THE *REPUERESCENTIA* OF THE TEACHER: A PHILOSOPHICAL-EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHILD AND CULTURE

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Abstract
In the light of some tenets of philosophy of childhood, this paper proposes an 'updating' interpretation of the educational notion of *repuerescentia* (re-turn to childhood), offered by the Renaissance humanist Desiderius Erasmus. In particular, Erasmus' argumentation about the need for an early liberal education is reconstellated into the domain of a reading of culture as a form of play, that is, as a transitional space and his concept of *repuerescentia* is read in reference to Deleuzian 'becoming child.' It is shown, on the one hand, that there is no complete overlapping between the Deleuzian construct and the notion here investigated; on the other, that a dialogue between these two ideas could result in a more articulated way of looking at the position of the teacher within the educational relationship. It is argued, moreover, that a re-appropriation of the notion of repuerescentia could allow us to reconstruct school as a site in which the classical heritage is made alive and not simply passed on. If the idea of *repuerescentia* implies that the classical heritage is structured as a pedagogy, thanks to philosophy of childhood we could broaden and elaborate on this view and recognize that the classical heritage is not something closed but always in the making. Indeed, it is due to children's voices that it revives and can continue to speak to us. In this sense, a repuerescentia-oriented teaching could also act as a strategy to resolve some of the deadlocks associated with the Deweyan controversy between the child and the curriculum. A different inflection of the latter relationship and a fresher way of experiencing 'tradition' seem more urgent than ever in contemporary educational scenarios, which are marked by what has been defined the "endgame of the loss of historical continuity." In addition to that, the idea of the teacher's re-turn to childhood allows us to overcome some of the setbacks of the constructivist approaches in education, as they have been denounced in more recent literature in educational theory.

Keywords: becoming child; school; classical tradition; teaching; constructivism

A *repuerescentia* do professor: uma perspectiva filosófica-educacional sobre a criança e a cultura

Resumo
À luz de alguns princípios da filosofia da infância, este artigo propõe uma interpretação 'atualizante' da noção educacional de *repuerescentia* (retorno à infância), oferecida pelo humanista da renascença Desiderius Erasmus. Em particular, a argumentação de Erasmus sobre a necessidade de uma educação liberal precoce é contextualizada no campo de uma leitura da cultura como uma forma de jogo, ou seja, como um espaço transicional e seu conceito de *repuerescentia* é lido em referencia ao 'devir criança' de Deleuze. Mostra-se, por um lado, que não há sobreposição completa entre o construto deleuziano e a noção investigada aqui; por outro lado, que um diálogo entre essas duas ideias poderia resultar em um modo mais articulado de ver a posição do professor dentro da relação educacional. Argumenta-se, ademais, que a reapropriação da noção de *repuerescentia*

poderia autorizar-nos uma reconstrução da escola como um lugar cuja herança clássica é trazida à vida e não somente passado adiante. Se a ideia de *repuerescentia* implica que a herança clássica seja estruturada como a pedagogia, graças à filosofia da infância nós poderíamos ampliar e elaborar sobre essa visão e reconhecer que a herança clássica não é algo fechado mas que se faz em permanência. Logo, é devido às vozes das crianças que ela revive e pode continuar falando conosco. Nesse sentido, um ensino orientado à *repuerescentia* poderia também agir como uma estratégia para resolver alguns impasses associados à controversa deweyana entre a criança e o currículo. Uma inflexão diferente da última relação e uma maneira mais fresca de experienciar a 'tradição' parece mais urgente que nunca nos cenários contemporâneos da educação, que são marados pelo que foi definido como o "desenlace da perda de continuidade histórica". Além disso, a ideia de retorno do professor à infância nos permite superar alguns reveses da abordagem construtivista na educação, assim como foram denunciados na mais recente literatura sobre teoria educacional.

