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## **A PHILOSOPHY OF THE EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP: EXISTENTIAL MEDIATION, TRANSMISSION AND TESTIMONY**

*Una filosofía de la relación educativa: mediación  
existencial, transmisión y testimonio*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents a philosophical reflection on education understood as the encounter and experience of transmission between generations in the dependency of time. From the pedagogical perspective, an encounter of this type involves an act of presence between adults and young people and the transmission of something from one position on the generational scale to another. This paper's thesis is that presence and transmission are currently in a state of crisis that affects the very notion

of education, what it means to educate and to be educated. In a world like ours, with growing sensitivity towards inclusion or inclusiveness, the major element missed, from the point of view of a certain philosophical and theoretical reflection – something we intend to remedy in these pages – is the relationship of presence between adults and young people. This is because the task of educating comprises transmitting responsibility as a central element of the adult condition, one that entails assuming certain limits. This transmission is an internalisation of the legacy of previous generations and it becomes feasible when an encounter, a conversation and a kind of moral transaction between them is possible. Adults transmit to children and adolescents – this is their responsibility – their experience accumulated over time, of which they as adults and educators are depositories and witnesses, albeit not its owners, and in this act, they put newcomers in contact with their predecessors more than the previous generations. We call this a testimonial covenant.

*Keywords:* philosophy of education; educational relationship; parent–child relationship; educational transmission; generations.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo propone una reflexión filosófica sobre la educación entendida como el encuentro y la experiencia de una transmisión entre generaciones en la filiación del tiempo. Desde el punto de vista pedagógico, dicho encuentro supone tanto un acto de presencia entre adultos y jóvenes como de transmisión de algo de un lugar a otro de la escala generacional. La tesis de este trabajo es que presencia y transmisión están hoy en una crisis que afecta a la misma noción de la educación, a lo que significa educar y formarse. En un mundo como el nuestro, con una creciente sensibilidad hacia lo que se llama inclusión o inclusividad, la gran excluida, desde el punto de vista de cierta reflexión filosófica y teórica —algo que se propone hacer en estas páginas—, es precisamente esa relación de presencia entre adultos y jóvenes. Pues la tarea educativa consiste en transmitir la responsabilidad como un elemento central de la condición adulta, una que entraña asumir determinados límites. Esa transmisión es una interiorización del legado de las generaciones anteriores, y se hace posible cuando existe la posibilidad de un encuentro, una conversación y una especie de transacción moral entre las mismas. Los adultos transmiten a niños y adolescentes —tal es su responsabilidad— la experiencia acumulada en el tiempo y de la que ellos son, como adultos y educadores, depositarios y testigos, aunque no sus dueños, y en ese acto ponen en contacto a los recién llegados con sus predecesores muertos o desaparecidos. A esto lo llamaremos pacto testimonial.

*Palabras clave:* filosofía de la educación; relación educativa; relación padres-hijos; transmisión educativa; generaciones.

## INTRODUCTION

'In Monsieur Germain's classroom, they felt for the first time that they existed and that they were the object of the highest regard: they were judged worthy to discover the world'.

(Camus, 2008b, p. 830)

The school, with its old name that comes from the Greek world – meaning leisure and temporal separation from the normal rhythms of the world (*skholē*) – was established to ready those who enter it for diligent study of what the world offers them through their teachers' mediation in a relationship intended to be something singular and unique (Oakeshott, 2009; Simons & Masschelein, 2014). The essence of this relationship is transmission of knowledge, guaranteeing the continuity of the world and of generations. But true transmission occurring requires the real existence of an encounter where some elements of high culture can be transferred from one side of the generational scale to the other through its foundational texts, with the aim of shaping the capacity for judgement and how the present is comprehended in light of it (Redeker, 2016, p. 27)<sup>1</sup>. The school then not (only) exists for the purpose of eradicating what we as a society consider to be an evil, but to study what makes us humans and what destroys us (Bárcena, 2016, 2020, 2023).

