Returning to the question of emancipation: the emancipatory potential of Vocational Education and Training (VET)

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This paper is centred on the issue of emancipation in education practice in general, and in VET in particular. We aim to contribute to the discussion of particular traditions of emancipation in education in connection with VET practices. In our overview of ongoing educational debates on VET policy making and the issue of emancipation in VET, we have observed that ultimately emancipation in VET is understood as a specific function for social and economic integration. In this paper, we discuss this functionalist orientation and contrast 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 our discussion regarding the latter interpretation of emancipation in VET practices.

Keywords: VET; emancipation; education; Paulo Freire; Jacques 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 reflection and conscious awareness (Grubb and Lazerson 2005). In addition, a notion of utilitarian education or productivism in education in general, and higher education in particular, as a phenomenon and expected outcome in neo-liberal 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, borrowing the words from 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 an important means for economic growth (Farrell and Fenwick 2007). Indeed, there is an emphasis 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 2005). If VET is understood as an educational sector that 'narrowly' aims to train students with job-specific skills for social inclusion and adapting the labour market needs, then, what makes it interesting to investigate the emancipatory potential of VET? First, it is interesting to look more carefully at this educational sector which receives much attention in current policy debates that emphasises 'work and social inclusion' (indistinctly). Second, in exploring these current debates in VET policy making, we want to open the black box of 'emancipation in education' and consequently in VET. More specifically, we want to open the perspective of VET as an educational practice in its own right, and hence, as a 'potential' emancipatory educational practice.

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

> 'a utility-seeking may involve work (training, producing, managing, financing, distributing, and governing), or leisure' (Rosefielde 2002, 8).

Additionally:

'(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).

In line with this, the understanding of emancipation in VET tends also to be restricted to a utility-seeking view; to achieve economic and social inclusion in society as it stands. Against this background, we aim to broaden the understanding of emancipation in VET practices beyond socio-economic utility-seeking. Moreover, we question the assumed strict 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 that will lead to the reproduction of the current socio-political and economic order. Such a binary opposition, we argue, 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, it seems relevant to 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, we problematise a utility-seeking understanding of emancipation in VET, informed by Freire's and Rancière's work on emancipation in education and their pedagogical approaches. Many are the reasons why we decided to select both Freire's and Rancière's work as 'lenses' to examine VET and to discuss emancipation in VET. Firstly, Freire has been emblematic for the hope of social emancipation and liberation through education. The author's provocative ideas on education, which contrasted most traditional models at that time, have been a source of inspiration for education and educational researchers until our days, in Latin America and even far beyond the Latin-American borders. Secondly, to account for emancipation in education, Rancière is a contemporary author whose work has received much attention recently. Rancière's inspirational view of equality and intellectual emancipation -in concrete pedagogical practices of education- enables us to see, to think and to be attentive to practices that define our current reality from a quite contrasting perspective as compared to Freire's proposal. In the last stage of this paper, hence, we want to use insights from both authors (Freire-Rancière), to direct further our 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 can be about.

Understanding emancipation[1]

To think of emancipation in education means to think of important questions associated with the achievement of freedom, autonomy, social justice and the construction of the self. In this way, the contribution of Critical Social Theory to emancipation and in particular their focus on education becomes central. 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 notion has certainly influenced authors of the Critical Pedagogy tradition, such as Freire, Giroux, Mc Laren, among others; authors who suggest the importance of education in the

process of individual emancipation and social struggle to fight against institutionalised forms of submission/oppression.

It is also interesting to observe the intricate relationship between emancipation (understood by critical pedagogy as part of social transformation) and its shift in current discourses towards 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 described above. Currently, there is a tendency to frame emancipation in education as empowerment, mainly associated with employability (job-skill training as a tool for employment) and hence to become economic and socially integrated (Inglis 1997; Grace 2007; Galloway 2011; Wildemeersch and Olesen 2012). As suggested by Wildemeersch (2011), presently, '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- and states 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 to pay attention to the 'movement from emancipation to empowerment' associated with a switch from the tradition of critical theory to current discourses in lifelong learning. In the first tradition, emancipation has been mainly associated with the awareness of power relations that play a role in the living conditions of the individuals and in the organisation of society as it stands. In current discourses of the learning society and lifelong learning, the accent is put on empowerment, in terms of the individual responsibility to develop a lifelong learner attitude and to adapt to fast changes in society in order to become competitive. The latter idea, we argue, is very much linked to 'socio-economic empowerment'[3]. In this sense, it is necessary to raise the question of power and how it frames our subjectivity and how it is expressed in personal and social relationships[4]. Rowlands (1997) specifically elaborates on the term empowerment and how it has been used in very different contexts and by different ideologies; she invites us to think on how it is possible that radically different political discourses (left, (neo) liberal, right parties, etc.) use and defend the same concept of empowerment. Are all these political ideologies referring to the same concept, or is it that 'empowerment' has become permeable to all ideologies or to a certain extent meaningless? Accordingly, in current education policy-making, the terms emancipation and empowerment are frequently used interchangeably, being a sign of the shift (in educational discourses) from emancipation (as liberation) towards empowerment (as a functional approach to adapt to society). In this light, Torres (2003), in her analysis of education in the era of lifelong learning 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'.

