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Don't be fooled by ignorant schoolmasters: On the role of the teacher in emancipatory education[1]

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Gert Biesta
Brunel University London

Abstract

The question I address in this article is how we might understand the role of the teacher in education that seeks to promote emancipation. I take up this question in conversation with German and North-American versions of critical pedagogy with, the works of Paulo Freire and with that of Jacques Rancière. I show that in each case we find not only a strong argument for emancipatory education but also a distinct view about the role of the teacher. My aim is partly to show the different ways in which the role of the teacher in emancipatory education can be conceived and to make clear how this role is related to the different understandings of emancipation and the dynamics of emancipatory education. The motivation for writing this article also stems from what I see as a rather problematic interpretation of the work of Rancière in recent educational scholarship, one where the key message of his 1991 book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is taken to be that anyone can learn without a teacher and that this alleged 'freedom to learn' would constitute emancipation. I challenge such a constructivist interpretation of Rancière's work and argue that the key message of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is that emancipatory education is not a matter of transfer of knowledge from a teacher who knows to a student who does not (yet) know, but nonetheless is a process in which teachers and their teaching are indispensable. This will allow me to argue why and how teaching remains essential for emancipatory education and why we should therefore not be fooled into thinking that ignorant schoolmasters, because they have no knowledge to give, have nothing to teach and can be done away with.

Keywords

Critical pedagogy, emancipatory education, Jacques Rancière, Paulo Freire, teaching, the role of the teacher

Corresponding author:
Gert Biesta, Department of Education, Brunel University London, Kingston Lane, Uxbridge UB8 3PH, England, UK.
Email: gert.biesta@brunel.ac.uk

Introduction: In search of the teacher

The question I seek to address in this article is how we might understand the role of the teacher in education that seeks to promote emancipation. I approach this question in conversation with the German and with that of North-American versions of critical pedagogy, with the work of Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière. In each case, we cannot only find a strong argument for emancipatory education, but also a distinctive view about the role of the teacher. My aim is partly to show the different ways in which the role of the teacher in emancipatory education can be conceived and to make clear how this role is related to different understandings of emancipation and the dynamics of emancipatory education. But the motivation for writing this article also stems from what I see as a rather problematic interpretation of the work of Rancière in recent educational scholarship, one where the key message of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière, 1991) is taken to be that anyone can *learn* without a teacher and that this alleged 'freedom to learn' would constitute a, or perhaps even *the*, 'moment' of emancipation (for a discussion on this, see Biesta and Bingham, 2012; Pelletier, 2012; see also Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2015; Stamps, 2013).

In this article I seek to challenge this interpretation of Rancière's work and will argue that the key message of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is rather that emancipatory education is not a matter of transfer of knowledge from a teacher who knows to a student who does not (yet) know, but nonetheless is a process in which teachers and their teaching are indispensable. What complicates the discussion is the fact that in his later work – and here I will particularly focus on Rancière's essay 'The emancipated spectator' (Rancière, 2009: chapter 1) – Rancière seems to have 'forgotten' this message himself and seems to be turning the argument for emancipatory teaching into an argument about emancipatory learning, in other words, focusing on the freedom of students and other 'spectators' to construct their own meanings and understandings (for a similar 'problem' in Rancière's engagement with the work of Althusser, see Lewis, 2012: 31).[2] By showing how such a constructivist interpretation goes against what I consider to be Rancière's unique contribution to the discussion about educational emancipation, I will also be able to articulate with more precision why and how teaching is indispensable for emancipatory education and why we should therefore not be fooled into thinking that ignorant schoolmasters, because they have no knowledge to give, have therefore nothing to teach and can be done away with.

Education as a matter of emancipation[3]

The idea that education is not just about the perfection of individuals through their engagement with culture and history – a line of thought particularly prominent in the Greek idea of *paideia* (παιδεία) and in some conceptions of the idea of *Bildung* (for a critical discussion, see Heydorn, 1972; Klafki, 1986) – but ultimately has to do with their existence as autonomous subjects (Drerup, 2015) and thus with their *emancipation*, has been part of the modern educational experience at least since Rousseau (Løvlie, 2002). If *paideia* was an education *for* free men to further their freedom as citizens and in this regard stood in opposition to the education meant for manual labourers and artisans, the *banausoi* (βάναυσοι) (Jaeger, 1945), the modern experience came to see education as a process that should bring about freedom. It thus conceived of education as a process of *liberation*.

While some authors were interested in the ways in which education *might* contribute to such liberation, others made the stronger claim that education is *necessary* for such liberation. The often quoted opening sentence of Kant's essay 'An answer to the question

"What is Enlightenment?"' in which he defines enlightenment as the human being's 'release from his self-incurred tutelage' and saw tutelage or immaturity as 'man's inability to make use of his understanding without the direction from another' (Kant, 1992 [1784]: 90), provides a telling example of the latter approach, particularly when combined with the claim from his essay on education that human beings can *only* become human through education and are nothing but for what education makes of them (see Kant, 1982: 701).[4]

From here the emancipatory impetus developed along two lines, one which we might call child-centred or psychological, and another which we might call society-centred or sociological. The first followed Rousseau's insight that adaptation of the child to the external societal order would corrupt the child, which led to the idea that a choice *for* the child could only mean a choice *against* society. This line of thought not only played an important role in the establishment of education as an independent academic discipline in Germany towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century (see Biesta, 2011). It was also central to child-centred forms of education that emerged around the time under such names as 'progressive education', 'Reformpädagogik' or 'éducation nouvelle'. These developments were further supported by theories that conceived of the child as a natural category and a 'given', and not as something that had to be understood in social, historical or political terms.

In the German context, the limitations of this understanding of emancipatory education became painfully clear when it turned out that theories and practices that focused exclusively on 'the child' could easily be inserted into a wide range of different ideological systems, including Nazism and fascism (see, for example, Klafki and Brockmann, 2003). This is why after the Second World War, educators and educationalists in Germany such as Herwig Blankertz and Klaus Mollenhauer turned to Marxist and neo-Marxist thought, including the early work of Jürgen Habermas, in order to develop what in Germany became known as 'kritische Pädagogik' (for example, Mollenhauer, 1976 [1968]). About two decades later, but with precursors in the work of 'social reconstructionist' educationalists such as George Counts (see Stanley, 1992), a similar strand of work emerged in North America through the work of authors such as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren under the name of 'critical pedagogy'. As a critical theory of and for education, the emancipatory interests of these forms of critical pedagogy focused on the analysis of oppressive structures, practices and theories with the ambition to bring about 'demystification' and 'liberation from dogmatism' (phrases used by both McLaren and Mollenhauer; see McLaren, 1997: 218; Mollenhauer, 1976: 67).

