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Presentation

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Each year we publish four issues. Starting next issue (No. 361), the magazine will have three sections: Research, Essays and Education Experiences, all of them submitted to referees. In the first issue of the year there is also an index of bibliography, and in the second number a report with statistic information about the journal process of this period and the impact factors, as well as a list of our external advisors.

From 2006 to the second number of 2012 (May-August 358), *Revista de Educación* was published in a double format, paper and electronic. The paper edition included all the articles in the especial section, the abstracts of articles pertaining to the rest of sections, and an index of reviewed and received books. The electronic edition contains all articles and reviews of each issue, and it is available through this web page (www.mecd.gob.es/revista-de-educacion/), where it is possible to find more interesting information about the journal. From the 358 number *Revista de Educación* becomes exclusively an online publication.

Revista de Educación assesses, selects and publishes studies framed in well established lines of research, mainly: methodologies of education investigation and assessment; analysis of education systems and public policies; evolution and history of contemporary education systems; education reforms and innovations; quality and equity in education; curriculum; didactics; school organization and management; attention to diversity and inclusive education; educational guidance and tutorship; teacher selection, training and professional development; international cooperation for the development of education.

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Index

Monographic issue: Exploring What Is Common and Public in Teaching Practices

Monographic section

Research

Monographic section

Presentation: Exploring what is common and public in teaching practices

Presentación: Explorando lo común y lo público en las prácticas de enseñanza

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The promise of quality education for all is a democratizing call, with which it is assumed that education is part of the common good. However, its conditions of possibility are precisely those that are being threatened. We are living in an era in which the principle of education as a public good is increasingly being questioned considering: (i) current trends in privatization and commodification, (ii) diversification of actors involved in schooling provision, and (iii) the incorporation of new patterns in the public management of education. On the one hand, the growth of school choice policies, the privatization of schools and the commercialization of education are eroding the democratic governance of public education, giving rise to new models of educational segregation and inequality. On the other hand, the successful increase in the number of schools supported, totally or partially, with private funds, which has brought about the diversification of actor involved in providing access to education, are challenging the idea that there is only one valid school education model, contributing to the redefinition of the meaning of what is public education. And, finally increasing practices of new public management in education are causing changes in the ways of assuming and exercising our shared responsibilities in educational matters, moving from democratic models to more technocratic ones, which are now strongly focused on meeting the needs of "customers" (students and families) rather than serving the common good. This is a situation that challenges the traditional role

of schools as democratic institutions and of public administrations as preeminent actors in the definition of education as a common good.

The purpose of this special issue is to create a space for theoretical discussion in which to better understand how teaching practices make up a substantial part of and contribution to the construction of common goods. In addition, it explores the extent to which these practices and the public dimension of education are linked to contemporary difficulties in creating common spaces in other areas of social life. It is essential that education be considered a public common good, that schools be held as the institutions best equipped to extend and guarantee rights and opportunities for everyone, and that teachers at such institutions be acknowledged as the ones responsible in the end for keeping alive the democratic promises of education for all learners. Indeed, at schools, democracy takes shape in a unique intergenerational movement that is both emancipating and liberating: the passing down of shared knowledge. In the current context of instability in democratic systems, schools and their teachers are undergoing new, heretofore unknown forms of pressure that struggle to set the meaning, direction and content of teachers' identities and roles. In recent years, the public sphere as a space for opportunity and quest for common goods has been undermined and eroded by the rise of modes of governance in which private interests jostle for representation and competence. Can teachers withstand this agenda? How should they go about it? Is there anything left of the hallmark of schools being the spreaders of our democracy? It is still worth striving for? Why? The ten contributions included in this special issue try to answer these questions.

Why the form of teaching matters: Defending the integrity of education and of the work of teachers beyond agendas and good intentions[1]

Por qué la forma de la enseñanza importa: una defensa de la integridad de la educación y del trabajo de los profesores más allá de programas y buenas intenciones

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Abstract

If we understand the good of education exclusively in terms of intentions and agendas, there remains a risk that education *itself* – which is first of all about the work done day in day out by teachers in schools, colleges, and universities – is entirely understood and approached in instrumental terms, that is, as the way in which particular intentions and ambitions are to be achieved. The problem here is not just that even with a broad understanding of what education is supposed to be for, the discussion can quickly move back to technical questions about effectiveness and efficiency. The problem is also that in such an approach it remains difficult to articulate the 'integrity' of education itself which, in turn, makes it difficult for education to resist when it is being asked to do things that would go against its integrity. In this paper I explore the question whether the

integrity of education may perhaps have to do with the specific form of education rather than with the aims and purposes that frame educational activities. The paper consists of a detailed reconstruction of the work of the German educational Klaus Prange who has put forward the idea that the distinctiveness of education lies in its mode of operation, where he suggests that the most central form is that of pointing. I argue, with Prange, that a focus on the form of education allows for a different way to resist attempts to undermine the public and democratic orientation of education.

Resumen

Si entendemos el bien de la educación exclusivamente en términos de intenciones y agendas, existe el riesgo de que la educación *en sí misma* (la cual trata en primer lugar del trabajo que realizan día a día los profesores en las escuelas, colegios y universidades), se entienda y sea abordada en términos instrumentales, es decir, como la vía por la que se deben lograr intenciones y ambiciones particulares. El problema aquí no es solo que, incluso con una comprensión amplia de para qué se supone que es la educación, la discusión pueda volver rápidamente a cuestiones técnicas sobre eficacia y eficiencia. El problema también reside en que en ese enfoque sigue siendo difícil articular la "integridad" de la educación en sí misma, lo que, a su vez, dificulta que la educación se resista cuando se le pide que haga cosas que irían en contra de su propia integridad. En este artículo exploro la cuestión de si la integridad de la educación tal vez tenga que ver con la forma específica de enseñar más que con los objetivos y propósitos que enmarcan las actividades educativas. El artículo consiste en una reconstrucción detallada del trabajo del educador alemán Klaus Prange, quien ha planteado la idea de que el carácter distintivo de la educación radica en su modo de funcionamiento, donde sugiere que la forma más central es la de señalar. Sostengo, con Prange, que centrarnos en la forma de la educación hace posible un modo diferente de resistir los intentos de socavar la orientación pública y democrática de la educación.

Introduction: The problem with agendas

The question as to what education is supposed to be *for,* continues to capture the attention of many (see Biesta 2015a; 2020a). If there has ever been a time when schools were just left alone, our time is definitely *not* such a time. Politicians, policy makers, researchers, educational publishers and companies, NGOs, supra-national organisations, the media, and the public all seem to have strong opinions about what education should aim for and what it should achieve. On the one hand there is an ongoing *narrowing* of the agenda for education, tying it to economic productivity, nationalist values, or high performance in league tables. On the other hand there is also an ongoing attempt at *broadening* education's agenda, for example in terms of personal well-being, social and environmental justice, democracy, and peace. While we could hope for the emergence of a hegemony in which broader, more meaningful, more public, and more democratic agendas prevail, and while it remains important to work on the emergence of such a hegemony, there remains a problem.

If we understand the good of education exclusively in terms of the agendas it is supposed to deliver, there remains a risk that education *itself* – which is first of all about the work done day in day out by teachers in schools, colleges, and universities – is entirely understood and approached in instrumental terms, that is, as the way in which particular ambitions are to be achieved (see also Biesta in press[a]). The problem here is not just that even with a broad understanding of what education is supposed to be for, the discussion can quickly move back to technical questions about effectiveness and efficiency, particularly in the form of the ubiquitous but deeply problematic 'what works'-question (see Smeyers & Depaepe 2006; Biesta 2007). The problem is also that in such an approach it remains difficult to articulate the integrity of education *itself* which, in turn, makes it difficult for educators to offer resistance when they are being asked to do things that would go against the integrity of their practice.[2]

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[2] The use of the word 'integrity' is not meant to suggest that there is some eternal, God-given truth about what education is and what it is not. It is rather meant to raise the question at which point we might feel that what is being asked from education goes against the very 'point' of education. Such a question is not dissimilar from questions medical doctors encounter when they are being asked, for example, to perform a cosmetic procedure that is technically possible but seems pointless from a medical point of view. I think it is important to ask the question, but am of course aware that the answer to it will be a matter of ongoing debate.

Put differently: if education's 'duty to resist' (Meirieu 2007) only has to do with the question which agenda(s) should prevail, teachers may be one voice in this discussion, but not necessarily a voice that carries any special weight. More worryingly, if the good of education is just understood as a matter of agendas, the work of teachers is all too easily conceived in merely technical terms, that is, as a matter of delivering particular agendas or outcomes. This severely undermines their opportunities for enacting a broad rather than merely technicist conception of their professionality (see Biesta in press[b]), which, as a concern, is definitely not of a recent date (see, for example, Ball 1995; Hodkinson 1998).

The question how the integrity of education itself can be safeguarded is not new. In the history of modern education, J.-F. Herbart is one of the first who explicitly thematised this issue by trying to articulate the 'proper concepts' of education (in German: 'einheimische Begriffe'), that is, those concepts that uniquely belong to education of education and are distinctive of it. For Herbart these included the idea of 'educability' ('Bildsamkeit'), that is, the assumption that human beings can be educated, and the idea of teaching ('Unterricht') (see Herbart 1989, p. 8). Herbart's attempt is perhaps more interesting than what proponents of German 'geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik' did in the early decades of the 20th century, because their emphasis on 'emancipation' as the proper *interest* of education in a sense turned the discussion back to the question of the appropriate agenda for education (see Biesta 2011).

In short, then, if the discussion about the good of education only focuses on the nature of the 'good' – the question of what education is *for* – but forgets to ask about the 'education-part,' so to speak, there is a real chance that even with the best intentions education remains the plaything of what 'others' want from it. This at least suggests that in addition to the question of the *good* of good education there is also a need to explore the *education-part* of good education, and it is this question which I will focus on in this paper. I will do this by means of a discussion of an interesting line of thought developed by the German educational scholar Klaus Prange, who has argued that what is proper and distinctive about education and therefore has something to do with education's integrity, does not lie in the agendas that give direction to education, but rather is to be found in the particular *forms* of the practice

of education itself and, more specifically, in what Prange refers to as the distinctive *operations* of teaching.

In his 'operational theory of education' Prange suggests that rather than trying to identify the proper concepts of education, we should start from identifying the proper *operations* of education ('die einheimische Operationen'). More simply than Herbart, Prange suggests that at bottom there is only *one* properly educational operation, namely that of 'Zeigen,' which has to do both with pointing and with showing (see Prange 2011; 2012a; 2012b; Prange & Strobel-Eisele 2006).[3] According to Prange, pointing is not just *fundamental* for education, but also *essential*, which is why he argues that without pointing there is no education. ("Wenn es das Zeigen nicht gibt, dann auch keine Erziehung." – see Prange 2012a, p. 25). So what, then, does Prange's operational theory of education entail, and how can it help us to think about the good of education beyond the articulation of agendas *for* education which, as I have mentioned, always run the risk of turning education into an instrument and teachers into technicians?

In what follows I will reconstruct Prange's theory in three steps. I start with an exploration of Prange's ideas about pointing as the basic operation of education. I then discuss his ideas about the relationship between teaching and learning. In the third step, I outline his views about the intrinsic morality of education. In the final section I return to the overall theme of this paper and discuss in what ways Prange's ideas can be helpful in pushing back against the instrumentalisation of education and the reduction of teachers to technicians.

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[3] The German word 'Zeigen' can be translated as 'pointing' and as 'showing'. I will translate it as 'pointing' because I believe that it is the most 'descriptive' translation of 'Zeigen,' whereas 'showing,' in a sense, refers to the particular intention of pointing. Put differently: the point of 'pointing' is that it seeks to show something to someone, so in this regard showing is entailed in pointing. The other matter of translation that is important here concerns the word 'education' which I will use, when referring to Prange, as translation of the word 'Erziehung.' Prange is entirely clear that his arguments are about 'Erziehung,' not about 'Bildung' (see Prange 2012b, p. 111). For an exploration of the distinction between 'Erziehung' and 'Bildung' I refer the reader to Biesta 2020b).

An operational theory of education

In one sense, Prange's ambition is rather simple, as he just seeks to describe what it is that we *do* when we educate or teach[4] (see Prange 2012a, p. 7). By starting with the question of the *form* of education or, with the term he tends to prefer, with the characteristic *operation(s)* of education, he seeks to develop a theory of education 'from the bottom up' (see ibid.), that is, from the point of view of the *practice* of education – or to be more precise: from the ways in which education is *enacted* – and not from the (normative) agendas ambitions that surround education.

An important reason for taking this route lies in Prange's concern for the integrity of education: both the integrity of education's practice and the integrity of its theory. Prange observes that in the public discourse about education other voices, such as those from psychology, sociology, economics, or organisational theory, have become much more prominent than the voice of education, which leaves education in the unenviable position of constantly having to translate insights from 'elsewhere' (see ibid., p. 14). Prange emphasises that the issue here is not about the status of education as an academic discipline amongst other disciplines,[5] and that it is also not a call for the splendid isolation of education (see Prange 2012a, p. 19), but that it is first and foremost about the terms of the relationship. Prange's main concern is to ensure that education doesn't end up as something entirely practical, devoid of any intellectual dimensions, and also not as something entirely instrumental – as just the 'executive arm' of agendas set elsewhere. And for this, so Prange argues, it is key that we are able to articulate what education in *itself* is, or, in a slightly more linguistic way, we need to be able to articulate what should count as education (in German: "eine Bestimmung dessen, was under 'Erziehung zu verstehen ist'" – ibid., p. 19).

Prange develops his argument by means of what the most basic account of education, namely that education is about someone teaching something to someone. This already reveals that education consists of

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[4] In many case one could read what Prange writes about education as an account of teaching. Because I want to stay rather close to the German original – see also the previous footnote – I will in most case use the word 'education' rather than the word 'teaching.'

[5] Whereas in the German context, and many other countries in continental Europe, education did establish itself as an academic disciplines, the main configuration of education in the English-speaking world seems to be that of an applied and in a sense 'practical' field of study; see Biesta (2011) for a reconstruction.

three 'components,' namely the one teaching (the teacher or educator), the one being taught (the student), and that what the teaching is about, which Prange refers to as the 'theme' (see ibid., p. 37). The theme is that which is at stake in what the teacher seeks to teach to the student; it is that which is at stake in what the teacher hopes that the student will in some way acquire (or in less acquisitive terms: that which the teacher's hopes towards the student are about). We can refer to this as 'content' but 'theme' allows for a wider and in a sense looser description of what is at stake. Prange gives several examples of possible themes, such as being able to walk, to speak, to read, to write and to do arithmetic (see ibid., p. 42), thus suggesting that themes are relatively complex.[6] He also uses the expression of 'cultural meaning' to explain what the status of themes in education is. Prange refers to the theme as that which the student is supposed to learn, and more generally connects education and teaching to learning. (I will return to this aspect of Prange's argument below.)

While all education thus entails three components, it is not enough to just have a teacher who has the intention to make a particular theme available or accessible to a student. It only becomes education, so to speak, when the question of *how* to do this comes into play (see ibid., p. 47), and this, so Prange argues, is the question of the *form* of education or, more precisely, the question of the particular *operation or operations* that establish a connection between the components so that the student can gain access to the 'theme' the teacher wishes to present to the student.[7]

So what, then, is the operation that establishes the connection between teacher, theme, and student and, in doing so, establishes the identity of the three 'components' as the one teaching, the one being taught, and the theme of the teaching? While Prange acknowledges that what is going on here can be described in many different ways and that, in a sense, there is quite a wide variety of educational operations, his central idea is that the basic gesture that can be found in all the different ways in

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[6] Prange's examples are perhaps a bit odd, as one could argue that walking, for example, is not something for which one needs education, whereas reading, writing and arithmetic are more likely to be achievements that require education. Speech seems to be halfway, as it is not something that needs education, although speech can be improved by means of education.

[7] I am aware that this formulation is a little vague, but this is because I do not want to confine what is going on in education to questions of the transmission of knowledge on the side of the teacher – which is why I think that 'theme' is a more interesting word – and also do not want to reduce the work of the student or that which the student may 'gain' from the teaching to matters of learning. I will return to this below.

which education can be enacted is that of pointing (see ibid., p. 65). What is distinctive about pointing is its 'double character' (ibid., p. 68), as the one pointing is not just pointing *at something* but is, in the act of pointing, referring *to someone*. The 'Look there!' of pointing always means '*You* look there!,' so we might say. One thing to highlight here is that the work of pointing always needs the hand and that, in this regards, education is literally a form of manual labour (in German: 'Handwerk' – see Prange 2012b). The other thing to highlight here is that pointing both *focuses* the attention and *asks for* attention or, in a slightly stronger formulation, *demands* attention (in German: "macht aufmerksam und fordert Aufmerksamkeit" – see Prange 2012a, p. 70).[8] In this sense we could say that pointing is first and foremost an *evocative* gesture, and I wish to suggest that this gives pointing its educational significance.[9]

What makes the pointing educational is the fact that the educator hopes or expects that the student will do something with what the educator tries to focus the student's attention on. 'Hope' and 'expectation' are the corrects words here. This is first of all because the educator doesn't produce the student's attention, but rather acts on the assumption that the possibility to pay attention already exists, which means that pointing is a matter of (re)directing the student's attention. But 'hope' and 'expectation' are also the correct words because at a very fundamental level the educator has no control over what the student will do once his or her attention is 'caught.' There is, in other words, no causal connection between the pointing and what may happen on the side of the student – which shows why 'effectiveness' is such an unhelpful notion in this context – although it doesn't mean, of course, that the work of the educator is pointless.

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[8] Prange's ideas here coincide with the way in which Benner has recently defined teaching as the art of *redirecting someone else's gaze* (Benner formulates it in German as 'die Kunst der Umlenkung des Blicks'; see Benner 2020, p. 21). For this, Benner refers the allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic* (for a detailed discussion see Benner 2020, pp. 15-23) where teaching is depicted as the 'turning of the soul's eye' (Plato, 1941, p. 232). Benner, in his discussion of Plato, emphasizes that this redirecting is not caused by teaching and also cannot be enforced by teaching (see ibid., p. 17), which means that, at most, it can be *evoked* by teaching. Whereas Benner approaches teaching in terms of the (re)direction of the student's *gaze* and thus approaches teaching first and foremost in terms of *looking*, a slightly broader term that is useful here is that of *attention*, as one could argue that the basic gesture of teaching is that of trying to (re)direct the attention of the student to something (see also Rytzer 2017).

[9] Prange and Strobel-Eisele (2006, chapter 2) suggest in their book on the forms of educational action that pointing is the basic educational form (in German: 'Grundform'), and then distinguish between four forms of pointing: ostentatious ('ostentativ') pointing (which they connect to practicing); representative pointing (which they connect to presenting); evocative pointing (which they connect to summoning); and reactive pointing (which they connect to feedback).

With regard to all this, Prange makes two rather strong claims. One is that the work of the educator is aimed at the learning of the student. He highlights, however, that education doesn't produce the student's learning; this learning is simply there and can also occur without education. Yet what education aims for, according to Prange, is to influence and direct the student's learning, to put it in broad terms. The second claim Prange makes is that it is only because of its orientation on learning that pointing acquires its educational significance[10] (see Prange 2012a, p. 67; see also Prange 2011). Before I add my comments, let me first reconstruct Prange's line of thought.

Education, teaching, and the invisibility of learning

As said, Prange argues for a very close connection between education and learning or, in more concrete terms, between teaching and learning. To make a case for a close connection is not to say that they are one and the same thing. On the contrary, Prange continuously emphasises the importance of the distinction between the two: that education and learning are two entirely separate processes and also separate operations, and that there is no automatic connection between the two. After all, people can learn and do learn without education. This so-called 'educational difference,' that is, the difference between (the operation of) teaching and (the operation of) learning is therefore a central idea in Prange's work. Yet key to education is to establish a connection between the work of the educator and the work of the student or, in the more general terms Prange uses, between education and learning. Prange even suggests at some point to use "education" (that is the word 'education' put in quotation marks) to refer to education and learning together, and use the word 'education' without quotation marks to refer to the work of the educator. Perhaps in English it makes sense to make a distinction between educat*ing* – as intentional action – and education – as the whole 'process,' but how important this is, remains to be seen.

While Prange thus gives learning a central position in his operational theory of education, he does so in a rather interesting and, so we

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[10] In German: "Allein durch den Bezug auf das Lernen gewinnt das Zeigen eine erzieherische Bedeutung." (Prange 2012a, p. 67)

might say, explicitly educational way. This has something to do with a fascinating claim he puts forward, namely that learning is basically *invisible* (see, e.g., Prange 2012a, p. 88); an idea he sometimes also refers to as the *intransparency* of learning (see, e.g. Prange 2012b, chapter 11).[11] Prange's point here is that learning doesn't show itself as some kind of isolated and self-sufficient thing or object we can simply study, like a tree, for example, but rather is entangled in all kind of situations and constellations through which we may have some kind of experience that learning *has* occurred (see Prange 2012a, p. 83). Learning thus constantly 'shows and hides' itself (see ibid.), which is the reason why Prange claims that 'learning is the unknown element in the educational equation' (ibid., p. 82).

What, then, does the word 'learning' refer to? We assume, Prange writes, that learning has taken place when a child is able to do something that he or she wasn't able to do before (see ibid., p. 104). Moreover, in education we assume that this *may* happen, and we find confirmation of this assumption when what we assumed *might* happen indeed did happen. But the 'event' of learning itself cannot be pinned down; the only thing we can observe is that something has changed – that a student is able to do something that he or she wasn't able to doat an earlier point in time. This also means for Prange that learning research is actually never researching learning *itself* but at most the relationship between 'trigger' and 'reaction' (in German: 'Reizinput und Reaktionsoutput' – see Prange 2012b, p. 173).

Rather, therefore, than trying to say something about learning in general or without context, Prange suggests that it makes more sense to say something about learning in its relation to education. And from this angle, Prange makes three claims about learning or, to be more precise, he formulates 'three fundamental insights about the meaning of learning for (educational) pointing' (Prange, 2012a, p. 87). The claims are: [1] that learning exists; [2] that learning is individual; and [3] that learning is invisible.

The claim that learning exists (my formulation; Prange writes 'Es gibt das Lernen.') means, for Prange. that learning is a reality in itself, independent from education. In a narrower sense Prange argues that

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[11] For Prange this is also a reason for being highly critical of the idea that it is possible to conduct research on learning itself, and even more so of the idea that education should be based on the findings of such research (see Prange 2012b, pp. 172-173).

educators work on the assumption that learning exists – it is their operational premise ('Betriebsprämisse'). More widely Prange argues that learning is an 'anthropological constant,' a fact of human nature (see ibid., p. 88). These claims still raise the question how we should understand learning, to which I will return. Yet one interesting implication Prange draws from this claim is that it doesn't make sense to suggest that we can learn how to learn, and that we should learn how to learn before learning can start (see ibid., p. 88). Of course, we may learn how to study, or how to practice, or how to experiment, but learning itself, Prange argues, is not something that can be learned.

The claim that learning is individual, basically means that no one else can do my learning for me, just as no one else can eat for me or die for me (see Prange 2012a, p. 89). While Prange acknowledges that we can learn with others and from others, we still have to do our own learning so that, in this regard, we should be as careful with the phrase 'social learning' as we should be with the phrase 'learning to learn' (see ibid.).

The claim that learning is essentially invisible is related to the fact that learning is individual. Prange points out that with others we can only observe the potential 'effects' of learning but not the learning itself (see ibid., p. 91). But also both with regard to our own learning and the learning of others we can only retrospectively, that is, after the 'event,' claim that learning has taken place. As Prange puts it: "Parents and teachers can see progress in what children are able to do, but cannot observe the learning itself." (ibid., p. 91; my translation). While education *is* visible because it is a social act, learning is not, because it is a form of 'reception' by the individual, as Prange calls it, which is only visible in an indirect way (see ibid., p. 92).

From an educational point of view, the question then is not whether we can say more about learning, albeit that Prange does venture into this terrain as well (see particularly Prange 2012a, pp. 93-106), but what we can say about the way in which the *co-ordination* between (the operation of) education and (the operation of) learning can be achieved or established (ibid., p. 93). In the German literature this issue is known as the question of 'articulation,' a term introduced by Herbart. Prange discusses it as the question of the co-ordination of pointing and learning, and particularly the co-ordination of pointing and learning *over time* (see ibid., chapter 5).

We have already seen, and this is also articulated in Prange's idea of the 'educational difference,' that teaching doesn't *cause* learning. Learning exists, as an anthropological fact or, if we don't want to overclaim, education proceeds on the assumption that students learn and can learn; that the learning is going on with or without education. Rather than to ask, therefore, what learning in itself 'is' in order then to use this knowledge in education – which for Prange is an impossible way of proceeding – Prange approaches the question by asking how learning becomes manifest as a result of education and, more specifically, as a result of or response to pointing. Seen in this way, Prange writes, "educating as pointing is a form through which learning is provoked" (see Prange 2012b, p. 169; my translation). The evocation entailed in the act of pointing – the 'You, look there!' – calls upon the student not just to look, not just to (re)direct his or her attention, but to do something with what is 'found' there.

In relation to this Prange makes the interesting suggestion that learning is brought to appearance ('Das Lernen wird zur Erscheinung gebracht' – ibid., p. 171) *in function of* the way education is organised. In practicing, learning 'reveals' itself as imitation; in problem-solving it 'reveals' itself as innovation and invention; in projects it 'reveals' itself as practical learning, and so on (see ibid.). Prange therefore compares learning to a chameleon in that it takes up the 'colour' that suits the particular educational 'staging' (see ibid.). Prange keeps emphasising, however, that the learning 'itself' remains hidden. It only becomes 'partially transparent' in light of the educational provocations (see ibid.).

The final point Prange makes in this discussion is that the intransparency of learning should not be understood as a kind of 'darkness' that still needs to be brought to light (see Prange 2012b, p. 176), but has to do with the fact that the one who learns – I would prefer the word 'student' – in their response to what is being pointed out to them, respond in a reflexive way, that is, with reference to themselves, and not in a purely reactive or mechanistic way. In doing so, so Prange argues, they decide whether and how they want to learn (see ibid.). This has everything to do with the fact that human beings not only have an 'outside' of observable behaviour and action, but also an 'inside' of thoughts and feelings that is not observable from the outside, although in everyday interaction we try to 'read' the outside for clues of what's going on inside. In my own terms I would say that Prange's point here is that the student is never mere

object of educational interventions, but a subject to which things are being pointed out; a subject whose attention is being called for – but it is first and foremost *the subject's* attention, and not some kind of amorph or abstract process or mechanism.

The morality of pointing

The final aspect of Prange's work that I wish to discuss, concerns what he refers to as the moral dimension of education. Prange emphasises that for education there is not just the question of the standards that education should comply with; education also has a contribution to make to the morality of those being educated. In this regard, then, morality appears twice: as standard *for* and aim *of* education (see Prange 2012a, p. 137). Although education should live up to general ethical standards, just as any other field of human practice, the question is whether there are any *particular*, education-specific standards that educators need to take into consideration, similar to the particular ethics of medicine, for example.

Prange approaches this in terms of the question what makes education good, that is, when can we call educational action good. One option he discusses is to say that educational actions are good when they achieve what they intend to achieve (see ibid., pp. 144-145). However, while this makes sense in the technical-mechanical domain – plumbing is good when it fixes the heating system; a car repair is good when it fixes a car – this line of argument does not apply to education. We know, after all, that even when educators have done everything right, there is no guarantee about the impact of their actions on the child or student, precisely because the relationship between educational action and what 'happens' on the side of the student is not mechanical but reflexive and self-referential. In other words: the student is subject, not object. And Prange also reminds us that there are cases where parents and teachers obviously didn't do the right things, and nonetheless their children and students turn out well.

Rather than focusing on the question of what education achieves – we might also say: what education produces – Prange suggests, not surprisingly, to turn to the question of the *form* of education, by

asking when (educational) pointing itself is good.[12] Or, to put it slightly differently, by asking what good (educational) pointing is. Prange thus seeks to articulate the morality of pointing itself (in German: 'die Moral des Zeigens') and comes up with three key requirements. One is that (educational) pointing needs to be understandable ('verständlich'); the second is that it needs to be appropriate ('zumutbar'); and the third is that it needs to be 'connectable ('anschlussfähig').

With regard to the first requirement, Prange argues that whatever we point at, we much show it in such a way that it is correct, transparent, and comprehensible (see ibid., p. 146). This entails the demand of rationality (see ibid.) or, phrased slightly differently, the demand of *truth* (ibid., p. 148). Prange argues that this requirement holds both for what we point at, that is, for *what* we show, and for *how* we show it, where it is also important that we make the showing itself transparent and accessible.

With regard to the second requirement, that of 'appropriateness,' Prange argues that we must ensure that what we point at is accessible for the students we show it to, that it doesn't go 'over their heads.' This doesn't mean that it shouldn't be challenging, but the challenge should be feasible. Prange suggests that this entails the demand of *respect*, that is, that we recognise our students as persons (his term) or subjects (my term), and do not approach them as objects, as that would turn education into training or oppression (see ibid., p. 147).

Thirdly, 'connectability' is the requirement that students can do something with what we show them, and particularly that they can continue with what we present them in their own lives and on their own terms (see ibid.). It means, in other words, that in what we show we have the interests of our students in mind and need to find a connection to those interests, and not let our pointing be led by our own interests. This, so Prange argues, entails the demand of *freedom*.

It is important to highlight that on what Prange would see as a superficial reading, one could see the three requirements in purely technical terms, and think of them as requirements for effective instruction, irrespective of what the instruction seeks to bring about. To say that teaching should be comprehensible and feasible and, in a slightly narrow interpretation, should be useful for students, does indeed sound as if it is just a matter of

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[12] I am adding 'educational' here in order to highlight that Prange's discussion is not about the good of pointing in general, but about the good of pointing as an educational act.

making sure that the teaching 'fits' with the students, without specifying whether this is for indoctrination or emancipation. Prange emphasises, however, that the requirements are *not* morally neutral, which is precisely his suggestion that the requirements entail the demand of respect, truth and freedom. As he explains: any attempt at indoctrination would go against the demand for truth; any attempt at manipulation would go against the demand for freedom; and any attempt at social conditioning would go against the demand for respect (see ibid., p. 150).

In this sense, then, Prange comes to the conclusion that the form of education – of educational pointing – has its *own* intrinsic or integral morality, rather than that this morality needs to be added to it from the outside. This, then, is another way in which the form of education matters for the integrity of education itself.

Discussion and conclusions

I started this paper with the observation that contemporary education is subject to many intentions and agendas. Some of these intentions are narrow and simplistic and reduce education to a commodity that is there to serve private interests, be they the interests of individuals, or of groups, or of society at large but only, then, in terms of producing commodities that are useful for the functioning of society (such as a well-educated labour force or a well-behaved or even obedient citizenry). There have been ongoing concerns about these developments; concerns that often refer to neo-liberal modes of governance and the centrality of economic agendas more generally. In all this, one key question is whether there is still an opportunity for education to exist as a common or public good, not focused on giving customers what they want from it, but contributing to a viable and vibrant public sphere which, in itself, is key for the democratic quality of society at large.

While these concerns are real and important, the intuition from which I have written this paper is that if we only focus on getting the agenda for education right and, more importantly, if we think that the push back against the ongoing privatisation of education is only a matter of establishing a progressive and democratic hegemony around the school, we continue to treat education itself – which first of all means the work of teachers – as an instrument for the delivery of such an agenda. While

agendas matter, and while the political struggle around the agendas for education remains important, my concern in this paper has been that the voice of education itself, so to speak, is easily lost or forgotten. As I have put it in the introduction, education ends up as a plaything or, to be more precise, it ends up as an object to be used, that is, as a commodity. In one and the same move it also turns educators into commodities, in things to be used, and the most visible manifestation of this is the ongoing attempt at seeing and treating teachers as technicians, that is, as deliverers of agendas from 'elsewhere.'

I have turned to Klaus Prange's work because I think that he is one of the few scholars who has tried to 'think' education from its *form*, and that he has done so precisely in order not to end up in the instrumentalisation and commodification of education by external agendas. So what does Prange's approach bring into view and how might this help in getting a sense of the integrity of education itself? If we follow Prange in his suggestion that pointing as the (re)directing of someone else's attention to something is the most basic and most proper educational gesture, then three questions can be asked. The first question is how we should understand this 'something.' *What*, in other words, is it that teaching should focus the student's attention on? The second question is *why* we should do this, that is, what the point of educational pointing actually is. And the third is *what students should do* once their attention has been redirected. What, in other words, do we expect from our students, or, in slightly more open terms, what do we hope that our students might do once we have managed to (re)direct their attention onto something? Let me try to answer these question with reference to Prange's ideas.

What is perhaps the most important and most interesting quality of the gesture of pointing, is that it is a double gesture, because in pointing we are always pointing at something – with the 'Look there!' we are directing someone's attention to *something* – yet at the very same time we are referring to *someone* – with the '*You*, look there!' we are, after all, trying to direct *someone's* attention. With the double gesture of pointing we are therefore calling someone to attend to the world. It is not just that we make *the world* into an object for someone's attention; at the very same time and in one and the same gesture we are inviting *someone* to attend to the world. While we could say, therefore, that in pointing we focus the student's attention on the world, seen as everything 'outside' of the student, the act of pointing actually also points at the student and in

this way also brings the self of the student to the student's attention. This is not just beginning to reveal the way in which the gesture of pointing is truly *world-centred* (see also Biesta 2021). It also begins to reveal that world-centred education does not turn students *away* from themselves but rather calls for *them* to attend to the world. '*You*, look there!'

Before I try to answer the question why we might do this, that is, how the act of pointing can be justified, I would like to say a few things about the third question: what it is that we expect from our students once we have managed to 'catch' their attention? From my own perspective I find it rather unhelpful that Prange focuses the answer to this question so strongly on learning. As I have argued in several places, learning is only one existential possibility amongst many others (see, for example, Biesta 2015b), so to claim, as Prange does, that the educational significance of pointing lies in learning, i.e., that learning gives pointing its educational significance, sounds too narrow to me, as it seeks to exclude many other ways in which human beings can exist in and with the world. In this regard I find Paul Komisar's suggestion to think of the student as an 'auditor' *"who is successfully becoming aware of the point of the act* [of teaching]" (Komisar 1968, p. 191; emphasis in original), far more interesting and relevant, as it allows for a much wider range of possible 'points' of the act of teaching than just learning, and thus opens up for a much wider range of responses on the side of the student than just learning (see, for more detail on this Biesta 2015b).

What I do find fascinating about Prange's discussion of learning, is first of all his idea of the intransparency and invisibility of learning, which is an effective antidote to all the claims about learning made by the learning sciences, including the claim that the science of learning should provide the basis for education. What is also very helpful is what we might term the profoundly *educational* account Prange gives of learning, that is, his suggestion that the ways in which learning emerges and shows itself is a function of particular educational provocations – the idea of learning as a chameleon. In all this, Prange maintains, correctly in my view, that learning itself actually never comes to the surface but that at most we can see change. This does mean, and there Prange's notion of learning remains rather formal and, in a sense, empty, that for Prange 'learning' basically refers to some kind of change and, in line with the most common 'formal' definition of learning, as change that is not the result of maturation. So perhaps it would have been more helpful if

Prange had replaced the word 'learning' with the word 'change,' although even then we might say that in education we are not just after change; sometimes the work we do as educators is to try to ensure that students *don't* change but stay on the 'narrow path,' so to speak.

This then brings me to the question of the *why* of pointing, that is, the question what the point of educational pointing actually is. What is very clear, is that *pointing is not about control*. One could say that this is the beauty of the gesture of pointing. It says 'Look there!,' and even says '*You*, look there!,' but it doesn't force the student to look there and doesn't determine what the student should do once he or she has focused his or her attention on what is 'there.' The gesture of pointing is, in this regard, not just an open gesture but also an open*ing* gesture, as it 'opens' the world to the student and, as I have indicated above, in one and the same 'move' also 'opens' the student to the world. What is at stake in this gesture, therefore – as Prange indicates in his discussion of the morality of pointing – is the freedom of the student. This is not, so I wish to add, the freedom for the student to do what he or she wants to do, where the world is just an instrument or playground for the student's desires. It rather is the freedom to exist as subject 'in' and 'with' the world, not just pursing one's own desires but also, and first and foremost, meeting the world and encountering what the world may be asking from us.

One thing to conclude from all this, is that in a rather profound sense the form of education-as-pointing already 'contains' a concern for the freedom of the student, and that this reveals something about the integrity of education because when this freedom is denied – when the difference between the operation of teaching and the operation of learning is forgotten or eradicated – education turns into something else, something profoundly uneducational. In this regard we might even say that the very form of education already resists any attempt to turn education into a 'perfect' instrument, which may even suggest – but I offer this for discussion – that education, if it stays true to its unique and proper form, may have an in-built resistance to attempts at its instrumentalisation and commodification. This, in turn, suggests that rather than only fighting for the right or proper agenda for education – which, in itself, is not unimportant – it is also absolutely crucial that we stand for the form of education itself, and not think of education's form as something contingent and practical, something that only has to

do with the 'how' of education – with how we teach – but that, in itself, would carry no significance.

The conclusion I wish to draw, therefore, is that the form of teaching matters, not in the technical sense in which teachers should be competent at teaching, but in the highly political sense in which the integrity of education is precisely to be found in the form of its enactment. While this insight may, in itself, not prevent neo-liberal incursions into the domain of education, I wish to suggest that a focus on form opens up a different terrain for resisting attempts at the instrumentalisation of education, and thus also opens up a different terrain for resisting the reduction of teaching to a technical matter and for resisting the reduction of teachers to mere technicians.

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Please, show me your world! A sophistical practice of teaching[1]

Por favor, ¡muéstrame tu mundo! Una práctica sofística de la enseñanza

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Abstract

This paper explores how education and teaching is or can be a sophistical practice. It takes inspiration from Cassin's readings of the sophists, Rorty's critique of Platonian philosophy, as well as Rancière's understanding of teaching as linking different worlds. The paper develops in detail what makes teaching a process of democratisation based on a sophistical discursive practice. The paper also develops a precise critique of the Platonian/Aristotelian line of thought within education through the work of Cassin and Jaeger. It shows how Platonian/Aristotelian thought establishes a foundational pattern of domination over education by philosophy and other disciplines. Such 'scientistic educational theory' is shown to link man and state through a socio-psychic pattern aiming at the perfection of both. The article is making problematic the original and patriarchal social scene at the heart of such theory and intends to replace such image with 'the mixture'; of interaction people in the everydayness of liveable life instead as the starting point for educational thought and practice. The insight shared with Arendt, that we live in an irreducible plurality of other people that are different from us and that we, therefore, need education and teaching to

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find out 'how to move' with and among others is developed in full in this paper. The paper concludes by making a case for a liveable life for all as that which motivates education and teaching to be something else than domination and control.

Resumen

Este artículo explora cómo la educación y la enseñanza son o pueden ser una práctica sofística. Se inspira en las lecturas que Cassin hace de los sofistas, en la crítica de Rorty a la filosofía platónica, así como en cómo comprende Rancière la enseñanza como la unión de diferentes mundos. El artículo desarrolla en detalle qué es lo que hace de la enseñanza un proceso de democratización basado en una práctica discursiva sofística. El artículo también desarrolla una crítica precisa de la línea de pensamiento platónico-aristotélico dentro de la educación a través del trabajo de Cassin y Jaeger. Muestra cómo el pensamiento platónico-aristotélico establece un patrón fundamental de dominación sobre la educación por parte de la filosofía y otras disciplinas. Se muestra que esta "teoría de la educación cientificista" vincula al ser humano y al estado a través de un patrón socio-psicológico que busca el perfeccionamiento de ambos. El artículo problematiza el escenario social original y patriarcal que se encuentra en el centro de dicha teoría y tiene la intención de reemplazar tal imagen con la de "la mezcla" y la interacción de las personas en la cotidianidad de la vida vivible, como punto de partida para el pensamiento y la práctica educativos. El artículo aborda la idea, compartida con Arendt, de que vivimos en una pluralidad irreducible de otras personas que son diferentes a nosotros y que, por lo tanto, necesitamos educación y enseñanza para descubrir "cómo movernos" con y entre otros. El artículo concluye defendiendo una vida digna para todos como aquello que mueve a la educación y la enseñanza a ser algo más que dominación y control.

Introduction

In this paper, teaching is explored as a sophistical practice, through a close reading of particularly Barbara Cassin's (2014, 2016), Werner Jaeger's (1939, 1943), Richard Rorty's (1980, 1982, 1990), and Jacques Rancière's (1991, 2007) work, among others.

The paper is mainly an exploration guided by three questions; firstly, how come that Sophist educational thought, so crucial for the very birth of western democratic culture as we know it, is dominated by philosophy and other disciplines? Secondly, what consequences, or effects, does such domination have for the possibility of a Sophist educational tradition of thought and practice today? Thirdly, how can teaching as a sophistical practice be reclaimed as a practice (discipline) of democratisation and democratic culture from which it emanates? Those questions serve as direction to the exploration rather than as a demand for a definitive answer. They are as such part of a larger project of reclaiming educational thought and practice, to which I am contributing (Todd, 2009; Säfström and Biesta, 2011; Biesta 2014; Masschelein and Simons 2013; Säfström and Saeverot, 2017; Hodgson *et al.*, 2018; Yosef-Hassidim and Baldachino, 2021).

The first section explores particularly the making of the Sophists as the enemy per preference for philosophy, and the constitution of a Theory of education through a Platonian/Aristotelian domination of educational practice. Such Theory of education is shown to establish the relation between man and state, give meaning to the idea of schooling, and defining teaching as reproduction of an original social scene. The following second section, break away from a Platonian/Aristotelian education Theory and make problematic its foundations in science-based education[2]. In a third section education is discussed as a certain performativity of pedagogy, as pedagogy and education are understood as sophistical practice. In a fourth section, teaching is explored as a sophistical practice of democratisation and some aspects that follow

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[2] With 'science-based education' I will primarily mean educational thought founded on 'science as first philosophy', and formal logic as founded by Aristotle, and today as expressed through positivistic or quasi-positivistic desires. The so called 'evidence-based' movement in the fields of educational research is an example (see Biesta, 2006). I will also mean, as the article develops in detail, any attempts to ground educational thought on 'ontology', in order to argue for (absolute) truth in educational endeavours as science based.

for teaching are developed in detail. Particularly the poetic moment in teaching is examined through the Greek concept of *Kairos*. Here the precise moment of democratisation in teaching is made clear, as well as the exact point at which an Platonian/Aristotelian education turn violent, as well as the nature of such violence. In a fifth concluding section, a sophistical practice of education and teaching is summarised as contributing to a liveable life in democratic culture beyond the *stasis* of Platonian/Aristotelian education (and state).

The making of the Sophists and the subjugation of educational thought and practice

The Sophists are primarily treated in intellectual history, if at all, as orators for the sake of oration without any real attachments to Truth (with capital T), and therefore as excluded from philosophical thought altogether (Cassin, 2014). Traditionally philosophy, in other words, is construed as the radically opposite of what the Sophists taught, and sophism as the very negation of everything that philosophy aspires to be.

From this follows also that since the Sophists introduce educational thought into intellectual history, and as guidence for life in the city-state, philosophy, in order to establish itself as the founders of Truth for its own sake needs to be controlling the teachings of the Sophists. Needs to be securing Truth, by denouncing the Sophists, and by so doing leaving educational thought in a precarious situation. What is created, as will be explored in the following, is a 'logic' in which educational thought always is in need to be paired with other disciplines, controlling the 'half-truths' of educational thought. The domination of philosophy over education signifies straightforward colonialisation of educational thought, motivating, among other things, the need to be taming education.

A similar point is made by Masschelein and Simons (2013) in their studies of schools/education; the Greek *Scholé*, as they explain is a form of equality implicitly public and democratic, therefore: "The taming of the school (…) implies the re-appropriation or re-privatisation of public time, public space and 'common good' made possible by the school", and they suggest that the history of school could be read as "a history of taming; a series of strategies and tactics to dispel, restrain, constrain, neutralise or control the school" (p. 51).

While Masschelein and Simons (2013) develop an argument and analysis in which they specify different ways the school and the teacher are getting tamed through politicisation, pedagogisation and naturalisation, the following will contrast focus on the theoretical ideology[3], in which the taming is made possible. The interest is in teaching, not the teacher, and education, not the school *per see*. What is explored is the very discourse practices[4] establishing this as that, discourse as a reality lived, as embodied discourse (Cherryholmes, 1988). Therefore, and in line with such an approach the taming of educational thought and action is not so much a taming of form, as it is a history of domination of educational thought and practice itself.

According to Werner Jaeger (1939), the subsequent domination over educational thought and practice is prepared for by Plato in his aversion towards the Sophists. With their acceptance of a limited truth within the finitude of living and the experiences of practical life as the bases for thinking and acting, the Sophists challenge Plato's aspirations of establishing philosophical thought as the essence of Truth and as unlimited in its claims. The Sophists challenged philosophy by showing the limits of philosophy: "The doctrine of the sophists is indeed an operator that serves to circumscribe and define the scope of philosophy" (Cassin, 2014, p. 30).

What follows from Plato's visions is not a society possibly changing as an effect of how people interact or perform culture, as it did for the Sophists. Instead, how one is to take place in culture is, in Plato's universe fixed in which *the original scene of the social*, as presented in the *Republic* by Plato, is already set and reproduced over time; "the farmer is a farmer and the potter a potter" (Cassin 2014, p. 123; Bloom 1991, p. 98, 421a, in *the Republic*). As such, *areté*, the embodied and performed culture and its values, is for Plato fixed and cannot be taught but only inherited, while the Sophist claims the radically opposite, that *areté* is first and foremost *taught* in different ways of performing culture (Jaeger, 1939). Also, as Rorty (1980) says, Plato "invented philosophical thinking" (p. 157), and in that invention distancing himself from educational

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[3] I understand theoretical ideology as developed by Brante (1980) and others as that foundation that cannot be proven but which needs to be taken for granted for a particular theoretical structure and object of knowledge to carry any meaning.

[4] Practices, like discourse, says Cherryholmes (1988), "are constituted by connected and overlapping sets of rules that organise and give them coherence" (p. 4). Moreover, rules, he says, is what we value as such.

thought and practice of the Sophists' who understood education strictly to be about 'how to move' well among others within the every-day of social life[5]. It means, that within a Platonian style philosophy there is a strand of anti-sophist and anti-education sediments inscribed as defining characteristics of a tradition of philosophy. Such anti-sophist and anti-educational sediments continue, through Aristotelian systematisations of a Platonian philosophy and universe to undermine educational thought (see Jaeger 1943, pp. 22-24, and pp. 80-81; Culler 2014).

While the Sophists' "must take account of the diversity of opinions, the mediocrity of peoples' actual behaviour, and finitude in its lived reality" (Culler, 2014, p. 117), Aristotle rather, and in line with Plato's invention of philosophical thinking, did not need to be concerned with the mediocracy of people's actual behaviour or diversity of opinion. The very aim of an Aristotelian first philosophy of science was rather to control and master the ambiguity of the everydayness of the Sophist's spatial-temporal world in order to perfect dysfunctional human behaviours, and thereby to be perfecting the state (see Jaeger, 1943, and below).

The Platonian/Aristotelian universe was to dominate the Sophists' praxis-oriented world in establishing theoretical science "to be the true, the 'highest' kind of culture and replace or *dominate* the current educational discipline" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 318; *my emphasis*).

A Platonian/Aristotelian Theory (Science) is linking the *absolute* (Truth), to the *hierarchy* (the Highest), as well as to *colonisation* of the everyday life (as expressed through the domination over education). Ironically establishing a *foundational anomaly* in which philosophy/theory is to dominate education/discipline, from within a renewed understanding of education: "Plato and Aristotle were the first to work out the full educational importance of pure science" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 318). That is, pure science[6] was to dominate educational thought and practice, rather than the educational discipline of ordinary life (*areté*); this "new subject [science] which demanded so much time and energy for purely intellectual studies divorced [educational thought and practice] from the interests of ordinary life" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 318).

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[5]   Plato, says Rorty (1980), introduced the split between eternal ideas and the spatial-temporal world, while the Sophist denied such distinction and stayed within the spatial-temporal world as such, or what I call 'the everydayness of life'.

[6]   On the subject of 'pure science', se also von Wright (1989), who distinguish between two forms of rationality within science, very much in line with the distinction made in this paper between Platonian/Aristotelian and Sophist educational thought.

The operation in which educational thought is subsumed by philosophy and science are complete with the Plato/Aristotle domination of educational thought of the Sophists. From this point of domination, they argue that the Sophists' emphasis on ordinary life and *paideia* as eminently political and ethical is at the risk of what they saw as producing "half-truth". Since the Sophists were not concerned with Truth for its own sake, with Theory and formal logic, the Sophists: "was in danger of teaching half-truths–unless [morality and issues of the state in praxis] it could be grounded on genuine and thorough political thought, searching for the Truth for its own sake. From this point of view, Plato and Aristotle later attacked the whole system of sophistic culture and shook it to its foundation" (Jaeger 1943, p. 293).

This anti-sophist and anti-educational stands are brought to its final close, in which the Sophists' becomes *the* enemy of philosophy by the Aristotelian dehumanisation of the Sophists (Cassin, 2014, pp. 32-34): "excluding all those who do not fall under his [Aristoteles] demonstration from humanity, from the outset, 'for such a man, as such, is like a plant, from the outset'" (Cassin, 2014, p. 35). The dehumanisation of the Sophists is based on an Aristotelian principle of noncontradiction, in which "to speak is to say something that has meaning, and that this meaning is the same for oneself and for another" (p. 34), which, among other things leads to that in denying the principle of noncontradiction one has already been forced to accept it "at the very moment he denies it" (p. 34) by confirming its meaning negatively.

Aristotle makes this argument as foundational as ontology, says Cassin, and as a condition essential for defining what humanity is, and who belongs to humanity. This move says Cassin is first and most an "a war machine against *homonymy*" (p. 35), in which a word can have identical spelling and pronunciation whilst maintaining different meaning. However, says Cassin, "by making an entire dimension of speech philosophically and ethically inaudible, one has confused otherness with nothingness" (2014, p. 36). I will come back to the Sophist's views on *homonymy* below when discussing how such thinking in which homonymy is not a problem relates to the way the Sophists understood politics of equality and consensus. The latter in which plurality remains and are not erased by a consensus, and as such necessary for the foundation of the (democratic) city.

My point here is that the construction of what can be called Platonian/Aristotelian education excludes per definition education as *praxis*, as performing culture and as inherently bound to the everydayness of lives lived by a plurality of people interacting with each other in a concrete environment. As filtered through a Platonian/Aristotelian style philosophy, education is implanted with an understanding of Theory and formal logic, internally linking Truth with hierarchy, and education as inferior to philosophy and the Sophist as a plant outside humanity. In short, Platonian/Aristotelian style education implies Theory of the 'One' unlimited Truth and social hierarchy dependent on such Truth, while Sophist education rather implies discipline in order to live well with a multiplicity of others in the city-state.

The perfect man and the perfect state

In returning to what I above called the original scene of the social, to Plato's Republic, one can now see how such foundational scene in the Republic is fixed in more than one way and, in the fixation, establishing social reality as foundationally hierarchical. Such reality is mirrored in a scientific educational Theory and fixated by absolute Truth distancing education from everyday life, from its worldliness. Theory, instead of being thought of as belonging to the everydayness of life, now imposes and dominate such worldliness 'from the outset'. Educational Theory hereafter aspires to control the 'messiness' and multiplicity of opinions more effectively by replacing the ambiguous and changing everydayness of social life with a foundational structure supposedly stabilising and ordering social life in the *polis*.

Plato's *Republic* says Jaeger (1943) is "primarily a book about the making of human character" (p. 259) and as such is vital in establishing education as *purification* of human character, of the essence of man, with how the perfect state is to be produced. The *Republic* is forming an authentic self in the image of a perfect state or nation: "The perfect man can be shaped only within the perfect state; and vice versa. To construct such a state, we must discover how to make such men. That is the ground for the universal correspondence between man and state's inner structure, for the resemblance between both patterns" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 259).

The resemblance of patterns establishes *the inner structure of man and state* as a psycho-social pattern, which gives rise to the original scene of the social. Such scene needs to be static; "the system needs to be static" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 237) since its function is to secure the stability of the city-state itself. In consequence, Platonian/Aristotelian education is aiming at establishing this psycho-social pattern of the original scene as the Theory of education, dominating the worldliness of sophist education and guiding the perfection of man and state, and "[a]ny departure from its standards is degeneration and decay" (p. 237). Therefore, such a pattern is also immanently patriarchal *stasis* and leads to severe problems for the possibility of equality and change up to this day in the form of far right nationalism, but also in modern liberal democracies (see Orellana and Michelsen, 2019; Säfström, 2019; Butler, 2015).

The ideal of schooling

The ideal schooling then in a Platonian/Aristotelian theory of education is a system of processes, institutional expectations and desires representing as well as creating the perfect man and the perfect state through purifying the psycho-social structure in which the connection exists already: "the one essential thing is that education should not be changed" (Jaeger, 1943, p. 237), since it is to guarantee the stability of the city-state over time. As such, establishing schooling as a pattern through which man and state are forever linked through what can be called 'the original myth of schooling' (see Säfström, 2011, pp. 94-95; O'Toole *et al.*, 2021; Hunter, 1994) and which serves as an absolute point of departure from which everything that goes on in the actual school can be determined and judged. As such defines the real of schooling and society through mirroring each other as fundamentally hierarchically structured.

According to such a pattern, any grading system in schooling can be regarded as fair, in so far as it can be claimed that it reflects the hierarchical inequality of the real as such, an inequality to be perfected through the procedure of teaching. Furthermore, when inequality is distributed over the social spectrum, everyone has his or her proper place in the hierarchy and according to his or her "character"(or abilities and talents, or intelligence, or class), stabilising society in its natural hierarchy, making the city-state (or any state or nation) harmonious and

prosperous[7]. In modern education, the hierarchically ordered reality of schooling works in naturalising inequality motivating and justifying that some are included already, and others are included as excluded through schooling (Rancière 1999, p. 38; Rancière, 2007, p. 23).

Breaking the crust of convention of Platonian/Aristotelian scientific education

For the pre-Christian, pagan Greece, the gods could take human forms, meaning that any stranger always had to be approached with care; he or she could be a god; "he or she may be divine" (Cassin, 2016, p. 10). In other words, the other needed to be approached with a foundational ambiguity in mind, not as one or the other, but as the prefix 'Ambi-' suggests, both god and human at the same time, which already makes the law of noncontradiction problematic and complex. Since it would imply that 'one' and the 'same' carry two radically different meanings, and both have entirely different consequences for establishing the consensus needed for the city-state to appear.

Either "same" is understood as self-same as in identity in which consensus represent this self-same in the same way, in which everyone reaches the same meaning at the same time; "same" here instead becomes One, it unifies the city and the soul of those who is counted as belonging to the whole of the city. Which is Plato's position in which the whole, "the city/soul functions like the body" (Cassin, 2014, p. 123), and in which the parts "conspire to become whole" (p. 123). This strive to become whole also means that no part can claim autonomy but are always defined from the whole (body). Moreover, it is here the Sophists deviates since Plato's whole "Unlike the sophist [Plato's] whole [do not allow for] open competition among the singularities that constitute it" (p. 123). There is no plurality possible.

In contrast to Platonian consensus, a sophistical consensus is possible without everyone thinking the same thing at the same time: "sophistical consensus does not even require that everyone think the same thing (*homonoia*) but only that everyone speak (*homologia*) and lend their

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[7] See further Säfström (2020), in which the distributive paradigm of education and schooling is identified and deconstructed.

ear (*homophonia*)." (Cassin, 2014, p. 33). A sophistical interpretation of *homonoia* then "takes as its model not the unity of an organism but the composition of a mixture" (p. 124). It is "a case of interpreting the 'same' not as a 'one' but as a 'with'" (p. 124). Being with already imply a division of One and relation between parts which allows for singularity as such, without being reduced to a "hierarchical subordination" under a "whole" (p. 130).

What is essential in a sophistical practice then is not a Theory of education representing a whole, but the discipline *in* speaking well and listening carefully to others, without imagining the words of others as already being within one's world of meaning, but as an expression of another move, another practice in the mixture. The original scene of the social for the Sophists (or to follow Cassin; sophistics) then is not hierarchised and differentiated from a fixed point of One (whole-body) but implies a relation of at least two (being with) in the mixture instead and is so far inherently plural. That is the original scene in 'sophistics' is already plural and established as *praxis*, as open and on the move, populated by multiple singularities who are ambiguously negotiating their own as well as others divine humanity, in order to go on together (the mixture) but not necessarily in the same way. *Isonomia*, equality required for the political organisation of democracy then, is here understood in terms of plurality (in difference) rather than self-same and as performativity within a particular discourse practice rather than as reflecting a particular *stasis*.

Cassin (2014) exemplify a sophistical consensus with Hanna Arendt's insistence on an irreducible plural condition of humanity since an Arendtian political theory "defines the specificity of the political by the 'with,' which is characteristic of an irreducible plural condition" (p. 133). The Arendtian sophistics also shows in how Arendt understand the city, not as with Heidegger as "tragically, ecstatic of itself", but in the "extraordinary and entirely everyday circumstance of 'living together' (*suzên*), through the 'sharing of words and deeds.'" (Cassin, 2014, p. 133; Arendt, 1993, p. 157).

So, "who is afraid of the sophists?" as Cassin (2014, p. 25) asks, and why? The making of "the Sophist" into an enemy to philosophy, in which the philosopher writes off the Sophist, not only from the domain of philosophy but "even from humanity itself" (Cassin, 2014, p. 30). Such move can now be understood at the backdrop of how sophistics limits

philosophy's claims to Truth, and by moving on beyond any fixation of this as that as eternal, and an end in itself. Sophistics destabilises any political project which is Platonian and Aristotelian, and which is not inherently and extensively plural and democratic.

A sophistical practice destabilises not only the *fixion*[8] of the original social scene from the point of education but is questioning the very originality of the original social scene, its secured position as founder of the city-state's reality, and as fundamentally and necessary hierarchically organised. A sophistical practice of education is questioning that "the whole *intellectual and spiritual world* revealed by education, into which any individual, according to his nationality or social position, is born." (Jaeger, 1939, p. 303; *emphasis in original*) is so fixed as Jaeger seems to be saying in the quote. For a sophistical practice denies precisely that one is born into something so fixed as an original structure representing the intellectual and spiritual world and to which one per definition is supposed to be destined by faith and to return to through education and teaching (see also Arendt (1958) on this point). Education as a sophistical practice is instead formulated beyond the idea of the fixed as eternal, the fixation, the *fixion* of the original social scene as representing the soul and state of eternity.

The beginning of the sophistical breakup with philosophy is, according to Cassin (2014), mainly to be found in the attitude of Gorgias (483-375BC). Since he "always asks one question too many, he always derives one consequence too many" (p. 30). There is something deeply interesting in this 'too many' because it signifies from within philosophy the very limits of philosophy, at the same time as one can only apprehend the limit from outside of philosophy. The 'too much', signals a foundational ambiguity.

Rorty's (1980) version of sophistics speaks directly to the 'too many' of Gorgias in the form of Rorty's "edifying philosopher". Such philosopher is to keep inventing new languages and the edifying consist mainly of "'the poetic activity' of thinking up (…) new aims, new words, or new disciplines" from which to "reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions" (p. 360). What Rorty calls an edifying philosophy is a philosophy for which there is nothing more to the world than the world as such: "there is [not] something out there in

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8   "Fixion", in Lacan's meaning is, "a fiction that one chooses to fix" (Cassin, 2016, p. 38).

addition to the world called 'the truth of the world'" (Rorty 1982, p. xxvi). A sophistical truth, in line with Rorty (1982), is rather truth with small 't', and plural and as such a compliment we pay to certain moves within the everydayness of living life well with others within the spatial-temporal world.

The 'word and deeds' is always in and of the world itself: When we say, –please, give me your word! We are asking of someone to commit to what we ask for ethically, but in so doing we also ask for the world of the word to be present, the world of the other. We are not asking for a concept, a distancing from that world, making the relation dependent on a third point from which the relation is to be judged and which as such displaces the directedness of our different words and worlds.

Assuming a third point of (Platonian/Aristotelian) Theory is to assume a superior power, what Rorty (1990), concerning Putnam, calls "the view from God's eye" (p. 3). Such a godlike view implies that a relation can no longer be direct but are filtered through this third point, outside of the relationship and from which the relation is to be given meaning and be understood. A Platonian/Aristotelian education, based on the absolute (Truth), hierarchy (highest Truth), and science (First philosophy), dominating education leads education and teaching into an utterly difficult position of reproducing an extra-real reality of schooling, in which the reproduction of inequality already makes up the very foundational reality of that situation.

For a sophistical practice, this third point from which power and judgement flow is only a repetition of fixation, of a *fixion*, from which a wordless truth in a mental representation of a concept is supposedly filling up the world with meaning. For a sophistical practice, discourse is not about meaning *per see*, but rather that which "induce a change of state" and: "he [the Sophist] knows and teaches *how to move,* not, according to the bivalency of the principle of noncontradiction, from error to Truth or from ignorance to wisdom, but, according to the inherent plurality of comparison, from lesser to better state" (Cassin, 2014, p. 33; *my emphasis*).

There is only the plural richness of a spatial, temporal realm, in which speech is spoken through the practices practised, meaning that what we call the real are dependent on the discourse practices we engage in within the emerging ethical, political sphere (which is what *paideia* is for the sophists, see Jaeger, 1939, p. 300). Therefore, what is needed

for social stability in the city-state, is not a Theory of education and teaching but rather the discipline of pedagogy (as in practice). From which to teach how to be moving well with and among others, and how to speak and listening carefully to others as well as oneself, in order to participate (being with) in the mixture of the democratic city-state. It is a pedagogy of performativity in which a multiplicity of 'words and deeds' are possible beyond the limiting effects of society as one whole body to which all has to comply. Therefore, the aim of a disciplined pedagogy is always: "to perform the social function which Dewey called 'breaking the crust of convention', preventing man from deluding himself with the notion that he knows himself, or anything else, except under optional descriptions" (Rorty, 1980, p. 379).

