existing in the world: but whose world—and why not change it?

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abstract
This article takes issue with Gert Biesta's lecture and the interpretation that one of his main arguments leads to the conclusion that the world is essentialist in nature. Thus, for any specific kind of entity, there is a set of characteristics, all of which any entity of that kind must have. In this text I will argue that existence "in the world" necessarily demands the belief that many other worlds consisting of diverse identities and communities have long been present and should be acknowledged. It also counters the view that children must be taught to adjust to life in the world—i.e., submit and compromise—by fostering philosophical communities of inquiry that place children's doubts and uncertainties at the center of their focus, thereby promoting the possibility of *Tikkun Olam* (social justice or the establishment of godly qualities throughout the world) in its broadest sense. All these "compromises" required from the child are cultivated by the "pedagogy of fear." I submit that, when allowed to do so from a young age, children can engage in three activities: 1) the exercising of their own thinking processes; 2) the development of the will to fight for improvement of things; and 3) the identification of possibilities for change and *Tikkun Olam*. Children can take part from an early age in philosophical communities of inquiry in which they can think and consider ideas—including those capable of creating their own unique "worlds." These three activities necessarily forming part of the basis of young children's understanding of what needs "repairing" in the world. The community of inquiry can cultivate their ability to identify injustice and social wrongs and be ready to actively seek to change society. At the heart of this change lies the potential of philosophy to serve as the driving force behind action and influence rather than as a power dedicated to preserving the status quo.

keywords: philosophy with children; gert biesta; pedagogy of fear.

existindo no mundo: mas o mundo de quem – e por que não mudá-lo?

resumo
Este artigo discorda da palestra de Gert Biesta, e minha interpretação é de que seu argumento leva à conclusão de que o mundo tem uma essência em sua natureza. Assim, para qualquer tipo de entidade, existem uma série de características, que qualquer entidade deste tipo deveria ter. Por isso, neste texto, defenderei que existência "no mundo" acarreta necessariamente a crença de que muitos outros mundos consistindo em diversas entidades e comunidades estiveram presentes há tempos e devem ser reconhecidos. O texto também se opõe à visão de que crianças devem ser ensinadas a se ajustarem à vida no mundo – i.e. submeter-se e comprometer-se – promovendo comunidades de questionamento filosófico que situam as dúvidas e incertezas das crianças no centro de seu foco, promovendo assim o *Tikkun Olam* (justiça social ou estabelecimento de qualidades divinas através do mundo) no seu sentido mais amplo. Todos estes "comprometimentos" exigidos das crianças fazem parte da "pedagogia do medo". O texto defende que a criança – se a ela é permitido desempenhá-lo desde a tenra

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idade – pode se envolver em três atividades: 1) o exercício de seus próprios processos de pensamento; 2) o desenvolvimento de sua vontade de lutar por (melhorar) coisas; e 3) a identificação das possibilidades de mudança e *Tikkun Olam*. As crianças podem participar, desde a tenra idade, em comunidades de investigação educacionais e filosóficas nas quais possam pensar e considerar ideias – inclusive aquelas capazes de criar um "mundo" singular delas –, um "mundo de adultos", se assim for. Estas três atividades necessariamente formam parte da base do entendimento da criança sobre aquilo que necessita de "reparação" no mundo. A comunidade de investigação pode cultivar sua habilidade para identificar injustiças e faltas sociais, e estar pronta para ativamente buscar mudar a sociedade. No centro desta mudança encontra-se o potencial da filosofia de servir como força motora por trás da ação e influência, em vez de um poder dedicado a preservar o *status quo*.

palavras-chave: filosofia com crianças; gert biesta, pedagogia do medo

existiendo en el mundo: pero, ¿el mundo de quién? – ¿y por qué no cambiarlo?