By considering the above mentioned ongoing debates associated with emancipation and empowerment in education, and what actually an emancipatory education is or should be about, it is interesting to draw upon Biesta's framework about different (overlapping) functions of education. This will allow us to contextualise our understanding of emancipation in VET as well as to address possible tensions regarding the different aims of educational practices. Biesta (2009a, 2009b) elaborates on tensions in educational debates related to three different perspectives on education: *qualification, socialisation and subjectification.*[5] Broadly speaking, *qualification* refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that 'qualify' individuals for a particular task, for instance, training for a specific job (or qualification for the labour market). The second perspective, *socialisation* is about the ways in which 'individuals become part of an existing socio-cultural, political and moral order' (Biesta 2009b, 360). In such a view, education is oriented towards the adjustment of individuals to a particular existing order and its reproduction. According to Biesta, it is however important to account for the interplay of active and passive ways of adaptation into an existing order. Active here refers to individuals who are capable of finding ways to become independent from such orders. In this view, Biesta proposes a third perspective on education, namely *subjectification.* According to Biesta, subjectification should be embedded in every educational practice, in order to enable people to become autonomous in their acts and thinking. It requires from those to be educated not only to 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). 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])

From these differentiated dimensions, the 'qualification and socialisation' perspectives can be aligned with empowerment, while 'subjectification' may be associated with emancipation (Galloway 2011). However, in making this distinction, we risk to frame emancipation (and related terms such as subjectification) as specific aims or functions of educational practices, and hence, immediately qualify the emancipatory potential of education in general or in VET to the extent in which it meets/reaches these aims or fulfil the functions.

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 competences to access current demanding labour market needs (UNESCO 2001)[6]. In the global scene, there seems to be a common assumption for VET to train job-skill workers to adapt to the labour market to acquire vocational-specific skills over a lifetime (Oketch 2007). Additionally, Willis (2009) points out that in a world where knowledge is required to become an active component of society and skills development is the key for employability, VET gains a relevant role in educational policies in order to prepare citizens with valuable skills for the labour market. Generally speaking, 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'. Furthermore, 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 specific focus on job-skill and technical training (Wilson 1996) and on competency-based approaches (Jacinto 2010)[7]. Creating links between VET and the labour market, it is argued, is a big challenge for Latin America, in order to promote labour and social inclusion among the disadvantaged population and to increase equal employment opportunities for all (ADEA 2008)[8]. Against this background, there seems to be a common assumption that the existing inequality in educational backgrounds within the population leads to inequality in job searching and hence social exclusion, in particular among the disadvantaged population. And most importantly, it is assumed that inequalities can be reduced through employability and consequently, VET policies are regarded as a facilitator for the social inclusion of the most disadvantaged groups in society. This understanding of VET related to economic and social inclusion, illustrates a tendency to understand emancipation (in VET) as equivalent to 'economic empowerment', and thus emancipation 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. An example is the work of Velde (1999) that stresses the development of competences in VET from an 'interpretative-relational approach' in which the personal development of the student or worker obtains a central place. Also Winters et al. (2012) stress the importance of a personal reflectivity regarding one's biography through 'vocational training conversations'. These authors engage in the development of 'meaningful learning environments' that allows students to orient their vocational career (in current 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, this alternative (although enhancing a personal reflectivity) does 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 people's own historicity) rather than questioning the taken for granted equivalence training=employability=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 of VET practices. Against this background, we will rely on Freire's and Rancière's work on emancipation to develop an approach that allows us to discuss emancipation as a moment/process of educational practices, and to go beyond the idea that promotes economic empowerment for social integration, and hence the integration into an existing socio-political order. Thus, in what follows, we will elaborate on the concept of

emancipation and the pedagogical approaches of Freire and Rancière, which will enable us to move towards an alternative understanding of the emancipatory potential of VET.