The inherent plurality of comparisons and the discipline of pedagogy

In this section, I will specifically explore teaching as a sophistical practice of being continuously moving "from lesser to better states" through comparisons, or precisely through, "the inherent plurality of comparisons" (Cassin, 2014, p. 33). Such starting point needs some work, since it seems to imply "the new language of learning" (Biesta, 2006, p. 15) infiltrating education, and in which comparisons and their result are being sequenced within league tables and assessment regimes, and which, with Rancière (1991), always comes down to be comparing intelligence in order to be ahead to always wanting to dominate the other (pp. 80-82). It is "an activity of the perverted will, possessed by inequality's passion", and he continues "[i]n linking one person or group to another, by comparison, individuals continually reproduce this irrationality, this stultification that institutions codify and explicators solidify in their brains" (Rancière, 1991, p. 82).

As the new language of learning, such language and activity seem to imply and encourage understanding teaching as an act of 'explicators' using a particular form of rhetoric. A particular type of speech which "revolt against the poetic condition of the speaking being. It speaks in order to silence. *You will speak no longer, you will think no longer, you will do this*: that is its program" (Rancière, 1991, p. 85; *emphasis in original*). That is, teaching within the new language of learning is ultimately fitting an educational world in which teaching is being

trapped by the violence and domination implicit in the strive for always better through comparisons and domination over the everydayness of the students lived reality: It is teaching being trapped ultimately by the desires of modernity and capitalism to produce productive rather than responsible citizens (see Säfström, 2020).

Instead, from the point of sophistical practice, comparisons are not understood through a hierarchical vision in which inequality passion is reproduced, but rather through a mixture in which verification of equality is an aim for a disciplined pedagogy. To be comparing is therefore not understood at the backdrop of winning and losing, getting ahead of and defeating the other, but as an integral part of translating from one to the other and back in the mixture: "In the act of speaking, man doesn't transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry, translates and invites others to do the same" (Rancière, 1991, p. 65).

To make comparisons is if you will an act of poetry rather than a tool in a war. Therefore, it is not about knowledge as such, since knowledge comes down to control and signify an end (to what was before uncertain), but also, if applied to persons, extend this control to be controlling others as well (Foucault, 1980). We do not need to know the student in order to interact with him or recognise him or her as a person. In a sophistical practice, we need to recognise and respond to the other in education and teaching; "not as students or as learned men, but as people; in the way you respond to someone speaking to you and not to someone examining you: under the sign of equality" (Rancière, 1991, p. 11).[9]

In speaking and recognising the other under the sign of equality and as capable of speaking, demands to be listening carefully as well, not in order to conceptualise the words of him or her, but in order to hear the world spoken by those words, in order to embark on a process of mutual translations: "All words, written or spoken, are translation that only takes on meaning in the counter-translation, in the invention of the possible causes of the sound heard or of the written trace" (Rancière, 1991, p. 64).

This process of mutual translation is ultimately a process of comparing words, comparing different worlds. In comparing different worlds different *speech*, translation is not the translation point by point[10], but

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[9] Seeing a person beyond the category doesn't mean that the teacher doesn't recognise a student, because he or she is already positioned as such, it means rather to acknowledge the singularity and possible autonomy of a person beyond the generalised category of being a student.
[10] See Bernstein (1983) on incommensurability.

here rather the poetic activity in comparing worlds without the need to fix such comparisons through a common fixed point or conceptual net from which to be claiming a consensus of meaning. Instead, what the act of mutual translation comes down to, following Rancière, but also what was central for the sophists (Culler, 2014, p. 92), is the need for improvisation, understood as "our intelligence's leading virtue: the poetic virtue", and Rancière continuous, "[t]he impossibility of our *saying* the truth, even when we *feel* it, makes us speak as poets, makes us tell the story of our mind's adventures and verify that they are understood by other adventurers, makes us communicate our feelings and see them shared by other feeling beings" (Rancière, 1991, p. 64).

In other words, a sophistical practice in education and teaching compares, not to defeat the other or examine her or him, but to be able to connect different worlds in the mixture of fellow adventurers. A mixture in which being with the other comes down to the mutual translation of a plurality of words and deeds, and as that which is necessary to be able to move ahead, together with but differently. Such teaching needs to be remaining in the plural world of others, to find out how to move in a plural world in which everyone has "the right to go on differently" (Bauman, 1999, p. 202). For a sophistical practice of education and teaching, being *with* is precisely why a democratic city-state is possible instead of based on domination and violence from the point of 'One', anticipated by an Platonian/Aristotelian Theory of education. A sophistical practice is instead a disciplined pedagogy in the practice of democratisation.

Teaching as a practice in democratisation

If being with speaks to a different original scene of the social than one of *stasis*, it is because a sophistical practice is performative (Culler, 2014, pp. 200-202), but also because being with does not exclude *being fore* the other and not only before the other, do not exclude ethics (see Säfström and Månsson, 2004; Levinas 1994).

Ethics, in this sense, needs no (First philosophy) Theory to make judgements on interactions and relations from above the everydayness of living, but is rather a particular practice (discipline) in living well with and among others. Such practice includes speaking and listening, to speak

one's world and listening to other's worlds to be able to connect and to engage in mutual translations of those worlds. In translating words, the world's worldliness is expanding, and such ethically infused expansion is here understood as democratisation in action. In other words, the publicness of the public extends through teaching in comparing and connecting different worlds in an expanding mixture, as such a mixture embodies the city-state's social and political organisation.

Teaching connects different sensibilities as a shared capacity to sense (Berardi, 2017), to make sense beyond a consensus of One, acknowledging that sensing is always both unique and shared (Rancière, 2007; *partage du sensible*). As such, teaching verifies sensing as a capacity among a plurality of speaking beings, not in order to melt their speech and worlds into one whole, but to be highlighting the sensible ordering of the real as inherently plural, and to understand our capacity in sensing as shared with others. If I can make sense, the other can as well (cf. Rancière, 1991, pp. 57-58).

Therefore, *to speak, to listen, to translate, to compare, to link*, are all pedagogical manoeuvres within a sophistical practice of teaching which does not examine the other in order to engage with him or her, does not engage from a distance in order to control him or her through knowledge. Teaching is *being* (as a verb) engaged *in* speaking, *in* listening, and *in* comparing, *in* linking, *in* being *with* (as fully as one can understand being with other people).

The poetic act of teaching

The poetic act of teaching is not only an intellectual virtue, as Rancière says, but as such, it also requires improvisation. The poetic activity of improvisations initiates an excess and a 'too much' into the normal ordering of natural inequality, and as inequality is mistaken for the true state of man in the social and natural world. Against such (patriarchal) *stasis*, the poetic act in teaching constantly asks one question too many, and it draws one consequence too many. *Poêsis* in teaching introduces a possibility to "dis-identify" (Rancière, 1991, p. 98) with the set order of inequality, it *instantiates* the possibility of change through destabilising the given, and therefore limit the range of claims of inequality as a necessary condition for education to be real.

Improvisation for the sophists means allowing oneself to speak about everything "by allowing himself to be led by opportunity" (Cassin, 2014, p. 92), which leads to the emergence of the *Kairos*, the almost untranslatable Greek word. Papastephanou (2014), though, translates *Kairos* with "lived time" (p. 719), which she contrasts with *Chronos* "measurable time". She does not see them as binary but instead intends to make room for a lived time as necessarily implied in measurable time, mainly when situated in the everyday practices of those events that are to be managed and organised by *Chronos*. Here I will discuss some aspects of *Kairos* to situate improvisation as the poetic activity *per preference* within teaching, to emphasise the moment of new beginnings implied by the Greek word *Kairos*.

First, *Kairos* is "the moment of the opening of possibilities"(Cassin 2014, p. 93), recognisable in teaching as the moment in which one address the student as a person beyond his or her identity as a student of a particular order, and as such, secondly; "both opening and cutting"(p. 93) into the order in which the student is identified as already belonging to a particular place in the hierarchical order of inequality.

Thirdly, the moment of opening and cutting is also a moment in which its purpose is revealed as belonging to that very moment, "*Kairos* is autotelic, it contains its purpose within itself. It is the moment in which *poêsis* and *technê* […], at the height of their inventiveness, approach *praxis*, approach a divine interiorisation of purpose" (p. 94). It is the moment in teaching in which a person speaks in a way as he or she has never spoken before, neither repeating what was already said nor responding to the desires of the institution, but within the moment brings something into existence that did not exist before. It is a moment that unfolds from within the act of teaching. *Technê* in teaching is the art of hearing and verifying someone as speaking (in its most total sense) and guide the unfolding of the newness of the event. *Kairos*, in short, can so far be understood as *poros*, "the 'passage'" (p. 94) through which the *technê* of teaching and the *poêsis* of the moment(s) in teaching enters into education: Teaching becomes *praxis,* a democratisation process of the events that unfolds.

Kairos is perfectly adapted to the moment in which *poêsis* and *technê* appear; since *Kairos*, says Cassin, is a singularity: "with *Kairos*, one is engulfed in a particular case, and there is nothing apart from the case, all invention is singular because it is perfectly adopted" (2014, p. 94).

In teaching as an instance of *Kairos* then, the teacher is fully present in the poetic activity of improvisation, in the singularity of a case in which someone enters the scene. The teacher recognises and verifies that someone is speaking their world, their truth, as it unfolds through the moment's purpose. Such purpose is approaching *praxis* "the divine interiorisation of purpose" (Cassin 2014, p. 94) to which the educative moment belongs. The significance of the moment as a series of unfoldings is also the reason why the effects of teaching are unique in their *poêsis* and singularity and not possible to generalise, while *technê* in teaching is the art of keeping the process moving, by *listening*, *speaking, comparing* and *linking* different worlds.

The moment of *Kairos* in teaching then is also the moment in which Platonian/Aristotelian education becomes violent in suppressing the singularity of the moment and all involved therein by demanding generalisation, through scientific education (it is Aristotle "who demands generality", Cassin, 2014, p. 94). Platonian/Aristotelian education then works against the poetic act in teaching, in the exact moment when the singularity of the one speaking is generalised and conceptualised, in order to return through Theory (science, scientistic, scientism) to *dominate* the speech of all involved. Such education and teaching dominate through how a speaking person becomes a thing (concept) in schooling, through setting up a *telos* outside the singularity of the moment and to which all have to adapt; "and all we have to do is to follow the predetermined route" (Cassin, 2014, p. 94). Such *telos* closes down and restrict the poetic activity in education, to control *poêsis* and *technê*, or rather when the latter is made into science controlling teaching and linking it to a predetermined route to a given goal. Whereas with the poetic act in teaching, in improvisation, the spur of the moment takes on the art of opening and cutting for a new beginning to appear; "with *ex tempore* [as an effect in *Kairos*] we have the autotelic opening of the beginning" (p. 94).

Teaching, the poetic activity in improvising, opens a plurality of possibilities at the moment in which multiple beginnings and purposes continuously unfold. To compare those beginnings and link them is expanding who can be seen and heard and introduce multiple ways in which one can move *with* others in the world. Teaching then, as a sophistical practice, is not the activity of securing the *stasis* of an original scene of the social, but rather speaks to a different social scene in which

democratisation is located precisely in the unfolding of new beginnings, as those take place in the moments of improvisations in a concrete classroom.

Conclusion, a sophistical practice in liveable life

In conclusion, beyond the philosophy defined as such through domination of Sophist educational thought, a sophistical education and teaching practice contribute to a liveable life in a democratic culture. It brings into the light the possibility of multiplicity, of pluralism, which is not imploding in the image of consensus (-ontology) and as represented by a whole social body, nor demands of all to enter into the same thought at the same time. Nor demands to step into the line of *telos* in which the steps taken are defined already from an absolute position of power. A sophistical practice is rather a practice of democratization beyond the *stasis* of an original social scene composed of hierarchy and patriarchy and shows a possible route beyond the violent effects of *stasis*. A sophistical practice, by being articulated, limits the effects of an unlimited philosophy, and profoundly question Platonian/Aristotelian Theory as foundation for education, as such education is reproducing a monoculture of 'One'. A monoculture in which each and every one has his or her place already carved out in the social body. Rather, the concerns of a sophistical practice are how to move among and with others in order to live well with a multiplicity of others in the mixture of a democratic city-state.

The *poêsis* of improvisation, central to teaching, opens for the autocratic purposes of each moment linking education with *praxis* and democratization. Sophistical education then, understand teaching being an art (*technê*) in which *speaking*, *listening*, *comparing* and *linking* are the main techniques used in order to guide the unfolding of the newness of each moment (*poêsis*). In such teaching, the teacher recognises and verifies when someone speaks beyond the desires of an institution and in a way he or she has never spoken before. A sophistical practice teaches from within the finitude of our lived reality and verifies a multiplicity of possible ways in which we can move forward *with* others in the everydayness of our shared lives. The sophist teacher says: – please, show me your world within your spoken words! Such teaching, informed

by a multiplicity of ways of being in the world, links new beginnings to the expansion of liveable lives in our democratic societies.

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Conserve, pass on, desire. Edifying teaching practices to restore the publicness of education[1]

Conservar, legar, desear. Prácticas docentes edificantes para restaurar el carácter público de la educación

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Abstract

The article presents the thesis that at the basis of the crisis of identity, mission, and function currently affecting the publicness of education systems there is a deep erosion of substantive practices in the act of teaching, since the disappearance of these practices contributes decisively to eclipsing the democratizing and potentially liberating promises of school education. After introducing the main topics for exploration, a relation is established between the problems brought about by the mandate to innovate in education and its relationship with the crisis of transmission. The article goes on to explore the possibilities of bringing back the public part to education through the restoration of three core edifying teaching practices: conserving, passing on, and desiring.

Key words: teaching practices, public education, school, post-critical pedagogy.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta la tesis de que, en la base de la crisis de identidad, misión y función que afecta actualmente al carácter público de los sistemas educativos, se encuentra una profunda erosión de las prácticas fundamentales en el acto de

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la enseñanza, ya que la desaparición de estas prácticas contribuye decisivamente a eclipsar las promesas democratizadoras y potencialmente liberadoras de la educación escolar. El artículo comienza presentando los principales temas de exploración y los problemas generados por el mandato de innovar en educación y su relación con la crisis de transmisión. Continúa explorando las posibilidades de devolver a la educación su parte pública a través de la restauración de tres prácticas docentes edificantes fundamentales: conservar, legar y desear.

Introduction

In this article I develop the idea that at the core of the current crisis regarding the publicness of education[2] is, firstly, the affirmation that teaching practices[3] should be more involved in transmission and not so much in construction and, secondly, that it is up to the teachers to become the main actors in the movement to ensure the democratizing availability of knowledge. I hold that for school education to be public, it must reaffirm its conservative mission. I will attempt to show what type of conservatism I am thinking of and why I think it is such a fundamental aspect on the path toward repairing democratizing promises of school education. This will be done in a post-critical and affirmative spirit[4], and

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[2] The crisis regarding the publicness of education has to do with the threatening of its very conditions of possibility. This critical scenario is starring by (i) current trends in privatization and commodification, (ii) the diversification of agents involved, and (iii) the incorporation of new patterns in the public management of education. In a forthcoming collective volume, some of these threats are thoroughly explored (Thoilliez and Manso (Eds.), 2022).

[3] I understand teaching practices in the sense of a craftsmanship as I discussed elsewhere (Thoilliez, 2019a).

[4] Recent years have seen a growing interest in post-critical approaches in educational research (Hodgson, Vlieghe, and Zamojski 2017, 2018, 2020; Koopal, Vlieghe, and Baets, 2020; Oliverio, 2019, 2020; Schildermans 2020; Schildermans, Vandenabeele, and Vlieghe, 2019; Thoilliez 2019b, 2020a; Vlieghe and Zamojski 2019, 2020; Wortmann 2019, 2020). Post-critique shows a way out of the intellectually suffocating hermeneutics of suspicion by opening more affirmative reasoning paths for the study of our problems. Critical practices of pointing at what goes wrong, need to be complemented by alternative post-critical gestures of caring for what deserves to be preserved. In the Spanish context, the discussion has also been recently addressed (Ayuste and Trilla, 2020; Noguera, 2020; Mejía, 2020; Huarte, 2020; Pagès, 2020; Pallarés and Lozano, 2020).

employing conservative vocabularies as an exercise to reexamine a set of teaching practices that I find are suitable to restore the publicness of education, and, more precisely, the common goods of education. I present this as an experiment to put forward "a progressive argument for a conservative idea" (Biesta, 2017). While I am aware of the risks of this position, I think they are the type of pedagogic risks that in the present conditions must nevertheless be taken. At the end of the article, it will be discussed why this experimental move is worth the risk.

Following on the work of Higgins and Knight-Abowitz (2011), education is a public good when (i) it is funded wholly or in part with public money; (ii) it is accountable to the public administration and the general public through a democratically established control mechanism regarding its performance; and (iii) it is based on the idea (and ideal) of education as a common good, specifically as schooling for all. I will pay particular attention to the problem when, as is happening today, an education system is said to be public and meets the first two criteria above but falls short in a key aspect of the third: school stops being for everyone if it fails to redistribute the accumulated knowledge by forgetting the very teaching practices that make it possible.

We live in the time of the imperative of innovation, of change, of transformation for schools and their teachers. Yes, teachers teach to help others prepare for the future, a future that is uncertain at best and therefore pushes educational activity to be in constant movement attending to that unknown future. Systems are called to address, adapt, and prepare for the future in bigger and better ways (Fernández Liria *et al.*, 2018; Gil-Cantero, 2018; Pérez-Rueda, 2021).

This, I find, causes damage that goes beyond mere discourse, by penetrating teaching practices in the sense of altering their being anchored in the present, their attention to the past, and their indeterminate orientation to an open future. Education systems today live immersed in *innovaphilia*[5], where school education is being over-identified, *unilateralized* in its orientation to an idea of the future in which, despite the inability to know what it (the future) will hold or demand from us, schools are forced to make the impossible to accomplish promise of "preparing for the future". The democratizing and liberating promises of school education are changed for the metaphysical impossibility of

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[5] Neologism derived from "innovaphilic times" (Narodowski, 2018).

promising to prepare for a particular future that in fact is impossible to know. The *innovaphilic* school becomes the deceit, in which we live blind to the problems and material conditions of the present, in which we live oblivious to a past whose transmission is considered useless for the "challenges of the future". A future that far from being an open question, has more to do with the need to update, thus, to constantly remove, erase, demolish what we have got to be replaced, substituted, switched by something else. Where nothing is preserved nor passed on, and education is presented as a coping mechanism. Where teaching happens in a survival mode to get the student out of the present alive, and it is asked to focus on change for the sake of change.

Construction versus transmission

Wherever the urge to innovate leads, transmission that comes about in the teacher-student relation succumbs more easily to an autonomous, creative pseudo-construction of knowledge. If restoring the public nature of education involves, as I maintain here, continuing to aspire to the *pansophian* democratizing promise of all knowledge for everyone, knowledge cannot only be self-constructed; it must also (and firstly) be transmitted. In fact, I believe this is what many teachers do, albeit clandestinely and peripherally: the endeavor to transmit what good and valuable they know about the world. But they do it stealthily, apologetically, even remorsefully. Here I am, of course, thinking of the simplified and flattened version of constructivism. I believe Piaget, Vygotsky or Brunner ideas are worth to be studied and pedagogically reimagined. The problem with constructivist theories in education is how they have been translated into teaching practices, and not how they were originally framed, neither the many serious attempts to materialize them[6].

When I position transmission vis à vis construction, "transmission" here needs not to be mistaken with imposition. I simply propose transmission in the sense of handing over a message. Affirming the strong connection between teaching and transmission (whenever teaching wants something to do with making public education happen,

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[6] Popularized versions of constructivism are also at the basis of what Meirieu's has framed as the contemporary quarrel between hiper-pedagogues and anti-pedagogues (Meirieu, 2022).

making the common goods of education available to all) does not imply pointing to any particular methodology. Transmission has more to do with the realm of the teaching motives, a materialization of the kind of love for the world that move many to the practice of teaching. One reason for teaching something to someone is having a message (idea, value, discovery, fact, artifact) and the need, the desire, the willingness, the urge even, to hand it over to him/her, to make it public by sharing it. Transmission is a fundamental move for teachers to share the world with their students. Therefore, "transmission" here is not to be mistaken with the Freirean idea of banking education, nor as negation of fundamental equality between the student and the teacher (the difference is of that of position, and there is nothing fundamental about positions, they are contextual, interchangeable, temporary by definition). This clarification about what I mean by "transmission" before even trying to do anything with it, accounts for the bad press this term has accumulated through time. However, being coherent with this article's restorative position, old bad heroes of our recent history of education such as "transmission" may deserve an affirmative reexamination.

In their fascinating reconstruction of the causes that have led us from a school of transmission to a school of learning, Blais, Gauchet and Ottavi (2014) point out four grounds for the act of transmission. Identifying them can help us stake out the restoration I propose to start up hereafter. To begin with, transmission is rooted in our temporal and historical condition, since it "lives off the weight of those who came before us". This condition intensifies in that in the act of learning something, we are indebted to those learned it before we did. Teachers are spokespersons for those precedents and the best teachers are those who perform this role of assimilation and restitution to the greatest extent. In their field of knowledge, they embody "a just relation with the past, a mastery of its legacy that allows them to add, invent, and break from it whenever necessary" (p. 104). The experience of knowing something, even in the most individualized process we can imagine, consists of acquiring something that others already possess. "Transmission always exists *objectively*" (idem). The second grounds of transmission can be found in the irreducibly mysterious nature of knowledge that implies the irreducibly initiative nature of its communication. Access to progressively more sophisticated items of knowledge requires prior transmission of their languages (be they literary, historical, mathematical, scientific, etc.).

In contrast, we live amidst the disqualification of "all types of knowledge that implies dependence on knowing, favoring instead whatever individuals are supposed to be able to take on themselves through their rational capacities" (p. 107). The third grounds of transmission are situated on the personal dimension of knowledge. These grounds are also "home for their difficulty as art" (p. 108). No matter how curious one is toward a field of knowledge, one must be accompanied by someone else to face the apprehension ahead on a road full of difficulties. This accompaniment is not reduced to delivering any particular information or skill; rather, it consists of "exorcizing the contrary effects and liberating those that make it move forward, beginning with the pleasure of thinking" (p. 109). It is accompanying on the road from the desire to know to the desire to study and learn. The fourth and final grounds are the symbolic dimension of knowledge acquisition itself. Teachers make this dimension palpable, whether through "the power of words, the role of donation, or the insertion of a lineage (p. 110). Learning is always receiving, no matter how autonomous it is made to be, even when we learn on our own, since we gather the fruits of knowledge that others conquered, established, or developed. Knowledge would made for the giving because it belongs to no one in the end. Instead, it is the result of a collective work destined to be pursued throughout time, one that creates a particular bond of nearness among its participants.

In a context where the prize is the future, the individual, and the professional usefulness of knowledge, it is easy to understand why school education tends to ignore the four grounds discussed above. The price of such ignorance, however, is that the autonomous learner eclipses the always necessary movement of transmission. In what follows, in contrast to the *unilateralization* of the school looking toward the future, consumed in processes of innovation and change, I propose to reclaim the democratizing and potentially liberating promises of school education, revising the following post-critically inspired teaching practices: conserving, passing on, desiring. Revisiting movements whose productivity as tools of creative resistance for bringing the "public" back to school education.

Conserve

As Hannah Arendt (1961) noted, education consists of intergenerational transmission of whatever is worth conserving in our world. From this point of view, teaching practices at schools are mainly and mostly a conservative endeavor. This is one of the key principles in *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy* (Hodgson, et al., 2017, 2018, 2020). If we can transcend, or momentarily suspend, the critical paradigm and its intellectual chains, we open paths of thinking that can restore the promises of education by taking care of its practices of conservation. Cultivation of this practice is so seldom found in schools that, paradoxically, as we shall see, it is outside the school buildings that reasons for restoring it in an edifying style are to be found.

When dealing with nature the Western world tends to relate to it conservationist (and classificationist) terms. Examples of this include sponsoring scientific explorations and creating and maintaining science museums and collections. The Museum of Natural Sciences in Madrid, currently ascribed to the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), is a prime case for this. Despite its modest funding compared to other similarly themed museums in other large cities, it offers something quite extraordinary: a public justification and explanation for its own existence. The Museum's reasoning for its conservationist purposes is structured around the following general principles[7]: (i) The ethical principal: the probability of life is tiny, for the time being known only in this strange, remote corner of the universe. Likewise, the likelihood of existing is infinitely smaller than that of not existing, and each life form is the upshot of an unrepeatable sum of improbabilities which have converged over the course of hundreds of millions of years. Thus, existing is a cosmic achievement, and keeping information on every species is worthwhile just because they exist (and this achievement itself is worth saving). (ii) The aesthetic principle: it is said that 'life is beautiful'. It is true that nature is the primary source of all beauty. All living things are beautiful, and any slice of biodiversity contains beauty. Gathering information from every species is worth pursuing just because each species forms part of that beauty. (iii) The principle of complementarity:

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[7] The richness of thought offered in this declaration of seven principles has led me to use it recently elsewhere, though for other purposes (Thoilliez, 2020b, 29-30).

species are not isolated entities but rather pieces in the web of life. Without different species, there is no factory of life, because species are its basic building blocks. The synergic sum of species is what sustains the cycles of life. Each species depends on many others, as they depend on it. Conservation of each cog and each gear is the first concern of any good mechanic. (iv) The principle of precaution (or the principle of the potential usefulness of what seems useless): if the evolution of life has managed to move from a bacterial soup to rare individuals capable of questioning themselves about the usefulness of what we do, it is precisely because we possess a certain capacity to retain the superfluous, the unusable or what at the moment seems useless. We should not run the risk of mistakenly considering a species useless (as we have already done too many times). (v) The scientific principle: each species is an enigma, a unique genome modelled by millions of years of evolution. Each species contains the answers to very myriad questions, and those enigmas are worth saving. (vi) The principle of knowledge: an unknown species may be the answer to a question we may not yet have asked, or the solution to a problem we do not yet perceive. We should do whatever it takes to find out about as many species as possible simply because knowing is better than not knowing. Our ancestral instinct of acquiring knowledge has helped human civilization advance. Moreover, the ability to understand the world depends on accumulated knowledge. Many forms of knowledge may at first seem of little use or have little potential for immediate application but are in fact essential in the long run. (vii) The economic principle (for those skeptical about all previous principles): all our food, a third of medicines, and a substantial number of the materials we use come from species which are or at some time have been wild. Biodiversity (that is species) underpins all the services the ecosystems have brought to humanity. They are potential resources and possible solutions to potential problems.

It is true that museums do more than just conserve, but can we even imagine a museum not devoted, at least in part, to conserving? It is difficult, to say the least. The crux is that schools and museums share a similar public mission of conserving heritage, not only to exhibit it so it can be appreciated, but also, and uniquely, for it to be intellectually appropriated by each and every person. And yet, this is exactly what schools are doing less and less, and when they do, they no longer fulfill their "public" role. However, a practice of teaching aiming at fulfilling

the democratic promises of schooling, would involve a conservationist commitment to the cultural objects that comprise the curriculum and the daily rituals of classroom life during the school year.

Compared to a museum, schools also feature several particularities that single out the conservative dimension of teaching practices. Heeding them can help us determine some of the particularities of the conservative nature of teaching practices. Among these eloquent differences are: Unlike museums with their ties with sightseeing and tourism, school is not something to visit, but somewhere with generally compulsory attendance, at least for good many years (with the teacher being a guardian who waits and checks daily that his group of students is conserved intact); The contents of a museum are displayed to the public for purposes of dissemination, whereas school aims fundamentally at literacy (with the teacher being the one who from one year to the next conserves the keys that require his translation); The museum is also a public place, where one passes through or visits from time to time, whereas school is a temporary destination inhabited daily, for several hours, its classrooms converted into intermediate spaces midway between public and private (where the teacher is the main person responsible for keeping it in a state recognizable by all); The anonymity of the unexpected museum-goer has no equivalent in schools, where everyone is someone, and everyone is known and expected (with the teacher being the daily host to a potential celebration, with his name on a list kept safe).

Pass on

Conservation has both internal and external goods that the Science Museum's declaration can help us identify. However, as noted above, especially in the educational sense being explored here, conservation loses its meaningfulness if it is not accompanied by its possibility of being handed down, passed on to others. It becomes even more meaningless without potential renovation by new generations, and the call to responsibility it represents (Arendt, 1961). The fact that there is a new generation yet to come is what motivates the older generation, to keep what is believed to be worth of value. The reason why things get conserved is that they can be passed on to the newcomers with

all their potential for renovation[8]. The works of the French philosopher Françoise-Xavier Bellamy are particularly illuminating when considering passing on as a key teaching practice that makes the common goods of education available to all[9].

Bellamy's reflections start off with his experience as an aspiring secondary school philosophy teacher in IUMF training, where he was informed that there was nothing to transmit, since by transmitting the teacher only helps the elite reproduce by exerting symbolic violence on students unfamiliar with the school language. His initial bewilderment was followed by a search for reasons for continuing to teach his students. Added to it is a clear awareness that the collective mistakes made in education are, due to its very nature, on a different scale than those of other collective undertakings. The realization that if what needs to be done in educational matters is not done or a mistake is made, making up for it or rectifying it may be impossible: "knowledge that was never taught, references that were never given, who will reinvent them?" (Bellamy, 2014, p. 160). Bellamy adds that cultural heritage "is only protected when it is shared" (idem). The possibility of a public legacy that makes school education possible makes cultural inheritance a "living inheritance open to infinite multiplication, but also makes it infinitely fragile; our heritage dies when it is no longer handed down. Our culture, and with it our own humanity, will die from our thanklessness" (idem). However, this warning is accompanied by a minute analysis, because, as Bellamy notes, the contemporary weakening of the social responsibility of transmission is "the result of a meditated, lasting, and explicit work" (p. 26). Spearheading this work are the intellectuals (and the reverberation of the echo of their works) Descartes, Rousseau, and Bourdieu. The original sin of the three culprits would be that of transmission, each adding a different but accumulative sphere to blame.

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[8] Vlieghe and Zamojsky phrased this idea in the following terms: "an intergenerational meeting during which the existing generation passes over the 'old' world to the newcomers – out of love for our common world, but also out of love for the new generation. This, then, grants the opportunity to bring new beginnings to this world" (2019, p. 11). Fernando Bárcena's seminal work on Arendt's natality is also in the background of my own interest in this particular Arendtian pedagogical motif (Bárcena, 2007).

[9] Due to space limitations, I will be focusing on his awarded book "Les déshérités ou l'urgence de transmettre". However, the ideas contained in his "Demeure. Pour échapper à l'ère du mouvement perpétuel" are also of great interest (Bellamy, 2020). For una updated revision of his own positions, see Bellamy (2021).

Starting with Descartes, transmission would be a flaw in reasoning: at the age of thirty-eight, Descartes, a disillusioned student as he described himself on the first pages of his *Discours*, in all his hours of study and lessons received, has found nothing but "a hotchpotch of obscure, complicated and uncertain doctrines. None of them achieve his backing, none actually settle the confusion reining in the order of thought" (Bellamy, 2014, p. 31). Books are promises never kept and culture a dangerous disease that deforms human nature. The only thing left is to return to the natural light of reason: "We choose our own path totally on our own. Only the ideas that our reason has produced on its own will be clear and distinct and, therefore, undoubted" (p. 35). Descartes calls modern man to follow his footsteps in the destruction inside oneself of "the sediments of tradition, and replace them with the orderly work of reason" (p. 37). Nothing should be received from the past; every inheritance should be rejected, refused. Later, Rousseau went further on the chain of transmission by romanticizing the natural human state, uncontaminated by culture, the uncultured human as a natural paradise lost, yearned for, and sought after. Accordingly, "the only ones responsible for our unhappiness are ourselves, it is our culture, and we should rid ourselves of it in order to find, finally, the meaning of nature" (p. 51). Therefore, Rousseau's educational project entails ensuring solitude and utmost control of any influence and reflexive temptation that may loom over him. The best would be "not to teach children anything; they would keep the innocence we envy in them" (p. 53) and therefore, the preceptor should resemble a father as little as possible: "Better the purity of ignorance than the alienation of transmission" (p. 56). Rousseau also criticized the symbolic figure par excellence of transmission: books (which is why Rousseau had so little contact with them at the end of his education). Books "take us away from the direct experience of life and make us enter the abstraction of a discourse unattached to reality" (p. 62). Freedom, only possible in a natural state of ignorance, is threatened by contact with the written word. Because contact with books and the culture they convey in no way benefits the child, it begs the question of who the beneficiary of transmission really is. This is the quest of the work of our third culprit in the brief intellectual history of disdain for cultural heritage. Bourdieu maintains that culture is arbitrary and "serves wholly to learn to make distinctions" (p. 71). These distinctions are only good for differentiating and making hierarchies, for reproducing and

legitimatizing inequalities, as a type of cultural heritage reproduced at school, which makes them devices of violence. "School is eliminated, expelled, enclosed. But it is especially violent because it is not content with just condemning in addition, it demands that the condemned agree to his sentence" (p. 77). Bourdieu is also bothered by the fictitious mechanism of schools, the exercise of scholastic training the students are subjected to. This led him to call for a rational pedagogy to prepare for the job market, to stop being a student as quickly as possible. To the extent that the school erroneously makes students believe that the culture it transmits has some value in itself, it "deprives disadvantaged students of the pragmatic lucidity that would allow them to understand the specific reality of school competition and to adopt more effective strategies" (p. 80) that will prepare them "for the fight for economic capital" (p. 81). This theoretical model encloses the teacher who is trying to teach, to transmit knowledge, to earn authority, to grade her students in the hopelessness of guilt with no chance of redemption, no way out: eternal instrument of a reproduction of inequalities that has no possible end, a servant of the (school) device of violence where it fits in as just another screw. The teacher, dispossessed from his ability to passing on, is pushed to make a quick exit through the back door of the classroom.

Desire

Anyone who has inherited material goods knows there comes a very specific time when one can accept the inheritance or turn it down. Accepting the inheritance often also entails taking on debts, as the ultimate gesture of intergenerational responsibility and love[10]. This can only happen if there is an awakening of prior desire: the desire to hand down and the desire to receive. Inheritances are not accepted by official mandate; they are taken on as they are accepted. There are no guarantees. They must be injected with the desire for ownership. To move forward in the practice of desiring (of awakening desire), I turn to the Italian psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati and his redescription of the "erotics of teaching" that he even today insists is possible.

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[10] Regarding the possibility that our educational invitations to share the world gets rejected, see Thoilliez (2020a), and Thoilliez and Wortmann (2021).

Through the lens of psychoanalysis, he takes on the current decline in the transmission of knowledge and analyzes the role a teacher can and must play in that miraculous encounter at class time. The main thesis of his book is that "what endures from school is the irreplaceable role of the teacher", whose function is to "open the subject to culture" and thereby make possible "the encounter with the erotic dimension of knowledge" (Recalcati, 2016, p. 14). The logic of the marketplace in neoliberalism sets an imperative of enjoyment that demands immediacy rather than the postponed satisfaction of desire (sublimation) on which our culture has been built. And all this is done "in the name of a neoliberal pedagogy that reduces the School to a business that produces suitable efficient skills for its own system" (p. 21). As Lacan diagnosed, there has been a diminishing of the paternal function. The Law has given way to a logic of supply and demand that leaves symbols stuck at the imaginary far ends. Parents give up their role, which used to be alongside that of the teacher, and side with their children against the teachers from the anxiety of parenthood. The problem of School "is not the panoptic look of the watchman who identifies and represses, punishing subjective differences from a normative idea that demands to be reproduced. Rather, it is its dramatic evaporation, the risk of extinction in which it finds itself. This same process affects the father figure" (p. 19). And this, Recalcati argues, causes a break of the symbolic: a break in the chain of transmission between generations. Added now to the social and economic precariousness of those who are supposed to maintain this transmission is the precariousness of its symbolic situation. The teacher's word does not gain weight and is replaced by the cacophony of multimedia, cell phones, different devices to which the students are continually connected. Recalcati calls it "weak totalitarianism, narcotic or stimulant, that reduces critical thought by taking advantage of the hypnotic function induced by the objects of enjoyment that have invaded the lives of our young" (p. 22). There is no text, no effort at disentangling it, only disjointed applicable fragments. Nowadays it is difficult to maintain the teacher's desire based on her own word.

Similarly, for there to be a student, there must be a desire for knowledge. "Without the desire to know, there is no chance for subjective learning of knowledge; without transfer, without ecstasy, without erotization, there is no chance of a knowledge connected with life, capable of opening doors, windows, worlds" (Recalcati, 2016, p. 43). And for this desire to exist,

breaking away from the mother tongue, abandoning the family bosom that facilitates or impedes separation, is a prerequisite. This is the only way to take flight to other horizons beyond incest and self-eroticism. In the subject willing to learn, exile from the Thing has already taken place. In him, family objects have been seen to be affected by the mandate of the Law, and in this way, his life can turn to other worlds and other libidinous investments. "For teachers, it is no longer about pursuing the ideal of a teacher-master able to say the last word on the meaning of life, but teacher-testimony what knows how to open up worlds through the erotic power of the word and of knowing, which he can attest to" (p. 45). Due to its very nature, compulsory school does not kill desire, but separates the subject from the family, from the incestuous constellation of desire, to socialize him and stretch his horizon farther and farther. And that way, ridding himself from the Thing, the bereft subject finds a word, brimming with desire, that holds him up among everyone else. "Compulsory schooling marks the necessary distancing of the subject from his family and his potential encounter with other worlds: it is the obligation of exile, of transition from the mother tongue to the language of the alphabet or to other languages entirely" (p. 78).

Thus, during the hour of class, desires crisscross; the desire to teach and the desire to learn, the desire to transmit a legacy, to recreate it, and the desire to receive a foundational word that orients the desire instead of only informing or restating what is already known as nauseam. Without desire there is no transmission, only imposition. And imposition does not awaken desire in and of itself toward the imposed-upon object, only misunderstanding and a desire to flee. Thus, as Recalcati holds, for there to be a learner, there must be an eroticism of the word, a passionate desire for the object in question that serves to transmit knowledge. The hour of class is not a warehouse or vehicle of information, but a place of encounter that turns the word into an event. Nowadays that formative word is trivialized; it loses the strength of the desire to teach. It is too reduced and isolated to untangle the teacher's word. "Real teachers are not those who have filled our heads with a pre-constructe--and thus dead--knowledge, but ones who have drilled holes in them to kindle a new desire to know" (Recalcati, 2016, p. 122). In contrast to the Edipus-School, vanished after the blows from the riots of May 1968, and the Narcisus-School, defined by the absence of the father, we now face the possibility of rebuilding a Telemachus-School restoring the generational

difference and the teacher's function as a central figure in the process of eroticizing the world through words. "Class generates erotic bodies from the objects of knowledge, but its effects go beyond knowledge by generating books from the bodies, transforming the body of the beloved into a book" (p. 96). Indeed, teaching consists of coaxing the subject to get out of himself, to ask his own questions and set his own course from which he can take on a destination in the legacy. The teacher's gesture is that of one who knows how to "turn books into erotic bodies, to transform knowledge into an object that causes desire, broadening the horizon of the world, transporting life to other places beyond what has already been seen or known" (p. 98). This eroticism of the word, this love for teaching that opens the subject to desire, produces fortunate encounters and is the generation and opening of cultural horizons as well as the transference of a place for the most personal and intimate word.

Is the risk worth taking? Conservative vocabularies for a progressive idea of public education

The practices I have redescribed in this article are by no means to be understood as a denunciation or vindication (Thoilliez 2019a; Masschelein and Simons, 2013). Rather, I offer them in the sense of rediscovery (Biesta, 2017; Thoilliez, 2019a): resuming these practices, resituating them at the core of teaching, in a Rortyan edifying sense, understood as the effort at "studying our problems, for better comprehending our present circumstances, and creating redescriptions that may help us on the path of inquiry toward overcoming our current difficulties" (Thoilliez, 2020a). They have as well a restorative potential, in the sense of revitalizing teachers' educational work.

When comparing museums with schools to address the practice of conservation in the third section, I have been inclined to present the latter as a safer place than the former, but this does not at all imply that schools are free of dangers. For example, a museum can be a safe place to meet with someone you do not know much, but schools can be the very unsafe place where a child meets with a classmate that bullies

him daily (where the teacher can be blind to all that suffering)[11]. Both museums and schools, share criticisms about how they came to existence, how they reproduce power relationships, or how they deal with the past and novelty. They are, in many ways, ambivalent institutions. Their questionable nature (in the sense that they are open for discussion, their nature is made up of questions) is what make them so interesting. And what is more important here, there is something valuable in the public orientation of their conservative mission. However, this does not make of them institutions less suitable or in less need for continuous renegotiations. It is quite the contrary. In the case of schools, those renegotiations take place within the next teaching practice that was addressed: pass on.

As in any recollection of arguments there is a tendency to make look simpler what it is more complicated. There is for sure some of that comfortable linearity in Bellamy's reconstruction of the triad Descartes-Rousseau-Bourdie that I presented in the fourth section. It cannot be denied poses some problems, such as its excessive Frenchness, and the fact that Bellamy himself is an example of what Arendt insisted not to do: mixing conservative vocabularies that fit well within the need of some restoration in education and use them for political purposes. He was a philosophy teacher, but he is now a professional politician at the EU Parliament (integrated in the Group of the European People's Party). However, the intellectual and unsafe exercise of thinking with some old names for reimagining some new ways of thinking the publicness of education is what has made this experiment so much worthy. Through Bellamy's work it has been argued that constructivism (in the flattened sense I referred to in the second section), which dreams of children self-constructing knowledge from their own interests, negation as a harmful adult influence on the child, and the aspiration of a school to stop its training exercises in elitist culture and to focus instead on preparing competence-wise for the world of real production of work all have their philosophical underpinnings in, respectively, the rationalist origins of modernity, the project of enlightened citizenry, and the affirmation of the suspiciously elitist capitalization and hierarchy of culture as it is transmitted at schools. The phenomena of *innovaphilia* and the eclipse

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[11] In a previous article, I explored the possibility of corrosive and reification practices taking place in school settings, as darker side of their democratizing nature as defended by Dewey (Thoilliez, 2019c).

of transmission threatening "the public" of school education as described in section 1, began with the allegedly progressive[12] project of modernity. Conserve and pass on could be re-suited as teaching practices with the potential to restore the "publicness" of education.

Desire has been the third vertex of my restoration experiment, addressed in the fifth section. Although I have focus on Recalcati's account, he is not the first will certainly not be the last to discuss the complex relation between education and erotism from a psychoanalytical stand. The works of Deborah Britzman, Sharon Todd, or Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, although not examined in the present article, deserve a thorough examination if anyone wants to have a full comprehension of a post-psychoanalytic ethics in education. However, the more conservative bearing of Recalcati's approach, made his work more appropriate for the kind of argument I have tried to elaborate in this article. On a different note, it also needs to be acknowledged that Recalcati's insistence on awakening the student's desire to know resembles to claims of enhancing student's motivation to learn. That is not, however, what Recalcati is trying to do. As Biesta has recently put it, "the challenge of trying to live one's life in a grown-up way, that is, not running behind one's desires but continuously returning to the question whether what one encounters within oneself as a desire is what one should be desiring" (2022, p. 100). For Recalcati too, it is not just about desiring as such, but what is presented as desirable by the teacher, how the teacher embodies the word, so it is desired by the student. Recalcati warns us about the disappearance of the word, to remind us of the hope that it is not too late to take on desire. The desire for knowledge can be internalized as a personal value, as far as its being a true vital recreation of what is received.

Reclaiming conservative vocabularies to restore in an edifying mode the publicness of education is without a doubt a risky experiment: longing for an idealized school from the past (that never existed), educational traditionalism according to which any older school time by was better, romanticization of educational situations via an imaginary peaceful teacher-student-content interaction. Or even the risk of becoming a

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[12] "Progressivism is a tension toward the future, and is in agreement with its own essence that does not know any point of arrival that can put an end to its movement. It will never cease seeing what is real as something to overcome, and therefore as something to be scorned. Any innovation, even the most recent, is quickly scorned for the mere fact that it is now real and no longer just a promise. The faster the pace of technical change, the faster this real rejection" (Bellamy, 2020, 81) See also Bellamy (2021).

"ghostbuster of schooling" (p. 61) as put it by Narodowski (2021) in his skeptical and vigorous attack of some current narratives about the past and future of schools. However, it is precisely because the risk of extinction for schools as we know them is so real, precisely because the publicness of education is on the brink of disappearance, that now it is the right moment to take real risks to reimagine a way for the goods of education to continue to be public via teaching and schooling. The risk the three accounted practices entail is degrading themselves through the path of a fearful nostalgic conservatism. That it is why they need to be practiced while politically avoiding positions of hiding fear for the future and rejection of the present, by faking love for the past. Conserving, passing on and desiring, are teaching practices capable of advancing creative educational conservationism, while avoiding regressive political conservatism. From the consideration of this set of practices, teachers can develop a type of educational work that is not oblivious to the problems of the present, that is far from being afraid of the future nor of what is to come. Practice teaching as an expression of true love of the past, of real care of the present, and of hopeful spirit towards future possibilities incarnated by the new generations.

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The teachers' Pascalian wager. The reasonable folly of education as a public good[1]

La apuesta Pascaliana de los profesores. La locura razonable de la educación como un bien común

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Abstract

The present paper investigates the idea of the teacher qua public official and, in this capacity, as the major vehicle for the defence of education as a public and common good in the era of the second enclosure, dominated by raging privatization. Interweaving political philosophy and educational theory, it first explores the notions of the commons and the public and their significance for the field of education and then it reconstructs the concept of "public officials" through a re-elaboration of some Deweyan tenets in order to show their role as promoters of public goods. It is argued that for teachers being a public official (in the meaning here elaborated) is not a sociological condition but a constitutive trait of their professional practice and an essential element of their moral centre. Accordingly, in the face of the decline of the public and the challenges engendered by the contemporary global educational reform movement with a neoliberal matrix, this way of being needs to be reclaimed against any demoralization, be it in the form of a Pascalian wager in favour of the reasonable folly of education as a public good.

Key words: teachers, public education, public officials, Dewey, Pascal.

Resumen

El presente artículo investiga la idea del profesor como funcionario público y, en esta capacidad, como el principal vehículo para la defensa de la educación como un bien común y público en la época del segundo cercamiento, dominado por una feroz privatización. Entrelazando filosofía política y teoría educativa, explora en primer lugar las nociones de lo común y lo público y su importancia en el campo de la educación, y a continuación reconstruye el concepto de «funcionarios públicos» a través de una reelaboración de varios principios deweyanos a fin de mostrar su papel como promotores de los bienes públicos. Se argumenta que, para los profesores, ser un funcionario público (en el sentido elaborado aquí) no es una condición sociológica, sino un rasgo constitutivo de su práctica profesional y un elemento esencial de su centro moral. En consecuencia, ante el declive de lo público y los retos engendrados por el movimiento global de reforma educativa contemporáneo con una matriz neoliberal, debe recuperarse esta manera de ser contra cualquier desmoralización, aunque sea en forma de una apuesta de Pascal a favor de la locura razonable de la educación como un bien común.

Palabras clave: docentes, educación pública, funcionario público, Dewey, Pascal.

Introduction

There is a sense in which the present paper advances a very simple thesis, viz. a vindication of the significance of teachers qua *public servants* (or *officials* as I will prefer to say for reasons that should become clear in what follows) as a privileged way of addressing the burning issue of defending the principle of "education as a public and common good," to refer to the statement of Goal 1 of the *#LobbyingTeachers* project (see https://lobbyingteachers.com/).

The advocacy of teaching as "public service" is obviously not brand new in the educational debate. In this paper, the argument will be initially developed at the crossroads of educational theory and political philosophy. There are three reasons for this tack: first, as aforementioned, a reference to and a constant interfacing with the main thrust of the *#LobbyingTeachers* project underlies the present reflection and it is

noteworthy that both the name of the project itself and the specification of its purposes harp on a conceptual platform that interweaves the educational and the political vocabularies.

Secondly, this is arguably not a merely stylistic curiosity but rather something to be valorized at the theoretical level: as Axel Honneth (2012; see also Oliverio, 2018) has forcefully highlighted, not only has the contemporary uncoupling of political philosophy and educational theory interrupted the modern tradition (from Kant to Durkheim and Dewey) that interlaced the two dimensions, but this has had as its upshot an impoverishment of the theory of democracy itself. While Honneth focuses on the education of new generations as pivotal for cultivating that "capacity of cooperation and moral self-initiative" which is crucial for "the common action in democratic self-determination" (Honneth, 2012, p. 430), in the context of this paper the dialogue between the two kinds of discourse[2] will concern the notions of "the common(s)" and "the public" as they are (or may be) appropriated within educational theory[3].

Indeed – and this is the third reason – by speaking of "education as a public and common good" the aforementioned Goal 1 postulates a sort of conceptual hendiadys (public *and* common), which is anything but to be taken for granted if we consider the debates in political philosophy. This remark does not amount, however, to a gainsaying of the fruitfulness of the conceptual hendiadys but it is understood as an invitation to delve deeper into it and to construe it in terms of what has been beautifully defined as "the public-private-common triangulation" (Pennacchi, 2012). And it is precisely an exploration of the status of the teacher as a "public official" that will grant a vantage point from which to engage with this triangulation in an educational key, thereby implying, if not an overlapping, at least an intimate interlacement between the notions of the "public" and "common" good when addressing education.

If the first part of my argumentation builds on a dialogue between political philosophy and educational theory culminating in the emphasis

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[2] It would be interesting to explore whether and how far the 'Honnethian' need for a re-coupling of political philosophy and educational theory can be situated within the framework of a post-critical stance in education (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2020). See also their contribution to the present special issue). However, this is not a task that can be undertaken here.

[3] Honneth's argument in many respects may be seen as representative of that instrumentalist take on education that Biesta invites us to go beyond in his paper in this special issue. However, I would tend to argue that the fundamental thrust of Biesta's endeavour and the main concerns of the present paper could ultimately be put in a fruitful dialogue, which should be postponed until another occasion.

on teachers as public officials (in a specific philosophical-educational acceptation), in the second part the focus shifts to an investigation of teachers in the horizon of what we can call their "professional subjectification," to adopt – not without an idiosyncratic twist – a felicitous phrase of Gert Biesta (2014, p. 135), which captures the profoundly moral dimensions of professional teaching practice. Indeed, vindicating the discourse of the "public and common good" represents a denouncement of the raging privatization of the world which we are currently witnessing and which goes hand in hand with the "unbounded individualism" (Pennacchi, 2012, ch. 5) dominating in our societies and infiltrating the school community even when schools remain juridically 'public.' In this respect, it is a genuinely political topic, albeit overflowing with educational resonances. However, this highly political theme will be tackled by marshalling Barber's (2007) reflections on "the infantilizing ethos of capitalism," which ultimately contributes to eroding the significance of teaching as a moral practice and, accordingly, to the "demoralization" of teachers (Santoro, 2018). I will argue that the "recovery of teaching" (Biesta, 2017) entails also the reclaiming of its *public* mission and that the latter belongs to the very subjectification of teachers as professionals. Dialoguing with Santoro's insightful perspective, I will lay an emphasis on the meaning of being a teacher in the era of the privatization of the world (which undermines the common and public character of the professional practice). I will suggest that, in the time of the eclipse of the Public, something like a Pascalian wager in its favour is required from teachers – and, thus, a substantial act that needs to be understood not merely as political but as involving (also) an 'existential thickness'. In present day scenarios, this wager may have become, therefore, an intrinsic vector of the teachers' professional subjectification.

The outlined argumentative architecture will be structured in three sections: in the first, I will briefly reconstruct some contemporary debates in political philosophy that emphasize the *difference* between the vocabulary of the commons and that of the public and I will reconnect them to two recent 'alternative' views of the schooling emerging in educational theory; in the second, I will zoom in on the question of the teacher as a public official, by marshalling a Deweyan tripartite understanding of the office, elaborated elsewhere (Oliverio, 2018). If the first section aims at extricating the two vocabularies of the commons and the public good from the link that the aforementioned hendiadys

assumes, second section re-integrates – via the Deweyan reconstruction of the idea of the 'office' – the two dimensions and the teacher as a public official will be viewed as the instantiation (and the promoter) of education as a common *and* public good. Second section operates as a sort of hinge of the argumentation, insofar as, on the one hand, the profiling of the teacher as a public official will allow us to make sense of the conceptual hendiadys, while not passing over the difference between the two vocabularies in silence (and, in this respect, it looks back to the dialogue with political philosophy); and, on the other, second section will represent a stepping stone to the perspective of the professional subjectification, which will be deployed in the concluding section, where the figure of the public official will be assayed in the light of contemporary challenges which often seem to doom teachers to demoralization. Appealing to a Pascalian wager as a response to this predicament ultimately adds up, therefore, to reclaiming "the reasonable folly" (Cassano, 2004) of education as a public and common good.

The commons and the public: 'enclosed education' vs 'the school as a public issue'?

The question of the common(s) has returned to the centre of political activism and theorizing during the last few decades. Since the epoch-making article of Garrett Hardin (1968) on *The Tragedy of the Commons* (which was not, however, a reflection in political philosophy or practice), through the studies of Elinor Ostrom (1990), up to the most recent theorization (see Dardot & Laval, 2019), the theme has acquired increasing relevance in the economic, philosophical and political debate, linked with worldwide actions in defence of the commons – whether material, like water, or immaterial, like education. It has not been an academic or scholarly fashion but rather a response to "the second enclosure movement" (Boyle, 2003; see also Coccoli, 2019), which is ongoing at a global level through a process of the expropriation of common resources and an incessant thrust towards privatization.

From this perspective, the appeal to education as "a common good" could be considered within the horizon of this endeavour of resistance to contemporary neoliberalism. And yet, the phrase which is the point of the departure of the present paper, viz. "education as a public and

common good," complicates the picture, as it deploys not only the conceptual armoury of the "commons" but also that of "the public." To put it bluntly, the problem is the status of that "and" that links (but also distinguishes) the two adjectives. It may obviously be argued in all legitimacy that both adjectives are to be understood as opposing the privatization of education and they simply reinforce each other so that it is an exercise in hairsplitting to further elaborate on this aspect; however, it is moot whether they may be merely juxtaposed without exploring their relationship. Thus, it may be appropriate to briefly sketch out some recent debates in political philosophy in order to construct a conceptual platform that could help to make sense of that "and" connecting the "common" and the "public" when education is in the spotlight.

To dramatically simplify (and putting in brackets the technicalities alien to the educational interest of this paper) we can distinguish two views. First, there are those (Cacciari, 2010; Mattei, 2012; Coccoli, 2019) who appeal to the idea of "the commons" as an overthrowing and an abandonment of the modern public-private dyad construed as the opposition between the state and the market that "colonizes entirely the imagery, by exhausting respectively the domain of the public and that of the private in a sort of zero sum game" (Mattei, 2012, p. 41)[4] in which alternative understandings seem to be impossible. As Coccoli (2019) has put it, "[t]he suppression of the dimension of the common is at the origin of that complementary opposition of public and private that represents, apparently in a complete way, the political and juridical structure of Western modernity" (p. 186).[5]

This way of framing the opposition, which connects it with the rise of "possessive individualism," would exclude in principle the "qualitative and ecological dimension" (Mattei, 2012, p. 37) of life. By "ecological" is here meant something "organized around a communitarian structure in equilibrium, in which the whole (the community) is not reduced to the aggregation of its parts (the individuals) but presents its own features, which receive their meanings precisely from its capacity to satisfy common needs" (*Ibidem*). In such an ecological model, the qualitative dimension prevails over the quantitative and the being-together over

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[4] All translations of passages from non-English works are the author's.
[5] As Bobbio (1995, ch. 1) has famously argued the private-public distinction should be traced back to the *Corpus iuris Iustinianeum* and, therefore, it is not a modern invention. For a fruitful discussion of this distinction from the perspective of philosophy of education, see Higgins (2018).

the possessing of something alone: "The common good, indeed, exists only in a qualitative relationship. We do not «have» a common good (an ecosystem (...)) but, in a certain sense, we «are» (participants in) the common good ((...) we are part of an ecosystem)" (ibid., p. 57).

The first casualty of this "great transformation" – from the ecological being in a communitarian structure to possessive individualism, from the qualitative to the quantitative – is the "general intelligence presiding over the ecological exchanges of production" (Ibid., p. 38). Remarkably, in this argumentation against modernity and its upshots, pre-modern ways of living are indicated, if not as a model to recover, at least as an option that demonstrates the limitations of the modern outlook. In this sense, some have spoken of a form of "neo-mediaevalism." What concerns us here, however, is that in this view the notion of "the common" is *not* co-extensive with that of the public, actually representing an alternative to it, as it aspires to go beyond modern dualisms (ultimately rooted in the subject/object dichotomy).

This approach has been criticized as a return to "a pre-modern worldview, a romantic regression to the Middle Ages, seen as the place of a happy and ecologically balanced communitarian life" (Vitale, 2013, p. 7) and, thus, a second – and different – view of the discourse of the commons has been advanced. While concurring with the attack on the rugged individualism and privatization taking place in contemporary societies, which is the main target of the heralds of the return to the commons, this second stance recoils from ways of thinking that might put the entire modern project at risk and it reclaims the permanent value of the Enlightenment heritage, consisting in the advocacy of the significance of "different viewpoints, the willingness to dialogue in a public scene and the capacity of self-scrutiny of one's own convictions" (Ibid., p. 8). In other words, the fear is that the appeal to communitarian life scotomizes the perils of the dynamics of exclusion, conformism and suppression of differences that the evoked ecologically balanced community (conceived of as a sort of *Gemeinschaft*) may conceal.[6] The common good should be re-interpreted, instead, as "the general interest of a political collectivity that is articulate and conflictual [and should be read] as that kernel of

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[6] In order to avoid oversimplifications and ossified dichotomies, it should be noted that also authors tendentially belonging to the first camp here examined have recognized this risk (see Coccoli, 2019, p. 355).

shared interests at the global, universal (I would say cosmopolitan) level" (Ibid., p. 67).[7]

What flummoxes the critics of the most radical appeal to the commons is that the call for an ecological stance seems to result in an anti-science attitude and in a refusal of the public sphere as modernity has thought of it, viz. as the domain of the exercise of a dialogical and argumentative reflectivity, which may (and should) be agonistic, thereby warding off the risks of fundamentalism (Pennacchi, 2012, p. 1512). Moreover, against the cult of the immediacy of a communitarian life one should reclaim the merit of the mediation of the Public – bearing in mind that, if "the Public is not identical with the state, the state has been decisive for the development of the Public and of the public sphere" (Ibid., p. 1670). Accordingly, "the common – the rethinking of which allows us to escape from the blunt private-public dichotomization (on which that of the state-market is modelled) – lives in a triangular scheme and dies if it claims to devour and swallow up any other dimensions, by putting itself forward as the only pole, thus transformed into an absolute" (ibid., p. 1768).

While it can be plausibly argued that it is precisely the "semantic nebulosity" of the notion of "the commons" that has turned it into an "empty signifier," thereby granting it the power of sustaining a series of important and seemingly disparate struggles the world over (Coccoli, 2019, p. 320), I have wanted to dwell upon the two aforementioned different positions to let the relevance of the conceptual hendiadys stand out. On the one hand, there are those who embrace the vocabulary of "the commons" as staunchly alternative to that of "the public," the latter being taken as coextensive with a modern mindset which has been making our societies unsustainable in any respect; on the other, there are those who, while agreeing upon many concerns of the advocates of the commons, tend to spot some dangers in endorsing a total abandonment of the modern framework (especially regarding the reference to a public sphere) as it may result in most unwelcome regressive movements and in a sort of nostalgic yearning for organicist communities. In the reading here proposed, the former camp sees the public as ultimately accomplice with the gesture of the "enclosure" – of which the contemporary process of privatization would be a calamitous renewal – and, accordingly, they

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[7] I cannot expatiate on this point here, but a claim like that in the quotation may be easily read through a Deweyan lens (see especially the § 5 of chapter 7 of *Democracy and Education*).

open up a chasm between the commons and the public, whereas their critics insist on the need to combine the two vocabularies, by salvaging the best of that of the public.

It would be foolhardy to claim that in present day educational theory we can identify positions that perfectly match the two here outlined. However, the work of Robbie McClintock (2012) represents what may be the most substantial and thought-provoking engagement with the topic of the commons and its reverberations on education. Without rehearsing here his complex and sophisticated theoretical device, I will confine myself to pinpointing only a couple of aspects: first, while cognizant of the aforementioned contemporary revival of the theme of the commons (ibid., pp. 82-84 for his remarks on Hardin and Ostrom), the US educationalist seems to undertake a more wide-ranging appropriation of the issue, by suggesting the notion of the *conceptual enclosure*: "An observer postulated boundaries in time and space enabling him to concentrate on what lay within them, to inventory the various attributes of things observed there, and to search for causal relationships determining how one thing within the bounded space acted on another there according to a temporal sequence" (ibid., p. 28). This idea is intimately bound with that of "area mapping," construed as the act of "establish[ing] boundaries differentiating what lay within the boundaries from what lay without" (ibid., p. 31) and as "the way of thinking in what was then called the modern era, the print era, what we now see as the era of enclosure" (Ibid., p. 32).[8] In this sense, modernity itself is an "era of enclosure" not only at the economic and political levels but also in its innermost manners of relating to the world. In this horizon, it is not therefore surprising that "[n]umerous acts of conceptual enclosure provided most people the basic generative metaphor for thinking about schools and what took place within them. (…) *Conceptual enclosure was an essential step in the construction of modern schooling*" (ibid., pp. 28-29. Emphasis added). It is not far-fetched to draw the conclusion that, in McClintock's view, the modern (compulsory) schooling is fundamentally "enclosed" education:

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[8] McClintock's reflection is fictionally situated within a sort of utopian narrative and this explains the use of the verbal tenses: the past refers to our age, the present, instead, to 2162 which is the year in which the author(s) of the thoughts, problematizations etc. presented in the volume is/are imagined to live.