Palavras-chave: devir criança, tradições clássicas, ensino, construtivismo

La *repuerescentia* del profesor: una perspectiva filosófica educacional sobre el niño y la cultura

Resumen

A la luz de algunos principios de la filosofía de la infancia este artículo propone una interpretación "actualizante" de la noción educacional de *repuerescentia* (retorno a la infancia) ofrecida por el humanista del renacimiento Desiderius Erasmus. En particular la argumentación de Erasmus sobre la necesidad de una educación liberal precoz es contextualizada en el campo de una lectura de la cultura como forma de juego, o sea, como un espacio transicional y su concepto de *repuerescentia* es leído en referencia al devenir niño de Deleuze. Se muestra por un lado, que no existe superposición completa entre constructo deleuziano y la noción investigada aquí, por otro lado, que un diálogo entre esas dos ideas podría resultar en un modo más articulado de ver la posición del profesor dentro de la relación educacional. Se argumenta, además, que la reapropiación de la noción de *repuerescentia* podría autorizar una reconstrucción de la escuela como un lugar cuya herencia clásica es hace viva y no simplemente pasó Si la idea de *repuerescentia* implica la herencia clásica sea estructurada como pedagogía, gracias a la filosofía de la infancia nosotros podríamos ampliar y elaborar sobre esa visión y reconocer que la herencia clásica no es algo cerrado sino en permanente hacer. De hecho, es debido a las voces de los niños que ella revive y puede continuar hablando con nosotros. En ese sentido, un ensayo orientado a la *repuerescenti*a podría también actuar como una estrategia para resolver algunos impases asociados a la controversia deweyana entre el niño y el currículo. Una inflexión diferente de la última relación y una manera más fresca de experimentar la tradición parece más urgente que nunca en los escenarios conteporáneos de la educación, que son marcados por lo que fue definido como el "descenlase final de la perdida de continuidad histórica. Además de eso, la idea de retorno del profesor a la infancia nos permite superar algunos reveses del enfoques constructivista de la educación, así como fueron denunciados en la más reciente literatura educacional.

Palabras clave: devenir niño, tradiciones clásicas, enseñanza, constructivismo.

THE *REPUERESCENTIA* OF THE TEACHER: A PHILOSOPHICAL-EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHILD AND CULTURE

Following the pioneering inquiries of Gareth Matthews (1980, 1994), philosophy of childhood has become an interdisciplinary field of investigation, in accordance with both the insights and the aspirations expressed by Matthew Lipman in an American Philosophical Association meeting in 1980 (see Matthews, 1994, p. 7). Among the rich and increasingly wide panoply of concepts and notions which have been created and/or re-signified in the exploration of this field, I will take up only a few in this paper: the Deleuzian concept of *becoming child*, which I will consider in the wake of the re-appropriation that Walter Kohan (2006, 2008, 2010, 2011) has made of it; the notion of *play* as David Kennedy (2006a; 2006b) has re-activated it in his reconstruction (in all the meanings of the word) of the pair "child-adult," and in his endeavour to *reimagine the school*.

More specifically, the paper will deal with the school insofar as it is permeated by the transformative tension triggered by the combination of the energies of *becoming child* and of *play*. School will be understood as the domain of a peculiar kind of educational relationship which is interested in the 'creative prosecution of culture' (a quite awkward way of conveying the active meaning of the word 'tradition,' by divesting it of the aftertaste too often associated with an implication of passivity).

I will try to deploy the interpretative potential of Kennedy's and Kohan's notions by mobilizing them in an idiosyncratic reading of one of the educational masterpieces of European Renaissance Humanism—Erasmus' *The Education of Children* (1971[1529])[i]. The anodyne English translation *The Education of Children* does not convey adequately the substance of the Latin title of Erasmus' work *De Pueris statim et liberaliter instituendis* [Why children should be educated from an early age and in a liberal way]. What is important in the Latin title is the double adverb which refers to the need for an early liberal education.

There is a sense in which this reference to "earliness" falls obviously within the framework of the "intrusive mode" (deMause, 2006; see also Kennedy, 2006a, pp. 88ff; 2006[2000], p. 32): as children risk remaining victims of bestial impulses, education is a primary task for parents, who are obligated to ward off any danger of moral and intellectual corruption, and the only tool at their disposal is an early education, based on words and inspired by classical studies.