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. Their understanding of education and emancipation goes far beyond a socio-economic utility-seeking approach, and moreover challenges the adaptation to an existing socio-political (hierarchical/regulating) order. Across their works, Freire and Rancière have explored education and emancipation (as central issues) in diverse domains: schooling, art, aesthetics and politics. In this light, it is important not to 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 broader societal issues and politics.

In this paper, however, we will consider those works in which both authors have explicitly combined education and emancipation. For this reason, we will develop their particular views on education and emancipation, principally from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire [1968] 2000) and from *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière 1991). We want to emphasise that in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* 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 pronounced conceptual difference on their understanding of emancipation in education. Therefore, it is necessary to present some of the differences and similarities between the central conceptualisations of these authors regarding emancipation as well as their pedagogical approach. This process of contrast allows us to further conceptualise emancipation related to VET practices.

Freire's emancipation through liberation

First and foremost, Freire develops in his work the intimate connection between education and politics. According to Freire ([1968] 2000), education is never neutral: either it 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. Thus, 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. The author's line of argument goes hand in with the second approach of education (actions of change) that is the development of education practices in view of freedom for the oppressed population, in particular 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' ('problem posing education') as an educational practice that aims at overcoming oppressive conditions and as a pedagogic 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 oppressors and oppressed. Liberatory education, thus, raises students' consciousnesses, preparing them to engage in larger social struggles for liberation. Therefore, education will not only be about the transmission of knowledge, skills and attitudes to students.

It rather is about a practice of reflection on the actual living conditions of particular men and women. Thus, education as a practice of liberation implies a social and political responsibility.

The use of words, for Freire ([1968] 2000; Freire and Macedo [1987] 2001), may enable transformation: 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 has a particular relevance in the life of people, which enables them to reconstruct their world through the word. Freire, in his pedagogy, elaborates on three different central phases suggested in his 'culture circles' dynamics (Freire [1968] 2000; [1973] 2002). Firstly, it is necessary to explore the specific context of a particular area and people living in that area in order to find a common vocabulary and problems experienced by the population (a thematic universe). Secondly, there is a phase of selection of the words/themes that belong to that common vocabulary found in the first stage. The words/themes to be chosen are the so-called 'generative words/themes' because they will enable students to generate other words/themes. For this purpose, the selected words/themes should have a meaningful content as well as an emotional one. Thirdly, he describes the process of (de-)codification of the living and oppressive conditions of the population. This interplay of images and words/themes, codification and de-codification of reality mediated by the use of images and dialogue leads to the conscious awareness of students, thus enables 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 a central stage towards individual emancipation (individual liberation of an oppressive situation) as well as for social emancipation (liberation of the collective towards social change). Conscientisation represents a transition process from being powerless and oppressed to achieving relative control over one's reality. Freire ([1968] 2000; [1973] 2002) develops, through his pedagogy, a sense of awareness which contributes to changing current living conditions. Thus, he clearly indicates a political engagement within educational practices - and emancipation as an outcome of education - that should ultimately lead to social transformation. As a result, through education, an individual should become emancipated and her/his emancipation process should direct her/his action to a broader social struggle, with the aim of achieving social emancipation.

Rancière's emancipation through the verification of equality

In the *Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991a), Rancière re-writes Jacotot's work. Joseph Jacotot (1830) was a French professor who taught French to Dutch-speaking students in Belgium without being able to speak Dutch himself. 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 compare them carefully with the Dutch version. Furthermore, he suggested that they repeat this action daily, memorising a little more every day. Apart from that, 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. This practice is regarded as similar to the acquisition of the mother tongue.

The fact that each person has been able to acquire 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 1991a,18). 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 particular way, Jacotot asserts 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 1991a, 15). Moreover, '…the ignorant person will learn himself what the master does not know if the master believes he can and obliges him to realize his capacity' (15). Rancière sees, in Jacotot's method, a master at work, who instigates the capacity that any person already possesses: the capacity to speak, compare and translate signs. By describing the Jacotot experience, Rancière develops the notion of an 'ignorant schoolmaster', for whom equality (and equality of intelligence) means a 'starting point' and not a goal to be reached. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991a), Rancière proposes emancipation ('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 (Rancière 1991a, 9 [Emphasis in the original]).