The modern logic of emancipation and its contradictions

The concept of emancipation that emerges from this line of thinking is one that conceives of emancipation as liberation from the oppressive workings of power. A crucial step in the process of emancipation therefore consists of exposing the workings of power – demystification – because it is assumed that only when we know how power works and how it works upon us that we can begin to liberate ourselves and others from it. What the Marxist tradition added to this – and this, in turn, has had a crucial influence on critical and emancipatory pedagogies – is the notion of *ideology*. Although the question of the exact meaning of this concept is a topic of ongoing debates (see Eagleton, 2007), one of the key insights expressed in the concept of ideology is not only that all thought is socially determined – following Marx's dictum that 'it is not the consciousness of man that

determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness' (Marx, quoted in Eagleton, 2007: 80) – but also, and more importantly, that ideology is thought 'which *denies* this determination' (Eagleton, 2007: 89).

The latter claim is linked to Friedrich Engels' notion of false consciousness: the idea that 'the real motives impelling [the agent] remain unknown to him' (Engels, quoted in Eagleton, 2007: 89). The predicament of ideology lies in the claim that it is precisely because of the way in which power works upon our consciousness that we are unable to see how power works upon our consciousness. This not only implies that in order to free ourselves from the workings of power we need to expose how power works upon our consciousness. It also means that in order for us to achieve emancipation, *someone else*, whose consciousness is not subjected to the workings of power, needs to provide us with an account of our objective condition (on this theme see also Honig, 2003). According to this line of thought, therefore, emancipation is ultimately contingent upon the truth about our objective condition, a truth that can only be generated by someone who is positioned *outside* of the influence of ideology – and in the Marxist tradition, this position is considered to be occupied either by science or by philosophy.

This line of thought not only provides us with a particular 'logic' of emancipation – one that sees emancipation as a liberation from oppressive power structures and processes – but also provides us with a particular 'logic' of emancipatory education, one that seeks to bring about such liberation through acts of 'demystification' and 'liberation from dogmatism', as mentioned above. Key to the modern 'logic' of emancipation is the idea that emancipation requires a particular intervention from the 'outside' by emancipators who themselves are not subjected to the power that needs to be overcome. This intervention takes the form of demystification, that is, of revealing to the ones to be emancipated what their objective condition is. This not only makes emancipation into something that is done *to* someone but also reveals that emancipation is based upon an assumed inequality between the emancipator and the one being emancipated, an inequality that will only be resolved in the future when emancipation has been achieved or brought about.

It is presumably not too difficult to recognise a particular pedagogy in this depiction of the modern 'logic' of emancipation. This is a pedagogy where the teacher knows and, more specifically, knows something about the objective condition of the student, and where it is, therefore, the task of the teacher to explain this condition to the student with the ambition that the student ultimately becomes like the teacher or, to be more precise, that the student moves from a situation of ignorance about his or her objective position to one of knowledge and understanding, similar to the knowledge and understanding the teacher already possesses. Such a situation may be described as one of equality.

As I have discussed elsewhere in more detail (Biesta, 2010a), the modern 'logic' of emancipation is not without problems and not without contradictions. One problem is the fact that although emancipation is aimed at liberation of the one to be emancipated, it actually installs dependency at the very heart of the act of emancipation. After all, the one to be emancipated is dependent upon a 'powerful intervention' by the emancipator in order to gain his or her freedom. More importantly for the argument in this article, this intervention is based on knowledge the emancipator claims to have about the objective condition of the one to be emancipated; knowledge which, before emancipation 'arrives', is hidden from the one to be emancipated. This means that the modern 'logic' of emancipation starts from a distrust in the experiences of the one to be emancipated, suggesting that we cannot really trust what we see or feel but need someone else to tell us what is really going on.

Whereas in classical Marxism the Marxist philosopher was supposed to be able to occupy this position, in our times we often find psychology and sociology in this position, asserting that they can reveal to us what is really going on in our heads – or more often nowadays: our brains – and in our social lives. Rancière captures well what is going on here by highlighting that under this logic of emancipation we need someone who 'lifts a veil off the obscurity of things', who 'carries obscure depth to the clear surface, and who, conversely, brings the false appearance of the surface back to the secret depths of reason' (Rancière, 2010: 4).

We should not immediately reject the modern 'logic' of emancipation, but should at least try to understand the particular issues it sought to address and the particular 'frame' from which it attempted to do so. Nonetheless, the clear tension between the ambition to liberate and the claim that this requires someone telling you what is really going on in your head, may help to see why an encounter with the modern 'logic' of emancipation may not immediately 'feel empowering' (Ellsworth, 1989).

Paulo Freire, emancipation and the pedagogy of the oppressed

The contradictions of the modern 'logic' of emancipation resonate strongly with what Paulo Freire has referred to as 'banking education', a mode of education where students are turned into '"receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher' and where teaching becomes an 'act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor' (Freire, 1993: 53). The fact that banking education appears to be central to the modern 'logic' of emancipation and emancipatory education raises the interesting question of how Freire's own conception differs from this – a question that is particularly important given Freire's place in the 'canon' of modern critical pedagogy (see, for example, Lankshear and McLaren, 1994). The critical difference, I suggest, has to do with Freire's understanding of oppression, that is, of that from which we need to be emancipated.

For Freire, oppression is not a matter of one person or group exerting (unwarranted) power over another person or group, but rather concerns a situation of *alienation*. Although alienation may well be the result of one person or group exerting unwarranted power over another person or group, the exercise of unwarranted power as such does not constitute the kind of oppression Freire seeks to overcome. Freire rather defines oppression as the situation where human beings *are prevented from being human* – or as he tends to put it: where human beings are prevented from being 'more fully human' (Freire, 1993: 39).

This not only explains why Freire characterises liberation as a process of *humanization*, that is, of becoming more fully human. It also shows why Freire is not after the liberation of the oppressed from the power of the oppressors, but after liberating them *both* from the inauthentic and alienated way of being in their linked identities of oppressor and oppressed, so that they can 'enter the historical process as responsible Subjects' (Freire, 1993: 18). This also makes clear why Freire's pedagogy is not a pedagogy *for* the oppressed where, through a powerful intervention the oppressed are set free, but a pedagogy *of* the oppressed. Freire emphasises again and again that 'the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed [is] to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well' (Freire, 1993: 26).[5]

For Freire, authentic existence is a way of existing as a subject of one's own actions rather than as the object of someone else's actions. Authentic existence is therefore a matter of freedom. Yet freedom for Freire is not a matter of just doing what one wants to do, but encompasses autonomy *and* responsibility (Freire, 1993: 29; see also Lewis, 2012: 82–86). Moreover, to exist as subject rather than object does not mean that one exists purely for and

with oneself. Freire stresses that 'world and human beings do not exist apart from each other, [but] exist in constant interaction' (Freire, 1993: 32). For Freire, the interaction between human subjects and the world requires both action and reflection. The 'action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it' is what he calls *praxis* (see Freire, 1993: 60). Praxis thus characterises the authentic existence as subject, which is why Freire sees it as 'the new raison d'être of the oppressed' (Freire, 1993: 48), that is, *after* they have overcome their alienated way of being.

