

**REVISITING RANCIÈRE'S CONCEPT OF INTELLECTUAL EMANCIPATION  
IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING PRACTICES**

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**ABSTRACT**

The paper discusses the emancipatory potential of Uruguayan Vocational Educational and Training (VET) practices, usually associated with job discourses, skills and training. In doing so, we revisit Rancière's work concerning intellectual emancipation to provide us with a guide to connect with the phenomena studied, as a lens to look at and to problematize emancipation in concrete practices on a heuristic level.

Thus, the paper is structured as follows. First, we describe the context of Uruguayan VET practices. Second, we discuss Rancière's key concepts about emancipation in education. Third, we craft a conversation between the empirical and theoretical work, in view of exploring concrete VET practices from the axiom of equality. Last, the text concludes with a reflection on new meanings regarding Rancière's intellectual emancipation that deserve further attention and allow us to identify other forms of emancipatory potential in VET practices, to move beyond its currently predominant functionalist understanding.

**KEY WORDS**

Rancière; intellectual emancipation; vocational education and training.



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# REVISITANDO O CONCEITO DE EMANCIPAÇÃO INTELECTUAL DE RANCIÈRE EM PRÁTICAS DE ENSINO E FORMAÇÃO PROFISSIONAL

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## RESUMO

O documento discute o potencial emancipatório das práticas de Ensino e Formação Profissional (EFP) no Uruguai, que são geralmente associadas a discursos de trabalho e formação. O trabalho de Rancière sobre emancipação intelectual é considerado um guia que permite discutir os fenómenos estudados, como uma lente para observar e problematizar a emancipação em práticas concretas de nível heurístico.

O artigo está estruturado da seguinte forma: primeiro, é descrito o contexto das práticas de EFP no Uruguai. Segundo, são discutidos os principais conceitos de emancipação na educação de Rancière. Terceiro, é desenvolvido um diálogo entre trabalho empírico e teórico, a fim de explorar práticas concretas de EFP a partir do axioma da igualdade. Finalmente, o texto conclui com uma reflexão sobre novos significados da emancipação intelectual de Rancière que nos merecem mais atenção e nos permitem identificar outras formas de potencial emancipatório nas práticas de EFP, de forma a transcender a atual compreensão funcionalista predominante.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Rancière; emancipação intelectual; ensino e formação profissional.



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# REVISANDO EL CONCEPTO DE EMANCIPACIÓN INTELECTUAL DE RANCIÈRE EN LAS PRÁCTICAS DE EDUCACIÓN TÉCNICO PROFESIONAL

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## RESUMEN

Este documento discute el potencial emancipador de las prácticas de Educación Técnico Profesional-ETP en Uruguay, generalmente asociadas con discursos laborales y de capacitación. Se revisa el trabajo de Rancière sobre la emancipación intelectual como una guía que conecta con los fenómenos estudiados, una lente para observar y problematizar la emancipación a nivel heurístico en prácticas concretas.

El artículo está estructurado de la siguiente manera. Primero, se describe el contexto de las prácticas de ETP uruguayas. Segundo, se discuten los conceptos clave de Rancière sobre la emancipación en educación. Tercero, se elabora un diálogo entre el trabajo empírico-teórico, para explorar prácticas concretas de ETP desde el axioma de la igualdad. El texto concluye con una reflexión sobre nuevos significados con respecto a la emancipación intelectual de Rancière que merecen mayor atención y permiten identificar otras formas de potencial emancipador en las prácticas de ETP, para trascender la actual comprensión funcionalista predominante.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Rancière; emancipación intelectual; educación técnico profesional.



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# Revisiting Rancière's Concept of Intellectual Emancipation in Vocational Education and Training Practices