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 own words. In this way, teachers and students are considered to have equal intelligence and hence are all capable of speaking.

Against this background, 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. Paraphrasing Rancière, one could say that while the intelligence responds only to itself, and both teacher and students are equally intelligent; the will may not respond only to itself but rather it may obey another will. It is precisely in this sense that Rancière through 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, therefore, largely 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 will be associated with the teacher/students pedagogical relationship towards the content, while the intelligence will emerge 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 ('individual to individual relationship'), there is equality among speaking beings, of intelligence at work. For this reason, according to Rancière, equality only exists in the act and for the individuals ('…only a man can emancipate a man' [Rancière 1991a, 102]), since institutions already embody inequality. In this sense, Rancière, through Jacotot's method, sees emancipation as an act of the individual as opposed to a social method of explanation. Thus, even when there is inequality of living conditions of the population, it should be possible to start from the assumption/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, 1991a).

Summary

By way of a synthesis we present below an overview of the main features of the work of both authors, including their contrasting positions. In doing so, we aim to create a kind of approach that allows us to look at VET practices in another way, that is, to further explore the emancipatory potential of VET with a focus on the pedagogic practices and not just the functions and aims. These authors, in spite of obvious differences, help to look in detail at the pedagogical relationship among teacher (teaching methods), students, and the content. The exploration of the theories of Freire and Rancière, in combination with the pedagogic triangle of Pratt (1998) will help us, therefore, to identify what to observe in order to explore the pedagogic relationship between teachers, students and the content. In *Five perspectives on teaching in adult and higher education*, Pratt (1998) develops and enriches the classical pedagogical triangle (teacher-students-teaching methods/content) associated with various teaching perspectives.

[Table 1 here]

Conclusion

In our overview of ongoing educational debates on VET policy making and the issue of emancipation in VET, we have observed that emancipation in VET is mainly considered a specific function for social and economic integration. In this way, we have identified two dominant positions in the discussion on emancipation in education in general and in VET in particular: *a*-emancipation as socio-economic empowerment; *b*- alternative models in VET practices that enhance 'meaningful learning environments' to become truly emancipatory (i.e. VET includes a subjective career construction through 'learning conversations' in VET [Winters et al. 2012]). Despite this rather specific framing of VET (as 'qualification and socialisation'), the conclusion is not that actual VET practices do not include any kind of emancipation. In order to find out about the emancipatory potential of VET, it is necessary then to approach emancipation from an educational perspective, not as an aim or function, but rather as a process in pedagogical practices. In this sense, it becomes interesting to further explore the concepts of 'political and pedagogic subjectivation' elaborated by Masschelein and Simons (2010a, 2010b). They argue that the school itself includes a very specific educational (and apolitical) perspective on emancipation, although there is an ongoing tendency (by the state or by other actors) to tame the school. They propose, therefore, a distinction between 'political and pedagogic subjectivation':

> While political subjectivation is a disengagement with the police order, pedagogic subjectivation includes engagement with "school material" (texts, books ...) that one has at one's disposal (Masschelein and Simons 2010b, 601[Emphasis in the original]).

We agree that here the emancipatory potential is located within the agent himself, in how s/he positions her/himself with what they have at her/his disposal. This engagement with the school material, thus, may offer an interesting perspective to further discuss the emancipatory potential of pedagogic practices, disregarding discourses on VET as 'qualifying, socialising or empowering' for social integration. Moreover, we may also discuss 'political and pedagogic subjectivation' regarding Freire's and Rancière's understanding of emancipation. On the one