Schools enclosed educative activities conducted by teachers guided by the curriculum, with its scope and sequence, acting on groups of children, graded by age and other characteristics. Educators defined outcomes and postulated causes; and then they devised accounts of how the causes operated and the outcomes came to be. Virtually everything that people had to say about the educational aspects of human life involved the demarcation of boundaries enclosing instructional work, classifying the salient characteristics that children should manifest and achieve within the spaces of the classroom and the duration of the lesson (McClintock, 2012, p. 43).

Hence, in order to revive the spirit of the commons (by taking advantage of the technological possibilities offered by media other than print and its 'area mapping' style), we should disengage (= dis-enclose) education from schooling in its modern version:

In a substantial future, one different from an extension of the present, the educational role of the schools would become highly contingent. It would depend significantly on whether people judged schooling inimical or supportive to the emergence of important capabilities in their lives. (…) If an alternative system of education were to emerge, it would provide persons of all ages with sophisticated resources to support the self-organization of human capacities taking place in their lives (McClintock, 2012, p. 159. Emphasis added).

Some caveats are in order: first, as aforementioned, it would be reckless to consider McClintock's elaborate positions as the simple educational counterpart of the most radical version of the appeal to the commons. To mention only one aspect, if the advocates of the latter often seem to flirt with an organicist mindset, nothing is more alien to the US educationalist who, while endeavouring to go beyond the deadlock caused by the conceptual enclosure of modernity, does not indulge in any backward-looking escapism and, indeed, deploys ingenious readings of Kant and Hegel in order to provide a different spin to the modern project. Secondly, at the typically educational level, mine might have been an oversimplifying and uncharitable rendering of McClintock's views about schooling as enclosed education, insofar as his attack could be not so much on the school device *per se* but on that specific configuration that it

has assumed in modern times. And yet, one cannot resist the impression that ultimately his way of creatively appropriating the themes of the enclosure and the commons in an educational key risks amounting to a dismantling of the very mission of the school.

Is a consideration of education as a common good doomed to a demise of the scholastic project as a whole? This does not seem to be the upshot of the reflection of Masschelein and Simons (2013) who arrive at a relaunching of the *raison d'être* of the school. It is noteworthy that this happens through a deployment of the vocabulary of the public, which is mobilized to make sense of the innermost *eidos* of the school:

> Important here is that it is precisely these public things – which, being public, are thus available for free and novel use – that provide the young generation with the opportunity to experience themselves as a new generation. The typical scholastic experience – the experience that is made possible by the school – is exactly that confrontation with public things made available for free and novel use (Masschelein and Simons, 2013, p. 38).

It is true that the Belgian educationalists' understanding of the notion of "public" cannot be overlapped with that introduced earlier and has rather to do with an appropriation of Rancièrian and Agambenian motifs. However, what I am interested in highlighting is that Masschelein and Simons portray the school as a third space in comparison with the private realm of the household and the community as the domain of what is already common: "A community of students is a unique community; it is a community of people who have nothing (yet) in common, but by confronting what is brought to the table, its members can experience what it means to share something and activate their ability to renew the world" (Masschelein and Simons, 2013, p. 73). Thus, the scholastic experience promotes a different kind of community thanks to the engagement with what is made public, that is, detached by common usage and turned into something to study. In this sense, the scholastic device as the place of collective study[9] is what makes possible the instauration of the 'and' of the conceptual hendiadys (common *and* public good).

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[9] It is to remark that, while McClintock (1971) has been one of the staunchest advocates of the notion of study, he seems fundamentally to play it out against the school (essentially reduced to an instructional machine).

Through Masschelein and Simons we can attain a purely pedagogical view of the conceptual hendiadys as quintessentially inscribed in the scholastic experience itself. In the wake of the previous explorations in political philosophy, however, the present argumentative trajectory will address this thematic constellation turning to a more specific question: in what sense do teachers as professionals inhabit that triangulation (private-common-public) which recognizes the rights of the commons, without sacrificing the significance of the public on their altar? In what sense do they contribute to furthering the link that connects and distinguishes the public *and* common good that education is? In what sense is this the pith and core of their mission qua teachers?

In the next section, I would like to outline briefly a Deweyan version of the triangulation I have spoken about as the horizon within which to situate the task of the teachers.[10] I will endeavour to delineate the figure of the teacher as a *public official* who, precisely in this capacity, attends to the preservation of the value of education as a public *and* common good. Or to put it succinctly: endorsing the movement of the commons against that of "the second enclosure" does not need, at the educational level, to lead to a demise of the scholastic project but rather to a re-affirmation of teaching as a public service[11].

The teacher as a public official

We owe to Philippe Meirieu (2008) an interesting reflection on the teacher as a public servant. His point of departure is that "in principle, in a School worthy of the name, a true 'master' can only be so legitimately if he is a 'public servant'"[12] (p. 1) insofar as he[13] promotes the advancement from the private to the public space. Indeed, for the French educationalist,

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[10] Due to the constraints of space, I will not be able to show to what extent Dewey's tenets would still be topical for the debate about the commons at a typically political level . See Honneth's (1998) re-appraisal of Dewey's view of the Public as still one of the most promising options. For a brilliant discussion (along different lines) of the contribution of Honneth to a reconstruction of Dewey's educational thought, see Thoilliez (2019).

[11] I see the endeavour here undertaken as in accordance, in many respects, with the fundamental thrust of the ideas of Maria Mendel and Tomasz Szkudlarek in their contribution to this special issue.

[12] For the English version of Meirieu's paper I will draw upon that retrievable on his website (http://meirieu.com/ARTICLES/autorite_english.pdf).

[13] When presenting and discussing Meirieu's reflections on the teacher as a public servant, I will use

"[t]he association of the teacher's authority with his status as public servant frees him from political contingencies and enables him to put into perspective the technocratic pressures which often hem him in. It records his subject knowledge and his administrative obligations within a perspective which gives them meaning. (…) In short it confers upon him an identity by placing him in a valuable verticality: a verticality which enables him to escape the horizontality of the scholastic market" (Meirieu, 2008, p. 2).

The notion of verticality is strategic in Meirieu's argument, which puts a strong accent on the "lack of symmetry between pupils and educators" (p. 9) so that the school cannot be a "democratic institution" but is and must be "a place where democracy is learned" (*Ibidem*). This does not imply any nostalgia for the old-fashioned kind of legitimacy of the teachers' role, based on a verticality construed as indisputable authority; however, Meirieu draws our attention to the fact that no teaching is possible without a kind of verticality which cannot be replaced either with the ability to manage the difficult situations in the school and a technical view of professionalism or with "corporate reactions" (p. 4).

But what kind of verticality is possible in the era of democracy, which seems to rather invoke the embracement of purely horizontal relationships? The answer of Meirieu reads as follows: "*In this case it is not the democratic ideal which represents verticality, but which makes democracy possible*: the founding and improving of those institutions which establish the 'common good', and the education of our children to enable them to live within these institutions and to make them progress. *Verticality is the state of a horizontality which is not a war of individualities*. And, in this respect, the School can embody such a verticality: insofar as it is not reduced to a sophisticated system for managing change, or to a juxtaposition of fragmented teaching (…)" (p. 7. Emphasis in the original). Thus, it is the school that, in a sense, institutes that verticality without which we would be delivered to merely marketized relationships or to "those conflicts inherent in a horizontality with no references" (p. 8). And it is from this perspective that the teacher

the masculine pronoun in accordance with his text.

is a "public servant," insofar as he contributes to the building up of the public space[14].

These remarks of Meirieu are significant because he is able to address the question of the status of the teacher as a public servant not in a sociological but in an educational way: being a public servant is not merely a social condition but it belongs to the very definition of what being a true teacher means. It is not therefore ancillary to the being-a-teacher but part and parcel of it. Moreover, situating the interpretation of the-teacher-as-a-public-servant within the horizon of the issue of verticality is a crucial move not only because it does away with many contemporary shallow pedagogical mantras but because it places the question of being-a-teacher in a non-technocratic perspective: when the inquiry into what being a teacher means and implies is at stake, the reference to strategies of management of the school environment and relationships, issues of efficacy and effectiveness and methodological 'recipes' are not sufficient, important as they may be.

And yet, Meirieu's articulation of the understanding of public service may not be fully satisfactory, as it remains ensnared in some modern dichotomies and mindsets.[15] His emphasis on the construction of the public space is welcome but it risks bypassing some of the concerns of the advocates of the commons, while we need a view of the public service that situates it within the aforementioned triangulation (private-common-public). In the rest of this section, I would like to suggest that some Deweyan tenets can offer a perspective which maintains the positive aspects of Meirieu's conceptual platform but completes it along the lines sketched out in the first section. This interpretive move will require a shift from the vocabulary of the "public service" to that of the "public office."

To begin with, we should recall how Dewey addresses the issue of the public. When distinguishing it from the private, he takes his cue from a fairly simple example, namely the difference between "private and public buildings, private and public schools, private paths and public highways, private assets and public funds, private persons and public officials. It is

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[14] I would suggest reading Bianca Thoilliez's elegant arguments about the three teaching practices of conserving, passing on and desiring as an extremely interesting and promising way of pedagogically articulating this verticality (see her contribution to this special issue).

[15] See Meirieu's explicit reference to Kant (p. 9) and the implicit one present in the idea of an education for democracy. On Kant as representative of the idea of education for democracy see Biesta (2006, ch. 6).

our thesis that in this distinction we find the key to the nature and office of the state" (LW 2: 245)[16]. This almost incidental statement is noteworthy because Dewey indirectly establishes a sort of complete identification between 'public' and 'official' (if private *vs* public; and private *vs* official; then public = official). The scope of this connection is, however, soon qualified:

> It is not without significance that etymologically "private" is defined in opposition to "official," a private person being one deprived of public position. *The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for. Officials are those who look out for and take care of the interests thus affected.* Since those who are indirectly affected are not direct participants in the transactions in question, it is necessary that certain persons be set apart to represent them, and see to it that their interests are conserved and protected. (LW 2: 245-246. Emphasis added)

This specification prevents a simple equivalence: the public is not completely to be identified with the official but it is to be understood as a domain which is *organized by means of officials*. The public is the name selected for "[t]hose indirectly and seriously affected for good or for evil [who] form a group distinctive enough to require recognition and a name" (LW 2: 257). The public and the official would then be two notions *intimately related rather than completely identified*.

And yet, things are not so plain, above all in a democratic state. Indeed, when suggesting that a citizen-voter is an "official of the public as much as (...) a senator or sheriff" (LW: 282), is not Dewey postulating that in a democracy the relationship between 'the public' and the 'official' tends asymptotically to become identified, so that each and every one is an official of the public? One could object that Dewey is here speaking about the political realm and this statement is exclusively the expression of his aspiration to more participatory forms of democracy. However, if we take seriously that asymptotical tendency, do we not arrive at the

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[16] Citations of the works of Dewey are to the critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press. Volume and page numbers follow the initials of the series. Abbreviations for the volumes used are: EW *The Early Works (1882–1898)*; MW *The Middle Works (1899–1924)*; LW *The Later Works (1925–1953)*.

dissolution of the role of teachers as public officials, namely people dedicated to the organization of the public in the specific domain of education (or, to put it more accurately, of formal education)? Would it be a position so distant from McClintock's, albeit attained through a different argumentative path?

In comparison with this (plausible) interpretation, I would insist that Dewey – admittedly approached through a hermeneutical twist – provides us with conceptual tools to think of the teacher as a public official, while also taking into consideration some of the dimensions highlighted by the advocates of the commons. In particular, I will refer to some aspects of the tridimensional view of the "office" elaborated elsewhere in reference to Dewey (Oliverio, 2014, 2018), by distinguishing between $officium_0$, $officium_1$, and $officium_2$.[17]

I will touch only on the first two dimensions. In the first text in which the question of the office is addressed, Cicero's homonymous treatise, the notion refers to an anthropological plane.[18] I cannot expatiate here showing in detail how Cicero's tenets can be read through a Deweyan lens but I will only specify that by $officium_0$ I refer to that dimension which (my Deweyan) Cicero connects with the emergence of the mind and of the sphere of meaning as related to life in common and association (*societas vitae*) and to language/communication (*oratio*). $Officium_0$ is thus construed as the condition of possibility for the rise of a human life as something not merely lived and sensed but as something in which things, insofar as they are meaning-ful, can (and should) be 'managed,' 'ruled' (Cicero speaks of *res gerenda*) and life is 'instituted' as life in common (*ad institutionem vitae communis*, we read in his *De officiis*). It is to note that community is not already there but we should look at this movement the other way round. In Deweyan terms: "There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common" (MW 9, p. 7). In this respect, despite the possibly infelicitous use of the verb "to possess," Dewey's tenets could resonate with some relevant themes put forward by the theoreticians of

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[17]   While built on the mentioned tridimensional model, the argument here presented actually deviates in some points from the previous treatment of the topic. However, I cannot linger over this difference.

[18]   Agamben (2012, p. 89) has sagaciously pointed out this aspect within a different kind of inquiry.

the commons but, at the same time, he would not lapse into a conception of the community as a sort of closed *Gemeinschaft*, which suppresses variety and individuality.

Moreover, while Dewey would recognize this backdrop as vital, he would not deem it to be exhaustive of the life in common, especially in a complex society. It is here that the dimension of $officium_1$ steps in. This is the dimension of the *office* of the *officials* as those who take care of the indirect consequences and thus promote the organization of the domain of the public. In the reading here advanced, being an official in reference to a specific area of social life entails systematically caring for the significance of that area for the welfare of the entire common life, way beyond immediate interests.

The 'level' of $officium_0$ as the institution of the life in common is the moment of communication as participation, which ultimately consists in the relationships between old and new generations (MW9, ch. 1, §§ 1-2). It has, therefore, a constitutive educational tenor, which is reconstructed and reinforced by teachers as officials, once the complexity of society demands the establishment of formal education and the school as a special social environment. Accordingly, I would suggest reading Dewey's insistence on the need for formal education not to decay into scholasticism (in the derogatory meaning of the word) not as an appeal to a liquidation of the school but as the highlighting of the reconstruction-in-continuity obtaining between $offcium_0$ and $officium_1$. To re-adapt Meirieu's tenets, we have to do, therefore, with a movement of verticality ($officium_1$) that helps to re-organize the horizontal relationships. However, this movement is not the breaking in of something completely unrelated to what 'precedes' ($officium_0$) but – in the logic of the 'dimensions' of the office – it is a renewal at a different level (including now a 'public' dimension) of the dynamics of the instauration of the life in common.

In this sense, understanding teachers as officials means stressing their role as those who preserve the meaning of education as "a common *and* public good." Leaving the plane of abstract conceptualizations and referring them back to contemporary challenges, it means that teachers' efforts to be faithful to the integrity of their profession implies (also) a kind of political role. We can capture the latter with the words of Dewey when reflecting on *The Crisis of Education* (LW 9, pp. 112-126) in the troubles of the 1930s. I will quote at some length a magnificent passage

from this text, as it illustrates the position which I am endeavouring to outline by reclaiming the role of the teachers as officials:

> (…) if the teaching body yields without a fight to show the difference between true and false economy, without an effort to show up the motives of organized finance, the teachers will not only harm themselves and the cause of education, but will also become the accomplices of politicians in continuing to do business in the old way at the old stand. Above all, *it behooves the teachers in behalf of the community, of the educational function which they serve,* and not merely because of their personal interest in a fit wage for what they do--self respecting and honorable as is that motive--*to make clear beyond a peradventure that public education is not a business carried on for pecuniary profit, that it is not therefore an occupation to be measured by the standards which the bankers and real estate men and the big industrialists seek for themselves* in working for personal gain and measuring success and failure by the ledger balance, but that money spent on education is a social investment--an investment in future well being, moral, economic, physical, and intellectual, of the country. *Teachers are simply means, agents in this social work. They are performing the most important public duty now performed by any one group in society. Any claims which they can rightfully make are not made in behalf of themselves as private persons, but in behalf of society and the nation*. These will be what they are and are not in the future largely because of what is done and not done in this day and generation in the schools of the country. (Ibid., p. 123. Emphasis added)

The Deweyan inflection of the conceptual hendiadys (common *and* public) lies, therefore, in the interweaving of $officium_0$ and $officium_1$, viz. in the recognition, on the one hand, that the institution of the common life is the inescapable backdrop for any kind of office (in the sense of $officium_1$), unless it finally deteriorates into mere officialdom[19]; and, on the other, that $officium_0$ – as being a participant in a common good/life – may be insufficient to counter phenomena regarding indirect

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[19] By officialdom I refer to the bureaucratic understanding of the role of the teacher as a public official which is poles apart from the view here advocated, which refers to a political and moral dimension.

consequences and, thus, reclaiming the consolidation of a public space. Accordingly, to bring the era of enclosure to an end in education should not amount to dismantling the school but to recovering its significance as "a public issue" (Masschelein & Simons, 2013).

If the Deweyan response to the crisis of education – in the aforementioned passage – consists fundamentally in a call for a sort of political engagement of teachers as public officials (thereby offering an instantiation of that coupling of politics and education whose need Honneth has recently reclaimed), in the following I will follow a different (but complementary) path: I will focus on the role of public officials as consubstantial to the very professional practice of teachers and, thus, to their professional subjectification. This shift of focus is related to some contemporary phenomena that impact on the very fabric of the communication between the old and young generations and make harder the struggles of teachers when pursuing their mission. It is to this that we have now to turn our attention.

The wager on the public beyond the demoralization of the teachers

Dewey may have seen it coming: in the aftermath of the Second World War he presciently diagnosed a "retreat to individualism" as a "crisis in human history" (LW 15, pp. 210-223), largely relying upon one of the sources of the contemporary discourse about the commons (namely Polanyi's [2002] *The Great Transformation*). However, he could not anticipate what we may call with a touch of irony "infantilism as the highest stage of capitalism," to re-adapt a Lenin title. I am referring to the brilliant analysis that Barber (2007) has dedicated to "the infantilizing ethos of capitalism." I will not be able to depict the whole of his multifaceted examination but I will unravel only some thematic threads relevant for the present reflection.

His point of departure is the "ethos of induced childishness[,] an infantilization that is closely tied to the demands of consumer capitalism in a global market economy" (Barber, 2007, p. 3). This jeopardizes the democratic project, insofar as, "many of our primary business, educational, and governmental institutions are consciously and purposefully engaged in infantilization and as a consequence (...) we are vulnerable to

such associated practices as privatization and branding (…) Thus, our democracy is little by little corrupted, our republican realm of public goods and public citizens is gradually privatized" (pp. 12 and 20).

To make his point clear Barber signals the existence of a clear gulf between a consumerist and a democratic ethos and, significantly, he matches this distinction with that obtaining between childishness/ infantilism and grown-up-ness:

> Citizens are grown-ups. Consumers are kids (…) Grown-up citizens exercise legitimate collective power and enjoy real public liberty. Consumers exercise trivial choice and enjoy pretend freedom. Consumers even when childish have a place in a free society and express one part of what it means to live freely. But they do not and cannot define civil liberty. When they are defined as doing so, free society is put at risk. Privatization does not just reenforce infantilization: in the realm of politics, it is its realization (Barber, 2007, p. 162).

Barber's argumentation is teeming with references to education, although fundamentally his treatment of it is cursory. However, it is noteworthy how far his reflections may resonate with some influential ideas of the contemporary debate. As early as in 2001, by mobilizing Arendtian categories, Jan Masschelein – from a different perspective – indicated how far the discourse of the learning society, which has incessantly monopolized educational theorizing and practice, is accomplice with the ethos of *animal laborans* and the circuit labour/ consumption, which impedes any emergence of a public domain. While Masschelein appropriately highlights that this predominance ultimately amounts to a logic of survival, we can say that the phenomena portrayed by Barber are the other side – seemingly more cheerful and happy-go-lucky – of the same process of the erosion of the public. On the other hand, Biesta's (2017, p. 4) identification of the task of education with the effort "to mak[e] the grown-up existence of another human being in and with the world possible" provides us with conceptual tools to meet – in a genuinely educational way – the challenges depicted by Barber. Moreover, Biesta's (2017, p. 18) emphasis on the contrast between being subject to one's own desires and becoming a subject of one's own desires and on the need to shift from desires (as impulses) to desirability is key

to thinking of an education which is not subjugated to the infantilizing ethos but endeavours to reclaim the democratic project in a contemporary scenario.

Due to the main thrust of the present paper, I will approach Barber's tenets from a slightly different vantage point, while maintaining as a necessary background the (admittedly sketchy) remarks of the previous paragraph. First of all, on account of the tripod of "infantilization, privatization, and civic schizophrenia" (Barber, 2007, p. 260) it is to highlight that "[n]ow even democratic models of citizenship are subordinated to parent-child paradigms" (p. 28)[20] and "[p]rivatization demeans the 'us' as an 'it' (big government, bureaucracy, 'them') and imagines that consumers and citizens are the same thing" (p. 150). Both movements (the subordination of any public practice to the parent-child paradigm and the cancellation of the public "us") are, to adopt the vocabulary introduced in the second section, the breaking of the interlacement-through-difference between $officium_o$ (= the institution of a life in common) and $officium_1$ (= the role of officials as those who contribute to shaping a public space); such a breaking, while claiming to dissolve the role of $officium_1$ in favour of an increase of the power of personal choice, finally evaporates also $officium_o$: indeed, what kind of institution of common life is possible when privatization obtains? In the vocabulary of Meirieu, it is the verticality of $officium_1$ that is necessary to avoid an unstructured horizontality.

At the same time, by disbanding $officium_1$ any space of mediation as a domain of reflectivity is not only made impossible but even seen as an attack on the immediacy of the satisfaction of one's own desires and on what is taken as "freedom," whereas,

> "[t]o be politically relevant, liberty in our era must be experienced as positive rather than negative, must be public rather than private. This means education for liberty must also be public rather than private. Citizens cannot be understood as mere consumers because individual desire is not the same thing as common ground and public goods are always something more than an aggregation of private wants" (Barber, 2007, p. 126).

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[20] For how the parent-child relationship can – and, indeed, should – enter into a reflection on education as a common and public good and not be merely dismissed as a negative model, see the brilliant argument in Ramaekers and Hodgson's paper in this special issue.

The logic of the consumerist ethos builds on the deletion of second-order desires in favour of the undisputed dominion of first-order desires (to stick to a distinction of Frankfurt (1971) akin to Biesta's (2017) opposition between desire and desirability). In contrast, the democratic ethos thrives on the education of people who cultivate (the ability for) second-order desires and on forms of relationships that make this possible. A caveat is appropriate: first-order desires, as they are frantically fueled by a consumerist ethos, are not simply a manifestation of $officium_o$ as the latter, *qua* a kind of *officium*, is geared to the institution of a life in common, whereas a consumerist ethos finally liquefies it. For this reason, the bankruptcy of the public (its corrosion into an "it" instead of an 'us' and the interwoven reduction of the officials to a "them" who are experienced as obstacles to the full enjoyment of one's desires) backfires on $officium_o$; in its turn, as aforementioned, a kind of $officium_1$, merely exercised in a way ultimately antithetical to $officium_o$ would decay to mere officialdom. In other words, the tripartite model of the office prevents us from creating a rift between the dimensions of the life in common and that of the formation of the public; it allows us to operate in the horizon of the aforementioned triangulation, as has been re-interpreted in the Deweyan key, and thus to preserve the value of some intuitions of the advocates of the commons, without ceding to their excesses.

The portrayed social constellation has calamitous consequences for teaching as a profession. In the age of GERM (Global Educational Reform Movement) the "choice" (a typical mantra of consumerist capitalism) is one of the main features modelling educational practices (Sahlberg, 2016, pp. 133-134) and, moreover, it is sustained by the emphasis on accountability ruled by an "odd combination of marketized individualism and central control" (Biesta, 2010, p. 56), that is, in the vocabulary of this paper, of infantilized individualism and officialdom, in which both $officium_1$ and, finally, $officium_o$ disappear. Teachers risk losing (or have they already lost?) their role as public officials in the strong meaning of $officium_1$. To harp on Santoro's (2018) categories, this may result in a degradation of the profession both in terms of the "harm caused to the students" (by being compelled to accept the practices dictated by GERM) and of the sense of "unfaithfulness to the integrity of teaching." The final upshot of this process could be what Santoro calls "demoralization," insightfully distinguishing it from burn-out (as a psychological notion).

I want to appropriate (possibly with a grain of idiosyncratic interpretation) Santoro's argument by stating that the teachers' demoralization is the consequence of the lost access to what Albert Hirschman (2002) defines as "public happiness," which accompanies any public action:

> One of the major attractions of public action is the exact opposite of the most fundamental characteristic of private pleasures under modem conditions: while the pursuit of the latter through the production of income (work) is clearly marked off from the eventual enjoyment of these pleasures, there is no such clear distinction at all between the pursuit of the public happiness and the attainment of it. (...) striving for the public happiness (in some concrete respect) and attaining it cannot be neatly separated. Indeed, the very act of going after the public happiness is often the next best thing to actually having that happiness (and sometimes not even the next best thing, but much the best thing of the whole process (...)). Public-oriented action belongs, in this as in other respects, to a group of human activities that includes the search for community, beauty, knowledge, and salvation. All these activities "carry their own reward," as goes the somewhat trite phrase. (p. 950)

In the reading here offered, Hirschman thereby explains what would appear to be sheer folly in the utilitarian logic typical of the social sciences, namely the commitment to public action and, in the present context, to teaching as public action (to the extent that it remains of such a kind), despite the fact that many 'practical' reasons could suggest undertaking other careers.

Remarkably, Hirschman illustrates his point by quoting a thought of Blaise Pascal about the search for God and this leads me to my final point: as operating in the horizon of the public in the time of its decline (Marquand, 2004; see also Biesta, 2012) is comparable with the act of believing in God in the epoch of His hiddenness (Goldmann, 2013), the logic presiding over Pascal's wager (Oliverio, 2002) can be read into the structure of the (contemporary) commitment of teachers to the public. Indeed, as Franco Cassano (2004, p. 59) has wonderfully put it, "wagering means wagering that God [or the public: *addition of the present author*] is not dead but only hidden and that as of now the only

way of representing it is that of proving, through one's own behaviour, that the finite [or the private: *addition of the present author*] may not be everything."

From this perspective, this wager is intrinsic to what Santoro (2018, p. 34 ff.) calls the teacher's "moral center." Without being allowed to investigate here the technicalities of Pascal's reasoning, it is important to specify that, if we stick to his views, wagering (on the public) – seemingly against all odds – is not a game of chance but it is a decision taken by marshalling the mathematical explanations elaborated by the French philosopher to demonstrate the reasonableness of 'working for the uncertain' (see Oliverio, 2002, esp. pp. 337 ff.). Hence, however risky, the folly of education as a public good is reasonable; it appeals to teachers as officials (in the sense of *officium$_1$*), if we do not want that the call for a dis-enclosed education (possibly sensible in other respects) winds up colluding with the pressures of the infantilizing ethos of consumerist capitalism.

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Teacherly gestures as an ontological dimension of politics: On the need of commonising in an age of pervasive privatization[1]

Gestos docentes como una dimensión ontológica de la política: sobre la necesidad de comunizar en una era de privatización generalizada

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Abstract

In this article we argue that enacting a public sphere requires teacherly gestures. Starting from the thesis that politics and education are two separate but interrelated spheres of human life, we investigate the ways these two spheres relate with each other, beyond a functional or instrumental understanding of their relation. Performing teacherly gestures by those who are gathered around some-thing is a necessary condition for making this particular matter into a common concern, i.e., making it public.

Keywords: commonising, teacherly gestures, democracy, public sphere.

Resumen

En este artículo argumentamos que la constitución de una esfera pública precisa de gestos docentes. Partiendo de la tesis de que la política y la educación son dos esferas separadas pero interrelacionadas de la vida humana, investigamos las formas en que estas dos esferas se relacionan entre sí, más allá de una comprensión funcional o instrumental de su relación. La realización de gestos docentes por parte de aquellos reunidos en torno a alguna cosa es una condición necesaria para convertir ese asunto particular en una inquietud común, es decir, hacerlo público.

Palabras clave: comunizar, gestos docentes, democracia, esfera pública.

Education and politics: differences, relations, commonalities

In this paper we want to develop a new direction for thinking about the *public* role of the teacher and of teaching. This is an old discussion within the field of educational philosophy and theory, where the link between the public and teaching is predominantly considered in one of the two following ways: either from the traditionalist perspective that the teacher should introduce the new generation into an established world of culture (Feinberg 2016)[2] or from the critical-pedagogical view that the teacher should position herself as a critical intellectual (Cf. Giroux 1997, 2011 etc.). According to the last point of view, teachers are expected to help their students develop a consciousness of existing forms of oppression (and their role in it) as well as a strong critical and democratic attitude; moreover teachers have to behave in a critical, pluralistic and anti-discriminatory way– possibly engaging themselves and their students in political struggles pertaining to the most fundamental societal issues, such as intolerable forms of economic inequality, oppression of minorities and structural societal violence. As we have argued elsewhere (Vlieghe & Zamojski 2019), we regard both views as coming down to an undoubtedly well-meant, but *dangerous confusion of politics and education.*

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[2] As Feinberg (2016: 16) puts it: "The unique mission of a public education […] is to reproduce a civic public"

Our point here is not to deny the political (or the economic, cultural, etc.) significance of education. Rather, we want to explore the idea that one cannot speak of a relation between education and politics without acknowledging that these are two different things. That this is the case seems obvious at the *ontic* level of practices (e.g., teaching is something different from running a political campaign) or processes (e.g., learning how to read is something different than making a decision by voting). However, education and politics differ also at the *ontological*[3] level, i.e., in the way they frame a different relation of humans with being. Following Arendt (1958; 1961) it can be argued that ontologically speaking, education and politics are two distinct spheres of human life. *Education* is a response to the fact of *natality*, i.e., the coming of new born children into an existing world to which they need to be introduced by the adult generation. Therefore, Arendt claims, education is a sphere of life where a representative of the existing generation introduces newcomers into the old world in such a way that this new generation could begin with this world anew, i.e., they can invent, design, and introduce their ideas for new beginnings, so that they potentially renew the world we all inhabit. *Politics*, on the other hand, answers to the fact of *plurality*, i.e., the uniqueness of every human being, who at the same time is always a member of a particular society. We are many, that all differ and still need to live together. Politics is therefore a sphere where the many that differ meet, confront their views, and make an effort to establish commonly acknowledged decisions about how to live well together.

We have suggested (Vlieghe and Zamojski, 2019, 2020) that both of these *spheres* operate according to their own specific *logics*. The logic of education starts with the recognition that there is something in the world that is worth of our attention and of the effort of study. Whether it's algebra, organic chemistry, music, cooking or woodcraft, education is necessarily predicated on the assumption that it is worthwhile to take interest and concern for this particular subject matter just for the sake of the thing itself: mathematics just for the sake of mathematics, for example, and not because society need engineers. In that sense, education always begins with the attitude of unconditional affirmation. Politics – on the other hand – starts with the attitude of indignation: it needs to point out

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[3] We follow the distinction between the ontic and the ontological as introduced by Martin Heidegger (1962).

the wrongs of the world that demand our (collective) action. The logic of politics begins with the assumption that there is something wrong that needs to be set straight. It basically demands a transformation of the world (and hence, if politics is also about affirmation, this is always conditioned upon this need of transformation). With reference to Max Scheler (1973) we identified the educational logic as one of *love*, and the political logic as one of *hate* (cf. Vlieghe and Zamojski, 2019).

In line with this argument, we believe that it is hugely important to make this distinction, especially today. This is because education and politics get constantly confused. This confusion stems from the fact that although at the *ontic* level many different ideas exist about the desired orientation of educational practices (e.g. that they should focus on equality of opportunities, address the needs of the job market, or create conditions for a strong democracy, or individual wellbeing, or the patriotic devotion, etc.), when looking from an *ontological* perspective it becomes clear that – regardless of the ideological variety in all these cases – education is *fundamentally* positioned as a mere means for particular political (or economic) goals. This *instrumentalization* of education results in appropriation of its logic and makes us forget about its distinct specificity. This is why today – as noted by Biesta (2010; 2013) – we urgently need to talk again about *the educational in education*, i.e., about what makes education unique, about its essence. Taken from another perspective, this instrumentalization of education dovetails with the phenomenon of the educationalization of societal problems (cf. Smeyers, Depaepe 2008). In such a case, treating education as a means for implementing a particular policy redefines political issues in terms of problems with education (e.g., when unemployment is rendered in terms of inappropriate education of the unemployed, diverting the responsibility of the government for macroeconomic situation of a country to the individual for lacking the appropriate qualifications) (Simons and Masschelein, 2010).

We furthermore argue that this careful separation of these two spheres and their logics is important not only for education, but also for politics. This is because today this tendency to mix one with the other is also related to an increasing privatisation of our life. Next to being obsessed with individual (private) freedom, wealth, comfort and success in life – as promised again and again by the institutions of the consumer society – privatisation also issues from leading our lives increasingly on-line, i.e. confined to our social bubbles. For their inhabitants these silos may

give the impression of constituting a public sphere, whereas in reality they are construed via mechanisms that exclude meeting strangers with whom one has to peacefully live together (Zuboff, 2019). There are no 'civic strangers' (cf. Sennett 2002) there to encounter, just our tribe and other tribes, our opinions and their opinions, our standpoints and theirs. There are no things to explore with strangers, there are just positions we find acceptable and the ones we don't. There are no longer truths about the world to be commonly pursued by the public, and likewise no truths one is pursuing at school anymore: there are only the right answers at the high stakes exams that one has to learn in order to secure one's personal educational success which can be consumed on the job market.

Separating rigorously education and politics is a necessary conceptual step to take in order to better understand to what extent these spheres are deformed by a far going privatization. Moreover, it also allows for understanding the ways in which we can respect their autonomy and articulate their essence. Importantly, *this clear separation of education and politics does not imply their isolation*. On the contrary, only when education and politics are acknowledged to be different things one can start to investigate how they relate to each other, and what they have in common.

In our previous work (Vlieghe and Zamojski 2019) we have already discussed the most fundamental ways in which education and politics relate to one another. On the one hand the establishment of the *polis* precedes the existence of education. This is so, because if education essentially concerns introducing the new generation into the common world, then it requires us to recognize this common world. In other words, education cannot emerge when we are living only within the confines of our *oikos*.[4] On the other hand, we argued (ibidem) that educational subjectification precedes political subjectification (but not the other way around): it is only the strong experience of educational potentiality that enables us to see that there is no necessity in the given order of things, and that we are able to transform ourselves and our lives. This second connection refers to an important commonality between education and politics. Both spheres and their logics assume the possibility of transformation. In politics we desire the transformation

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[4] Therefore the phenomenon of pervasive privatisation is a threat to both spheres: politics and education.

of a given status quo, whereas in education we are aiming at a very specific kind of transformation, based on the idea that an encounter with a particular thing may enable us to see the world with new eyes.

In this paper we want to suggest that education and politics have one more important thing in common which relates them in a way we did not explore so far. As we will try to show, *both education and politics involve practices of commonising through performing teacherly gestures*. Connecting this to the question we started this paper with, these gestures could be called 'public' in a more profound sense than that traditional and critical-pedagogical approaches refer to, because it is through these gestures that a teacher gathers people around some part of the world, so as to make this some-*thing* into a matter of common interest. To express this idea, we will use a somehow unusual terminology and claim that a teacher makes things public through the specific gesture of *commonising*. In what follows we will argue that this commonising gesture is an indispensable *educational* aspect that is constitutive of politics. Therefore, we also hold that not every gesture performed 'in public' is a *public* gesture, as the latter involves – exactly – gathering of people around something that is shown to be truly *common* (and this applies both to the sphere of education and the sphere of politics). This is, one can perform a great variety of gestures in front of a public, viz.; exhibitionist gestures ("look at me!"), police gestures ("move away!", "step back!"), or totemic gestures ("this is ours"). However, unless these don't involve commonising, they are not public gestures in a strict sense.

Commonising in the educational and in the political sphere

Let us first consider the commonising gesture that is constitutive of the logic of education. This is not easy, because more often than not in educational theory, the very need for a teacher is justified in terms of a particular anti-communal assumption behind the educational process. *Either*, the interaction between teacher and student is split up into a hierarchical interplay between the authority the teacher has thanks to her superior insight and the lack thereof in those entrusted to her care. *Or*, as it is the case in today more popular student-centered approaches, the teacher is made into an instrument for supporting individual students' needs and facilitating the development of their talents. *In both*

cases of theorizing the teacher-student relation, there is an undesirable introduction of a *divide*. We would like to argue that we can only overcome this by drawing again attention to the third, often forgotten but probably most profound element characterizing the educational event, i.e., the dimension that transcends the sterile discussion between teacher- and student-centerdness and that turns all those involved into 'commoners': *the thing of study*.

It is because a teacher, out of her love for a particular aspect of the world (a subject matter), brings something to the attention of all present in a classroom and shows that it is important, that something first becomes a matter of interest. This only succeeds, most importantly, when the teacher doesn't place herself in a position of authority, but when *both* teacher and students relate to the matter at hand *as studiers*. True teaching presupposes that the thing *itself* gets authority. The teacher's love for the subject matter is then only a conduit for generating a shared interest, attention and care, and for commencing on a journey of thinking, investigating, imagining, experimenting and sustaining attachments *with* the matter at hand, i.e. *studying it*. Something is 'put on the table' (Masschelein and Simons 2013) and becomes the object of communal efforts of examination, but also of wanting to be in the presence of the thing, to care for it and to be changed by it (at an ontic level this might translate into affects such as passion, devotion, the desire to know everything about it, to keep investigating it up to the point of forgetting about all other life duties, but also to fierce discussion about it when it is difficult to come to a shared understanding of the thing in question).

The thing of study makes all involved *equal* (teacher and student, but also students among themselves, in spite of the many differences that divide them), because in relation to it even the most knowledgeable is still to some extent ignorant and will have to publicly test her assertions against the thing itself. Studying comes with a moment of de-identification and hence it could be called profoundly commonis*ing* (underlining the strong sense of this word being a verb: we don't first have to share an identity which makes the event of study possible; instead it is the act of studying itself which renders us common). Surely, the teacher starts from a different situation (she knows more, or is less ignorant, and she has an interest students probably don't have at the start). However, in genuine teaching she doesn't take advantage of all this to position herself as someone superior. On the contrary, she just invites others to share

her love for a particular thing and to study it together. This, then, means that both teacher and students (as studiers) subject themselves to what the thing demands from them. It goes without saying that teaching in this sense is an act of generosity (and hence of vulnerability and risk [Cf. Biesta 2013]), meaning that students can easily display no interest, attention, care and love whatsoever. Teaching-as-commonising can end up awfully disappointing too.

After ontologically identifying the commonising gesture in education we like to put forward the hypothesis *that a similar moment is constitutive of the logic of politics*. At least this is the case when politics is understood in a particular way. More specifically, we take sides with Arendt (1958) who takes politics in what we call a strong sense[5]. Politics is the sphere where we no longer appear as individuals (or groups of individuals) solely concerned about our private interests but expose ourselves to others in the risky undertaking of a discussion about the good life in common, also by literally leaving our *oikoi* (households) and going to the *agora*: the public sphere. Only there something truly new can begin as the confrontation with different perspectives might change what we think about the world and make us leave behind opinions we previously held dear. Importantly, the agency that arises here is not the sum of agencies (or the arithmetic mean of interests) that previously existed in individuals. No one can predict the outcome of the political discussion. That is exactly why we need to gather and speak with one another, so as to render capable the people of political 'action'.

Now, Arendt also famously said that such a gathering can only be successful on the condition that something is 'put on the table' (which is not so different from our description above, and in the work of Masschelein and Simons (2013) this expression is actually used to capture the essence of school education, although Arendt never used this expression herself in her reflections on education). The table in-between the participants to the political discussion both divides and unites (and when the table would disappear this would lead to a very unpleasant and awkward situation). However, in her own account of politics, Arendt has neglected to develop this metaphor in a strong materialist sense, i.e., in terms of thing-centerdness, as she has mainly emphasized the agonistic

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[5] For the difference between *the strong* and *the wrong* sense of politics in Arendt, see Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019, pp. 157-158).

nature of the public sphere (Benhabib, 1992). Hence, she has missed out, we claim, on identifying the commonising moment of making something into a shared matter of study amongst equals as a constitutive dimension of politics, i.e., the very dimension that renders politics close to what education is all about. To do this, we have to delve once more into practices of deliberation in the Ancient Athenian polis.

The studious public: political deliberation and teacherly gestures

In this section we want to draw attention to a further development of Athenian democracy that was not discussed by Arendt, but that makes an important difference. At a given moment it became obvious that it was no longer possible for the Assembly (*ekklesia*) to meet at the Agora, as the marketplace appeared to be a too crowded, too buzzy, and too loud place, where all just tried to pursue their own business - a place dominated by the individual economic interests of Athenians and of others involved in the trade. The bustle and shouting over there made it too difficult to focus on anything else but market affairs, and especially on the city itself, the *polis*. Hence, not long after the popular revolution, probably around the early 5th Century BCE, the Ancient Athenian citizens decided to move the gathering up to the hill of Pnyx (Thomson, 1982, pp. 136-137; Cf. Hansen, 2021; Ober, 2017; Canevaro, 2018). This location didn't only offer the required quietness and peace, but more importantly from up there one could literally see the 'thing' they gathered around: the city. It is interesting to note that, so as to enable the people to go beyond the sphere of the *oikos* (the home, the workshop) and to discuss matters that are different from private affairs, people went up to this hill and see with their own eyes and at a glance the *polis* as the backdrop for all their separate dwellings in and between *oikoi*[6]. We argue that the true political discussion (i.e., true public deliberation) exactly needs such a thing-centered arrangement, i.e. it could not happen anywhere.

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[6] Going up the hill and looking from above seems not only different than flying over or walking through (Cf. Masschelein, 2010), but somehow goes beyond this opposition. It does not involve mapping or exposing oneself to what the road commands (ibidem, cf. Masschelein, 2019), but it enables one to leave the *oikoi* and climb to another place where it is possible to notice what goes beyond one's home and workshop.

When looking downhill, the city appears as a matter of common concern, or – to be more precise – what comes into view is the site from where the matters that concern all *oikoi* emerge. What the gathered can see at a glance is the common, the *polis*. It is exactly here that the *public* sphere is enacted, viz. *vis-à-vis* this common thing. If there would be no city, but instead only a multiplicity of *oikoi*, then there would be no need to gather and discuss anything together. There would be no need for a public sphere. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine that in the absence of such a sphere trade would still go on, and in that sense the *agora* would still operate in its usual way. However, for a public sphere (i.e., for politics) to emerge, there has to be more than private interests, private opinions, private preferences and private worries, problems and challenges. Something needs to exist that exceeds individually experienced matters and that is of concern to each individual: something more than each *oikos* can handle alone, but also something that requires more than aggregating private opinions. This is: something that calls for a well informed decision taken by the many concerned and gathered around the thing in question.

At the *ontic* level, there is always a concrete political issue – for instance: a decision about a war, about the rules of law – to gather around. Seen from the ontic perspective this issue functions merely like an 'object' (see Heidegger, 2001), i.e., something that can be useful (or not) in view of one's interests. However, for politics in a strong sense to take place this object needs to become a 'thing'. This regards fundamentally an *ontological* operation, which comes close to what we explored in our previous work on teaching (Vlieghe and Zamojski, 2019). There we claim that what a teacher essentially does is showing that a subject matter is interesting and worthy of care and attention, thanks to displaying her love for it. Only then one can start studying it together, i.e., engaging with it attentively and carefully, and for its own sake. Analogously, in the case of public deliberation, people have to overcome their private position as individuals with a particular interest. They need to come and see that in each concrete issue that is being discussed some-*thing* is at stake that exceeds one's private perspective: the issue they debate is not just a law (that might be beneficial for them or not) or a war (that they like or find horrific), but it is also *an issue of how to live well together in the city*. Ontologically speaking, a truly political discussion always involves this further orientation to a larger concern.

Furthermore, the issue discussed at the Pnyx is not only 'bigger' in terms of transcending the particular and insular interests of one's own *oikos*, but also in terms of complexity. If the matter being discussed in public is as complex as the city itself, no private person is able to encompass its intricacy, and hence, this is another reason for gathering and thinking together. Very concretely, someone must *put something on the table* by sketching a preliminary account of the issue. This understanding is then deepened by others, when they introduce their accounts to the debate. The outcome of such an exercise is unforeseeable and may come as a surprise. As such, everyone will end up seeing more, or at least, they will be able to go beyond their own point of departure and experience the complexity of the discussed thing. In the course of such a debate there might occur long digressions and also distraction might happen, and hence there will be the need to refocus on the issue in question, i.e., to come back to the matter that is not yet grasped in all of its intricacy. Consecutive speakers turn the attention of the gathered people to various layers and dimensions of the problem, while displaying the ways in which it matters from them differently. Inevitably – even in the case of Athenian direct democracy – not all citizens could be present during the Assembly[7]. However, these practical limits should not be regarded as an argument against direct, deliberative democracy (and in favour of a representative model). Rather they involve the requirement that the views of those who are currently not present, and cannot speak for themselves, should be brought in and recollected in order to take them into account when making a decision. Moreover, it might appear that even after long and careful consideration of the issue, some insights might still be superficial or even contradictory, and hence even deeper elaboration might be mandatory.

This description of what happens during the meeting at the Pnyx is meant to highlight two important points. First, it shows that one has to relate to the issue at hand as a thing around which people gather when

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[7] As noted by Thompson (1982) Pnyx (depending on the arrangement of the space on the hill in various periods of its history) could accommodate 5.000 to 10.000 citizens (with 6.000 being the quorum in certain matters) out of 30.000 to 50.000 citizens overall. Ober (2017, p. 19) comments on this in the following way: "Athen's democracy was a direct form of government by citizens. The assembled citizens voted directly on policy; they did not elect representatives to make policy for them. (…) The Athenian demos (as the whole of the citizen body) was imagined as present in the persons of those citizens who chose to attend a given assembly. So the demos was conceptually represented, *pars pro toto*, by a fragment of the citizenry".

forming a *studious* public. Again, the issue under discussion becomes a 'city' issue as it is no longer approached as an object that affects their own *oikos*, i.e., as an *object* they should *learn* about. Instead, what is at stake goes beyond all *oikoi* and always involves the very question of how to live well together. Hence, it could be called a *thing* of *study*. Going up the hill is not so much a question of elevating citizens present during the Assembly against all others, rather it is an exercise in humility. To look from there at the city comes down to seeing how complex it is, and to recognise that what they have in the front of their eyes is a reality much different from each of the *oikoi.* It becomes clear to what extent one is *ignorant* about the matter to be discussed if one would have remained within the confines of one's own household and if one would have solely pursued one's own interests. In that sense, the participants that gather on the hill are literally being *taught*, and possibly they also need to teach each other, i.e., when one is unaware how the matter under discussion plays out in the part of the city where others live. They help each other in getting to understand the nature of the matter they discuss, so as to start appreciating its complexity and to come and see its various sides and dimensions. Leaving this out, they would risk making a decision harmful to the city. The outcome of this exercise is always unforeseeable and may come as a surprise.

And so, a second and most important conclusion to draw, is that for all this to happen, *the commonising gesture of a teacher is essential*. Consider that the kind of gathering we just analyzed can be turned easily again into a mere market occupation, i.e., when the studious thing in common is substituted with mere competition between private opinions, interests and preferences. One can easily install a marketplace on a hill, instead of an Assembly. Arguably, this happens when one emphasises the role of conflict in how the gathering plays out. Then the common disappears from sight, the gathering is turned into just a decision making process, and the focus is on the different private orientations in view of reaching an agreement. In order to prevent this from happening, and more exactly to preserve the possibility of collective study of a matter of common concern, teacherly gestures are required. To be clear, such gestures are not necessarily performed by a particular person having the official position of a teacher. What is needed, rather, is what we have called elsewhere, the *figure* of the teacher, *ontologically* understood (cf. Vlieghe and Zamojski, 2019): a figure who gathers people, points

at something and makes the gathered attentive, so that the issue under consideration can become a thing that appears as a common concern, as well as a thing that demands careful study. Sometimes it is a particular speaker who puts this thing on the table, but likewise it can be a group of people who while presenting the matter from their own perspectives, put on display their care and engagement for it. Or, a teacherly gesture might take place when someone brings to recollection to the assembly what has been said so far.

The absence of teacherly gestures in political theory

The conclusions we draw from the example of the studious gathering at the Pnyx is also important because it addresses a problem we see in most contemporary political theory, where this teacherly dimension of politics remains remarkably absent from consideration. To show this, let's start with those views on the public sphere that conceive of it in terms of conflict and struggle. In this case political subjects are seen as originally and essentially antagonistic (Mouffe, 2013; Laclau, 2005). This is because societies are always structured in such a way that opposing interests are inevitable (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Hence, political subjects don't gather on the hill, but precisely meet on the market, as each and every participant to the discussion starts from a very clear picture of what their interest is, and based on this, which decision they want to arrive at. They know beforehand what is at stake and what will be their gain or loss. They are not ignorant. And so, politics appears to be all about sustaining the conflict in a way that could result in a strategic reshuffling of alliances on the political stage, and aggregating the votes to the advantage of a particular side of this conflict. Hence, there is no place for collective study of a thing of common concern. Instead, the public is the scene for inventing new rhetorical strategies that could be successful in extending *the chain of equivalence* of various political *demands of heterogenic groups* recognising their common political *enemy* and, hence, forming a new collective political subject (Laclau, 2005).

The alternative dominant approach in political theory today consists of defining the public as dependent on primal consent, meaning that the public emerges as an effect of excluding differences and finding an *overlapping consensus* within *reasonable comprehensive doctrines*

(Rawls 1993), i.e., views we all agree on, regardless of the differences in the ways in which we depict and understand all aspects of the world. This consensus functions as a point of reference for all possible debates regarding all possible issues, thanks to which we can always calculate (i.e., deduce) what should be the best decision on a particular matter, assuming that we agree on a fundamental understanding of justice (Rawls 1999). Within such a frame, there is no place for collectively studying something that gathers us, because the public debate solely consists of logical calculation that leads from the agreed consensus on the principles of justice to the decision about the matter at hand. When Rawls introduces the notion of the *veil of ignorance,* his aim is not to bring about cognitive humility regarding the matter of common concern. Instead, it is an attempt at forgetting about oneself, erasing one's own habitus and purifying one's reason, in order to be able to deduce the principles of justice from a position of no position (Rawls, 1993, pp. 22-28).

To conclude, *in both cases* (the agonistic and the consensual model) reflection and imaginativeness are involved, but studious practices and teacherly gestures are not considered as vital to the public sphere. This stands in contrast to another, viz. the deliberative model in political theory, which not only acknowledges, but exactly hinges upon learning processes that happen within public deliberation (Habermas, 1990; Benhabib, 1996). In this case, those who are gathered to discuss are not concerned with aggregating allies against a repressive regime, nor do they deduce their decision based on an overlapping consensus. Instead they learn from each other's views on the discussed matter. Nevertheless, even in this case, what Habermas (1996) calls *the democratic opinion-and will-formation* is not about collective practices of studying the common thing, but – indeed – about learning from each other. It seems thus that political subjects are more focused here on other interlocutors and their insights than on the matter that gathers them.

However, the critique we raise here doesn't imply that we want to give up on the deliberative model of democracy. In order to grasp the commonising dimension of the public debate, this model still seems to us as an appropriate point of reference, but we also think that it should be complemented by taking into account that democratic politics needs teacherly gestures.

To be clear, this is *not* to suggest that education functions as a means for obtaining political goals or that it should be subordinated to a political logic. Rather, we argue that there is a vital place for educational practices in the democratic political process, where these practices still function with respect to their own logic. Our claim is, to be clear, that acknowledging the commonising dimension of the public debate implies that politics requires subjects performing teacherly gestures. This is not to say, again, that teaching should be conceived of as a means to cure our political impotence (and that we should put the responsibility for making things right in the world on the shoulders of today's teachers and their pupils). Nor does it mean that we are advocating for a democracy ruled by teachers (yet another incarnation of Plato's idea of the philosopher king). Once more, we make a claim at an *ontological* level. In order for politics, taken in a strong deliberative and transformative sense, to happen, 'someone' must put some-*thing* on the table and gather people around it. Something becomes public and diverse people become one studious public. Only then it can become clear that there is an issue of importance and common concern that transcends private interests and personal positions. This demands particular scholastic arrangements (e.g., climbing up the hill), which ensure equality among the participants to the discussion (in view of their shared ignorance vis-à-vis the issue of concern) and which allow for sustaining the conditions for sharing knowledge (i.e., making knowledge public) and for exploring together the matter at hand[8]. So, to sum up, for politics in a strong sense to happen a public must perform collective study practices and hence commonising gestures by a teacher are necessary. But again, as our understanding of 'the teacher' is an ontological one, we do not necessarily refer to a single person, as it may concern different people.

It is essential to note that the focus and the meaning of these gestures are different in the classroom as compared to what happens during the assembly (i.e. in the sphere of education and in the sphere of politics). The teacher in her classroom displays her teacherly gestures as expressions of the love for the world, pure affirmation of the subject matter, inviting the students present in the classroom to make the effort of studying this matter together with her. In the assembly, on the contrary, the display of teacherly gestures transforms a particular issue into a matter of common

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[8] For a more elaborated account of teacherly gestures see: Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019).

concern for the citizens gathered there, i.e., into a thing to be studied in view of the question about the good way of living together in the *polis*. That there is still a crucial difference between teacherly gestures in the classroom and in the assembly, consider the difference between educating about politics and having a political discussion about education. In the first instance, what matters is that something (viz. politics) is studied out of love and care for this particular subject matter (i.e., study *as such*), whereas in the last case what matters is that studying together will lead to making a decision about something we consider wrong with the topic under discussion (viz. education).

Concluding remarks

Today, in a time of pervasive privatisation such an understanding of politics and the public debate is not obvious (to say the least), and – to some extent – it may even be that it is no longer possible at all. This is because we are increasingly living within the confines of our echo-chambers geared by the mechanisms of 'social media' (Kosiński *et al.*, 2013). As the digital is the medium through which we are connected with the world, it frames our experience of the world and the ways we establish our relation with the world. It is today rather common sense knowledge that the digital works by aggregating and accelerating our clicks, i.e. that it needs our activity in order to perpetuate. As we click, the algorithms of the digital learn how to feed us, they learn how to provide the kind of "news" that will make us more active in clicking. And hence it is no longer we who learn from the public debate or from the world, but inversely the machine that learns from us. This way, our view of the world, as selected by our own personalized newsfeed is increasingly narrowing down. However, we are not conscious of this, as we just search for the news, and the search engine noiselessly works out a selection that comes with the disguise of being 'the' official one. Hence, we no longer are exposed to a public agenda, instead we are fed with news prepared just for us. This situation cannot be interpreted in terms of the plurality of public spheres (Cf. Frazer 1992), because it consists of the opposite movement of the privatisation of the public, i.e., of creation of many separated, homogenous, and antagonistic bubbles where particular groups of people 'feel at home' with their idiosyncrasies

and personal beliefs. These beliefs are not challenged but become ever more radicalised. Moreover, one is unable to go beyond one's bubble, because the walls of the echo chamber one is trapped in are too high, and there is no hill one could climb to see the common. Hence, the political process as it stands today is reduced to a demonstration of differences: it functions as a totemic practice of showcasing these new kind of tribes (Maffesoli, 1996). There is no commonising momentum in this sort of politics, and hence, no teacherly gestures are displayed[9].

But then there is the threat that such a critical understanding of our current situation severely restricts our political agency and leaves us with a purely fatalistic attitude. In spite of this, we believe that politics in the strong sense – as we have sketched it out in this article – can happen, and arguably is happening from time to time. One way to deal with this tension consists of looking for historic examples of the emergence of studious public.[10] Another could consist of making determined attempts to perform teacherly gestures and enact the studious public, precisely in spite of the critical knowledge we have and that suggests that achieving this today seems impossible.

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[9] To a certain extent, the proliferation and omnipresence of digital technologies, which in the wake of the corona-crisis risks to become a permanent condition, might threaten occasions for truly commonising for another reason. According to the thesis put forward by Harold Innis in *Empires and Communication* (Innis 2007), it could be argued that there are means of knowledge dissemination that are intrinsically privatizing and intrinsically communizing. Where Innis had in mind the shift from pre-alphabetic culture (where access and dissemination used to be a privilege for an elite that protected this privilege from the masses and where the creation of new knowledge was almost non-existent) to alphabetic culture (where knowledge is publicly available, open for contestation and study, and hence subject to constant revision and innovation), a similar but reverse argument could be made in relation to the proliferation of particular digital technologies that come with privatizing tendencies. Unfortunately, there is no opportunity here to develop this argument.

[10] We believe that the Polish Solidarity (Solidarność) movement of 1980-1981 could function as such an example (cf. Skórzyński 2014; Machcewicz 2015).

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Returning education to the common: reckoning together in contemporary schooling[1]

Devolver la educación a lo común: echando cuentas juntos en la escuela contemporánea

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Abstract

This article addresses directly the issue of how we might consider what counts in contemporary schooling; of how we go about working out together what counts for us. This will, in turn, open up possibilities for seeing the practices of teaching and learning as making a contribution to the construction of common goods. It begins from the etymology of "to count". From the Latin *computare*, it is imbued with a sense of calculating or enumerating (such as resultsre, grades, league table position etc in the context of schooling). But there is another sense of the verb which also suggests a "reckoning among", or "reckoning together". To "count" is, therefore, also strongly related to ideas of "judging or considering along with others". In further exploring how we work out together what counts in education, the article turns to the work of the American philosopher, Stanley Cavell, and to his explorations of criteria and judgement in the opening chapter of his seminal work *The Claim of Reason* (1979). In discussing Wittgenstinian criteria in language, and of what, for Wittgenstein, "counted" as something, Cavell notes that Wittgenstein's source of authority is always the "we" (the community of language users); it is always the "we" who establish the criteria under

investigation. Cavell proceeds from this discussion to examine the formula: "We say" in appeals to ordinary language. In saying this, argues Cavell, we are issuing an invitation to the other to see if they can accept what we say, or the way we see things. The fact that we do this *together* signals our membership of a polis: "Our search for criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community" (Cavell, 1979, p. 20). To work out what counts for us – through reckoning together – is the way that I "discover my position with respect to these facts" (ibid., p. 25). The article argues that to offer this invitation to others see things the way we see them (to consent in criteria) – or, conversely, to dissent in criteria – is a pedagogical moment. In the context of education, it can be a practice – rooted in dialogical approaches – that ruptures a transmission model of education and the precedence of outcomes. To accept the invitation to talk together, and to consider to what we can give our consent (and from what we must dissent), is a way of realising the democratising promises of education that has profound implications for pedagogy as well as for the construction of common goods.

Key words: community, criteria, common, Cavell, proclaim, return, counts, attunement, consent.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda directamente la cuestión de cómo podemos considerar lo que cuenta en la escuela contemporánea; de cómo vamos a definir lo que cuenta para nosotros. Esto, a su vez, abrirá las posibilidades de ver las prácticas de enseñanza y aprendizaje como una contribución a la construcción de bienes comunes. Partimos de la etimología de "contar". Del latín *computare,* está impregnada de un sentido de cálculo o enumeración (como los resultados, las calificaciones, la posición en la tabla clasificatoria, etc. en el contexto de la escuela). Pero hay otro sentido del verbo que también sugiere un "considerar con" o "considerar conjuntamente". Por lo tanto, "contar" también está fuertemente relacionado con las ideas de "juzgar o considerar junto a otros". Para seguir explorando cómo definimos juntos lo que cuenta en la educación, el artículo recurre a la obra del filósofo estadounidense Stanley Cavell y a sus exploraciones de los criterios y el juicio en el capítulo inicial de su obra cumbre *Reivindicaciones de la razón* (1979). Al hablar de los criterios wittgenstinianos en el lenguaje, y de lo que, para Wittgenstein, "contaba" como algo, Cavell señala que la fuente de autoridad de Wittgenstein es siempre el "nosotros" (la comunidad de usuarios del lenguaje); es siempre el "nosotros" quien establece los criterios investigados. Cavell parte de esta discusión para examinar la fórmula: "Decimos" en apelación al lenguaje ordinario. Al decir esto, argumenta Cavell, estamos lanzando una invitación al otro para ver si puede aceptar lo que decimos, o la forma en que vemos las cosas. El hecho de que lo hagamos *juntos* señala nuestra pertenencia

a una polis: Nuestra búsqueda de criterios en base a los cuales decimos lo que decimos, son reivindicaciones a la comunidad" (Cavell, 1979, p. 20). Definir lo que cuenta para nosotros (echando cuentas de manera conjunta) es la forma en que descubro mi posición con respecto a estos hechos" (ibid., p. 25). El artículo defiende que ofrecer esta invitación a que otros vean las cosas como nosotros las vemos (consentir en los criterios) –o, a la inversa, disentir en los criterios– es un momento pedagógico. En el contexto de la educación, puede ser una práctica, enraizada en enfoques dialógicos, que rompe el modelo de transmisión de la educación y la precedencia de los resultados. Aceptar la invitación a dialogar juntos, y considerar a qué podemos dar nuestro consentimiento (y de qué debemos disentir), es una forma de hacer realidad las promesas democratizadoras de la educación que tiene profundas implicaciones para la pedagogía, así como para la construcción de bienes comunes.

Palabras clave: comunidad, criterios, común, Cavell, proclamación, devolver, cuenta, sintonización, consentimiento.