Freire's understanding of oppression as alienation provides the reason why his critique of banking education is different from common complaints about the transmission conception of education as a conception informed by a deficient theory of learning. Although Freire does argue that banking education leads to superficial forms of learning where 'words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity' leading to memorisation but not to real understanding (Freire, 1993: 52), his critique is not that banking education relies on a misguided learning theory so that all problems are resolved if we were to allow students to be active constructors rather than passive recipients. He rather hints at the deeper point that in banking education students can only appear as objects of the acts of the teacher and not as human subjects in their own right. In banking education, 'the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are merely objects' (Freire, 1993: 54). Emancipatory education therefore needs to begin with addressing 'the teacher-student contradiction' which in his view can only be done 'by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both teachers and students are simultaneously teachers *and* students' (Freire, 1993: 53; emphasis in original).

The roles of the teacher in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Freire's 'response' to the problems of the modern 'logic' of emancipation thus seems to be one that heralds the end of the teacher. After all, in order to overcome the 'teacher-student contradiction' characteristic of banking education, both the teacher and the student need to give up the very identity that keeps them in an oppressive and dehumanising relationship. Instead they need to engage in a relationship which Freire calls *dialogue*.

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.
>
> (Freire, 1993: 61)

One could say that Freire here dissolves the (oppressive) teacher-student relationship of banking education by turning it into a process of joint learning, joint discovery, of joint creation of knowledge, although in Freire's vocabulary it is more accurate to say that banking education is transformed into joint *praxis*, that is, into an authentic human existence for both the (former) oppressor and the (former) oppressed. This is no longer a situation in which the teacher is the one who has knowledge and the students just memorise the content narrated by the teacher. Instead both are involved in collective acts of inquiry, inquiry in 'fellowship and solidarity' which are 'directed towards humanization' (Freire, 1993: 66).

In Freire's hands, the teacher is transformed into a fellow-inquirer, that is, someone who, always together with their students, is involved in praxis, that is, in transformational

action-reflection. Here the teacher is a subject *with* other subjects, rather than a subject depositing knowledge into objects. In one and the same move, students cease to be 'docile listeners' and become 'critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher' (Freire, 1993: 62). In this situation, Freire argues, 'no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught' (Freire, 1993: 61).

While at this level the 'banking-teacher' disappears and the teacher-as-fellow-inquirer emerges, it is important to acknowledge that this is not the only figure of the teacher present in Freire's work. There are at least two more 'teachers' to be found in Freire's writings. This raises the interesting question of how these different identities can be reconciled. The key here is to see that the image of the teacher-as-fellow-inquirer, as subject involved in praxis with other subjects, describes the situation where the teacher-student contradiction *has been resolved*. It describes, in other words, the situation *after* alienation. But the important question for emancipatory education is not so much what this situation looks like, *but how we might get there* and whether teachers have anything to do with moving towards the situation where the teacher-student contradiction has been resolved.

The first point Freire repeatedly makes in relation to this question is that oppression cannot be overcome through banking education. 'The pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors' (Freire, 1993: 36), because such a 'gesture' – which can take the form, for example, of 'false generosity' or 'paternalism' – 'itself maintains and embodies oppression' (Freire, 1993: 36). This reveals that Freire is well aware of the contradictions that characterise the modern 'logic' of emancipation and their enactment in educational settings and why he maintains that 'the great humanistic and historical task' of liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressors lies with the *oppressed* and has to lie with them (Freire, 1993: 26).

But Freire immediately adds that 'if the implementation of a liberating education requires political power and the oppressed have none', this raises the problem of how the oppressed can carry out a liberating pedagogy 'prior to the revolution' (Freire, 1993: 36). Freire's response to this predicament is twofold. First, he makes a distinction between two stages within 'libertarian pedagogy', the first in which 'the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through praxis commit themselves to its transformation', and the second 'in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, [so that] this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation' (Freire, 1993: 36).

But – and this is the second part of Freire's response – the 'pedagogy of the first stage' must deal with another problem too, which is 'the problem of the oppressed consciousness' (Freire, 1993: 37), a consciousness shaped by the very relationship of oppression that needs to be overcome. While Freire highlights that this 'does not necessarily mean that the oppressed are unaware that they are downtrodden... their perception of themselves as oppressed is [nonetheless] impaired by their submission in the reality of oppression' (Freire, 1993: 27). 'Submerged in this reality', Freire writes, 'the oppressed cannot perceive clearly the ''order'' which serves the interests of the oppressors whose image they have internalized' (Freire, 1993: 44).

So how is it possible to change this situation? This is perhaps the most delicate aspect of Freire's theory, because on the one hand, he wants to resist the idea that the oppressed must be told to become subjects of their own history. Yet on the other, because the 'oppressed consciousness' prevents the oppressed from seeing themselves as subjects of their own

history, the oppressed need in some way to be 'prompted' to become engaged 'in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human' (Freire, 1993: 48); they must be 'prompted' to 'engage in reflection on their concrete situation' on the assumption that 'reflection – true reflection – leads to action' so that this is not a matter of 'armchair revolution' (Freire, 1993: 48).[6]

Freire adds two points to this. One is that 'action will constitute authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection', that is, if they bring about 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1993: 48). The other is that Freire does give a specific name to those who do the prompting – he calls them 'revolutionary leaders' (see, for example, Freire, 1993: 49) – though he does emphasise that these are not leaders who lead the oppressed out of their oppression, but leaders who are involved, alongside the oppressed, in transformational action-reflection, that is, in praxis. This is why Freire writes that a process through which they discover themselves as the 'permanent re-creators' of reality, and thus as subjects of their own history can only come about if:

> [r]evolutionary leadership ... practice[s] *co-intentional* education [where] teachers and students (leadership and people) co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge.
>
> (Freire, 1993: 51).

In the idea of the 'revolutionary leader' we can see a different figure of the teacher at work in Freire's thought, namely of the teacher as the one *who instigates praxis*, not as a powerful act through which the oppressed are liberated from their delusions but by starting up, in a kind of boot-strapping way, the very transformational action-reflection that characterises the human way of being in the world. While the 'revolutionary leader' is close to the teacher-student who works with the student-teachers *after* the revolution, the work of the teacher before the revolution is at least different in its orientation, as it aims to *engage* the oppressed in transformational action-reflection – and in his discussion of problem-posing education (see Freire, 1993: chapter 4) Freire describes in much detail how such engaging of the oppressed in praxis might be carried out.

While in this way Freire seems to make an interesting case for a form of emancipatory teaching that does not fall back onto the monological mode of banking education, there is one further level in Freire's work and hence a third figure of the teacher where Freire is less successful in resolving the predicament of emancipatory teaching without banking. This comes into view when we see that in such books as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire himself operates as a teacher, not only by telling (other) teachers what they should and should not do, but also by expressing strong claims about the allegedly true nature of human beings. After all, as discussed above, Freire defines oppression as the situation where human beings are prevented from being 'more fully human', thus implying that to overcome alienation means to be closer to what it means to exist in a (more) fully human way. While Freire's depiction of what it means to be human is not entirely without reason, it is nonetheless a very particular vision of what it means to be human, and therefore perhaps one that not everyone will accept or recognise as what all human beings ought to strive for.