But there is a more charitable interpretation of the significance of the "earliness" of education in Erasmus, as far as I suggest understanding him. It is precisely because children are not only destined to become full wo/men (that is, rational beings)—if the appropriate measures are taken—but are also from a very early age capable of (and worthy of) being treated as (future) wo/men that it is possible to educate them early in a liberal way, by drawing upon the rich repertoire of themes and contents of the *studia humanitatis*. Furthermore, these studies are not just something preambulary, doomed to be replaced by the rules devised by reason but they are the very substance of any educational path that will lead to the fully human and rational flourishing.

I want to follow a precious indication of the contemporary French philosopher Kambouchner (2013, p. 337), who emphasizes how Erasmus is intimating that the universe of classical culture is not something alien to childhood but rather it can be offered to children by courtesy of specific educational strategies and—what is even more important—has itself a pedagogical structure.

Against this backdrop the dynamics of what Erasmus calls *repuerescere* and refers to the teacher, insofar as s/he wants to be really a teacher, adds something more—at least in my understanding as mediated by the contemporary philosophy of childhood—namely that not only can children access culture, but the latter can continue to be a living tradition exclusively only insofar as it is revived by childhood, both real childhood and the one that the teacher has to re-live if s/he wants to be equal to her/his role. Erasmus's text reads as follows:

> Furthermore it will help very much, if he that has taken upon him to teach a child, so sets his mind upon him, that he bear a fatherly love unto him. By this it shall come to pass that both the child will learn more gladly and he shall feel less tediousness of his labour. For in every business love takes away the greatest part of hardness. And because after the old proverb: 'Like rejoices in like,' the master must in a manner play the child again [*praeceptor quodammodo repuerescat oportet*], that he may be loved by the child.[ii] (Desiderius Erasmus, (1971[1529]), p. 65)

The dynamics of *repuerescentia* is introduced in close connection with the link between teaching and the parental roles and the need for love in education. The idea of *repuerescentia* is advanced in reference to the invitation to induce the "affection of a parent" and through the mention of an old proverb pointing to the notion of similarity and affinity: does it mean that a movement of sameness is here at work? Is *repuerescentia* nothing but a sly way to reproduce the identical? I would, on the contrary, suggest reading the introduction of the joint themes of parenthood and similarity within the constellation of Levinas' ideas on paternity. By elaborating on the latter's reflections, highlighting "the rupture of the egoist I" and the "reconditioning in the face of the Other," which culminate in "a psychological development of the adult through her relationship with the child," David Kennedy comments:

> The result of this development is an adult who is in touch with the child-dimension of her own subjectivity—its forms of feeling, intentionality and cognitive style. Being more in touch with myself as a child means being more in touch with the child before me; being more in touch with the child before me allows me to make child rearing and educational decisions that are both the instigators and the consequences of dialogue . . . (Kennedy, 2006a, p. 72).

In the wake of these concepts we can get back to Erasmus in order to interpret his passage deconstructively: the similarity is not the sameness—rather, it is the irreducible difference within a relationship of co-belonging for ever to be re-created and renewed. It is the *belonging without appropriation*, which opens up

the space for the recognition of alterity *qua* alterity and for the dialogue with it. This space is also the domain of growth.

There is no growth if education boils down to mere transmission (which is the replacement of belonging with appropriation, the infecundity of parenthood understood as a mere interest in continuation). Nor is there any real growth without continuity, what Dewey calls "connectedness in growth" (Dewey, 1988[1938], p. 50). The parent-child relationship is the embodiment—in all the meanings of the word—of this generative continuity which is not the self-reproduction of the same but the unpredictable unfolding of the old in new directions emerging in the openness of the dialogue between the older and the younger generations. Otherwise we would have only a "form of ventriloquism" (Kennedy, 2006b, p. 7).