Introduction

In 1996, American politician, and later US presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton, published a book, *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (Clinton, 1996). The volume presented her vision for the children of America, and advocated a society which meets all of a child's needs. The title clearly referenced the African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child". Commonly thought to have origins in, and variants from, different parts of Africa, the proverb has been over-used to the point of cliché. However, what it suggests is a broader, and crucial, debate about the public dimensions of education in contemporary society. It raises important practical, yet also profoundly philosophical, questions: What are (or should be) the aims of schooling? Who is school for? What matters for the school - and so what is taught and how should it be taught? And perhaps most importantly, what should be the relationship between central or local government, communities, and schools? These questions also open onto further concerns relating to how pupils and teachers are situated within the school system because of what is seen to (or mandated to) matter in these institutions. What underlies these concerns

is first, how the contemporary school might exist in the public sphere as a space for opportunity and quest for common goods; second, how this quest has been frustrated by the rise of modes of governance in which private interests and regimes of regulation have come to dominate.

Schools are at the heart of their communities. Their mission statements are full of laudable aims that are often founded on ideas of "community": of a being an inclusive community of pupils, teachers, parents and governors, or of being physical hub in the neighbourhood which serves a local community. We might think that idea of the English community school is founded on these kinds of principle (and that in this sense, there is something of the idea of the village raising the child inherent in it). But the language is perhaps misleading here. The idea of the "community school" is not akin to the idea of the community shop or library where local people pitch in to lead and run services for the benefit of the public. A community school in England is controlled by the Local Authority which owns the land and buildings, employs staff and determines admission arrangements. Such schools have little control over what is taught, and as such, follow the English National Curriculum. Alongside the decline in the number of such schools[2], there has been a concomitant rise in the number of academies - independent schools which can be set up by business sponsors, but accountable through a legally binding funding agreement with central government.

What counts in contemporary schooling?

Given the changing nature of the organisation and ethos of many schools – particularly in the English context – in what sense can our schools still be said to be "communities"? From the Latin *communis*, we get the everyday sense that modern word "community" is rooted in ideas of the common, public, or of something shared by others.[3] As communities, schools do share in common what counts for them, often expressed in

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[2] The Department for Education report that in 2019 there were 24,323 schools in England, but that only 25% of secondary schools, and 68% of primary schools were in the control of, and maintained by, the Local Authority, Community schools are included in these figures. See DfE (2019).

[3] While this is one understanding of the word that can be drawn from its etymological roots, the paper will, in subsequent sections, draw on others, especially those highlighted in the work of Robert Esposito (2009).

their mottoes, mission statements: aspiration; learning together; respect for each other; collaboration and partnership; inclusion and equity for all. But what counts is not simply a matter of schools articulating their vision and values – of establishing and sustaining communities through practices that vivify their mission. What counts is now not the result of what is shared in common across school communities *as determined by them*, but rather is circumscribed by central government. Increasingly the statutory schools" sector is subject to modes of governance that not only determine *what* counts, but also legislate, inspect, and regulate in order to secure it.

Understanding what counts in contemporary schooling takes little effort; the dominance of what I call the discourses of "counting and accounting" are thinly veiled, despite the much-vaunted policies of academisation in the sector with its promises of increased budgetary freedom, curricular flexibility and increased scope for the procurement of services. What counts is often linked with what can be easily measured, compared in league tables or evidenced through different inspection and regulation processes. Pupil outcomes – especially in seen in measures of attainment – count. That learning, evidenced through progress and attainment measures, counts for central government, is the driving force behind current moves to assess and address learning loss as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Education Policy Institute, 2021). Attainment counts too in terms of public examinations, and the pressures on schools to improve pass rates in the school leaving exams in order to meet accountability measures, and to secure position on national league tables (Taylor, 2016). Pupils themselves feel the pressure of what counts in terms of attainment, whether it is as primary-aged pupils facing standardised tests (Connor, 2003; Howard, 2020), the negative effects of tiering based on potential for performance (Barrance, 2020), or secondary pupils facing public examinations and the stress of performance (Roome and Soan, 2019).

The fact that pupil outcomes and attainment count to such an extent makes sense of other regulatory, and accountability measures in schools. In order to secure pupil attainment, pedagogical practices – and even the curriculum itself – need to be carefully directed, and behaviour must be closely managed to maximise pupil progress. All this is critical if education is to produce the highly skilled citizens who will contribute to the economic development of the country and its success among its

competitors on the world stage. In this culture, what counts is ineluctably linked to what counts for the national prosperity. And this is a global issue. In 2018, for example, the Nigerian government instigated a series of public school reforms title "Every Child Counts." While this suggests a broad commitment to public school reform for the benefit of children and young people, its motivation and emphasis is perhaps better understood in its rationale: equipping Nigerian youths to be productive with a skill-based curriculum – prioritising science and technology – to help eradicate poverty from the nation.[4] What such initiatives suggest is that what counts in schooling has shifted to serve political and economic needs in an increasingly competitive global market.

The pressures that these kinds of enumeration exercises exert has led to different forms of resistance and response. One pertinent example is that of the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) which has brought together community and grass roots organisations to "reclaim the promise of public education as…[a] gateway to strong democracy and racial and economic justice", and to "unite parents, youth, teachers and unions to drive the transformation of public education, shift the public debate and build a national movement for equity and opportunity for all".[5] Another is that of the system of democratic schools in Poland, initiated in 2013 as schools set up by parents dissatisfied with the mainstream education system, and offering an alternative learning environment "free from the perceived shortcomings of public schooling" (Galwocz and Starnawski, 2020, p. 17916).

What it means to count

From the Old French *conter*, counting is etymologically related to enumerating, adding or summing up, and in the idea of assigning numerals to things.[6] We see strong lines of connection between such ideas and what counts in schools (grades, examination passes etc). But there is another sense of the verb "to count" which is rooted in the Latin *computare*. From *com* – with, and *putare* – to reckon, we understand

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[4] See https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/293506-nigeria-adopts-every-child-counts-education-policy-osinbajo.html Accessed 29th March 2021.
[5] See http://www.reclaimourschools.org/ Accessed 15th July 2021.
[6] See https://www.etymonline.com/word/count Accessed 29th March 2021.

that to count can also mean to reckon together with (others). This is important, as it links the idea of counting to that of community.

The community is not conceived here as a body of like-minded people who come together – almost as if in an echo-chamber – to lament the state of public schooling. It is rather that, drawing on the etymology in the Latin *com–munus* (where *munus* signifies the burden that we share), we get the sense of community as realised in the challenge of living with others who may be radically different to us. In this sense, we do not participate in a ready-made community, but rather *make* community happen. As Robert Esposito puts it: "Community cannot be thought of as a body... Neither is community to be interpreted as a mutual, intersubjective "recognition" in which individuals are reflected in each other so as to confirm their initial identity; as a collective bond that comes at a certain point to connect individuals that before were separate" (2009, p. 7).

What Esposito highlights here is that the *munus* that the *communitas* shares is not easily thought of in terms of something that is possessed, but rather that it is a "debt, a pledge, a gift that is to be given… The subjects of community are united by an "obligation" (Esposito, 2009, p. 6).

In the remainder of this paper, I develop the idea that resistance to the idea of what counts in education (and to the dominant sense of enumerating) can be found in our reckoning together as teachers, pupils, parents, and school communities. The obligation that we owe to the *communitas* is seen in this very idea of reckoning together. Thinking in this way elicits a rupture in a transmission model of education that privileges outcomes, and could help realise the democratising promises of education that has profound implications for pedagogy as well as for the construction of common goods. In developing these ideas, the paper turns, somewhat unusually, to the work of Stanley Cavell, and to his reading of Wittgenstein on criteria. Here I turn in particular to passages from his seminal work, *The Claim of Reason* (Cavell, 1979) to consider the relationship between our reckoning together; our claims to community and the common good(s) of education.

What counts as something? Wittgenstein and Cavell

In the opening chapter of his seminal work, *The Claim of Reason* (1979), Stanley Cavell, by way of introduction, explores how we should approach

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953/1973). He recalls how, for a long time, Wittgenstein's recurrent notion of a criterion had seemed both strange and familiar – a "blur or block" (Cavell, 1979, p. 6). Cavell is at this point interested in Wittgenstein's claims about the sorts of investigations he called grammatical, and particularly the question that is asked in such investigations: "Under what circumstances, or in what particular cases, do we say…?" (Cavell, 1979, p. 30). What we discover, claims Cavell, as a result of these investigations, are our criteria. They establish what kind of an object anything is. For Cavell, Wittgenstein's criteria are "the means by which the existence of something is established with certainty" (*ibid*., p. 6). In short, they tell us what *counts as* something: "It is this feature of counting something under a concept which Wittgenstein's notion of a criterion is meant to bring out" (Cavell, 1979, p. 35). Perhaps Wittgenstein's most famous case is what counts as pain, and so the criteria for knowing with certainty when another is indeed in pain.

Wittgenstein's notion of a criterion, is, Cavell argues, a very ordinary one; it is also one in which what counts for *us* is foregrounded:

> He speaks, for example, of criteria as possessed by certain person or groups of persons (they are "mine" or "ours"); of their being "adopted" or "accepted"; of their forming a "kind of definition"; of there being various criteria for something or other "under certain circumstances"; of their association with "what we call" something; and of their showing what something "consists in" or what "counts as" something" (1979, p. 7).

The concern in Wittgenstein is clearly with establishing certainty in relation to our words. But Cavell's treatment of Wittgenstinian criteria in this first chapter ("Criteria and Judgement") opens onto a discussion of how criteria and judgment, exercised through our being a member of a *linguistic* community, are extended to what is at stake in our being a member of a *political* community. Indeed, for Wittgenstein, "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (1953/1973, §19). Cavell's starting point for this lies again in Wittgenstein. He notes that the source of authority for establishing the criteria under investigation – those which are, for him, the data of philosophy – are always "ours" (1979, p. 18). For Cavell, it is what *we* say that is important here. When, in appeals to our

ordinary language, we use the phrase "When we say…we mean…", we are issuing to the community of language users "an invitation for you to see whether you have such a sample, or can accept mine as a sound one" (*ibid*., 19). But there is something further at stake in the idea of the "we" in relation to our criteria. The fact that "we" is grammatically first person, and yet also plural, is, for Cavell, significant. It signals that in saying "When we say… we mean…" we are not only speaking for ourselves, but for others. Others have consented to our speaking for them, and we accept that others speak for us too. Cavell puts it like this: "To speak for oneself politically is to speak for others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them – not as a parent speaks for you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., speaks your mind" (1979, p. 27).

What this shows is that the operation of criteria is ineluctably linked to our political lives. Our being intelligible to each other depends on what Cavell calls "our mutual attunement in judgements" (1979, p. 115). We should not take this to mean that, in making judgements on criteria, we deliberately sit around, discuss together, and eventually come to some kind of democratic agreement where the view of the majority holds – some kind of generalisation. It is rather that, as Cavell point out, there is already in *language* a "background of pervasive and systematic agreements among us" (*ibid*., p. 30). We do not arrive at agreement; we are rather "in agreement throughout…in harmony" (*ibid*., p. 32). The "astonishing fact of the astonishing extent to which we *do* agree in judgement" (p. 30) – that we *are* intelligible to each other – shows that our judgements, our criteria and what counts for us as something, are both shared, and are yet also a continuing obligation. This underpins Cavell's claim that "The philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community" (1979, p. 20). The political, then, is at the heart of such claims. This is rooted in the idea that our judging together is "the human capacity for applying the concepts of language to the things of a world" (Cavell, 1979, p. 17). In working our together what counts for us, we reckon together, and we make community. And sometimes this means an encounter with radical otherness; as Esposito puts it, "exposure to what interrupts the closing and turns it inside out: a dizziness, a syncope, a spasm in the continuity of the subject" (2009, p. 7).

At the end of Part 1 of the *Claim of Reason*, Cavell imagines some of the questions that a child might ask – "What is God?"; "Who owns the land?"; "Why do we eat animals?" In thinking how to answer these, he feels that he might have run out of reasons, but is reluctant to say that this is simply how things are, or what we do. In such instances, he finds that the way forward for him is to "take the occasion to throw myself back upon my culture, and ask why we do what we do, judge as we judge, how we have arrived at these crossroads" (1979, p. 125). What results from this is described by Cavell as "a convening of my culture's criteria, in order to confront them with my words and life as I pursue them and as I imagine them; and at the same time… confront[ing] my words and life as I pursue them with the life my culture's words may imagine for me" (*ibid*.). For Cavell, this kind of task counts as philosophy, but also what we might call education – the "education of grown-ups" (*ibid*.). It is surely also a kind of working out what counts for each of us, and for our culture; it is a reckoning – and a reckoning together. What characterises such reckoning together is change, or, as Cavell puts it "a turning of our natural reactions; so it is symbolized as re-birth" (1979, p. 125).[7] Our reckoning together reflects not only the ways in which we work out our political lives together, but also the ongoing possibilities for community.

Dissent in criteria

When "we say…", we offer an invitation to the other to see the world as we see it; to share in a form of life. While Cavell noted the "astonishing fact of the astonishing extent to which we *do* agree", and that we are mutually attuned, this is not always the case. Sometimes an initial disagreement over criteria can be overcome. We might find that we were not actually talking about the same thing, were imagining a situation differently, or were not considering carefully enough the matter at hand. But what if disagreement persists; if no agreement can be reached? "At such a crossroads", writes Cavell, we have to conclude that on this point we are simply different; that is, we cannot speak for one another" (Cavell, 1979, p. 19). In saying that we are different, we are claiming that

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[7] Cavell contrasts the natural growth of children with change and conversion for adults – for "grown-ups" (Cavell, 1979, p. 125).

others no longer are able to speak for us. This does not mean that the whole system and background of our agreement in criteria is in some way undone, but rather that there is a dispute, such that the withdrawal of our consent is the result. We no longer recognise that the present arrangement is faithful to what we originally consented. As Cavell puts it: "Dissent is not the undoing of consent, but a dispute about its content, a dispute within over whether a present arrangement is faithful to it" (1979, p. 27).

Cavell claims that in Wittgenstein, criteria are the means by which we learn what kind of object anything is, and the value we assign to it (Cavell, 1979, p. 16). Put another way, it is through criteria that we reckon together what counts as something, and what counts for us (*ibid*., p. 7). What counts in schooling, as we have seen, is largely the result of claims made *on* school communities. What counts is evident in concerns that tend towards different forms of enumerating, such that league tables can be compiled; comparisons made; interventions planned, and improvement evidenced. The increasingly widespread resistance to such moves in compulsory schooling (and across other sectors such as higher education), signals discontent with the present arrangements. The dispute relates to whether current priorities for curricula, for what it means to be a teacher, a pupil, or an educated person, are faithful to the criterion of schooling to which the community consented. Dissent happens because there is a disappointment with criteria with the criteria as they have been inherited.

Claiming and proclaiming: passionate speech

When our attunement is lost, claims Cavell, we appeal to criteria. We do this when "we don't know our way about" because "we are lost with respect to our words and the world they anticipate" (1979, p. 34). This is not a state of what we might call a loss of voice (with respect to our criteria) from which there is no recovery. Cavell finds that, in Wittgenstein, there are two senses of judgement in relation to appeals to criteria. The first (the judgements predication) is about determining whether an object counts under the criteria at all. The second (the judgements proclamation) is about saying it out.

In proclaiming, we call attention to what we count as something, and declare our position. This is what it means to have a political voice – to speak with, and on behalf of, others in relation to what is common between us. To pro-claim – to speak forth – in this way, is part of our responsibility not only to the linguistic, but also to the *political* community. To proclaim is to have a voice in those communities, and to test the limits of that voice. Cavell puts in in this way:

> We do not know in advance what the content of our mutual acceptance is, how far we may be in agreement. I do not know in advance how deep my agreement with myself is, how far responsibility for the language may run. But if I am to have my voice in it, I must be speaking for others and allow others to speak for me…The alternative is to have nothing to say, being voiceless, not even mute (1979, p. 28).

Cavell issues a note of caution, however, that "in the political, the impotence of your voice shows up quickest" (1979, p. 27). We risk rebuff from others, even those for whom we claimed to be speaking, "and that this is likely to be heartbreaking and dangerous" (*ibid.*). In his work, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (2005), Cavell writes about this possibility of rebuff as inherent to his claims for what he calls passionate utterance (2005, p. 155). The development of this idea is set against the background of Austin's discussion of the force of our words which bears some brief discussion here. Austin traces how utterances have been thought of over time, and identifies two broad movements: one whose focus is on the truth or falsity of constatives – what he calls the "verification movement" – the other concentrating on the "different uses of language" (Austin 1979, p. 234). Austin's interest, however, lies in those expressions which share a number of particular characteristics. They are relatively straightforward examples, expressed in the first person singular present indicative, and they are plainly not nonsense. One example might be: "I pronounce you husband and wife".[8] At first glance other examples, such as Austin's: "I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth" (p. 235), appear to

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[8] For such a performative utterance to be "felicitous", Austin identifies a number of conditions that must be met. The utterance must take place as part of a conventional procedure where the context and people involved are appropriate; the procedure must be executed completely and in an appropriate fashion; the utterance must be backed by appropriate feelings by the people involved who must conduct themselves accordingly afterwards (1979. p. 237).

be simple statements, and grammatically might be classed as such. But herein lies a problem: for Austin, it is not possible to talk of examples such as these in terms of their being true or false. He goes on to identify their distinctive nature as "performatives" in this way: "If a person makes an utterance of this sort we should say that he is doing something rather than merely saying something…In saying what I do, I actually perform that action … I am indulging in it" (Austin 1979, p. 235).

Cavell, however, draws attention to what's he finds a crisis in Austin's arguments in that what holds for constative utterances (that they can be thought about in terms of truth or falsity) also holds up for performatives, so collapsing the very distinction that Austin originally set up. Austin then moves towards a discussion of the *force* of utterances, laying aside his earlier binary distinction to introduce a ternary model of the *force* of language: the locutionary force (of saying something meaningful); the illocutionary force (of doing something *in* saying something) and the perlocutionary effect (of doing something *by* saying something). In this ternary model, Austin is less interested in perlocutionary effect than is Cavell. Ian Munday argues that, for Cavell, perlocutions: "open up a new field of enquiry that moves beyond formal constraints and presents an approach to speech that engages with the other. …Consequently, taking seriously the importance of the perlocutionary effects of language is to acknowledge the individual/expressive uses of speech in which people establish relationships with another (2009, p. 63). So for Cavell, notions of invocation, appeal and, crucially, response, characterise passionate utterance; such utterances are often spoken in the context of an exchange – a reckoning together. It is in this very kind of reckoning together as members of a *polis* that we create community, and in which there is the possibility that we can both claim and reclaim the common goods of schooling.

A passionate utterance, then, is an invitation to a form of conversation, one in which a speaker invokes, or provokes the words of another. The proclamatory moment of passionate utterance is made without knowing its effects: perhaps acceptance, postponement or even rejection, and what the consequences of these might be (consent or dissent). In making our proclamation – in speaking out of passion (and here Cavell simply highlights the emotional in our utterances that he felt were underplayed

in Austin[9]) – we invite an exchange. We also risk rebuff. And the danger of which Cavell warned is evident in his assertion that: "each instance of [the passionate utterance] risks, if not costs blood" (2005: 187). But if the proclamatory moment is one marked by the kind of utterances that Cavell calls passionate, it is also the means by which we "reaffirm the polis" (1979, p. 27). We lay bare our motivations, and commitments, and thereby call attention to what counts for us, to what we have reckoned together.

Ventriloquism and vampirism

The claims that are currently made by government and regulatory bodies *for* (on behalf of) public schooling, especially in terms of what should be the overriding priorities, are claims that made *on* schools. There are connotations of "claim" here that are suggestive of authority, ownership, dominance, and demand. To have a claim on someone (or indeed on an institution) is to assert a right over them. It is to privilege one voice over that of others; to demand the right for one's voice to be heard (insisted on, affirmed, concurred) and yet not to allow others to speak on your behalf. Where such claims on schooling are not faithful to the criterion of schooling to which the educational community has consented, there is dissonance not attunement. Dissonance is the result not of the limits of knowledge, but, as Cavell claims of experience. "When these limits are reached, claims Cavell, "our attunements are dissonant" (1979, p. 115), and we are out of tune with one another.

In the case of criteria, when we withdraw our consent, we are saying that others can no longer speak for us (and that we can no longer speak for them). But to return to the example of schooling, and to the common in public schooling, there is something different playing out. While the result of the powerful discourses of outcomes, progress, of regulation and of accountability in our schools is that school communities are out

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[9] The implication here is that passionate utterance is not only be expressed by those with a particular relationship marked by moments of high passion: by those who are, for example, lifelong friends, lovers or even sworn enemies. Such relationships could certainly provide the context for individuals to speak out of passion and seek or demand a response from the other. But in fact, this is the stuff of our ordinary lives. What Cavell hints at, though, is a context for passionate utterance where, although perfectly ordinary words may be used (just as in Cavell's example, "I'm bored"), the perlocutionary effect of the utterance is marked.

of tune with those who regulate them, these bodies still claim to speak for them. It is as if there is *forced* consent in criteria (which of course to Wittgenstein and Cavell is anathema). Cavell has elsewhere – in his writings on 1930s and 1940s Hollywood films of the genre he calls the "melodramas of the unknown woman" – written about the ventriloquism of the feminine voice (Cavell, 1996). He exposes a common thread across these films where the male characters speak for the female such that there is not only ventriloquism taking place,[10] but a kind of "vampirism" (1996, p. 70). These films depict the (female) heroine in a state of voicelessness – of inexpressiveness and therefore of unintelligibility. Take the example of the 1944 film, *Gaslight* directed by George Cukor. Here the heroine, Paula, is rendered voiceless by her murderous husband, Gregory. He speaks for her; refuses to let her meet with friends and acquaintances; persuades her that she in sinking into insanity. Today we might call this coercive control – a pattern of controlling behaviours that create an unequal power dynamic in a relationship.

What is happening in contemporary schooling is clearly far from what is projected on the screen in a film made for entertainment. I am not intending to make any kind of direct comparison here; this would be stretch the illustration way too far. But there is something of a mode of ventriloquism at play in terms of thinking what is common in schooling. This ventriloquism asserts itself in the form of a claim (exercised through different regimes of governance) to speak for others on what counts; to claim to be in attunement (with school communities). This is a perversion of the idea of "we say" (the claim that others can speak for us because we have consented for them to do so). As Cavell writes, this goes beyond ventriloquism to a kind of "possession" or "inhabitation" of the voice of another (1996, p. 61).

The proclamatory moment: Reckoning together

To claim that what is common and public in our schools has been lost in the rise of modes of governance that shift the orientation of the work of teaching away from the pursuit of the common good, and towards regimes dominated by mechanisms of accountability towards political

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[10] See also Fulford (2009).

and economic ends, risks claiming that it is also hope that has been lost. It goes beyond recognising a state of voicelessness to suggest that there is no hope for the recovery of voice. But this seems wrong in two ways. First, it might lead to a kind of thinking that there is little left worth holding onto in terms of the pursuit of democratic schooling and the educational task. But this would be to turn away from the kind of claim that Hannah Arendt makes in her celebrated quotation from her essay, "The Crisis in Education": "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" (1954, p. 193).

Second, it misunderstands what it is to dissent (in criteria). Cavell writes that when disagreement persists, there is no appeal beyond ourselves; we are, he writes "simply different" (1979, p. 19). But this is not the end of the matter. Our appeals don't simply cease; they are the process by which we remain intelligible to each other, and share a form of life. Beyond our appeals to criteria in language, our appeals to criteria for what counts for us as anything – and here, what counts as the common goods of education – are ineluctably related to our continuing to claim, and proclaim, them as ours. Thus the obligation to the making of the community of the school is, to use Cavell's term, perfectionist.[11] Cavell outlines what is at stake in such proclaiming:

> To proclaim it here and now you must be willing to call out, ('-claim') just that predicate on the basis of what you have so far gathered… and you must find it called for on just this occasion, i.e., find yourself willing to come before ('pro-') those to whom you speak it (e.g., declare yourself in a position to inform or advise or alert someone of something, or explain or identify or remark something to someone) (1979, p. 35).

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[11] Cavell finds in the work of the 19th century American Transcendentalist poet and essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson what he terms an idea of Emersonian Moral Perfectionism. He describes this "not a competing theory of the moral life, but something like a dimension or tradition of the moral life that spans the course of Western thought and concerns what used to be called the state of one's soul, a dimension that places tremendous burdens on personal relationships and on the possibility of necessity of the transforming of oneself and one's society" (Cavell, 1990, p. 2). In characterising an *idea* as perfectionist, I am drawing attention to that aspect of perfectionism which is to do with partiality and iteration, as exemplified in Emerson"s famous line (from his work, "Circles" that "Around every circle, another can be drawn" – Cavell, 1990, p. xxxiv).

What might this mean in our school communities and for educators in terms of re-claiming the common goods in schools and in our teaching; in terms of re-finding education's place as a common good rather than as a political pawn for economic or political ends? How can we pro-claim what counts for us, in the kind of teaching practices that contribute to the construction of common goods? In *Must We Mean What We Say*, (2002), Cavell writes about the task of "bringing words back home" (p. 62), from their metaphysical, to their ordinary uses. To return our words to the common is also to be thrown back onto them; to experience them anew. There is in this, perhaps, a way of thinking about how we return the idea and practices of *education* to the common, from what might be thought of as its political misuses, to think again about its common goods.

Returning education to the common: ways forward

Returning education to the common is not necessarily a matter of mobilising mass resistance movements to the corrosive influence of performativity and the target-driven culture, of managerialism and competition. Nor is reckoning together is not some kind of naïve antidote to the ills of neoliberal influences in education. Proclaiming and reclaiming will not automatically produce a return to common goods of education, nor will it achieve a setting aside of the regimes of accountability, however desirable those things might appear. Charter schools in the United States (semi-autonomous public schools that receive public funds) set up to operate according to a basic principle of autonomy, could be seen as an example of reclamation, of working to prioritise choice for families and communities, and to realising the common goods of education. They might even be seen in the sense of a "counterpublic" (Fraser, 1997, p. 82), an alternative to the "one-size-fits-all" model of traditional public education (Knight Abowitz, 2001). However, they have been subject to significant criticism, with Garth Stahl claiming that it can be argued that "these schools function as vehicles for behavioural scrutiny and bodily surveillance, shaping the lives and subjectivities of economically disadvantaged students of colour" (2019, p. 1330). But there are ways forward; there is hope for returning education to the common through

moves that can be made both at the political level and the pedagogical levels.

Towards a pedagogical return

Proclaiming what counts is an important first step towards reclaiming the common goods of education; it is also a means of achieving it through the everyday work of teaching and learning in our schools – in the daily encounters between a teacher and her pupils. It is in these daily pedagogical moments that there is an opening for thinking together about what counts, and for being willing to come before others and make our position known. This is not something that can be curricularised or laid out on a lesson plan. While "to proclaim" has connotations of something that is broadcast or heralded, Cavell notes that that it is also something much more ordinary – even intimate – and that in proclaiming, we can simply "remark something to someone" (1979, p. 35). Returning education to the common can happen through the most ordinary of opportunities that the teacher can open up for thinking beyond the strictures of what must be taught (or learned or assessed). This is not a case of initiating a radical rethink of curricula, or of returning to what has been deemed to have worked well in the past (or in other sectors) in order to foster improvements.[12] It is rather realised in everyday pedagogical practices whereby the teacher opens up the world to her pupils. Such practices are ones that are characterised by ways of being with pupils, and of talking with them, that contribute to the construction of the common goods of education (rather than merely securing narrowly conceived measures of achievement). Practically, this might begin with asking the kinds of questions whose focus is not merely on checking whether a pupil has an adequate grasp of the relevant subject knowledge (for example, of the stages of solving an equation in mathematics, of using correct punctuation in English, or of the stages involved in conducting a basic experiment in science). It is rather that the kinds of questions asked are radically open

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[12] As an example, at the time of writing this paper, England's Department (DfE) have announced that Latin (generally a subject now only taught in elite private schools) is to be taught at state schools across England in an effort to improve learning with other languages and subjects such as maths and English. See https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jul/31/latin-introduced-40-state-secondaries-england. Accessed August 3rd 2021.

ones that, in the Cavellian sense, are invitations to passionate exchange. They are also profoundly philosophical questions that go to the heart of what it means to be a human being; what is at stake in being a member of the community; about the values we hold most dear; about what is worth knowing (and so, worth learning), and why it matters.

Such pedagogical approaches are not easily checked off a tick list of techniques that can be observed and noted as good practice in teacher observations. They are rather embodied values of the teacher herself, and the outworking of her commitment to being in relationship with her pupils. Reclaiming what is common is part of what it is to be in relationship with another as pupil or teacher. Again, this goes far beyond the expectations of the teacher in terms of behaviour management protocols for effective pupil progress and attainment, and what is enshrined in teacher standards about maintaining good relationships with pupils and exercising appropriate authority. It is an opening up of the world and the offer of an invitation to share in it. And it is about the teacher's own openness too. The relational is central here, because when we reclaim the common goods of teaching together, we do this through reckoning with others.

Towards a political (re)turn

When we say: "I reckon [something to be the case]", we are saying: "I hold this impression [of something]; how do you reckon it?" We are offering up not only a declaration of how we see the world, but also issuing an invitation to see if you hold it in common with me too. Reckoning together as a way of working out what counts for us as a means of claiming and reclaiming the common goods of education, goes beyond pedagogy. It must be inextricably woven throughout the practices of local and national leadership, governance and regulation. This is not to suggest a return to some kind of "golden age" of schooling – a harking back to certain pedagogical practices, curricula or approaches to leadership and organisation. It is rather a call for a mode of conversation that is a turning together (*con-vertere*). To engage in this kind of conversation – and to keep the conversation going by a commitment to ongoing forms of reckoning together – places significant responsibility on all those for whom education counts. To join such a conversation is, to use Cavell's

words, to "speak politically" (1979, p. 25). And for Cavell, the alternative to *not* speaking for yourself politically is not speaking privately; it is rather "having nothing (political) to say" (1979, p. 28). This is not a once-for-all-time conversation. It is part of a daily return of education to the common; a continual reckoning together of what counts, and a calling to account. Reckoning together in this way becomes one of the central missions of the school. But more than this, it becomes the mode by which we live together in community as members of the *polis* who take on the responsibility for education; for a kind of education that is realised in the multiple ways in which it is returned to the common through proclaiming – and reclaiming – its democratising promises.

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The ends of public schools and why society needs teachers[1]

Los fines de las escuelas públicas y por qué la sociedad necesita a los profesores

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Abstract

In this paper we intend to imagine, by way of delimitation, and perhaps a detour of spaces that appear to be emptied from their significant presence, the role of teachers in society where recent developments challenge political and cultural foundations of education in its shape we had known as implicated in the construction of modern states in Europe; in society where one often hears of the end of public school. However, the notion of the end will be problematized here as well, and we will reflect not so much on the end, but on a complex occurrence of multiple ends of public schools. These reflections suggest a peculiar ontology of ending, of a time of exhaustion when things slip out of our hands and no aims can be seen clearly on the horizon. And, as according to what we have announced here, ends appear as multiple here, we shall suggest four overlapping ontologies of ending. Clinging to the ambiguous meaning of the word, we shall try to position the figure of the teacher within this ending ontology, drawing the ends of their work (now read as aims) from the ends of public school. Perhaps, in the world where we witness the end of nature, the end of security, the end of

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future if one might risk to put it succinctly (Szkudlarek, 2017), this is, ultimately, the only way of thinking of ends of teachers' work.

Key words: public school, ends of education, teachers' work.

Resumen

En este trabajo pretendemos imaginar, por medio de la delimitación, y tal vez un desvío de espacios que parecen vaciarse de su presencia significativa, el papel de los docentes en una sociedad donde los recientes desarrollos desafían los fundamentos políticos y culturales de la educación en su forma hasta ahora conocida, como implicados en la construcción de estados modernos en Europa; en una sociedad donde a menudo se oye hablar del fin de la escuela pública. Sin embargo, aquí también se problematizará la noción de finalidad, y reflexionaremos no tanto sobre la finalidad, sino sobre una compleja sucesión de múltiples fines de las escuelas públicas. Estas reflexiones sugieren una peculiar ontología de la finalidad, de un tiempo de agotamiento en el que las cosas se nos escapan de las manos y no se vislumbran claramente objetivos en el horizonte. Y, como de acuerdo con lo que hemos anunciado aquí, los fines aparecen como múltiples, aquí sugeriremos cuatro ontologías de orientación superpuestas. Aferrándonos al significado ambiguo de la palabra, intentaremos ubicar la figura del docente dentro de esta ontología de la finalidad, definiendo las finalidades de su actividad (ahora leídos como objetivos) desde los fines de la escuela pública. Quizás, en el mundo en el que somos testigos del fin de la naturaleza, el fin de la seguridad, el fin del futuro, si uno puede arriesgarse a decirlo de manera sucinta (Szkudlarek, 2017), esta es, en última instancia, la única forma de pensar en los fines de la tarea de los docentes.

Palabras clave: escuela pública, fines de la educación, tarea docente.

Introduction

In this paper we intend to imagine a role of public schools and teachers in society where political and cultural foundations of education, understood as implicated in the process of modernization, are shaken, and where we hear about the end of public school repeatedly. We see such these negative prophecies as linked to more general ontologies of ending, of a time when things wane, disintegrate, or slip out of control. Ending

seems persistent and productive of conditions of risk, loss, insecurity and fear and, at the same time, of strategies of survival and inviting yet unknown futures. This ending condition has been announced for ages. Christianity has always been obsessed with the end of the world (and salvation of chosen ones). Astrophysicists supplemented that framework, minus salvation, with notions of entropy and thermal death of the universe. Grand metaphysical projects of modernity, like Hegel's and Marx's, construed logics that lead to the end and turned *post mortem* salvation into retroactive consciousness and emancipation. Then the postmodern condition defined itself as culture of exhaustion and termination of the progressive matrix, save the progress in technology: we stay where we are and all we can do is re-mix inherited signs and ideas for recreating our identities. End is here and now – to use Beckett's words, all is "finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (Beckett, 2009). It was within the postmodern turn, seamlessly glued with neo-liberal economy of global capitalism (Callinicos, 1990) when we identified numerous ends major and minor: of modernity, of the subject, of democracy, of reason, of science, of theory, and of the school as well. Deschooling once proposed by Illich returned in fragments in neoliberal reforms that reduced education to learning and schooling to provision of individually measured outcomes. Against this backdrop the end of school appears as a long-lasting ontological condition within which we teach, learn, and try to make sense of education.

We want to amplify this ending condition here to see what interests might make people want to liquidate public schools or abandon them to their slow decay; to see what we are losing, why it hurts, and – via those detours – what are the values that make some eager to liquidate schools while others resist or mourn their death. If indeed value of the school can be seen via its ending ontologies, one could also assume that the present wave of exposing the value of the scholastic (e.g. Biesta, 2017; Masschelein and Simons, 2013) can also be read – like in Hegel's metaphor of Minerva's owl – as implicated in school's ending as its condition of possibility.

We see the end of school as plural. There are various ways of schools being reduced, diminished, liquidated, or pushed to the margins. There are, therefore, diverse end of public-school ontologies – modes of being, shrinking or surviving, sometimes expanding into niches where such moves are possible in the state of ending. Vattimo's hermeneutic

understanding of ontology as *interpretation* of our condition in the process of becoming history (Vattimo, 1991) matches this approach very well. As long as one can distinguish between such ontologies endlessly, we speak of two major ones and of some modalities, or ontologies minor within them. First major ontology links to neoliberal management and privatization of the public. We illustrate it with cases of recent educational policies in Poland, but they are typical of societies where neoliberal reforms introduced strict measures of efficiency and financial control. We will describe three "ontologies minor" within this trait. The second major ontology relates to developments of new media that contribute to fragmentation of the public and its parcellation into insulated filter bubbles. What is questioned here is not the public logic of the school, but the institution of the school as such. However, the very same revolution is productive of crises of what is public and of rational underpinnings of public life in general, so it is not only public school, but public life and rationalism that demand attention here. And because we have an institution that was invented to create rational foundations for public life, which is public school, in the concluding part we close the circle. The lucky ambiguity of the term "ends" helps us to reverse the direction of our reflection and see what *ends* become visible through the varied ontologies of the school ending, and to reflect on ends of teachers' work finally.

We do not promise to end this reflection with unexpected aims of teaching. The sense of our work here is, rather, to articulate educational concerns with the endgame of schooling. Living in the end tends to be driven by desires to delay, postpone, or push away the ultimate horizon of termination. Even though much of how we understand teaching is defined by introducing, beginning, or developing – after all, education has become a public issue in course of progress and modernization – under present conditions the ideas of conserving against decay or forgetfulness, preventing from destruction and surviving, always implicated in the idea of education as well, are understandable and they often dominate those related to "good old progress". As Gert Biesta (2017) has noticed, conservative ideas (the rediscovery of teaching included) gain a radical edge nowadays and may work for the benefit of progressive values.

Genealogical reminder

The emergence of modern education systems in Europe followed the proliferation of print and the emergence of reading publics, Reformation with its numerous denominations, Counter-Reformation and religious wars, and the conviction that it is us humans (rather than fate, God, or historical necessity) who are responsible for the shape of the social, an idea aptly expressed by Immanuel Kant (Kant, online), may all be seen as effects of print. The French Revolution was a critical moment here: seen by Kant as realization of human freedom and moral autonomy, it was also a horrific experience that initiated the quest for emancipation otherwise than by violence. Public education was then postulated as alternative to revolution (Tröhler *et al.*, 2011). Modern democracy and republicanism are, in this context, politically grounded in demands for knowledge being accessible to all and–to use Kant again–in encouraging individuals to using reason in public.

Of course, this genealogy is not the only one, nor is it binding for those who run schools nowadays. As we have learned from Foucault (Foucault, 1980), institutions set up for one particular reason change functions and modes of operation continuously; fundamental ones may disappear, while marginal ones may turn constitutive of new power regimes. Still, it is worth remembering that school is one of very few institutions at hand that could address democratic challenges, and that teachers can revitalize the public use of reason as counteracting both endemic ignorance (which was the challenge in the time of Kant) and what Stiegler (Stiegler, 2015) calls organized stupidity nowadays. Unless we replace the school with another public space for re-construing the social, we need to keep it alive and see it as even more political than it was at the time of its birth.

Transformations of the public in public education in Poland

As we are using examples from Poland to discuss the first ontology of public school's ending, we need to start with a brief history of schooling in the country after World War Two, during the post-communist transition with its neoliberal policies, and after the nationalist PiS party won parliamentary elections in 2015.

Until 1989, the post-war Poland was a Soviet-style socialist state with certain liberal deviations. Public education was defined through the prism of modernization and social justice. However, despite of ideological assumptions, selection and class segregation were endemic to its education system. Massive vocational education, linked to rapid investments in heavy industry, was promoted as emancipation for rural youth, while small urban cohorts might enjoy elite *licea*. In the 1970s, researchers began to expose such inequalities as hidden curricula, and dramatic differences in educational opportunities between urban and rural youth were highlighted (Kwieciński 1972). After students' rebellion in 1968 candidates with working class background were promoted in university enrollments, but it was interpreted as breaking solidarity of students in protest. The state legitimized itself as socialist, but workers' strikes in 1970 ended with week-long massacres in the streets. In short, socialism and equity gained a meaning of oppression, and such values became easy to marginalize after the Solidarity upheaval of 1989. Economic development and personal liberty turned out to be more significant, and those demands affected schools and education policies deeply. Politically, such demands could be accomplished under condition of creating a strong middle class, which was overtly proclaimed by post-1989 governments.

Indeed, middle-class parents engaged actively in breaking state monopoly in education and demanded freedom, not equality (Mendel, 1998). Parental movements gained strength and led to diversification of a previously homogeneous, state-run education. Parents-run *Szkoły Społeczne* ("social", as opposed to "state" schools) appeared in 1989 along with for-profit private schools and schools run by associations, foundations etc. In the 1990s such institutions hosted about about 2% of schoolchildren. Diversification tendencies gained impetus after Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, when catching up with the West was accompanied by strong class polarization and distinctions built on educational criteria. Parents-run schools and home-schooling associations began to run away from public control and open recruitment, while continually drawing on public resources. This wave of class-based diversification, strengthened by regulations on school choice and external examinations with publicly available results, resulted in deep segregation in urban public schools as well (Dolata, 2008).

Since the 2000s one could see efforts to reconcile neoliberal management and the concern with common good, as represented by open, public schools. The end of public school, although proclaimed, has not come (Mendel, 2018), or, so to say, it has not "ended" in a concluding closure: it lingers on, proliferates into diverse modalities, and schools slowly erode in some dimensions and develop in others. The overwhelming majority of schools remained public. Run by local governments, they keep enjoying respect and many offer innovative, quality education. However, the situation of local governments has become very difficult after the 2015 elections. In 2016, the nationalistic government introduced a massive structural reform (labeled "deform" by teachers' unions) and charged local governments with its immense costs. This move, together with reductions in tax revenues, brought financial problems to local communities. Moreover, the national government keeps changing core curricula and an immense pressure on religious and national values is threatening to minority and liberal-minded students and brings a suffocating atmosphere to everyday schooling.

In view of these changes, the question arises about the "public" in public education in Poland. An interesting criterion of what public means was proposed in 1945 in the USA, when the court of State of Connecticut decided that such schools must be under the exclusive control of the state, and that they must be free from sectarian instruction (Miron and Nelson, 2002). The fact that Polish schools, as a result of the last reform, work on the basis of detailed national curriculum seems to over-fulfill the first condition. However, the intensifying pressure of ministers of education towards nationalism and Catholic fundamentalism means that the state does not provide freedom from sectarian instruction.

This landscape gains more complexity when we ask who owns or controls schools. Privatization tendencies are still present in Poland, and those are diverse enough to be discussed as specific "ontologies minor" within the general ontology of privatization.

The ends of *public* school: privatization

Announcing the end of school is a frequent reaction to privatization, to class- or race-based segregation, etc. (Giroux, 2015; Hursh, 2015; Mendel, 2018; Uryga, 2017), but we see this development as complex and sometimes

intentionally disrupted or hybridized. Andre E. Mazawi interprets such processes as related to shifts in the construction of contemporary states that become "network states" with "graduated sovereignty", combining public and non-public actors around particular functions and operations. In this perspective, education is part of transformations of the very nature of the public (Mazawi, 2013) and privatization is not always synonymical with abandoning public functions. "The end of public school" in Poland can be interpreted as implicated in such changes. Within this general ontological condition, we see three modes, or micro-ontologies in which it can be observed in Poland.

First involves actions for profit where means are dragged from public to non-public sphere. This "direct privatization" ontology can be compared to charterization in the USA. Even though the rhetoric of public good is in service of privatization agendas, the key issue remains that schools turn into profitable businesses that take public money but escape public control, and that they become property of its operators. In Poland such transitions are usually gradual ("creeping" privatization, Sześciłło, 2013). It happens when local communities transfer schools to non-public operators without agreements that would secure buildings and ground from overtaking (Dziemianowicz-Bąk and Dzierzgowski, 2014). Such lots are often spacious and always well communicated with other establishments, which makes them attractive for private owners. In the USA, premises of schools liquidated because of poor pedagogical performance are frequently turned into investment grounds and sold to developers. Pauline Lippman (2011) says that the very process of performance control is part of urban policies of revitalization. Even in creeping privatization that we see in Poland, transfers to private operators are indeed opening possibilities for small groups of individuals to take over real estate (Dziemanowicz-Bąk and Dzierzgowski, 2014).

The second is a "soft privatization" ontology. It concerns small schools in rural environment that–under New Public Management rules–prove too expensive for local communities to run. Massive resistance against their closures made the then liberal government pass a so-called Small Schools Act that allowed for transferring them to local NGOs as operators. Some of such schools, or rather their buildings and lots, have eventually become properties of few-person associations that had saved them from liquidation once. However, researchers led by Krystyna Marzec-Holka (2015) who examined all small schools in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian region

stated that in general such local associations play an active, animating role in their communities and contribute to development of local democracy. Hard-line neoliberalism is being softened here: schools are rescued from liquidation in spite of being economically ineffective and increase their public impact. However, it may still lead to real estate privatization, for instance when children of the founders grow up, teachers retire, and there is no will to continue the work of the association.

Apart from direct privatization and its soft or delayed form, there is a third one that we call hybrid ontology. An example can be a new school built by the city of Gdańsk, described by city officials as "a free, public school with a broader offer, innovative management and doors wide open to the local community" (Majewska, 2017). Built and equipped with public money, the school was immediately transferred to a private foundation for operation, while the city remained its owner to guarantee open enrolment policy and control the curriculum. The school offers its modern facilities to the neighbourhood and is becoming an important place for the development of local civic activity. The Gdańsk project subscribes into a "managerial privatization" (Mazawi, 2013) path in education. Contrary to the ontology of direct privatization, public good dominates other profits here: the school has not become private property and the city controls its operation. The assessment of this path is still not unambiguous, but the hybrid created in Gdańsk may illustrate how "graded sovereignty" (Mazawi, 2013) works and how the neo-liberal paradigm can be used by people oriented to democratic commonality. Still, there is a shadow in this luminous case: teachers are not being employed according to union's regulations. In this respect, there is no difference between this hybrid case and other forms of privatization.

In 2015 and 2019, populist – nationalist PiS party won parliamentary elections under a socially oriented agenda and the promise to strengthen the role of the state. Paradoxically, effects of their social and educational policy reinforce privatization tendencies. Introduction of generous child benefits for all families, with a simultaneous deterioration of financial situation of local governments who run public schools, result in rapid growth of private schooling. The party that loudly pronounces taking side of ordinary people is thus increasing class inequalities in education, replacing the policy of social cohesion with that of national identity – the public returns here in a mythical, nationalistic articulation.

End of school ontologies and losing teachers

In diverse ways and degrees, privatized schools still perform public functions. However, the factor that unites them is that teachers are victims of their transformation. Privatization, hard, soft or hybrid, concerned or unconcerned with public good, allows operators to employ teachers with disregard of Teacher's Charter that has regulated the profession since the socialist times. In the managerial discourse those regulations are denigrated as obstacle to schools' efficiency, and public opinion is being attacked with revelations of teachers working short hours and enjoying extensive paid holidays. The aura of forcing teachers to work more results–in schools that escape public regulations–in bigger workloads, unpaid holidays, lack of resources for in-service training, the lack of permanent contracts and other deviations from union agreements, sometimes compensated by somewhat higher salaries: "There are teachers who work from 3rd September to 28th June (…) In the summer they are unemployed and have to register in a Job Agency. (…) There are cases when the teacher is fully employed but apart from giving classes, they have to rake leaves in the school's area as well" – says the president of the teachers' unions" (Zakrzewski, 2014). Even though non-public school operators often respect many of union regulations, teachers in these schools always work under less favourable conditions. The Teacher's Charter was created in 1982 to buy teachers' consent to the regime that decided to crash the Solidarity movement. The debate on its sense today exposes that fact to delegitimize its very idea, but it misses its essential meaning of a collective work agreement, which is nothing exceptional in professional environments. Nowadays this attack adds to an open fight against "old elites" that includes public depreciation of judges, artists, teachers, medical doctors or academics – a populist discourse that allows PiS to make room for their substitutes nominated by the party.

"Losing teachers" also means that the system loses qualified professionals. Teachers quit jobs massively, especially after the recent nomination of a fundamentalist Catholic for minister of education and the announcement that the state budget, in deficit caused by generous benefits and lack of transparency in public spending, will not allow for rising salaries in public sector. In September 2021 ca. 15 000 teachers were missing in Poland. However, teachers may quit jobs for other reasons as well. Tony F. Carusi, in his analysis of education policies in

the USA, points to a paradoxical situation where massive loss of teachers results from them being recognized as key factor in their students' performance. Being decisive in the "Race to the Top" (the current US education agenda) does not bring job satisfaction: in a system driven by constant measurement it exacerbates the burden of responsibility and makes teachers first to blame for anybody's not reaching the top. When asked by their students for advice as to further education, teachers strongly discourage them from becoming teachers (Carusi, 2017).

The end of public *school* and the end of print

As we have mentioned, modern school emerged in culture of print. Even though paper mills and printers still work hard, the print has lost its status of defining technology, and that change was spotted already with the advent of television (McLuhan, 1994). Web 2.0 and social media are late steps on the ladder that grounds in that McLuhanian revolution, but the turn to social media, which comes together with the incredibly fast development of artificial intelligence algorithms, seems to be of unprecedented importance.

Social media do not negate but transform the public. Powered by advanced AI engines, they elevate a particular form of the public to unprecedented heights. In a way, they mimic traditional neighborhoods in how they "swallow" the private and mold shared opinion about other private beings and "remote public" issues. AI algorithms supply individuals with information tailored to private needs and preferences, extending that commercial logic onto the whole domain of information and learning. Not only is this a matter of information being available without the mediation of textbooks or teachers; it is also about thinking, deliberating, and acting publicly which apparently does not need to be taught at school. It is easy to claim that schooling, with its linear-sequential logic copied from the matrix of print, is at odds with new media, with how we use touchscreens or read hypertext. Stefano Oliverio (Oliverio, 2020) speaks in this context of a "techno-revolutionary tone" in education. Public school ends here not only through transformations of the public, but through an alleged redundancy of the school itself. But what kind of public we become when mediated by touchscreens, bots, and social media?

Knowledge, politics, and the media

As we keep repeating, modern democracy and republicanism have been genetically grounded in demands for knowledge being accessible publicly. As long as Wikipedia reinvigorated hopes for a globally informed public sharing rationally moderated knowledge, the era of Facebook means disintegration of what was hoped to become the new Commons – public sphere where "all knowledge" was meant to be provided "for all" and co-produced by everybody (these are the founding ideas of the Wikipedia). Social media close us in filter bubbles, isolate us from differences, industrialize political marketing, intensify political manipulation, and thus contribute to the crisis of democratic culture (Bendall and Robertson, 2018). Theodora Diana Chiş quotes Nicolas Negroponte who in 1995 provoked readers with his futuristic vision: "Imagine a future in which your interface agent can read every newswire and newspaper and catch every TV and radio broadcast on the planet, and then construct a personalized summary. This kind of newspaper is printed in an edition of one" (Chiş, 2016, p. 5). We have arrived at this future, and we have a social life here – we share such news composed "for one" within enclosed communities of our choice.

Social media are by and large driven by emotions: what literally counts within our bubbles is liking and being liked, and what it provokes in reaction to other bubbles easily is hate. This identity mechanism constitutes a perfect machinery for contemporary politics, often described in Carl Schmitt's terms as driven by the construction of enemy (Schmitt, 2008). Political marketing and populist manipulation have never been so easy before. A most widely known case is Cambridge Analytica forging US election campaigns by using Facebook data of millions of voters (Nix, 2016). In the background there is a sophisticated "psychographic algorithm" that correlates digital traces people leave online and a five-dimensional personality model. It allows for testing our personality online without us knowing that we are being tested. As the authors of the algorithm claim, such Internet-based personality judgments are more accurate than those made by humans (Youyou *et al.*, 2015). Arguments for voting Trump could be fine-tuned to personality profiles of any Facabook user in the USA. If democratic public schools were meant to educate citizens who cast their votes upon individual rational judgment, this task has become far more difficult than it was ever before.

Ends of school: How its ending suggests its aims

What *ends* for educational re-action (reacting to those ending modalities, as well as acting again for public good) can we see in the end of school ontologies? Drawing ends for action from ends that terminate action demands a move of retrojection and negation in one, of projecting catastrophic images of end backwards, onto the beginnings and trajectories of coming to an end. It is a paraphrase of Hegelian dialectic, where negativity is inherent in every being and termination is at the same time its fulfillment and beginning of a new process in which negativity is sublated by a new "positive" identity capable of hosting old and creating new negativity. So what ends of public schooling shine through their endgames today?

In the privatization (direct, soft or hybrid) ontology we can see that schools are problems or objects of desire as purely material beings: as buildings and lots of precious land that is "wasted" when used for children's games and obsolete instruction as buildings uselessly packed with books that no one reads and computers that lag behind those that children have at home. The value of schools lies with their brick-and-mortar fabrics, and most of all with the place they occupy (sic!) in the neighborhood. In the time of public school system being constructed, the location of schools demanded sophisticated logistics. Schools had to be set in a child's walking distance within or between local housing establishments, in places, sizes and numbers that had to take the size of given communities into account, in places where there was enough space to provide room for children's physical activity, etc. (Falski, 1925). Andre Mazawi (2013) speaks of their *territorializing* function. Schools delimit borders and bind communities to given localities, they become hubs between smaller communities or centers within larger ones. They may be relics of open space in densely built urban areas or cozy shelters in the open, between scattered farmhouses. In short, they sit in perfect places for people to associate. In course of time, built settlements tightened around them, and nowadays schools often remain largest enclaves of perfectly communicated space in densely built areas. This is why they become objects of predatory housing policies. Dream locations for shopping centers.
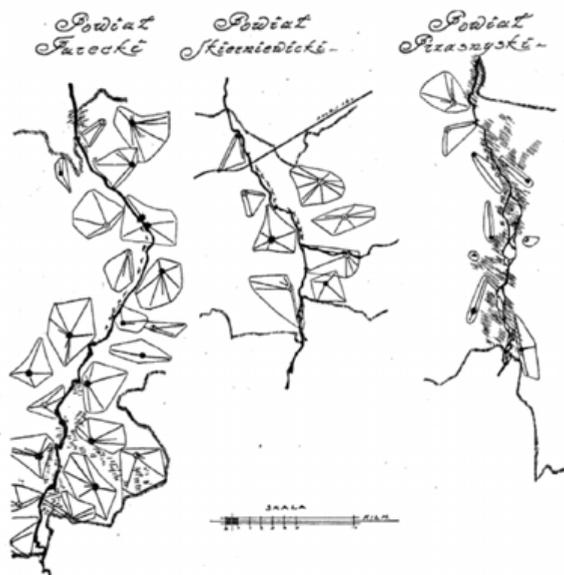
Schools are also valuable because of money invested; in Marxist terms, because of work invested in their classrooms, gyms and dining rooms; or in teachers' qualifications that took time and public resources to acquire. This is residual value which can be read as negative burden, money wasted for something that does not work and cost for those who manage public finances, or as expectation, a promise of return for those who put effort into their establishment or whose children can just walk to school. This conflicting nature of monetary value is productive of strategies bridging those who want to get rid of costs with those desperately wanting the school to operate – like teachers and parents in rural communities who take over the school to run it themselves. In other cases (cf. Gdańsk hybrid), agreement between parties involved allows for schools keeping open recruitment, high standards of performance and operating as community centers, and being affordable to the shrinking finances of local governments – at the cost of teachers' working conditions.

We also see that school is an object of competition between conflicting authorities. In case of Poland, the PiS policy aims at centralization of nearly anything. Local governments, and those of large cities in particular are their annoying obstacles. Making running schools hard for local

governments by charging them with costs of massive restructuration and limiting their tax revenues, means that the state will be able to "rescue" public schools (they have already practiced it with some theaters or museums) and then change their managerial staff and programs of their activities. Schools, as social hubs, and places where knowledge and attitudes are created, are critical places where the nature of social bonds and identities is being defined. In a centralized state driven by nationalist sentiments, its function is to unify mind-frames of the population by pride, myths, and fear rather than by civic competence, and thus to secure the ruling clique against being overthrown in elections. The second value that shines through this ending ontology is, therefore, that of shared knowing.

And there is one more value visible in the struggle for public schools in Poland nowadays. In conversations with parents, we hear that some seek private schools not because they need to satisfy their middle-class ambitions, but because they want to save their children from religious indoctrination. Catholic religion is taught in public schools, usually by priests, and children who do not attend the classes need to spend time in common rooms, thus forced to demonstrate their difference in public. The present minister for education decided to make religion or ethics classes obligatory, and in shortage of ethics teachers their training was commissioned in Catholic universities. Referring to the Connecticut criteria, public schools cannot protect their children from sectarian teaching when the state is sectarian itself. In this variety of the end of public school, private schools are perceived as safe havens for minorities, and it is those schools who perform this crucial function of public schooling.

Turing to the second ontology of the end of school, one related to new media, we can suspect a set of neoliberal desires operational here as well (reducing costs by digitally assisted home schooling, etc.) But we may also spot expectation that schools, in their present or modified form, could help make sense of digital culture, help invent its grammars – a thing that they did to print. What is at stake is not only different skills needed in digital environments, but first of all, the density of the horizontal, rhizomatic structure of this environment and its parcellation into self-sustainable bubbles insulated from other nodes of the web. This environment lacks grammar and vocabulary that would enable communication across the bubbles, and even though there are

travelers and interpreters, there are no common spaces (like market squares in ancient cities) where they could be met easily. What we are heading at now is the figure of a teacher that could work as traveler and storyteller who initiates the construction of transversal reason – a notion Wolfgang Welsh (1995) proposed as response to the postmodern crisis of universality. This concept is found adequate to the research on World Wide Web (Sandbothe, n.d.), and we believe it is valuable for education in the digital world. For the time being, this ontology is a perfect hunting ground for commercial and political marketeers who find their prey perfectly sorted, legibly tagged, and grouped in comfortably homogeneous enclaves. Can those be turned into communities – and can those form a kind of society where their worldviews interact and where they learn to develop a notion of common good? Some hope of this kind was visible, for instance, during the protests against ACTA regulations that were interpreted as imposing policing control over the Web in Europe (Lee, 2012). However, nobody is interested in maintaining such commonness when threat (or occasional fascination) disappears.

Closing the circle: Reclaiming teachers and public schools

Throughout this argument we claim that privatization and new media undercut both public school as institution, and public sphere that is *the* space for republican political orders and democratic practices. At the same time, public school was one of crucial institutions that created those disappearing public spheres and citizens who could make democratic use of them. Reclaiming public schools seems to be, therefore, a point of dissection where this circle of demolition could turned into thinking of new futures for democracy.

It seems that to imagine ends of public schooling and teacher's work that correspond to the ontological condition of their ending requires that we take physical and virtual spaces into account simultaneously; that we treat such issues as privatization of schools, segregation of urban spaces, dissection of World Wide Web into insulated bubbles, populist politics that use AI to corrupt elections campaigns, and education reduced to serving human capital to global capitalism or producing voters to populist reactions against global capitalism, as elements of the same puzzle. After all, all those developments and both ontologies we discuss here are

product of capitalist logic of parcellation, privatization and profit. This logic operates in the ontology of end of public school and discloses values that reveal its ends.

Let us start with physical space. In the 1980s Henry Giroux (2015) observed that public school is the last public sphere, i.e., one that is free from segregation at the entry gates. This observation only gains importance nowadays when schools become more and more segregated. If we wonder where we make young people isolated by physical and virtual arrangements meet and talk over their concerns, public school is (still) there. School is the place where they may learn where are the limits of what is familiar, about difference, otherness and *the unheimlich* that do not allow to "rest in peace" within the familiar. This is a value of teaching that cannot be attained by learning alone (Biesta 2017).

What we are learning from school's ending via privatization and segregation is that schools are fundamentally important locations in physical space: places for doing things together, binding hubs where individuals enter public scene to share and confront their thinking and experience limits to what has been familiar to them. Also, despite the unprecedented availability of online content, places where common knowledge can be pursued through purposefully invented practices. They remain connected to the external world, but are capable of inventing and maintaining knowledges that have no practical connection to that world and can therefore socialize to possible rather than actual realities. They are also intimate places, frequently in a walking distance for anyone within the community, and accessible to those from other communities as well. They are invested with local histories, memories, and future expectations, and can therefore support communities, individuals and societies in their becoming. They can bind or separate generations, classes, genders and races, religious denominations, and political ideologies. Their work is, at the same time, about gradual grammatization of knowing; about turning it into elements that can be decontextualized and employed as elements of new epistemic constructions (see below for more detail). These values are inherent in end of school proclamations and policies and can be transformed into ends of its operation by asserting social interaction and integration, knowledge production, confrontation and retention. The recent COVID 19 experience adds a powerful justification to keeping the school as physical place detached from the home, family and pressure of daily routines. What Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons (Masschelein

and Simons, 2013) identified as grounded in the history of *scholè* (school as free time) has never been so clear before.

However, the return to the common world bound by books and operating as a reading public seems hardly possible nowadays. For the time being, we are happy to use our critical skills to undermine all claims to truth and benevolence (see conspiracy theories around COVID-19 and vaccination policies, cf. Weise, n.d.), and we enjoy our sectarian online commonalities. Not only because we have mastered virtual space to the degree where it has become possible, but because we are mastered by its algorithms as well. Like in Rousseau's advice given to Emile's tutor, we are free to do whatever we want, but we want what algorithms want us to want. In Stiegler's terms we live in the time of permanent innovation when "industrial technical invention has come to outpace conceptual innovation in other social systems such as law, government, and education" (Tinnell, 2015, p. 133). Education has always worked within processes of grammatization where semantically rich signs are separated from their context and turned into particles that can be circulated and articulated into varied semantic chains and processes of "tertiary retention", of common external memory that works as repository for communication and cultural creations. Modern schools played active role in the grammatization of script, while nowadays this process concerns digital signs. The process is under way and schools try to find ways to address it, but we are far from a significant response, and we usually participate in it as objects rather than responsible actors. What we like on Facebook, or where children put ticks in test sheets are transformed into digital elements of psychographic marketing or political strategies, into school ranks or PISA tables that shape national policies. Education feeds this productive mill and "proletariatizes" students by making them more and more dependent on what the Web knows. Education is implicated in this construction of systemic stupidity (Stiegler, 2015) and fuels tendencies that proclaim the end of school. But it can also turn these resources into culturally productive and socially desirable ends.