In a world like ours, with growing sensitivity towards what is called inclusion or inclusiveness – and this should be applauded in general terms – the major element missed, from the point of view of a certain philosophical and reflection (something we intend to remedy in these pages) is the relationship of presence between adults and young people. The educational relationship is a classic topic in the philosophy of education, and whenever education faces a crisis, so too does the meaning we attribute to this relationship. So, we must again ask ourselves about it and its destiny. In the aforementioned book, Robert Redeker, with a tone of evident agitation, argues that the school that is being built before us today no longer appreciates this link that connects masters to the subject of study, and he warns that the core of the school is not so much the student (who must learn) as this link between master and study. There are no masters, he notes, but rather 'demonstrators' who merely show what society already has, which is always changing, but perhaps without any true invitation to study. His statement might be problematic, but this is not the place to give it the discussion it deserves. The purpose of this article is to rethink from a particular philosophical position, the aforementioned educational relationship, understood as an encounter between generations in the dependency of time, where notions of presence and transmission are fundamental.

Two timescales meet in this relationship: the young time of recent arrivals to the world and the older time of adults. Since the time of classical Greece, this

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to David Reyero for bringing this book by Robert Redeker to my attention.

difference between ages has been of paramount importance in educational settings. While material things are obtained with money, education is achieved with time, dedication and effort; knowing who we are takes a whole lifetime and care of others (responsible adults). This is a first basic statement here. The second is that the task of educating is based on the belief that the future of a life being formed is never encoded in advance. We are heirs, and making this inheritance effective requires us to make a constant effort of personal and subjective conquest, and not just to adapt to constantly changing times (Recalcati, 2020, p. 73). Unpredictable and unforeseeable in its effects and its results, education is based on responsibility, trust and hope, confronting deterministic predictions (Biesta, 2011).

The encounter between generations then demands the living presence of an adult before a young person, a child or adolescent. As Pennac (2007) writes: 'One single certainty: the presence of my students is closely dependent on mine' (p. 13, author's own translation). Furthermore, this relationship is mediated by a series of acts of transmission that recall our position as heirs, which is the location of symbolic dependency. Part of this article's thesis is that presence, transmission and inheritance are today undergoing a crisis that affects the very notion of what it means to be educated. As Max van Manen wrote some time ago in a book that has been passed from hand to hand and from generation to generation:

The notion of education, conceived as a living process of personal engagement between an adult teacher or parent and a young child or student, may well disappear in an increasingly managerial, corporate, and tecnicized environment. How can educating and bringing up children remain a rich human and cultural activity? (Manen, 1998, p. 20).

The methodological focus of this text is philosophical in nature as it seeks to consider in depth (and displace) some things that are readily taken for granted in pedagogy. It also owes much to some of Hannah Arendt's ideas. It is worth recalling the end of her famous essay of the late 1950s 'The Crisis in Education':

One cannot educate without at the same time teaching; an education without learning is empty and therefore degenerates with great ease into moral emotional rhetoric. But one can quite easily teach without educating, and one can go on learning to the end of one's days without for that reason becoming educated. All these are particulars, however, that must really be left to the experts and the pedagogues. What concerns us all and cannot therefore be turned over to the special science of pedagogy is the relation between grown-ups and children in general or, putting it in even more general and exact terms, our attitude toward the fact of natality: the fact that we have all come into the world by being born and that this world is constantly renewed through birth. Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance

of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (Arendt, 2019, pp. 300–301).

I would like to underline three essential aspects of this fragment, which define the central structure of the argument in these pages.

Firstly, the statement that the purpose of all teaching and learning is to turn someone into an educated person, to obtain something similar to what we could call ‘forming’, and not just the acquisition of skills or technical abilities. This forming relates to the construction of the condition of the subject as an adult in the world, progress towards oneself or good use of oneself. Secondly, what is truly of interest and in some way escapes from the particular science of pedagogy, is the relationship between adults on the one hand and children and young people on the other, that is to say, the encounter between generations; ‘our attitude’ – writes Arendt – towards the fact that the human being enters the world by being born and that the world itself is renewed by the arrival of new people. Finally, the fact that what gives the task of educating its purpose is love for these recent arrivals and love for the world (*Amor Mundi*) is what justifies the task of educating and that the purpose of the school is therefore not just instruction in the art of living but also transmission to and accompaniment for these people who are new to the world. This is where educational responsibility resides: in caring for the recent arrival and for the world. By educating we transmit this dual love and dual care, and in so doing we influence the other, establishing a sort of *testimonial covenant*; since the adults who transmit testify about the world, they are witnesses of a cultural era that they present to young people as a subject of conversation. Because it influences, it provokes something within the other. Historically, some pedagogical theories considered that any intervention in the freedom of the other is manipulative, and so should be rejected. However, allowing oneself to be influenced in this way is characteristic of liberty, for liberty is always receptive; it allows another thing to be introduced into it triggering something inside it (Hersch, 2017, p. 37). This statement will also be important in this text.

