childism and minority cultures in school

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abstract
While inequality between children and adults characterizes practically every aspect of contemporary society, school is considered a paradigmatic site of adult domination. Childist critiques tend to point to school as a place where adultism is not only conspicuous but also (re)produced. In this article, however, it is argued that the public school, obviously founded by adults for adult purposes, has an important childist dimension. Although it is based on a clear distinction between adult teachers and child students, school can problematize key adultist norms and promote a more age-equal society. This does not imply that exiting schools are necessarily childist, but rather that a certain understanding of the school, which emphasizes its social-democratic significance, can uncover its childist aspects and build on them when reimagining public education. The conception of the school in which the article focuses is presented in Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons' 2013 book *In Defence of the School: A Public Issue*. Although the authors do not refer directly to childism (or child equality), and are clearly writing from an adultist perspective, I argue that the public school they describe does have a childist dimension: it challenges one of the root causes of adultism: considering children the property of their parents. Nevertheless, Masschelein and Simons' conception of the school raises a problem of its own, which also has a childist aspect: the concern that uniform schooling supervised by the state will be detrimental to minority and indigenous groups, imposing a culture and identity determined by adults. The second part of this article addresses this concern, arguing that genuine school education can be key not only to preserving but also to revitalizing minority cultures and identities by allowing the students to bring their "newness" into the encounter with the cultures and identities of their families.

keywords: childism; school; minority education; democratic education; equality.

infantismo e culturas minoritárias na escola

resumo
Enquanto a desigualdade entre crianças e adultos caracteriza praticamente todos os aspectos da sociedade contemporânea, a escola é considerada um lugar paradigmático de dominação adulta. Críticas de estudiosos da infância tendem a apontar a escola como um lugar onde o adultismo é não apenas evidente, como também (re)produzido. Neste artigo, no entanto, argumento que a escola pública, obviamente criada por adultos para propósitos de adultos, tem uma importante dimensão infantista. Embora se baseie em uma clara distinção entre professores adultos e estudantes crianças, a escola pode problematizar as principais normas adultistas e promover uma sociedade mais igualitária em termos de idade. Isso não significa que as escolas existentes sejam necessariamente infantes, mas sim que uma certa compreensão da escola, que enfatize seu significado

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social-democrático, pode revelar seus aspectos infantis e basear-se neles ao reimaginar a educação pública. A concepção de escola na qual me debruço neste artigo é apresentada no livro de Jan Masschelein e Maarten Simons, de 2013, *Em defesa da escola: uma questão pública*. Embora os autores não façam referência direta ao infantismo (ou igualdade infantil) e escrevam, claramente, sob uma perspectiva adultista, acredito que a escola pública que eles descrevem tem, de fato, uma dimensão infantil – ela desafia uma das causas fundamentais do adultismo: considerar as crianças como propriedade de seus pais. No entanto, a concepção de escola de Masschelein e Simons suscita um outro problema, que também tem um aspecto infante: a preocupação de que a escolarização uniforme supervisionada pelo Estado seja prejudicial aos grupos minoritários e indígenas, impondo uma cultura e uma identidade determinadas pelos adultos. A segunda parte deste artigo aborda essa preocupação, defendendo que a educação escolar genuína pode ser fundamental não apenas para preservar, mas também para revitalizar as culturas e identidades das minorias, permitindo que os alunos tragam a "novidade" ao encontro das culturas e identidades de suas famílias.

palavras-chave: infantismo; escola; educação de minorias; educação democrática; igualdade.