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## INTRODUCTION

The encounter with Rancière in today's educational context, in particular in Vocational Education and Training (VET) practices, implies some challenges to consider and to discuss. As a whole, VET is mainly associated with an education sector that promotes economic and social inclusion by means of work (Beech, 2010; Jacinto, 2008, 2010; NCVET, 2007; OECD, 2010; Wilson, 1996). Exploring VET policy making at a global, regional and national level, one frequently encounters the idea that education, in particular VET, leads to the economic independence of individuals, and at the same time, has an impact on the economic development of a country (ILC, 2008). In this sense, education, and more specifically, the development of knowledge and skills, is understood as a factor of production for the economic growth of a country. Nowadays, under the framework of lifelong learning discourses, VET is increasingly also seen as a personal and social investment to become competitive (Cruikshank, 2008). More in particular, in Latin America lifelong learning policies and VET plans are oriented to specific trainings that respond to the needs of the market (Jacinto, 2008). In this light, it seems that inequalities for the disadvantaged population are mainly thought to be reduced through job-market oriented programmes. Despite the fact that there are inspiring perspectives in the apprenticeship tradition, in which work becomes part of a self-realization process (Kerschensteiner, 1911; Schlögl, 2010; Winch, 2006), there is still a need to go beyond dominant economic discourses, to focus on practices, and to discern whether and how emancipation plays a role in VET practices.

Against this background, a first challenge introduced in this paper is to discuss the emancipatory potential of Uruguayan VET practices, usually associated with job discourses and skills-training, using Rancière's framework as a lens to look at and to problematize emancipation on a heuristic level. Therefore, we suggest revisiting Rancière's concept of emancipation, taking equality of intelligence as a point of departure, an assumption from which the teacher engages in the relationship with the student. This assumption, that we will elaborate further in the theoretical section of this paper, is rather uncommon in everyday VET educational practices. Actually, it is common to understand VET practices with the rationale of preparing a skilled workforce for the economic growth of a country (Billet, 2001, 2002; Billet, Fenwick, & Somerville, 2006; Chappell, 2003a, 2003b; Pahl, 2014; Tennant & Yates, 2004), rather than putting education in the centre, not as an outcome but as an (emancipatory) process that may contribute a shift in opportunities to start assuming equality of intelligences at any education level. Although training, qualification and employability perspectives permeate both actual VET and general education discourses, we have observed that scholars are mainly critical to VET practices in view of employability discourses rather



than to general education practices (Anderson, 2008; Beach & Carlson, 2004; Giroux, 1994, 1999; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005).

Following from the above, we have encountered a second challenge; that is, to develop a particular way of doing empirical research to describe the interactions between the teacher, the students and the content (as a thing in common). This methodological design based on descriptions helps us avoiding a priori interpretations of what are good or bad practices, or whether there is (or not) a particular kind of emancipation. This design directs our attention to a third challenge, which is the interpretation of the descriptions following Rancière's theory of emancipation and the discussion on whether it is a relevant theory to interpret what we observe/describe in VET practices. Furthermore, this particular way of doing research allows us to engage in a relationship of equality with the 'subjects' of this research, which implies a last challenge in this paper; that is, to include some meta-observations about the role of the researcher and the relationship with the researched, with reference to some central Rancièrian notions concerning emancipation.

To elaborate on the suggested challenges, in what follows, we describe the context of Uruguayan VET practices where the research was conducted. Second, we discuss Rancière's key concept of emancipation in education. Third, we craft a conversation between the empirical and theoretical work, in view of exploring concrete VET practices from the assumption of equality. Last, we conclude with a reflection on new meanings and new contexts regarding Rancière's intellectual emancipation that deserve further attention and allow us, not only to identify other forms of emancipatory potential in VET practices, but also to explore other ways of doing research and relating to the researched subjects.

## DESCRIBING THE CONTEXT: URUGUAYAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Uruguayan VET includes training at secondary and post-secondary levels, in formal and non-formal education, in public and private institutions. In Uruguay, formal education relates to a systematic education model (mandatory from primary to secondary education) structured and regulated by the State and/or the Ministry of Education and Culture that facilitates a recognized training and diploma. With regards to non-formal education, it includes education and training practices which are not necessarily formally regulated. It may include language courses, ICT training or other programs with a lifelong-learning approach (UNLE, 2009). Also, non-formal education may involve popular education practices organised by actors and organisations from civil society.

In the public system, VET formal education is organised at two different levels, a basic and an upper professional training. The basic one includes programs to become assistants of a particular occupation with a job market orientation, usually organised with the basic cycle of secondary education, to give students the opportunity of choosing a vocational occupation. The upper level is oriented to students who become a professional/technician in a specific track/occupation. This level is part of the tertiary system of education, and it offers the possibility of obtaining a professional, technical, or technological career in VET, which also allows for the continuing education at university (ANEP-CETP/UTU, 2003, 2010; UNLE, 2009).