resumen
Este artículo está en descuerdo con la intervención de Biesta y mi interpretación es que su argumento lleva a la conclusión de que el mundo tiene una esencia en su naturaleza. Así, para cualquier tipo de entidad, existen una serie de características que cualquier entidad de este tipo debería tener. Por eso en este artículo defenderé que existir "en el mundo" acarrea necesariamente la creencia de que muchos otros mundos que consisten de diversas entidades y comunidades existen desde hace tiempo y deben ser reconocidos. El texto también se opone a la visión de que los niños deben ser enseñados a adaptarse a la vida en el mundo – i.e. someterse y comprometerse-, promoviendo comunidades de cuestionamiento filosófico que sitúan las dudas y faltas de certezas de los niños en el centro de su atención promoviendo así el *Tikkun Olam* (justicia social o establecimiento de cualidades divinas a través del mundo) en su sentido más amplio. Todos estos "compromisos" exigidos a los niños hacen parte de la "pedagogía del miedo". El texto defiende que los niños – si les es permitido desempeñarlas desde su más tierna edad- pueden comprometerse en tres actividades: 1) el ejercício de sus propios procesos de pensamiento, 2) el desarrollo de su voluntad por luchar por (mejorar) las cosas y 3) la identificación de las posibilidades de cambio y *Tikkun Olam*. Los niños pueden participar, desde edad muy temprana en comunidades de indagación educativas y filosóficas, en las cuales puedan pensar y considerar ideas – inclusive aquellas capaces de crear un "mundo" propio singular. Estas tres actividades necesariamente forman parte de la base del entendimiento de los niños sobre aquello que necesita ser reparado en el mundo. La comunidad de indagación puede cultivar su habilidad para identificar injusticias y faltas sociales y estar lista para cambiar activamente la sociedad. En el centro de este cambio se encuentra el potencial de la filosofía de servir como fuerza motora por detrás de la acción y la influencia, en vez de ser un poder dedicado a preservar el *status quo*.

palabras clave: filosofía con niños; gert biesta; pedagogía del miedo.

existing in the world: but whose world—and why not change it?

In his eye-opening remarks at the ICPIC conference (Madrid, June 2017) Prof. Gert Biesta spoke of the importance of existence with and in the world—one of the central ideas he addresses in his *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future* (2006). Herein, he outlined an educational framework devoted not only to "filling children with answers but making space for asking questions, asking better questions and asking questions better." He also spoke of his concern—if we may term it thus—that thought is frequently "in the head," thus "feeding thinking but not reaching the heart or touching the soul." In this light, he seeks to challenge the link between thinking "in the head" and Philosophy with Children's ability to reach hearts and touch souls. Believing that people "come together in schools," he is worried—rightly so, in my opinion—about the dangers of living in an idea of (or about) the world rather in the actual world. As he puts it: "Education is not about learning but about coming to exist in and with the world as subject."

His concern relates to two approaches—child-centred and curriculum-centred education. In place of these, he proposes a world-centred approach. In his view, the key confrontation today—as has been the case for many years already—is between the world and the apprehension (or fear, if you will) that the child as subject (and as student) will place him or herself at the centre of the world, later on also putting the status of teachers at risk. Regarding being in the world—acting rightly within it—as being predicated upon a "non-ego-logical way of being," it seems that he favours the world over the child, the teacher (or adult) over the pupil. Although he states in his book that "Education is […] not exclusively the servant of the existing order" (BIESTA, 2006, p. 2), in his presentation he championed, albeit implicitly, what I call the "compromising child"—in the sense of "giving in" or "giving up."

What should children "give up"? Their ability to see the emperor's "new clothes," the injustice prevailing within the world, the power struggles and

hegemonic forces that determine their identities from a young age, the proper "home" for them? All these "compromises" form part of what I refer to as the "pedagogy of fear." (KIZEL, 2016a) Relating to the concept of childhood, the child, and the rationale for education and practices pertaining to the pedagogy of upbringing, this is founded on the belief that the child constitutes a potential educational—generally psychological problem—that must be diagnosed, defended, assisted, and, of course, "promoted," aided, and abetted.

The pedagogic position that currently still dominates educational schooling discourse is based on two vertices that influence and support one another:

- The child as "not-knower": children are essentially young people without knowledge whom the education system can better by informing them and inculcating in them values so that they become "knowing"—i.e., gain intellectual knowledge and know how to behave. During childhood, pupils are "candidates for the world" — "not yet fit to the world" because not autonomous or capable of guiding and directing their lives in a relatively independent fashion (Lipman, 1991). Some educational systems thus contain a double discourse—an external one that discusses the belief in the child's capabilities (some of which correspond to the educational structure) and an internal one based on the belief that, children not yet being "ready," school is the place in which they achieve maturation.

- The "demand" model as the pedagogic foundation of the educational system. Here, the school is perceived as the ideal place for learning—a "study hall," if you like. According to this logic, this sacred hall of learning, which possesses objective status, affords optimal teaching-learning processes to be conducted in a professional educational language that bestows upon them a high degree of social legitimacy. On the basis of this view, the school possesses the right to demand at any and all times that the young student meet the standards set by adults and gain measurable achievements as a way of preparing to enter adult life as a fit and mature person. In many respects, students thus swim in a sea of demands and commands.

In line with these axes, teachers (as the representatives of "the right order," which is by definition "adult order") view themselves as lifeguards responsible for protecting the children from the world outside the classroom walls. They are thus charged with a sacred task. This terminology is employed in such programmes as "No child left behind," "War on poverty," "Teach for America," and "Knowledge is Power Program"—all of which draw some of their educational ideology from the same pedagogical source.