In this perspective it is significant that the theme of *repuerescentia* comes to the foreground in intimate connection with that of the love. Here there is obviously Erasmus' struggle against brutal educational systems, and in favour of sweeter and milder ways of educating. But much more is at stake, namely that kind of Socratic dynamics of love (see Kohan, 2008, p. 57), which prevents the fecund paternity from turning into patriarchal dominion (which wants exclusively to force children to conform to the norms of the past) and allows the dialogue between generations to be really generative-in-continuity.

In speaking of continuity I do not want to water down the character of unprecedented novelty which the encounter with childhood should promote. But I would like to point to the risk linked to "the endgame of the loss of the historical continuity" (Kennedy, 2006b, p. 10). This feature of the postmodern condition can be experienced as something emancipative and exhilarating, but we should not underrate the danger that this trait could rather serve the interests of a social system that thrives on free-floating individuals and the liquidation (and liquefaction, in Bauman's [2000, 2005, 2006] sense) of any bond.

The issue of "the endgame of the loss of the historical continuity" is closely linked with that of culture, but before entering into this thematic constellation, we

should explore the notion of *repuerescentia* by comparing it with that of "becoming child." I quote Kohan at length:

> Becoming child is not becoming a child, not infantilizing oneself, and not even moving backwards to one's own chronological childhood. Becoming is to encounter a certain intensity. Becoming child is the childhood as intensity, a situating oneself intensively in the world; a getting out of one's 'own' place and situating oneself in other places, which are unknown, unusual, unexpected; it is something without a past, present or future; something without a chronological temporality, but with a geography, intensity and its own directions. A becoming is something 'always contemporary,' a cosmological creation: a world which explodes and the explosion of the world. Becoming child is to encounter that one who in principle should be not encountered; it is an adult, a child or whatever human being who encounters that one whom s/he should not encounter. The indeterminate article 'a' does not mark a lack of determination, but rather the singularity of an encounter, of whatever 'a' with whatever other 'a,' a singular encounter, not particular or universal. The 'becomings' are always minority and run in parallel: becoming-intensive, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible. What the different becomings have in common is their opposition to the model, to the dominant form of Man. . . . 'Becoming child' is, then, an unexpected force, which breaks in, without being invited or anticipated, and extracts, from our own age, from the body that we are, the flows and the particles which give rise to a 'creative involution' and to a 'marriage-against-nature.' (Kohan, 2006, pp. 53-54)

On the one hand, it should be admitted that this notion is situated in a fairly different theoretical constellation in comparison with Erasmus'/Kambouchner's concept of *repuerescentia*. Indeed, the idea of the aionic childhood—in the footsteps of an innovative reading of Heraclitus (Kohan, 2006, p. 49ff.; Kohan, 2008, pp. 48f.; Kohan, 2011, pp. 341-342)—, the emphasis on the need to take leave of chronological metaphors and espouse a "geographical' discourse," stressing intensity, and the interpretation of "becoming child" as a practice of unlearning (in the wake of Manoel de Barros [Kohan, 2011, p. 349]) all seem to make Kohan's views fairly irreconcilable with the horizon of discourse of Erasmus and Kambouchner, which seems rather to be interested in how to promote classical

culture and learning in the sense of that cultural knowledge that comes to us as a heritage.

Although it may sound unnatural to establish an alliance between Deleuze/Kohan and Erasmus/Kambouchner, I think that letting the former's ideas resonate in the latter's could be advantageous. If not a 'becoming child' *stricto sensu*, *repuerescentia* is a re-turn to childhood, understood not as a coming back to one's own childhood but as an original change of direction, a breaking free from any replication, inaugurated by the encounter with the originality of childhood: first of all, the childhood of children who are in front of us as teachers and, secondly, the childhood as a permanent dimension of our being-in-the-world (and, often, the latter is discovered just through the former). This encounter—which is marked by love, if we follow Erasmus, and is therefore generative—assumes not only that something is taught and learned but, more radically, that something worth being learned exists.

A heritage not renewed by the intensity of childhood is the possession of the dead, which is doomed to be buried by the dead (the—legitimately!—bored-to-death pupils of our schools on whom traditional contents are inflicted and who cannot but bury them in a refreshing oblivion). The mortification (literally understood!) of children and that of knowledge and culture go hand in hand.