In this paper, we will consider the formal education sector: *The Basic Professional Training plan*, which trains students to become assistants of a particular occupation. Students enrolled in the Basic Professional Training programmes are mostly adolescents who have dropped out of formal education. These students often struggle to register in a training programme that allows them to return to education while learning job skills. In view of this case-study, we have selected one particular practice—a Gastronomy course—to gain understanding of what (intellectual) emancipation might mean in that practice and to what extent emancipatory practices are at work<sup>1</sup>.

## RANCIÈRE'S KEY CONCEPTS ABOUT EMANCIPATION IN EDUCATION

To start the discussion about emancipation in Rancière's work, it is important to elaborate on the concept of equality of intelligence. In his book *The ignorant schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991), Rancière describes how concepts of intellectual emancipation and equality of intelligence could be the starting point/axiom of an educational process. *The ignorant schoolmaster* is based on an educational experience in the nineteenth century, inspired by ideas of the French Revolution. Jacotot (1830) a French professor, was assigned to teach Dutch-speaking students in Belgium. He did not speak Dutch, so he started his lesson giving students a bilingual translation (French/Dutch) of the book *Télémaque* by François Fénelon. He oriented the students, with the assistance of a Dutch speaker, to memorise some French phrases and compare them carefully with the Dutch version. In repeating this action, students started to recall the story by using the words from the text. Rancière was captivated by the fact that these students were beginning to understand the text in French, without further explanation on his behalf. They did so in the same way as a mother tongue is learned, that is, without a particular explanation, but rather by having the attention directed at a thing in common, in this case a book, and hence, by putting their own intelligence at work.

While referring to Jacotot's experience, Rancière developed his idea of 'equality of intelligence', based on the assumption that any person is capable to speak, to compare and to translate signs into other signs. In addition, Rancière paid attention to the 'will', being a central element for intelligence-in-action. In his view, in the educational relationship the will of the teacher is crucial in directing the attention of the students, while the will of the student is crucial in putting his/her own intelligence at work, in this case, to read, to compare and to translate someone else's words into his/her own words. In Rancière's view equality of intelligence involves teachers starting from the assumption that students already possess the capacity for intelligence (the capacity for learning). The students can learn the content without the assistance of an explanatory master. The role of the teacher is in the first place to stimulate the will of the students, and thus invite them to use their own intelligence to engage with the content at hand. In the end, an ignorant schoolmaster is someone who will provoke and direct the attention of the students towards the content, inviting them to observe, compare, question, and understand what is yet not known rather

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<sup>1</sup> The selected case-study belongs to a wider research in the frame of a doctoral study: Source: [https://limo.libis.be/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1940266&context=L&vid=Lirias&search\\_scope=Lirias&tab=default\\_tab&lang=en\\_US&fromSitemap=1](https://limo.libis.be/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1940266&context=L&vid=Lirias&search_scope=Lirias&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US&fromSitemap=1)

than transmitting/explaining her/his knowledge as a way towards learning. In this sense, equality of intelligence is different from equality of knowledge. Rancière's pedagogical approach, inspired by Jacotot, helps us understanding that:

Explication is not necessary to remedy an incapacity to understand. On the contrary, that very incapacity provides the structuring fiction of the explicative conception of the world (...) To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself. Before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid. (Rancière, 1991, p. 6)

In this light, teachers start from the assumption that students already possess the capacity for intelligence. In Rancière's words:

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, 1991, p. 9 [Emphasis in the original])

When teachers start from the assumption that students already have the capacity for intelligence, that is, the capacity of understanding by themselves then the students will must be strengthened so that they can use (enact) this capacity. It is in this sense that Rancière constantly emphasizes the need to support students' own will and direct their attention to the content to discover how things work. The will is not a matter of a random spontaneous action, rather it is exercised by directing the attention of the students to the content, to a constructed 'thing in common'.

Rephrasing Rancière (1991), individuals 'are a will served by an intelligence'. So far, intelligences are equal but wills are not. Thus, in a classroom 'attention' may make the difference between good or poor work because the will is strengthened and exercised. The equal capacity of all human beings to know, as claimed by Rancière (1991) and inspired by the method of Jacotot, demands that students focus their attention and will on the object of study. This act should be exercised and strengthened by someone else's will (not someone else's intelligence), which in a classroom context is mainly represented by the figure of the teacher.