infantilismo y culturas minoritarias en la escuela

resumen
Aunque la inequidad entre niños y adultos caracteriza prácticamente todos los aspectos de la sociedad contemporánea, la escuela se considera un lugar paradigmático de la dominación adulta. Las críticas infantilistas tienden a señalar la escuela como un lugar donde el adultismo no sólo es conspicuo, sino también (re)producido. En este artículo, sin embargo, se sostiene que la escuela pública, obviamente fundada por adultos para fines adultos, tiene una importante dimensión infantilista. Aunque se basa en una clara distinción entre profesores adultos y alumnos niños, la escuela puede problematizar normas adultistas claves y promover una sociedad más igualitaria en términos etarios. Esto no implica que las escuelas existentes sean necesariamente infantilistas, sino más bien que una cierta comprensión de la escuela, que enfatice su significado socialdemócrata, puede desenmascarar sus aspectos infantilistas y basarse en ellos a la hora de reimaginar la educación pública. La concepción de la escuela en la que me centro en este artículo se presenta en el libro de Jan Masschelein y Maarten Simons de 2013 In *Defence of the School: a public issue* [En defensa de la escuela: una cuestión pública]. Aunque los autores no se refieren directamente al infantilismo (o a la equidad infantil), y escriben claramente desde una perspectiva adultista, yo sostengo que la escuela pública que describen sí tiene una dimensión infantilista: cuestiona una de las causas profundas del adultismo: considerar a los niños propiedad de sus padres. Sin embargo, la concepción que Masschelein y Simons tienen de la escuela suscita un problema que le es propio, que también tiene un aspecto infantilista: la preocupación de que una escolarización uniforme supervisada por el Estado perjudicaría a los grupos minoritarios e indígenas, imponiendo una cultura y una identidad determinadas por los adultos. La segunda parte de este artículo aborda esta preocupación, argumentando que una auténtica educación escolar puede ser clave no sólo para preservar, sino también para revitalizar las culturas e identidades minoritarias, al permitir que los alumnos aporten su «novedad» al encuentro con las culturas e identidades de sus familias.

palabras clave: infantilismo; escuela; educación de minorías; educación democrática; igualdad

childism and minority cultures in school

introduction

While inequality between children and adults characterizes practically every aspect of contemporary society, school is considered a paradigmatic site of adult domination. It is therefore no surprise that childist approaches, which challenge age hierarchy, tend to criticize school sharply and to support alternative forms of education. Childism is a conceptual framework born about two decades ago out of trends in childhood studies viewing children as beings rather than mere becomings, social participants in their own right rather than passive recipients of socialization (Wall, 2006, 2008).[2] The crucial step from childhood studies to childism, according to John Wall (2019, p. 260), is "to use children's experiences as means for broader systemic critiques of scholarly and social norms". Childism, then, is an activist no less than a theoretical framework, attempting to challenge children's marginality in order to change "adultist" norms and social structures, and promote a more inclusive political imagination in which the subordination of children to adults is problematized (Biswas & Wall, 2023; Burman, 2023).

Childist scholars such as Tatek Abebe and Tanu Biswas point to school as a place where adultism is not only conspicuous but also (re)produced. They reproach the reduction of the "right to education" to the "right to school", and call for replacing it with children's rights *in* education. Biswas (2023) argues that schooling ignores children's perspectives, promoting nation building and assimilation into the existing social system, which is destructive to the future of humanity. She sees school as a "conspirator of capitalism" (Abebe & Biswas, 2021, p. 125), whose main goal is to contribute to the students' employability, and supports the reorganization of institutions to overcome age segregation and foster community formation.

Abebe (2023) denounces compulsory schooling as a specific European and North-American institution, in which children have no say regarding the duration and nature of their education. He describes how school "detach[es] children and

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[2] Wall (2019) distinguishes between the contemporary use of the term, to which he contributed, and previous uses such as those by Hunt (1991) and Young-Bruehl (2013).

young people from local wisdom, ways of living and traditions that are considered valuable" (p. 111), and analyzes refusals of schooling as part of wider resistance to attempts to "civilize" and "develop" colonized subjects. In light of attempts by individuals and communities in Ethiopia to avoid compulsory schooling and reimagine education, he stresses "the need to question and critically evaluate the significance and limits of schooling for both society and childhood in ways that foster conversations around alternative, post-schooling futures" (p. 113).