Although Freire's critique of the logic of oppression is original and important, and although the metaphor of banking education, particularly in the way in which Freire uses and develops this idea, provides a powerful reference point for the critique of monological

educational practices in which students can only appear as objects, the way in which Freire himself appears as a teacher shows that it is perhaps more difficult to escape from a banking mode of emancipatory education than Freire seems to believe. It is here that Rancière's account of Joseph Jacotot, the 'ignorant schoolmaster', seeks to articulate a different response to the contradictions of the modern 'logic' of emancipation and emancipatory education.

Rancière, Jacotot and the ignorant schoolmaster

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Rancière, 1991), Rancière recounts the story of Joseph Jacotot (1770–1840), a French schoolteacher who during his exile in Belgium in the first decades of the 19th century developed an educational approach, which he called 'universal teaching'. Jacotot's approach stemmed from a discovery he made when he was invited to teach French to Flemish students whose language he didn't speak. What was peculiar about this situation was that there was 'no language in which he could teach what they [his students] sought from him' (Rancière, 1991: 1). Nonetheless, his students did manage to learn to speak and write French, which they accomplished through studying a bilingual edition of Fénelon's novel *Télémaque*.

Rancière's exploration of the 'case' of Jacotot is interesting for two reasons, which are both connected to the discussion of Freire. One has to do with the fact that Jacotot and his students did not share a language, so that there was no possibility for Jacotot to deposit any content in the minds of the students. There was, in other words, no possibility for banking education. Yet, while in this regard – that is in terms of the transmission of knowledge – Jacotot wasn't able to teach his students anything, Rancière insists that this doesn't mean that Jacotot's students learned without a schoolmaster. This means that, in another sense, Jacotot *did* teach and *did* act as a schoolmaster. And it is precisely in relation to this point that Jacotot – at least in the hands of Rancière[7] – provides a way of overcoming the Freirean 'teacher-student contradiction' that does *not* result in the dissolution of the teacher in the way in which I have shown this to be the case in Freire. Let me briefly try to explain how this is achieved.

Whereas Freire focused his critique on education as a process of *banking*, Rancière's critique has a slightly different target as it focuses of the role of *explanation*. Rancière contends that in educational settings, explanation offers itself 'as a means to reduce the situation of inequality where those who know nothing are in relation with those who know' (Rancière, 2010: 3). When teachers explain something to their students, they do so with the intention of giving their students the knowledge and understanding they do not yet have. In this sense, it looks reasonable to think of explanation as the way to overcome the inequality between the teacher who knows and the student who doesn't know *yet*.

Rancière argues, however, that whereas this may be true when we look at the content being transmitted from the teacher to the student, the way in which the 'act' of explanation is itself performed communicates something different, namely that explanation is *indispensable* for learning and understanding, that is, that students are thought to be *un*able to understand *without* explanation. This is the point Rancière makes when he suggests that 'to explain something to someone is first of all to show him [that] he cannot understand it by himself' (Rancière, 1991: 6), which means that to explain is 'to *demonstrate* an incapacity' (Rancière,

2010: 3; emphasis added). Explanation then turns education into what Rancière refers to as *stultification* – a process that keeps students 'in their place', that literally keeps them stupid and without a voice – rather than as a process of *emancipation*.

Rancière thus suggests that explanation actually enacts and in a sense inaugurates and then perpetually confirms the inequality of teacher and student. In this set-up it is not so much that a student is the one who *needs* explanation. It is rather that the act of explanation constitutes the student as the one who is unable to learn *without* explanation, *without* the intervention of a 'master-explicator'. This leads Rancière to the conclusion that the student so conceived is actually the *product* of the 'explicative order' (Rancière, 1991: 4), not its condition. The explicative order is founded upon what Rancière calls the 'myth of pedagogy', which is 'the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid' (Rancière, 1991: 6). The explicator's 'special trick' here consists of a 'double inaugural gesture' (Rancière, 1991: 6).

> On the one hand, he decrees the absolute beginning: it is only now that the act of learning will begin. On the other, having thrown a veil of ignorance over everything that is to be learned, he appoints himself to the task of lifting it.
>
> (Rancière, 1991: 6–7)

The intention behind this approach to teaching is generally a laudable one, as the teacher aims 'to transmit his knowledge to his students so as to bring them, by degrees, to his own level of expertise' (Rancière, 1991: 3). The 'art' of the schoolmaster, 'who methodically lifts the veil from that which the student could not understand alone, is the art that promises the student will one day be the equal of the schoolmaster' (Rancière, 2010: 5). But will this promise ever be delivered? Is it ever possible to escape from the circle of explanation? Or is it the case that as soon as one starts out on a trajectory of explanation, one will be there forever, always trying to catch up, always trying to understand what the explicator already understands, but always in need of the explicator's explanation in order to understand?[8] Viewed in this way explanation is actually 'something completely different from a practical means of reaching some end' and rather appears to be an end in itself. Explanation is 'the infinite verification of a fundamental axiom: the axiom of inequality' (Rancière, 2010: 3).

Rancière's emancipatory teacher

The question this raises is whether it is possible to break away from the circle of powerlessness 'that ties the student to the explicator' (Rancière, 1991: 15)? Rancière suggests that this may indeed be possible, but not through the introduction of more 'refined' or more 'progressive' forms of explanation. Here, Rancière clearly diverges from the path of modern 'logic' of emancipatory education by arguing against the idea that emancipation results from an explanation of the objective condition of the student. He writes:

> The distinction between 'stultification' and 'emancipation' is not a distinction between methods of instruction. It is not a distinction between traditional or authoritarian methods, on the one hand, and new or active methods, on the other: stultification can and does happen in all kinds of active and modern ways.
>
> (Rancière 2010: 6)

The more fundamental question that emerges from this discussion is therefore whether it is possible to teach *without explanation*, and it is here that the case of Jacotot is relevant, because it provides us precisely with an example of this.

Yet what is important about the 'case' of Jacotot – and it is here that Rancière and Freire diverge – is that the case of Jacotot is not one where the teacher had completely withdrawn and education had turned into collective learning or collaborative inquiry. It rather provides us with an example of an educational 'dynamic' where students learned without a 'master-*explicator*' (Rancière, 1991: 12; emphasis added). Rancière summarises this by saying that 'Jacotot had taught them something [but] he had communicated nothing to them' (Rancière, 1991: 13). The dissociation of teaching from communication is central to Rancière's argument and provides one way to understand the idea of the ignorant schoolmaster, as the educational dynamic that is at stake here is one that no longer relies on the (superior) knowledge of the schoolmaster. But in what way, then, is the ignorant schoolmaster involved in teaching?