In this regard, the teacher-student relationship is conceived as an individual-to-individual relation, thus, as an intelligence-to-intelligence relation, with the assumption of equality as a starting point. This one-to-one relation allows to understand intellectual emancipation as an act of the individual and not as a social or institutionalised practice. According to Rancière (1991),

whoever teaches without emancipation stultifies. And whoever emancipates doesn't have to worry about what the emancipated person learns. He will learn what he wants. Nothing, maybe. He will know he can learn because the same intelligence is at work in



all the productions of the human mind, and a man can always understand another man's words. (p. 18)

In many pedagogical relationships the differences in intelligence are taken-for-granted, without further verification. In order to avoid such prejudices, Rancière suggests to suspend one's own self-evident presuppositions and to start from the assumption of equality of intelligence. Only during the process, this assumption should be verified. This is exactly what Jacotot did: he trusted the intelligence of his students and put them at work. The verification came afterwards. In the case of Jacotot, later developed by Rancière (1991), he teaches the Dutch speaking students to read in French by asking them to observe, to compare, and to read a bilingual (French – Dutch) text. Thus, Jacotot has not explained the French language to the students, but rather, has directed their attention to 'a thing in common', such as a book.

Thus, the ignorant schoolmaster's pedagogical model helps us to reflect on what the teacher can actually teach, which is not so much related to the teacher's own knowledge, but rather to the teacher's mastery of directing the students' attention to observe, to think, to verify and to translate for themselves (Rancière, 1991, 2010; Tur Porres, Wildemeersch, & Simons, 2014). In this light, the schoolmaster is ignorant about how the student will proceed in dealing with what is presented. And moreover, being an ignorant schoolmaster also means: intentionally unprejudiced, or, suspending one's prejudices.

## CRAFTING A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL WORK

The idea of equality of intelligence in education, which is not a 'fact' but an assumption in the teacher-student relationship, is fundamental for exploring intellectual emancipation from a Rancièrian perspective. Such assumption is rather uncommon in everyday educational practices, thus, we have decided to explore and understand the emancipatory potential of VET pedagogical practices in the classroom setting, at the core of pedagogical relationships among the teacher, the students, and the content ('the thing in common').

We understand pedagogical practices in line with Schatzki's proposal (Knorr Cetina, Schatzki, & Von Savigny, 2001; Schatzki, 2012), mainly related to different activities which are organised under common space and time objectives. Accordingly, we approach pedagogical practices as the interplay between the teacher and the students in connection with the content, in the context of the educational process (Pratt and Associates, 1998). Hence, we are principally looking at practices and relations, in which all actors (teacher-students-content) are engaged, rather than at intentions and beliefs. Therefore, pedagogical practices include interactions, actions, ways of doing, of saying, of talking in a class group, in connection with the use of specific materials and classroom settings. Additionally, pedagogical scenes are understood as unique space/time fragments that emerge from the interactions among the teachers, the students, and the content; thus, they are the embodied experiences of relationships in pedagogical spaces. Consequently, to avoid a priori interpretations, we observe what occurs in actual VET practices on a daily basis, rather than 'what is said about pedagogical practices'

(Bernstein, 1999). We have observed and registered teachers' instructions and class-organisation, students' responses, activities, specific practices and interactions, relationships (between teachers and students, and between them in connection with the content), with specific acts of content/curriculum structuring, with the use of materials (pedagogical devices), classroom settings and organisation (Bernstein, 1999; Bernstein & Solomon, 1999; Knorr Cetina, Schatzki, & Von Savigny, 2001).

Based on participant observations and descriptions, we have crafted a conversation between the empirical and the theoretical work. The empirical work is related to interactions in the practices, among the teacher, the student and the content (the thing in common). And the theoretical work is associated with Rancière's framework used as a lens to look at the interactions. This lens will allow us to find out if and how Rancièrian principles such as 'equality of intelligence' and 'intellectual emancipation' are at work in the observed practices.

In this light, below, we describe a scene in a Gastronomy group that shows a particular way the teacher, the students and the content are related.