This post-schooling trend echoes the decades-old call for de-schooling (Illich, 2000; Firestone, 2003; Holt, 2021), which also critiques the school's contribution to capitalism and social inequality, as well as the inherent inequality between adults and children at school. However, attempts at de- or post-schooling are also highly problematic, for entrusting the education of the young to the family, community or voluntary organizations amounts to privatization, which advantages children of higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and widens socioeconomic gaps. Such privatization strengthens precisely the capitalist, profit-driven society scholars such as Abebe and Biswas want to challenge. Rather than renouncing school education and looking for radical alternatives, I therefore suggest thinking about school itself – exploring its radical, childist potential.

In this article, I argue that the public school, obviously founded by adults for adult purposes, has an important childist dimension. Although – and in a sense because – it is based on a clear distinction between adult teachers and child students, school can problematize key adultist norms, and promote a more age-equal society. This does not imply that existing schools are necessarily childist, but rather that a certain understanding of the school, which emphasizes its social-democratic significance, can uncover its childist aspects and build on them when reimagining public education.

The conception of the school on which I focus in this article is presented in Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons' seminal book *In Defence of the School: A Public Issue* (2013). This "apology" does not apply to all schools, most of which are what the authors call "deschooled schools" (2013, p. 29) – but articulates the essence of the school ("the scholastic") to shed light on its advantages and call for

its "reinvention". Although Masschelein and Simons do not refer directly to childism (or child equality), and are clearly writing from an adultist perspective, I argue that the public school they describe does have a childist dimension: it challenges one of the root causes of adultism: considering children the property of their parents.

Nevertheless, Masschelein and Simons' conception of the school raises a problem of its own, which is also related to childism. In line with Abebe and Biswas' claim (2021, p. 120) that school is expressive of the cultural imperialism of Western colonialism, it raises the concern that uniform schooling supervised by the state would be detrimental to minority and indigenous groups, imposing a culture and identity determined by adults. In the second part of this article, I address this concern, arguing that genuine school education can be key not only to preserving but also to revitalizing minority cultures and identities by allowing the students to bring their "newness" into the encounter with the cultures and identities of their families. The article contributes, therefore, to childist scholarship by showing that childism can embrace and benefit from the public school, as well as to the scholarly discussion of Masschelein and Simons' conception of the school by showing that it is compatible with promoting childism and minority cultures.

the childist dimension of school

liberated time

The starting point for Masschelein and Simons' (2013) discussion is similar to that of the school's critics, namely that school is not synonymous with education, and not every society has its own school. For them, school is a specific historical invention that originated in the Greek polis and has a direct link to the democratic politics from which it emerged. This is evident in the Greek word *scholè*, from which "school" is derived: *scholè* means free time, but in school it is not the time of rest and leisure associated with the higher social strata as opposed to the working masses; it is rather liberated time – liberated *from* the elites who claim exclusive access to free time, and liberated *for* study and practice. As Masschelein and Simons write, "the school was a source of 'free time' – the most common translation of the Greek word *scholè* – that is, free time […] for study and

practice afforded to people who had no claim to it according to the archaic order prevailing at the time. The school was thus a source of knowledge and experience made available as a 'common good'" (2013, p. 9).

School, then, is inherently public, since it makes knowledge and skills (as well as the time needed for learning and practice) available to all. It is also essentially democratic because it challenges the unequal social order according to which knowledge is the exclusive property of specific social groups and passes from father to son:

> the Greek school emerged as an encroachment on the privilege of aristocratic and military elites in ancient Greece. In the Greek school, it was no longer one's origin, race or "nature" that justified one's belonging to the class of the good and wise […]. The Greek school rendered inoperative the archaic connection linking one's personal markers (race, nature, origin, etc.) to the list of acceptable corresponding occupations (working the land, engaging in trade and commerce, studying and practicing) (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 27).

To achieve this, school operates through what Masschelein and Simons call "suspension", namely "(temporarily) rendering something inoperative, or in other words, taking it out of production, releasing it, lifting it from its normal context" (2013, p. 33). The modus of temporariness embodied in suspension allows the school to be a different world, a heterotopia topographically separated from the "real" world", a cave (Masschelein, 2018) into which one enters for a limited time, until the bell rings. Unlike Plato's cave, school is not designed to (permanently) keep people in, but to (temporarily) keep other things out: "what the school did was to establish a time and space that was in a sense detached from the time and space of both society (Greek: *polis*) and the household (Greek: *oikos*)" (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 28). When the school fulfills its scholastic purpose, it brackets out the logic of efficiency and productivity according to which society and the household operate, making knowledge and skills (temporarily) objects of study freed of economic demands. In contemporary terms, school can liberate time from the instrumental shackles of capitalism rather than strengthen them. At the same time, it also brackets out the inequality inherent to the social order, which evaluates people according to the household to which they belong. In the egalitarian school time, all learners are equal – as all equally students.

who's child?