In my view, like Biesta these educators have a real concern for the child, thus requiring him or her to fit into the world—to be a "fitter-iner," to coin another phrase. Irrespective of how easy and comfortable this "fitting-in" is— without too much objection—it has little power to change, the child merely needing *a priori* to accept the rules of the game and discourse and the boundaries placed around possibilities. The "pedagogy of fear" stunts the active and vital educational growth of young people, making them passive and dependent upon external disciplinary sources. Under the guise of a living, breathing educational system that seeks progress, fear and apprehension of a conscious and alert life guided by an educational space that enables the philosophical life so necessary for the young person are inculcated. It is thus no wonder that Martin Seligman (1995), the founder of the positive psychology school, argues that modern psychology has been co-opted by the "disease" model. According to him, we have become preoccupied with correcting what has gone wrong rather than building strength and resilience, especially in children. In its over-enthusiastic adoption of the model of "repairing damage," the pedagogy of fear views students as in constant need of "rectification."

I take issue with this essentialist view of the world as presented by Biesta. In my opinion, the world is human rather than essential. It is thus not just one world but many—a world of multiple identities and narratives, a pluralistic universe of worlds in all their richness and challenges and the dissolution of the general consensus into a ruler of "good" and "bad." As Jean-François Lyotard observes in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), we do not trust the meta-narrative.

Even if some of us find it difficult to accept the fact, in this new world — whether it is postmodern à la Lyotard or "liquid modernity" à la Zygmunt Bauman (2000) — we must relinquish the hegemonic justificatory mechanisms behind the meta-narrative. This is dissolving and diffusing on the clouds of linguistic and literary units, as Lyotard puts it.

In many respects, Biesta wants to persuade us that the multiple worlds into which we have long since dissembled — whether units of identity, nationalism, communalism, gender, local/indigenous — are the same "world." According to this perception, people become part of this world when they step out through the school gates — the basic educational unit that may in fact sustain the "world." He thus states: "The task of education or the educational task is to arouse the desire in another human being for wanting to exist in the world in a grown-up way."

We should be deeply uncomfortable with the association he makes between the essentialist world and adults or adulthood. In my view, the world is neither as "adult" nor as "mature" (in the sense of understanding and ethical and other capabilities) as he would have us believe. To a great extent, this world, in which he still attributes a central place to education — or the school — is flawed, deficient, and inclined to negativity. This is due in no small part to the fact that education functions as a mechanism preventing inclusion and delegitimizing plurality. Rather than enabling identities (KIZEL, 2016b), it blocks them. A mechanism that works in this way is inherently violent, making the world a narrow and restrictive place.

The world is thus in no little need of *tikkun olam*. This Jewish concept refers to "repairing the world." In modern Jewish circles, *tikkun olam* has become synonymous with the notion of social action and the pursuit of social justice. In the Mishnah, the first layer of the Talmud consisting of rabbinic teachings compiled in the third century, it first occurs as denoting the safeguarding of the disadvantaged: "One does not ransom captives for more than their [market] value because of *tikkun olam* and one does not help captives escape because of *tikkun olam*" (GITTIN, 4:6, s./d.). In its explanation of the Mishna, the Gemara states that

the rationale behind the rabbinic enactment is that paying a higher than normal ransom for captives might encourage kidnappers to capture more Jews and demand still higher ransoms (ZION, 2013).

The task of *tikkun olam* frequently falls upon the shoulders of the philosophical community of inquiry. Matthew Lipman and others believe children to be capable of thinking critically about the world if given the opportunity to engage their creative powers by asking questions rather than accommodating themselves to the adult world, compromising their own ideas and views, shutting off their curiosity, dampening their doubts, and squashing variety. To a great extent, Lipman and others contend that the world should not be accepted as it is. The child's role—if he is allowed to play it from a young age—is divided into three parts: 1) the exercising of his or her own thinking processes; 2) development of the will to fight for (improve) things; and 3) identification of possibilities for change and *tikkun olam*. While children are not meant to storm the Bastille or blockade the streets in protest against the G8, they can take part from an early age in educational and philosophical laboratories in which they can think and consider ideas—including those capable of creating their "world"—a "world of adults," if you like.