This crisis has not arrived with the advancement of the internet and social media, it was already proclaimed after the invention of television (McLuhan, 1994) and, more recently, after the video revolution in the 1980s. There are striking similarities between what Gregory Ulmer (Ulmer, 2004, 2019) was writing about educational uses of video and what Bernard Stiegler says about digital technologies. Both thinkers

developed Derrida's project of grammatology pedagogically. Both say it will take time, just as proliferation of alphabetic script and follow-up technologies had to take their time. When speaking of using camcorders in the classroom Ulmer (2004) said that teachers need to be ready to "speak nonsense" long enough to start seeing sense shining through the chaos. We still do not know what "grammes" (originally, written signs) will we identify in the noise, and what grammatologies will they produce for us and within us. Both Ulmer and Stiegler sooth the panic and say that we are on the path to unprecedented creativity. To arrive there, however, we need a "quantum leap" (Stiegler, 2015) – something that cannot be determined beforehand, definitely not by pressure toward immediate and accountable efficiency.

What next? Let as signal briefly other ends that can be drawn from the school's ending ontology.

First is ignorance – an issue broader than Stiegler's stupidity. There are two instances of ignorance that need to be reminded here. Starting with classics, there is Socratic ignorance. Against what dominates in neoliberal knowledge-based policies that seek certainty (evidence-based everything) and silences ambiguity, and against Internet celebrities and conspiracy theories, the virtue of not being sure and the courage to say so sounds like an important starting point for teachers dealing with simple solutions of complex issues and with conspiracy theories that find insidious plots everywhere. This leads us to its instance expressed by Jacques Rancière in his *Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière, 1991) where teachers who do not know are capable to teach without stultifying outcomes of explication. In his political philosophy, where the distinction between "police" that maintains divisions and distinctions that structure social order and "politics" that disrupts the rules of perceiving the social is fundamental (Rancière, 2015), Rancière says that police regulations need to be ignored when we try to enact emancipated lives. In pedagogical sense ignorance is thus productive when we ignore inequalities that serve "police" distinctions and "distribution of the sensible" with which students enter the school. In practical terms it means that we must make a (counterfactual) assumption that everybody can learn everything without presuming limitations of disqualifying nature. On the other hand, somewhat in line with the remark on Socrates, teachers' ignorance as to the subject they teach makes it possible to ask the student "what do you think about it" seriously and initiate thinking together. These

challenging ideas point to another important issue in the context of this paper: if we indeed live in time of systemic stupidity that is organized and maintained by forces that wage economic war on societies (Stiegler's term), looking for caveats of ignorance within that war machine is of strategic importance for our chances to change.

Next is rationalism, an idea deeply embedded in modern educational tradition of science education. Teaching scrutiny and methodological rigor is fundamentally significant, and we do not need to seek practical, and economic in particular, justifications to make every effort to make it work at school. However, in contemporary context (e.g., the anti-vaccination movement) it needs to be connected to the value of critical thinking in an extremely attentive way. As Bruno Latour notes, (Latour, 2004) critical competencies may be complicit to proliferation of conspiracy theories. Latour proposes in this context that we redirect our educational efforts from "matters of fact" to "matters of concern" and teach science not for single solutions but calling for more complexity, for density of descriptions, for multifaceted interpretations that confront simplistic explanations of everything, and for arranging education around issues of public concern one cannot remain silent about. A figure of the teacher as rational transversal traveler, one capable of linking heterogeneous elements in a process of interpretation, could be very helpful here.

Following the critical trait, we turn to Jürgen Habermas. If the world is ridden by emotional manipulation and political marketing, and if we still wish to restore the conditions for democracy, we need to teach how to distinguish between truth, rightness, and sincerity. These labels represent what Habermas (Habermas, 2015) calls validity claims. He defined them when discussing ethics of discourse as the condition of democratic deliberation. We can deliberate when we see our interlocutors as speaking truth, as expressing concern with given norms, and as being authentic, or sincere in what they say. Importantly, listening to political campaigners we forget easily that those three claims are of different nature while we must be attentive why we trust them: do they refer to reliable facts? Are they "right" in terms of certain values? Or do they just "look reliable" and "sound sincere"? In the time of political marketing, one must be aware that those who shape our opinion have been professionally trained to look sincere, or they may sincerely believe in lies. Also, we need to remember that what is factual is not always what should be. The fact that those conditions of possibility of democratic deliberation (and thus of decision

making) can be manipulated by spin doctors of political campaigns easily means that teaching how to critically *distinguish* between those features that are inseparable as conditions of democratic dialogue becomes an urgent end in the time when we hear of the end of democracy.

And we have one more suggestion that can be applied right now efficiently. From the grammatological perspective (Derrida, 2016; resp. Ulmer 2004 y 2009; Stigler, 2015) we know that we ourselves are shaped by the media that mediate our relation to the world. How can we therefore gain distance to those media, how do we learn their performative work? First, we have the deconstructive approach that teaches how to gain distance within the text of which we ourselves are part. Another approach, proposed by Szkudlarek (2009), is that we acknowledge the complexity of cultural landscapes where ancient oral, modern literary, and postmodern visual and – across this divide – digital messages operate simultaneously creating nebulous networks of meanings. Distance may be acquired through translation, by expressing one medium in the language of another – a practice well known from schools where we drew pictures to books, we read or made written reports on films we watched. Ulmer proposed that we make films on anything expressed in other media, but we should treat it broadly. Not only is this valuable in terms of gaining distance to new technologies that have enormous potential of simulation and immersion, and thus allowing for under-standing (which always implies substitution or translation), but also because there is always something lost in translation: something that cannot be rendered otherwise. This is where, in residual signifiers that cannot be translated into the known, can we search for "grammes" that compose our yet unknown, but already active futures.

Final (if not ultimate) remarks

We have not proposed a new pedagogy here, or have we invented new roles for teachers. All ideas of which we speak in the concluding section above have been known for long, and we have identified them as operational in the endgames of schooling. However, it was not our aim to be innovative pedagogically. We live in a culture of ending. It has been with us at least from the time of the Apocalypse, it repeated itself with millennial paroxysms frequently, it gained a tragic dimension

after the Holocaust and critical self-awareness with postmodernism, it turned tangibly practical with neoliberal reforms, and now it intensifies and crystallizes rapidly in the time of climatic catastrophe. The end is something that lasts, that is, and it will be with us until the end. We have therefore tried to treat frequent claims and some particular cases of the end of school ontologically, to identify values that seem to operate behind this endgame, and to draw ends for schooling and teaching from this condition. If these ends have already been known to pedagogical audiences, we tried to see them with ontological gravity, as embedded in the condition of ending. We will need to stay with this ending condition for long, and if we cannot reverse its logic and return to progressive hope easily, we need to learn how to control the regress before we manage to turn scattered signs and possibilities into new operational grammars of education.

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The common school and its dunces: Parents, homework, and the inheritance of the "vie collective"[1]

La escuela común y sus zoquetes: Padres, deberes y la herencia de la "vie collective"

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Abstract

The separation between family and school as pedagogical sites as classically understood has been compromised by the demands of the intensive parenting culture and the increased focus on parental engagement in children's schooling. While the defence of the common school and its separation from the familial and social order provides important reminders of the specificity of school practices and their democratic import, it overlooks the reality of the figure of the parent who needs to find a way to engage with them today. A key aspect of this is the support of children's homework. Today, where children are required to do it, parents are encouraged not only to provide support but also evidence of this. Through a discussion of what we see and what we hear in the film *Deux Cancres* [Two Dunces] we explore the idea and experience of the common school in terms that recentre a political, pedagogical understanding of the parent.

Keywords: homework, common school, parents, inheritance.

Resumen

La separación entre la familia y la escuela como lugares pedagógicos, tal como se entendía tradicionalmente, se ha visto comprometida por las exigencias de la cultura de la crianza intensiva y un mayor interés de los padres por participar en la vida escolar de los niños. Si bien la defensa de la escuela común y su separación del orden familiar y social proporciona importantes recordatorios de la especificidad de las prácticas escolares y su importancia democrática, pasa por alto la realidad de la figura paterna que necesita encontrar una manera de comprometerse con ellas hoy en día. Un aspecto clave es la ayuda en los deberes de los niños. Hoy en día, cuando se pide a los niños que hagan deberes, se anima a los padres no solo a que les ayuden sino también a que den pruebas de ello. Partiendo del debate de lo que vemos y oímos en la película *Deux Cancres* [comercializada en España como *La hora de los deberes* pero cuya traducción literal es "Dos zoquetes")], analizamos la idea y la experiencia de la escuela común en términos que reestablecen una comprensión política y pedagógica de la paternidad.

Palabras clave: deberes, escuela común, padres, herencia

Introduction

In recent years, the common school has needed to be defended. In the context of nations repositioning themselves within a global knowledge economy, with the accompanying demands of competitiveness and accountability, schools are often seen as inefficient, failing to close gaps, failing to solve inequalities, failing to meet the needs of a diverse, rapidly changing economy. While the *idea* of the common school and its defence may be key to the very affirmation of equality and democracy, our experience of school and its practices may not bear this out. The idea of the common school as leading out from the space and structure of the family and as a suspension of the order of society (cf. e.g., Masschelein and Simons, 2015) is compromised not only by the instrumentalisation and personalisation that characterises education today, but also by

the way in which parental engagement with schooling is seen to be essential to a child's outcomes and is used as a marker of school quality. This has been a growing trend in recent decades. For example, in the UK, the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 required that all maintained schools (i.e., those publicly funded by the local authority) adopt a home–school agreement (Ofsted, 2011). The UK Department for Education commissioned a review of best practice in 2010 on the basis that the "large and positive impact on children's learning" of parental engagement made identifying the most effective interventions a priority (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011). In the USA, the Department for Education has a dedicated Family and Community Engagement team, as "family engagement is becoming an integral part of education reform efforts."[2] Similar initiatives are also found, for example, in Australia[3] and the EU,[4] and the need for such policy is recognised by the OECD.[5]

Within the frameworks provided by such policies, it is clear that the parent is addressed in specific ways, or at least a specific figure of the parent is presupposed, subject to the instrumentalising demands of the knowledge economy. Parents are addressed and asked to understand themselves today in terms of what has been critically identified as an intensive "parenting culture" (Lee et al., 2014). This phenomenon is characterised by an increased policy focus on parents, motivated by the "assumption that there is a direct causal link between the quality of parenting and social outcomes" (Furedi, 2014, p. ix), and the transformation of raising children into "a cultural accomplishment that can be cultivated to produce positive outcomes" (ibid.) through, for example, parenting classes, making expertise available to the general public via the mass media, and by embedding parental engagement in the expectations of what a good school looks like. This cultural change goes hand in hand with what has been referred to as the 'schoolification' (see Moss and Bennett, 2006) of children's lives, as a focus on reaching set learning milestones and the notion of 'school readiness' increasingly shapes early years education and care. As argued elsewhere, this constitutes a reduction of the figure of the parent, of their experience of raising

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[2] https://www.ed.gov/parent-and-family-engagement
[3] https://www.dese.gov.au/supporting-family-school-community-partnerships-learning/family-school-partnerships/parent-engagement-learning
[4] https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2014-2015/school/france-parental-involvement_en.pdf
[5] https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41727&filter=all

children (see e.g., Faircloth, 2020), to, as Daly (2014) puts it, a "parenter" who exists to do things to and for a child in order to maximise future learning outcomes. The 'parenting' account of raising children overlooks or denies the existence of the parent as a political, pedagogical figure (see Hodgson and Ramaekers, 2019).

In this article we explore the idea and experience of the common school in terms that recentre this political, pedagogical understanding of the parent. On this view, irrespective of any particular construction of the good parent, any parent always finds herself situated "between child and world", and thus unavoidably represents or, in Cavell's terms, makes themselves exemplary of (1979, p. 178), the socio-cultural meanings that shape their lives, into which they introduce their children. [6] This raises questions, then, about the nature of that exemplarity, the forms it takes on a daily basis, and the responsibility entailed in the implied assumption of authority in the act of passing on (Cf. Cavell, 1979, p. 178). In what follows we are not bluntly rejecting the specific figure of the parent presupposed by policies on parental engagement in schools. Rather, we hope to bring out that the demands made by such policies, the expectations they set about what kind of parent one is supposed to be, are demands that a parent somehow needs to relate to. After all, such expectations are part of today's world, the very world for which parents, at least in many Western contexts, are asked to assume responsibility. So, as parents, we find ourselves subject to multiple demands wherein rejection of the prevailing construction of the good parent is an option, but it's only one of the options. The parenting account of raising children is, after all, neither totalising nor exhaustive.

This discussion of the competing demands of adulthood and parenthood that follows takes its cue specifically from the presentation of the experience of doing homework in the film, *Deux Cancres*.[7] The film, we argue, articulates aspects of the experience of being a parent of a child who is attending school, in terms of the demands on one's time, how this may ask us to confront our inheritance of the common school, and the experience of ordering, and outcasting, the experience of school seems to entail. By exploring these aspects, we hope to capture a more

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[6] We are situating ourselves in a tradition of thinking about the pedagogical relationship as an intergenerational relationship as expressed by educational philosophers and philosophers such as Schleiermacher, Mollenhauer, Langeveld, Buber, Arendt, Savater, Stiegler, and Buber, among others.
[7] http://www.film-documentaire.fr/4DACTION/w_fiche_film/48900_1

nuanced account of raising children, and of being involved in, or asked to be engaged in, one's child's education, than we find in discussions about the educational responsibilities of parents vis-à-vis the school and their children's education or in sociological critiques of the parenting culture. This confronts us with the question of the form of the common school we are asked to – and willing to – pass on and the relationship between public and private that takes shape in the relationship between family and school.

In what follows we first describe "what we see" and "what we hear" in the film. In the section *What We See* we further contextualise the film's presentation of homework practices in terms of the contemporary parenting culture and debates on homework,[8] and bring out how Ludovic, the father in the film, is in some ways exemplary of this culture. In *What We Hear*, we elaborate on other aspects of what is presented in the film, by focusing predominantly on the voiceovers, in which Ludovic gives his account of his personal experience of school (his inheritance of it), of being a parent, and of supporting his child with his homework, and in which he seems also to present a critique of the manner of our formal schooling. In the sections that follow we then explore the apparent tension, or contradiction, between these two registers of the film – of engaging with the practice of homework yet having deep reservations about it – to elaborate on our accounts of raising children and the (idea of the) common school. When brought together, the father's own experiences of school and his inheritance of it, his efforts to comply with the demands of good parenting and of the school today, and his son's experience of school serve as a reminder that the common school also creates an (its) outside, hence outsiders ("dunces"), within its "vie collective."[9] The presentation of this experience in the film leads to consideration of the intergenerational relationship, the responsibility of the older generation for the passing on of the idea of the common school, and the inherent tension that exists in the figure of the parent.

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[8] We acknowledge that attitudes to and policies on homework differ internationally. Hence the discussion here relates to those contexts where homework is frequently set by schools and is an assumed part of children's education, as depicted in the film.

[9] This is an expression already used by the father, Ludovic, to describe the school as a "new community life". We will come back to it below.

What we see

The film *Deux Cancres* presents the experience of a father, Ludovic (Vieuille, the film's director), supporting his son, Angelo, with his homework. Much of the film is spent looking at the two of them from across the kitchen table, as they sit side by side struggling with maths, grammar, English, …. Occasionally the daughter or mother is to one side of, or in the back of, the shot. Occasionally the father is in the adjoining kitchen as he prepares dinner while also helping his son. But the main focus is on the interaction of father and son with the tasks assigned by the school. From Angelo's body language and frustrated responses, we can see that he struggles to grasp a lot of the material assigned and to focus on the task at hand. Hence, his father seems often at the limit of his patience, not only with his son's wandering attention but also with his own struggles with the material. His attempts to explain it are often frustrated by what he perceives to be, unclear instructions from the teacher. Yet he is equally frustrated by Angelo's apparent failure to engage with the process and to retain information he and Angelo's mother have spent hours trying to explain and revise.

His experience will be familiar to many parents. At the end of a long day of work and school, parent and child need to sit together to ensure the set homework is completed. Where the practice exists, today it is expected not only that children will do their homework and will often receive a form of sanction if they do not, but also that parents will actively participate in the process of completing it, either through one-to-one support, or by checking it and signing a homework book to verify that it has been completed.[10]

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[10] For example: "Children and parents should be very clear about what is to be completed at home. The Upper KS2 children [ages 9-11] have diaries where they list their homework. They are expected to have these signed by parents after completing and showing work at home. Signing the diary or the piece of homework lets teachers know that parents have supervised or checked work. If parents are not happy with the finished standard of homework, they should not avoid signing the diary, but rather write a quick note to the teacher instead" (St Mary's Catholic Primary School Homework Policy, July 2020).

As a further example, the Toronto District School board in Canada advises:

"Parents/guardians are a key part of finding homework success. Some tips on what you can do to support your child include:

■ Set a time for homework and provide a quiet space away from distractions
■ Practice math, reading and writing daily and encourage your child to help you read and write everyday items such as recipes, newspapers or shopping lists
■ Show interest and talk about what happened at school
■ Praise and encourage your child to ask for help when needed

So, we see Ludovic checking the teacher's instructions on the task, ensuring that Angelo is aware of the negative feedback he has received from his teachers and, therefore, of the need to concentrate and make progress. We see Ludovic showing Angelo how to seek additional information where needed, in a dictionary or online, and giving space for Angelo to think and to answer for himself. We see him pointing to words and exercises in textbooks and notebooks, while explaining what he is pointing at, or asking questions about it. We see him demonstrating a maths exercise by writing it down for Angelo. We see him testing Angelo, as he helps him to revise his course material. We see Angelo sitting at the table by himself, talking to his father who is in the kitchen, out of shot, preparing dinner, while asking him questions to check whether he is still focused on his homework. We see that the practice of (supporting) homework takes place among the many other things a parent does: making dinner, mediating sibling arguments, and so on. We also see Ludovic's frustration at the lack of progress Angelo makes, and the time it takes.

Frustration at, and outright resistance to, the imposition of school on family time by the setting of homework has grown in recent years, as pressures on both parents and children - and concern for work-life balance - have increased (see e.g., Gill and Schlossman, 2004; Buell, 2008; Richter and Andresen, 2012; links to media reports on parental resistant to homework are provided below[11]). Where the practice of homework exists, resistance to it is by no means specific to the overworked, competitive, late neoliberal period. In the US in particular, active bans were introduced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in some states as parents and progressive education reformers sought to challenge the imposition of the school on the life of the family and the freedom to choose how to use its time (Gill and Schlossman, 2003). Often, it was not that parents did not want their children to learn outside of school, but rather that they wanted to retain the freedom to choose what, when, and how they did so. Alternatively, progressive educators argued that it was an imposition on the natural needs of the child for play and rest, and was leading to exhaustion and physical and mental degradation. By the late

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■ Keep in touch with teachers and ask about completed homework" (https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Elementary-School/Get-Involved/Homework)
[11] See e.g. Pidd (2009) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/18/canada-homework-milley; Luke (2015) https://www.timescolonist.com/life/homework-how-much-is-too-much-1.1961263

20th century, however, the dissent had seemingly been outweighed by the demands of the capitalist economy and the need to ensure optimal examination outcomes for all (see e.g., Martin, 2017; Fargion, 2021). As indicated above, resistance to homework does still exist, though this seems to lead to further guidance on efficiency and effectiveness than a move away from the practice.

In recent years scholars have convincingly shown how an intensive parenting culture is enmeshed in neoliberal ideologies, and how it perpetuates a normative idea of what it means to be a good parent, one that is by and large based on middle-class conceptions of family life and parent-child relationships (see e.g., Jensen, 2010). Recently, Fargion (2021) has succinctly summarized the relevant features of this culture of parenting as follows:

> In short, parents seem tasked with devoting huge amounts of time and money to their children's education, both checking and supporting their school performance and organizing extracurricular activities, as well as with being able to control and guide their offspring. In this view, all aspects of children's lives require careful planning and organization so as to provide optimal opportunities for development, thus guaranteeing high results in school and success in a competitive society. (Fargion, 2021, pp. 3-4)

In this discourse the good parent appears not only as a learning facilitator, whose relationship with their child is framed in terms of the development and use of appropriate skills and approaches, but also, as Ramaekers and Suissa (2012) note, as taking the position of the expert. The parent is asked to see the child as if from an external, third person perspective. Fargion expresses this as enacting a "decontextualized performance, with targets to be reached, and necessary competences to be learned" (Fargion, 2021, p. 1). This framing of raising children as parenting, then, is seen to detach what we do from one's personal registers and private concerns, and hence has been seen as "de-personalized" and "depoliticized" (see Ramaekers and Hodgson, 2020). In taking responsibility for the work of the school, the good parent is one who sidelines or translates her private and personal concerns, in view of performing and prioritizing certain school practices within the context of her (private) home.

We see nothing unusual, then, in Ludovic's focus on his child given today's intensive parenting culture in which ensuring optimal educational outcomes and meeting the learning needs (of both oneself and one's child) are the job of parenting. Indeed, in the contemporary context of intensive parenting and active home-school engagement, the time and attention Ludovic gives to supporting his son's education is, arguably, exemplary. As indicated, the active engagement of parents is seen as key today in ensuring optimal educational outcomes. Whereas, traditionally, the home is the primary site of socialisation and school the site of initiation into particular forms of knowledge and conduct, today's conceptualisations of good parenting have blurred these distinctions. (From an educational point of view, parental involvement is, in this sense, an important indicator of social investment (cf. e.g. Hartas, 2015) and the home is recast as a learning environment in the study of factors affecting social and educational outcomes (see e.g. Hartas, 2012)). We see Ludovic taking seriously this responsibility, wanting to contribute to his child's educational outcomes, wanting to perform according to expectations, and continuing to invest in his son's education in spite of this effort being unrecognised by the school. Comments from Angelo's teachers, which we refer to later, testify to this.

What we hear

The presentation of the time and effort given to supporting Angelo with his homework is overlaid with Ludovic's voiceover, in which he laments, that despite the time he and Angelo spend, his son does not make progress or meet expectations. The following transcription of a scene captures this.[12]

L: Right … so what shall we start with? You're on measurements? [L reads a maths exercise from a sheet of paper; at the same time A yawns] "Convert these periods of time into minutes. One hour equals

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[12] L = Ludovic, the father; A = Angelo, the son; dialogue between L and A are in normal font, voiceovers in italics. Sentences between square brackets are descriptions provided by the authors of this article.

sixty minutes."

L: Sixty minutes. According to Miss Troquet, my son's schoolteacher, homework should not take more than 10 or 15 minutes.

Coax him down from his room: 8 minutes. Sit down, then run back upstairs for the satchel: 2 minutes. Get out exercise book, pencil case, books: 30 seconds. Read instructions, figure out what needs to be done: at least 5 minutes. With Miss Troquet's projected 15 minutes expired we finally get down to work.

60 minutes.

The average time taken to complete my son Angelo's homework. The days go by to the rhythm of that hour spent together. An hour that never ceases to extend a working day. An hour that passes, presses, escapes, then it's gone. An hour that sometimes isn't enough.

At first it is unclear whether Ludovic's frustration is with his child, or with the teacher's expectation that the work could be completed in 10 to 15 minutes. As they work together to try to make sense of the material, it becomes clearer that it is both, but also that Ludovic has deeper concerns about himself and about the form of schooling to which his son is (and he was) subject.

A: But there's this verb … I don't know.

L: Which verb?

A: Être [To be].

L: Think of an example of its future tense.

A: "J'ai" [I have].

L: No, that's the present tense of "avoir" [to have] … At the moment, for example, you can say: "I am home." Supposing we were talking about tomorrow?

A: "I will be at home."

L: I will be at home. Yet again, after school, we will be at home for your daily session. You will try to conjugate, calculate, learn your lessons … You are still a small boy and every day we get to know each other a little better.

L: Your father – me – doesn't know how to go about your homework. How to assimilate these lessons into your fantasy world? Your schoolbooks aren't much fun, though.

We could read Ludovic's film as, frankly, indulgent. His concerns over his son's lack of progress and the time he invests are clearly a reflection on his own failings at school and his anxieties not only for his son's future but also for his son's love for him, as we hear:

> *L: Feeling a prisoner of the classroom again through my children's homework is unbearable. Making this film was like the urge to doodle in class, a selfish form of escape, a way of fleeing at all costs. Only, this film has become homework for me to do. Angelo clings to fractions and grammatical rules as if to an elusive lifebelt, in the improbable fear that he won't be loved. I think that I have become like him. I cling to this film like a lifebelt in the fear of not being loved by my little boy because of homework. Both of us cling on but, inexorably, fatigue always gains the upper hand.*

Of course, Ludovic's experience of school is not universal, so again we could dismiss this as his personal issue, one that he is projecting on to his struggling son. We could also read Ludovic's film as echoing the 20th century progressive reformers, and today's child-centred educators, in its critique not only of the intrusion of the school into the time and space of the family but also of the way in which Angelo's particular needs are not met, his interest not captured, by the standard curriculum and pedagogy.

At various points in the documentary we can hear Ludovic's voiceover lamenting this:

> *But the strict rules of grammar and conjugation lock his imagination into a regulatory framework.*
> *You know, there are rules. At home, at school, at work. Everywhere. To live together, you need rules. To avoid accidents, you need to know the highway code. There are lots of codes: the penal code, the civil code, good-driving codes. If you don't know these codes, you don't get through. You stay where you are. You don't move forward. Or you hit a wall.*
> *How to render a perfectly clear sentence murky by deconstructing it grammatically? How to tell my son that when his mom says "Papa et Angelo", the word "et"* [meaning "and"]*, slipped in to show we are together, this tiny two-letter word, an "e" and a "t", is now a "coordinating conjunction".*

One suggestion here seems to be that the demands of formal grammar do not take account of the way Angelo learns. The comments from teachers, written daily in the "Liaison Book" that provides a means of home-school communication, indicate no sympathy, only disappointment with Angelo's failure to comply with these demands:

Must work harder …
Not enough "progress" …
I don't like you.
Angelo hardly busting a gut!
Angelo not working … either in class or at home.
4 grades, including 3 zeros!
Worrying grades …
Disastrous results, inappropriate attitude in class.

At times we are shown pages from Angelo's exercise book in which he has made elaborate sketches and doodles. The act of doodling in class, which Ludovic likens to the urge to make this film, is generally seen as a sign of distraction, a lack of engagement, and not listening. Matthew Battles writes:

While our current sense of doodle is relatively new, it is an old word. In his Dictionary of the English Language, Samuel Johnson defines a doodle as "a trifler, an idler," calling it a mere "cant word" and suggesting that it derives from the expression "do little." Later dictionaries, however, trace it from the Portuguese doudo, for foolish, or more plausibly from the Low German dudel, as in dudeltopf, a nightcap (an etymology that crosses aptly with that of "dunce cap," so named for the medieval Scholastic philosopher Duns Scotus, whose aversion to classicism earned the derision of Renaissance schoolmasters). (2003, p. 106)

'Dunce' is how Ludovic refers to himself – in his voiceover he says: *"Everyday, the homework session reminds me of what a dunce I was"* – and to the two of them in the title of the film (*Deux Cancres*). (The term also appears in a radio news bulletin heard while Ludovic is doing the school run in the car: "the dunce's cap awarded by the OECD to our neighbors". Will France follow the same route? A study of the

academic performance of 15-year-olds in 65 countries is "worrying and unacceptable" says Education Minister Vincent Peillon, while PM Jean-Marc Ayrault has pleaded for "electric shock treatment", giving a sense of the discourse of educational achievement and competition in which contemporary schooling takes place).

It is clear that Ludovic strongly sympathises with his son's struggles. Accompanying the images of the teachers' comments given above we hear Ludovic:

> *How to make my son understand that it isn't him being assessed, rather knowledge, temporarily gained, then churned out, with grades that reflect pupils' weaknesses rather than their progress.*

While not a rejection of "school" as such, the way Ludovic describes and depicts the school tends to be negative. It is presented as austere, formal, orderly, and devoid of people. When we are shown the images of empty school corridors and playgrounds, we hear Ludovic's voiceover say:

> *On my kids' first day at school, my throat tightened, suffocating me, at the sight of rows of coat pegs … the odour of glossy-floored corridors polished by the feet of hundreds of children trying to find their place in this new community life.*

Arguably the concerns and anxieties that Ludovic expresses are not specific to schooling today; the competitive, performance culture is but an aspect of the latest iteration of the school system he has inherited. But it is nonetheless noteworthy that a father reminisces on it in these terms – "dunce" – bringing out a register, both for himself and his son, of finding it difficult, of being set apart from "cette […] vie collective" (translated in the film's subtitles as "community life") implied by the common school. We will come back to this below.

Coming to terms with our inheritance: the dunce(s) and the common school

In this section we further explore the apparent tension, noted above, between 'what we see' and 'what we hear': between Ludovic's experience

of supporting school practices through homework and feeling resistant to them because of his own, and now his son's, experience of them. But rather than seeing this as a contrast, or alternatively taking what we hear in the voiceover as providing an interpretation of what we see (as is common in the documentary genre), we suggest that the very tension between 'what we see' and 'what we hear' presents something of the experience of a parent faced with the reality of (his child going to) school; of what it means to be a parent of a child who attends school. Rather than offer a psychologized reading of Ludovic's expressed anxieties, we suggest that his questioning and reflections touch upon an existential register of the relationship a parent has with their child(ren). We explore this below in terms of parental ambivalence, our relationship to our inheritance, and the idea of the dunce and the common school.

Parental ambivalence

The many things we see and hear (Ludovic's "doings" and "sayings", to use Schatzki's (2002) terms), rather than being contradictory, give an account of what constitutes the practice of a parent supporting his child's schooling. Ludovic's doings and sayings capture the ambivalence of this experience of having to relate to his child as a pupil/student. As indicated above, being a parent inevitably has a representational dimension. Understood as always situated between their child ("beginners", Cavell says [1979]) and some form of communal life ("forms of life"), a parent inevitably, unavoidably, represents something of this communal life, or more generally of the socio-cultural meanings that shape their lives and into which they introduce their children. But what comes out clearly in Ludovic's sayings and doings, and what brings out an existential depth to this parental 'in-betweenness', is that one is never entirely one or the other (for child or world; private or public, if you will). The experience of this figure of pedagogical representation is constituted by a myriad of competing wants, intentions, questions, hesitations, actions, and so on, shaped not only by the demands of child, school, and society but also by one's inheritance of what these are. Simultaneously wanting to help your child with his/her homework, resenting the need to do so, feeling frustrated at the lack of time after school to properly help your child with his/her homework, wanting your child to perform well at school,

questioning the use of it all, wanting your child to feel ok and to be happy, wavering between your understanding of your child's needs and the (reasonableness of) expectations of the school, between your wish to relieve your child of his/her suffering and your grasp of the necessity of some form of schooling, etc.

Relating to our inheritance

In the voiceover we hear Ludovic expressing his own anxieties: his son's struggles lead him to recollect his own negative experiences of school. It could, then, be read as a parent's lament, that expresses a desire to (over)protect his own child (as an example of what is referred to in the literature as 'cotton wool parenting'; see, e.g., O'Malley, 2015) because of his own experiences. Again, if we read the film as a personal indulgence on Ludovic's part, we might feel like saying that he should deal with his own issues himself, and not burden his children with them. But this, individual, psychologised interpretation risks overlooking the depth of what it means to "deal with one's issues", and in particular how this is inherent to what it means to lead a grown-up life. As we grow up, and throughout our adult life, we cannot avoid finding some sort of relationship with our inheritance (even if that relation is one of avoidance). As Mollenhauer succinctly put this: the generation that is growing up is not only burdened with the heritage of the social structure, it is also obliged to determine its relation to/rapport with this cultural heritage (Cf. Mollenhauer, 1985). This only intensifies when raising children oneself, for two main reasons. First, because the child is being initiated into forms of life we must take responsibility for and can be called upon to account for (Cf. Cavell, 1979, p. 178; Cf. also Arendt, 2006). Second, because this child can, at any moment of his upbringing, refuse to follow us, throw their upbringing back in our face (Cf. Mollenhauer, 1985), and hence confront us with what we take for granted as "natural", throwing us back upon ourselves (Cf. Cavell, 1979, pp. 124-125).

Cavell has expressed this, in terms of teaching, in a way that helpfully shifts this sense of anxiety: "The anxiety in teaching, in serious communication, is that I myself require education" (Cavell, 1979, p. 125). Ludovic's anxiety is due not only in finding his knowledge lacking and his ability to convey to his son what he does know, but also to facing the

limits of his willingness to consent to the practices of schooling. In one particular scene Angelo says: "I can't stand maths." Ludovic responds by saying: "Once you understand, it's more fun." But we then immediately hear him say in the voiceover: "Hypocrite! My mind could barely be less scientific. Must the emancipation of my son involve disciplines that he hasn't chosen?" In the voiceover Ludovic criticizes himself for his dishonesty towards his son. (Or perhaps it's not dishonesty, but an example of the truths we tell our children, as part of their socialization, as part of somehow trying to motivate his son, trying to meet the demands of the school, trying to meet the expectations of what a good parent is). This is not a dismissal of school, or a direct criticism of what is on the curriculum, or a plea for personalized learning (whatever that may mean). What the voiceover conveys, we suggest, is a realization that Ludovic's immediate response to Angelo, "Once you understand, it's more fun", was an evasion of a particular call to engage in "serious communication", evidenced by his self-rebuke "Hypocrite!". The (implicit) question, "Why do we need to do maths?", is a question that requires "serious communication", similar in nature to questions Cavell offers as examples: "Why do we eat animals? or Why are some people poor and others rich? or What is God? or Why do I have to go to school? or Do you love black people as much as white people? or Who owns the land? or Why is there anything at all? or How did God get here?" (Cavell, 1979, p. 125). In the face of these questions, serious questions, "[we] may find [our] answers thin, [we] may feel run out of reasons without being willing to say, "This is what I do" (what I say, what I sense, what I know), and honor that" (Ibid.). Not least because we – Ludovic – continue to have these questions ourselves. We may ignore that we only have thin answers and proceed—hence possibly denying the other's interest—or we may, as Cavell seems to suggest, take the opportunity to engage in "serious communication", no matter how uncomfortable that may be, and to "ask why we do what we do, judge as we judge, how we have arrived at these crossroads" (Cavell, 1979, p. 125).

Of course, this is not something that can be resolved within the relationship between Angelo and Ludovic, or in general between any particular child and her parent. (What else can you do, as a parent, at such a moment? What serious options do you really have? Coming to the end of one's reasons, to the point of literally saying "This is just how it is", seems unavoidable. Because (if we consent to the idea of the common

school) school is unavoidable. (And maybe this in itself is an educational experience for Angelo, the child, that is: learning that some things just are as they are?) Depending on your relationship with your child you may be able to answer these questions satisfactorily. But, at least at that very moment, things will not change. (Angelo will still have to do his maths, no matter what Ludovic says, or how Ludovic feels about it being on the curriculum.)

The dunce(s) and the common school

The questions "why we do what we do, judge as we judge, how we have arrived at these crossroads" (Cavell, 1979, p. 125) become all the more pressing in the face of Ludovic's accounting for himself and his son as "dunces" ("cancres", in French). His use of the term indicates a sense of not belonging to "cette […] vie collective" of the school. In the film we are shown scenes in which it is clear that Angelo has no clue at all what he is doing, or of what his father is trying to explain. He doesn't – yet – share in the experiences of "typically developing" children, he cannot find himself at home in the collective life form "school". Ludovic's reference to school as a form of collective or communal life seems to register his sense of, and appreciation of, the formative aspects of education as being different from how human beings are formed in other settings (e.g., the family). At the same time, however, it also registers his sense that those who are not (or do not seem to be) susceptible to such "formation", or at least not as easily as other children ("typically developing" children), are in danger of being designated as "different": "not enough … not working … disastrous … inappropriate" were terms Angelo's teachers used. (And, clearly, *that* experience is also a kind of "formation".)

Western forms of education and schooling have a long history of ways of dealing with "Angelo": designating a place in the order by labelling, rendering "special", or even pathologizing their behavior. At a certain point in the film, we see a leaflet on a school notice-board, "Specialized Help for Challenging Pupils [French: *Elèves en Difficultés*]. Information for teachers. For help with challenging pupils, fill in the form …", which seems to emphasize Ludovic's sense of Angelo not being an ordinary pupil in the eyes of his teachers (reaffirmed by the teachers' comments in the Liaison Book). The fact that Ludovic is showing this in his film

could be read as a mere private concern of a lamenting parent not able to accept his son's academic failure, or even as placing blame with the teachers. But rather than absorb this into an already existing critique of the exclusive nature of the standard school system, we take this as opening up the question of the nature of the common in the common school. Ludovic's account of his and his son's experiences of being "dunces", of having to relate to the "vie collective" of the school (as a parent and a former pupil, and as a pupil), invites us to consider again what is "common" in the common school given the common experience of its practices as exclusive and alienating.

Cavell makes this point forcefully when discussing an example that Wittgenstein gives about a child not being able to learn a series of numerals and this child then being "treated as a lunatic" because he's not able to follow the suggestive gestures of the teacher's demonstrative behaviour (Cf. Wittgenstein, 1958; Brown Book, p. 931, in Cavell, 1979, p. 112). He raises some pertinent questions, which are helpful for our purpose:

> What is ample evidence for lunacy? Not being able to keep up in school over a period of years? We may not call it lunacy, our gradations are not so crude; but the children are certainly treated differently because of it, and set apart. And sometimes the ostracism is based on the way a member dresses or on what he does not possess or on the words he uses. Is this more rational? How does it happen? (Cavell, 1979, p. 112)

Both Ludovic's and Angelo's experiences with (the) school touch upon exactly this, we argue. Ludovic is not calling his son and himself "lunatics", clearly, and our concern here is not with current issues relating to the ability of schools to recognize and provide for neurodiversity. Our focus remains on the figure of the parent. It is the father who refers to the both of them as dunces, and in doing so he is – implicitly – raising questions similar to Cavell's, we suggest. Recall the scene, described above, in which the teachers' comments about Angelo are shown. Here are clear instances of making "gradations" and children being "treated differently". It is in instances like these, specifically when taken together with Ludovic's continued efforts to support his son in doing his homework and not achieving sufficiently satisfying outcomes, that the matter of the "common" in the common school surfaces in a specific sense, or at least

a certain experience of it: it becomes uncannily clear that for some the inheritance of the "common" in the common school is the experience of being separated out within it.

Responsibility for what brings us together and what thus also, potentially, separates us cannot be discarded, but needs to be assumed, accounted for, collectively. Ludovic takes his responsibility seriously: affirming his consent for the idea of the common school in his investment in the sciences, maths, and grammar his son is set, yet struggling to consent fully to its practices, which precisely order the next generation in terms of their meeting certain requirements of the vie collective of the school. At times, following Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein, we will see that some do things differently than we do, or that they are different from us, and we could then just leave it at that. Or, thinking about Angelo, we might feel as teachers that we have done what we should do: we've given our feedback on his efforts and we've made clear that he is a "challenging pupil". Cavell's suggestion seems to be that we are sometimes very quick, too hasty, in calling someone "mad" or "different" (thus incomprehensible), etc. In dealing with these examples of "lunacy" he reminds us that "if I say 'They are crazy' or 'incomprehensible' then that is not a fact but my fate for them" (Cavell, 1979, p. 118). Thus, our judgement entails a responsibility, for the ordering of the social that ensues. Here it calls upon us to account for why we organize our "vie collective" in this way, and not otherwise. The pedagogical responsibility of the teacher is different to that of the parent, of course. But as grown-ups, responsibility for this "fate" is a shared one.

Conclusion

In today's ordering of the home-school relationship, the need for parental engagement, and the intensive parenting culture that shapes how we understand what it means to be a good parent, taking responsibility is, to a degree, instrumentalised. The logic of parental engagement is that it is an investment in my child's learning that will pay dividends in terms of attainment. Not only is the substantive content reinforced (e.g., the Maths, English, being learned) by this parental support but so too are positive attitudes to learning.

The limitations of the common school as "mainstream" education in terms of inclusion are well known and this is not the line of inquiry we have taken here. Nor have we adopted the approach that what is common in the common school is the collective exposure to things, texts, ideas, as a site of suspension from the social order. Our focus on the position of the parent in the understanding of school's contribution to the construction of common goods is intended to draw attention to their position, situated between child and world, wherein the common school and its practices are part of the world that we, generally, seek to pass on to our children. Our experiences of it and our commitments to it will vary, and thus we see the tension as played out in the film *Deux Cancres*. The film, through its focus on the practice of homework, and the relationship between school, parent, and child this constitutes, draws attention to the general tension (between instrumentalised education, including parenting, and what is left out of the picture in such accounts of education and upbringing) and the specific tensions in the parent-child relationship, between our own experiences, values, and beliefs, and our responsibility for initiating our children in the expectations of the vie collective as it is.

Angelo, as we have seen, makes little progress, despite the time his father invests in doing homework with him. The French term for homework, *devoirs*, implies an obligation. The verb *devoir* means "to must" and derives from the Latin *dēbēre*, which is close to the Spanish term *deberes*: something you owe, an obligation, a debt. The hope, or expectation, is that the child's debt is repaid, so to speak, by paying attention and making progress in their understanding and ability. Parental engagement in the practice of homework, particularly in the manner shown by Ludovic, seems premised on the idea that the additional investment, of time and effort, will pay off. Progress will be made. But the balance is never paid. Here, again, we see a tension in Ludovic's experience. He wants nothing more than the investment to pay off. For Angelo to be able to pay the debt, to progress, to understand the very currency with which they are working. But Ludovic is not calculating the time as being wasted: he values the very fact that they do spend time together, each day getting to know each other a little better.

The separation of family life and school life, and the notion of education as leading out (*educere*) from one to the other is compromised by the parenting understanding of raising children that focuses so

heavily on learning outcomes and the accountability placed on schools to encourage parental engagement for the benefit of attainment. The separation becomes hard to conceive of when a home-school contract exists. Though we may wish to defend this separation and the specificity of the school as an educational space that enables suspension of the social order and the newness and potentiality of the new generation, there remains a grown-up responsibility to not only pass on and defend the idea of the common school but also to question it and the "fate" of those who don't or can't recognise its value or the currency with which it operates. Such questioning is, perhaps disappointingly, not oriented to a resolution – "this is what an inclusive school is"; "this is what schooling for the future is" – but serves as a reminder not only that the parent is a political, pedagogical figure, but also that the question of the common school is a collective, educational one.

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195

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Neoliberal educational free choice versus the conception of education as a common and public good[1]

La libre elección educativa neoliberal frente a la concepción de la educación como un bien común y público

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Abstract

This article analyzes the concept of educational freedom in Spain, focusing especially on two of its manifestations, freedom of education and free school choice, as well as its relationship with a conception of education as a common and public good. The objectives have been to analyze the future of its meaning, the main theoretical approaches, its reconstruction in the current social context and the way it relates to a cohesive educational system that extends and guarantees rights and opportunities for all. For this, a systematic review of the literature (SLR) has carried out, between 1976 and 2020, according to the PRISMA model. Of the 1159 texts reviewed, we have worked on the 47 scientific articles published in open access and that focused specifically on the subject under investigation. The validation was given with the extended criteria of the University of York. The findings reflect that the current notion of educational freedom, linked above all to free educational choice, is closely tied to the defense of the "à la carte" choice of center and teaching model, within the framework

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of market logics binded to a neoliberal ideology. Thus, freedom of education appears increasingly unrelated to equal opportunities for all and educational equity, and more associated with a tool to avoid social mixing and obtaining socio-labor competitive advantages. In the discussion and conclusions, the way in which the results connect with dynamics of educational neoliberalization is analyzed and the need to continue investigating the deep elements that underlie this experience of freedom is pointed out. There is also the opportunity to explore a republican-oriented approach to educational freedom linked to the common and public good of all and for all.

Keywords: educational freedom; educational equity; educational neoliberalism; common benefit; public good.

Resumen

En este artículo se analiza el concepto de libertad educativa en España, centrado especialmente en dos de sus manifestaciones: la libertad de enseñanza y la libre elección de centro, así como la relación de ambas con una concepción de la educación como bien común y público. Los objetivos han sido analizar el devenir de su significado, las principales aproximaciones teóricas, su reconstrucción en el actual contexto social y el modo en que se relaciona con un sistema educativo cohesionado que extienda y garantice derechos y oportunidades para todos. Para ello, se ha realizado una revisión sistemática de la literatura (SLR), entre el año 1976 y 2020, de acuerdo con el modelo PRISMA. De los 1159 textos revisados se ha trabajado sobre los 47 artículos científicos publicados en acceso abierto y que se centraban específicamente en la temática objeto de investigación. La validación se dio con los criterios ampliados de la Universidad de York. Los hallazgos reflejan que la actual noción de libertad educativa, vinculada sobre todo a la libre elección educativa, se encuentra muy ligada a la defensa de la elección "a la carta" de centro y modelo de enseñanza, en el marco de lógicas de mercado vinculadas a una ideología de corte neoliberal. Así, la libertad de enseñanza aparece cada vez más desligada de la igualdad de oportunidades y la equidad educativa, y más asociada a un instrumento para evitar la mezcla social y obtener ventajas competitivas futuras en clave sociolaboral. En la discusión y conclusiones se analiza el modo en que los resultados conectan con dinámicas de neoliberalización educativa y se apunta la necesidad de seguir indagando los elementos profundos que subyacen a esa vivencia de la libertad. Se plantea también la oportunidad de explorar un enfoque de libertad educativa de orientación republicana ligada al bien común y público.

Palabras clave: libertad educativa; equidad educativa; neoliberalismo educativo; bien común; bien público.

Introduction

Since the last third of the 20th century, much of the planet has witnessed a series of social, cultural, ideological and political transformations associated with neoliberal globalisation (Rendueles, 2020). This process has involved the consolidation of policies aimed at the privatisation of public services, financialisation of the economy, weakening of the welfare state, increased subordination of labour to capital and growing commodification of numerous social spheres (Harvey, 2007).

The neoliberal hegemony is thus not limited to a series of policies and socio-economic changes, but also entails a cultural and mental transformation (Read, 2009) that implies a particular way of thinking about humanity which involves, among other aspects, an "individualistic philosophy essentially focused on the self" and embedded in market logics (Cabanas and Illouz, 2019, p. 62). This "psychologisation of social life" (Parker, 2010, p. 13) compels us to think of ourselves as independent entities, emancipated from any social structure, to such an extent that we increasingly view ourselves as consumers (Moruno, 2018) rather than citizens.

Neoliberalism, therefore, is not only the ideological theory that currently underpins and sustains capitalism, but is also the generator of a social vision, a way of living and relating, a "regime of truth" (Foucault, 2004), a "common sense" (Gramsci, 1981) of shared worldviews, and a particular type of subjectivity (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2018). Michel Foucault (1975) observed that contemporary Western societies have abandoned the disciplinary model of social control to adopt more subtle and refined tools of social control that require the "victims" themselves to accept and even actively collaborate and participate in it (Han, 2012; Hardt & Negri, 2002).

The neoliberal model establishes the "obligation to choose" as the "logical rule of the game", in a life governed by market dictates (Laval and Dardot, 2013). Freedom of choice, in terms of selecting the most advantageous option from among a range of offers and maximising self-interest, has thus become one of the basic tenets of the new forms of behaviour. The State is expected to strengthen competition in existing markets and create competition where it does not yet exist. Consequently, the dominant notion of freedom in the current historical period is closely connected to the negative liberty defined by Isaiah Berlin (Carter, 2010), but in a context of global commodification.

The prevailing image under neoliberal subjectivity is that of "individual freedom but not political freedom" (Villacañas, 2020, p. 105), which is exercised within a market logic. Furthermore, this freedom is blind to social structures, the material conditions of life and the relations of domination that underlie it and influence our behaviour (Beauvois, 2008). Under this ideological umbrella, the experience of freedom implies the paradoxical aspiration to maximise non-interference with the individual's desire, while at the same time the individual minimises his or her political freedom to intervene in the social structures and relations that dominate and condition him or her.

This substantial shift was evidenced by Margaret Thatcher's (1987) notorious observation in a now famous interview when reflecting on the concept of *society*: "There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families". Her negation envisages a social reality viewed not as a constellation of shared structures that determine our life opportunities, but as the sum of individual wills divorced from any kind of social power structure that conditions them.

Thus, if neoliberalism implies a profound change in the economic and social playing field and in the subjectivity and desires of those who participate in it (Han, 2012), it is worth investigating how this affects the sphere of education and how this sphere, in turn, actively participates in this shift. The late 20th century witnessed the emergence of a global trend towards the privatisation of education systems (Verger, Zancajo, and Fontdevila, 2016) and the commodification of the "educational economy" (Ball, 2014). This process, from which Spain has not been exempt (Bernal and Lacruz, 2012), has led to the increased involvement of private actors –especially business– in the provision of education services. In addition, "market mechanisms" (Bonal and Verger, 2016) and "business logic" have been incorporated into education (Rodríguez, 2016), often accompanied by a model of educational philanthrocapitalism (Saura, 2016) linked to Big Tech digital platforms (Saura, 2020).

The effect of neoliberalism on the Spanish education system has been to shift the central principles and policies of education towards a vision based on market dynamics and culture. Management and administration tools more properly associated with private companies have been incorporated into schools, individualising goals and rewards and transforming families into "school consumers" seeking to maximise their opportunities. Competition is encouraged between schools as these vie for higher positions in the rankings, while school management

practices driven by performance targets oblige teachers to compete with each other and convert "star teachers" into marketing products. Hence, competition becomes a way of internalising the demands of profitability, while at the same time generating disciplinary pressure via increased workloads, shortened deadlines and the individualisation of wages, undermining forms of collective solidarity in education communities (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2018).

This neoliberal approach entails a progressive shift whereby education is increasingly viewed as a commodity and less and less as a right, and is managed, organised and regulated more as a business than as a public service. The purpose, principles and objectives of education have been increasingly linked to market demand, to the detriment of the integral development of students or the needs of the social community in a broad democratic sense. Such transformations clash with the concept of education as a common good, which assumes, as Cascante (2021) argues, that education does not spring solely from individuals as the subjects of rights, but also from the community. Thus, beyond individual rights operating in the field of education, commonly agreed democratic interests must be safeguarded, because education arises from the community and the community must therefore benefit from it. Hence, it can be argued that the way in which educational freedom is conceptualised or addressed will also affect the possibilities for education to be not only a public good, but also a common good (UNESCO, 2015).

The present research analyses the interface between freedom of education and school choice. Historically, freedom of education has formed a core element of educational debate in Spain, both at the time of establishing the 1978 Constitution (González and Hernández, 2018) and throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries (Gómez, 1983). In recent years, however, the demand for such freedom has gained renewed strength. Educational freedom has to a greater or lesser extent penetrated several debates as the main argument. Thus, freedom of education and school choice have played an enormous role in the debates surrounding the education laws passed in the 21st century (Briones and Oñate, 2021; Vintanel, 2017) and more specific, regional controversies such as the so-called parental PIN or educational veto in the Regions of Murcia and Andalusia (Climent, 2020; Fernández, 2020) and the laws on plurilingualism in the Region of Valencia (Alonso and Pérez, 2018; García, 2015).

This creates the need to analyse what kind of freedom is projected onto and from education and determine whether the educational sphere is thought of from the perspective of negative liberty in a context of growing commodification and individualism (the freedom, for example, to choose a school or a type of education without interference from third parties, whether the community or the State) or from a positive, republican perspective that assumes educational freedom is based on an egalitarian distribution of power that enables the various agents involved to intervene democratically in this sphere.

Method

This article analyses recent shifts in the concept of educational freedom in Spain and explores how these have impacted on the education system and will continue to affect it in the face of future challenges.

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted of research and publications related to the subject under study: freedom of education and school choice. The specific objectives were: (a) to identify the main theoretical approaches to the concept of educational freedom, understood as freedom of education and school choice; (b) to analyse the dominant meanings and implications for educational practice; and (c) to contribute to debate on the purpose of the Spanish education system today.

The review was carried out in accordance with the PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews*) guidelines for a systematic review (Moher et al., 2009; Urrútia and Bonfill, 2010), enabling us to avoid, or at least minimise, possible biases (Moraga and Cartes-Velásquez, 2015).

Publications considered for inclusion comprised peer-reviewed scientific articles based on quantitative and/or qualitative methods, literature reviews and essays. References were identified by searching databases using the most suitable, relevant and frequent search terms (see Table 1) employed to refer to the subject in Spain.

Scopus, Dialnet and Web of Science (WOS)[2] were systematically searched for all documents published between 1976 (beginning of the transition to democracy) and 2021 (present day), using Boolean

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[2] Scielo was also searched, but no significant references were found, so it was excluded from the analysis.

operators. The content of the selected articles was read and analysed before mapping the current state of the question.

TABLE 1. Search strategy

Database	Keywords	Boolean operators	Search results
SCOPUS	"school choice" *[libertad de elección educativa]*	AND	158
	"freedom of education" *[libertad de enseñanza]*	AND	173
DIALNET	"school choice" *[libertad de elección educativa]*	AND	428
	"freedom of education" *[libertad de enseñanza]*	AND	314
WOS	"school choice" *[libertad de elección educativa]*	AND	83
	"freedom of education" *[libertad de enseñanza]*	AND	3
Total			1159

Note: Table by the authors.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- ■ Publications about experiences or studies in Spain or in Spanish schools.

- ■ The area of knowledge falls within the social sciences, teaching and education.

- ■ Open access documents.

- ■ The subject matter of the publications specifically includes the research subject and does not focus on related but tangential subjects such as academic freedom, civil liberties education or freedom during the educational process.

In the first screening, we read the titles and abstracts and scanned the article contents, excluding any which (a) did not report an explicit approach to the concept of freedom of education and/or school choice, in the sense defined in our research; (b) did not report an analysis of the education system that rendered explicit a particular vision of freedom of education or school choice; or (c) reported intervention projects or proposals. After applying these criteria to the total of 1159 articles identified in the database search and excluding duplicates, 47 papers were selected for the systematic literature review. Fig. 1 summarises the process.

FIGURE 1. Prisma Flow Diagram 2009 (Spanish version)
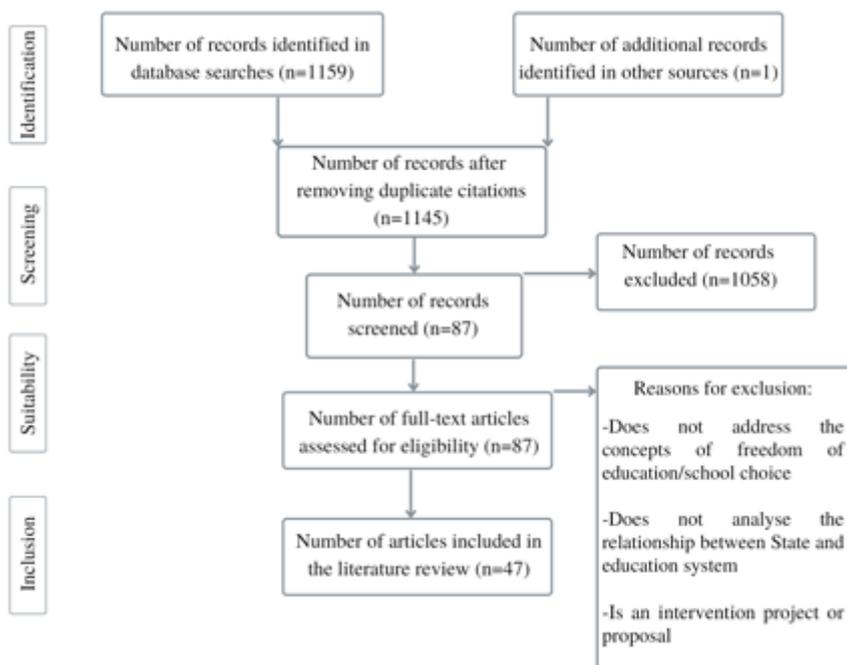
Note: Diagram adapted from Moher et al. (2009).

This initial screening yielded an overview of the research subject, shedding light on the main political and epistemological approaches in recent times to the concepts of freedom of education and school choice, their implications for the Spanish education system and their associated values and elements. In our view, these empirical results will contribute to a better interpretation of the current debate on education and to critical reflection on the limits and potential of the Spanish education system.

Extended University of York criteria (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2009) were applied for validation: study inclusion and exclusion criteria, relevance and appropriateness, quality assessment, data description, currency, impact and sufficiency. The inclusion and exclusion criteria have already been given above in the section describing the screening process. Relevance and appropriateness were ensured by identifying those studies that were most relevant to the research subject. Quality assessment and data description refer to the validity and soundness of the research method employed and the robustness of the data obtained. The criterion of time is aimed at obtaining a diachronic perspective of the research subject. The criterion of currency was met by including significant contributions from the 1970s to the present, retrieving the most recent advances in the field. Figure 2 shows the number of articles selected by decade of publication. With regard to the criterion of impact, all articles reviewed were published in prestigious, high-impact, peer-reviewed journals. Fulfilment of the sufficiency criterion was satisfactory, with the final inclusion of 47 publications.

FIGURE 2. Decade of publication of the articles included in the literature review
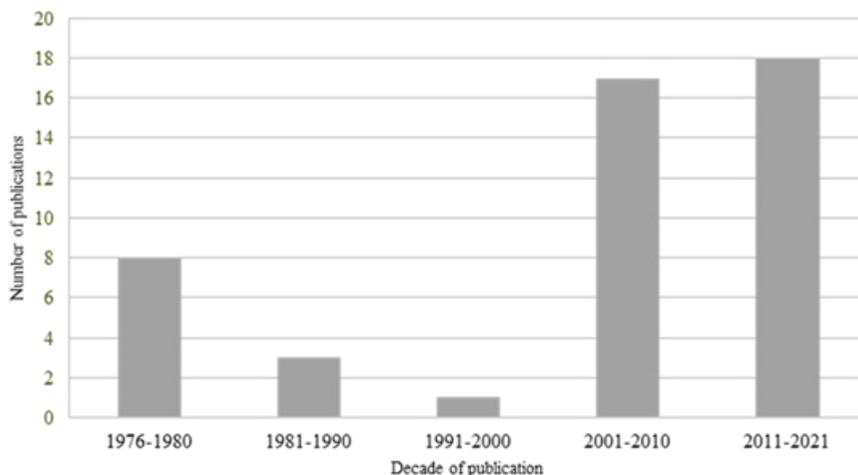
Note: Table by the authors.

The process employed was sequenced as follows. Having selected the publications that met the study criteria using the Mendeley reference manager, a coding guide was drawn up using the Microsoft Excel software program, detailing the criteria for coding the characteristics of the studies reported in the selected articles, in accordance with the specific objectives of this review. The sections on objectives, methods, results and conclusions of the articles were reviewed in order to extract the following information identified in the categories: year of publication, authors, author affiliation (university or non-university), journal quality in rankings, type of study (intervention, descriptive-empirical or theoretical), methods used, sample, data collection sources, results and conclusions according to the specific objectives of the present literature review, proposals or recommendations and limitations given. We also included the defining framework of educational freedom –freedom of education and school choice– as a category of analysis. These categories were established in a verification protocol that was applied to each document.

An analysis of these articles revealed an interesting distribution over time, whereby the preliminary results, screening and relevance criteria all

indicated a high concentration of publications in the late 1970s, followed by a significant decline that was reversed in the early 21st century and has continued to the present day (see Figure 2). We believe this distribution reflects debate at the time of writing and adopting the Spanish Constitution over its article 27 referring to freedom of education, which was one of the most controversial and contentious provisions (Villamor, 2007; Mayordomo, 2002), followed by renewed interest in this question in response to subsequent legislative modifications: LOE (Organic Law on Education) in 2006, LOMCE (Organic Law to Improve Educational Quality) in 2013 and LOMLOE (Organic Law modifying the LOE) in 2021 (Briones & Oñati, 2021; Celador, 2016; Guardia, 2015; Vidal 2017).

Results

In relation to the first of the study objectives, we identified two main, broad categories of theoretical approaches to the concept of educational freedom: one based on a legal, historical or philosophical-political perspective, encompassing general reflections on the meaning of education or specific applications (school choice, academic freedom, homeschooling, single-sex education), and a second focused on educational freedom in terms of school choice, analysing implementation in given contexts. These approaches enabled us to explore the way in which different disciplines enter into dialogue and determine, from different angles, the state of our research subject.

First, a review of texts analysing the evolution of the concept or its topicality at different times revealed a *historical shift* in use of the concept of educational freedom. In the 19th century, in countries such as France, freedom of education (in terms of the freedom of private entities to create schools and the freedom of families to choose education in accordance with their convictions) was the banner under which the clergy united to combat the advance of public instruction (García, 2018; Puelles, 1993), whereas in Spain, the situation was to some extent the reverse, and freedom of education became one of the central demands of liberal sectors in order to guarantee a counterpoise in civil society to a State strongly dominated by clerical and conservative sectors (Hernández-Díaz, 1982; Martín, 2008; Molero, 2005; Vilanou, 1982). This discursive logic was to change during the 20th century, especially from the Second Republic

onwards, when educational freedom, associated with the freedom of families to create schools and choose their educational model, became a demand that was closely linked to the defence of religious education and conservative private initiative (Gómez, 1983). As we shall see below, this interpretation of freedom became one of the main arguments in demands for an agreement on State-subsidised private schools after the dictatorship.

Between the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the context of the constitutional process, the debate on educational freedom was clearly central in various publications. The common thread running through all of them was a vindication of this freedom as a means to defend *religious freedom* (González del Valle, 1979) and "the rights of the Church in the field of education" (Guzmán 1979, p. 180) associated with the Concordat between Spain and the Vatican, and thus counter the risk that the democratic regime would lead to greater State influence –or even a monopoly– in education through State schools (Gómez, 1979; Hengsbach, 1979). According to this approach, such freedom would only be possible by maintaining a "progressive critical distrust of the State", as Gómez argued (1979, p. 137), and by guaranteeing the "right to freely establish and govern educational establishments" and the "preferential right of parents or guardians to elect the education of their choice for their children" (Martínez, 1979, p. 217). Furthermore, there was a demand that such "freedom" not be reduced to a mere "formality" because of lacking the "real conditions" (Orlandis, 1979, p. 117) or "economic means" (García-Hoz, 1979, p. 39) to render it viable, nor should it be subordinated to the development of the public education system (Hervada, 1979). In other words, an early defence appears to have emerged of what would become the agreement on State-subsidised private schools, whose main beneficiary was the Catholic Church, which today still controls six out of every ten such schools (Fayanás, 2018; Rogero-García and Andrés-Candelas, 2014).

