confronting adultcentrism:

childist and decolonial interventions in educational philosophies and institutions

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abstract

'Confronting Adultcentrism: Childist and Decolonial Interventions in Educational Philosophies and Institutions' explores the transformative potential of childism as an orientation to critique and transform adultism and coloniality within education. Edited by Tanu Biswas and Toby Rollo, the special dossier builds on the Childism Institute's discussions to center children as epistemic agents and challenge the structural marginalization of childhood in socio-political and philosophical spheres. Childism deconstructs and critiques adult-centric biases, proposing a profound shift toward recognizing the interdependence of childhood and adulthood, and unique relational perspectives as vital to intergenerational justice. The articles examine how traditional (euro-centric) educational systems reinforce adultist hierarchies, viewing children as incomplete beings in a preparatory phase called 'childhood'. They advocate for reimagining educational systems with age-inclusive pedagogical relationships where children participate as active contributors. Key themes include democratic education and liberation as an intergenerational project,, decolonial critiques of childhood philosophies underlying educational practices, and the role of children as epistemic agents and activists. Some contributions argue for dismantling adultist structures and integrating children and childhood into democratic and liberatory frameworks. Others explicitly link adultism to coloniality, showing how Eurocentric colonial projects infantilized colonized peoples. The articles extend childism's reach to address historical legacies of racialized and epistemic oppression including explorations of racialized imageries of childhood. Collectively the dossier advances childism as a timely intervention for reshaping education, philosophy, and policy, embracing children's present contributions and fostering intergenerational equity.

keywords: childism; adultcentrism; decoloniality; intergenerational justice; education; pedagogy.

confrontando o adultocentrismo:
intervenções infancistas e decoloniais em filosofias e instituições educativas

resumo

"Confrontando o Adultocentrismo: Intervenções Criancistas e Decoloniais em Filosofias e Instituições Educacionais" explora o potencial transformador do criancismo (*childism*) como uma orientação para criticar e transformar o adultismo e a colonialidade na educação. Editado por Tanu Biswas e Toby Rollo, o dossiê especial baseia-se nas discussões do *Childism*

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Institute para destacar as crianças como agentes epistêmicos e desafiar a marginalização estrutural da infância nas esferas sociopolíticas e filosóficas. O criancismo desconstrói e critica vieses adultocêntricos, propondo uma mudança profunda no que diz respeito ao reconhecimento da interdependência da infância e da idade adulta e das perspectivas relacionais como vitais para a justiça intergeracional. Os artigos investigam como sistemas educacionais tradicionais (eurocêntricos) reforçam hierarquias adultocêntricas, considerando as crianças como seres incompletos em um estágio preparatório chamado "infância". Eles defendem a reimaginação dos sistemas educacionais com relações pedagógicas que incluam todas as idades, nas quais as crianças participem como contribuidoras ativas. Entre os principais temas estão a educação democrática e a libertação como um projeto intergeneracional, as críticas decoloniais às filosofias da infância subjacentes às práticas educacionais e o papel das crianças como agentes epistêmicos e ativistas. Algumas contribuições defendem o desmantelamento das estruturas adultistas e a integração das crianças e da infância em estruturas democráticas e libertárias. Outros vinculam explicitamente o adultismo à colonialidade, mostrando como os projetos coloniais eurocêntricos infantilizaram os povos colonizados. Os artigos estendem o alcance do criancismo para abordar os legados históricos da opressão racializada e epistêmica, incluindo explorações de imagens racializadas da infância. Coletivamente, o dossiê apresenta o criancismo como uma intervenção oportuna para remodelar a educação, a filosofia e a política, abrangendo as contribuições atuais das crianças e promovendo a igualdade entre as gerações.

palavras-chave: criancismo; adultocentrismo; decolonialidade; justiça intergeracional; educação; pedagogia.

confrontando el adultocentrismo: intervenciones infancistas y decoloniales en las filosofías e instituciones educativas