More is at stake in *repuerescentia*, therefore, than a mere remembering of what being like a child means in order to avoid the overburdening of the child with too many contents and to present the subject-matters in adequate ways (although this seems to be the sense in which Erasmus takes the whole matter). The *repuerescentia* of the teacher should be understood as a re-orientation of her/his relationship to knowledge which is triggered by the encounter with the child. In this re-orientation a new and different love of her/his subject-matter emerges: it is no longer that of the specialist (or even of the pedant) but that of a genuine teacher. The latter is characterized by the fact that his/her love for knowledge is animated by love for the pupil, who is not the addressee of a communication but the partner in a dialogue. And as a genuine tradition is nothing but an ongoing dialogue, there is no true cultural tradition if not within

the loving relationship between a *repuerescens* teacher and a child. This is what study as *studium* (= etymologically 'passion and intensity') fundamentally amounts to.

The specialist's knowledge is derived from the *studium* (understood in this sense), not the other way around. The typical idea dominant in our school systems is that first there are the disciplines as specialized fields of knowledge, then the school subject-matters which derive from them, and the educational challenge is, accordingly, how to make these subject-matters accessible to pupils. In this view pupils and knowledge are separated, and pupils are those who have to be led to the acquisition of knowledge: this is what the task of pedagogy consists in (*paídes ágein eis tèn epistémen*). Accordingly, what Dewey called "the case of Child vs. Curriculum" (Dewey, 1976[1902], p. 290) inevitably obtains.

The *repuerescentia* of the teacher does not, however, overlap completely with the *psychologization of the curriculum* (Ibid., p. 285). Although I would argue that this is not the case with Dewey, the psychologization of the curriculum might also be interpreted in such a way as to remain patronizing, insofar as it might be read as a way of adapting subject-matters to the cognitive and developmental levels of children, of whom, therefore, the lower capacities would be emphasized rather than their potential to enrich the world of culture (even if one starts with the interests of children). As the notion of psychologization may risk remaining encapsulated in a developmental framework according to which the Curriculum may be seen as representing the ending of a trajectory of which the Child is the 'square one,' it may also risk being deployed, therefore, to perpetuate a 'historical' view (much in the sense of Kohan), to which any possibility of the intensity of 'becoming' remains alien.[iii] Instead, the perspective should be changed: the encounter with children also allows the subject-matter (and more generally the world of culture[iv]) to develop, resulting, it could be argued, in an "emergent curriculum" (Kennedy, 2006a, 2012), to be understood also as an enrichment of general culture through the emergence of unexpected novelty due to the dialogue with childhood.

In the issue of the *repuerescentia* of the teacher, then, not only is a more humane educational relationship at stake but also the flourishing of the domain of culture, which evolves creatively only if it lives in the thriving continuity of a "connectedness in growth" (Dewey, 1988[1938], p. 50). This childlike relationship with culture and knowledge can be summarized in the notion of play.

The topic of play is intimately woven into the very fabric of Erasmus' text: first, at the argumentative level, the main challenge of the Erasmian teacher is how to make the cultural contents attuned to children's capacities through a series of strategies which are fundamentally inspired by the valorization of a playing attitude; secondly, at the linguistic level, the Latin phrase for primary education is *ludus litterarius*, that is, *literary play*, so that in a sense, by deploying his pedagogical talent and innovativeness[v] in early education, Erasmus does nothing but substantiate and take literally the very Latin wording for 'primary education.' With just a grain of exaggeration it could be argued that the whole educational endeavor of Erasmus revolves around how to be faithful to the idea a) that literary culture, insofar as it is 'educational,' is a form of playing (which does not go counter to the need for effort, mainly in later stages of education) and b) that the heritage of classical culture can be reconstellated into the domain of the childlike activity of playing.