Subsequent approaches in the 21st century evidenced more clearly the conjunction of the three elements that seem to be most strongly linked to freedom of education: the freedom to create schools reflecting a particular ideology, the freedom of families to choose a school and educational model, and to a lesser extent, academic freedom (Guardia, 2019; Llano, 2006; Vidal, 2017). With regard to the first two (school creation and school choice), Viñao (2019) observed that these eventually became part

of the dominant interpretation of the freedom of education established in article 27 of the Spanish Constitution, despite its ambivalence.

On numerous occasions, this specific meaning of freedom of education has been used to argue in favour of the system of State-subsidised private schools (Guardia, 2015), single-sex education (Báez, 2019; García-Gutiérrez, 2004) and homeschooling as extensions of this freedom (Llorent-Bedmar, 2004; Monzón, 2011). Thus, the right to education and freedom of education emerge more as opposing elements to be *balanced* (Hernández, 2008; Murgoitio, 2018) than as complementary components.

We also found critical approaches that explicitly distinguished between freedom *of* education and freedom *in* education, although they continued to associate the former with "private initiative", while the latter was associated with "civic freedoms in the field of teaching", "academic freedom" and "participation of the school community" without any "ideological dirigisme by the public authorities" (Dutra, 2002, p. 4). Within this approach, Prieto and Villamor (2018) have argued that in the current context, "the reference to school choice is, therefore, a narrowing of the consideration of freedom in education (...) The use of this meaning of freedom implies an economic conception of education" (p. 24).

A constant feature observed in the review was related to mistrust or rejection of the State in the field of education, which was articulated in various ways: rejecting the State's educational monopoly as being incompatible with pluralism (Guardia, 2019; Murgoitio, 2018); desiring less interference by the "State in the education of families" (Llano, 2019); and associating the State's greater influence in education with dynamics opposed to freedom (Blanco, 2009) or tending towards "neutralising nihilism" (Llano, 2006, p. 183).

This stance reflects a demand that public education be "ideologically neutral", arguing that it is the ideologies of private schools that will guarantee social and educational pluralism (Celador, 2016). Besides the difficulties in defining the concept of neutrality (Llano, 2019) and the fact that all "education is political" (Carbonell, 2019), this line of reasoning demands the absence of ideology on the part of the public authorities while at the same time defending the right to opt for a particular ideology in the private sphere. According to this approach, freedom of education is not constructed through the plurality of teachers in State schools, but by creating the possibility –only available to a limited segment of the population– of escaping from the public education system.

Such an argument reflects the increasing penetration of market dynamics (Andrada, 2008) or "quasi-market" systems (Maroy, 2008) in education, which involves the creation of an *educational offer* that places certain families in the position of exercising "their *freedom*", mainly through the "choice of school", assuming the role of *consumers* (Olmedo-Reinoso and Santa Cruz, 2008). This very different approach to "freedom" has witnessed an unprecedented surge in popularity in recent years, and is propounded by conservative and neoliberal sectors that view education as an investment, students and families as customers and the educational authorities as a mere regulatory body between agents and investors, and claim to offer "free choice" in a markedly asymmetrical and unequal scenario for *all* families in terms of cultural capital, income and information (Bernal and Veira, 2019; Sanz-Magallón et al., 2021; Villarroya and Escardíbul, 2008).

Our literature review also revealed that since the late 20th century, educational freedom seems to have become more associated with a defence of freedom of *choice* under market logics, and much less with a concern for religious or moral questions, as if there had been a shift *from the pulpit to the marketplace*. Indeed, some of the recent studies examining the question of religion in education do not even include an in-depth discussion of the concepts of freedom of education or school choice (Jiménez, 2011; Sanjurjo, 2013). Thus, freedom of choice appears to be increasingly linked to issues related not so much –or not exclusively– to the denominational or ideological nature of State-subsidised private schools, as to the possibility of seeking competitive socio-economic and cultural advantages. Examples include the *possibility* of escaping from depressed areas (Bernal and Vera, 2019; Valiente, 2008), "taking refuge" from educational or social problems (Fernández and Muñiz, 2012; Rodríguez et al, 2014; Rogero-García and Andrés-Candelas, 2014), maintaining middle-class status (Andrada, 2008) and accessing better "educational quality" based on a school's "reputation" (Peláez-Paz, 2020).

From this it can be inferred that within the obvious plurality of approaches to educational freedom, the "package of freedoms" (Llanos, 2006 and 2019) that it represents seems at present to have condensed around the freedom to create privately owned schools and for families to choose an educational model in accordance with their personal convictions. Moreover, this interpretation is located in a context of increasing commodification of education, social inequality and rejection

of the State and public authorities as an element of cohesion. These three factors (narrowing of freedom of education, rejection of the State and commodification of the education system) provide a glimpse, in relation to the second of the study objectives, of the consolidation and possible dominance of a *neoliberal interpretation of educational freedom*. Such a framework would necessarily imply the commodification of relations in education, not only in terms of content, management and organisation of schools, but also in terms of the roles, desires and relations of their actors (Cascante, 2021).

Discussion and conclusions

It is evident that the concept of freedom of education has coalesced in its neoliberal sense within the context of an increasingly commodified education system. Meanwhile, for some of the critical positions, the debate resides in how to correct its less desirable effects, such as segregation or discrimination, without questioning the premise that the less interference from the public authorities (beyond setting minimum educational standards), the greater the freedom of education (Sainz and Sanz, 2021).

There are some contradictions in this framework. On the one hand, the right to choice of school can never be universal without absolute equality of conditions for families to select from an infinite educational offer. The evidence, however, seems to point in the opposite direction, towards a "segregation" effect (Andrada, 2008; Fernández, 2008; Gómez, 2019; Madaria and Vila, 2020; Mancebón and Ximénez, 2007; Murillo et al., 2021; Olmedo-Reinoso and Santa Cruz, 2008; Pérez, 1998; Sainz and Sanz, 2021), because such freedom of choice often excludes or does not exist for a large part of the population that lacks sufficient material conditions to exercise it. Furthermore, as Pérez (1998) has observed, in several instances, freedom of education has increasingly been interpreted to mean the "freedom to impose the school's ideology" (p. 142). In other words, rather than reflecting a desire to broaden the diversity of educational options by increasing the variety of choices available to all families regardless of their social status, this demand for greater freedom of education instead serves as a means to guarantee that a school's given ideological framework or ideology will be maintained by its owners.

Second, the freedom of education associated with the creation of schools governed by a particular ideology operates in a context where the resources necessary to create such schools are unevenly distributed and the number of sectors with the actual capacity to create such schools (whether or not these are partially supported by the State) is consequently limited. Thus, the education system that actually exists is not based on a wide range of educational options from which families select that which most closely reflects their aspirations or values. On the contrary, the landscape indicates that most alternative options to State schools fall within one particular ideological and denominational sector. Furthermore, such *choice* is often not so much a choice of ideology as a desire to maintain status or avoid precarious educational environments. The freedom to create and choose a school, as proposed in the Constitution as a safeguard clause for a particular ideology and religious affiliation, now seems to have become an excuse for perpetuating an eminently discriminatory model.

Thus, we consider it important to insert into the academic debate the way in which neoliberal educational freedom is closing the doors to an exploration of a *republican meaning of educational freedom* (Garzón and Díez-Gutiérrez, 2016), defining republican freedom as that which aspires to an "absence of domination" (López de Robles, 2010) and which does not derive from the mere absence of State or third party interference but is the result of a political and democratic intervention that guarantees the existence of reciprocally free subjects who do not need "permission to navigate civil life" (Domènech, 2019). If measures aimed at commodifying education generate dynamics of segregation that systematically affect and exclude the most vulnerable sectors or those with the least resources, we may not be dealing with a model that is dysfunctional as such, but rather with its inevitable consequences.

An alternative approach would be to think about freedom *of* and *in* education not as the right to choose a school or educational model in a competitive, commodified scenario governed by a privatised and individualised vision of education, but as the result of democratic political intervention.

This would imply exploring legal, political, and educational mechanisms that guarantee freedom of choice of educational model through the effective participation of families, students and the education community in the dynamics of the schools themselves, as established

in the Constitution and in the definition of the regulatory frameworks that govern the teaching-learning process. Educational freedom does not appear here as the fiction of individual (or family) emancipation from a common educational space, based on self-interest, but as the effective possibility of participating in and co-governing the construction of this collective space for the common good and betterment of all.

This will entail projecting a sense of freedom *of* and *in* the educational sphere as a result of the material possibility of "participating on equal terms" (Rendueles, 2020). It will be necessary to propose mechanisms that endow sufficient autonomy to civil society, in the framework of a public education system that is more permeable to the needs and particularities of each community and where freedom refers not to *choose of* school and type of education, but to jointly constructing a democratic education in a shared project.

The public education system should not be seen as a sort of *equitable counterweight* to the excesses of "genuine freedom" guaranteed by the private sphere, but as a privileged instrument to convey educational freedom, guaranteeing equal conditions and critical autonomy for students, teachers, and families.

This brings us to the second element for discussion, namely the way in which the neoliberal interpretation of freedom is framed as the right of families to choose an educational model for their children. This choice is posited as the result of a private, individual act in an increasingly commodified context. But which scenario offers more freedom? The possibility of electing an educational model through choice of school, in a commodified context conditioned by material limitations such as distance, income or cultural capital, or the guarantee of being able to participate on equal terms with reciprocally free subjects (Domènech, 2019) in shaping the conditions of the educational model itself? In other words, (republican) freedom would derive from the ability to participate in, shape and allocate resources to the education system, free of relations of subalternity derived from economic or political inequality, and articulated in ways other than a market, private and competitive logic.

It may be worthwhile therefore to investigate the fundamental elements underlying the educational community's experience of freedom. Besides the immediate strategies or interests that motivate people to opt for one school or another, what deep needs and concerns underlie their decisions? Can these be met by another educational model based on

a public education system common to the entire population? Can this educational freedom be inserted into decision-making spaces other than simply opting for one school over another based on a commercial logic? There is a need for research focused not only on how society behaves in a "quasi-market" educational environment, but also on how society's needs and interests can be addressed by an educational model capable of ensuring freedom *of* and *in* universal public education, and providing a guarantee of the equity and cohesion from which we have been drifting away.

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The common and the public in teaching practices from the community funds of knowledge and identity approach[1]

Lo común y lo público en las prácticas de enseñanza desde la perspectiva de los fondos comunitarios de conocimiento e identidad

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Abstract

This article defends the principle according to which the common and the public in teaching practices require participatory processes, based on co-responsibility and co-design, between different resources, services, organizations and social, community and educational agents. The idea of community funds of knowledge and identity refers to culturally developed educational opportunities, accumulated over a period of time and socially distributed and mediated for the functioning, well-being, singularization and development of a region. Within the framework of diverse and well-positioned local educational ecosystems, this idea is illustrated from the theoretical-practical analysis of four example projects: the archaeological site of Soses (Ibéro de Gebut, Lleida), the petitsjovesactius.

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org web page, involvement in the arts by a primary school and, finally, a youth radio project to redefine relations between an institute-school and the Bon Pastor neighbourhood in Barcelona. The experiences analysed are presented as a hybrid between innovation and research, since they are oriented towards goals previously defined by the educational agents of the community (outside the school) consistent with their interests. At the same time, they are models that can be evaluated for the research in the context of their application. We conclude that certain characteristics and conditions favour the projects and educational experiences analysed. Among these, we noted that co-participation and co-design processes are necessary, which entails recognizing the set of educational opportunities, both inside and outside the school. That is, learning throughout life. Also, its experiential base, since these types of educational practices are characterized by acting, doing and experimenting, configuring a broad learning system in constant development.

Key words: community education, education and culture, school community relationship, funds of knowledge, funds of identity.

Resumen

En este artículo se defiende la tesis según la cual lo común y lo público en las prácticas de enseñanza requiere de procesos participativos, basados en la corresponsabilidad y el codiseño, entre distintos recursos, servicios, organizaciones y agentes sociales, comunitarios y educativos. Se sugiere la noción de fondos comunitarios de conocimiento e identidad para hacer referencia a oportunidades educativas culturalmente desarrolladas, históricamente acumuladas y socialmente distribuidas y mediadas para el funcionamiento, bienestar, singularización y desarrollo de una determinada región. En el marco de ecosistemas educativos locales diversos y situados, se ilustra dicha noción a partir del análisis teórico–práctico de cuatro ejemplos-proyectos: el yacimiento arqueológico de Soses (Poblado Ibéro de Gebut, Lleida), la página web "petitsjovesactius.org", la intervención artística de un centro público de educación infantil y primaria y, finalmente, un proyecto de radio juvenil en la redefinición de las relaciones entre un instituto-escuela y el barrio del Bon Pastor en Barcelona. Las experiencias analizadas se presentan como un híbrido entre la innovación y la investigación, puesto que se orientan a fines previamente definidos por los agentes educativos de la comunidad (más allá de la escuela) en coherencia a sus intereses. Al mismo tiempo son modelos evaluables para la investigación en su contexto de aplicación. Se concluye considerando ciertas características y condiciones favorables al desarrollo de los proyectos y experiencias educativas analizadas. Entre otras, se señala que se requiere de procesos de coparticipación y codiseño, lo que conlleva reconocer el conjunto de oportunidades educativas, tanto dentro como fuera de la escuela. Es decir, aprender a lo largo y ancho de la vida. También, su

base experiencial, ya que este tipo de prácticas educativas se caracterizan por el actuar, hacer y experimentar, configurando un sistema de aprendizaje amplio en constante desarrollo.

Introduction

Traditionally, it is the school that has been entrusted with the dual mission of equipping people with those intellectual, social, affective and cultural artefacts – such as language, mathematics, science or the arts –that will allow them to be incorporated into human groups (socialization function), as well as developing biographical life projects (individualization function) (Bruner, 1997; Coll, 2004; Vila & Esteban-Guitart, 2017). In reality, we can distinguish a dual purpose linked to *learning how to be* and *learning where to be*. By *learning how to be*, we refer to the contribution in the profession of learning, the identity of a learner, that is, the recognition we have of ourselves as learners, and the ability to develop ourselves in teaching and learning situations (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Engel & Coll, 2021). While by *learning where to be*, we refer to the ability to function in solidarity and critically in the public-private sphere of human life (Grau, 2020). That is to say and, in short, the promotion of learning with meaning and personal and social value that lead people to understand each other, and understand, evaluate and intervene critically and competently in the environment, in a broad sense: personal, social and cultural, as well as present, past and future (Coll et al., 2020; Gee & Esteban-Guitart, 2019; Grau, 2020).

The thesis that we defend in this article is that this double mission requires confronting the school practice, and the learner in it, in real life situations, which extend the boundaries of the times and school educational spaces, to incorporate – in alliances based in collaboration, participation and shared responsibility – the public sphere in the construction of common goods. In other words, it is necessary to extend

the vision that has traditionally encapsulated learning and the educational phenomenon to the school institution, being as it is a totally necessary agent, to assume the situated, distributed and potentially connected character of both educational practices and educational practices, as well as the learning processes (Iglesias et al., 2020).

In this sense, we defend the need to incorporate other areas of life, social and community contexts, in school practice based on processes of co-responsibility and co-design. This leads us to the notion of "local educational ecosystems" (Plana, 2018) as spaces where it is possible to articulate shared, common spaces in teaching and learning. Local educational ecosystem being understood as the creation of a participatory network or alliance that incorporates different actors, services, equipment, resources and social, community and educational opportunities to identify learning needs, as well as to jointly develop educational actions. This approach is in tune with the distinction of ecosystems proposed by Hannon et al. (2019) since ecosystems focused on the generation of learning are configured from the participation of educational centres and other organizations, adopting different formulas and creating new learning opportunities. As elements that guide their analysis (Iglesias & Esteban-Guitart, 2020), it is important to pay attention, among other things, to their *diversity*, since they are built and developed from multiple agents, profiles and roles; its *governance* since educational resources must be distributed; or to its *flexibility*, since the framework of action is unique depending on the students, educational centres or organizations in the environment. In short, in this article we defend and illustrate the fact that teaching practices constitute a substantial contribution to the construction of common goods to the extent that they are capable of articulating bonds of trust, exchange and collaboration with other services, agents and social and community actors in relation to a shared project, asset, or artefact.

In particular, in this article we suggest the concept of community funds of knowledge and identity to incorporate the common and the public in school teaching and learning practices, in the more general methodological framework of the creation of local educational ecosystems. After presenting the concept, we illustrate it with regard to four examples that will allow us, at the same time, to suggest some conclusions regarding the characteristics and conditions of possibility and sustainability of educational practices such as those presented here.

These case examples have been selected based on the following two criteria. In the first place, they empirically illustrate the notion of a local educational ecosystem based on the participation in a common project by different agents, actors and social, educational and community services. Second, they are articulated around the same artefact, project or common good, which supposes a particular community fund of knowledge and identity, such as a particular natural, archaeological, and cultural heritage.

From funds of knowledge to community funds of knowledge and identity

The sociocultural approach to funds of knowledge was initially developed in Tucson, Arizona (USA), in order to propose both a theory and a methodology from which teachers can document the knowledge and skills of the families of their students to represent and recognize themselves as competent (Moll et al., 1992). In this sense, funds of knowledge are understood to be: "the culturally developed and historically accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills essential for the functioning and well-being of the family or individual" (Moll, 1997, p. 47).

The purpose is to dismantle the perspective of the deficit according to which certain students, and families, would supposedly be characterized by a host of social, economic, intellectual, linguistic, etc. deficiencies. On the contrary, it is argued that all families, beyond their diversity and varied casuistry, have strengths, skills and knowledge. The challenge consists in documenting them empirically and linking them to the curriculum and pedagogical practice of teaching and learning (Esteban-Guitart & Saubich, 2013; González et al., 2005; Lorenzo et al., 2020; Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018).

For this purpose, a study group was organized. This group comprised university professors and researchers who acted as a scaffold for the entire process of implementation of the approach (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2018). At first, a phase of training and familiarization with the concept and practice of knowledge funds was developed. Subsequently, a methodological phase was undertaken to carry out visits to the students' homes to identify their funds of knowledge. It is considered that visits to the students' homes are practices that allow the approach, assessment and the acquisition of knowledge regarding the life context of the

student and their family. Transcending the traditional tutorials as the only way of a teacher-family exchange that normally is reduced to superficial exchanges linked to the student's school performance, with on the other hand, power relations very marked by the educational-school institution (Rodriguez, 2013). On the contrary, it is argued that it is necessary to establish bonds of mutual trust with families through knowledge and recognition of their particular social, historical and cultural conditions of life. Additionally, the home is conceptualized, anthropologically, as a testimony and a distributed artefact of the knowledge, skills, relationships and significant practices of the family (Llopart et al., 2017). The objective of the visits is in no case to judge or evaluate, but rather to identify significant practices and experiences in the life of the family unit – competences and activities related to gardening, repair, religion, medicine, multilingual competence, etc. –To incorporate and link them to pedagogical and curricular practice.

Finally, in the context of the study group, considered a community of practice (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2018), it is discussed the way to link teaching practice and pedagogical and curricular objectives with the funds of knowledge identified through the visits made (Llopart et al., 2017). For example, after identifying funds of knowledge linked to the care of farm animals, a transversal activity was designed, in primary education, that incorporated linguistic objectives –through multilingual texts according to the different mother tongues of the students and families–, as well as linked to biological sciences. In particular the classification of animals according to what they eat, the ability to differentiate between oviparous and viviparous animals, or to discover the benefits and products obtained from farm animals. This activity incorporated, among other actions, a visit to a farm where one of the students' parents worked (Jovés et al., 2015). In another example, after identifying oral tradition as a fund of knowledge in Punjabi Sikh families in an elementary school in Canada, the same students documented stories about the lives of their grandparents and grandmothers in India to turn them into picture books used as pedagogical and cultural resources by teachers in the school context (Marshall & Toohey, 2010).

Different evaluations show benefits derived from the implementation of this approach in improving school performance, based on more contextualized and meaningful learning; a better understanding of the living conditions and experiences of students and their families, as well

as the improvement of family-school relations, as the most outstanding aspects (Llopart et al., 2018; Volman & Gilde, 2021; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). However, despite its vocation and community orientation (Moll, 2019), the approach has basically been reduced to the scope of the skills, relationships and knowledge available in the different families. Here we suggest an expansion of this framework to incorporate resources, services, equipment and social and community agents considered as funds of knowledge and identity (see Table 1).

We assume, in fact, a link between knowing and being in the sense that learning entails an identity transformation (Gee & Esteban-Guitart, 2019; Esteban-Guitart, 2021; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Ligorio, 2010). That is, a person becomes more capable of carrying out a certain action, for example "becoming a teacher" and, at the same time, acquires or constructs certain positions and identity discourses linked to said profession, "identifies himself or herself as a teacher" in a certain way. That is why we speak of funds of knowledge, as well as funds of identity, as they are part of the same learning process (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, Esteban-Guitart & Saubich, 2013).

TABLE 1. Comparison of funds of knowledge and community funds of knowledge and identity

	Funds of knowledge	**Focus**	**Community funds of knowledge and identity**	**Focus**
Definition	Repertoire of cultural and intellectual resources (skills, ideas, knowledge) that a family has, accumulates and uses to maintain its well-being, development and quality of life.	Resources in the family environment	Geographical-cultural spaces, physical-symbolic artefacts, social and community organizations, agents or institutions that through networking with schools become educational opportunities and resources for teaching and learning.	Resources at the community level
Unit of analysis	The home: the family and its social relationships, practices and experiences.	Family	The community composed of the different organizations and agents of a social, educational or cultural nature in the territory.	Community
Identification and intervention	Ethnographic analysis of the students' home through visits made by teachers. Linking the curriculum and teaching with the resources, knowledge and skills of the students' families.	Ethnographic visits at home for their curricular contextualization.	Community mapping to identify educational practices, agents, resources and opportunities in the territory. Creation of an educational alliance (community educational ecosystem) to jointly design and implement educational projects.	Community mapping of assets for the development of online educational projects.

Source: Own production

On the other hand, we distinguish among the community funds of knowledge and identity, the reference to geographical-cultural spaces, physical-symbolic artifacts, social organizations or institutions and community actors or agents. The four aspects may be linked in the same reality. For example, the mountain of Montserrat, in the Bages region, province of Barcelona (Catalunya), simultaneously houses a culturally

configured geographical space, a social institution linked to the Catholic Church (the Monastery of Montserrat), with different devices and artefacts (for example the Virgin of Montserrat, popularly known as "la Moreneta"), as well as a human landscape configured by the local people, for example the "Escolanía", one of the oldest children's choirs in Europe. From the perspective of the community funds of knowledge and identity, this place can be considered as a potential resource, as well as a source of competencies and knowledge, as well as narratives of discourse and identity. However, for this fund of community knowledge and identity to be considered an educational artefact, it needs to be placed within the design and development of what we have previously described as a local educational ecosystem. That is, the alliance and coordination of different actors, services and facilities (school, town hall, families, etc.) to design interdependent educational actions in coherence with a common educational project. In this sense, below, we present four illustrative examples selected from the two criteria set out above.

Example 1: The Ibéro de Gebut Village (Soses, Lleida) as a community funds of knowledge and identity

In 2017, the Jaume Miret school (Soses, Lleida), a public centre for infant and primary education, had a change in management with the aim of developing an educational transformation project towards linking learning environments inside and outside the school centre. This situation coincided at the same time as the excavation work at the Gebut archaeological site, located near the school and led by the "Grupo de Investigación Prehistórica" (Prehistoric Research Group) (GIP) of the University of Lleida. These are the remains of a settlement of the Ilergetes, one of the populations that were part of the Iberian culture during the second half of the 1st millennium BC. In particular, the Iberian settlement of Gebut is estimated to date back to the middle of the 7th century BC.

From this archaeological heritage, a transversal educational project was carried out in which the "Centro de Recursos Pedagógicos del Segrià" (Segrià Pedagogical Resources Centre) was incorporated. This centre belongs to the Department of Education of the Generalitat de Catalunya, the Municipality of Soses, the families of the educational centre, and the Museum of the city of Lleida. In particular, during the 2017-2018 academic

year the project was titled "Discovering Gebut" and aimed to explore the Iberian civilization from different teaching and learning activities that included a visit to the Museum of Lleida, stimulated by an educator, as well as to the site itself, conducted by the archaeological team from the University research group (see Figure 2). With the collaboration between teachers and families, different training activities related to the life of the Iberians were carried out, such as a workshop on tagine cuisine, an exhibition of ancient objects or a mythological hunt with clues. It is interesting to mention that one of the workshops was stimulated by students from the Ilerna vocational training centre in Lleida, with a video game that they designed related to the Iberian world.

In the 2018-2019 academic year, the project focused on the exploration in the classroom of different artefacts found at the site, linking them with modern-day objects and thus working on their historical evolution. The grand finale of the project took place in a fair in a street of the municipality, where the work carried out during the course and the achievements and learning achieved was shared with the school population, teachers and the archaeological team of the university, together with families and the general neighbourhood. Another of the activities carried out consisted of the collection of toys for the benefit of a local social organization in a show of solidarity by the infant students. Finally, during the 2019-2020 academic year, the focus was on the role of women throughout history and their link to women in the municipality (Roca, 2020).

IMAGE I. Visit by the students from the Jaume Miret de Soses school to the Gebut archaeological site

Source: https://www.territoris.cat/articulo/pla-d39-urgell/visita-arqueologica-dels-alumnes-lescola-jaume-miret-soses-poblat-iberic-gebut/20180428211518047909.html

As a whole, the different activities help gain knowledge of the cultural heritage through the recovery and diffusion of traditions and their own identity; working on different cultural identifications and their historical evolution, as well as incorporating activities to recognize the origin and competencies of the different families in the educational centre. As summarized by the school director, the project allows "networking with different educational agents in the environment, with the common purpose of improving learning opportunities for all students" (Roca, 2020, p. 69).

Example 2: "Active little ones". Socially and digitally mediated teaching

The website https://www.petitsjovesactius.org emerged in the last semester of the 2019-2020 academic year in the situation of home

confinement due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. It is a digital environment that offers different activities and educational support for the infant, primary and secondary education.

This page is accompanied by different links, to the Arnau Berenguer school and the association of families of the Palau d'Anglesola educational centre, as well as the Instagram channel @petitsjovesactius in which the different activities related to the cultural, artistic and cooking fields are disseminated and crafts, as well as examples of productions, of the apprentices and agents involved (see Image 2). In addition, the website gives visibility to both the volunteers, participating entities, as well as the "Talent Show" activity aimed at recognizing the capacities and competencies of the school population.

IMAGE 2. Screenshot of the project website

Source: https://www.petitsjovesactius.org

Specifically, this project arises from the community organization "Voluntariado del Palau - Pequeños Jóvenes Activos" with the collaboration

of the teaching staff of the Arnau Berenguer infant and primary school (Palau d'Anglesola, Lleida, Catalunya), its parents' association, as well as the collaboration of different entities and agents in the territory that offered different educational activities in the nine weeks when the harshest and most restrictive confinement took place. Specifically, different dynamic, recreational activities were proposed on the website daily, adapted to each educational level, with a leading role for children, with materials that they could easily find at home. Weekly, both municipal entities and the school cook proposed activities. Some of the organizations and social, educational and community actors that participated in this initiative were, among others, the women's association of Palau d'Anglesola, different local artists, the Friends of the (Pilgrim's) Way Association or the senior citizen's residence "Ca la Cileta".

Example 3: The contextualization of learning spaces. Art as a pedagogical device

The initiative "We link the inside and outside through art" was born in the Arc d'Adà public school, in the municipality of Llardecans (Lleida), with a population of 451 inhabitants. Together with the city council and the community, an educational cross-sectional project was planned and implemented in order to combat the depopulation of the municipality through a process of transforming the school. The project began with the incorporation of the local artist Lara Costafreda, a former student of the school, who painted both its façade and the town's nursery (see Figure 3).

IMAGE 3. Detail of one of the elements of the school painted by the artist Lara Costafreda

Source: https://www.segre.com/noticies/cultura/2020/08/27/art_per_lluitar_contra_exode_rural_113576_1112.html

These paintings are intended to represent identitary elements that are shared, both by the school and by the municipality; hence the theme of the rural environment and the characteristic flora and fauna of the area. In addition, these murals become a pedagogical, interactive "blackboard" to work on content and skills linked to different learning objectives. In this sense, it should be noted that after observing the paintings, natural environment content was pedagogically worked on. For example, the identification, description and analysis of animals and flora in the area. Later, different extension activities were carried out, such as a representation in watercolours of the paintings, painted by the boys and girls in art classes; an interview with the author about defining creativity, with a subsequent t-shirt printing workshop; an explanation

by the students from more advanced courses of the characteristics of the animals represented in the murals, or a visit to an exhibition organized by the town council of a local author entitled "readings and textures".

Example 4: Youth Radio in rebuilding the relationship between school and neighbourhood

The Bernat de Boïl public nursery and primary school, in the Bon Pastor neighbourhood of Barcelona, was considered for two decades to be a "highly complex" centre that almost exclusively accommodated students from minority groups and in many cases belonging to families with a high risk of social exclusion. Stigmatized as a segregated centre, the local families and "payas" (n.t. this is a derogatory term used by Gypsies to denote those not of their ethnic kind) of the neighbourhood chose to enrol their children in a subsidized centre or to look for more public centres further away. This stigma was even greater for the institute located on the same street, with just one class per year and limited to "ESO" (lower secondary education), where the failure and dropout rates were among the highest in the city. In 2017, the school authorities agreed to close the secondary school and convert the infant and primary education centre into the El Til·ler primary and secondary school, ranging from three year-olds to 16 year-olds, and seeking to consolidate the relationships that were established between the school, the school population and their families, as a basis to ensure continuity until the end of compulsory education. The teaching team took advantage of this organizational change to promote a new course aimed at ending the stigma and offering the neighbourhood a quality educational proposal, with a special emphasis on the work of art and music education, project-based teaching and openness to the network of social, educational and cultural entities in the area.

The first year of primary-secondary school began its journey with a 1st year at secondary level in which the new methods were tested. One of the experiences consisted of a Youth Radio project that was aimed at establishing new relationships between the primary-secondary school and its surroundings, the Bon Pastor neighbourhood, and was based on collaboration with a great diversity of agents (Lamas & Lalueza, 2012; Lamas et al., 2020). The project was based on the collaboration

of secondary students with university students studying Psychology, Journalism and Audio-visual Communication through a Service Learning program. After investigating the identitary links between the school population and their environment, they went out to interview the neighbourhood on the street and neighbourhood shops. The civic centre made a radio studio available to them where they conducted interviews and recorded audios and videos, which they later posted on Instagram, publicising them through their families. There were also "international correspondents", a group of the same age in a small town in the state of Colorado in the USA, who were carrying out a similar program. Student products were shared in the respective classrooms via links on Instagram, the blog page, or the website, projecting onto a large screen and allowing the students themselves to engage in a synchronous, often animated dialogue that included singing, dancing and sharing music. In several cases, viewing the radio production from the other location instigated a new production by the other group in response. This happened, for example, when Colorado students saw radio advertisements from their peers in Barcelona, in connection with a campaign to recycle bicycles. Colorado students responded by creating a radio ad in Spanish in support of the students' bike campaign that was in turn shared with the Barcelona group and posted on the school's Instagram account (Walker et al., 2021). Finally, some of the videos produced within the framework of the project were screened at the local Library, in an open event that took the form of a popular festival.

Discussion and conclusions

The four examples presented here allow us to illustrate both the notion of community funds of knowledge and identity, as well as the design of local educational ecosystems within the framework of expanded experiences of school teaching and learning. In the case of Soses, the site – the Iberian town of Gebut – becomes a geographical, historical and cultural space that extends the school teaching-learning processes through the participation of other organizations and agents such as the research group of the University of Lleida, the City Council of the municipality or the Museum of Lleida. In this case, the local educational ecosystem is configured and built from the participation of the educational centre,

the parents' association, the council itself, the Museum, the university's research group, as well as the Segrià Pedagogical Resource Centre. At the same time, historical and cultural heritage becomes an identitary element of the community, as well as a learning vehicle linked to the historical evolution of the area. In this sense, the site is considered a fund of community knowledge and identity as it is pedagogically used through the transversal project designed by the aforementioned local educational ecosystem.

In reference to the "Pequeños Jóvenes Activos" (Active Young Ones) web project, the municipality's volunteers, together with the school, the parents' association, and different entities and agents of the territory collaborate in a shared space, together with the boys and girls, with the purpose of offering different recreational and educational activities in times of confinement derived from the COVID-19 pandemic. The website itself, as a node of resources and experiences, is considered a fund of community knowledge and identity at the service of students and their families. Here, the local educational ecosystem incorporates, in addition to volunteers, the educational centre, families as well as the different entities and organizations of the municipality.

In the example of the municipality of Llardecans, part of the school's physical geography becomes a mural or pedagogical blackboard in which agents of the territory participate (specifically the local artist Lara Costafreda) to contextualize the educational centre, and link it with the community to through contents related to the animals and fauna of the territory. Different objectives and curricular competencies are established (creativity, knowledge of the natural environment) and the building, in its intervention and in its pedagogical use, becomes a fund of community knowledge and identity. On the one hand, knowledge and skills related to the plastic arts or natural sciences are promoted. On the other hand, shared identitary representations and discourses that are linked to the natural environment of the local context are promoted. Again, the use and educational and pedagogical scaffolding is undertaken through a transversal project that incorporates the students themselves, the local artist, the teaching staff, as well as the council itself.

Finally, through the Youth Radio project, it is evident how an educational centre redefines its relationship with its surroundings, specifically with the neighbourhood to which its students belong, since it is constituted as a community fund of local knowledge. So, students are connected with

their daily environment and the people who inhabit it, in such a way that their own vital context is situated as an object of study, at the same time that inter-institutional alliances are established with the university, the civic centre and the library. In addition, the ecosystem expands through the "translocal" connection, the interaction between two local projects, distant from each other, but capable of generating interdependence and growth logics.

Therefore, the fundamental thesis that underlies this article, and that is illustrated from the notion of community funds of knowledge and identity, proposed here, as well as the four illustrative examples, is that the common and the public are incorporated and at the same time cogenerate in teaching practice stemming from community articulation. The archaeological site of Gebut, the website "https://www.petitsjovesactius.org", the artistic intervention at the Arc d'Adà school building and the Youth Radio of the El Til·ler primary secondary school become common goods to extend the processes of school learning and teaching in two ways. In the first place, they are nodes from which they encourage the joint work of different agents, entities and social, educational and community actors. Second, they facilitate learning experiences, as well as identitary experiences, linked to the educational project developed, in addition to the social and community environment. For example, in the case of the Gebut experience, the Iberian town allows the extension and illustration of school content-competencies, as well as to make visible and facilitate processes of collective identification with the historical and cultural past of the region. In fact, different studies show in particular the benefits in cognitive, identity-directive and socio-affective competences of educational projects based on the arts and the cultural heritage of the students, their families and life contexts (Alvarez et al., 2021; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019; Zhang Yu et al., 2021).

In any case, the examples considered illustrate how educational-pedagogical practice expands and materializes in a singular movement consistent with the idea of ecosystems proposed by Hannon et al. (2019) and Plana (2018) and which is illustrated from the complementarity of the following dimensions: a) *Inter-institutional* (implies the formalized participation of schools, universities, town halls, museums, civic centres, libraries…); b) *Intergenerational* (interaction and mutual learning between schoolchildren, university students, adults and older people in the community, professionals…); and c) *Intersectoral* (schoolchildren

and educators collaborate with university students, educators, cultural agents, social activists, artists). In this way, the complementarity of the dimensions described coincides with the space of action and interdependence of agents and learning that make up local ecosystems. On the other hand, the generalization of experiences such as those described here entails valuing these dimensions as necessary conditions to generate local educational ecosystems, and with them facilitate the creation of teaching and learning practices based on what are considered both public and common goods as they are the result of the democratic-horizontal co-participation of different services, agents, institutions and social, educational and community resources.

Likewise, the notion of community funds of knowledge and identity underlies the consideration in relation to the community-public sphere as a distributed space of potentially educational resources, services and social agents. This idea is in tune with the notion of "learning ecologies" (Barron, 2004) understood as a set of contexts, both physical and virtual, that potentially provide learning opportunities, in their unique configuration of activities, physical-material resources, as well as social relationships of accompaniment, collaboration and teaching. However, it transcends it, since it does not only consider the learning opportunities, services, artefacts and resources of the learner, at the individual level, but especially the social and community actors, as well as institutions, facilities and physical-cultural spaces that the educational institution can potentially have.

However, and in the light of the above, for these local educational ecosystems to be implemented, some conditions are required that underlie the four examples described above, and that also help with the design of similar experiences in other school contexts. First, co-participation and co-design processes are required (Penuelet al., 2020). Which means a recognition of educational opportunities both inside and outside of school. This is an aspect that is included in literature under the mandate of learning, not only *throughout*, but also *across* people's lives (Barron and Bell, 2015; Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2018; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2017; Subero et al., 2017). On the other hand, the experiential base supports the different actions, that is, they are based on acting, doing and experiencing (Gee & Esteban-Guitart, 2019); what on the other hand characterizes the system as permanently in motion, in tension, in development. Here, two aspects of this characteristic

should be highlighted. First, the importance of shared action in the development (design and implementation) of the educational project or action. What Jenins et al. (2015) call "doing it together" as opposed to "doing it yourself". Second, the fact that such collective and participatory action is based, and at the same time oriented, on the contribution to a common product considered by us as a community fund of knowledge and identity. That is to say, the archaeological site, the website, the artistic intervention at the school building or the knowledge about the school neighbourhood broadcast over the radio are, at the same time, intellectual and experiential resources, knowledge and skills of the community and identitary devices for the recognition of the place and its people.

Ultimately, they are collective artefacts that become common and public goods from the participation of different organizations and people, potentially connecting different spaces, times and social, community and educational agents. Which brings us back to the ecological-systemic perspective of Bronfenbrenner according to which, in his notion of mesosystem: "the development potential of an upbringing scenario is increased as a function of the number of supportive links between that scenario and other contexts in which the child and the adults responsible for their care are inserted. Such interrelationships can take the form of shared activities, two-way communication and information provided to each scenario about the others " (Bronfenbrenner, 1985, pp. 51-52 The same author, in another text (Bronfenbrenner, 1987), referred in this sense to the need to establish educational continuities between different contexts and life practices translated into the appearance of mutual trust, positive orientation, consensus of goals, as well as balance of powers (Gifre & Esteban-Guitart, 2012).

On the other hand, the development of these experiences is a hybrid between innovation and research, in what Bronfengrenner called "experiments by design" (Cole, 2016; Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010; Lalueza et al., 2020). That is to say, forms of intervention that are oriented towards goals defined by the educational community, that are useful to its interests and from which it is expected to obtain positive results for the development of its members, but that are at the same time models subject to scrutiny in the framework of research projects. This makes it possible to evaluate its operation and its results in a real environment over long periods of time. In this long-term line of research, studies and conceptualizations are necessary in relation to three fundamental aspects.

In the first place, the very notion of community funds of knowledge and identity, only exposed here. Second, the methodological challenges of local educational ecosystems. In other words, what processes, mechanisms and conditions enable, or limit, its materialization? Finally, and thirdly, a broad bank of experiences is required to identify and document what we consider here as public and community teaching processes based on the perspective of funds of community knowledge and identity.

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Research

Primary and secondary students' views of learning personalisation: construction and validation of a scale[1]

Posicionamiento del alumnado de Educación Primaria y Secundaria ante la personalización del aprendizaje: construcción y validación de una escala

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Abstract

In this work we present the formulation and psychometric validation of a scale for the exploration of primary and secondary students' views of school learning personalisation strategies (EPAE-A from the Spanish *Escala de Personalisación del Aprendizaje Escolar – Alumnado*, School Learning Personalisation Scale – Students). The instrument was developed as part of a broader research project which analyses educational innovation involving personalisation. The starting point for the formulation process was to establish a typology of teaching practices and strategies which, according to the scientific literature, promote school learning that has personal meaning and significance for students. In order to construct the EPAE-A, two preliminary pilot studies were conducted, the first

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involving 507 students and the second 1,411 students. The process enabled us to reduce the initial set of items to a total of 34. These were grouped into two sub-scales: one of frequency (10 items) and the other of agreement (24 items). Factor analysis revealed a four-factor structure of the agreement sub-scale corresponding to four dimensions of learning personalisation: 1) learner's control and decision-making regarding the learning process; 2) experiential and emotional basis; 3) connections between learning experiences; and 4) reflection upon oneself as a learner and upon the learning process itself. A unidimensional structure was identified for the frequency sub-scale, grouping items according to specific teacher and student actions related to learning personalisation strategies. In order to obtain evidence of the validity and reliability of the scale, the final version was applied to a sample of 4,909 students aged between 10 and 18 years from educational institutions located in Catalonia, Extremadura and Madrid, Spain. The results provide strong evidence of the internal structural validity and reliability of the scale.

Resumen

Este trabajo presenta el proceso de construcción y validación psicométrica de una escala para explorar los posicionamientos del alumnado de educación primaria y secundaria ante las estrategias de personalización del aprendizaje escolar (EPAE-A). El instrumento forma parte de una investigación más amplia dirigida al análisis de prácticas de innovación educativa basadas en la personalización del aprendizaje. El punto de partida de la construcción de la escala fue una tipología de actuaciones y estrategias pedagógicas que, de acuerdo con la revisión de la literatura, promueven la realización de aprendizajes escolares con sentido y valor personal para el alumnado. Para la validación de la EPAE-A se realizaron dos pruebas piloto preliminares, con 507 y 1411 estudiantes respectivamente, que permitieron reducir el número inicial de ítems a 34 agrupados en dos sub-escalas, una de frecuencia (10 ítems) y otra de acuerdo (24 ítems). El análisis factorial permitió, además, identificar una estructura de cuatro factores en la sub-escala de acuerdo que se relacionan con las siguientes dimensiones de la personalización del aprendizaje: 1) decisión y control del aprendiz sobre el proceso de aprendizaje; 2) base experiencial y vivencial; 3) conexión entre experiencias de aprendizaje; y 4) reflexión sobre uno mismo como aprendiz y sobre el propio proceso de aprendizaje. En la sub-escala de frecuencia, por su parte, se identificó una estructura unidimensional que agrupa ítems sobre acciones específicas de profesores y alumnos vinculadas a las estrategias de personalización del aprendizaje. Con el fin de obtener evidencias de la validez y fiabilidad de la escala construida se llevó a cabo una aplicación de la versión

definitiva a una muestra de 4909 estudiantes con edades comprendidas entre los 10 y los 18 años de 12 centros educativos españoles situados en Catalunya, Extremadura y Madrid. Los resultados obtenidos muestran que la escala cuenta con evidencias sólidas de validez de estructura interna y fiabilidad.

Introduction

In this work we provide a description of the formulation, development and assessment of the psychometric properties of a scale with which to explore the views of primary and secondary students regarding a range of school learning personalisation practices and strategies (henceforth EPAE-A from the Spanish *Escala de Personalisación del Aprendizaje Escolar – Alumnado*, School Learning Personalisation Scale – Students). Students from 12 Spanish educational institutions located in Catalonia, Extremadura and Madrid, Spain, were involved in the process. In order to ensure the successful implementation of school learning personalisation practices and strategies, it is vital that the views of the students themselves be known.

Proposals seeking to promote the personalisation of school learning have proliferated over the course of the last twenty years. The initiative has involved national or state education authorities (ACARA, 2013; DfES, 2006; NETP, 2010), foundations, private corporations and other entities (e.g., Christensen Institute, Digital Promise, Education Elements, KnowledgeWorks, LEAP Innovations, Students at the Center), and supranational entities (OECD, 2006, 2017; UNESCO-IBE, 2017). At the heart of these initiatives lies the argument that, in order to confront the challenges presented by the modern economic, social, employment, technological and cultural reality of the Information Society, profound changes to the organisation and operation of education systems are needed (Marope, 2017a). Particular emphasis is put on the notion that learning should focus on and be tailored to the student.

However, there are markedly contrasting interpretations of what is meant by learning personalisation and how it can be achieved. Although an in-depth review of existing characterisations, definitions, and implementations of personalised learning is beyond the scope of the present work, a brief overview of those approaches to which we have referred will help to clarify the context in which the EPAE-A was developed.

Personalised learning has at times been compared with competency-based learning (Hammonds & Moyer, 2018; Levine & Patrick, 2019). The comparison is, in our view, inadequate, as it addresses only one element of personalisation, leaving aside others that are of equal importance and not strictly part of competency-based education. Such omissions include the identification and consideration of students' interests and objectives, and the exploration and establishment of connections between learning experiences that occur inside and outside school (see the next section). In other words, learning personalisation practices and strategies are, in general, inclusive of but by no means limited to the principles of competency-based education (Jonnaert, 2019; Marope, 2017b; Perrenoud, 2000).

Another comparison often made with personalised learning is the use of digital information and communication technology (ICT) in its various forms: online learning, as an element of blended learning, or in support of classroom-based teaching and learning (Grant & Basye, 2014; Johnson et al., 2014). Arguments are diverse (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 2017, 2018; Xie et al., 2019). We also consider that special mention should be made of comparisons between personalised learning and the use of learning analytics to tailor teaching to students' learning processes, an approach which involves technology-assisted analysis of large datasets (Chrysafiadi et al., 2020; Kabassi & Alepis, 2020).

Again, we consider this comparison to be inappropriate. The possibilities of learning personalisation afforded to teachers and students by ICT are unparalleled. Implementation of certain personalisation practices and strategies would be highly challenging, if not impossible without appropriate ICT infrastructure. The majority of these tools can, with the support of ICT, be readily implemented and optimised. However, use of ICT is not in itself enough to personalise learning, even if we include Learning Analytics. In fact, there are numerous learning personalisation proposals, initiatives and experiences that make very

limited use of ICT, and some avoid it completely without suffering any degree of disadvantage.

In an attempt to capture the specific nature of learning personalisation proposals, Bray and McClaskey (2013, 2015) propose that these be distinguished from the notions of *differentiation* and *individualisation*, focusing on the roles played by the student and the teacher. Although the idea of student-centred learning is common to all three approaches, in the cases of differentiation and individualisation, the learning process is led and directed by the teacher, who tailors instruction according to his or her perception of students' needs and selects the resources that he or she deems most appropriate at the time. Only in the case of personalisation is there acknowledgement of and respect for students' capacity to drive their own learning, encouragement to express their choices and interests, and progressive involvement as active co-designers and decision makers in the development and application of learning activities.

Personal significance and personalisation in learning

It is vital that we keep in mind what it is that we ultimately seek to achieve through learning personalisation, as well as the means of achieving it. The aim is for school learning to be relevant and to have personal meaning and significance for students. The means to this end are a set of practices and strategies which teachers adopt as they plan and conduct activities in conjunction with their students. Both aspects must be borne in mind and reflected in the dimensions and items of the scale and constitute the primary point of reference for its formulation.

Research conducted in the field of Learning Sciences offers a number of points concerning the types of situation that are conducive to achieving learning that is personally relevant, meaningful, and significant for the student. Reviews and summaries of these results (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2015; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; OECD, 2017; Sawyer, 2014) reveal strong agreement regarding certain principles common to situations and activities that tend to yield relevant, profound, and personally meaningful and significant student learning. The results indicate that the likelihood of success is greater when: (i) what is learned and how it is learned draws on learners' interests, objectives and choices; (ii) the capacity of

learners to control and make decisions regarding their learning process is respected; (iii) learning contents and activities are linked to learners' day-to-day affairs and to the culture of which they are a part; (iv) learning situations have an experiential and emotional component; (v) exercises and activities constitute "learning by doing" and involve the achievement of a final result or the creation of a product; (vi) connections are made between learning experiences obtained at different times and in different contexts; and (vii) learners are encouraged to reflect upon their own learning process and their approach to confronting and addressing learning situations and activities. Taken individually, each of these principles is insufficient to guarantee that learning situations or activities will result in learning charged with personal meaning and significance for the student. However, when considered together in the design of learning situations and activities, the likelihood of this occurring is substantially increased.

In general, works on the subject of learning personalisation tend to reflect some or all of these principles in the form of practices and strategies for the design and application of school teaching and learning activities. Certain principles are present in the majority of proposals, reflecting a fairly common view of learning personalisation. This is the case with regard to consideration of learners' interests, objectives and choices, which tends to be manifested in strategies that seek to incorporate "the choice and the voice" of learners into the design and application of learning activities (e.g., Bray & McClaskey, 2015; Schmid & Petko, 2019; Underwood et al., 2009; Waldrip et al., 2014, 2016). The same is true of acknowledgement and acceptance of learners' capacity to control and make decisions regarding some or all learning activity elements, often presented in terms of "pupil's control" over their learning process (e.g., DeMink-Carthew & Netcoh, 2019; FitzGerald et al., 2018; Netcoh, 2017; Prain et al., 2013).

Other principles appear less frequently, however. This is the case with the notion of connecting learning experiences obtained at different times and in different contexts, which tends to be manifested in strategies that seek to identify student learning experiences in their various activity contexts and establish relationships between them (Holmes et al., 2018; Jones & McLean, 2018). The same is true of encouraging learners to reflect upon their own learning process and their approach to confronting

and addressing learning activities (Olofson & Downes, 2018; Watson & Watson, 2017).

Finally, principles relating to "learning by doing" and to experiential and emotional components tend to be reflected indirectly in personalisation proposals involving so-called inquiry methodologies – learning based on projects, problems, cases, design, phenomena, etc. – or cooperative learning proposals with which they are often linked in didactic terms (Jones et al., 2013; Lee, 2014; Schmid & Petko, 2019).

This heterogeneity is also evident in the limited number of works that concern the validation and application of questionnaires to expose student views of learning personalisation. Underwood and Banyard (2008) used questionnaires to identify and compare managers', teachers' and learners' views of personalised learning in England. The student questionnaire consists of 11 sub-scales designed to explore students' perceptions of a wide variety of aspects ranging from computers to certain behaviours on the part of teachers.

Equally diverse are the numerous aspects covered by the 19 sub-scales of the Personalised Learning Questionnaire (PLQ) developed by Waldrip et al. (2014). The idea behind the PLQ is that personalised learning occurs when there is "a productive interplay between (a) teacher expertise in identifying and addressing students' ongoing individual curricular needs and (b) student capacity to develop, over an extended time-frame, increasing independence as learners" (op. cit., p. 358).

The perspective adopted for the formulation and validation of the EPAE-A is significantly more focused than the two questionnaires mentioned above. Firstly, we have limited its scope to students' views of teaching practices and strategies that are specifically oriented towards promoting and reinforcing personal meaning and significance in school learning. Secondly, we have selected practices and strategies that are referenced, with varying frequency, in the learning personalisation proposals and approaches identified as part of our review of relevant literature published in the last 15 years. Finally, they are practices and strategies which are directly reflected in the design and application of classroom teaching and learning activities and, as such, are easily detected and perceived by students.

With this in mind, we have opted not to include questions which, while doubtless relevant from an overall perspective of learning personalisation, are often difficult for students to detect and perceive. Similarly, we will

not explore students' views of methodologies, teaching proposals, or tools such as inquiry methodologies, cooperative learning, competency-based assessment, or use of ICT, which, notwithstanding their presence in school learning personalisation proposals and initiatives, are not exclusive to this context and may take different forms in other teaching scenarios.

Construction of the EPAE-A scale

The aim of the present work is to describe the process involved in the formulation and development of a Likert-type scale with which to explore primary and secondary students' views of school learning personalisation and to provide psychometric evidence of its quality. It is part of a broader research project to analyse education innovation practices based on personalisation of learning in primary and secondary education centres in Catalonia, Extremadura and Madrid, Spain.

Initial design of the scale

Formulation of the scale began with a typology of teaching practices and strategies which, according to our review of the literature, promote learning that is personally meaningful and significant for the student. The categories of this typology defined the initial dimensions of the scale. The research team devised each category based on a series of statements relating to students' views of: (a) the frequency with which a given personalisation practice or strategy is used in their place of learning (Frequency); (b) the importance that they ascribe to it (Agreement); (c) their inclination to participate in it (Preference); and (d) its impact on the learning process (Impact). The typology of practices and strategies is presented in Annexe I along with examples of statements relating to the four aspects explored.

The complete list of statements was subjected to an iterative process of review, discussion and reformulation in order to eliminate repetitions, improve composition, and ensure that all categories of the typology presented in Annexe I were covered, along with the four aspects of frequency, importance, preference, and impact. As part of this process,

the statements were presented at two different points in time to students aged between 10 and 18 years in order to ensure ease of comprehension.

The first version of the scale consisted of 77 statements, 22 of which were frequency items and 55 were opinion items. Initial inclusion of a large number of items enabled us to select those with higher factor loadings and communalities in each dimension during the development process. This allowed us to reinforce evidence of the validity and reliability of the scale and ensure that the instrument would be of a reasonable and practical length. We then assigned five response categories to the statements. For the frequency items, these categories were: 1 = *Never*; 2 = *Rarely*; 3 = *Sometimes*; 4 = *Frequently*; and 5 = *Always*. For the opinion items, the categories were: 1 = *Strongly disagree*; 2 = *Disagree*; 3 = *Neither agree nor disagree*; 4 = *Agree*; and 5 = *Strongly agree*.

Development of the scale

Once the first version of the scale was complete, two consecutive pilot studies were organised in order to optimise it. The first pilot study enabled us to identify a conceptual structure of the dimensions of school learning personalisation that would be compatible with both our initial proposal – at least in part – and the responses that we received from participants. The second pilot study allowed us to test this structure. As a result of the two pilot studies, we were able to reduce considerably the number of items included in the scale.

First pilot study

The first pilot study involved 507 students from the education centres involved in the *Aprender con Sentido* research project. The scale was applied on a group basis and in a classroom context using the e-encuesta online platform. Direct supervision was provided at all times by the teacher in charge. At the beginning of each session, a member of the research team explained the purpose of the scale and provided instructions for responding to it. The researcher remained in attendance throughout the whole session, answering questions and resolving students' queries.

We conducted a series of tests to assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis (KMO = 0.87955; Bartlett's test for sphericity, χ^2 = 3053.0, df = 276, p = 0.01). We then divided the sample (N = 507) into three independent sub-samples (N_1 = 169; N_2 = 169; N_3 = 169). We began by using the data from the first sub-sample of participants (N_1 = 169) to test the goodness of fit between our initial proposal of a typology of school learning personalisation practices and strategies (see Annexe 1) and the responses obtained from application of the questionnaire. To do so, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; Batista-Foguet et al., 2004) using the unweighted least squares estimation method (Manzano & Zamora, 2009). We then assessed the results according to the goodness of fit criteria presented in Table I.

TABLE I. Goodness of fit criteria[2]

Index	Hypothesis
Chi-Square (χ^2)	$p > 0.05$
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	$CFI \geq 0.95$
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	$TLI \geq 0.95$
Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR)	$SRMR < 0.05$
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	$RMSEA < 0.08$

The results of the CFA showed a clear lack of fit between the data obtained from the application of the scale and the model proposed initially (χ^2 = 3452.45, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.610; TLI = 565; SRMR = 0.112). In light of this, we began a search for an alternative theoretical model that would fit the participants' responses.

To do so, we conducted two procedures using the data obtained from the second sub-sample of participants (N_2 = 169). We began by conducting a parallel analysis (Timmerman & Lorenzo-Seva, 2011) in the context of an exploratory factor analysis (Bandalos & Finney, 2018), which suggested a nested factor structure. In fact, the distribution of the factor loadings and communalities convinced us of a clear division of the scale into two sub-scales: one that encompassed all of the items

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[2] Note: The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is reported in all cases, with the exception of those with a small sample size, as suggested by Kenny, Kaniskan and McCoach (2015).

relating to importance, preference, and impact, which we designated the *agreement* sub-scale; and another that encompassed all of the frequency-related items, which we designated the *frequency* sub-scale.

We then conducted a series of exploratory factor analyses. For this, we decided to calculate polychoric correlation matrices using the unweighted least squares estimation method, applying a *Promin* rotation (Howard, 2016). The exploratory factor analyses enabled us to eliminate from the scale those items which either: (a) presented lower than expected factor loadings and communalities; or (b) loaded on a theoretically incompatible dimension (Izquierdo et al., 2014).

Once the two procedures were complete, we were left with a scale of 37 items organised into two sub-scales. More specifically, we obtained a frequency sub-scale of 10 items organised into a single dimension, and an agreement sub-scale of 27 items organised into four dimensions.

In order to confirm this factor structure, we conducted another CFA with the data from the third sub-sample of participants (N_3 = 169). In general, we found evidence of the suitability of a theoretical model with one dimension within a sub-scale of frequency (χ^2 = 495.828, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.960; TLI = 933; SRMR = 0.048) and four dimensions within a sub-scale of agreement (χ^2 = 2479.93, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.968; TLI = 958; SRMR = 0.051).

Following an assessment of the items grouped in each sub-scale, we decided to name the five dimensions as follows: (a) *frequency*; (b) *control and decision-making regarding the learning process*; (c) *experiential and emotional basis*; (d) *connections between learning experiences*; and (e) *reflection upon oneself as a learner and upon the learning process itself*.

Second pilot study

Given the relatively small size of the sample used in the first pilot study, we decided to conduct a second. The aim of this second study was to test the factor structure obtained previously with a larger sample of 1,411 students from primary and secondary education centres involved in the PERSONAE research project. As in the first pilot study, the scale was applied on a group basis and in a classroom context, this time using the Qualtrics online platform. Direct supervision was provided at all times by the teacher in charge and, as before, a member of the research team was present throughout.

This time, CFA was conducted for both sub-scales. Initially, the theoretical model fit the data less well than in the first pilot study. However, after several iterations during which certain items were eliminated, we were able to substantially improve the fit indicators for both the frequency sub-scale (χ^2 = 1423.2, p < 0.01; CFI = 0.995; TLI = 0.990; SRMR = 0.017; RMSEA = 0.029) and the agreement sub-scale (χ^2 = 203.33, p > 0.01; CFI = 0.965; TLI = 0.831; SRMR = 0.032; RMSEA = 0.065). Specifically, we eliminated three items from the latter.

In summary, the second pilot study provided us with evidence of a factor structure of two sub-scales, one with one dimension and the other with four dimensions. We were also able to reduce the size of the agreement sub-scale to produce a final version of the scale with a total of 34 items. This completed the development stage of the EPAE-A. Key data covering the entire development process are presented in Table II.

TABLE II. Development of the scale

EPAE-A (from the Spanish Escala de Personalisación del Aprendizaje Escolar – Alumnado, School Learning Personalisation Scale – Students)		Initial formulation	First pilot study	Second pilot study
	Student participants (N)	---	507	1411
Frequency sub-scale	Number of items	22	10	10
	Theoretical dimensions/Factors	8	1	1
	Cronbach's alpha	-	0.906	0.895
	McDonald's omega	-	0.907	0.916
Agreement sub-scale	Number of items	55	27	24
	Theoretical dimensions/Factors	8	4	4
	Cronbach's alpha	-	0.866	0.854
	McDonald's omega	-	0.852	0.897

Note: During the initial formulation of the scale, statistical tests were not conducted.

Psychometric properties of the EPAE-A scale

Participants

In order to determine the validity and reliability of the scale, the final version was applied to a sample of 4,909 students from primary and secondary education centres involved in the PERSONAE research project. Of these, 2,543 (51.8%) identified themselves as male, 2,327 (47.4%) identified themselves as female, and 39 (0.8%) did not declare their identification with either gender. Primary students (1,296) accounted for 26.4% of the total, lower secondary students (3,000) for 61.1%, and *bachillerato* (upper secondary) students (613) for 12.5%. Average age was 13.3 years (SD = 2.23). A search for differences between groups revealed no substantial variance in any of the models. The platform and application conditions were the same as those used for the second pilot study.

Analysis

We explored two psychometric properties agreed by various researchers to be of particular relevance to the assessment of the quality of a scale (Aiken, 2003; Carmines & Zeller, 1988; Prieto & Delgado, 2010). We began by exploring the validity of the scale. Validity is the degree to which evidence concerning the use of a scale supports the desired interpretation of its results for the purposes of a given objective (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999). In our case, we focused on evidence of construct validity (Kane, 2012). This type of evidence enables us to verify the degree of fit between the test participants' scores and the theoretical factor structure predicted by the developers of the scale (Kane, 2016). With a view to assessing the degree of construct validity of our scale, we conducted CFA on the data (Batista-Foguet et al., 2004). As with the formulation and development phases, we used the unweighted least squares estimation method (Manzano & Zamora, 2009) to contrast the results with the goodness of fit criteria presented in Table I.

We then explored the reliability of the scale. Reliability is the consistency or stability of the results obtained from multiple repetitions

of a measurement process (Cohen et al., 1996). From a practical point of view, the degree of reliability of a scale is established by calculating a coefficient of internal consistency, such as Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which is currently one of the most widely used methods of assessing the reliability of questionnaires (Zumbo & Rupp, 2004). However, Cronbach's alpha can pose issues with ordinal response categories, as is the case with our scale. For this reason, we included an additional indicator that seems more appropriate to our circumstances: McDonald's omega coefficient (McDonald, 1999). A summary of the statistical criteria recommended by the specialised literature (e.g., Elosúa & Zumbo, 2008) and which we used to assess the indicators of internal consistency are presented in Table III.

TABLE III. Assessment criteria for indicators of internal consistency

Indicator	Acceptable values
Cronbach's alpha	$0.75 < \alpha < 0.95$
McDonald's omega	$0.85 < \omega$

All of the data analysis was conducted using the Stata v.16 software package.

Results

Before conducting the psychometric tests, we made a preliminary exploration of the data. We found neither atypical nor lost data, but we did find non-linear distributions in several items. We therefore applied the Satorra-Bentler correction for non-normal data to all subsequent analyses (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2010).

We then assessed the appropriateness of using CFA on the data matrix. Both the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test (KMO = 0.886) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 3015.2$, df = 190, $p < 0.01$) suggested the suitability of the data.