resumen

"Confrontando el Adultocentrismo: Intervenciones Infancistas y Decoloniales en las Filosofías e Instituciones Educativas" explora el potencial transformador del infancismo (*childism*) como una orientación para criticar y transformar el adultismo y la colonialidad dentro de la educación. Editado por Tanu Biswas y Toby Rollo, el dossier especial se basa en las discusiones del *Childism Institute* para centrar a los niños como agentes epistémicos y desafiar la marginalización estructural de la infancia en los ámbitos sociopolíticos y filosóficos. El infancismo deconstruye y critica los sesgos adultocéntricos, proponiendo un cambio profundo hacia el reconocimiento de la interdependencia entre infancia y adultez, y perspectivas relacionales únicas como esenciales para la justicia intergeneracional. Los artículos examinan cómo los sistemas educativos tradicionales (eurocéntricos) refuerzan las jerarquías adultistas, viendo a los niños y a las niñas como seres incompletos en una fase preparatoria llamada "infancia". Abogan por la reimaginación de los sistemas educativos con relaciones pedagógicas inclusivas en cuanto a edad, donde los niños y las niñas participen como contribuyentes activos. Los temas clave incluyen la educación democrática y la liberación como un proyecto intergeneracional, las críticas decoloniales de las filosofías de la infancia subyacentes a las prácticas educativas y el papel de los niños y de las niñas como agentes epistémicos y activistas. Algunas contribuciones argumentan a favor de desmantelar las estructuras adultistas e integrar a los niños, niñas y la infancia en marcos democráticos y liberadores. Otras vinculan explícitamente el adultismo con la colonialidad, mostrando cómo los proyectos coloniales eurocéntricos infantilizaron a los pueblos colonizados. Los artículos

extienden el alcance del infancismo para abordar los legados históricos de la opresión racializada y epistémica, incluyendo exploraciones de imágenes racializadas de la infancia. Colectivamente, el dossier impulsa el infancismo como una intervención oportuna para reconfigurar la educación, la filosofía y las políticas, abrazando las contribuciones presentes de los niños y fomentando la equidad intergeneracional.

palabras-clave: infancismo; adultocentrismo; decolonialidad; justicia intergeneracional; educación; pedagogía.

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in educational philosophies and institutions

This special dossier of *childhood and philosophy*, guest edited by Tanu Biswas and Toby Rollo, contributes to a philosophical reorientation in which children are recognized as epistemic agents and adultism and coloniality are identified and critiqued within educational structures. Grounded in critical discussions from the Childism Institute's Transnational Childism Colloquium, it builds upon the principles of childism to re-envision children's roles within philosophical and educational discourse. Childism, here, is not merely a critique of adult-centered biases. It is an orientation that confronts the structural exploitation of childhood and promotes intergenerational justice by centering children's agency, voices, and knowledge.

Educational institutions occupy a particularly central role in maintaining childhood as a social structure to lopsidedly serve adult-centric interests. The call for a critical childist lens in philosophy and education comes from the pressing need to rethink foundational structures and assumptions that have historically marginalized children's experiences and perspectives. As outlined in Biswas *et al.* (2023), childism functions as more than a critique of adult-centered structures; it represents a profound conceptual shift that reimagines children as full participants in the social and epistemic spheres. Childism challenges the assumption that children exist in a state of "becoming" rather than "being," a view that has relegated them to preparatory phases within developmental hierarchies, thus limiting their agency and voice.

Traditional philosophical frameworks have largely sidelined children, focusing on ideals of autonomy and rationality typically associated with adulthood. These frameworks, rooted in long-standing adultist assumptions, view children as incomplete or subordinate, awaiting the maturity that adulthood supposedly confers. As Biswas and colleagues point out, even philosophical disciplines that have engaged with concepts of difference—such as postmodernism and feminism—have often neglected age as a significant category of analysis, thereby leaving age-based power relations unexamined. By not only incorporating but also centering children's

and childhood perspectives, childism calls for a restructuring of social norms and philosophical inquiries, aligning them with pluralistic understandings of subjectivity that embrace diversity in age as well as other dimensions like gender, race, and ability.

Sharing this foundation, Rollo's interventions in childist and decolonial theory (Rollo, 2016, 2023) highlight how studying adultism deepens the intersectional understanding of oppression by revealing its entanglement with coloniality. Rollo argues that the adult/child binary, foundational to adultism, was indispensable for Euro-centric colonial projects, where colonized peoples were infantilized and subjected to paternalistic control. By tracing the historical domestication of Europe's own youth through hierarchical systems, Rollo connects intergenerational colonization to the global expansion of Euro-centric colonial dominance. His analytical approach further illuminates how the marginalization of children reinforces other forms of oppression, such as racism and ableism. Studying adultism, therefore, not only exposes the mechanisms of oppression but also expands decolonial efforts, making transformative childist perspectives central to dismantling interconnected systems of domination.

Childism then distinguishes itself by aspiring to expand transformative interventions such as feminism, critical race theory, and de-colonialism. Much as these fields redefined social theory by centering marginalized perspectives and developing new modes of relationality and intersectionality, childism introduces concepts of "empowered inclusion" and "deep interdependence," (Josefsson & Wall 2020) emphasizing that children are not peripheral beings but intrinsic participants in the human condition. Childism represents an invitation to rethink ontology, politics, and ethics in ways that do not presuppose adult-centric norms but instead celebrate the diversity of childhood as a fully realized state of being. This critical lens does not only seek to add children's voices but to question and deconstruct the adultist frameworks that have historically suppressed them, making room for a relational ontology where both children and adults engage in mutual, empowered learning and existence.