Masschelein and Simons repeatedly stress that although the school itself is not democratic, it has a crucial contribution to democracy by making knowledge public and challenging the unequal socio-political order. They say nothing, however, about school's possible contribution to challenging the inequality between children and adults. In fact, they seem to be willing to accept ageist inequality in school – such as the clear hierarchy between adult teachers and child students – as a fair price for keeping out other inequalities (based on class, race, gender, etc.). Nevertheless, I argue that school as described by Masschelein and Simons does have a childist aspect even without completely renouncing age-based hierarchy. It confronts one of the pillars of adultism: the assumption that children belong to their parents.

Adam Benforado (2023) has recently discussed the history of the idea that children are their parents' property. As he points out, Aristotle's claim from the 4th century B.C. that a man's child, just like his chattel, is "a part of him" (2004, p. 1134b) echoes into the 20th century, with philosopher Robert Nozick writing that children are "part of one's substance" (1989, p. 28).

Historically, this possessive understanding of the parent-child relation has been expressed in countless practices – from fathers' ownership of the products of their children's labor to their right to inflict corporal punishments and even trade in children for profit. To be sure, the possessive relation and the ensuing practices by no means belong to a distant past: physical punishments are still acceptable in many US states (Benforado, 2023, p. 60), and even the idea of a free child adoption market is endorsed by some contemporary libertarians.[3] The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child notwithstanding, the possessive understanding of the parental relation is woven into almost every aspect of contemporary family life, including how we speak to and about "our" children (Benforado, 2023, p. 59).

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[3] This idea gains momentum in rightwing circles that tend to endorse it as a solution to the problem of unwanted infants born due to the criminalization of abortions. A noteworthy example is Argentina's president Javier Milei, who has recently replied to a question on this matter by saying that "it depends":
https://latin-american.news/javier-milei-is-once-again-the-center-of-controversy-for-his-statements-about-the-sale-of-children/

The idea that children inherently belong to their parents, thereby authorizing parents to control what they learn and understand, carries significant educational implications. This concept is manifested not only in the parents' right to homeschool, a practice often subject to minimal state oversight in the United States, with approvals almost invariably granted (Benforado, 2023, p. 69). The most prevalent manifestation of this perception of parental authority is the right granted to parents to opt their children out of various lessons and activities, from evolution through sexual education to the Holocaust (Benforado, 2023, pp. 66–67). Thus, the right to decide on educational matters – what and where their children learn – often lies with the parents rather than the children. This view is not limited to the rightwing Texas GOP, which asserted in its 2016 platform that "Parents have the God-given right and responsibility to direct and guide their children's moral education" (Benforado, 2023, p. 58). As early as 1925, the US Supreme Court clarified that the liberty of parents and guardians encompassed the right "to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control" (Benforado, 2023, p. 67), an understanding widely regarded as self-evident today.

Benforado (2023) focuses on the American context, but the phenomenon he analyzes is anchored in a fundamental social norm, namely "the damaging expectation that kids will emerge from the cocoon of childhood as fully realized replicants of their parents' beliefs and values" (p. 73). In this conceptualization, the purpose of education is to serve as a parental instrument to shape children in their own likeness, minimizing the likelihood that children develop their own perspectives, choosing diverging paths than those of their parents, and contributing something new to the world.

The notion that children are their parents' property is not merely a manifestation of adultism, but constitutes its core, the nucleus from which it emanates and extends. It embodies a perception of absolute and total inferiority, permeating from the nuclear family into society and its institutions, reinforcing the pervasive belief that children are objects rather than subjects, subjected to the dictates of adults who stand in for their parents in their absence.