From the results we can conclude that, in general terms, there is strong evidence of the internal structural validity and reliability of our scale. In

terms of evidence of internal structural validity, the analyses produced positive results for both sub-scales (see Table IV). On the agreement sub-scale, participant scores were grouped according to the proposed four-dimensional theoretical structure (χ^2 = 247.76, p > 0.01; CFI = 0.971; TLI = 0.945; SRMR = 0.031; RMSEA = 0.037). On the frequency sub-scale, participant scores were grouped according to the proposed unidimensional structure (χ^2 = 553.05, p > 0.01; CFI = 0.981; TLI = 0.990; SRMR = 0.020; RMSEA = 0.06). These results are consistent with the preliminary results obtained during the formulation and development phases.

TABLE IV. Fit indices of the factor structure proposed for each sub-scale

Test	Criteria	Frequency sub-scale	Agree-ment sub-scale
Chi-Square (χ^2)	p > 0.05	0.177	0.257
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	CFI $\geq$ 0.95	0.981	0.971
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	TLI $\geq$ 0.95	0.990	0.945
Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR)	SRMR < 0.05	0.02	0.031
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	RMSEA < 0.08	0.06	0.037

Once the fit indices had been determined, we calculated the internal consistency indices for each sub-scale (see Table V). As shown, the values of these indices were acceptable. However, it should be noted that the values for the agreement sub-scale are somewhat lower (α = 0.861; ω = 0.872) than those for the frequency sub-scale (α = 0.874; ω = 0.894).

TABLE V. Internal consistency indices for each sub-scale

Test	Criteria	Frequency sub-scale	Agreement sub-scale
Cronbach's alpha	$\alpha \geq 0.85$	0.874	0.861
McDonald's omega	$\omega \geq 0.85$	0.894	0.872

In short, we found strong evidence of the internal structural validity and reliability of the EPAE-A and this is summarised in Figure I.

FIGURE I. Evidence of EPAE-A validity and reliability
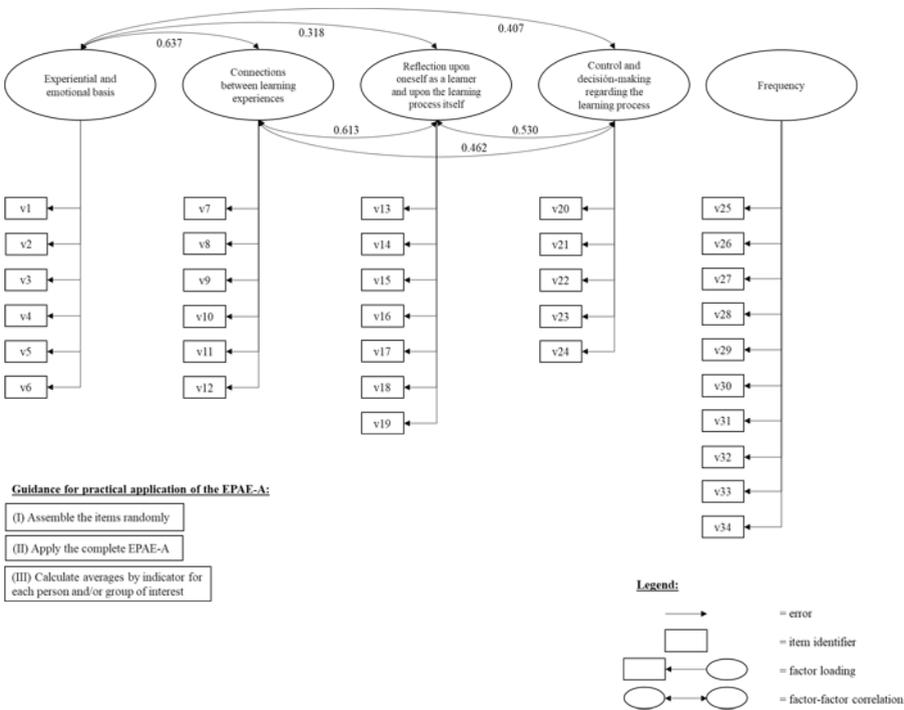
Note: The items (v_n) can be found in full in Annexe II.

Application and assessment of the scale

The scale can be administered by any teacher who requires information concerning their students' opinions of school learning personalisation strategies. In order to analyse the data obtained, we recommend the use of the averages obtained for each person or group in each of the factors. In other words, the EPAE-A is designed to calculate not a global indicator but five different indicators, one for each of the factors.

Discussion

The EPAE-A complies with quality and validation standards and is in line with the sequential statistical analysis procedures designed for the exploration of relationships between variables using factors (Boateng et al., 2018). Formulation and optimisation of the scale involved two successive pilot studies (N = 507; N = 1,411). Our validation of the scale using a large number of responses (N = 4,909) reflects the strength of the instrument for gauging students' views of the practices and strategies adopted by teachers in order to personalise school learning. It is worth mentioning that the sample used to establish the validity and reliability of the EPAE-A was considerably larger than those generally used for the formulation and validation of this type of scale (e.g., Underwood & Banyard, 2014; Waldrip et al., 2014).

The items belonging to the eight categories of teacher practices and strategies upon which we initially based the scale were eventually grouped into four factors as a result of the psychometric analyses. Although the number of items (see Annexes I and II) has been reduced, it is clear that the final scale accounts for all of the principal dimensions of learning personalisation proposals and initiatives. The grouping of the items into factors corresponds, for the most part, with the initial practice and strategy categories.

Two sets of items were not grouped as factors in their own right, but instead were distributed across the four factors that resulted from the factor analysis. These are the items from the initial categories concerning consideration of students' interests and objectives and incorporation or utilisation of resources and learning opportunities that are available within community surroundings and the activity contexts to which

students have access outside school. The importance of this lies in the fact that, as mentioned in the introduction, both types of practice, especially those concerning the consideration of students' interests and objectives, are present in a generalised manner within the proposals and initiatives aimed at learning personalisation. Far from casting doubt on their importance, we believe that this result reinforces the centrality of considering students' interests and objectives in the personalisation of learning, and of linking them with other practices and strategies. To work based on and in accordance with students' interests is closely related with acknowledgement and acceptance of their capacity to drive their own learning process, with identification and interconnection of their learning experiences both in and outside school, and with individual and collective reflection on the origin and scope of these interests. As such, it is reasonable to interpret the fact that the items relating to interests are distributed across the four factors as a reflection of the centrality of these interests in approaches to learning personalisation.

Let us now address the unidimensional structure of the frequency sub-scale. Although this result is contrary to our expectations of a factor structure similar to that of the agreement sub-scale, it does coincide with a contribution from the work of Underwood & Banyard (2008) who, when comparing students' and teachers' views of personalised learning, conclude that students "tended to strongly see personalisation as individualisation" and to ask themselves what degree of freedom and initiative they have (p 245). This tendency may equally contribute to the unidimensional structure of the frequency sub-scale in that the majority of its constituent items involve, in one way or another and with greater or lesser degrees of clarity in each case, a reference to the degree of initiative and freedom available to the student.

In sum, based on our results we are able to assert that there is strong evidence of the validity and reliability of the EPAE-A for use in education centres in Spain. However, the work we have conducted leaves a number of open questions, two of which we feel merit particular attention. The first concerns the age group for which the scale is intended – namely students aged between 10 and 18 years – and the composition of the sample of 4,909 students used for the final validation. Our sample presents two possibilities. On one hand, given the breadth of the age interval and the differences between the three levels of education within the Spanish education system, we believe that it would make sense to

explore a potential division of the EPAE-A into three versions – primary education, lower secondary education, and *bachillerato* or upper secondary education. On the other, we consider that a re-validation of the scale using a student sample that is more evenly distributed across the three age groups would serve to bolster evidence of the scale's validity and reliability, especially if the sample size were similar to that used in the present study.

The second open question that we think should be highlighted concerns the specific context of the Spanish education system for which the scale was developed and in which it was validated. The views of students – and, of course, of teachers – regarding personalised learning practices and strategies are undeniably influenced by the pedagogical culture and traditions of Spain's education system and the institutions that have received and moulded them as students. As such, it would be interesting to test whether the factor structure of the EPAE-A holds true with samples of students from education systems and institutions with different pedagogical cultures and traditions.

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Academic achievement in middle childhood: relationships with Emotional Intelligence and Social Skills[1]

Rendimiento académico en educación primaria: relaciones con la Inteligencia Emocional y las Habilidades Sociales

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) and social skills (SS) have always been considered important for children's psychological and behavioural adjustment. However, during the last century they are receiving increasing attention for its influence in the academic setting too. The objective of this study is to analyse in depth the relationship of school performance with EI and SS. Especially we examine which specific dimensions of EI and SS are more related to academic achievement in mathematics and language. One hundred eighty students between 8 and 11 years old participated in the study. We administered the BarOn EI Inventory, the Social Skills Improvement System – Rating Scales (SSIS) and a test of mathematics and linguistic competences. The results showed that there is a relationship between EI and SS and academic achievement. The Interpersonal and Adaptability components of EI, together with the Communication and Cooperation factors of SS have showed to have the strongest impact on academic achievement. These findings point out the need to consider students' socioemotional competences in order to help them achieve all their academic and personal potential.

Key words: emotional intelligence, social skills, academic achievement, primary education, linguistic competence, mathematics competence.

Resumen

La Inteligencia emocional (IE) y las habilidades sociales (HHSS) siempre se han considerado importantes para el buen desarrollo de los niños y niñas. No obstante, en los últimos años están recibiendo cada vez más atención, sobre todo en el campo educativo, por su influencia en el contexto escolar. El objetivo de este estudio es examinar detalladamente la relación entre el rendimiento académico y la inteligencia emocional y las habilidades sociales. Concretamente analizamos las dimensiones específicas de la IE y las HHSS que están más relacionadas con el rendimiento académico en lengua y matemáticas. Ciento ochenta alumnos de entre 8 y 11 años participaron en el estudio. Se administró el inventario BarOn, el SSIS-RS de habilidades sociales y una prueba de competencias matemáticas y lingüísticas. Los resultados demuestran que hay relación entre la IE y las HHSS y el rendimiento académico. Los componentes Interpersonal y Adaptabilidad de la IE, junto con los factores de Comunicación y Cooperación han demostrado tener el mayor impacto en el rendimiento de los alumnos. Estos resultados ponen de manifiesto la necesidad de tener en cuenta las competencias socioemocionales de los alumnos para ayudarlos a alcanzar su máximo potencial académico y personal.

Palabras clave: inteligencia emocional, habilidades sociales, rendimiento académico, educación primaria, competencia lingüística, competencia matemática.

Introduction

Finding ways to promote academic achievement among students has always raised great interest in the educational field. Because of this, it comes as no surprise that researchers have focused on identifying the most potential predictors of academic achievement in elementary and high schools in the last few decades. Among these factors, emotional intelligence and social skills have emerged as two of the variables that attracted most of the attention, aside from the intellectual or motivational ones.

Interest in emotional intelligence (EI) as an influence on academic success has appeared amid a passionate debate in the scientific field about the importance and the nature of EI (Parker et al., 2004a; Petrides et al. 2004). Numerous studies have related emotional intelligence to

school achievement, from preschool to higher education (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2004; MacCann et al., 2020; Perera, 2016). Despite the dispersion of studies, their contributions indicate the existence of a relation between these two variables, either directly or mediated by different variables.

Focusing on social skills (SS), research has demonstrated that social and academic competence are also closely linked (Asle-Fattahi & Najarpoor-Ostadi, 2014; Eisenberg et al., 2010; Valiente et al., 2008). Learning is a complex individual process, but also a social one. In fact, social interaction is one of the key components for learning that allows cognitive growth. So mucho so, according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) around 50% of the differences in school success can be attributed to causes directly related to a social origin (Mudarra & García-Salguedo, 2016).

Therefore, the relationship between different aspects of EI and SS on the one side, and academic achievement on the other, seems pretty obvious. However, most of the studies analysing these associations have focused on adolescents and very limited work has been done with younger samples (Brouzos et al. 2014; Keefer et al., 2012).

Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement

Since the early 2000s there has been a general acceptance about the existence of two distinct constructs of EI (Austin et al., 2004; Livingstone & Day, 2005): a practitioner (e.g., Bar-On, 1997) and a scientific (e.g., Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This conceptualisation is consistent with the Petrides & Furnham's (2001) suggestion that EI can be divided into trait and ability EI. Both the practitioner and trait conceptualisations of EI rely on self-report measurements of perceived EI whereas the scientific and ability conceptualisations use performance-based measurements. Notwithstanding, a consensus has begun to emerge over the last few years that the two EI constructs are not antagonistic but complementary to one another, each reflecting a unique aspect of the individual's emotional functioning (e.g., Agnoli et al., 2012; Schutte et al., 2011).

The present study puts the focus on children's trait EI, because of two main reasons. Firstly, little work has concentrated on trait EI in childhood, especially in elementary school children. Secondly, trait

EI captures what a child believes about her/his abilities (Petrides & Furnham, 2003), in contrast to ability EI that focuses on knowledge and abilities in the emotional domain. In other words, trait EI involves self-evaluations of one's own emotional knowledge and efficacy, that are personally meaningful, and may exert a significant influence on how a child manages emotionally challenging situations at school as well as on actions and decisions that are related to academic performance.

In the current study we used the Bar-On & Parker (2000) practitioner-oriented vision of EI. The BarOn model proposes that EI consists of four primary abilities: intrapersonal (the ability to recognize and express effectively one's own feelings and needs), interpersonal (the ability to understand others' emotions and engage in satisfying interpersonal relationships), adaptability (the ability to adapt to novel situations and solve problems of a personal or social nature), and stress management (the ability to cope with difficult and strong emotions and the ability to control impulsive behaviors).

Research investigating the relationship between trait EI and academic achievement has produced mixed findings. Some studies have supported the link, others have reported null results, and yet other studies have shown that the association is specific for some trait EI dimensions but not for others (Brouzos et al., 2014). These studies are very heterogeneous, not only because of the diversity of the emotional competences that are approached, but also because of the manner in which academic achievement is tested. So, despite fairly intensive research over the past years, the mechanisms underlying the relationship between trait EI and academic achievement in childhood are generally unknown (Keefer et al., 2012).

Research has started taking into account possible indirect routes through which trait EI may be exerting influence on academic performance. For example, trait EI has shown to predict important factors for a successful teaching and learning experience, such as critical thinking and collaborative learning (Fernandez et al., 2012), cognitive and affective engagement (Maguire et al., 2017) and creative skills (Sánchez-Ruiz et al., 2011). Past work has also shown that emotional self-efficacy enhances academic self-efficacy, which, in turn, improves academic performance (Hen & Goroshit, 2014). Many authors have argued that the reason trait EI is linked to academic outcomes is because it facilitates the adaptive coping and emotion regulation necessary to face academic stress (e.g.,

Saklofske et al., 2012). However, it is also possible that the EI-academic performance association is attributable to the content of what is learned (MacCann et al., 2020). In this sense, emotional content is evidently more relevant to humanities-related subjects (where accurately portraying and evoking emotion can be part of the assessable content) as compared with mathematics (where the content is completely unrelated to emotions).

Focusing on primary education, Eastabrook et al. (2005) found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. They divided a sample of school children, based on the end-of-year Grade Average Scores (GPA), into three groups: "above average," "average," and "below average". "Above average" children scored higher compared with the other two groups on the overall EI trait score (as measured by the EQ-i:YV scale), and on two of its subscales assessing interpersonal and adaptability skills. Similarly, Qualter et al. (2007) showed that high and average trait EI students achieved significantly better grades at the end of the school year compared with a group of children with lower trait EI scores in a primary school group.

Finally, in a later study, Brouzos et al. (2014) examined the relationship between trait EI with academic achievement in a sample of children aged 8 to 10 and 11 to 13. In the younger group, total EI was not significantly correlated with academic achievement; but at the subscale level, one of the EQ-i:YV subscales, adaptability, correlated positively with young children's average grade scores in Maths and Greek. Conversely, in the 11- to 13-year-old group, the results showed that children's total EI scores predicted performance in both academic subjects. At the subscale level, significant positive associations were found between the EI scales: stress management, intrapersonal EI, and adaptability skills with children's average grade in both academic subjects.

Extending the research to high school students, Parker et al. (2004a) found that academically successful students had more advanced adaptability and stress management skills than their peers. A finding that is in line with a longitudinal study by Parker et al. (2004b) which determined that the intrapersonal ability, stress management and adaptability were the EI dimensions that best predicted academic achievement in the transition of students from high school to university.

Social Skills and Academic Achievement

An increasingly robust body of literature suggests that social skills and academic achievement are closely linked (Coplan et al., 2001; Denham et al., 2012; Eisenberg et al., 2010; Valiente et al., 2008; Wentzel et al., 2012). Well-developed social skills contribute to academic success and improve the learning environment for everyone. Students with these skills tend to pay better attention to speaker, work more cooperatively with others, ask for help when needed, and behave more responsibly in class (Caprara et al., 2000).

Social skills are learned behaviors that promote positive interactions while simultaneously discouraging negative ones when applied to appropriate social situations (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The most common social skills behaviors include: Communication (taking turns and making eye contact during a conversation, using appropriate tone of voice and gestures, and being polite by saying 'thank you' and 'please'); Cooperation (helping others, sharing materials, and complying with rules and directions); Assertion (initiating behaviors, such as asking others for information, introducing oneself, and responding to the actions of others); Responsibility (showing regard for property or work and demonstrating the ability to communicate with adults); Empathy (showing concern and respect for others' feelings and viewpoints); Engagement (joining activities in progress and inviting others to join, initiating conversations, making friends, and interacting well with others); Self-Control (responding appropriately in conflict and non-conflict situations).

According to DiPerna & Elliott (2002) social skills can be considered as academic facilitators. This is, attitudes and patterns that allow the student participate and benefit of the classroom instruction, embracing factors such as motivation, interpersonal abilities, implication or study techniques (Welsh et al., 2001). Students who lack these skills are unlikely to meet their teachers' behavioral expectations and are at-risk for pejorative outcomes including poor school adjustment in the form of impaired relationships with teachers and peers, academic underachievement and high rates of disciplinary contacts (Walker & Severson, 2002). Finally, Akbaribooreng et al. (2015) suggest a significant positive relationship between social skills and academic performance in a group of high school students, exposing that pupils with high social competence tend to be more pro social and perform better in school.

However, not all the SS affect school success in the same way. Many authors (Gresham, 2000; Lane et al., 2004; Lane et al., 2006) point out that self-control, cooperation, assertion and compliance with the rules, are the main SS related to academic achievement. Especially these ones have been studied in depth by Lane et al. (2010) and have been considered crucial for academic achievement.

In this line, Gresham et al. (2000) examined which social skills were rated as critical to classroom success by upper elementary school teachers. Their findings suggested that teachers view self-control and cooperation as more important than assertion skills. In another study of Mudarra & García-Salguero (2016) with high school teachers in Spain, apart from the ones described above (assertion, self-control and cooperation), they also include as very important for academic success, responsibility and extroversion. Especially, teachers consider that for academic achievement is crucial the ability to speak in an appropriate tone of voice (communication), defend themselves (assertion), being able to initiate conversations with their peers (extraversion) and express themselves in an appropriate language when one is contradicted and reach agreements and assume compromise in conflictive situations (self-control).

However, there is very little research in this area at primary school level. In Portugal two studies relate emotion understanding to academic achievement in elementary school (Silva, 2012; Rocha, 2016). In both studies, the results suggest some relation between emotion understanding and the grades obtained in Portuguese and mathematics. However, and according to the studies carried out by the latter, the influence that emotion understanding has in predicting academic achievement is affected by social competence, in a way that social competence is a mediator that facilitates the relationship with others.

Understanding which Social Skills are considered very important for the academic achievement of the students would provide proposals to prevent maladaptive behaviour, reducing the students vulnerability, optimizing social relationships -interactions with peers and teachers- and reaching better academic goals.

Present study

The present study aims to assess potential links between trait EI, SS and academic achievement in a primary school sample.

The study aims to extend previous research in the following ways. Firstly, we assessed our predictions with elementary students to analyse if the relationships found in older ages are the same in younger children. This would raise the possibility that the effects of trait EI may vary across educational levels as well as across subjects.

Secondly, the majority of previous studies have focused exclusively on overall EI and SS scores, and very few have explored the links between specific EI dimensions and SS factors with academic achievement. Thus, in this study it was considered important to examine the relative contribution of each of the individual dimensions EI on children's achievement at school.

Finally, earlier research has, in most of the cases, operationally defined children's SS and EI either in terms of peer evaluations or by means of parents or teacher reports. In the current study, we opted for a more comprehensive assessment by asking directly to the children to get a better characterization of their behaviours and beliefs.

Specifically, the aims of the study are:

(i)   Examine in depth the relationship of school performance with EI and SS.

(ii) Identify which specific dimensions of EI and SS are more related to academic achievement.

(iii) Explore if these relationships are different in maths and language.

Method

Participants

One hundred eighty primary education students aged between 8 and 11 years participated in the study (M = 9.67). There was a balance of boys and girls. The sample was recruited from two schools in the province of Girona, in Catalonia, Spain. Schools had similar characteristics in

terms of students and both had two groups per grade. The sociocultural environment was also very similar, as they belong to the same neighbourhood. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of the sample.

TABLE I. Main descriptive data of the participants

Sample characteristics	N = 180
Age, M, years	9.67
Sex, female, %	47.2
Grade, %	
3rd	48.1
5th	51.9
General Intelligence, M (SD)	18.5 (6.4)
Non-verbal Intelligence, M (SD)	9.6 (3.4)

In order to ensure that our sample size was sufficient to detect an adequate effect, we computed post hoc power analyses using G*Power 3.1 Software (Faul et al., 2007). Results revealed that our total sample size of 180 participants was sufficient to detect with a .99 power a medium effect size (f^2 = .15).

Procedure

Data collection took place at the school attended by the children, with the required written consent and authorization granted by the parents and the school board, and following the ethical principles of scientific research. The questionnaires were administered to all students in the mainstream classroom in two different sessions. The first one, which lasted one hour, included the assessment of emotional intelligence and social abilities, while the second one, which took place one week later, was devoted to test the linguistic and mathematics competences with a standardized test and lasted 90 minutes.

Measures

Emotional Intelligence. The Spanish version of the BarOn EQ-i:Yv (Bermejo et al., 2018) was used to evaluate the emotional competence of the students. In this self-report, students are asked to respond to the statement that best describes the way they feel, think, or act in most situations using a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*very seldom or not true of me*) to 4 (*very often true or true of me*). The instrument consists of 60 items divided in four sub-scales: interpersonal EI (the ability to understand others' emotions and engage in satisfying interpersonal relationships; 12 items), intrapersonal EI (the ability to understand own emotions and communicate them to others; 6 items), adaptability (the ability to be flexible, realistic, and effective in problem solving and managing change; 12 items), and stress management (the ability to manage and control own emotions and to respond calmly to stressful events; 12 items). A high score on any individual ability scale (or the total score) reflects a high level of social and emotional competency. The total emotional intelligence is rated by an IQ score (M = 100, Sd = 15).

Social Skills. Social skills were rated with the Social Sills Improvement System (SSIS; Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The SSIS is a self-report normed test for children between the ages of 3 and 18 and includes domains in the areas of socials skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence. For the aim of our study, we only used the first one. The social skills part includes seven subscales: 7 communication items (e.g., making eye contact), 6 cooperation items (e.g., helping others), 7 assertion items (e.g., initiating behaviors), 6 responsibility items (e.g., showing regard for property), 6 empathy items (e.g., showing concern and respect for others), 7 engagement items (e.g., joining in activities) and 7 self-control items (e.g., responding appropriately in conflict and non-conflict situations), for a total of 46 items in the overall social skills domain. On each of the items, students rated the frequency of a particular social skill using a 4-point scale of *Never*, *Seldom*, *Often* or *Almost Always*. Total raw scores, general for social skills and of each subscale were used in the analyses.

Linguistic and Mathematics competence. We used a standardized set of tests for children that are administered to all primary school students of Catalonia (Spain). Although there is a test for each of the main school subjects, we selected just two for the aim of our study: the

Catalan (language) and mathematics ones. The tests used in this study were the version of the 2016–2017 academic year for 3rd grade and the version of 2011–2012 for 5th grade. These versions were selected together with the teachers of the participants to ensure that the tests had not been administered before to the students. The Catalan test of 3rd grade consisted of a narrative text with eight reading comprehension questions. From those, five were multiple-choice questions with four possible answer options, and three were open questions, in which they needed to write down a short answer. The 5th grade test consisted of a reading comprehension task and a writing exercise. In the reading task, students had to read a text and answer 12 questions (11 multiple-choice and one open question). In the writing exercise students had to write a short text of about 50 words. Both the reading comprehension task and the writing task were scored from 0 to 10, according to the correction criteria established by the Department of Education. Moreover, to ensure the maximum objectivity in the qualification of the writing task, the first author and another researcher not involved in the study evaluated the exercise, and the inter-rater agreement was calculated with the Cohen's Kappa statistic. The obtained value was $\kappa = 0.64$, showing a considerable accordance level (Landis and Koch, 1977). The average score of the two tasks was used as the global grade of linguistic competence. On the other hand, the mathematics test had the same format for both courses. It consisted of 5 activities based on daily situations with different type of exercises in each (multiple choice questions, chart interpretations, circle the correct drawing, etc.). Each student had one hour to finish each test and they were scored in a 0-10 scale to obtain a global grade of linguistic competence and mathematics competence. To get a global score of their performance in both subjects, the arithmetic mean between the both (linguistic and mathematics competence) was calculated and it was categorized as academic achievement.

Data analyses

Two sets of analyses (bivariate correlational analyses and regression analysis) were performed using the computer program IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

Results

The means and standard deviations of each of the study measures are shown in Table 2.

TABLE II. Statistical measures of EI, SS and school competences scores.

Measure	M	SD	Min	Max
Total Emotional Intelligence	102.11	13.90	65	139
1. Intrapersonal	102.43	14.34	64	141
2. Interpersonal	102.72	13.96	56	131
3. Adaptability	101.21	15.09	54	137
4. Stress Management	98.57	14.34	60	133
Total Social Skills	103.86	12.61	66	128
1. Communication	14.69	2.85	4	18
2. Cooperation	16.86	2.99	7	21
3. Assertion	14.80	3.44	6	21
4. Responsibility	16.19	2.88	7	21
5. Empathy	13.95	2.82	5	18
6. Engagement	16.74	3.58	4	21
7. Self-control	11.62	3.74	3	18
School Competences	7.41	2.03	1.85	10
1. Maths score	7.35	2.03	1.5	10
2. Catalan score	7.46	2.43	1.3	10

Correlations among the various EI and SS variables and school competences scores were calculated and are presented in Table 3 As the table shows, the total EI and SS scores were significantly correlated with the language competence (Catalan grade) (EI: r = .198; SS: r = .158) but not with the mathematics one.

At a subscale level, adaptability and interpersonal EI were the EI components more related with the overall academic achievement.

Especially adaptability emerged as the only factor that significant correlates with both subject scores (Catalan: $r = .200$; mathematics: $r = .224$), together with the interpersonal factor for language ($r = .218$) and the intrapersonal for mathematics, in this case negatively ($r = -.153$). So, most of the EI factors (all of them except stress management) had some kind of relation with academic achievement, either with mathematics or Catalan.

Regarding social skills, communication and cooperation were the SS components that significantly correlated (Communication: $r =. 214$; Cooperation: $r = .269$). Responsibility also showed a low significant correlation with the language score ($r = .175$).

TABLE III. Correlations between IE, SS and mathematics and Catalan competence scores.

Measures	Academic achievement	Maths Competence	Catalan Competence
Emotional Intelligence	.145	.054	**.198***
1. Intrapersonal	-.086	**-.153***	-.016
2. Interpersonal	**.175***	.086	**.218****
3. Adaptability	**.235****	**.200****	**.224****
4. Stress management	.079	.065	.077
Social Skills	.124	.061	**.158***
5. Communication	**.214****	**.159***	**.223****
6. Cooperation	**.269****	**.156***	**.316****
7. Assertion	-.044	-.086	-0.03
8. Responsibility	.125	.039	**.175***
9. Empathy	.083	.081	.071
10. Engagement	-.020	-.063	.019
11. Self-control	.096	.085	.089

* p <.05; ** p <.01

A stepwise linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate which components of EI and SS were more predictive of mathematics and Catalan scores. Table 4 shows the results of the regression analyses for mathematics. Model 1, including Adaptability, was statistically significant (F(1,165) = 6.878, p < .010), with an adjR² of .034. Model 2, which included the interpersonal factor of EI, was statistically significant (F(2,164) = 8.165, p < .001, with an adjR² of .079. In this case, both (Adaptability and Intrapersonal EI) were positive statistically significant predictors in the model, and the explained variance lightly changed (R² change = .051). Entering Engagement in the next step, the explained variance in maths score did not change significantly, (R² change of .022, Fchange (2,163) = 6.951, p < .001), though all the variables remained significant. Finally, the last model (4), adding communication, was the one that fitted best, explaining 16.5 % of the variance in maths score (F(4,162) = 7.995, p < .001, with an adjusted R²= .144. All the variables (Adaptability, Intrapersonal EI, Engagement and Communication) also remained as significant and positive predictors for maths score in the full model.

TABLE IV. Linear regression analysis between components of EI and SS and maths score.

Variables	β	Typ. Error	Beta	t	Sig	F	Adjusted R²
Model 1							
Constant	4.729	1.030		4.592	.000	6.878	.034
EI-Adaptability	.026	.010	.200	2.623	.010		
Model 2							
Constant	7.130	1.282		5.562	.000	8.165	.079
EI-Adaptability	.036	.010	.272	3.476	.001		
EI-Intrapersonal	-.033	.011	-.236	-3.019	.003		
Model 3							
Constant	7.652	1.295		5.909	.000	6.951	0.97
EI-Adaptability	.044	.011	.333	4.012	.000		
EI-Intrapersonal	-.031	.011	-.222	-2.852	.005		
SS-Engagement	-.092	.045	-.165	-2.050	.042		

Model 4							
Constant	6.031	1.361		4.431	.000	7.995	.144
EI-Adaptability	.043	.011	.326	4.037	.000		
EI-Intrapersonal	-.027	.011	-.197	-2.595	.010		
SS-Engagement	-.179	.052	-.322	-3.466	.001		
SS-Communication	.192	.061	.275	3.159	.002		

Table 5 shows the results of the regression analyses for the Catalan score. In this case, only one model was obtained. As seen, adaptability (EI) was the only component significantly related to the grade in Catalan ($F(1,165) = 9.281$, $p < .003$), with an adjusted R^2 of .048. This means that the model explained 4.8 % of the variance in the sample Catalan scores, or what is the same, participants' predicted Catalan score increases .036 points for each point of adaptability. In this case, compared with the correlations presented before, adaptability was the only factor that remained significantly associated with the Catalan score, since the rest of EI components and all the SS components disappeared.

TABLE V. Linear regression analysis between the components of EI and SS and Catalan score

Variables	β	Typ. Error	Beta	t	Sig	F	Adjusted R^2
Model 1							
Constant	3.852	1.218		3.163	.002	9.281	.048
Adaptability	.036	.012	.231	3.047	.003		

Discussion

The present research provided support for the relationship between EI and SS and academic achievement in a sample of primary school children. Especially, the Interpersonal and Adaptability components of EI, together with the Communication and Cooperation factors of SS, have showed to have the strongest relationship with academic achievement.

These findings give evidence that both EI and SS are related to the academic achievement of the students, an idea that is in line with previous research (Gresham et al. 2000; Lane et al., 2004; Mavroveli & Sánchez-Ruiz, 2011; Qualter et al., 2012). The involvement of the EI in predicting competence scores may be explained in terms of the benefit of managing and controlling emotions whilst problem solving. This is, students with higher EI levels are more able to regulate the negative emotions related to academic performance, such as anxiety, boredom or disappointment. On the other side, having adequate social skills, such as communication and cooperation is key to develop successful interactions in the school setting, which in turn, will end up with better academic performance.

In our study general EI score was related to language competence but not to the mathematics one, a finding that is in line with Petrides et al. (2004). This can be attributable to the content of what is learned, as humanities is more emotionally charged than mathematics.

Regarding the specific components, the fact that Adaptability and the Interpersonal factors have been the EI components more related to academic achievement is not surprising. The interpersonal component is related to social awareness and, therefore, students that have high scores on it are children who are good at listening and are able to understand and appreciate other's feelings (BarOn & Parker, 2000). As a result, a student with good interpersonal skills engages in satisfying social relationships, which in turn, facilitates a good classroom environment for learning. On the other hand, the component of Adaptability is defined by these authors as the ability to manage the change. Thus, it can be hypothesized that students with high adaptability scores are good at finding solutions for the problems they face, the difficulties they experience and the things they do not understand in the classroom.

In terms of SS, Communication and Cooperation were the components that stood out as more important for academic achievement. Communication is integral to effective academic collaboration. Pupils who have good communicative skills are able to discuss and exchange ideas effectively with their teachers and peers, which is the basis of the learning process. Cooperation, in turn, means being able to work together, engage in teamwork, having abilities to solve conflicts and valuing others' tasks. Nowadays that achievement in academic settings increasingly requires performance not only in individual tasks, but also in collaborative environments (project-based methodologies, problem-

based learning, etc.), it is obvious that cooperation skills may help to perform better in schools.

Emotional Intelligence

Focusing in each of the subjects in particular, we have seen that Adaptability stood out as the emotional component more related to the language score. In practical terms, Adaptability is conceptualized as reality testing, flexibility, and problem solving (BarOn & Parker, 2000). Therefore, it makes sense that, during the reading exercise, students may use mainly this ability to follow successfully the passages of the story: using strategies to validate regularly if they understand or not what is happening in the story, and thus continue reading or go back to reread any of the paragraphs. Moreover, this component of Adaptability and its associated flexibility might enable students to put themselves in the shoes of each character and empathize with them, being able to answer correctly to questions about feelings and/or emotions (*What was the intention…? Did Mr. Hopper feel satisfied?…)* as well as more implicit questions, whose answers are not directly found in the text. Regarding the writing task, this ability would help to consider the characteristics of the receiver of the text and consequently adapt the register to them.

The fact that the Interpersonal and Intrapersonal components of EI did not predict significantly the Catalan score might seem contradictory, given that this subject requires constant interaction with others and the ability to understand and express feelings. A possible explanation is that at age 8-10, the linguistic curriculum involves many elements (such as spelling, punctuation and grammar) which do not appear to rely on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (Jordan et al., 2010).

In the case of mathematics, Adaptability and Intrapersonal (in a negative way) were the EI components more related to its score. In the mathematics context, Adaptability can be described as the students' capacity to adapt in order to deal with novelty or change in their mathematics schoolwork: altering the way they think about a problem, changing the way they try to solve it, or down regulating their emotions (e.g., reducing anxiety, frustration) when considering the mathematics problem. The nature of mathematics involves students consistently learning and applying new knowledge in a variety of very different topics that often require

unique skills (Collie & Martin, 2017). Thus, Adaptability is required on a regular basis in order for students to learn and engage effectively with mathematics.

We have found that Adaptability was a predictor of the scores of language and mathematics. In this sense, our results are in line with the ones from Brouzos et al. (2014) and Hogan et al. (2010), which also identified Adaptability as the most important EI factor for academic achievement.

The scores on the Intrapersonal EI component were negatively related to the students' academic achievement in mathematics. The intrapersonal factor involves the knowledge and labelling of one's own feelings (BarOn & Parker, 2000). In the subject of mathematics, which is usually a subject that requires a lot of concentration and attention, it could be useful to not think about or consider the own feelings and emotions and be stuck on them. The students who have low levels of intrapersonal factor usually are more reserved and can use their cognitive resources to the task instead of revolving around their feelings.

Social Skills

Focusing on social skills, Engagement and Communication were the components more associated with the scores in mathematics, however the first one in a negative way too. This is in line with previous research (Ackerman et al., 2001; Furnham et al., 1998).

According to Gresham et al. (2000), Engagement include facets related with social interaction such as joining activities in progress and inviting others to join, initiating conversations, making friends, and interacting well with others. By this definition we can deduce that Engagement is closely related to extraversion. The negative link between Engagement and mathematics achievement may be a result of less engaged students spending less time socializing and more time focused on their tasks. Furthermore, according to Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham (2003) a lower level of engagement may present an advantage when students are expected to give convergent answers (such as in mathematics) rather than divergent ones (such as in language).

Regarding Communication, students who have good communication skills are able to explain adequately their answers and results, present

alternative strategies to solve problems, are receptive when others explain their points of view and respect turns when talking. When the students discuss with other students and teachers, and consider other points of views about concepts, theorems, principals and the underlying processes involved in solving them, they are strengthening their understanding and internalizing in a better way the concepts that have been worked.

Future studies, limitations and implications

Although finding interesting associations between EI and SS and academic performance, these were quite weak. The fact that previous studies done with older students (high school and university level) found stronger relationships between EI and academic achievement (Mayer & Cobb, 2000; Parker et al., 2004a,b; Petrides et al., 2004) may be due to the development of EI. This is, emotional intelligence develops with age and experience; therefore, the lower scores and the lack of some associations found compared to previous studies may be explained by this fact: the immaturity of emotional competencies, and the need to develop them (Zins & Elias, 2007). Also, the lack of significant correlations between academic achievement and total EI and SS scores in the present study can be explained by the mixture of positive, negative and negligible relationships observed between academic achievement and the different subscales. Finally, the weaknesses of the correlations may also be because these constructs act as moderators instead of having a direct effect in the school field. In the same manner, personality characteristics were not taken into consideration, which would have been important, seeing that some authors argued that intelligence and personality are better predictors of academic achievement than emotional and social competences (e.g. Barchard & Christensen, 2007). Another variable that could be analysed in future studies are teacher-children relationships. Different studies reveal that this type of relationships as well as the affective relation between them is important to the comprehension of school achievement (Pasta et al., 2013) and the development of social and emotional competences (Franco et al., 2017). Future research could have into account these variables when studying the relationship between EI and SS regarding academic achievement, to have a more completed perspective of their influence.

Despite our promising results, there are some methodological limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting them. First, the emotional intelligence and social skills of the participants were evaluated through self-report instruments. Some authors have arguments against the use of self-report methods with children because they make them to show themselves in a more desirable social way (Matthews et al., 2007). Another limitation is the characteristics of the sample. Specifically, it would have been beneficial to have a larger sample that represented students from a wider range of grades. This would have allowed observing developmental trends in these relationships. However, now that some preliminary work has been done laying the foundation for predictive pathways between SS and EI on one hand, and academic achievement on the other, a hypothesized causal model could be constructed and tested in future studies.

Some practical implications may be suggested from the study contributions. First, the need to carry out a comprehensive education in schools that addresses the promotion of not only academic but also social and emotional competences. For this reason, improving emotional intelligence among teachers should also be a fundamental element. Therefore, teacher programs in higher education institutions should start instilling elements of emotional intelligence in its curriculum as well as providing activities and continuous training to actual teachers to help them develop these competences. Regarding SS, they can also be taught or enriched in the school environment, through adequate learning experiences (García-Sáiz & Gil, 1995). This could prevent maladaptive behaviours, enhance social relationships and satisfying interactions between teachers and students, and therefore promote a better academic achievement. Finally, with the current trends in the school system, which emphasizes the students' ability to express themselves and have an active role in the teaching and learning process, it is mandatory that a student acquires good interpersonal communication skills. In fact, nowadays group activities are being more and more used as an assessment and learning practice, so managing the social relationships and interpersonal conflicts of the group may become really important. For this reason, schools should attempt to embed these qualities within the content that is taught and assessed.

Conclusion

The present study has found relationship between specific aspects of EI and SS and school performance. Especially, the results showed that in language (Catalan) Adaptability is the most important emotional factor, whereas, in mathematics apart from Adaptability, Intrapersonal (in a negative way) is also crucial, together with the social skills of Communication and Cooperation.

This investigation contributes to the existent literature about EI and SS in the school context in different ways. First, it is the first research, to our knowledge, that not only focuses its attention in the possible influence of the EI and SS in the performance of a subject, but also determines how each of the specific components of EI and SS are related to them. In second place, we observed that several components of the EI and SS, to a greater or lesser extend, are related to school achievement, highlighting the importance of social and emotional competences in the school context. Finally, our study has been one of the very few in testing the relationship between EI and SS and academic achievement in primary education students, demonstrating that the relationships found in older students, are already present from very young ages.

To sum up, the current results suggest that those students who are equipped with certain social and emotional skills benefit of better academic performance. Thus, schools should promote these factors and skills among students in order to help them achieve all their potential.

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The lack of influence of class size on students' academic performance: empirical evidence for Andalusia[1]

La falta de influencia del tamaño de la clase sobre el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes: evidencia empírica para Andalucía

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Abstract

Class size has been and continues to be a focus of the Spanish education debate. Most of the literature points towards the negative influence that overcrowded classes may have on students' academic performance, which has increased the belief that a reduced class size may be better for students' learning. However, the endogeneity that class size presents has prevented a great part of the research works – which are mostly correlational – to grasp its actual influence. Because of that, we intend to solve this issue by the use of a fuzzy regression discontinuity approach (a combination of regression discontinuity and instrumental variables) using as instrument the class size which schools should have set if they had followed the education legislation. This issue has been analysed for the most populated Spanish region, i.e. Andalusia, using census data for primary and secondary education students, provided by the Andalusian Agency of Education Assessment (AGAEVE) for the academic years 2011/12 and 2012/13. Our results

show that class size does not influence students' administrative scores (in mathematics and reading) in primary and secondary education and that the characteristics of the students in the class may be more important.

Keywords: class size, academic performance, fuzzy regression discontinuity, instrumental variables, primary education, secondary education.

Resumen

El tamaño de la clase ha estado y continúa siendo un foco del debate educativo en España. La mayoría de la literatura indica que existe una influencia negativa de las clases sobrepobladas sobre el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes, lo que ha aumentado la creencia de que un tamaño de clase reducido favorecería el aprendizaje del alumnado. Sin embargo, la endogeneidad que presenta el tamaño de clase ha evitado que gran parte de los estudios –la mayoría correlacionales– obtengan su influencia real. En consecuencia, pretendemos resolver este problema mediante el uso de un procedimiento de regresión discontinua difusa (una combinación de regresión discontinua y variables instrumentales) usando como instrumento el tamaño de clase que los colegios deberían haber fijado si hubieran seguido la legislación educativa. Esta cuestión se ha estudiado para la región más poblada de España, esto es, Andalucía, usando datos censales para estudiantes de educación primaria y secundaria, proporcionados por la Agencia Andaluza de Evaluación Educativa (AGAEVE) para los cursos académicos 2011/12 y 2012/13. Nuestros resultados muestran que el tamaño de clase no influye en los resultados académicos administrativos (en lectura y matemáticas) de los estudiantes de primaria y secundaria y que las características de los estudiantes que componen la clase serían más importantes.

Palabras clave: tamaño de clase, rendimiento académico, regresión discontinua difusa, variables instrumentales, educación primaria, educación secundaria.

1. Introduction

There is a worldwide debate on the influence that class size may have on students' academic performance. Most of this literature seems to indicate that a reduction in class size is positive for students' academic outcomes (Argaw & Puhani, 2018; Bowne, Magnuson, Schindler, Duncan, &

Yoshikawa, 2017; Dolton & Marcenaro-Gutierrez, 2011; Goldstein, Yang, Omar, Turner, & Thompson, 2000; Hanushek, 2002; Krueger, 2003; Shin & Young, 2009; Uttl, Bell, & Banks, 2018, among others). In spite of the relevance of this issue, it has been scarcely studied for Spain and, among these few examples, only correlational evidence exists (as e.g. in Anghel & Cabrales, 2014). Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of a solid empirical body of research on the impact of class size for Spain, some education policies have been implemented to change this limit. Particularly, for primary and secondary education, until the academic year 2011/12 the class size was fixed at 25 and 30 students (respectively) but, in the next academic year, it was increased by 20%, and reduced again to 25 and 30 students in 2016.

In this context of "arbitrary" changes in class size, the Spanish press has alerted about the problems of overcrowded classes in terms of students' learning, which may increase disruption and teacher time doing tasks such as marking homework or exams, also reducing the learning time that students have2. Additionally, decreasing the number of students per class may suppose an increase in the number of classes, which might be translated into hiring more teachers and, therefore, higher budgetary expenses in terms of these teachers' salaries. For instance, following MECD (2018), secondary education teachers in Spain receive 61,543$ (PPA) as maximum salary, which is 7.4% higher than the OECD and 7.8% more than the UE22. Thus, in such a context, the decision of reducing class size in Spain should not be arbitrary, but be built on solid empirical evidence.

Specifically, this piece of research analyses class size influence on students' performance for the most populated Spanish region (Andalusia, with a total of 8.4 million people in 2018) which, in addition, is one of the worst performing Spanish regions in international large-scale assessment tests. In the case of PISA3 2015 (OECD, 2016), Andalusian students obtained 479 points in reading (in contrast to Spanish students, who got 496 points and 487 for the OECD), 466 in mathematics (compared to 486 for Spain and 478 for the OECD) and 473 in science (493 for Spain and 488 for the OECD). Furthermore, Andalusia also presents a high percentage of repeater students in PISA 2015 (38%), while this figure

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[2] This is discussed in this article of the Spanish newspaper "*El País*": https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/06/18/actualidad/1560868415_851675.html
[3] PISA stands for "Programme for International Student Assessment".

was 31% for Spain and 13% for the OECD (OECD, 2016). This situation of Andalusia has remained similar in PISA 2018 (MECD, 2019, 2020).

This research work is novel as it is the first time that the influence of class size on students' academic achievement has been analysed for Spain using census data, together with a methodology (fuzzy regression discontinuity) which let us get as close as possible to a causal influence. Particularly, the research question we want to answer is:

Does class size influence students' academic performance in primary and secondary education in Andalusia?

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. First, we present a brief literature review, followed by a description of the data and methodology employed, the results, their discussion and conclusions.

2. Literature review

According to the previous literature, the most famous education experiment to study the influence of class size on students' academic performance was the Tennessee Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project. Many authors such as Mosteller (1995) and Finn and Achilles (1999) analysed its results and highlighted that reduced class size was positive for academic performance for primary education students, being this even more effective for poor children. Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, and Willms (2001) analysed this project and indicated that, although having internal validity, it did not have external validity, as the results applied only to the students participating in the experiment, being the characteristics of these students different from those presented by the population of Tennessee students. In addition, they indicated that class size reduction may be conditioned by the capacity of schools to create more classes.

This positive influence of class size reduction on students' academic performance was also found by authors such as Jepsen and Rivkin (2009), who analysed an experiment aimed at studying the influence of class size on students' academic performance in primary education in California, finding that lower class size was positive for performance in reading and mathematics. Similarly, Breton (2014) found, for fourth grade Colombian

students in TIMSS[4] 2007, that a reduction from 53 to 20 students per class increased students' academic performance in mathematics in 0.80 standard deviations. Francis and Barnett (2019) also analysed this issue for preschool students in Chicago, finding that a reduction in 5 students per class to a total of 15 students raised students' cognitive scores in literacy skills in 0.2 standard deviations. In fact, some papers as Whitmore (2014) indicated that a reduced class size was necessary for better student outcomes, although this positive influence was reduced for higher grades. Zyngier (2014) analysed 112 research works and also indicated that the positive influence of reduced class size on students' academic outcomes may be more relevant at early grades, and even more for socio-economically disadvantaged students. Contrarily, Etim, Etim, and Blizard (2020) analysed the influence of class size on primary and secondary students in North Carolina, finding that the influence of a higher class size was negative in primary education, but positive in secondary education.

Some meta-analyses have also studied this issue. For instance, Goldstein et al. (2000) focused on 9 research works which used multilevel analysis and found a reduction of students' academic performance in 0.02 standard deviations per additional student in the class. Accordingly, Finn, Pannozzo, and Achilles (2003) performed a review of the literature on class size, finding that a reduced class size was associated with higher student engagement, which was also associated with their academic performance. Shin and Young (2009) did a meta-analysis on 17 studies for the United States, finding that small classes presented academic results of 0.20 standard deviations higher than those in larger classes. In a similar vein, Bowne et al. (2017) analysed 38 studies on class size influence for early childhood students in the United States, finding a positive influence of lower class size which ranged from 0.22 to 0.10 standard deviations until 15 students per class, being this influence null for bigger classes. Filges, Sonne-Schmidt, and Nielsen (2018) performed a meta-analysis of 127 studies for 41 countries, for students from kindergarten to 12nd grade, finding a positive but small influence of reduced class size on students' reading performance, but no influence for mathematics. Moreover, Uttl et al. (2018) performed a meta-analysis using over 100 studies, finding that a reduced class size was positive for students' academic performance until

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[4] TIMSS stands for "Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study".

20 students per class, decreasing this influence from 20 to 30 students per class.

On the other hand, some research works have indicated that "Reducing class size is not, on its own, a sufficient policy lever to improve the performance of education systems, and is a less efficient measure than increasing the quality of teaching" (OECD, 2012, p.1). Chingos and Whitehurst (2011) also supported this argument, finding that most of the existing class size studies, in spite of their huge amount, failed in having enough quality in order to be the basis of education policies. This was additionally supported by Hanushek (2011), who indicated that teacher quality seems to be more important than class size. Li and Konstantopoulos (2017) used data from TIMSS 2011 for 4th grade students in 14 European countries, and also found that class size may not have a positive influence on students' academic performance (with the exception of Slovakia), indicating that classroom dynamics, instruction, and practices may be relevant to explain academic performance, but they could not be controlled in the model, as these variables were not included in the database. Leuven and Løkken (2017) analysed class size influence for 1st to 9th grade students in Norway, also finding that class size may not be relevant to explain their academic performance. Similarly, Köhler (2020) analysed this issue for 12nd grade South African students, finding a null influence of class size on students' academic performance, indicating that other characteristics such as those of teachers or school functionality might be more relevant.

Thus, most studies seem to fail in obtaining a causal influence of class size on students' academic performance due to endogeneity and issues of variable omission. Some research works which have successfully done this are, e.g., Akerhielm (1995), who employed an instrumental variable approach, using as instruments the average class size for a particular subject and students' enrolment for eighth grade United States students. She found that the influence of class size on students' academic performance changed from positive (with ordinary least squares) to negative (but small) or insignificant when using an instrumental variable estimate. Other research works such as Angrist and Lavy (1999) have got close to this causal relationship, using a fuzzy regression discontinuity approach for 4th and 5th grade Israeli students, finding that a reduced class size improved their academic performance. We follow a similar approach, but for 4th and 8th grade Spanish students and using student

observations instead of class observations. These authors revisited their analysis in Angrist, Lavy, Leder-Luis, and Shany (2019), using 5th grade Israeli student data for the period 2002-2011 and they did not find any evidence of class size influence on students' academic achievement. Shen and Konstantopoulos (2019) also employed a fuzzy regression discontinuity approach on TIMSS 2003, 2007 and 2011 data to analyse the influence of class size on 8th grade student performance in Hungary, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia, finding that a reduction of 1 student per class in Romania was positively associated with an increase of 0.05 standard deviations in mathematics and science scores, and 0.03 standard deviations in science scores for Lithuania; however, class size did not influence students' academic performance in Hungary and Slovenia.

Blatchford (2016) indicated that cross-country comparisons in terms of class size could be misleading due to low external validity of some research works, so special attention on each country situation has to be paid. Following this logic, the present research work is focused on Spain and, concretely, on Andalusia. This is particularly relevant bearing in mind that the evidence on the class size influence on students' academic performance for Spain is quite scarce, correlational and far from conclusive. For instance, Wößmann and West (2006) found a positive association of class size reduction with 8th grade Spanish students' academic performance (using TIMSS 1995 data); nevertheless, they employed as instrument the average class size of the grade reported by the school principal, so it might be subject to misreport. Other authors such as Mora, Escardíbul, and Espasa (2010) analysed an education policy reform implemented in Spain between 1992 and 2003 and its influence on the dropout rates of the 18-24 year age group during this period (using data from the Spanish Minister of Education and a correlational logistic model), finding that a reduced class size lowered dropout rates in around 0.4% per pupil in the class. Similarly, García-Pérez, Hidalgo-Hidalgo, and Robles-Zurita (2014) employed a switching regression model and found, for 15-year-old students participating in PISA 2009, that a reduced class size was positively associated with non-repeaters' academic achievement in mathematics (in 0.008 standard deviations per pupil reduction) but with decreasing returns. Conversely, Anghel and Cabrales (2014) analysed a census of 6th grade students in the academic year 2008/09 in Madrid, using ordinary least squares regression with school fixed effects; they indicated that class size did not seem to have

an influence on students' academic performance, hence concluding that policies focused on it may be a waste of resources.

3. Data and methodology

3.1. Data

The census database employed in the present paper was gathered and provided by the Andalusian Agency of Education Assessment (AGAEVE from now on) with the aim of measuring students' competences (or cognitive skills) in an assessment named as "diagnostic assessment test". Concretely, this assessment intends to measure students' competences on Spanish language (reading from now on) and mathematics, being these tests scored by external teachers. These tests were developed using questions that were similar in their structure and purpose to those employed by PISA to measure students' competences[5]. Furthermore, students are linked to their administrative scores (SENECA scores) which are the scores that they obtained in the subjects of reading and mathematics at school after finishing the academic year (scored by their teacher), i.e. they measure students' content-based knowledge; these administrative scores are going to be used as our dependent variable in the present study. In addition, this diagnostic assessment contains student, family, tutor teacher and school (answered by the head teacher) questionnaires, and also contains information about the class size of each class within each school.

The data used in this research work is that from the 2012/13 academic year for 4th and 8th grade students, together with 8th grade data for the academic year 2011/12 (which we will use as a robustness check for secondary education)[6]. These two academic years are used because the Spanish government increased by 20% the class size limit[7] from the initial 25-student-limit for primary education (1st to 6th grade) and 30-student-

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[5] Some examples of this kind of cognitive test questions for PISA can be found in https://www.oecd.org/pisa/test/.

[6] Unfortunately, 4th grade data for the academic year 2011/12 is not available.

[7] This modification was regulated in the Real law Decree 14/2012, of 20th April of urgent policies of rationalisation of public expense in the education field, which modified the initial class size legislation in BOE (2006, art. 157.1.a).

limit for secondary education (7th to 10th grade) in 2011/12 to 30 students in primary education and 36 students in secondary education in 2012/13. In this census dataset, there are a total of 90,048 students in 2,482 schools in the 4th grade dataset in 2012/13, 86,626 students in 1,595 schools in the 8th grade dataset in 2012/13, and 88,277 students in 1,609 schools in the 8th grade dataset in 2011/12.

3.2. Methodology

First, with the objective of developing a fuzzy regression discontinuity approach, we need to check some characteristics of our data:

3.2.1. Testing for exogenous variation

As previously indicated, the education legislation indicated that schools had to reach a maximum of 30 students per class in primary education and 36 in secondary education in the academic year 2012/13 (30 students per class in secondary education in the academic year 2011/12). This legislation was exogenously set, but school head teachers may decide to follow it or not based on some conditional variables, so it is not as exogenous as it should be (in our data, only 38.18% of classes in 4th grade and 17% in 8th grade[8] in 2012/13 strictly followed it)[9]. This is the main issue that makes us use a fuzzy regression discontinuity approach (combining regression discontinuity with instrumental variables) instead of directly using a sharp regression discontinuity methodology, as we will explain in the following.

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[8] This figure is 18% of classes for 8th grade in 2011/12.
[9] This is a trend which still continues. For instance, as indicated in the following press report (https://sevilla.abc.es/andalucia/sevi-mas-mitad-colegios-andaluces-supera-ratio-maxima-alumnos-profesor-201703201406_noticia.html), around 59.3% of Andalusian schools had class sizes with higher number of students than the class size limit in 2017.

3.2.2. Testing for discontinuity in covariates

In order to select the sample for our fuzzy regression discontinuity strategy, we obtained the total number of students who were attending 4th and 8th grades in each school and academic year (which we called the "school size"). Then, following Angrist and Lavy (1999), we took those schools which had a school size of ± 5 students around the class size legislation figure for that academic year. For example, in 2012/13, the class size legislation for primary education (and for secondary education in 2011/12) indicated a maximum of 30 students per class, so we kept those schools which had between 26 to 35 students, 56 to 65, 86 to 95, 116 to 125, 146 to 155 and 176 to 185 students[10].

The main descriptive statistics are presented in Table A1 (Appendix) for each grade and academic year, together with a test of mean differences between the population and the sample under analysis. In these statistics we can appreciate some significant differences between them in terms of students' socio-economic characteristics and school funding, with a higher number of differences for 8th grade for both academic years (most likely due to the lower rate of classes which followed the class size legislation). Hence, this may be the result, again, of a non-random decision by schools on their class size, so we will add control variables for students' socio-economic status[11] and school funding to our estimates, in order to grasp these differences.

3.2.3. Testing for continuity of the density and the class size instrument

We describe in what follows the creation of a class size instrument which will intend to solve the previously described potential non-random allocation of students to classes. In this case, the proposed instrument is the class size that schools should have set when their school size reached the class size limit indicated by the class size law, thus randomly

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[10] For 8th grade students in 2012/13, as the class size limit was 36 students per class, these figures are 32 to 41 students, 68 to 77, 104 to 113, 140 to 149, 176 to 185 and 212 to 221 students.

[11] Concretely, we have employed a socio-economic status index which was created by AGAEVE using the highest level of education of the parents, the highest parental occupation, the number of books at home and the level of home resources. It was standardised to have mean 0 and standard deviation 1.

distributing students in equal-size classes. In order to obtain this instrument, we followed Angrist and Lavy (1999) and calculated:

$$CSI_{jt} = \frac{SS_{jt}}{Int\left(\frac{SS_{jt}-1}{CSL_t}\right) +} \quad (1)$$

where j is the school; t the grade and academic year ($t = 1$ for 4th grade in 2012/13, $t = 2$ for 8th grade in 2012/13 and $t = 3$ for 8th grade in 2011/12); SS_{jt} is the school size in that particular grade and academic year; CSL_t is the class size limit by law for that grade and academic year (taking the value 30 for 4th grade in 2012/13 – and also for 8th grade in 2011/12 – and 36 for 8th grade in 2012/13); for any positive number n, the function *Int(n)* is the largest integer lower than or equal to n. For instance, for 4th grade in the academic year 2012/13 and school sizes between 1-30, CSI_{jt} takes the values [1-30], [15.5-30] for school sizes between 31-60, [20.33-30] for 61-90, [22.75-30] for 91-120, and so on. Concretely, this class size instrument shows the class size which should have been set in the case that the schools had exactly followed the class size law when their school size reached the class size limit. As an example, whenever the school size reached to 32 in 4th grade in 2012/13 (2 students over the limit) then students should have been randomly separated into two classes of 16 students. Thus, to the extent that this class size instrument is based on an exogenous class size regulation, our instrument may follow the *independence/exogeneity* assumption.

In the following we present some graphics on the relationship between class size and our class size instrument (Figure 1) for both 4th and 8th grades in 2012/13 (and 8th grade in 2011/12). As it can be appreciated (and previously indicated), it seems that schools do not exactly follow the law in terms of dividing their students in similar size classes when the school size reaches the class size limit. The actual class size and the class size instrument present a significant correlation of 0.77 in 4th grade and 0.41 in 8th grade in 2012/13 (0.50 in 8th grade in 2011/12) so, as a preliminary approach, it seems that this instrument may be enough correlated with the endogenous variable that it instruments, accomplishing the *relevance assumption* (needing also a Stock & Yogo, 2005, test of weak instruments to check this, as we will see in the Results' section).