These three factors necessarily forming part of the basis of young children's understanding of what needs "repairing," they must be capable of identifying injustice and social wrongs and be ready to actively seek to change society. At the heart of this change lies the potential of philosophy to serve as the driving force behind action and influence rather than as a power dedicated to preserving the status quo. In this context, let me quote Walter Omar Kohan. At the end of the first chapter of his *Philosophy and Childhood: Critical Perspectives and Affirmative Practices* (2014), Kohan identifies one of the most important challenges facing contemporary P4C:

> […] if it is to be a truly philosophical venture into education, it demands a truly philosophical posture. It demands the prevalence of the question. As long as p4c's answers hide its questions, the movement might be able to impact educational systems, but the philosophical, educational and political force of that impact will be seriously affected. (KOHAN, 2014, p. 10)

He then addresses the link between engaging in philosophical thought within the philosophical community of inquiry and social activism in the present. Following Jaspers (1959), he argues that the three traditional pillars of philosophy—wonder, doubt, and commotion—should be complemented by dissatisfaction, this serving as a key factor particularly in the economic, social, and political environments characteristic of Latin America. *Contra* Lipman, he asserts: "I don't believe that philosophy can be found […] in a body of abstract, complex, general and ill-defined ideas" (KOHAN, 2014, p. 7).

Kohan distinguishes between the ancient Greek pursuit of truth and our current focus on its functioning, creation, legitimization, and transfer. One of the central questions P4C must address today is the degree to which it is relevant and can serve as a source of influence—primarily with respect to social change amongst both children and adults. In other words, connecting to Biesta's claim about "existing in the world"—to what degree does philosophical engagement in the philosophical laboratory/community of inquiry impact children—or more precisely, their belief in their ability to be a force for change in their broader environment while still at school and then afterwards as what we frequently call "significant adults"? I suggest that we will call it "the potential of children and young adults not just to exist passively but to make a different in the world or in the worlds."

This influence being exerted in broad social realms closely interlinked with the political world, we must ask to what degree philosophical thinking can help children understand that they form part of a social structure that both restricts and equips them. To what degree does philosophical inquiry constitute a model of activism that heightens their awareness of their ability to bring about social change on the one hand and motivates them to put this capacity into action on the other? To what extent does Philosophy with Children enable even relatively young children to adopt an activist stance—i.e., seek to engage in social activism by defining and analyzing problems and offering relevant solutions?

I suggest that "seeking to change the situation" can be understood as a codeword for self-competency and a prerequisite for engaging in activism. In this, I agree with Biesta when he maintains that

> The "world," understood as a world of plurality and difference, is not only the necessary condition under which human beings can come into presence; it is at the very same time a troubling condition, one that makes education an inherently difficult process. (BIESTA, 2006, p. 9)

Biesta, however, holds mainly teachers responsible for this task. Although he notes that their role is one of responsibility rather than technical, in my opinion he makes very little room for children as potential agents of change in the world. With all due respect to the work teachers do, they have and continue to serve in various educational systems as "normalizers" of children and agents of oppression rather than liberation.

This hegemonic discourse—which Freire (1970) calls the "pedagogy of the oppressed"—represents itself to teachers and students as the authentic embodiment of "reality," the "economy," and "society." It thus portrays itself as the ultimate manifestation of "existential certainty"—the latter also being exemplified in the policy of over-evaluating and assessing of young people, who are required to meet ostensibly objective standards based on essentially quantitative measures relating to themselves, their success, and their future.

On this view, schools are the ultimate representative of "knowledge"—and of course its status—and, at the end of the educational path, a singular, unique "truth" (APPLE, 1982). To achieve its goals, the educational system of "the world" employs scientific tools that validate the processes of assessment and form an integral part of the regular curricula across all grades, classifying students according to disciplines and hierarchic levels of thought (APPLE, 1986). Graduation is the *telos* of the educational process. Only once students have passed this point, via the summarizing evaluative process of final exams, are they recognized as fit and proper citizens of the world. The constant assessment—which resembles the process of annual re-licensing—that accompanies the progress of children and young people is part of the domination of the adult

world over childhood and the scientific legitimization of the latter by the former (APPLE, 1989).

Adults do not behave this way out of malice or arbitrariness but are themselves victims of the same pedagogy of fear. This fear is passed down from generation to generation as part of a basic human-survival need—not only via supervised means but also by our own addiction to it (without being conscious of this fact or acknowledging it). Lodging itself in our unconscious collective, it becomes a hidden, unspoken, self-evident space from which we suckle and in which we function—the pathological disease of the West. It is thus no wonder that we have become so focused on needs and deficiencies that we have forgotten that children also have strengths and capacities.

Some of the strengths that we must reinforce within the framework of the philosophical community of inquiry, within which children have to deal with the multiple identities and multiple "worlds" from which they come, are those that will enable them to engage in seeking to "repair the world" rather than accepting it as it is.

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