## THE FOOD A THING IN COMMON<sup>2</sup>

*At the beginning of the class students get ready to work, they already know what to do, each week the teacher delivers the recipes organised per day so that each student already knows what to do once inside the classroom. All of the students seem to have their place in the classroom; they talk, cook, and move around quite freely. Students are divided into working groups; each of them stays together with the small group while working and dividing tasks in a very relaxed way.*

*The room smells nice, especially of food, and it is warm and welcoming. Most of the time the teacher is making jokes with the students. She is at her desk organising some papers and recipes, looking at the lesson plan, and looking around the classroom. The teacher also walks around to observe what the students in the small groups are doing and to correct their cooking techniques. She offers some tips: "pass the boiled potatoes (or any vegetable) under cold water once it has reached its cooking time, otherwise, the vegetables will go on cooking with their own heat".*

*Students prepare the tables, present their dishes, and they are ready to eat once the teacher has evaluated the presentations. At the end of the lesson students begin the 'ritual', an exquisite moment when all of the students gather together to enjoy what they have prepared. The students carefully prepare the cafeteria tables to gather everyone together. The classroom is quickly transformed from a simulated 'restaurant's kitchen' to a 'restaurant's dining room' with lively and talkative 'chefs' enjoying their creations.*

*After eating the prepared food, the teacher hands out the recipes for the following week so that students can already be aware of the ingredients they will need. The teacher asks students to check on the cupboards and fridge: "we may have some of the ingredients and may not need to buy them". Students have some time to copy the recipes.*

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<sup>2</sup> For a complete description of the scene see: [https://lilmo.libis.be/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1940266&context=L&vid=Lirias&search\\_scope=Lirias&tab=default\\_tab&lang=en\\_US&fromSitemap=1](https://lilmo.libis.be/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1940266&context=L&vid=Lirias&search_scope=Lirias&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US&fromSitemap=1)



*At the very end of the lesson the students should clean the classroom. At the beginning of the year the teacher organised small groups of students that will be responsible for washing the dishes, sweeping, and cleaning up the classroom every week. All of the students participate in maintaining the cleanliness of the classroom.*

In this scene, the teacher assigns the students something to do, e.g. presenting recipes organised per day to work with. It is also common that the teacher directs students' attention to their cooking techniques. In this class, it is typical to find a one-to-one relation of intelligences at work among students. Normally, they give suggestions to each other in relation to their work, asking for help, and making some critiques, too.

With regards to the content, the teacher usually puts the recipes and the cooking process central; she advises students and demonstrates techniques. The latter demonstrations are not necessarily explanatory. They rather direct the attention of the students at different cooking techniques, enabling students to observe, to compare and to translate the techniques into their own ways of cooking. The preparation of the recipe can be considered a direct relation to the content between the teacher and the students, and 'food' as a thing in common.

Each class ends up with a shared meal, the one prepared by the students and presented to the teacher as the main dish. Despite, we observe that more attention is paid to the 'eating time' than to the dishes' presentation, students do not miss the point about the learnt content. The food as 'content' and as a 'thing in common' brings all together in a common place. In fact, the conversations during the 'eating time' are rich, while acknowledging what they have done, observed, what they know (or not yet) about cooking certain dishes, and what they have learnt from a specific preparation. At that time, students are the 'chefs', the learners, the guests, and their opinions are valued as important by everyone in the classroom. So far, using Rancièrian' lenses, this might be an example of equality at work, first, they are able to learn and to use their intelligences for any preparation, by observing, comparing, paying attention; second, they think themselves equal to others, not as 'servers' but as capable of talking, watching, imitating and doing.

Against this background, it seems that the teacher and the students have turned 'food preparation' into a thing in common, a specific content to which all relate on an equal basis. In this sense, the teacher gives evidence of equality of intelligences at work. The intelligence emerges from the content (from the observation of different recipes and cooking techniques) to which the teacher directs the students' attention. Usually, the teacher asks students to observe the recipes, to prepare them, to be acquainted of any error done and, the day after, to prepare the recipe better than the day before. In a way the teacher directs the attention to the content, while inviting the students to observe, compare, translate, and rehearse the techniques, so as to improve their cooking.

Also, across the scene a 'will to will' relationship is reinforced when the teacher approaches the students, observes the way they work, and makes comments on their cooking techniques. The teacher allows students to discover how things work, to enhance intelligence manifests in relation to the content. Additionally, when students present their dishes to the teacher and to their classmates, the 'will' is reinforced, because it gives them the opportunity to listen to other's comments, to observing other classmates' preparations and techniques, and to continue learning and improving their own work in a voluntary way (through their own will).