hand, we can discuss Freire's liberatory education ([1968] 2000) in view of a 'political subjectivation' (Masschelein and Simons 2010b), since Freire understands this pedagogical practice not only as a specific educational approach, but rather as a tool for socio-political change. On the other hand, we can discuss Rancière's 'intellectual emancipation' (1991a) in view of a 'pedagogic subjectivation' (Masschelein and Simons 2010b), since Rancière's point of departure is equality of speaking beings and equality of intelligences at work when dealing with 'a thing in common'; thus, engagement with the content of education through which 'intelligence' will emerge. In this sense, this discussion may help us to develop a specific educational approach to emancipation vis-à-vis the emancipatory potential of VET. Therefore, it is important for us to look at emancipation as an educational feature of the educational process or pedagogical approach, informed by Freire's and Rancière's works rather than restricting emancipation to a function/outcome of education. Against this background, we suggest that the insights of both authors (Freire and Rancière) on emancipation and pedagogy can expand the discussion over emancipation in VET that now is held by policy makers, mainly, in view of economic and social integration. If we want to continue our reflection on emancipation in education, we have to go to concrete practices and pedagogical approaches to see what is going on in current VET. When looking at these practices, it could be relevant to use the concepts of Freire and Rancière and see how they help us to understand better the way in which these practices are emancipatory. Therefore, it is necessary to observe in VET practices how the relationship is framed between teacher and students, between the teacher and the content, and both the relationship between teacher and students with the content.

Moreover, we want to raise now the question whether the current understanding of emancipation in VET (as empowerment), actually goes back to a classic distinction between labour and intellectual work. The notion of training/qualification in VET has been broadly used by scholars who are critical about these practices, to argue that emancipation will not be possible in VET, since the training prepares job-specific skilled workers to adapt to the labour market needs without, necessarily, questioning them. However, although VET *par excellence* is an area of education highly engaged with the world of work, and particularly, we may say, of 'manual work', it is debatable whether it necessarily reproduces current living conditions without questioning them. It is, therefore, interesting to further explore this classic dichotomy (labour vs. intellectual work), specifically, from the perspective of Freire ([1968] 2000) and Rancière (1991a, 1991b) whose works we assume are relevant to think emancipation in educational practices and moreover to explore deeper the taking for granted relation: 'education for work' equal 'social inclusion'.

In this paper, we have argued that emancipation/empowerment should not only be understood as an outcome of an educational practice, but first and foremost as part and parcel of the process of this practice. We therefore consider it important for research to concretely observe and interpret these practices in terms of the relationship among teachers, students and what is actually taught (the content). Freire and Rancière are two authors who, by excellence, present ways to engage in such activity. They have elements in common, but they also differ substantially with regard to their understanding of emancipation. We think their understanding of the educational process, also in the context of VET, may help to move beyond a functionalist understanding of emancipation/empowerment which is prominent nowadays, and, in doing so, to understand better to what extent VET practices enable or disable emancipation.

Notes

1. We are interested in exploring what is meant by emancipation in education and pedagogy, for this reason, we refer to the tradition of 'Critical theory' and 'Critical pedagogy' and the relation emancipation-education. However, it does not mean that the above mentioned approaches represent the only possible way to discuss emancipation; but certainly they are appropriate for the aims of this paper.

2. Wildemeersch, D. (2011) Introduction of his presentation at the 5th International Colloquium on Socio-Cultural Animation in Spain.

3. See Rowlands (1997), Luttrell, Quiroz et al (2009), for an in depth development of the term empowerment.

4. See Rowlands (1997) and Foucault (1985) to grasp the concept of power in personal and social relationships and Foucault's studies on 'governmentality'.

5. In more recent works, Biesta focuses on civic learning and he refers only to the classification of socialization and subjectification (Biesta 2011). However, we consider 'qualification' as a core concept for our research in VET practices, thus, we take into consideration his previous texts (Biesta, 2009a, b), wherein he uses the classification of qualification, socialization and subjectification on education.

6. 'Thinking education in economic terms' (under the framing of Knowledge Based-Economies) can be better identified with a omnipresent global policy and practice, in education in general, rather than with an exclusive aim in VET (See Masschelein and Simons 2002; Dale 2005; Robertson 2009a, 2009b; Popkewitz 2011).

7. Beech (2002) provides an in depth analysis of educational reforms in Latin America during the 1990s. He argues that, regarding

8. Biennale of ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa), Uruguay, 2008.

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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 educative process, whereby an illiterate person can even teach someone else to read by directing her/his attention to the text.
Pedagogic approach	- Critical dialogue relationship - Codification/decodification - Unveiling the truth - Conscientisation - Action/social struggle Word=Work=Praxis Reflection/Action 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)	'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' Intelligence emerges from the content: to observe, compare and translate
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. Students 'de/codify' with the help of the teacher who enables students to 'unveil reality'.	Act of translation and counter-translation, particularly in the sense of translating the words of others into one's own words (teachers do not 'unveil reality'; 'everything is in the text').

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.