## **1. EXISTENTIAL MEDIATION: PROMOTING THE ADULT CONDITION**

In his book *Prendre soin de la jeunesse et des générations*, the philosopher Bernard Stiegler (2008) mentions a piece of French legislation, passed in 2007, that stated that for certain offences in the event of repeat offending, juveniles would not be tried as minors but instead the law would treat them as adults. It was argued that the legal provision that limited the age of criminal responsibility resulted in a feeling of impunity. At the same time as questioning the young people’s position as minors, this legal measure also brought into question the majority of their adult forebears, releasing them from their responsibility as adults. The measure has important consequences for education, as education is entrusted with leading people towards responsibility and the status of being of full age. By treating young people as ‘adults’

while at the same time releasing adults from responsibility, these terms are inverted, causing a state without differentiation between generations.

Stiegler also refers to an advertising campaign from that time for the television channel *Canal J* aimed at children and adolescents. This campaign's main slogan – on a photograph of an obviously bored child and his grandfather who could no longer make him laugh and entertain him, as well as other images – was: *Les enfants méritent mieux que ça. Ils méritent Canal J* (Children deserve better than this. They deserve Canal J.). Children deserve something better than this where, in one of the photographs, 'this' is a grandfather showing his young granddaughter his false teeth. 'This' is an adult generation that can no longer take care of its children and grandchildren educationally. It is a rupture between the generations and the dramatic expression of a pedagogical abdication, the expression of an era in which parenthood is depleted or simply declining (Recalcati, 2014; Zoja, 2018).

Education is the name we give to the transmission of the human aptitude that leads to the adult condition, which involves accepting certain limitations. This transmission is an internalisation of the legacy of the previous generations. Adults transmit to children and adolescents the experience they have accumulated over time, which they are depositories of and witnesses to as adults and educators (not its owners, but its transmitters) and in this act, they put the newcomers in contact with their predecessors. They help shape their memory. They tell them that what they, children and young people, feel, undergo or suffer, has also been felt before, cried over and endured, as we read in Klaus Mann's novel *The Volcano*:

Neither our sorrows nor our ideas are as modern or as new as we tend to think in our early enthusiasm. Others have already suffered them and thought them in the past, and they have had to face the same problems as us. Nonetheless, their ideas and their pain have transformed into beauty. They have left us their great legacy of wisdom and their pain turned into art (Mann, 2003, 219).

Instead of closing off worlds, this process of transmission opens them up; it is the way that informs and reflects the diversity of ways of knowing how to live, how to act and how to die. For this very reason, education is a humanising process of universalisation rather than a more parochial effort to reduce the individual to a single community.

Constructing the status of the subject of education as an adult is not possible if we do not accept that what we call 'the world' is not our creation and it does not have to respond to our desires. When saying this, I have in mind the words of Albert Camus in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature on 10 December 1957: 'Each generation doubtless feels called upon to reform the world. Mine knows that it will not reform it, but its task is perhaps even greater. It consists in preventing the world from destroying itself' (Camus, 2008a, p. 241). The task facing the generations that meet one another is perhaps exactly this: to prevent the world from destroying itself, a task that traverses the school while at the same time

surpassing or transcending it, as 'a person's relations with the world are essentially moulded in and by the school' (Rosa, 2020, p. 309 author's own translation; see also: Larrosa, 2020).

To be an adult is to open up a more internal space so that the world can form part of what we are and affect us internally (Biesta, 2022, p. 2). However, an inversion of the hierarchy of generations is now happening that results in their complete confusion. The specific means of control of young people's attention, through the particular devices of the telecommunications society and social networks (where the world and its things are never positioned at a certain reflexive distance), promotes stagnation in their growth. Francesco Stoppa (2011) considers that the 'intergenerational relationship' is one of the keys to understanding the current era: the inability to accept one's own disappearance, he notes, is the greatest problem of the adult generation (p. 47). As he notes at another point: 'The new generation has been asked not to grow too much; each child must continue to be the child, a sort of unbreakable doll' (p. 241, author's own translation).