Rancière characterises the shift that is at stake here with the help of the distinction between intelligence and will, in that what Jacotot did was not to replace the intelligence of his students with his own intelligence, but rather to *summon* his students to use their own intelligence. The relationship between Jacotot and his students is therefore not a relationship of intelligence to intelligence but of 'will to will' (Rancière, 1991: 13). From this Rancière concludes that whereas stultification takes place 'whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another', emancipation takes place when an intelligence obeys only itself 'even while the will obeys another will' (Rancière, 1991: 13). What therefore is at the heart of the conception of emancipatory education that emerges from this, is what Rancière describes as the act of revealing 'an intelligence to itself' (Rancière, 1991: 28).[9]

Rancière highlights that the route students will take when summoned to use their intelligence is unknown, but what the student cannot escape is 'the exercise of his liberty' (Rancière, 1991: 23).[10] This is why Rancière concludes that there are only two 'fundamental acts' for the schoolmaster: 'He *interrogates*, he demands speech, that is to say, the manifestation of an intelligence that wasn't aware of itself or that had given up' and 'he *verifies* that the work of the intelligence is done with attention' (Rancière, 1991: 29; emphasis in original). What is verified here is not the *outcome* of the use of intelligence, as this would return the process to that of explanation, but only the *use* of intelligence, in other words, that the 'work' of intelligence is done with attention. Rancière emphasises that this interrogation should not be understood in the Socratic way where the purpose of the interrogation seems to be that of leading the student to a point that is already known by the master. While this 'may be the path to learning', it is 'in no way a path to emancipation' (Rancière, 1991: 29). Central to emancipation, then, is the consciousness 'of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself' (Rancière, 1991: 39).

Rancière highlights that to start from the assumption of the equality of all speaking beings is not to assume, naively, that equality *exists*. It is not to assume that he has a special insight into how inequality exists and how it can be transformed into equality. Rancière actually writes that about inequality 'there is nothing to know' (Rancière, 2010: 4) – which adds another layer of meaning to the idea of the ignorant schoolmaster.

> Inequality is no more a given to be transformed by knowledge than equality is an end to be transmitted through knowledge. Equality and inequality are not two states. They are two

> 'opinions', that is to say two distinct axioms, by which educational training can operate, two axioms that have nothing in common. All that one can do is verify the axiom one is given. The schoolmaster's explanatory logic presents inequality axiomatically … The ignorant schoolmaster's logic poses equality as an axiom to be verified. It relates the state of inequality in the teacher-student relation not to the promise of an equality-to-come that will never come, but to the reality of a basic equality.
> (Rancière, 2010: 5)

The point for Rancière, in short, is not to *prove* the equality of intelligence, 'It's seeing what can be done under that supposition' (Rancière, 1991: 46).

The figure of the ignorant schoolmaster that emerges from Rancière's discussion of Jacotot – and I wish to emphasise one more time that what we are looking at is Rancière's 'use' of the case of Jacotot, not Jacotot himself – is important in the context of the question of whether teaching has a role to play in education that aims at emancipation. It is important to keep this focus in mind, that is, to see the figure of the ignorant schoolmaster as having to do with the question of emancipatory education, and not to see it as a paradigm for all dimensions of education.

Rancière's 'intervention' is clearly orientated towards the question of how in educational relationships and settings students can appear and exist as subjects rather than objects and towards the question of what this requires from the teacher. Rancière's argument is therefore neither an argument *against* education as the transmission of knowledge or education as explanation – those 'modes' of education are perfectly acceptable if the ambition is to transmit knowledge or to bring about understanding – nor an argument for a kind of constructivist classroom in which the teacher is only present as a facilitator of learning, but no longer has something to teach and is no longer allowed to teach something (on the latter, see Biesta, 2012).

The point I wish to make here – and this is crucial for what I seek to do in this article – is that *Rancière's argument is an argument about emancipation and the role of the teacher in emancipatory education, and not a general theory of education or schooling or the dynamics of instruction (didactics)* (which is why Jacotot's notion of 'universal teaching' is misleading where it concerns the way in which Rancière makes use of Jacotot). At a very basic level, Rancière's argument is a critique of the idea that emancipation relies upon some deeper insight about our true human existence which, through an act of explanation, needs to be transmitted from the emancipator to the one to be emancipated. In this sense, he appears to be in agreement with Freire's insight that banking education can never be the method of emancipation. Both Freire and Rancière disagree with a basic tenet of the modern 'logic' of emancipation and emancipatory education, namely the idea that emancipation rests on providing an explanation of the objective condition of the one to be emancipated. But there are three ways in which Rancière's approach differs from Freire's.[11]

One is that Rancière's approach retains a very explicit and precise task for the teacher and therefore also retains a very specific identity for the teacher, albeit not in terms of the transmission of knowledge, but in terms of a relationship at the level of will. Rancière describes the 'logic' of emancipatory teaching in the following way: 'The emancipatory teacher's call forbids the supposed ignorant one the satisfaction of what is known, the satisfaction of admitting that one is incapable of knowing more' (Rancière, 2010: 6). The second difference is that for Rancière equality is not some kind of deeper truth about the human being which would, as I have shown to be the case with Freire, turn emancipatory

teaching back to the transmission of a truth about the true and objective condition of the one to be emancipated. For Rancière, equality functions as an assumption, as something that gives direction to emancipatory teaching; not as a truth upon which it is founded but as a possibility that constantly asks for what Rancière terms verification; not to be understood as providing evidence for its truth, but understood in the literal sense of making true, that is, acting as if it were true in order to see what follows from it. This also means, and this is the third point where Rancière's approach differs, that equality is not projected into the future as a state that will only come into existence 'after the revolution' (see Thompson, 1997), but is situated in the here and now.

Three conceptions of emancipatory education: Liberation, truth and teaching

Comparing the modern 'logic' of emancipation with the views of Freire and Rancière reveals a number of important differences in how emancipation is conceived and how the role of education – and more specifically the role of the teacher – is understood. According to the modern 'logic', emancipation is understood as *liberation from power*. As oppression is not just understood in material terms but also in what we might call discursive terms – the idea of ideology – liberation relies on a teacher who provides the one to be emancipated with the non-distorted truth about their objective condition.

Freire and Rancière are both critical of the modern 'logic' of emancipation, but for different reasons and with different outcomes. For Freire the main problem seems to be the powerful position of the teacher, hence he conceives of emancipatory education as a process where the teacher becomes a fellow-inquirer together with other fellow-inquirers collectively involved in the action-reflection process called praxis. Freire thus takes the teacher out of the equation (albeit that he struggles to do so entirely as he still has a role for the revolutionary leader and ultimately appears as a teacher himself, making claims about the authentic condition of the human being). This is the reason why he defines oppression as *alienation* from this authentic condition and emancipation as a return to this condition.