But the notion of *repuerescentia*, at least as I am proposing we read it, allows us to go further: if a) and b) obtain, the teacher cannot introduce the cultural contents unless s/he her/himself is able to re-turn to childhood and to enter the dimension of play. The teacher who betrays and does not recognize (the refreshing potential of) childhood is not simply a conservative educator more interested in the integrity of the cultural heritage than in pedagogical strategies, but rather s/he is alien to any intimate relationship with the world of culture, of which s/he deems her/himself to be a champion and a representative. Her/his failure is not only pedagogical but cultural, and it is the latter insofar it is the former.

The encyclopaedia of culture, the general culture as *enkúklios paideía*, can be the aim and the driving force of a project of early liberal education only if we are able to recognize its primordial rootedness in the circle (*en kúklo*) of playing

children, of children in their 'childing' dimension (*paideía* as *paízein*), that is, not seen in reference to a future state they are destined to arrive at (whether adulthood or an organized body of knowledge as an ossified heritage). This 'childing' dimension is the condition of possibility of any genuinely liberal culture.

By deconstructing Erasmus and going with him beyond him, we can say that not only should children be early and liberally educated (*statim et liberaliter instituendi*) but the very 'institution of general culture' happens fundamentally in that *literary playing* which the education of childhood is. This is how I suggest revisiting the appeals to liberal education and general education in correspondence with Kohan's notion of 'childhood of education' and Kennedy's valorization of play.

What I am proposing by elaborating on the idea of *repuerescentia* should not be, however, misunderstood as a mere veneering of constructivist pedagogies through a uselessly complicated classical vocabulary.[vi] On the contrary, I would venture to state that the notion of *repuerescentia* could help us to go beyond some limitations of constructivism.

Indeed, constructivist pedagogies have been the main representatives of that phenomenon which Gert Biesta (2006, 2010a) has called *learnification*--that is, the replacement of the language of education by that of learning. It is not harmless to see the pupil as only a learner (Biesta, 2010b), because this move deletes the possibility of recognizing that peculiar—and highly significant from an educational point of view— experience that Biesta captures in the expression *being taught by*:

> My point . . . is, that *to learn from someone is a radically different experience from the experience of being taught by someone*. When we think, just at the level of 'everyday phenomenology,' of experiences where we were taught something—where we would say, always in hindsight, that 'this person has really taught me something'—we more often than not refer to experiences where someone showed us something or made us realise something *that really entered our being from the outside*" (Biesta, 2014, p. 53)

Biesta spells out the 'being taught by'[vii] experience in terms of *transcendence* and *resistance*: the former refers to the fact that the 'learner' has to do with "something that is fundamentally beyond [her/his] control" (Ibid., p. 57); the latter to the fact that "[f]rom the perspective of the student teaching . . . brings something that is strange, something that is not a projection of the student's own mind, but something that is radically and fundamentally *other*" (Biesta, 2012, p. 42).

I wish to situate these insightful remarks in the context of the present reflection (not without a hermeneutical bending, or even a twist, in introducing Biesta's approach). The literary play, *ludus litterarius*, which Erasmus presents is neither the unfolding of a knowledge coming from within the child (otherwise the teacher would play no role) or the imposition of some cultural contents from without (otherwise the teacher would not need to "play the childe" and *repuerescere*). It is a dialogue in the transitional space of culture. In this dialogue both parties experience transcendence and resistance, which are the marks of a true dialogue as distinguished from a mere exchange of projections.[viii]

Indeed, *repuerescentia* is not a mechanism of identification, as it might seem if we stick to Pliny's sentence quoted by Erasmus:[ix] as I understand it, what is important in *repuerescentia* is not so much that the teacher remembers what being a child means and, consequently, identifies her/himself with the pupil, as that by encountering the alterity of the child and experiencing her/him as a resistance in reference to her/his own (the teacher's) way of knowing and to her/his relationship to culture, s/he re-turns to childhood, through a movement that is not a coming-back but a transcendence, a going beyond the usual (and often encrusted) way of relating to culture (reduced to a dead heritage or watered down clichés). In that dialogue which is liberal education as a literary play is, there is a double movement of transcendence and resistance:

- the child as the student (as the subject of a *studium* in the aforementioned meaning) experiences an access to the world of culture as something more

than and different from the mere development of her/his own native resources (as in the constructivist logic of learning), but rather as something "strange" (in Biesta's words) that should be explored as a new field;