This experience of transmission can be frustrated in various ways. The philosopher José Luis Pardo speaks of a corruption of children and adolescents that takes two forms. The first comprises preventing recent arrivals from entering the school. Of course, children and adolescents go to school day after day, but this does not mean that they still access the experience of learning through study. Preventing them from doing so turns them into beings for whom 'everything is true', because they have not learnt to question anything or to doubt. The second way is to allow them to enter the classroom but then shut the door behind them, preventing them from going out into the world, maybe because it is thought that the world is dangerous and they must be protected from it, as happens in the film *Kynodontas* (Dogtooth), by Yorgos Lanthimos (D'Hoest, 2020). For these other '*enfants terribles*', 'everything is false': 'Some distil a bitter rancour against the city, the Enlightenment (which is another name for "learning"), democracy and adult life, because these put an end to their privileges' (Pardo, 2004, p. 313, author's own translation).

Being an adult means initiating oneself in the art of taking responsibility for oneself; progressing towards oneself: it means entering the realm of civility, of judgement and of discernment. We progress towards ourselves, and we update our potential, knowing at the same time that the potential itself (as Aristotle thought) is the ability to do and not do: this potential 'is mid-way between being and not being, as young people are mid-way between childhood and adulthood, in this hazardous land that philosophers and sophists dispute' (Pardo, 2004, p. 329 author's own translation).

The relationship of transmission between generations, the purpose of which is the forming of the adult condition of a being in the world, occurs in a time that is an *interval*. I will consider two possible interpretations of this.

A first version identifies it with a passage towards a goal that ends and concludes in something, in some other place. Putting it this way, the 'between', as in the

expression ‘between childhood and education’, is something akin to what occurs in a provisional time, between a before and an after. As such, it is an example of ‘no man’s land’ where the recent arrival is located, a land that still has no owner, is somewhat ungovernable, but which excites our desires of colonisation and appropriation. In this intermediate space, things are done and decisions are made to lead the children (that we educate) making them travel through our representation of them as the subjects of education. Leading them there, to their completed education, is something akin to making them enter a civilised city, because what is outside, where we encounter the child, is an uncivilised space, perhaps a savage or barbarous space.

We can, for example, find this image in ‘Education as Initiation’, the lecture that Richard S. Peters gave in the early 1970s when he took possession of the chair in philosophy of education at the Institute of Education in London. According to Peters, educators have an obligation to initiate students in the most valuable cultural heritage of the society in which they will live. Peters argued that we are the heirs to a cultural legacy accumulated over centuries and, in this way, children always start from outside its walls; the question is to bring them into the ‘citadel of civilization’ so that they can come to understand and esteem what they see when they are within it (Peters, 1980, 104). Some years later, the philosopher Michael Oakeshott dedicated an essay to thinking this process of education in the terms of a ‘transaction between generations which aims at introducing newcomers to an intellectual, imaginative, moral and emotional inheritance’ (Oakeshott, 2009, p. 97).

I would like to suggest another interpretation of this space between childhood and education. From the above, I would like to keep the idea that this ‘between’ is an intermediate space, a passage, and so that it is a path or a journey. But we will now understand it as the realisation of an experience. It is, of course, a space of transit where things happen, but although it is a space of transit, I would say that it is of value in itself and is inscribed in a space of indetermination, of uncertainty, of a certain ambiguity, where no result can be anticipated with complete confidence. In this experience there would not strictly speaking be a pre-established method, but there would be a route, and the way to follow it is determined not by prior goals but through the interest and attention that the act of travelling inspires in the subject. Travelling in this way is a medium without a predetermined end or destination. It is a studious mode. This metaphorical way of understanding education, as a journey or as a path might be the most modest of all, but, as Miguel Morey wrote in a text some time ago:

However, it is one of those that most certainly involve the possibilities of attention and memory as well as the dreams of the imagination to the point that we could say that it cannot authentically be fulfilled as such without these being present in the encounter. Past, present and future always intermingle their presences in the experience of the present that accompanies the Walker and establishes him as such. (Morey, 2007, 341 author’s own translation)

From this second viewpoint, the space 'between children (and adolescents) and adults' is the space where the subject who is being formed is not merely an object (of pedagogical knowledge), nor is it a free existential game (Esteve, 2012, p. 109 author's own translation). It is another thing: it is what we recall when we come to be what we are through a process of mediation (or several mediations), and we gradually learn that there is no straight line between the self and the objects of desire, but that what we choose is frequently influenced by models who take the role of our teachers. Educators are mediators of our existence (Girard, 2023), or as Georges Gusdorf said:

