

Teaching Through Inquiry: REBOOT's effort to educate against and beyond boundaries

The unity of teaching and research has long been a defining principle of higher education, yet its implementation often falls short in today's increasingly corporatized and precarised state of academia. Rooted in Wilhelm von Humboldt's vision of the modern university, this principle was never just about maximising research output but about academia as a holistic and humanistic endeavor. More than a century later, bell hooks' concept of "engaged pedagogy" expanded on this ideal, arguing that education should be an act of freedom, where students and teachers co-create knowledge through critical dialogue.

The REBOOT Project's main objective is to explore European film industry competitiveness through research. With the resources allocated towards this significant research, there is space opened to create synergies in the classroom: integrating research into teaching can transform students from passive recipients into active participants, ensuring that education remains not just a means to an end, but a process of intellectual and personal growth.

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) was a German aristocrat, linguist and education politician. On his initiative, Friedrich Wilhelm III. founded the *Universität zu Berlin* (today's Humboldt-Universität) in 1809. Humboldt's ideas of the modern university informed the reformation of universities as institutions. Instead of giving practical training to doctors and clerics or mannerly education to aristocratic elites, the university developed into a place of scholarly inquiry. Humboldt aspired to combine autonomy – both of the institution and the students – holistic studies of the arts and sciences in connection with the respective field of study and most infamously: the unity of research and teaching. The seemingly less popular part of the Humboldtian university model is that the ["modern research university was originally designed to serve humanistic rather than scientific goals"](#). To be cynical, central were not grants or maximum publication output but the utilization of academic research for a bigger, educational cause.

It goes without saying that, with Humboldt being a man of his time, the "modern" university at the time was only accessible to men, adhering to bourgeois ideals of women's space being the private.

Undoubtedly a more comprehensive approach to modern education was provided by bell hooks in her 1994 series of narrative essays [*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*](#). Influenced by her experience as a student in both racially segregated and so-called integrated schools, and later as a student and teacher at universities such as Stanford and Yale, hooks dissects the state of the U.S. education system and the difficulties arising in pedagogy and culture if problems of class, gender or race are not brought to the conscious of teaching staff.

Building on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, hooks is suggesting an "engaged pedagogy". In today's corporatised education system, it may seem dramatic to say that engaged pedagogy is – like a lot of hooks' work – rooted in love, it is true, nonetheless. With decentering "students" and "teachers" and relating to them as human beings with human experience rather than their roles in the classroom, hooks undoubtedly revolutionised the discourse on what it means to educate children of different backgrounds.

Seeing children ([link to Kinderuni blogpost](#)) and young adults as the leaders of the future, be it as producers, directors or cultural policy makers, has been engrained in REBOOT's mission from the beginning. It is only consequential to see academic students as the leading scholars of tomorrow.

There is no need to sugarcoat it: Courses on methodology, epistemology and even practical research are not areas of academic education students, especially on the undergraduate level, usually are interested in. Or to put it differently: They are not areas a lot of teachers tend to interest their students in.

REBOOT related courses, whether they are lectures on the politics of media or thesis courses on undergraduate and graduate level, always aspire to not treat participating students as passive listeners, material as closed and ultimate truths. Instead, students are invited into the discussion, inspiring autonomous research, utilizing interactive methods to nurture their interest and engagement, with student body and teachers forming the learning process with their interests – together.

Putting bell hooks' ideas into practice, we believe in inviting personal standpoints and stories of student and teachers into the classroom, departing from the teacher as sober lecturer and

examiner, creating space for togetherness, inquiry as human beings and most importantly: [dignity](#).

Teaching in the framework of a research project like REBOOT, not only gives students the possibility to work with real data but also gives them the chance, as young scholars and humans, to find out what aspects of media scholarship they are interested in, translating their personal interests into practical research that is connected back to the „real life“.

But the unity of inquiry and teaching, that is so emblematic in the Humboldtian university model and implicit in hooks' philosophy of teaching, doesn't stop at the classroom door. For us, students are not side effects of a staff position, renting our rooms and time for a few years, never to be seen again. We see them as project collaborators, future team members and of course: human beings.

After all, the academy should not be only a knowledge machine for the industry, producing well-skilled workers but a place of inquiry, learning and even self-actualisation. Thinking research and teaching not as a dichotomy but two sides of the same coin, creates chances for student and teacher to grow as researchers, as human beings, as critical citizens in the process of knowledge creation. Or as bell hooks puts it: "the academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created."

References

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