Against this background we can see that Rancière goes exactly in the opposite direction, as he gives up on the idea that it is possible or necessary to base emancipation on a truth about the objective or authentic condition of the human being. But unlike Freire he does retain a key role for the teacher; not, however, as the one who provides the ones to be emancipated with knowledge about their objective or authentic condition – which is the reason why the emancipatory schoolmaster is *ignorant* – but by enacting a particular intervention or 'interruption' (see Biesta, 2009), one that, as he puts it, *forbids* the one to be emancipated the satisfaction of claiming that one is incapable of learning, thinking and acting for oneself. Oppression thus appears as the belief that one is unable to learn, think and act for oneself – a rejection of one's freedom – and emancipation concerns revealing 'an intelligence to itself' (Rancière, 1991: 28) or, in a more precise formulation, interrupting and refusing the student's denial of their own freedom.

Simply put, then, the modern logic of emancipation relies on a teacher and truth. Freire removes the teacher and ultimately retains the role of truth, whereas Rancière retains the teacher but removes truth. For Rancière emancipation doesn't run on a truth to be conveyed from the teacher to the student and therefore the emancipatory teacher appears as ignorant.

Constructivist enthusiasm: The uptake of Rancière

In the foregoing pages I have provided a reconstruction of three different conceptions of emancipation and three different approaches to emancipatory education. Starting from the contradictions that are present in the modern 'logic' of emancipation, I have presented Freire and Rancière as providing two different responses to these contradictions. Each takes a different 'horn' of the dilemma posed by the modern logic of emancipation. Whereas Freire tries to get rid of the authoritarian teacher who prevents students from appearing as subjects in the educational relationship, we could say that Rancière gets rid of the role of authoritarian knowledge that prevents students from being different from how they are being defined by that knowledge and how they come to define themselves by it, namely as *incapable*. I have also highlighted that Freire and Rancière introduce different understandings of oppression and that their views about emancipation respond to those understandings.

My particular interest in this article, however, has been the role, position and identity of the teacher in emancipatory education, and it is here that I wish to locate the unique contribution Rancière has made to the discussion, as he has managed to introduce a 'third option': *This is the option where teachers actually have something important to do vis-à-vis emancipation and are not seen, as was the case in Freire, as part of the problem*. But unlike the idea that teachers should supplant false consciousness in their students with true consciousness – a manoeuvre that Freire rightly objects to – Rancière takes the question of emancipation away from matters of knowledge and truth. We can see this in the two formulations he provides for the role of the emancipatory schoolmaster. One formulation is 'positive' in the sense that it indicates what the emancipatory teacher should do, namely 'revealing an intelligence to itself'. The other formulation is 'negative' in that it is about forbidding the supposed ignorant one 'the satisfaction of admitting that one is incapable of knowing more'.[12]

What is remarkable about the uptake of Rancière's work in the field of education is that many seem to have missed the particular 'edge' of Rancière's argument – that is, that it's an argument about the role of knowledge in emancipatory education (and, more specifically, a rejection of the idea that emancipation 'runs' on demystifying knowledge) – and have read it as a general discussion about education-as-instruction rather than a specific discussion of education-as-emancipation. Moreover, the idea of the ignorant schoolmaster has been read along the lines of contemporary constructivism, where it seems to have become 'common sense' to claim that in education everything centres around student learning – their acts of sense making – and the only thing teachers can do is to facilitate such sense making, but they cannot – and according to some ought not – try to transfer knowledge from themselves to the student.

Pelletier (2012: 615), for example, refers to this view when she writes that 'teaching, as all good, progressive teachers know, is not about transmitting knowledge, but enabling another to learn'. Engels-Schwarzpaul (2015: 1253–1254) makes a similar claim in her discussion of Rancière, when she writes that 'it is now widely accepted that learning is not based on the unilateral conveyance of knowledge from teacher to student', but rather that it is 'more effective when students take an active part in knowledge building'. Against this background, she takes the key message of Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* to be one of '[encouraging] learning through the use of one's own intelligence, experiment and experience, attentiveness and persistence' (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2015: 1255).

There is a similar tendency in the account Chambers (2013) gives of Rancière's educational theory. Although strongly focusing on political questions, Chambers, where it

concerns matters of education, comes close to a constructivist reading of Rancière as well, suggesting that Rancière 'advocates an utterly radical pedagogy' centred around a 'rejection of mastery… of schoolmasters who know it all, and convey this knowing to their students' (Chambers, 2013: 639). Chambers thus presents Rancière's 'new pedagogy [as] a reversal of the explicative order's primary assumption', suggesting that what is central to this new pedagogy is students' 'ability' to come to their own understanding (for example of a text) 'without the explanations of a master' (Chambers, 2013: 644). He writes:

> When a student picks up a book and reads it for herself (even, as in the case of Jacotot's teaching experiments, a book written in a language other than her mother tongue), then she is using the method of equality. This capacity for anyone to read the book without having someone else telling them what it means – this is the power of equality, and this is all there is to equality.
>
> (Chambers, 2013: 644)

Against readings such as these – which don't promote a full-blown constructivism but do tend to take Rancière's argument as a general theory of education that should put the learning and sense making of students at the centre – I wish to maintain that Rancière's work provides us with an argument about *teaching* rather than learning and that the 'location' of this argument is in the discussion about *educational emancipation*.

With regard to the first point – that Rancière is presenting an argument for teaching not for learning – the claim Rancière makes in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is therefore *not* that anyone can learn without a teacher. This is not because Rancière would disagree with this claim – as it stands, it simply is true – but because this is not what the discussion is about. The claim Rancière rather makes (and here he distinguishes himself both from the modern 'logic' of emancipation and from Freire) *is that emancipation doesn't 'run' on knowledge* (which is why the argument should be read within the confines of the discussion about educational emancipation). It neither runs on a truth about the nature of the human being, nor on a truth about the objective condition of the one to be emancipated. It is for this reason that an emancipatory teacher should not be understood as a teacher who possesses *such* knowledge, which is why the emancipatory teacher is characterised as 'ignorant' (see also Rancière, 2010).