The pupil only exists for the teacher, who is the mediator of existences. But the teacher only exists for the pupil. Teachers have a vocation towards teaching that only the testimony of the pupil can reveal. It is normal for teachers to be uneasy and to doubt their certainty. Nobody is wholly worthy of bearing the crushing burden of the truth, nobody, in all conscience, can profess to teach. They must emerge from their reserve, the pupils must direct their requests to them. (Gusdorf, 2019, p. 41, author's own translation)

## 2. CULTURAL TRANSMISSION: ENCOUNTER BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Between 11 September and 28 October 1928, José Ortega y Gasset gave a series of five lectures entitled *Introduction to the Present* in the city of Buenos Aires. At one point in these lectures, he returns to the concept of 'generation', saying:

The discovery that we are irrevocably assigned to a particular age group and to a lifestyle is one of the melancholy discoveries that every sensitive man sooner or later makes. A generation is an integral mode of existence that is indelibly fixed on the individual. (Ortega y Gasset, 2008, Vo. VIII, p. 58, author's own translation)

In his meditation on the present, Ortega y Gasset emphasised its constituent drama as three different modalities of time coexist in every present, rather like three 'presences of the present': the today of youth, the today of mature men and women and the today of the elderly. Three vital dimensions coexist in every present in inevitable conflict, difference and hostility, so that every present is always discontinuous, meaning different things to the youth of twenty years, to the man or woman of forty and to eighty-year-olds. So, we make ourselves present in the present according to the generation of which we are part. When born, then, the human being enters a reality that is already built. It is simultaneously a recent arrival and the last to arrive. The people who were already in the world before this arrival offer the inheritance of a culture – language, ideas, beliefs, values – as orientation in the jungle of the world. What is the nature of this transmission? (Bodei, 2016).

Transmission first poses the question of the boundary between the self and the other. As the goddess says to Parmenides in his poem: 'I will speak, and whether you take my words with you after hearing them depends on you' (Kingsley, 2021, p. 56). With these words, Parmenides becomes a mediator like every adult educator.

On the other hand, transmission has nothing to do with the will to mastery, with a despotic act or with the desire to be admired for the knowledge one believes one possesses. It is not merely an attempt to make an undifferentiated and uniform body of information accessible to someone through technological devices. It is more a merely didactic act, and, as Catherine Chalier (2008) notes, it is described in many ways: telling, explaining, demonstrating, indoctrinating, informing, listening, desiring, bearing witness.

The current crisis of transmission has its protagonists in the history of thought. Chalier recalls the act of Descartes, who felt the urge to abandon his old readings and teachers and discover for himself, no longer on the basis of the old inherited words; so he started his journey. From this act onwards, the figure of the teacher has been linked to tutelage that must be rejected in modern societies. The symbolic order that links generations, and the previous distinctions and prescriptions as help for the art of living in the world, are liable to be repudiated, as they entail an act of violence (Redeker, 2020, p. 114).

With the support of the institutions entrusted with forming, adults accompany the people who have recently entered the world and seek to transmit the social and moral competence of responsibility as growing beings. They bring things to the table, so to speak, and invite them to look at them, which is the first step towards being able to study them. They are not there to be eaten or simply used (Alba Rico, 2011, p. 37). Culture, as something that can be inherited (neither eaten nor only used) is decisive. But how should 'culture' be understood here?

Culture, which etymologically is connected to a relationship of care for something (one can possess land but it will not bear fruit if it is not cultivated adequately), does not only allude to the flow of moral energy that keeps a society intact (Scrutton, 2021). Rather it is something that is acquired through cultivation and study as it does not grow spontaneously. Scrutton speaks of 'high culture' in the sense of something that requires advanced study, and this is what is transmitted from generation to generation; when this is not done, new arrivals are left without a legacy, without an inheritance and, finally, without a world. Matthew Arnold said in that, seen in this way, culture is 'pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world' (Arnold, 2010, p. 48). This culture is an interior operation.

The culture transmitted, which requires acts of reading, thought and conversation between generations, opens up worlds and it places the world itself at a certain meditative distance. It tells us, as we noted above, that the world is not our creation, it placates our egos and narcissisms and it warns us that feelings appear when they find an objective form in words, plans, projects, that is to say, in things to do and share. So, reading good novels does not mean surrounding ourselves with theories or abstractions, but rather venturing to explore moods, emotional descriptions of the world, values and moral virtues. Reading the Bible or Homer, Virgil, Austen or the Brontë sisters; Proust, Tolkien, Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky; Paul Auster, Virginia Woolf

or Iris Murdoch, rearms and strengthens us, as do the rituals and sacraments of a shared religious culture. In a creative and intense way, the culture transmitted offers 'the ethical vision that religion made so easily available' (Scrutton, 2021, p. 39). In essence it expands the repertoire and scope of our emotions. Studying culture, the best that has been said and thought, enables growth and frees us from the solipsism of a self-referenced self.