Childism is particularly urgent in the current socio-political context, marked by climate crises and global socio-economic challenges, where children and youth are

increasingly stepping forward as activists. These young activists not only exemplify the capacities of children as agents of change but also reveal the ethical failures of adult-dominated systems that have disregarded their futures. By foregrounding a childist lens, scholars and educators alike are invited to question the structural adultism that blocks intergenerational justice and prevents meaningful inclusion of children in decision-making. The ambition of childism is therefore not merely academic but profoundly practical: it aims to reshape democratic spaces, educational institutions and social policies to reflect a more inclusive, intergenerational ethics that sees children as vital, active participants in both local and global arenas. It does so by recognizing the deep interdependence of adulthood and childhood as structures.

Collectively, these articles challenge prevailing educational frameworks, exposing how adultism and coloniality converge to limit children's participation, often relegating them to marginal roles within social, educational, and philosophical spheres. Through diverse theoretical lenses, these contributions argue for a reconceptualization of educational spaces and structures, where children's insights and agency are recognized as essential to democratic, epistemic, and decolonial projects.

A recurring theme within the issue is the rethinking of education's democratic role through a childist lens. This theme is addressed powerfully in Hedegaard's "Rethinking the Democratic Role of Education through Childism." Here, Hedegaard critiques the traditional perception of children as "not-yet" citizens who must be prepared for democratic life by acquiring values, knowledge, and rationality deemed appropriate by adults. Through an exploration of childism, Hedegaard challenges this deficit-based model of democracy, arguing that it perpetuates a view of children as incomplete beings. The democratic role of education, as proposed by Hedegaard, should not be confined to fostering adult-centric virtues within children but should include children as current democratic actors whose unique perspectives on justice, rights, and communal life are valuable. Hedegaard's framework introduces an expanded democratic imagination that reframes education not as a preparatory process but as an inclusive and immediate space for democratic participation, acknowledging children as present contributors to civic discourse.

Complementing Hedegaard's re-envisioning of democratic education, Liebel and Meade's article, "Can School Become a Non-Adultist Institution?" interrogates the deep-seated adultist hierarchies within conventional schooling structures. Despite efforts to reform educational approaches, the authors argue that school systems remain entrenched in adult-centric authority structures that prioritize adult knowledge and control over children's autonomy. Liebel and Meade critique the subtler manifestations of adultism within schools, such as curricula that frame children as passive recipients of knowledge or as "becoming" citizens who must conform to adult-defined standards of behavior. This work resonates with Hedegaard's call for educational spaces that recognize children as current citizens. Liebel and Meade propose practical strategies for fostering child-centered learning environments that respect children's autonomy and agency, advancing a model of education that is not only non-adultist but actively democratic in its embrace of children's voices.

This reimagining of democratic education connects with Padilla Rosas's work in "The Philosophy of Liberation for/With Children: In Search of Liberation and the Creation of an Ageless Pueblo." Padilla Rosas introduces a childist perspective to the philosophy of liberation, traditionally focused on criticizing colonialism and oppressive structures. By advocating for the inclusion of children's voices within liberatory frameworks, Padilla Rosas expands on the Latin American concept of *pueblo*, understood here as a collective of people unified in their political struggles. Children, Padilla Rosas argues, are integral members of this collective and should not be excluded from philosophical and political discourse aimed at liberation. The philosophy of liberation, Padilla Rosas asserts, must abandon an adultist conception of emancipation and embrace a model where children's voices contribute to the collective agency of *pueblo*. This shift not only aligns with Hedegaard's democratic ideals but also proposes a radical vision of a world where liberation is an intergenerational project, inherently inclusive of children and childhood.

In "Adultcentrism and the Children's classroom: If you want to teach them you must know who they are" Eslava addresses the centrality of intergenerational collaboration across institutions — between pre-service teachers, university educators, and pupils — to dismantle various types of adultcentrisms e.g., cognitive,

epistemic and pedagogical. Like Eslava, who links university and school classrooms through pre-service teachers, Victoria also employs an intergenerational lens in "Ejercer, Ejercitar y Reparar: Filosofía con Infancias como Práctica Extramuros, como Derecho, como Ejercicio Espiritual, como Crítica al Adultocentrismo y al Androcentrismo". However, her focus extends beyond teaching contexts to analyze how the discipline of philosophy itself, historically, perpetuates adultcentric and androcentric norms, influencing how knowledge is created and transmitted across generations. Victoria's analysis of the discipline of philosophy aligns theoretically with Luo's exploration of how postmodern shifts in the discipline of childhood studies enable pedagogical practices to address adultism in "The Postmodern Turn in Childhood Studies and its Pedagogical Implications".