Most of the students attending the Gastronomy programme are used to 'being explained' without taking into account their intelligence or intellectual capacity. Thus,

their previous experiences are mainly based on the assumption of inequality of intelligence rather than on the opinion of equality, where they can ask questions, observe and compare what they know to what they yet not known. So far, in creating a thing in common with the 'food' preparation and presentation, the teacher succeeds in drawing the attention of the students to the content that can inspire the emergence of intelligence. The teacher and the students place food in the centre of the attention, motivation, and interest. Furthermore, the teacher draws attention to the content through which knowledge will emerge. The teacher first presents the recipes and lets students experience cooking. Then, she asks questions to the students that help them to observe, to compare, and to repeat some actions on cooking. In doing so, intelligence is expected to emerge from the content. Similar to the Jacotot example used by Rancière (1991), in this case students are willing to engage with the cooking assignment without resistance. We can raise the question if in everyday classroom situations where there is resistance on behalf of the students, the will to will relation works the same. This may describe some teachers' limitations to act on the will of the students and may lead us to think of ways to engage students' will in everyday classrooms. In this light, we have observed that during the class the teacher makes sure that the students' attention is focused specifically on the cooking techniques and recipe preparation. Thus, the teacher's approach shows she assumes the intelligence of the students emerge in interaction with the content, through which they are able to understand without an explanation. We can argue that, to a certain extent the teacher starts from the axiom that all students are capable of understanding/learning in direct contact with the recipes, the cooking techniques' observation, in interaction with others' classmates in order for intelligence to emerge.

So far, from a Rancièrian viewpoint it is interesting to observe how the teacher directs the attention of students to the food, how it becomes a thing in common, and how the teacher does not position herself as an 'explanatory' master. As for a Rancièrian emancipatory potential, this pedagogical scene offers a very interesting image of a teacher who assumes equality of intelligence without 'comparing students' intellectual ability. The teacher does not position herself immediately as someone who starts to explain. Accordingly, the teacher starts from the assumption that all students can actually observe, read, ask questions and compare. The teacher is successful, at least in regard to turn food into a common thing; it becomes something of interest that makes students attentive. In other words, the pedagogical scene shows both a will-to-will relation and an intelligence-intelligence relation.

A different situation occurred in the next pedagogical scene, an English lesson within the same Gastronomy class group but with a different teacher.

### STARTING FROM (IN-)EQUALITY<sup>3</sup>

*The English teacher started by saying that they would work on a restaurant menu. And she continued asking whether students had the copies she gave them on that issue. Some students claimed that those copies were delivered long time ago (because the teacher was under sick leave for quite a long time).*

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<sup>3</sup> For a complete description of the scene see: [https://limo.libis.be/primop-explora/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1940266&context=L&vid=Lirias&search\\_scope=Lirias&tab=default\\_tab&lang=en\\_US&fromSitemap=1](https://limo.libis.be/primop-explora/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1940266&context=L&vid=Lirias&search_scope=Lirias&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US&fromSitemap=1)



*The teacher wrote on the board:*

*1) Restaurant menu*

*2) Specific verbs: mix, cook, heat, smash, add (imperative form)*

*The teacher spoke in English; students complained and said that they did not understand; some of them said they did not like English. Then, the teacher wrote a Spanish translation of the English vocabulary. The teacher shifted the attention of the students to the restaurant dialogue written on the board:*

*I- I recommend ..... (chicken Kiev)*

*II- I suggest (onion soup)*

*III- Personally, I prefer (spaghetti with tomato sauce)*

*The teacher asked students to create sentences similar to what is written on the board. Immediately, students started complaining about the task, and one said: "I do not know why the waiter should 'recommend'. If I go to a restaurant I have to know what to eat!" The teacher reacted: "You are very wrong. In high-class restaurants the waiter always recommends...I do not know where you want to work but at least you should know!". And she continued: "I think that you should write the following list that I am going to write on the board and that you may not know! Maybe if you have gone to secondary school you would know..." That comment generated negative reactions among the students, despite the complaints, they started writing the suggested dialogues in their notebooks.*