Thinking of education in this way becomes hard in a situation of growing infantilisation where the pressure of social networks turns the subjects of education into mere consumerist beings who want and desire ever more, but at the same time appear to be more unsatisfied and isolated from one another, despite being part of the same generation. Some studies, such as the *Médiamétrie* published on 24 November 2021, have found that – and I cite the data provided by Frédéric Lenoir (2022, p. 59) – young French people aged between 15 and 24 years spend an average of 3 hours and 41 minutes browsing the internet on their smartphones, compared with the one hour and thirty-seven minutes of the general population. According to this author, what is at play on social networks (such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *TikTok*, *Snapchat* and others) 'is our primary need for social recognition, something that delights our primary brain' (Lenoir, 2022, p. 60, author's own translation). Being recognised and admired is the objective of young users of social networks, and the dopamine hit that our brains produce with each new like or positive comment is the reward they crave.

For Sébastien Bohler (2019), the current alliance between technology and economic liberalism (resulting from our cerebral cortex) brings us back to the constant incentives of the most primitive part of our brain. From this perspective, an education aimed almost exclusively at achieving immediate pleasure and satisfaction and avoiding the displeasure that the effort of sustained attention over time entails; an education with social prestige, informational distraction, immediate recognition of what we post on networks as immediate incentives – and which strengthens personal narcissism and the 'always more' – at the same time forgoes another education that is based on an idea of culture defined, at least, by these central components: limitation of the self-destructive impulses that have as their horizon what Freud called the 'death drive' (Freud, 2006); filter of good taste; and care for language understood as the core being of the human being that exceeds an instrumental vision of it that places it at the service of the ideology of communication. Perhaps in relation to this we should return to what Alain said in his *Propos sur l'éducation*: that true problems always taste rather bitter at the beginning, and that 'pleasure is reserved only for those who have worked out how to overcome bitterness'. The goal then is not pleasure but rather 'the defeated difficulty' (Alain, 2001, p. 18, author's own translation).

Cultural transmission between generations is an invitation to join a conversation that started before we were born and before we came into this world. It is a shield against the idea of the prolonged child, and against all of the mechanisms

for infantilising subjects. There can be no truly human conversation without a multitude of voices, without a diversity of registers, nuances and tones. Nor can there be conversation without a plurality of bodily gestures, of ways of looking, listening and moving. And there is no conversation without a variety of ways of thinking and relating through thought with the world:

As civilized human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves. [...] properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation which, in the end, gives place and character to every human activity and utterance (Oakeshott, 1991, pp. 490-491) (Oakeshott, 1991, pp. 490-491).

### 3. THE TESTIMONIAL COVENANT: THE AUTHORITY OF TIME

As we said above, with education we decide on a twofold love – for recent arrivals and for the world – and we have the opportunity to accept our responsibility to these new people and to the world. So, every educational experience establishes a type of *generational pact*. A pact is a contract that binds two parties, who commit to or ‘compromise’ on something. The word compromise, Chesterton (2020) said, ‘contains, among other things, the rigid and ringing word *promise*’ (p. 23). The covenant entails mutual trust, responsibility and hope in achieving what is promised will be obtained. The generational covenant of which we spoke commits to a certain future without seeking to determine it wholly.

This covenant involves a pedagogical promise that aspires to make the world that will be inhabited permanent and durable. That education consists of introducing a relationship with the world means it can, above all, take the form of remaking what has already been: a living act of transmission of the past and invention of the future (Collin, 1999, p. 223). So, all teachers as educators, whatever their level, transmit a pedagogical legacy, an inheritance that they will never be able to give exactly as they received it. This, I believe, is their condition: that of a mediator of time. They represent the world into which students are initiated, but it is not the world. They are mediators, but not substitutes, neither for the world nor for the students’ existence. Therefore, if educators wish to celebrate the inheritance they transmit, they must dilute themselves, they must efface themselves.