But, to make the point one more time, this is not because the emancipatory teacher lacks knowledge, but because *knowledge is not the 'way' of emancipation*. Here also lies the significance of Rancière's claim of equality as an *assumption*. Unlike Freire, Rancière doesn't put a strong claim about the authentic existence of the human being on the table – and in this sense he is also explicitly un-Kantian – but articulates an explicitly political 'interest' and an explicitly political 'project'.[13]

When Rancière writes, therefore, that 'learning also takes place in the stultifiers' school' (Rancière, 1991: 102), it is precisely to show that emancipation is not about learning. There is not only the point that learning can happen anywhere, with or without a teacher. There is also the point that to 'become' emancipated – and it is actually more accurate to say: to *be* emancipated – is not something that requires learning, but is about using one's intelligence under the assumption of equality. Doing so is not to reveal a particular capacity – particularly not the capacity to learn, interpret or make sense – *but is rather to inscribe oneself in the political project of equality* (see also Biesta, 2010b). Of course, in order to use one's intelligence in such a way, no teacher is needed; that is the whole point of using one's *own* intelligence. Yet where the emancipatory teacher has a role is in those cases where students – and I would like to add: of any age – *deny* or *refuse* this option, either by claiming

that they are unable to think and act for themselves or by expressing that they are unwilling to think and act for themselves. The emancipatory teacher thus has a role in those situations where students deny or refuse their possibility for being a subject and prefer to be or remain an object. The particular intervention of the emancipatory teacher is aimed at this 'attitude', if that's the appropriate term here.[14]

Rancière reading Rancière

There are two more points to add to the discussion, and they both have to do with Rancière's own reflections on his work, also in response to the ways others have engaged with it. One has to do with the question and status of explanation, as there seems to be a tendency in those commenting on Rancière's work to highlight the irony of trying to explain what the work is about when it seems to be quite critical of the logic of explanation. However, as I have tried to indicate in the preceding pages, we should not read Rancière's argument as a case for the prohibition of explanation (on this, see also Stamp, 2013). Rancière is helpfully clear about this himself when he writes that 'we can certainly use our status as legitimate ''transmitters'' to put our knowledge at others' disposal' and that this is actually what he himself is 'constantly doing' (Rancière, 2010: 245).[15] The only point here is that explanation – and particularly the attempt to explain what's really going on in another person's head or life – is not the way of emancipation.

The second point, however, is more problematic from my perspective, as in later work Rancière seems to be veering towards a constructivist reading of his own work, one where emancipation becomes understood as the freedom to learn and, more specific, the freedom to interpret and make sense. In the line just quoted about legitimate transmitters, Rancière actually continues by saying that 'what is ''stultifying'' from a Jacotist perspective is the will to anticipate the way in which they will grasp what we put at their disposal' (Rancière, 2010: 245). This becomes a bigger theme in *The Emancipated Spectator*, originally given as a talk in 2004 and subsequently published as chapter 1 in a book with the same title (Rancière, 2009). Although the discussion in this essay is on questions of theatre and the position of spectators, Rancière discusses this as an educational problematic as well, making explicit reference to *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.[16]

In the rendition of the dynamics of education that Rancière provides in this discussion, he seems to have shifted from a focus on emancipatory teaching to a more general account of education as a teaching-learning situation – or, as I have called it above, a general theory of instruction. And the account Rancière gives here is one that comes close to a constructivist reading, where the dynamics of education are not that of transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student, but one where students learn through what we might term 'trial and error' – in Rancière's words 'the path from what she [the student] already knows to what she does not yet know, but which she can learn just as she has learnt the rest' (Rancière, 2009: 11). Rancière calls this 'the poetic labour of translation', which he claims is 'at the heart of all learning' (Rancière, 2009: 10). It is translation because it is a process where the student moves from what he or she already knows to what he or she does not yet know; and it is poetic because the student does not repeat what is already there, but invests his or her own understanding. As Rancière puts it:

> From this ignoramus, spelling out signs, to the scientist who constructs hypotheses, the same intelligence is always at work – an intelligence that translates signs into other signs and proceeds

> by comparisons and illustrations in order to communicate its intellectual adventures and understand what another intelligence is endeavouring to communicate to it.
>
> (Rancière, 2009: 10)

In this account, the teacher also appears in a different way from how I have discussed this above, namely as a facilitator.

> He does not teach his pupils his knowledge, but orders them to venture into the forest of things and signs, to say what they have seen want what they think of what they have seen, to verify it and have it verified.
>
> (Rancière, 2009: 11)

What Rancière is describing here, then, is very much an account of learning rather than an account of teaching. Moreover, it is an account of learning in the general sense of making sense. And it could be read in constructivist terms, in that each individual – we might even say each individual learner – constructs his or her own 'story', or with the phrase Rancière uses: each individual 'composes her own poem' (Rancière, 2009: 13). One thing Rancière highlights in his account of this dynamic is that there is no direct relationship between the teacher/performer and student/spectator and therefore neither the ambition (Rancière, 2009: 14) nor the possibility for 'uniform transmission' (Rancière, 2009: 15). There rather is always a 'third thing' – the work of art, the theatre performance, a book 'or some other piece of writing' (Rancière, 2009: 14–15) – that is 'alien to both' but to which they can refer 'to verify in common what the pupil has seen, what she says about it and what she thinks of it' (Rancière, 2009: 15). There is, therefore, a radical openness of interpretation in relation to this 'thing', and Rancière does indeed affirm that 'in a theatre, in front of a performance, just as in a museum, school or street, there are only ever individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs that confront and surround them' (Rancière, 2009: 16), which provides 'starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new' (Rancière, 2009: 17).

What is most remarkable about *The Emancipated Spectator* (Rancière, 2009), at least from the perspective that I have been pursuing in the previous pages, is that Rancière seems to locate the emancipatory 'moment' precisely in the acts of interpretation of spectators – and by implication in the acts of interpretation of students. In relation to the 'new idiom' that emerges when artists 'construct the stages where the manifestation and effect of their skills are exhibited', Rancière argues that 'the effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated' and that it 'requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ''story'' and make it their own story', from which he concludes that 'an emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators' (Rancière, 2009: 22).

There are two reasons why Rancière seems to end up here is problematic – one has to do with the role of the teacher, the other with the status of emancipation. The first problem with the constructivist 'uptake' of Rancière's work – ironically, also by Rancière himself – is that the unique position he had carved out for the teacher in emancipatory education seems to have disappeared again. Rancière rather seems to be 'back' where Freire already was, that is, with the teacher as a facilitator of learning, a facilitator of students constructing their own stories. The second problem has to do with the question of whether everyone's freedom to construct their own story, a freedom which I have referred to elsewhere as the 'freedom of

signification' (see Biesta, 2016), is a meaningful notion of freedom and hence a meaningful notion of emancipation.

I doubt that this is the case (for a detailed argument, see Biesta, 2016), because the question that immediately arises is what the criterion would be upon which we were to judge the different interpretations, significations or poems that people would come up with. The freedom of signification thus appears as a kind of neo-liberal freedom, where everyone is free to articulate their own 'story', rather than a political let alone a democratic freedom where there would always be a question about how the different 'poems' would impact on the ways in which we live our lives *together-in-equality*, rather than each of us being enclosed in our own story. This is not only remarkable given the fact that the idea of equality plays such a key role in Rancière's writings. It is also remarkable because the figure of the emancipatory teacher that emerges from the reconstruction provided above precisely depicts emancipatory teaching as an *interruption* of such a relativistic set-up where students would only spin around in their own universe – emancipatory teaching as an interruption of the refusal to exist as subject.