*Those dialogues were not read or reviewed by the teacher; she quickly changed topic, and she showed the students a pack of cookies to read its nutritional facts, saying: "I want you to read the nutritional facts of these cookies". Again, students seemed not to understand the assignment. The teacher said: "It is not so difficult, for example: 'calories' what does it mean?" A Student responded: "'calorías' (saying it in Spanish) it is easy". To what the teacher said: "You see it is not so difficult, compare it with the Spanish version. Is it that difficult?" The teacher continued reading each of the ingredients contained on the package of cookies.*

*Again, the teacher switched topics, asking students to solve a math problem related to caloric consumption according to the cookies packaging. The teacher used some technical terms in English and Spanish related to the subject, comparing, translating, and correcting language associated with the subject and written on the board. Most of the time the teacher spoke in Spanish and translated words from English to Spanish.*

In the above scene, we observe how the same students of the Gastronomy workshop scene act in the English class in a very different way. One could argue that they react in each class according to the ways in which they are challenged and trusted, as (un-)equal to others. We do not aim to compare teaching styles or pedagogical approaches; however, we make the case about the assumption of equality in these scenes. To a certain extent the English class scene shows some moments of comparison of what is known to what is not yet known regarding the English vocabulary used in a restaurant. For instance, when the teacher writes on the board the Spanish translation, which allows students to observe, to compare, and to translate what is written. However, Rancière's translation might not be simply transferred or understood as a typical translation from

one language to the other, rather, translation is what each intelligent person does: understand a message in one's own way.

Some students are familiar with the English vocabulary but resist what the teacher is trying to introduce, perhaps because she does not start from the assumption of equality of intelligence and explicitly points to the supposed differences. What the teacher does, in Rancièrian terms, weakens the 'will' to focus on the discussion because it is not possible to give opinions, thus, the power of translation in one own way is unclear. The teacher seems to assume a kind of 'intelligence over intelligence/will' relationship in which the teacher 'already knows'. Hence, there is a risk of a superior intelligence at work, a hierarchical relationship between the one 'who knows' and the one 'who does not know'. Against this backdrop, we argue that (in this scene) there is still a need to start from the assumption of equality of intelligence, and furthermore, we argue that equality of intelligence (capacity) may/can be positioned as a pedagogical method within VET practices. This means that equality might move beyond 'moments' to become a practice within the pedagogical relationship (as a pedagogical method), then, intellectual emancipation may become part of the educational process.

Despite the strong logic of explanation and hierarchy in terms of intelligence, in this scene the students are actually resisting and raising their voice. As Rancière discussed in his work, even the stultifying teacher somehow has to assume that all students are able to understand if his 'explanations' are to be understood. Accordingly, the students' resistance may be interpreted as an attempt of being intellectually active in their own way. Their reaction clarifies that the circle of explanation can never be completely closed because students might challenge the claim that 'the teacher knows and the students lack knowledge'.

It is interesting now to compare the scenes based on the insights of Rancière, to observe how intelligence emerges (or not) from the content; how attention is directed to the content while enhancing the capacity to observe, to compare and to translate, and ultimately to verify intelligence at work. With regards to the content, in the Gastronomy workshop it is at work through the recipes, the cooking techniques and the preparation of food. In the English class, the content is approached through questions and instructions that try to direct the students' attention, i.e. to the dialogue written on the board or the package' ingredients. In both scenes there is a content to work with. In the first scene, we argue that intelligence emerges from the content 'food'/'recipes' (as a thing in common). Also, in the Gastronomy scene, the teacher manages to positively strengthen the students' 'will', through encouraging their capacity to observe, to compare, to rehearse. In the second scene, nonetheless, the action of directing students' attention to the content is less clear or at least weakly achieved. This can be a consequence of constant changes in topics that do not give students the time to observe and to translate the 'dialogue' into their own words; the result of a teacher-student-content relation that lacks a clear 'will' reinforcement; or a pedagogical relationship that does not start from equality of intelligence but from 'differences'.

These scenes are interesting to observe how the teacher's and students' 'intelligence to intelligence' and 'will to will' relation may become productive or destructive from an emancipatory potential perspective, and how directing the students' attention to something in order to transform it into a thing in common becomes a challenge.