Consequently, the educational relationship between generations is based on a pact that is also testimonial in character, as I wish to call it now. Adults instruct, teach, retell, narrate, explain or demonstrate, all of which is in service of constructing an adult condition of the subject of education. They institute the souls of young people, helping them grow and elevate themselves. Their work is everyday,

quotidian, insistent. In doing all of this, they bear witness to the world in which they have been, and to the culture studied and assimilated. And when transmitting it, it is as though they say: 'I was there, and I will tell you what I saw, what I heard, what I read, what I thought.' One can continue to teach and transmit, or attempt to educate, within an uninterrupted or partially broken tradition, but not in the absence of past. One cannot be in education and not offer a testimony. In a way, the adult is a representative of the past to the child or adolescent and offers his or her testimony through the objects of the transmission.

There are two words for witness in Latin: *testis* – meaning someone who appears as a 'third party' (*ter-stis*) in a dispute between two parties – and *superstes*, meaning someone who has experienced a certain reality or incident and can bear witness to it. The legal dimension of testimony derives from this (Pierron, 2006, p. 29). But the act of testifying involves a relationship, and in this sense it is on the side of the statute of mediations. As the word *superstes* seems to indicate, testimony points towards the idea of how a subjectivity has lived through an occurrence to some extent and has experienced it to the point of being able to testify about it.

Testimony therefore has a first aspect of emission, and a second of reception. Testimony is given and at the same time received, interpreted, discussed, considered or studied. Consequently, it is always fragile since its credibility depends on the goodwill of its recipients. At the heart of the educational relationship, this testimonial act requires the trust that we have already mentioned, and which is where true pedagogical trust resides. What is seen and experienced, and then transmitted and received, is an authority, and so it is offered without imposing itself, as the authority related not to power but to the experience of time. As Pierron says, 'the question of the authority of the testimony is only imposed because education compromises a transmission of values' (Pierron, 2006, p. 282, author's own translation). The teacher is not merely a merchant of knowledge or competences, nor is the student merely a customer. Teachers transmit and do not just communicate, they converse and do not simply interact. They are not mere demonstrators who show what already exists in society: they offer things to be studied, to be looked at closely. As an educational gesture, transmission becomes testimony in the sense that the teacher testifies before the students to what is edifying and of value in the culture in which he makes them participants. Teachers' authority relates to their responsibility and obligation to and for the world, and this authority makes the other grow, augmenting it, encouraging it to sculpt its own existence.

Given its temporal nature, authority is an inescapable dimension of every social bond as it ensures the continuity of generations, transmission and dependency (Revault d'Allonnes, 2008, p. 15). Therefore, a crisis of authority in the world of education entails a profound transformation of the experience of temporality. This crisis is not only found on the side of the past and of tradition (which is founded on an immemorial time and is transmitted), But on the side of the future as what is yet to come. So any future plan, educational or otherwise, is what authorises us to

act, and authority is exercised when it inscribes its act in a future. As a result, this crisis of temporality, linked to a crisis of authorisations, makes a time emerge, like ours, that is starved of promises.

#### 4. FINAL THOUGHTS

We have discussed the educational relationship above as an encounter between generations in the dependency of time and we have emphasised three main ideas: education is the help in the construction of the adult condition of another human who is being formed; existential mediation by adults is central in the educational encounter; and the educational relationship is situated in a covenant of a testimonial nature between the generations. A certain feeling of crisis is also mentioned, relating to the weakening of the relationship of presence and transmission between adults and young people, and with the decline of the idea of parenthood/progenitor, as proposed by Massimo Recalcati (2014), who states that ‘the spectre of freedom tends to erase the symbolic difference between the generations’ (p. 152, author’s own translation). I would like to end by considering this matter.

Recalcati does not seek to suggest a return to the parent, adult or educator as the figure of the ‘master’, but he does say that the educational undertaking is both a (moral) burden and a responsibility that we cannot simply cast aside. He argues that if adults disappear from the scene because they have stopped acting as such or have become something else (friends or something like it), then the urgent question is how there can be inheritance or symbolic dependency. It is the adult as educator who should offer young people a testimony about the alliance between the law of the word and desire, who is destined to help them ask themselves seriously the question of limits, who ultimately cooperates in opening up worlds, instead of being a prisoner in a narrower one that coincides with his or her ego. It is not then either a case of complete identification with an inheritance or a legacy (with the other or with what is other) nor its absolute rejection. Educational transmission occurs through embodied testimony about how to live life by trying to discern between different desires and between fundamental desires and needs whose satisfaction often involves effort, obligations and renunciations.