- the teacher her/himself, by truly encountering children—that is, recognizing them in their 'childing' and not considering them just as wax, clay, or a condition of deficit—on the one hand experiences a resistance, an otherness, which s/he should enter a dialogue with, without attempting to reduce it to her/his own frame of mind; and on the other hand, needs to transcend her/himself (towards childhood as a permanent possibility of human experience) by virtue of the appeal of the real child as a transcendence. In this view the teacher experiences a refreshing unlearning (much in the sense of Manoel de Barros quoted by Kohan [2011, p. 349]).

R*epuerescentia* is, then, a dynamics of a self-transcending provoked by a transcendence, a dynamic in which general culture (*enkúklios paideía*) is no longer just a set of given frames of mind or of contents taken for granted but a connectedness in growth, the life of a historical continuity revived by the intensity of the becoming and, therefore, different from that legitimately stigmatized by Kohan.

I would suggest that this movement of 'transcending' cannot come about without a real encounter with childhood and that, therefore, culture can continue to live (and not to wither and fade into the insignificance of a dead heritage) only in this trans-generational (and trans-generative) dialogue.

In this paper I have been insisting on the issue of culture—understood as general and liberal culture—that is, "a certain process and the real or ideal outcome of this process in a subject who devotes her/himself actively to it. This process is not thoroughly individual: it always takes place in a specific society and with the contribution of specific institutions; but its primary protagonist is an individual . . . who realizes thereby her/his humanity. This realization itself is principally intellectual . . . but it cannot be devoid of a moral sense" (Kambouchner, 1995, p. 448). This classical and humanistic notion of culture (the one rooted in the ideas of *paideía* and *humanitas* and obtaining in Erasmus and in

all the humanistic tradition) implies a familiarization with "a domain of specific works" which aspire to the character of "generality and universality" (Ibid., p. 449).

In a sense, it is reckless to attempt to establish a dialogue between, on the one hand, that tradition of which authors such as Kambouchner are the representatives and updaters and, on the other hand, the philosophy of childhood in the vein of Kohan and Kennedy, as well as the educational thinking of Biesta.

The concerns of authors like Kambouchner are not, however, destitute of any significance for our time: while the "endgame of the loss of historical continuity" could be read as potentially liberatory, it is in fact a major crisis. Loss of historical continuity as an endgame could also be considered as a Beckettian awakening from the Joycian nightmare of history. Historical continuity as the uniform continuation of the past, impermeable to any 'becoming,' is the torture of something which cannot finish because it is unable to grow, re-start, refresh, *repuerescere* ("Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished", in Beckett's [1958] memorable words). The way out of this deadlock is not so much the liquidation of the significance of the cultural heritage of the humanistic traditions—which is most desired by the protean manipulative powers of turbo-capitalism (think of how all the educational reforms advocated by the financial camps imply turning the curriculum in the direction of useful and up-to-date subject-matters)—but rather its renewal.

There is a sense in which the tradition of classical culture has represented merely a kind of restrictive weight, a Medusa-like element that has been petrifying the emergence of the new. In educational contexts, this has manifested as an erasure of children's voices, as a sacrifice of childhood (and of originality and inventiveness) on the altar of the preservation of a heritage of which children had to be only the passive replication. But I would suggest that in the epoch of the "endgame of the loss of the historical continuity" we should take seriously the risk that, due to major changes in technology (and the connected transformations in our experience of history), we are losing any relationship with "the older heritage of culture" and that the latter appears increasingly meaningless. In this sense, it is

always 'nearly finished' in an infinite endgame. What gets lost is its vitality, the capacity for being an instigation to growth.

We need schools as sites in which to cultivate the *eu phrónein*—good judgement and reflection—an expression used by the Greek rhetorician and educator Isocrates, one of the first advocates of the *enkúklios paideía* (see Kambouchner, 1995, p. 465). We could do that, however, not by clinging to the old heritage as a perennial paradigm to which children and young generations should conform, but rather by rediscovering it as the space of *ludi litterari*, as the circle in which the childing children not only can grow but can actively contribute to a connectedness in growth which will always be unprecedented, original and new.

