefit. All these are the results of fights for the past future led in the past present. Therefore, we need to go back to the future in both pedagogy and philosophy as well as in our thinking about great social undertakings that will stop the vision of the dystopian world.

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