In addition to democratic education and liberation as an intergenerational project, this dossier thematically engages with the decolonial critique of adultism and coloniality in educational practices and theories. In "Coloniality of Early Childhood Education: Critical Analysis of Pedagogical Practices in a Peripheral Context," Ferreira da Silva offers an ethnographic examination of early childhood education in peripheral regions of Brazil, focusing on the persistence of adultist and colonial structures within pedagogical practices. Through interviews with teachers and families, Ferreira da Silva critiques the colonial and Eurocentric biases that shape educational environments, particularly for racialized and marginalized children. This work exposes how pedagogical practices, such as the rigid enforcement of feeding routines, serve to discipline and marginalize young children in ways that reflect broader patterns of social exclusion. By highlighting the adultist imposition of "white plague" ideologies on non-Western children's experiences, Ferreira da Silva calls for a counter-colonial approach to early childhood education that values the distinctiveness of childhood outside adultist and colonial frameworks. This analysis resonates with Chávez and Vicenzi's work on infants in "O lugar dos bebês no confronto com o adultocentrismo," where Chávez and Vicenzi explore how even the youngest children are subject to adultist interpretations that view them as "incomplete" beings. Chávez and Vicenzi argue for a reconceptualization of infancy that respects babies' unique modes of expression and existence, critiquing the

pervasive assumption that children's experiences must align with adult developmental models.

The decolonial analysis of childhood continues in Roland and Iacobino's "Who's Tired of Michel Foucault? Thinking about the Intersection of Childism and Decoloniality through a Foucauldian Lens." Roland and Iacobino revisit Foucault's genealogies of childhood, analyzing how notions of childhood and coloniality have historically intersected to reinforce systems of power and control. Roland and Iacobino draw on postcolonial theorists and feminist scholars, such as Silvia Federici and Anne Laura Stoler, to demonstrate how colonial power relations have informed Western constructions of childhood as a subordinate category. Roland and Iacobino's article reveals the "co-production" of childhood and coloniality, where colonial structures used age and developmental narratives to justify the subjugation of colonized peoples by characterizing them as childlike. Their Foucauldian critique extends the issue's decolonial theme by illustrating how childism offers a way to disrupt these historical legacies, advocating for a new epistemic framework that recognizes children as legitimate agents of knowledge, thereby challenging the colonial roots of adultism.

Patton's "With My Love: The Colonial Legacy of Racialized Pedophilic Pornography in the Atlantic World" provides a historical perspective on the adultist and racialized violence inflicted upon children in visual media. Patton's examination of early 20th-century American postcards reveals how the sexualized portrayal of black children perpetuated colonial ideologies and supported systems of white supremacy. This historical analysis exposes the adultist and racial biases that have long underpinned cultural representations of childhood innocence and maturity, emphasizing how such imagery reinforced social hierarchies that excluded black children from the realm of innocence afforded to white children. Patton's article underscores the need for a decolonial framework within childist scholarship, one that addresses historical legacies of violence and exploitation in visual and educational representations of childhood.

The final thematic cluster within this dossier centers on children's roles as epistemic agents and activists, showcasing how childism can empower children's social participation and challenge epistemic injustice. In "Breaking Boundaries:

Children Activists as Epistemic Agents Within Contours of Epistemic Marginalization," Maldonado-Castañeda examines how children's environmental activism serves as a form of resistance against epistemic injustice. Their concept of "epistemic capability" suggests that children, despite their marginalized status, develop critical tools to navigate and reshape social narratives through their activism. This article presents activism as a powerful means for children to assert their voices and directly address issues of social and environmental importance, thereby challenging traditional perceptions of children as passive or subordinate participants. Maldonado Castañeda's concerns are echoed in Snir's "Childism and Minority Cultures in School," where Snir critiques the role of public schools as agents of assimilation that often marginalize minority cultures. They argue that childism can transform schools into sites where cultural diversity is valued and children are encouraged to engage with their own and others' cultural backgrounds, facilitating epistemic agency among minority youth.

This collection of articles thus collectively argues for a transformative rethinking of educational, philosophical, and social paradigms that challenge adultist structures and embrace childist principles. By examining the intersections of childism, decoloniality, and democratic theory, the volume sets forth a compelling vision of intergenerational justice that sees children as active agents with unique epistemic contributions. These contributions to *childhood and philosophy* champion a new scholarly paradigm where children are valued not as future adults but as present participants in knowledge creation and social transformation, with the capacity to shape a more inclusive and equitable world. Furthermore, childhood is repositioned beyond its subservience to exploitative adulthood structures. The issue stands as a foundational text for future inquiries into childism and intergenerational justice, urging scholars, educators, and policymakers to foster inclusive spaces that respect children's agency and recognize their philosophical contributions.

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