A truly public school, as described by Masschelein and Simons, temporarily removes children from their parents' authority,[4] thereby disrupting the mechanism of familial replication. As discussed earlier, the school's free time is liberated from the pressures of both societal and household demands – directed not only to productivity and efficiency, but also to meeting family expectations. Where society sees the son of the day laborer and the daughter of the university professor, school "allows young people to enter into another world in which they can stop being 'son' or 'daughter'" (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 31); it "gives people the chance (temporarily, for a short while) to leave their past and family background behind and to become a student just like everyone else" (2013, pp. 31–32). At school, while being a student, family origin is irrelevant – all are equal before the curriculum.

The word "pupil", as pointed out by Masschelein (2015), is derived from the Latin word for orphan or foundling. But despite the tragic and violent connotations of this etymology, temporary orphanhood can be liberating. At school, the orphan-pupil is unburdened from expectations linked to family and origin. Expectations imposed not only by parents but also by whoever is acquainted with them, or shares their worldviews. Similar to race, class and gender, all familial ties and belongings are bracketed out during the free time of school, allowing each child to shape their identity in relation to the world based on individual choices rather than by conforming to their parents' expectations. Thus, by (temporarily) severing the connection between parents and their children's education, school directly challenges the core of adultism.

age hierarchies in a childist institution

One might argue, however, that this does not make the school a childist place. After all, school maintains a strict hierarchical distinction between adults and children, integral to its very essence. It arises from the school's task to

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[4] Removing children from their families by state authorities under the pretext of acting in their best interest is a violent and unjustifiable practice. As demonstrated by Laura Briggs (2020), this colonial and racist practice persists to this day, for example in the US welfare system. The school, while not entirely free of violence (Rotlevy & Snir, 2024), differs significantly—not only thanks to its universalist aspirations, but also because the children's separation from their parents is temporary. At the end of the school day, all return to their families.

introduce the young generation to the world, presenting its ways and secrets to the "newcomers" (Arendt, 1961). The generational gap is reflected in numerous practices that require children to exhibit discipline and obedience. Schoolchildren are expected to sit quietly, listen attentively, repeat actions countless times, and do whatever their teachers tell them to.

According to this critique, childist education should actualize age equality in practice, "move away from the hierarchy of adults as teachers and children as learners to instead fostering horizontal educational practices, with children and adults as co-learners" (Abebe & Biswas, 2021, p. 122). I suggest, however, to understand school as employing different tactics to achieve the same strategic goal of liberation from adultism. Instead of bracketing out the differences between adults and children alongside the other distinctions mentioned above (race, class, etc.), school acknowledges the relevance of age difference to its mission of acquainting children with the world. Although from a childist perspective we must reject Arendt's portrayal of children as "not finished" beings (1961, p. 185), there is no problem endorsing her claim which is much more important to Masschelein and Simons' (2013) understanding of the school, namely that children are "newcomers" (Arendt, 1961, p. 176), not unlike immigrants arriving on a new place. Once again the temporal dimension makes all the difference: adults are more familiar with the existing world, into which they welcome the new generation. They pass on their knowledge and skills to introduce children into the world, without necessarily assuming that the latter have no knowledge of their own or denying the value of learning and doing together. Indeed, at school, children and their unique perspectives are not central, but neither are adults'.It is the world that is placed on the table as subject matter that is central, demanding everyone's attention.

Acknowledging the differences between adults and children within the school setting does not entail forsaking equality or accepting the prevalence of adultism beyond its walls. These differences allow the children's perspectives to be expressed rather than being blurred by that of the adults. More importantly, a just and egalitarian society does not imply complete absence of hierarchies or

power relations. Not only is such a society unattainable, but it is also undesirable – hierarchical differences may be justifiable and advantageous in certain contexts, and they are by no means inherently unjust as long as they are not arbitrarily imposed and do not encroach upon other areas where they are irrelevant (Walzer, 1984; Graeber & Wengrow, 2021).