As parents we do not have our children, we are not their cause nor their owners, as Levinas thought (1993): ‘I do not *have* my child; I *am* in some way my child’ (p. 135). The child, and for the teacher the pupil, is the absolute difference, and in relation to them (children or pupils), adults (parents or teachers) must learn to stay modestly and patiently in the background, in case the child breaks into pieces, not taking the foreground as though setting themselves up as impeccable models of what the child should be. The child, like the pupil, embodies this absolute difference that Recalcati tells us about in *The Son’s Secret*, his boundless strength; as he bears his own indecipherable enigma, his secret. It is against the backdrop of this solitude, as this author states, that the relationship with the other emerges as

a true educational relationship, one where love is the unprecedented experience of God. Here, pedagogical love is love not just for what the young person already is, but also for what he might become, for a story that he will have to write taking charge of himself. It is here that adults endeavour at every moment to give shape (educationally healthy and viable) to their capacity to influence.

At some moment in these pages it was suggested, agreeing with José Luis Pardo, that unschooled children – for whom *everything is true* and who are inclined to believe everything – and perpetually schooled children – for whom *everything is false* because they are unwilling to believe anything and they confuse fiction with falsehood – are like *enfants terribles* who appear to distil a type of resentment towards the city and anything that looks like enlightenment, citizenship or good judgement. This *enfant terrible* has a long history in the narrative of Western thought. It appears in the 17th century in Thomas Hobbes's *De Cive* as the *puer robustus* and Alexis de Tocqueville follows suit in chapter six of the first part of the first volume of his *Democracy in America*, talking of the *homo puer robustus*. For Hobbes, it is a case of a 'wicked man', who 'is almost the same thing with child grown strong and sturdy, or a man of a childish disposition' (Hobbes, 2016, p. 54). For Tocqueville it is the child who still does not know the price of life and who seizes others' property before knowing that his can also be stolen. Tocqueville writes: 'it cannot be repeated too often that nothing is more fertile in prodigies than the art of being free; but there is nothing more arduous than the apprenticeship of liberty' (Tocqueville, 2010, p. 439, author's own translation). This point is key. According to Dieter Thomä (2018), the *puer robustus* is someone who loiters in doorways and is sometimes accused of disturbing the peace, while at other times being seen as a leader or hero according to the situation, but it is always a marginalised being; a revolutionary or a rebel (with or without a cause). For Rousseau this is the 'noble savage', and for Friedrich Schiller the 'rough child', who often presented himself as an anarchist or adventurer.

However, a good child is not one who toes the line of what the parent says, nor is a good pupil, student or apprentice one who does not depart from the analytical index of the complete works of his or her teacher, but rather one who challenges it. The educational relationship that I have tried to think here would include a chapter – I do not know whether it would be the final one or perhaps the penultimate – that is a meditation on this *homo puer indoctus*. But it is now time to recall something that, as educators, we should not forget, and which Daniel Pennac (2007) put very well, namely: 'The idea that it is possible to teach without difficulties is due to an ethereal representation of the student' (p. 228, author's own translation).

Pennac's words are very important, and they relate to a way of formulating the (educational) relationship between generations that I hope I have made a contribution to illuminating, at least in certain crucial aspects of it, in these pages, something I do not know if I have achieved. As noted above, our sensitivity to inclusiveness and attention to diversity has fortunately grown. But if these become a sort of

advertising slogan that prevents the possibility of careful study of the things of the world, and of what we mean when we say the words ‘inclusion’, ‘diversity’ and ‘difference’, which we often mention without considering them in depth (such is the task of a philosophy of education), then we forego the most worthwhile mission of education, which is to help other human beings grow by opening themselves to the immensity of a past of which, even if they do not know, they are the heirs. The question involves not leaving the person who is educated without an inheritance. This is our responsibility as adults and our obligation to the world. It is a task of great moral importance.

In what matters most, we must admit with pedagogical humility that we do not know anything about our children or about the young people we try to help mature and make grow. As a father I know that I don’t need to fully understand my son to love him. He keeps his own enigma, and his destiny is open and not fixed in advance, unlike what happened to Oedipus with the Oracle. We are close to our children in an absolute difference. And in this difference, we learn to love them. I know that I love mine, whom I will never possess, and that, nonetheless, I also am him in part. So, I wait for him to come home and, if he comes, I will let him speak if he wishes to, but I will not ask him questions unless he wants me to. I feel that these pages are dedicated to him.

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