Modern educational discourse arose under the sign of a separation of childhood and culture: the one who inaugurated a new valuation of childhood was the same who deprecated culture as a factor of moral corruption for society (I am thinking obviously of Jean Jacques Rousseau). It can be argued that this split has overshadowed the entire history of modern education, and that the opposition between the child and the curriculum and between progressive and conservative education are different versions of this. The notion of *repuerescentia*, as far as it is read through the contemporary philosophy of childhood, could help us to bridge this gap and provide us with the conceptual tools to cope with the challenges of "the endgame of the loss of the historical continuity."

Enviado em: 06/01/2015
Aprovado em: 07/01/2015

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[i] All the quotations of Erasmus are from this edition. The English version is from the translation included in the volume *Treatise on Schemes and Tropes gathered out of the best Grammarians and Oratours* (London, 1550) by Richard Sherry and the quotations are taken from the Kindle edition bearing the title *The Education of Children* (2011).

[ii] In this case I have intervened on the text by updating the spelling. The original Sherry's translation reads as follows: "Furthermore it wyll helpe verye muche, if he that hathe taken vpon hym to teache a chylde, so sette hys mynd vpon hym,that he bear a fatherly loue vnto hym. By thys it shall come to passe, y^t both the child wil lerne more gladly, & he shal fele lesse tediousnes of his laboure. [Sidenote: A sentence to be marked.] For in euery busines loue taketh away y^e greatest part of hardnes. And because after the olde prouerbe: Lyke reioyseth in lyke, y^e master muste in maner play the childe againe, that he may be loued of the chylde." The original Erasmus' Latin text is the following: "Porro non parum adferet adiumenti, si qui puerum suscepit instituendum, animi inductione parentis affectum induat. Hoc pacto fiet ut et puer discat libentius, et ipse minus sentiat ex labore taedii. Siquidem in omni negocio magnam difficultatis partem adimit amor. Quoniam autem iuxta uetus prouerbium "Simile gaudet simili", praeceptor quodammodo repuerescat oportet, ut ametur a puero."

[iii] It is hardly necessary to specify that here I am not interested in an analysis of Dewey's ideas (which would need more room, due to the complexity of his thinking) but rather in providing some hints at how even progressive educational theories can be re-appropriated in ways that prevent one from fully recognizing the potential of children and at how, therefore, some tenets of specific trends of contemporary philosophy of childhood could work as helpful correctives.

[iv] There is an important issue to be explored: when Dewey refers to the Curriculum pole, he speaks of "social culture" as opposed to "the individual nature" (Dewey, 1976[1902], p. 274), while the idea of general culture in the humanistic tradition is not linked only with a process of socialization but with a familiarization with a domain which aspires to represent a broader universality. The question arises whether it is possible to think of the *enkúklios paideía* as an emergent phenomenon which, while rooted in social constellations, is not reduced to their level. This would probably be a non-Deweyan understanding of culture, but it is an issue that cannot be engaged with here.

[v] It is to be reminded that Erasmus was a very inventive writer of textbooks, which taught Latin by resituating this 'old' language in more common experiences and made it a living language and not just a dead heritage.

[vi] It is here—in my misgivings about constructivist pedagogies—that I part company with Kennedy.

[vii] It is to be highlighted that Biesta takes this notion of "being taught by" as well as that of transcendence from Levinas, an author who plays a major role also in David Kennedy's philosophy of childhood.

[viii] As is evident, although I draw upon Kennedy's ideas, I make idiosyncratic use of them (much in the way I do with Biesta's tenets).

[ix] “How much more curteouse is it that Pliny warneth a certen master that was to sore. Remember saythe he, that bothe he is younge man, and that thou hast ben one thi selfe.” Latin version: “Quanto humanius est quod Plinius admonet quendam seueriorem literatorem: "Memento", inquit, "et illum adolescentem esse, et te fuisse” (Desiderius Erasmus (1971[1529], p.66).