School, then, needs to not completely disregard the distinction between adults and children; rather, it should strive to prevent this distinction from manifesting as arbitrary domination. The political lesson taught by school is not that there are no meaningful differences between groups, including age groups, nor that all hierarchies are necessarily unjust and objectionable. Rather, the lesson underscores the principle of equality – all children are equally students – and recognizes that hierarchical distinctions may be warranted in certain circumstances, while being problematic and objectionable in others.

This lesson holds significant relevance for childism. School does not combat adultism by constructing a world where age is entirely divorced from power relations. Such a world would be disconnected from the "real" one and fail to equip children with tools necessary to oppose adultism. Instead, school teaches children to remain vigilant against arbitrary and oppressive uses of the power dynamics to which they are subjected. Consequently, when the bell rings and students return to their families, they are adept at navigating unequal relationships,cooperating in some instances and protesting in others. Upon reentering society each day, they do so having experienced themselves not as the exclusive property of their families, but as possessing greater confidence to choose whether and how to follow in their parents' footsteps. This becomes a foundational basis for a genuine struggle against adultism, grounded not in abstract ideals or practices but in the everyday transition between a space where children are not exclusively owned by any adult and a society that still perceives them as parental chattel.

minority identities in school

school as a melting pot

Masschelein and Simons' (2013) perspective raises serious concerns regarding students' ethnic and religious minority identities. The problem stems from the state's control over public schools, and the fear that it utilizes the education system to impose a unitary and hegemonic culture.hereby eradicating the cultural identities of migrant and indigenous minorities. This critique as well a postcolonial version of which - we have seen in Abebe and Biswas (2023)- has a long history.

As Meira Levinson (2002, p. 70) points out, already in his 1859 *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill argued that standardized state education would result in standardized people: "A general State education is a mere contrivance for molding people to be exactly like one another" (Mill, 2003, p. 167). Therefore, public schools are likely to contribute to cultural homogeneity, irrespective of the subjects they teach (Haberman, 1994, p. 185). This conclusion is not solely theoretical but borne out by extensive examinations of public schools worldwide (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Horst & Gitz-Johansen, 2010; McAndrew, 2013). In a review of this literature, J. Mark Halstead (2007) argues that from a cultural perspective, public education in England and many other places fits the infamous "melting pot" image. As the case of the Muslim community suggests, the goal of the "common school" is "to create citizens with common values and shared loyalties" (Halstead, 2007, p. 830), which requires students of minority cultures to relinquish their existing loyalties and adopt new ones. Public schools commonly assess cultures based on their proximity to or divergence from the ideal of the majority culture (Feinberg, 2007); consequently, efforts to integrate students of minority groups into society often result in assimilation (Merry, 2013), where acculturation turns into cultural erasure (Bowskill et al., 2007).

This concerns not only the curriculum but also the freedom to manifest cultural and religious markers in schools (Bowen, 2006; Scott, 2007). Although the prohibition against religious clothing or other symbols of religious belonging can be viewed as creating a "sanctuary apart from the rest of society" (Williams, 2007,

p. 676), it is often perceived as oppressive. The sense of injustice within the common school system has led Catholics in the US and elsewhere to establish separate schools (Reich, 2007), and many other ethno-religious communities have done so throughout the world. Eamonn Callan (1997) justifies such actions, contending that where parents desire it, education should closely approximate the home culture.

Toby Rollo (2022) makes analogous assertions concerning the education of indigenous children in North America. The roots of what he terms "colonial pedagogies" lie in practices of forcibly separating children from their families and placing them in residential schools, "not to educate them, but primarily to break their link to their culture and identity" (Rollo, 2022, p. 128) and to acculturate them into productive habits deemed suitable for civilized people (2022, p. 131). However, colonial, assimilative pedagogy is not a thing of the distant past, nor is it confined to the curriculum; it cannot be remedied by incorporating more diverse, multicultural content. Rollo argues that the very structure of public schools, of state-sanctioned mandatory education, causes "the system of coercive colonial assimilation [to] continue to function today under the auspices of the public school system" (2022, p. 130). Drawing on the insights of indigenous scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011, 2014), he contends that colonial pedagogy is inherent to all state-run education. Consistent with Abebe, Biswas and Callan, Rollo, he concludes that the education of indigenous children and youth must be returned to their indigenous communities.