## UNDERSTANDING INTELLECTUAL EMANCIPATION IN VET PRACTICES

Across the paper, we argue that one dominant and common way to understand emancipation in connection with VET practices, is often related to discourses that stress the training of job-skilled workers to adapt to current economic demands from a lifelong learning perspective. In our theoretical approach, we have argued that emancipation in VET practices can be considered in a different way, from the perspective of 'equality of intelligence'. In our empirical research we have decided to avoid a priori interpretations associated with this educational field, and developed a research method to describe the interactions between the teacher, the students and the content (as a thing in common). When considering these descriptions, we have revisited Rancière's view on intellectual emancipation in connection with these practices, and we have found when and how 'equality of intelligence' and 'intellectual emancipation' are (not) at work in these practices.

The analysis of the scenes using Rancièrian's lenses helps to gain insight concerning how intelligence may manifest itself. Students in this particular VET context (and in many other educational contexts) are used to 'being explained' what they need to learn and how to manage knowledge. Traditional teaching methods do not take into account—as a basic assumption—the students' equal intelligence or intellectual capacity. However, we have observed that when the subject of knowledge becomes a 'thing in common', such as in the gastronomy workshop, the relation between the teacher, students, and the content becomes significant and real to the students. This, however, implies turning equality into an assumption/axiom, instead of an (empirical) target.

We found that Rancière's theory opens a new perspective on emancipation in the context of VET-practices. Emancipation is not necessarily, or solely, an outcome of VET practices, in the sense that it enables students to adapt to societal demands. Emancipation can be at work in and through the concrete VET-practices, when the teacher stimulates the students' will and encourages them to use their intelligence to engage with the content. In this light, Rancière shows us why and how to put the content of the apprenticeship central, from which intelligence will emerge, if teachers start from the assumption of equality of intelligence. At the same time, this approach strengthens the will of students when inviting them to observe, to compare, to question, and to translate. Moreover, Rancière can teach us that in VET-practices emancipation can emerge through putting students' capacity of learning at work, and starting from equality, which differs from more classical/traditional views that consider emancipation an outcome of the educational process. Hence, Rancière's insights help to consider emancipatory practices in connection with the trust put in the intelligence of the students from the very beginning, starting from the assumption of equality, addressing the will of the students, and directing their attention to a thing in common.

Rancière's view on intellectual emancipation is not only important for VET practices, since it shows ways to avoid educational relationships of subordination. However, it also enables us to reflect on the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Also the researcher-researched relationship can be marked by hierarchy: the relationship between the researcher as master interpreter and the researched (the teacher, the student) who 'does not know very well what s(h)e does'. In our empirical research, we have tried to preclude such hierarchies, when organising our observations strictly on descriptions of concrete actions and interactions, while avoiding evaluative interpretations based on a-

priori interpretations of 'good' or 'bad', or 'emancipatory' and 'non-emancipatory' practices. The emancipatory potential of the described practices emerged from the verification a-posteriori of the practices in view of the central notions of the research.

Another lesson learnt refers to the conventional understanding of VET practices as an education sector for the disadvantaged population and/or as a means for social and economic inclusion, with a kind of practice that 'this type of population can cope with'. In such approach, emancipation is still a matter of dominance that ascribes to the intellectual elite, the scholar or the teacher the capacity to liberate the student, the poor or the uneducated, from his/her condition of ignorance. Rancière's radical answer to such approach is then to create conditions for the student to find his/her own responses to the questions, challenges or invitations presented by the teacher, with the mediation of the thing in common, be it a book, a text, a film, a picture, or any kind of object that may set in motion a process of enlarging one's own capabilities. Rancière's approach helps us to understand that 'explaining' something to others is not stultifying as such if a teacher starts from the assumption of equality of intelligence; however, if 'explanation' becomes what teaching and learning is about, it just confirms inequality of intelligence, and hence it stultifies. What the VET teacher must then achieve is to create opportunities for the student to consider him/herself as capable to think, to speak, to learn, to produce. Through our observations, we have shown such opportunities and moments in VET practices, whereby capabilities emerged from the encounter between teachers, students and the objects at hand, and whereby trust in equality of intelligence was the condition that enabled emancipation.

Moreover, we suggest to acknowledge that thinking about Vocational Education and Training implies thinking about education; the inclusion of the term 'education' in these types of programmes requires thinking on how vocational training is not just 'training for a job' but always implies there are social, educational and political issues at stake. At this point, Rancière provokes us to think about liberating ourselves from 'master explicators' in order to avoid the stultification not only of students but also of teachers. In doing so, there is a possibility to let education in VET comes to full expression, and to start to see its emancipatory potential in perhaps minor, but important, pedagogical practices.

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