Conclusions: Don't be fooled by ignorant schoolmasters

In this article I have tried to highlight Rancière's unique contribution to the discussion of emancipatory education by showing that, unlike what seems to be the thrust of Freire's view on emancipatory education, there is a clear role, task and identity for the teacher. Unlike in the case of critical pedagogy, this task is not to be understood as that of supplanting false consciousness with true consciousness. But unlike Freire, Rancière doesn't conclude from this that we should do away with the teacher. He rather highlights the problems with the idea that emancipation 'runs' on knowledge. This is one sense in which the emancipatory teacher can be called ignorant. The other way in which the emancipatory teacher is ignorant is because this teacher does not start from knowledge about the alleged incapacity of the student, but rather from the assumption of the equality of intelligence which, as I have shown, is precisely not a matter of knowledge or truth (and here again Rancière takes an approach that is fundamentally different from Freire's).

This, as I have tried to argue, has nothing to do with one way in which Rancière's work has been interpreted, which is in terms of the idea that everything in education depends on the meaning making by students, and that teachers can only be facilitators of this process and actually have nothing to give or anything to add.[17] We should therefore not be fooled by the figure of the ignorant schoolmaster by assuming that schoolmasters who have no knowledge to give also have no teaching to do and should therefore move to the side of the classroom to become facilitators of learning. For Rancière the emancipatory schoolmaster is precisely that: a schoolmaster involved in the act of teaching. And similarly we should not be fooled by the idea that the freedom to learn and, more specifically, the freedom of interpretation and signification, is the way in which we inscribe ourselves in the political project of equality.

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Notes

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2. There are also problems with Rancière's conception of learning (see Citton, 2010; Hallward, 1995). A discussion of this aspect of Rancière's work lies beyond the scope of this article.
3. In this and the following section I summarise a main line of thought develop in more detail in Biesta, 2010a.
4. In German: 'Der Mensch kann nur Mensch werden durch Erziehung. Er ist nichts, als was die Erziehung aus ihm macht' (Kant, 1982: 701).
5. In his detailed reading of Freire, Lewis (2012) seems to underplay this particular aspect of Freire's work and keeps him closer to the neo-Marxist understanding of oppression as the exertion of unwarranted power by the oppressor(s) over the oppressed, so that the main emancipatory 'act' is that of demystification (see, for example, Lewis, 2012: 104). Although, as I will argue below, demystification does play a role in Freire's overall conception of emancipatory education, the basic 'logic' of emancipation is conceived in terms of overcoming alienation, not oppressive power.
6. Although here Freire comes closer to the idea of false consciousness, and thus to an understanding of oppression that is closer to neo-Marxist critical theory, his 'solution' at this point is not to revert to explanation, but rather to joint action (co-intending, in Freire's vocabulary).
7. This is an important point, because many readers of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* seem to assume that Rancière simply provides a description of Jacotot's theory and simply endorses this theory. While it is sometimes difficult to see where Jacotot ends and Rancière begins, I nonetheless wish to make a radical distinction between the two and wish to suggest a reading of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* that focuses on the argument Rancière makes 'through' the story of Jacotot. It is of course legitimate to refer to Jacotot's ideas themselves, but in that case I would argue that *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is an unreliable source for this and readers should rather engage with Jacotot's own writings.
8. What here appears as a set of (rhetorical) questions about teaching, can also be read as a critique of Bourdieu and particularly of the application of Bourdieu's ideas about cultural (and increasingly also, social) capital to education – see the introduction by Kristin Ross in Rancière (1991).
9. To refer to this as an act of revelation is slightly misleading, as it may reduce Rancière's emancipatory logic to that of explanation. Below, I will provide a different and in my view more accurate formulation of emancipatory teaching, one where the act of emancipatory teaching appears as that of forbidding the student the apparent satisfaction of claiming that one is unable to learn and know without the help of a teacher-explicator.
10. In comparing Freire and Rancière, Lewis (2012) suggests that in Freire we find a focus on freedom with little attention to the question of equality; whereas in Rancière, we find a focus on equality with little attention to the question of freedom. Although it is true that Rancière seeks to articulate a logic of emancipation that starts from the assumption of equality rather than the assumption of inequality, Rancière's observation that students cannot escape the exercise of their liberty indicates that Lewis's claim that 'universal teaching remains silent on the question of freedom' (Lewis, 2012: 73) is perhaps not entirely accurate. After all, as I will discuss below, central to the emancipatory 'act' of the teacher is the interruption of the students' denial or rejection of their freedom.

11. For a further discussion of differences and similarities between Freire and Rancière, see Galloway (2012); see also Lewis (2012).
12. Both formulations sound in a sense remarkably Kantian, as one could imagine that one way in which the emancipatory teacher might enact this is by telling students that they should have the courage to use their own intelligence, which is in line with Kant's formulation of the 'motto' of Enlightenment as Sapere aude! – have the courage to use your own understanding. On the dimension of encouragement, see also Sonderegger (2014). While I agree therefore with Lewis that there is a strong Kantian 'streak' in Rancière's work, I would not locate this in the alleged centrality of the emancipatory teacher's 'command' to the students that they should follow their own path (see Lewis, 2012: 78-79), but with the interruption of the students' denial of their ability to use their own understanding, that is, a denial of their freedom.
13. In terms of the 'uptake' of Rancière's work in the field of education, it is probably also important to mention that his argument may not be first and foremost directed at a particular configuration of the school, but rather that it is first and foremost a critique of society in so far as it operates on a particular logic of schooling – a thesis discussed in more detail in Bingham and Biesta (2010), particularly the concluding chapter, 'The world is not a school'.
14. One way in which this 'intervention' can be enacted, as I have shown, is 'negative', that is by denying the student the alleged satisfaction of their inability to think and know for themselves. But there is also a more 'positive' enactment of this emancipatory gesture, which is where teachers approach students as subjects even if all the 'evidence' suggests the opposite. On this dynamic, see Biesta, 2015.
15. See also chapter 1 in Lewis (2012), which provides a compelling account of the differences and similarities between Rancière and Althusser.
16. I agree with a comment made by one of the reviewers of this manuscript that the question of educational emancipation is to be distinguished from the question of emancipation in the context of art. After all, we should not automatically assume that art is educational, or that education is 'artistic'. I use the word 'artistic' in order to distinguish the argument here from the discussion about the aesthetics of education, about which Lewis (2012) has provided a highly original and, to a large degree, compelling argument. The reason for raising the issue of the relationship between art and education in my argument is because Rancière himself draws the two closely together in *The Emancipated Spectator*.
17. The 'stronger' version of this line of thought argues that teachers ought not give anything to their students, as doing so would limit their freedom, which is the mistake upon which extreme forms of child-centred education are based.

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Gert Biesta is professor of Education and Director of Research in the Department of Education of Brunel University London, UK. In addition he holds the (part-time) NIVOZ Chair for Education at the University for Humanistic Studies, the Netherlands, and is Visiting Professor at NLA University College, Bergen, Norway. He is associate editor of *Educational Theory*. His work focuses on the theory and philosophy of education and the theory and philosophy of educational and social research.