To refocus on Masschelein and Simons' conception of the school, we may say that the problem arises from the distinctive nature of the school as an educational institution, namely the suspension of family ties – which encompass, in addition to social status and class, also a specific (and ethnic) culture, tradition and religion. In essence, we are once again confronted with the question of the price paid for the equality school fosters among students: Does this equality come at the cost of the inherent value of the rich variety of cultures and subcultures within an open democratic society? Does it not adversely affect those who identify with cultures and traditions different from the hegemonic ones? These questions

pertain to the very essence of the unique encounter between students and the world that takes place at school: Should the school completely disregard the students' individual identities, even if this contributes to their elimination? Is the world they are presented with not a product of these cultures and identities? And is the encounter with the world not inevitably influenced by the students' own identities?

childism, minorities, and indigenous cultures

These questions are not unrelated to the issue of childism in school education. Note that examining school from the perspective of minority and indigenous cultures casts a shadow over the attempt to attribute a childist nature to school education. While Western popular imagination often portrays traditional cultures as patriarchal and consequently oppressive of children, the reality is quite the opposite in many cases. As Rollo writes, "Early settlers in North America were both puzzled and frustrated by the inclusive and egalitarian structure of families and the reverence for children demonstrated by many Indigenous societies" (2022, p. 124). A significant part of the culture that settlers sought to instill in indigenous children forcibly taken from their families and placed in boarding schools, involved respect for elders and clear boundaries between parents and children. The childist aspect identified above in schools – generating equality by temporarily suspending family ties and challenging children's belonging to their parents – is therefore potentially at odds with childist dimensions in minority cultures.

However, it is precisely the childist dimension of school that causes the greatest tension with minority cultures and identities. When the school (temporarily) liberates children from their families, it frees them from the demands of specific traditions, allowing them the possibility – not always afforded at home – of (temporarily) lifting their burden. During school time, no parent or teacher can impose tradition or identity upon the child. This does not mean, of course, that school is permitted to compel students to renounce their identities. Fully aware of their home and familial background, each child can decide whether

and to what extent they feel attached to their family and ethno-religious origin. This is another clear manifestation of childism: at school, the individual child is more important than any particular identity or tradition; the child's freedom is prioritized over the law of the father and the tradition he represents. Does this mean that such school is inherently hostile and oppressive towards specific cultures and identities? In the following subsection I offer a negative answer to this question.

renewing culture at school

Following Hannah Arendt (1961), Masschelein and Simons argue that school facilitates a safe encounter between the old (the established world) and the new (the children).[5] Such safe space is required because the interaction between old and new exposes each to potential harm: "the child requires special protection and care so that nothing destructive may happen to him from the world. But the world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation" (Arendt, 1961, p. 186). In other words, the danger is not limited to the unfamiliarity of the established world to the child; what is intriguing here is that the child poses a threat to the world, as the novelty the child represents can unsettle it. The danger, according to Arendt, lies in the possibility that the new generation might rush to destroy the world (or parts of it) without first recognizing its value, without comprehending that, despite the need for radical change, the world still contains numerous aspects worthy of appreciation and preservation (Hodgson et al., 2018).

This view may appear highly conservative, yet Arendt insists that such education is in fact a precondition for non-conservative politics. In her conclusion to "The Crisis in Education," she emphasizes that education is "where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave

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[5] Note that Arendt characterizes children not only as "new" (or "newcomers") but also as "not finished but in a state of becoming" (1961, p. 185). This view is incongruent with childism, which asserts that children are complete human beings. Additionally, in her writings on education, Arendt objected to the desegregation imposed in the American South (Arendt, 2003), a stance that led to her accusation of complicity with racism. It is thus important to emphasize that incorporating some of her ideas into the conceptualization of school does not necessarily imply agreement with all of her views.

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" (1961, p. 196). School protects the children from the world and the world from the children, but in protecting the newness inherent in each child (and in the new generation as a collective) it allows for the renewal of the world – not its complete destruction, but rather its regeneration, rejuvenation, change and transformation without unnecessarily obliterating what holds value.

Arendt, and Masschelein and Simons in her footsteps, are well aware that "the common world" appears differently to each individual according to their position in it, akin to a table around which different people gather, each viewing it from a different perspective (Arendt, 1958, p. 52). For Arendt, addressing the question of how to present the world to the next generation is the responsibility of educators, the foundation of their authority (1961, pp. 185–6). The responsibility of teachers extends beyond ensuring students' physical safety or emotional well-being, and their authority is not derived merely from their capacity to administer punishment. Rather, educational authority and responsibility are grounded in the older generation's familiarity with the world and their ability to discern its inherent value. Although Arendt does not mention the plurality of cultures and subcultures – in fact, she seems to assume that like particular identities they have no place in school – we can readily modify this aspect of her view so that the world educators are responsible for introducing to the students can encompass the diverse array of cultures and traditions found in every contemporary society.[6] If the teachers fail to acquaint the students with certain kinds of traditional knowledge, thereby making them invisible (Abebe & Biswas, 2021, p. 120), they simply betray their responsibility to the common world.

However, as discussed earlier, the threat to minority cultures extends beyond the curriculum and cannot be addressed solely by more inclusive and multicultural contents. It is crucial, therefore, to apply Arendt's view on the

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[6] Elsewhere (Snir, 2016), I have criticized Masschelein and Simons' (2013) claim, following Arendt (1961), that schooling must be depoliticized. Space limitations prevent me from delving into this issue here.

renewal of the world by the young to the diverse cultures that inhabit it. School education does not impose identity or tradition on any student, but each student is free to engage with their identity and culture (or any identity or culture for that matter) as they see fit. The point is not only that school is committed to preparing students for living in cultures different from those of their parents, as suggested by Brighouse (2002). Rather, it is that schools enable students to explore the identity and culture of their parents from a free and open standpoint that encourages a variety of questions and experiences.

In this manner, tradition can be transmitted to the new generation not as a mandate from above or as a meaningless collection of beliefs and practices, but as a living, dynamic world that invites active engagement. Consequently, the young students need not be passive receivers and transmitters of traditions (Merry, 2005, p. 479). They can infuse the "newness" inherent to them into the old traditions, just like the new generation does for Arendt's "common world": the significance of being a Jew in a modern world or a Muslim in a predominantly Christian country can take on new forms with each generation.

While such processes occur continuously – after all, no identity or tradition is fixed, even if its bearers occasionally perceive it as such – they may be perceived as threats and resisted, as is sometimes done by leaders of religious and ethnic communities. Alternatively, they can be embraced and facilitated, inviting the younger generation to carry the past into the future in its unique way. My claim is that the kind of childism public schools can facilitate may contribute to renewing and rejuvenating specific cultures and traditions more than education in the community.

afterword

The arguments put forward in this article – asserting that school education has a childist dimension that supports rather than threatens minority cultures – are philosophical and by no means empirical. I do not contend that existing schools actively endorse childism or refrain from imposing the majority culture on minorities. The reality is undoubtedly bleak: many institutions labeled as schools are clearly adultist while also promoting the hegemonic culture at the expense of

other identities. In line with Masschelein and Simons, I contend that these institutions fail to fulfill the scholastic essence of a school and are unworthy of the name "schools". This is not solely a theoretical-linguistic diagnosis but a call to action: a plea for a comprehensive transformation of contemporary schools, a reinvention that would breathe new life into the scholastic ethos, fostering age equality and rejuvenate minority migrant and indigenous cultures.

However, I do not assert that the public school *à la* Masschelein and Simons is the sole means through which education can promote childism or support minority cultures. My argument is more modest, suggesting that such a school can advance these objectives. Contrary to the prevailing notion that views schools as inherently adultist, advocating for their abolition and replacement with communal or more 'open' institutions, I propose that school – real school – can also serve to promote childist and multicultural endeavors. Considering the numerous other advantages of public schools, particularly their contribution to democracy and social justice, it is a prospect worth exploring.

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