FIGURE 1. Relationship between class size and the class size instrument
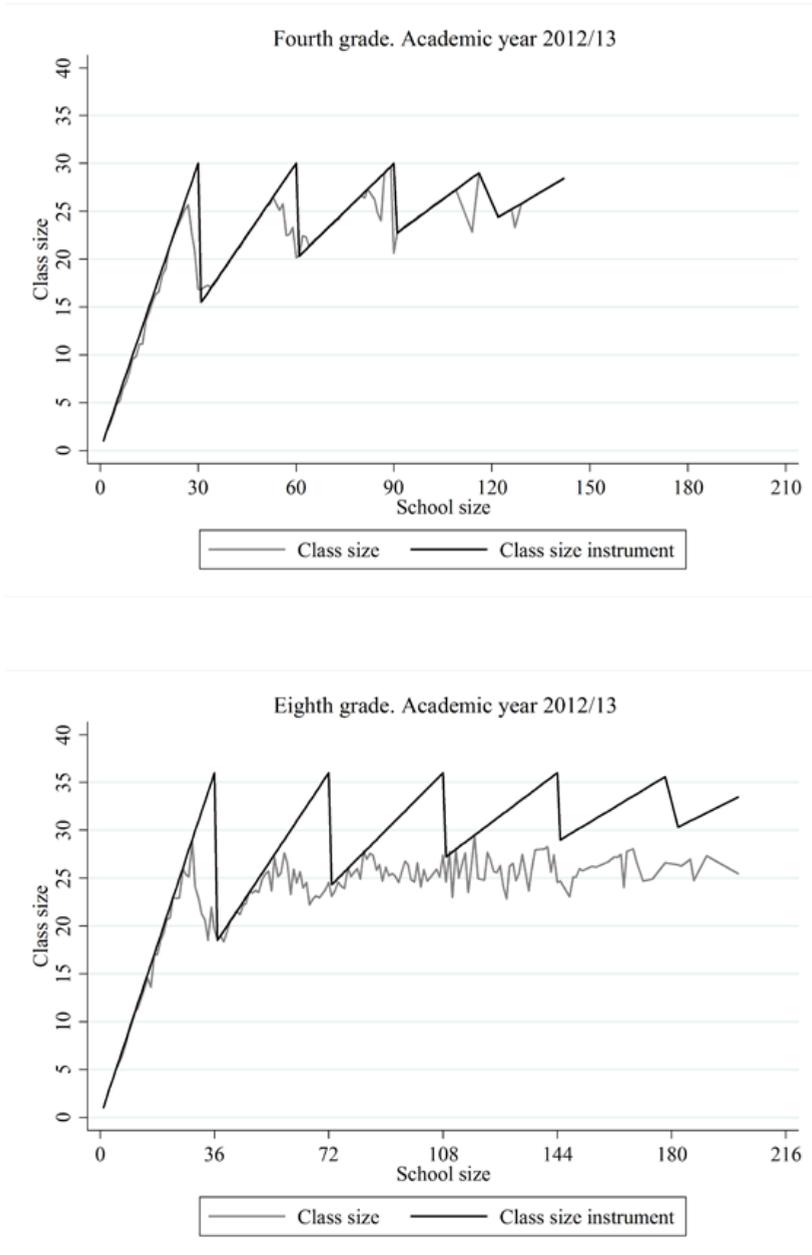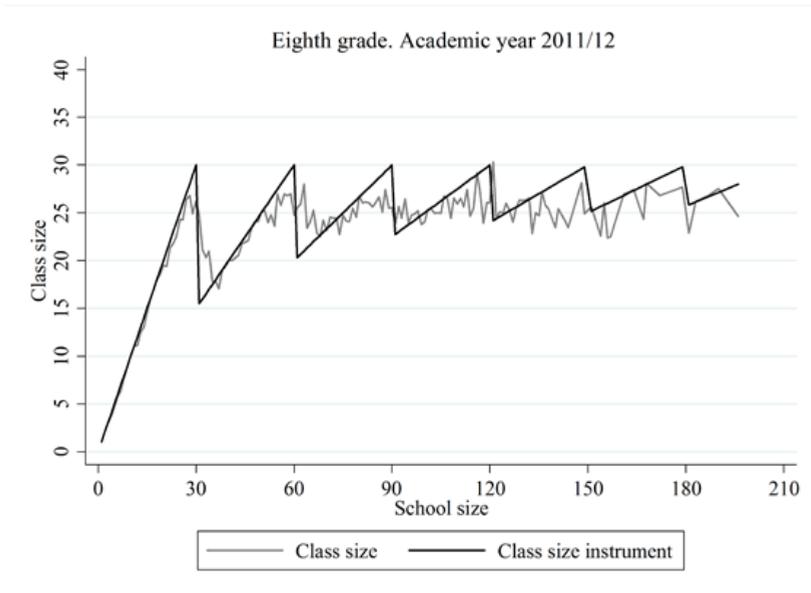
Notes: Class sizes are calculated by school size.
Source: Authors' own calculations.

3.2.4. Testing for discontinuity in the outcome variables

As indicated by Feir, Lemieux, and Marmer (2016), we need the discontinuity of the outcomes not being weak to make our identification strategy work. In order to check this, we have plotted the relationship between standardised administrative scores in reading (Figure 2) and mathematics (Figure 3), for both 4th and 8th grades in 2012/13 (and 8th grade in 2011/12), together with the class size instrument. It seems that there is a positive relationship between the class size instrument and students' standardised administrative scores (contrary to what is found in the literature), to the extent that standardised administrative scores seem to mimic the behaviour of the class size instrument, even in the "jump-downs" of the cut-off points of the class size instrument. This correlation seems to indicate that our regression discontinuity strategy may work (if the class size instrument is not correlated to the error term; we will check this when applying the Wooldridge, 1995, endogeneity test in the Results' section).

FIGURE 2. Relationship between the class size instrument and reading standardised administrative scores

Eighth grade. Academic year 2011/12
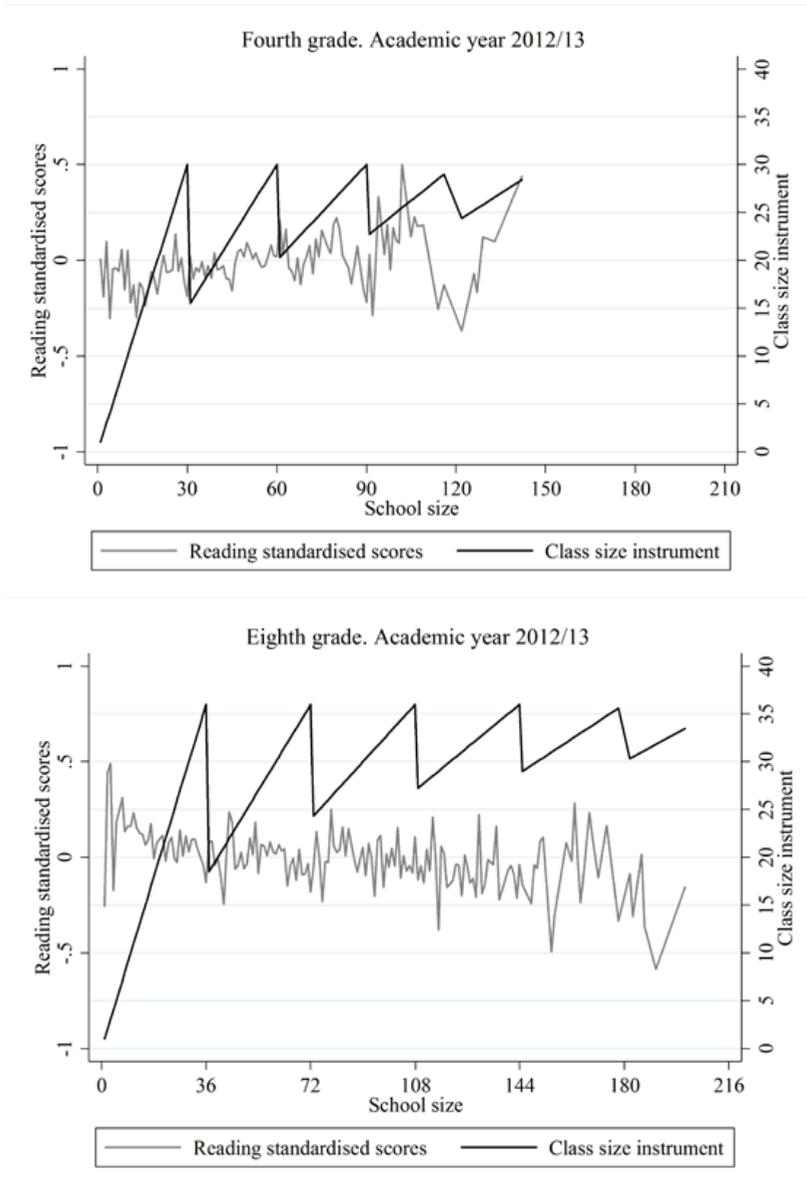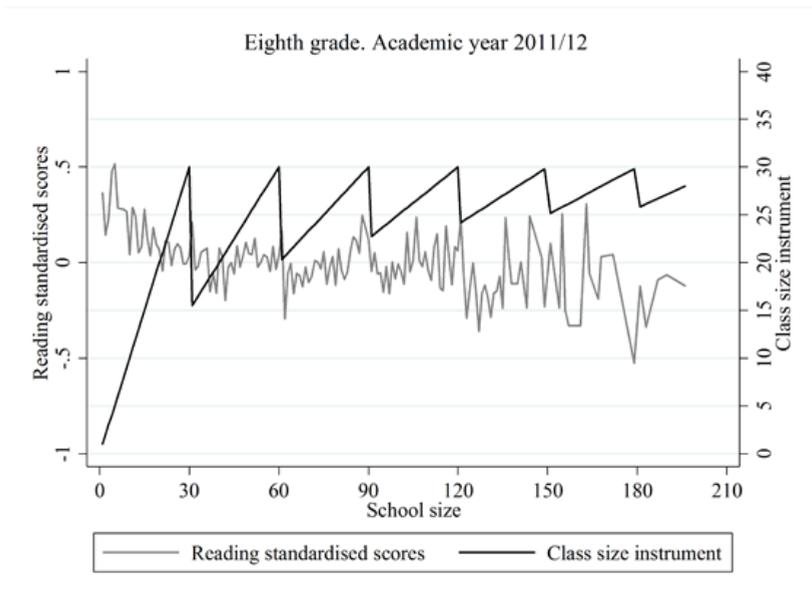
Notes: Reading standardised administrative scores are calculated by school size.
Source: Authors' own calculations.

FIGURE 3. Relationship between the class size instrument and mathematics standardised administrative scores
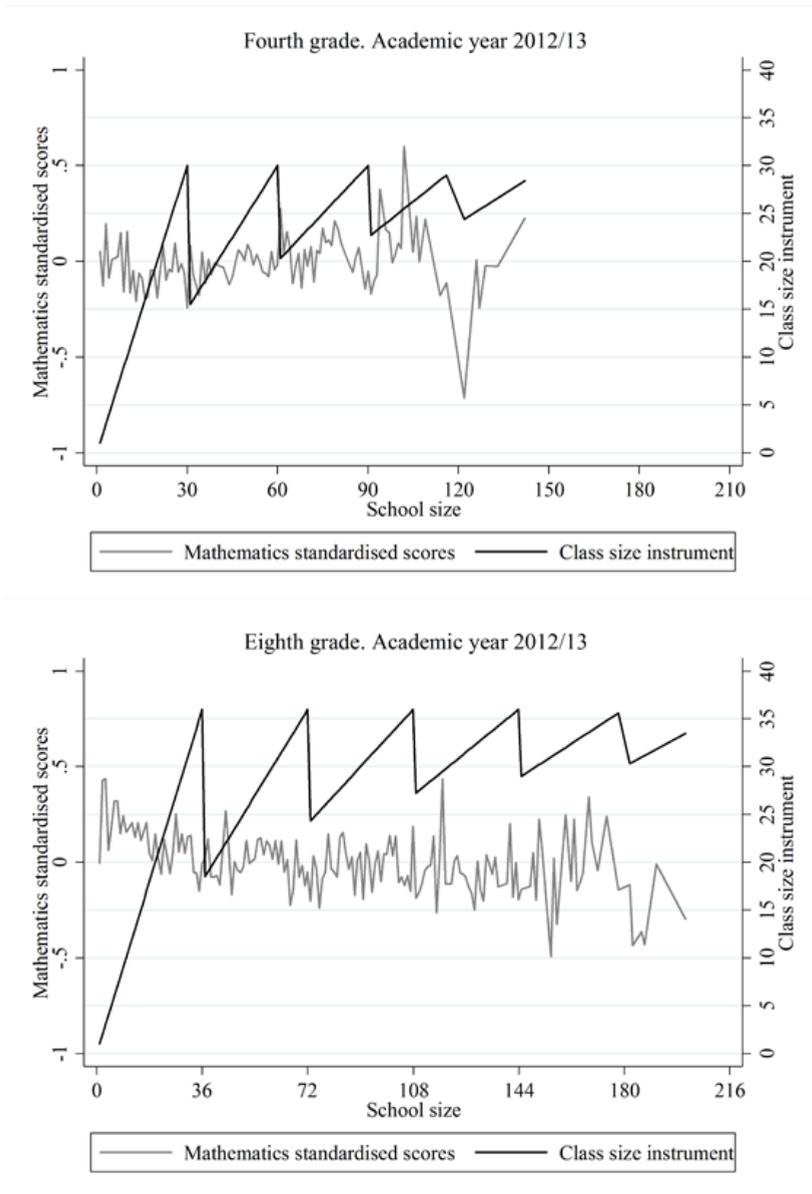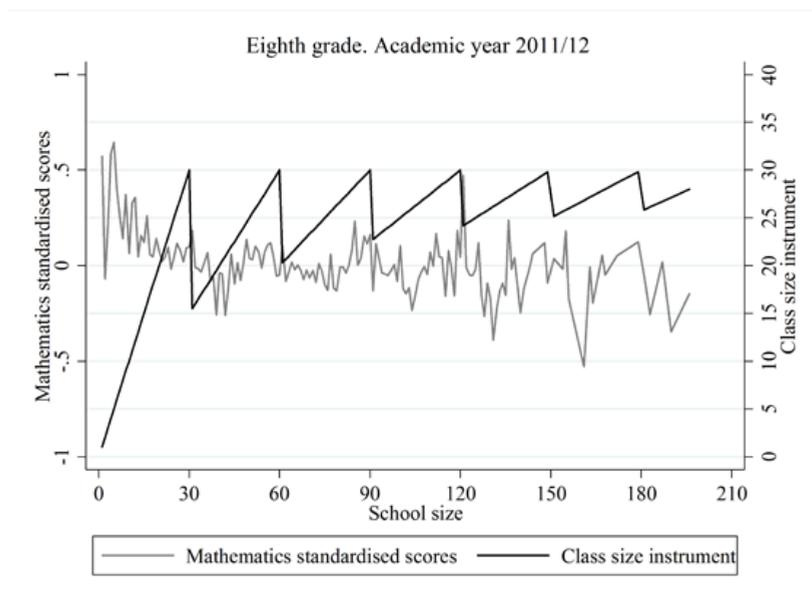
Notes: Mathematics standardised administrative scores are calculated by school size.
Source: Authors' own calculations.

There are two additional properties that our class size instrument has to accomplish. First, the *exclusion restriction*, which states that the only influence channel of the instrument on students' academic performance is through class size. As we have previously found, the instrument seems to accomplish this restriction, as it seems to be related to the outcomes of interest (as found in Figures 2 and 3) and the potential confounders for this relationship may be controlled by both the use of fuzzy regression discontinuity and socio-economic background controls. The second one is the *monotonicity property* (Barua & Lang, 2016; Dhuey, Figlio, Karbownik, & Roth, 2019; or Fiorini & Stevens, 2014). Barua and Lang (2016, p. 348) defined it as "while the instrument may have no effect on some individuals, all of those who are affected should be affected unidirectionally"[12]. Therefore, in the view of the previous results, it seems

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[12] It was defined by Fiorini and Stevens (2014) as "fo r a given change in the value of the instrument, it cannot be that some individuals increase treatment intensity while others decrease treatment intensity" (p. 2).

that the monotonicity property is accomplished, as there seems to be an increasing trend in standardised administrative scores with the class size instrument, which begins whenever we reach to a class size cut-off.

3.2.5. Ordinary least squares and census estimations

In order to see how using a simple regression approach may bias our results we present Table I. In this table the census information has been employed, analysing the influence of class size (specification I) and that of our instrument of class size (specification II) on students' standardised administrative scores. As it can be appreciated, this influence is positive in the case of the class size variable, but differs depending on the grade and academic year for the class size instrument (ranging from negative to positive). Then, we can see here that, in the first case, the omission of relevant variables explaining students' standardised administrative scores may positively bias the class size influence. In the second case, the use of the class size instrument, which represents a "proper" division of classes, is free of this omission; however, although ideal for our research work, this last division does not reflect reality.

TABLE I. Influence of class size on students' standardised administrative scores, population estimates

Variables	Fourth grade. 2012/13				Eighth grade. 2012/13				Eighth grade. 2011/12			
	Specification I		Specification II		Specification I		Specification II		Specification I		Specification II	
	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics
Class size	0.013***	0.010***	-	-	0.017***	0.017***	-	-	0.016***	0.016***	-	-
	(0.002)	(0.002)			(0.002)	(0.002)			(0.002)	(0.002)		
Classes size instrument	-	-	0.009***	0.006***	-	-	-0.008***	-0.007***			-0.003	-0.002
			(0.002)	(0.002)			(0.002)	(0.002)			(0.002)	(0.002)
Constant	-0.297***	-0.226***	-0.219***	-0.130***	-0.420***	-0.407***	0.236***	0.205***	-0.397***	-0.376***	0.064	0.057
	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.042)	(0.053)	(0.054)
Observations	88,909	88,905	88,909	88,905	85,915	85,920	85,915	85,920	86,600	86,596	86,600	86,596
R-squared	0.003	0.002	0.002	0.001	0.008	0.007	0.002	0.001	0.007	0.006	0.000	0.000

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at district level.
Estimation method: Ordinary least squares.
Dependent variable: Standardised administrative scores using the mean and standard deviations of the population.
Coefficient: *** Significant at 1%, ** significant at 5%, * significant at 10%.
Source: Authors' own calculations.

Thus, we have to move to our fuzzy regression discontinuity approach in order to get closer to the influence of class size on students' academic performance.

3.2.6. Fuzzy regression discontinuity

Once we have defined our class size instrument, we can implement the fuzzy regression discontinuity methodology. In order to do this, we stick only to our sample of analysis (schools which had a school size of ± 5 students around the class size legislation figure for that academic year) and estimate the following model, separately for each academic year:

$$Y_{icjt} = \alpha + \beta CS_{cjt} + \rho X_{icjt} + \delta C_{cjt} + \gamma SCH_{jt} + \varepsilon_{icjt} \qquad (2)$$

where i represents the student, c the class, j the school and t the grade and academic year ($t = 1$ for 4th grade in 2012/13, $t = 2$ for 8th grade in 2012/13 and $t = 3$ for 8th grade in 2011/12); Y_{icjt} are students' standardised administrative scores (in reading or mathematics)[13]; CS_{cjt} is class size; X_{icjt} are student observable characteristics; C_{cjt} are class observable characteristics; SCH_{jt} are school observable characteristics; α is a constant term and ε_{icjt} is the idiosyncratic error term.

As previously argued, our variable of interest (CS_{cjt}) may be biased by the particular decision of each school head teacher in terms of class division. Because of that, we estimate our main model by the use of two-stage ordinary least squares, for each grade and academic year. Our instrument is the previously defined CSI_{jt}. The underlying idea is to instrument the class size variable using, as instrument, the class size which schools should have set if they had followed the education legislation, together with the rest of variables which may explain the differences between these two class sizes. Then, in the first stage of this procedure we regress the class size variable on the class size instrument and these variables:

$$CS_{cjt} = \pi_0 + \pi_1 CSI_{jt} + \pi_2 X_{icjt} + \pi_3 C_{cjt} + \pi_4 SCH_{jt} + \vartheta_{icjt} \qquad (3)$$

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[13] This standardisation has been performed using the mean and standard deviations of the population and is aimed at interpreting the results as effect sizes, for international comparisons.

Where π are the coefficients of the controlled variables and ϑ_{icjt} the idiosyncratic error term. Once these variables have been controlled for, we can obtain the predicted value of class size from equation (3), i.e. $\widehat{CS}_{cjt}$, which would be free of their influence. Then, we can continue to the second stage, in which we substitute CS_{cjt} from equation (2) with this predicted value ($\widehat{CS}_{cjt}$):

$$Y_{icjt} = \alpha + \beta\widehat{CS}_{cjt} + \rho X_{icjt} + \delta C_{cjt} + \gamma SCH_{jt} + \varepsilon_{icjt} \tag{4}$$

The β coefficient would be measuring the influence of class size on students' standardised administrative scores. The fact that this coefficient is measuring our influence of interest depends on the identification of those variables which are making CS_{cjt} differ from CSI_{jt}. Then, we have controlled students' characteristics (X_{icjt}) such as sex, socio-economic status and competences (in reading or mathematics). In the case of class variables (C_{cjt}), we have controlled by the years of experience of the tutor teacher – as previously indicated by Breton (2014) or Hanushek (2011), this experience may condition the influence of class size on students' academic performance. Regarding to school variables (SCH_{jt}), we have controlled by school funding and school size. It has also been controlled by squared school size, in order to find potential non-linearities. As a robustness check of our results and following Angrist and Lavy (1999), we have also employed a piecewise school size variable[14]. Furthermore, we added a district size variable and the sample has been clustered by district, in order to account for potential differences between districts in the amount of students who can access to the schools.

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[14] The underlying idea of this piecewise school size variable is to create a continuous piecewise linear trend similar to the slope of school size on the linear segments (as suggested by Angrist & Lavy, 1999). Denoting the school size variable as , for 4th grade in the academic year 2012/13 (), this piecewise function is defined as for the interval [1, 30], for the interval [31, 60], for the interval [61, 90], for the interval [91, 120], for the interval [121, 150] and for the interval [151, 180]. For 8th grade in the academic year 2012/13 (), this piecewise function is defined as for the interval [1, 36], for the interval [37, 72], for the interval [73, 108], for the interval [109, 144], for the interval [145, 180] and for the interval [181, 216]. For 8th grade in the academic year 2011/12 (), the piecewise school size function is defined as for the interval [1, 30], for the interval [31, 60], for the interval [61, 90], for the interval [91, 120], for the interval [121, 150], for the interval [151, 180] and for the interval [181, 210].

4. Results

The main results for our fuzzy regression discontinuity analysis are presented in Table II. First, in specification I we have included as controls only class size, school size and the quadratic school size, finding that class size does not seem to have any influence on students' standardised administrative scores in any of the cases. Then, in specification II, we have included the rest of the previously described controls. As we can appreciate, again, class size seems to have a null influence on students' standardised administrative scores. Regarding the rest of the variables, there are some of them which may be more important than class size to explain students' standardised administrative scores: girls seem to perform better than boys in around 0.03 and 0.10 standard deviations (SD) in 4th grade and between 0.16 to 0.20 SD in 8th grade; in the case of the socio-economic status of students, it has also a positive influence on students' standardised administrative scores (around 0.23 SD in 4th grade and between 0.14 to 0.18 SD in 8th grade for each 1 SD increase in this index). Furthermore, students' standardised competences have a positive influence on students' standardised administrative scores – around 0.58 SD in 4th grade and between 0.49 to 0.58 SD in 8th grade for each 1 SD increase on students' competences[15].

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[15] The estimations on Table II have been replicated not including students' standardised competences and results do not change. These estimations will be provided upon request to the authors.

TABLE II. Influence of class size on students' standardised administrative scores

Variables	Specification I						Specification II					
	Fourth grade. 2012/13		Eighth grade. 2012/13		Eighth grade. 2011/12		Fourth grade. 2012/13		Eighth grade. 2012/13		Eighth grade. 2011/12	
	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics
Class size	-0.001	-0.004	-0.018	0.018	0.022*	0.019	-0.022	-0.032	0.003	0.013	-0.011	-0.028
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.027)	(0.029)
School size	0.004	0.006	0.003	-0.004	0.002	-0.001	0.005	0.007**	0.001	-0.002	0.005*	0.005
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Squared school size	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000	0.000	-0.000**	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Teacher's years of experience (Ref.: less than 5 years)												
20 years or more	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.183***	-0.192***	0.047	0.006	-0.040	-0.028
							(0.049)	(0.047)	(0.054)	(0.062)	(0.032)	(0.036)
10 years or more and less than 20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.144***	-0.161***	0.027	-0.025	0.012	-0.060*
							(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.062)	(0.033)	(0.035)
5 years or more and less than 10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.078	-0.149***	0.050	-0.041	-0.002	0.003
							(0.051)	(0.050)	(0.048)	(0.056)	(0.031)	(0.033)
School funding: (Ref.: public)												
Private	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.004	-0.032	0.612***	0.387***	0.081	0.226
							(0.167)	(0.127)	(0.153)	(0.143)	(0.153)	(0.198)
Semi-private	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.050	0.166	-0.044	-0.156	-0.084	-0.019
							(0.141)	(0.150)	(0.171)	(0.178)	(0.158)	(0.168)
District size	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000**	-0.000
							(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Female (Ref.: male)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.101***	0.031***	0.156***	0.199***	0.179***	0.198***
							(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Socio-economic status	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.228***	0.234***	0.175***	0.144***	0.164***	0.159***
							(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.017)
Standardised competences	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.582***	0.585***	0.486***	0.576***	0.524***	0.577***
							(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.027)	(0.024)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Constant	-0.072	-0.085	0.265	-0.253	-0.551**	-0.363	0.448	0.608*	-0.036	-0.106	0.089	0.464
	(0.194)	(0.216)	(0.563)	(0.585)	(0.272)	(0.289)	(0.344)	(0.364)	(0.554)	(0.523)	(0.470)	(0.511)
Observations	16,031	16,028	19,672	19,681	27,646	27,640	16,031	16,028	19,672	19,681	27,646	27,640
Instrumental variables tests												
Wooldridge (1995) endogeneity test	3.586*	4.420**	1.543	0.055	0.081	0.234	1.574	2.746	0.090	0.346	0.034	0.630
Stock and Yogo (2005) test of weak instruments	78.927***	78.931***	5.450***	5.597***	22.551***	22.550***	18.185***	18.1892***	7.058***	6.728***	6.455***	6.380***

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at district level. A missing flag has been included in order to prevent missing information on teachers' years of experience, students' socio-economic status and standardised competences. The null hypothesis of the Wooldridge (1995) endogeneity test is that the endogenous variable is now exogenous and the null hypothesis of the Stock and Yogo (2005) test of weak instruments is that the instrument is weak.

Estimation method: Fuzzy regression discontinuity (regression discontinuity and two-stage least squares). The instrument of class size is the class size which schools should have set if they had followed the education legislation.

Dependent variable: Standardised administrative scores using the mean and standard deviations of the population.

Coefficient: *** Significant at 1%, ** significant at 5%, * significant at 10%.

Source: Authors' own calculations.

We can find in this same table two tests aimed at checking whether our instrument has solved the endogeneity problems or not. Focusing on specification II, the first one is the Wooldridge (1995) endogeneity test, in which the null hypothesis is that the class size variable is not endogenous anymore; the null hypothesis of this test is accepted, so we can trust that our approach has solved endogeneity issues. Then, we performed Stock and Yogo (2005) test of weak instruments, in order to check whether the class size instrument is correlated enough to the class size endogenous variable, being the null hypothesis that it is a weak instrument. As we can appreciate, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1%, so we can assure that our instrument is not weak. Thus, the results of these two tests support that our class size instrument works well within this fuzzy regression discontinuity approach. Particularly, for specification I in 4th grade the first test indicates that our instrument does not solve endogeneity problems; nevertheless, when all the potential mediator variables for the difference between class size and its instrument have been controlled for, then it seems that endogeneity issues are solved.

In the case of our robustness check using a piecewise school size, the results are presented in Table III and we also find a null influence of class size on students' standardised administrative scores and that our instrument also works.

TABLE III. Influence of class size on students' standardised administrative scores, piecewise school size

Variables	Fourth grade. 2012/13		Eighth grade. 2012/13		Eighth grade. 2011/12	
	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics
Class size	-0.022	-0.031	0.005	0.014	-0.003	-0.025
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.038)	(0.036)	(0.026)	(0.027)
Piecewise school size	0.002	0.003	-0.002	-0.003	0.001	0.005
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Teacher's years of experience (Ref.: less than 5 years)						
20 years or more	-0.182***	-0.192***	0.045	0.007	-0.040	-0.028
	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.052)	(0.060)	(0.031)	(0.036)
10 years or more and less than 20	-0.147***	-0.165***	0.025	-0.025	0.007	-0.061*
	(0.055)	(0.053)	(0.050)	(0.060)	(0.033)	(0.034)
5 years or more and less than 10	-0.079	-0.150***	0.048	-0.040	-0.006	0.001
	(0.051)	(0.050)	(0.047)	(0.056)	(0.030)	(0.033)
School funding: (Ref.: public)						
Private	0.013	-0.019	0.598***	0.387***	0.030	0.204
	(0.162)	(0.121)	(0.158)	(0.148)	(0.146)	(0.186)
Semi-private	0.044	0.158	-0.055	-0.160	-0.133	-0.040
	(0.137)	(0.146)	(0.162)	(0.169)	(0.154)	(0.157)
District size	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000**	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Female (Ref.: male)	0.101***	0.031***	0.157***	0.199***	0.179***	0.198***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.011)	(0.013)
Socio-economic status	0.228***	0.235***	0.175***	0.144***	0.164***	0.159***
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Standardised competences	0.582***	0.585***	0.484***	0.576***	0.519***	0.575***

	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Constant	0.504*	0.692**	0.045	-0.083	0.055	0.374
	(0.296)	(0.307)	(0.511)	(0.479)	(0.429)	(0.457)
Observations	16,031	16,028	19,672	19,681	27,646	27,640
			Instrumental variables tests			
Wooldridge (1995) endogeneity test	1.579	2.791	0.118	0.409	0.008	0.515
Stock and Yogo (2005) test of weak instruments	19.055***	19.060***	8.263***	7.888***	7.128***	7.062***

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at district level. A missing flag has been included in order to prevent missing information on teachers' years of experience, students' socio-economic status and standardised competences. The null hypothesis of the Wooldridge (1995) endogeneity test is that the endogenous variable is now exogenous and the null hypothesis of the Stock and Yogo (2005) test of weak instruments is that the instrument is weak.

Estimation method: Fuzzy regression discontinuity (regression discontinuity and two-stage least squares). The instrument of class size is the class size which schools should have set if they had followed the education legislation.

Dependent variable: Standardised administrative scores using the mean and standard deviations of the population.

Coefficient: *** Significant at 1%, ** significant at 5%, * significant at 10%.

Source: Authors' own calculations.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This paper has analysed the issue of class size and its relationship with students' academic performance in primary and secondary education for the Spanish case. In order to do this, we have taken advantage of census data for the Spanish region of Andalusia, by the use of a fuzzy regression discontinuity approach. This methodology has been employed due to the decisions made by head teachers in order to allocate students in classes, who did not strictly follow the Spanish class size law, which has prevented us from directly using a sharp regression discontinuity approach.

In this context, our results indicate that class size does not seem to be a relevant variable in determining students' academic performance in primary or secondary education, having a bigger weight the characteristics of those students who compose the class, as previously highlighted by authors such as Akerhielm (1995), Köhler (2020) – who also indicated that other characteristics such as those of teachers or school functionality may be relevant – or Li and Konstantopoulos (2017) – who highlighted that classroom dynamics, instruction, and practices may be relevant too. Thus, our results are in accordance to those found by authors such as Whitmore (2014) or Zyngier (2014), who remarked that class size is not so relevant in higher grades; nevertheless, in our case, it seems that it is not so relevant even in lower ones, as found by authors such as Angrist et al. (2019), Leuven and Løkken (2017) and Li and Konstantopoulos (2017). These results have passed many tests which indicate that our class size instrument has successfully worked.

This is quite relevant in terms of education legislations and budgetary decisions for Spain. In this sense, the common perception (without empirical support) that a bigger class size is negative for students' academic performance may suppose triggering education policies aimed at reducing class sizes, which may increase the number of classes per school and, then, enhance the monetary expenses of hiring more teachers for these classes (Filges et al., 2018). However, our empirical results support that a bigger class size might not be such a problem, having a higher relevance the skills of the students attending the class. For instance, this may indicate that a big class crowded with highly skilled students might not be an issue, but a little one of low skilled ones

might be. Thus, it seems that recent class size policies applied in Spain, which were aimed at improving students' academic performance, were useless in both primary and secondary education and may be the origin of unnecessary expenses, concluding that education policy decisions should be based on empirical evidence for each particular case, more than on intuition.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic that we are living nowadays may have an impact on this class size issue (Oikawa, Tanaka, Bessho, & Noguchi, 2020; Phillips, Browne, Anand, & Bauch, 2021), as class size has become even more restrictive, so a clear and solid evidence on this topic prior to the pandemic should be developed, so that the consequences of this situation can be properly evaluated.

This paper is not free of limitations: in spite of presenting high internal validity for Andalusia, it does not have so much high external validity, as class size decisions may vary by country (as found by authors such as Blatchford, 2016, and Shen & Konstantopoulos, 2019) or even by region within Spain. In addition, our results are only applicable to primary and secondary education students in the academic years under analysis.

Future research works could be aimed at analysing this class size issue with this same methodology for the rest of Spanish regions whenever census data are available for them, and also for the whole of Spain – for international comparison purposes – or even for other countries. Furthermore, studying early childhood education or higher grades such as high school or university degrees may be interesting for future research. Finally, analysing the consequences on this class size issue in COVID-19 times could also be interesting for future research works.

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Appendix

TABLE A1. Descriptive statistics and test of mean differences between the population and the employed sample

	Variables	Fourth grade. 2012-13						Eighth grade. 2012/13						Eighth grade. 2011/12					
		Population			Sample			Population			Sample			Population			Sample		
		Obs.	Mean	S.D.	Obs.	Mean	S.D.	Obs.	Mean	S.D.	Obs.	Mean	S.D.	Obs.	Mean	S.D.	Obs.	Mean	S.D.
Sex of the student	Male	90,048	0.51	0.50	16,433	0.52	0.50	86,626	0.52	0.50	19,880	0.52	0.50	88,271	0.52	0.50	28,109	0.52	0.50
	Female	90,048	0.49	0.50	16,433	0.48	0.50	86,626	0.48	0.50	19,880	0.48	0.50	88,271	0.48	0.50	28,109	0.48	0.50
Level of education of the father	Incomplete primary education or did not attend school	70,745	0.13	0.33	12,822	0.13	0.33	62,998	0.15[D]	0.36	13,916	0.16[D]	0.36	61,706	0.16[D]	0.36	19,638	0.15[D]	0.35
	EGB or Compulsory Secondary Education	70,745	0.34[D]	0.47	12,822	0.35[D]	0.48	62,998	0.35[D]	0.48	13,916	0.38[D]	0.48	61,706	0.35[D]	0.48	19,638	0.33[D]	0.47
	High school, First Grade Professional Formation, Elemental Arts School and Artistic Professions, BUP, COU, Official Language School or Medium Grade Professional Formation Cycle	70,745	0.21	0.41	12,822	0.21	0.41	62,998	0.21	0.40	13,916	0.21	0.41	61,706	0.21	0.41	19,638	0.21	0.41
	Second Grade Professional Formation, Arts Speciality and Artistic Professions or High Grade Professional Formation Cycle	70,745	0.12[D]	0.33	12,822	0.11[D]	0.31	62,998	0.10	0.31	13,916	0.10	0.31	61,706	0.10	0.31	19,638	0.11	0.31
	University degree, PhD	70,745	0.20	0.40	12,822	0.20	0.40	62,998	0.19[D]	0.39	13,916	0.15[D]	0.36	61,706	0.18[D]	0.38	19,638	0.20[D]	0.40

		N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Level of education of the mother	Incomplete primary education or did not attend school	79,641	0.09	0.29	14,447	0.09	0.29	70,425	0.12[D]	0.33	15,651	0.13[D]	0.34	68,675	0.13[D]	0.34	21,758	0.12[D]	0.32
	EGB or Compulsory Secondary Education	79,641	0.35	0.48	14,447	0.35	0.48	70,425	0.38[D]	0.49	15,651	0.41[D]	0.49	68,675	0.39[D]	0.49	21,758	0.37[D]	0.48
	High school, First Grade Professional Formation, Elemental Arts School and Artistic Professions, BUP, COU, Official Language School or Medium Grade Professional Formation Cycle	79,641	0.21	0.41	14,447	0.21	0.41	70,425	0.21	0.41	15,651	0.21	0.41	68,675	0.21	0.41	21,758	0.21	0.41
	Second Grade Professional Formation, Arts Speciality and Artistic Professions or High Grade Professional Formation Cycle	79,641	0.12[D]	0.33	14,447	0.12[D]	0.32	70,425	0.10[D]	0.30	15,651	0.09[D]	0.29	68,675	0.09	0.29	21,758	0.10	0.30
	University degree, PhD	79,641	0.23	0.42	14,447	0.23	0.42	70,425	0.19[D]	0.39	15,651	0.16[D]	0.37	68,675	0.18[D]	0.38	21,758	0.20[D]	0.40
Father occupation	Business managers or public administration	70,349	0.07	0.26	12,715	0.07	0.26	62,302	0.08[D]	0.27	13,778	0.07[D]	0.25	61,434	0.07[D]	0.26	19,594	0.08[D]	0.27
	Technicians, professionals, scientists and intellectuals. Army (officials and high ranks)	70,349	0.13	0.34	12,715	0.13	0.34	62,302	0.13[D]	0.33	13,778	0.11[D]	0.30	61,434	0.13[D]	0.34	19,594	0.14[D]	0.36
	Technicians and support professionals. Administrative employees. Little business people	70,349	0.21	0.40	12,715	0.20	0.40	62,302	0.20[D]	0.40	13,778	0.19[D]	0.40	61,434	0.20[D]	0.40	19,594	0.21[D]	0.41
	Hotel workers, personnel, protection and sellers. Army (sub-officials and low ranks)	70,349	0.14[D]	0.35	12,715	0.13[D]	0.34	62,302	0.13	0.34	13,778	0.14	0.35	61,434	0.14	0.35	19,594	0.14	0.35
	Agriculture and fishing qualified workers. Artisans and qualified manufacturing, construction and mining workers	70,349	0.34[D]	0.47	12,715	0.35[D]	0.47	62,302	0.33[D]	0.47	13,778	0.36[D]	0.48	61,434	0.33[D]	0.47	19,594	0.30[D]	0.46
	Non-qualified workers	70,349	0.05[D]	0.22	12,715	0.06[D]	0.23	62,302	0.06[D]	0.23	13,778	0.06[D]	0.24	61,434	0.06[D]	0.23	19,594	0.06	0.23
	Performing housework	70,349	0.01	0.10	12,715	0.01	0.10	62,302	0.01	0.10	13,778	0.01	0.11	61,434	0.01	0.10	19,594	0.01	0.09
	Inactive	70,349	0.05	0.23	12,715	0.05	0.23	62,302	0.06	0.22	13,778	0.06	0.25	61,434	0.06	0.23	19,594	0.06	0.23

Category	Variable	Obs	Mean	S.D	Obs	Mean	S.D	Obs	Mean	S.D	Obs	Mean	S.D	Obs	Mean	S.D	Obs	Mean	S.D
Mother occupation	Business managers or public administration	78,575	0.03	0.18	14,231	0.03	0.18	69,282	0.04	0.19	15,358	0.03	0.18	67,804	0.03D	0.17	21,513	0.03D	0.18
	Technicians, professionals, scientists and intellectuals. Army (officials and high ranks)	78,575	0.13	0.34	14,231	0.13	0.34	69,282	0.12D	0.32	15,358	0.10D	0.30	67,804	0.12D	0.32	21,513	0.13D	0.34
	Technicians and support professionals. Administrative employees. Little business people	78,575	0.18	0.38	14,231	0.18	0.38	69,282	0.15D	0.37	15,358	0.15D	0.36	67,804	0.16D	0.36	21,513	0.17D	0.37
	Hotel workers, personnel, protection and sellers. Army (sub-officials and low ranks)	78,575	0.13D	0.34	14,231	0.12D	0.33	69,282	0.12D	0.33	15,358	0.13D	0.33	67,804	0.13	0.34	21,513	0.13	0.34
	Agriculture and fishing qualified workers. Artisans and qualified manufacturing, construction and mining workers	78,575	0.07D	0.25	14,231	0.07D	0.26	69,282	0.07D	0.26	15,358	0.08D	0.27	67,804	0.06D	0.23	21,513	0.06D	0.22
	Non-qualified workers	78,575	0.09	0.28	14,231	0.09	0.28	69,282	0.10D	0.29	15,358	0.10D	0.30	67,804	0.10D	0.32	21,513	0.10D	0.31
	Performing housework	78,575	0.34	0.47	14,231	0.35	0.48	69,282	0.37D	0.48	15,358	0.38D	0.49	67,804	0.37D	0.48	21,513	0.35D	0.48
	Inactive	78,575	0.03	0.17	14,231	0.03	0.17	69,282	0.03	0.17	15,358	0.03	0.17	67,804	0.03	0.17	21,513	0.03	0.17
Number of books at home	Between 0 and 100	82,465	0.67	0.47	14,948	0.67	0.47	73,075	0.63D	0.48	16,262	0.65D	0.48	71,284	0.65D	0.48	22,625	0.63D	0.48
	Between 101 and 200	82,465	0.16	0.37	14,948	0.16	0.36	73,075	0.17	0.37	16,262	0.17	0.37	71,284	0.17D	0.37	22,625	0.17D	0.38
	More than 200	82,465	0.17	0.38	14,948	0.17	0.38	73,075	0.20D	0.40	16,262	0.18D	0.39	71,284	0.18D	0.39	22,625	0.20D	0.40
Household resources	Place to study	82,527	0.95	0.22	14,956	0.95	0.22	73,093	0.96	0.19	16,284	0.96	0.20	71,342	0.96D	0.19	22,647	0.97D	0.18
	Internet	82,186	0.83D	0.38	14,899	0.82D	0.39	73,045	0.89D	0.31	16,262	0.88D	0.32	71,036	0.89D	0.31	22,538	0.90D	0.30
	Books (novels, tales, poems, comics...)	82,319	0.96	0.19	14,904	0.96	0.19	72,888	0.96D	0.21	16,207	0.95D	0.22	70,796	0.94D	0.25	22,479	0.94D	0.23
School funding	Public	90,048	0.76D	0.42	16,433	0.70D	0.46	86,626	0.74D	0.44	19,880	0.91D	0.29	88,271	0.75D	0.43	28,109	0.66D	0.47
	Semi-private	90,048	0.21D	0.41	16,433	0.25D	0.44	86,626	0.24D	0.43	19,880	0.08D	0.27	88,271	0.23D	0.42	28,109	0.31D	0.46
	Private	90,048	0.03D	0.16	16,433	0.05D	0.22	86,626	0.02D	0.13	19,880	0.01D	0.10	88,271	0.02D	0.15	28,109	0.03D	0.16

Notes: "Obs." stands for "Observations" and "S.D." stands for "Standard Deviation". The "D" means there are significant differences (significant at 5% or less) between the "Population" mean and the "Sample" mean columns within each grade and academic year.
Source: Authors' own calculations.

Factors related to distorted thinking about women and violence in Secondary School students[1]

Factores relacionados con las creencias distorsionadas sobre las mujeres y la violencia en estudiantes de Educación Secundaria

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an issue facing cultures globally, whose origin lies in gender-differentiated socialisation. The purpose of this study, which is cross-cutting in its approach and *ex-post-facto* in its design with a sample of 777 adolescents in Castilla-La Mancha, is to discover the difference between boys and girls respecting the distorted beliefs about women and the use of violence, as well as the relationship between distorted thinking and religiosity, political positioning and the consumption of pornography. The results show that boys show greater tolerance towards these beliefs than girls. Moreover, statistically-significant differences were found between those who considered themselves very religious people, who were politically positioned on the political Right and who consumed some pornography; and those who were not very or not at all religious, who were politically situated in the political centre or Left, and who consumed no or almost no pornography, respectively. The structural equation model shows that sexism is directly related to distorted thinking, while its

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relationship with religiosity and political conservatism is indirect. It underlines the importance of identifying these thoughts among adolescents so as to prevent the acceptance of violence in future couple relationships. The educational arena plays an important role in developing equality in order to build a society free of any kind of discrimination against women, an aspect that must begin in teacher training and include the gender perspective in the classrooms.

Resumen

La violencia de género (VG) es un problema que afecta a todas las culturas, cuyo origen se encuentra en la socialización diferencial. El presente estudio, de corte transversal y diseño ex-post-facto y con una muestra de 777 adolescentes de Castilla-La Mancha, tiene como objetivo conocer las diferencias entre chicos y chicas respecto a las creencias distorsionadas sobre las mujeres y el uso de la violencia, así como la relación entre estos pensamientos distorsionados con la religiosidad, el posicionamiento político y el consumo de pornografía. Los resultados evidencian que los chicos presentan mayor tolerancia hacia estas creencias que las chicas. Además, las diferencias se encuentran entre quienes se consideraban personas muy religiosas, se posicionaban políticamente en la derecha política y consumían algo de pornografía, respecto a quienes se consideraban poco o nada religiosas, políticamente situadas en el centro o a la izquierda política y consumían nada o casi nada de pornografía, respectivamente. El modelo de ecuaciones estructurales muestra que el sexismo se relaciona de manera directa con los pensamientos distorsionados, mientras que la relación con la religiosidad y con el conservadurismo político es indirecta. Se subraya la importancia de identificar estos pensamientos entre adolescentes con el fin de prevenir la aceptación de la violencia en las futuras relaciones de pareja. El ámbito educativo tiene una importante labor en el desarrollo de la igualdad con el fin de construir una sociedad alejada de cualquier forma de discriminación contra las mujeres, aspecto que ha de iniciarse con la formación del profesorado y la inclusión de la perspectiva de género en las aulas.

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious public health problem in most societies and cultures (McCarthy, Mehta & Haberland, 2018). GBV is taken to refer to violence against women because of the sole fact that they are women, hence it has a social and political nature, bearing in mind the unequal power relationships between men and women that have been legitimised according to the patriarchal system (Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero, 2020). Specifically in Spain, the Macro-survey of Violence against Women, which was conducted in 2019 by the Government Delegate's Office for Gender-based Violence, reports that the prevalence of physical violence among women who have had a partner is 11.4% and 8.9% have suffered sexual violence from a current or former partner (Delegación del Gobierno contra la Violencia de Género, 2020). It has been found that the rate of violence during courtships varies between 20% and 80% for psychological abuse (Rubio-Garay, López-González, Saúl & Sánchez-Elvira-Paniagua, 2012). These data reveal that violent behaviours during courtship are not an exception. However, it has been studied to a lesser extent than in the adult population (De la Villa, García, Cuetis & Sirvent, 2017), despite negatively affecting adolescents and it may influence how they become involved in a couple relationship in the future (Rodríguez-Franco & Rodríguez, 2009). It should be added that in the study of this prevalence in adolescents there may be an underestimation considering that there is great difficulty in identifying certain behaviours as abuse (Decker et al., 2015). Moreover, prior studies show that violence, as a means to resolve conflicts, is a common element in courtships (García-Carpintero, Rodríguez-Santero & Porcel-Gálvez, 2018), due to the gender inequalities that have traditionally been transmitted.

The acceptance of distorted beliefs about women and the use of violence have been studied as an important risk factor in maintaining GBV (Bosch & Ferrer, 2012; Fernández-Montalvo & Echeburúa, 1997). These cognitive distortions are erroneous ways to interpret reality. Moreover, they are one of the great obstacles that divert attention away from the problem, since they legitimise violence as an appropriate way to resolve conflicts (Echeburúa, Amor, Sarasua, Zubizarreta & Holgado-Tello, 2016). Some of these beliefs are based on women's responsibility for these occurrences, shifting abusers' blame, what is meant by GBV and resistance to this type of abuse. Such distortions are based on the

traditional roles that consider women inferior (Lorente, 2007; Torres & López-Zafra, 2010) and question whether abuse is really taking place, minimising its effects, blaming the victims and exonerating the aggressors (Torres, Lemos-Giráldez & Herrero, 2013). Detecting these cognitive biases about women and the use of violence has been very important in intervention with abusive men, mainly, (Echeburúa & Fernández-Montalvo, 2009), although it has also made it possible to set out guidelines for preventing it with adolescents (Fox, Hale & Gadd, 2014). Moreover, the deconstruction of these ideas may seem a starting point for the elimination of gender inequality and the distortions about the roles of men and women in couple relationships.

With respect to tolerance of these cognitive distortions, there is a greater tendency to accept them among men than among women (Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero, 2019). The same differences (Decker et al., 2015) and similar explanatory factors (Merino et al., 2021) have been found in the adolescent population, albeit most research into these beliefs has been carried out on the adult and university population (Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero, 2019; Echeburúa et al., 2016; Fernández-Montalvo & Echeburúa, 1997). Moreover, to understand how boys and girls construct those irrational ideas, it is necessary to know the acceptance of these concepts in adolescence, given that sex-specific behaviours are acquired in each culture; it is sociocultural factors that influence models of masculinity and femininity (Soler, Barreto & González, 2005) and determine behaviours oriented towards these social prescriptions, such that abusive and coercive behaviours could emerge (Francis & Pearson, 2019).

The construction of these distortions is influenced by the cultural mandates that have granted a series of privileges and rights to men, both beyond and within the couple, and have traditionally legitimated power and domination over women, accepting the use of violence to control them (You & Shin, 2020). The representations of the feminine and masculine identities that are formed through socialisation are symbolic structures that lend meaning to reality and guide men's and women's behaviours. These cultural representations of gender are beliefs shared down the generations through interaction with various agents and institutions that model the behaviour (González-Anleo, Cortés & Garcelán, 2018; Spruijt, Dekker, Ziermans & Swaab, 2019). Moreover, discrimination against women originates in collective expectations

of what is considered appropriate (Perrin et al., 2019). Therefore, the normalisation of GBV lies in the prescription of discriminatory beliefs, rules and attitudes that tend to make such violence difficult to eliminate (Read-Hamilton & Marsh, 2016).

Another important predictor of GBV is sexism, by which is meant the set of "attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, as well as the organisations, institutional and cultural practices which either reflect negative assessments of people according to the gender to which they belong or support the existence unequal statuses of women and men" (Swim & Hyers, 2009, p. 407). It is an attitude that endures over time and which has an affective burden that leads to the development of discriminatory behaviours. Thus, the belief becomes established that men and women are essentially different and, therefore, must conform to different social roles and norms (Hellmer, Stenson & Jylhä, 2018). This attitudinal construction is explained under the Theory of Ambivalent Sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In this theory, traditional sexism, called hostile sexism, coexists with another, much more subtle, apparently kinder sexism, but which is just as discriminatory, called benevolent sexism. Both forms of sexism perpetuate inequality and the subordination of women (Montañés, Megías, De Lemus & Moya, 2015).

Expectations about gender roles are influenced by sociocultural factors (Glick et al., 2000). Specifically, the relationship between religious practice and discriminatory attitudes towards girls and women has been examined, and it has been concluded that, upon comparing monotheistic religions, it is not a question of the specific affiliation, but rather of the degree of religiosity or the strength of a religion that predicts discrimination against women (Hannover, Gubernath, Schultze & Zander, 2018). This relationship may be direct, since the religious authorities may be explicitly teaching stereotypical viewpoints through the values inculcated by religious teaching (Mikolajczak & Pietrzak, 2014). However, religiosity has been related more to benevolent sexism than to hostile sexism (Haggard, Kaelen, Saroglou, Klein & Rowatt, 2019; Hellmer et al., 2018).

Discriminatory attitudes towards women have also been associated with ideological variables related to political conservatism (Sibley, Wilson & Duckitt, 2007), characterised by the need to preserve and maintain social traditions, that is, to traditional gender roles attributed to women that highlight their delicacy and their need to be protected by men (León

& Aizpurúa, 2020), albeit it has been statistically related to the hostile dimension of sexism (Christopher & Mull, 2006).

It should be added that the normalised use of the Internet and social media are key to the transmission of distorted attitudes and the way in which violence against women is exercised in the virtual world (Rebollo-Catalan & Mayor-Buzon, 2020). The link between consumption of pornography and sexist attitudes is relevant, since it is based on viewing women as sexual objects and justifying violence against women (Gallego & Fernández-González, 2019). Exposure to pornography has been associated with violence between adolescent couples since, with the proliferation of the Internet, adolescents can easily access sexually-explicit material (Rostad et al., 2019). It has also been shown that frequent exposure to pornography is related to acts of sexual aggression and violence during courtship in adolescence (Wright, Tokunaga & Kraus, 2016). The content of the scenes represented and the frequency with which it is consumed could contribute to the development of a culture that supports abuse of women, favouring attitudes of tolerance of the use of violence against them (Sun, Bridges, Johnson & Ezzell, 2016). Moreover, some studies refer to the fact that, the greater the use or consumption of pornographic content, the greater the frequency of physical and sexual violence against women (Brem et al., 2020). It is important to state that high rates of adolescents who depend upon pornography for sexual education have been found; this is a group that is liable to be influenced due to their identity being in the process of being construction since their inexperience makes it a critical period (Rothman, Kaczmarsky, Burke, Jansen & Baughman, 2015).

Nevertheless, the abundant scientific evidence shows that, although there has been a great advance in recent years with regards to the equality between women and men, discriminatory attitudes remain in developed societies and among younger groups (Esteban & Fernández, 2017; León & Aizpurúa, 2020). Therefore, carrying out research in the adolescent population is fundamental to prevention, since there is a positive relationship between the acceptance of such beliefs and attitudes and GBV (Ubillos-Landa, Goiburu-Moreno, Puente-Martínez, Pizarro-Ruiz & Echeburúa-Odriozola, 2016). Moreover, adolescence is a crucial step in the development of skills that promote healthy affective links in such relationships (Muñoz-Fernández, Ortega-Rivera, Nocentini, Menesini & Sánchez-Jiménez, 2019). Given the importance of socialisation in

the maintenance of distorted ideas and ideas that discriminate against women, it is necessary to intervene through co-education to challenge these highly damaging prescriptions that sustain inequality (Glass et al., 2018; Navarro-Pérez, Carbonell & Oliver, 2019).

For all these reasons, the purpose of this study was to analyse the distorted beliefs about women and about the use of violence in a sample of adolescents from Castilla-La Mancha. It also seeks to discover the influence of discriminatory attitudes in the acceptance of cognitive distortions, as well as their relationship with religiosity, political positioning and the consumption of pornography as influential factors in such acceptance. Given that these irrational beliefs are a risk factor for GBV, studying what variables may predict these distortions could prevent their assimilation and prevent them from affecting their couple relationships in the future.

Method

Participants

The sample in this research consisted of 777 adolescent in 3rd and 4th year of Secondary School (ESO), of which slightly more than half were women. The average age of the sample is around 14 years. 54.3% were in 3rd year at Secondary School. More than 90% were Spanish nationals. Around 50% lived in settlements with more than 10,000 inhabitants. One in three participants were from the province of Toledo. Around 50% of the people who participated were considered not very or not at all religious, were politically positioned more on the Left and more than 63% did not consume pornography (Table 1).

TABLE I. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample.

	%	n	M (SD)
Sex			
Women	49.5	385	
Men	50.5	392	
Age			14.47 (.891)
12-14	55.1	428	
15-18	44.8	348	
Year			
3rd	54.3	422	
4th	45.7	355	
Nationality			
Spain	92.1	716	
Foreign	7.9	61	
Province			
Albacete	10.7	83	
Ciudad Real	27.8	216	
Cuenca	9.9	77	
Guadalajara	17.8	138	
Toledo	33.8	263	
Rurality			
< 2,000	4.2	32	
From 2,000 to 9,999	46.7	363	
> 10,000	49.1	382	
Religiosity			2.17 (1.453)
None/low	53.3	414	
Somewhat religious	28.6	222	
Very religious	18.1	141	
Political tendency			2.37 (1.345)
Left	46.1	358	
Center	27.5	214	
Right	16.1	125	
Consumption of pornography			1.27 (1.526)
None	63.6	494	
Very low	12.6	98	
Low	21.4	166	

Measurement instruments

Sociodemographic and contextual characteristics. Ad hoc questions were created for gender, age, place of residence and degree of religiosity, political positioning and consumption of pornography, coded on a six-value Likert scale, from 0 (not at all) to 5 (very/high for religiosity and consumption of pornography), and from 0 (extreme Left) to 5 (extreme Right).

Inventory of Distorted Thoughts about Women and the Use of Violence - Revised (IPDMUV-R) (Echeburúa et al., 2016). It consists of one factor and a total of 21 items that assess irrational beliefs about women and violence against them. The response of each of these items is dichotomous (Yes/No) and the score ranges between 0 and 21 points, hence, the higher the score, the greater the acceptance of the distorted beliefs. The validation of the scale returned a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .74. In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha was slightly slower (.705).

Adolescent Sexism Detection (ASD) *Scale* (Recio, Cuadrado & Ramos, 2007). It consists of 26 items and two factors: 16 items designed to detect the hostile component of sexism (items 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26) and 10 items concerning the benevolent component of sexism (items 1, 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 17, 21, 24), on a six-value Likert scale (from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree)). The scale validation found an excellent level of internal consistency (.90). In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was .927.

Procedure

The study, which has a quantitative methodology and an *ex-post-facto* design, was carried out at secondary schools in the Region of Castilla-La Mancha. The university's Ethics Committee gave its approval to undertake the project (CEI/HU/2019/39). The research team contacted the centres' management; they were informed of the study's purpose. A timetable was set out to be able to administer the instrument in a three-week range (second half of September and first week of October 2019). Informed consent was given to the teachers responsible for the groups, who signed the authorisations to give the questionnaire, in which the anonymity of the participants, as well as the confidentiality of the data,

were guaranteed. Filling out the questionnaire took approximately 40 minutes.

Data analysis

The database was created with the statistical program SPSS (IBM 25.0). *Chi-square* statistics were used to analyse gender differences in each IPDMUV-R item. The continuous variables were analysed using Student's t-test for independent samples. The size of the effect between the variables through *Cohen's d* statistic; the relationship is small if $d \leq .20$, medium if $d \leq .50$ and large if $d \geq .80$. The acceptance of distorted ideas about women and the use of violence, as measured by percentile scores for religiosity, political positioning and consumption of pornography, were calculated with the one-factor *ANOVA* test. *Post-hoc* multiple comparisons were made to contrast the means on the distorted ideas scale. A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to calculate which variables predict cognitive distortions about GBV. Finally, the relationship between sexism, distorted thoughts about women and the use of violence, and sociocultural factors, was analysed using Structural Equation Models (SEM). The program AMOS was used (IBM AMOS 24.0). The overall model fit analysis was performed using the *Generalised Least Squares* technique. The following indicators were used to determine the goodness of fit: GFI, AGFI, CFI, NFI $\geq .95$, RMSEA $\leq .70$.

Results

As Table 2 shows, the acceptance of distorted ideas about women and the use of violence, in a range of 0 to 21, it was lower than 5. On the ASD, the average was 48 points. Finally, very close scores as between hostile and benevolent sexism were obtained.

TABLE II. Descriptive data on the sum of the sexism scale, the hostile and benevolent sexism components and the IPDMUV-R sum.

	M	**SD**	**Asymmetry**	**e**	**Curtosis**	**e**
IPDMUV-R	4.50	2.852	.606	0.99	.318	.198
ASD Sexism	48.14	17.986	.945	.088	.430	.175
Hostile sexism	24.72	10.491	1.633	.088	2.368	.175
Benevolent Sexism	23.41	9.261	.489	.088	-.293	.175

Table 3 shows the sex differences for each IPDMUV-R item. In general, there was greater acceptance of cognitive distortions among boys than among girls in the sample. Only in item 8 (for many women, abuse by their partners is a sign of concern for them) was there greater percentage acceptance in the women's group. There were statistically significant differences between boys and girls in biases related to women's supposed inferiority and traditional gender roles (items 1, 2 and 4). There are also differences in the distortions that blame women for violence (items 10 and 11) and in those that exonerate the aggressor (items 16, 19, 20 and 21); men's acceptance was nearly 48% and 62% for items 20 and 21, respectively.

TABLE III. Differences in the acceptance of IPDMUV-R according to sex.

	Men	**Women**	**χ2**
1. Women are inferior to men.	3.6% (13)	1.1% (4)	4.804*
2. If the man is the breadwinner, the woman must be subordinate to him.	3.9% (14)	1.1% (4)	5.670*
3. The man is the head of the family, so the woman must obey him.	2.2% (8)	0.8% (3)	2.252
4. The woman must have lunch and dinner ready for when the man gets home.	7.5% (27)	3.6% (13)	5.190*
5. The woman's obligation is to have sexual relations with her partner, even if she does not want to at that time.	2.5% (9)	0.8% (3)	2.984
6. A woman should not contradict her partner.	4.1% (15)	2.8% (10)	.979
7. A woman who continues to live with a violent women must have a serious problem.	55.5% (196)	53.4% (183)	.331
8. For many women, abuse by their partners is a sign that they are concerned for them.	20.3% (72)	30.5% (107)	9.707**
9. When a man hits his partners, she knows why	8.6% (31)	5.6% (20)	2.521
10. If women really wanted to, they could prevent new episodes of violence.	35.9% (127)	22.6% (79)	15.050***
11. Many women deliberately provoke their partners so that they will lose control and hit them.	9.4% (34)	5.6% (20)	3.717*
12. The fact that most women do not call the police when they are being abused is evidence that they want to protect their partners.	33.1% (118)	29.4% (104)	1.118
13. Schoolteachers are right to use physical punishment against children who are repeatedly obedient and rebellious.	18.8% (67)	11.0% (39)	8.417**
14. Children are really not aware that their fathers abuse their mother unless they witness a fight.	53.9% (192)	49.1% (169)	1.617
15. To abuse a woman you have to hate her.	36.1% (125)	30.9% (107)	2.101
16. Most men who attack their partners feel ashamed and guilty about it.	25.5% (89)	15.2% (53)	11.333***
17. What happens within a family a matter for the family and the family alone.	28.5% (102)	23.9% (84)	1.904
18. Very few women have physical or psychological sequelae due to abuse.	15.1% (53)	13.5% (47)	.362
19. Men often abuse their partners because they annoy them.	18.3% (65)	12.9% (45)	3.915*
20. Most people who use violence are failures or "losers".	47.4% (166)	34.7% (120)	11.678***
21. People who use violence have serious psychological problems and often do not know what they are doing.	61.7% (211)	53.9% (186)	4.265*

Note: *p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01; ***p≤ .001

The results also show differences between boys and girls in the scores obtained in the sum of the IPDMUV-R, as well as on the ASFD in the hostile component of sexism (Table 4). A moderate effect size was observed for the ASD ($d = .317$) and, to a greater extent, for the hostile component ($d = .435$). Differences should be noted between both groups with respect to political positioning and consumption of pornography, with the size of the effect on the consumption of pornography being very high ($d = 1.032$).

TABLE IV. Difference in averages according to sex with respect to the sum of the IPDMUV-R, the ASD, the hostile and benevolent components and religiosity.

	Men		Women				
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**t**	**Cohen d**	**CI 95%**
IPDMUV-R	4.88	2.868	4.11	2.770	3.317***	.273	.131 - .414
ASD Sexism	50.20	18.738	44.60	16.540	4.161***	.317	.175 - .458
Hostile sexism	26.80	11.175	22.35	9.196	6.060***	.435	.292 - .577
Benevolent sexism	23.77	9.226	22.59	9.306	1.783	.127	-.013 - .268
Religiosity	2.09	1.519	2.26	1.379	-1.638	-.117	-.257 - .023
Political tendency	2.50	1.407	2.23	1.264	2.736**	.201	.052 - .350
Consumption of pornography	1.97	1.554	.57	1.123	14.252***	1.032	.881 - 1.184

Note: *p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01; ***p ≤ .001

After establishing that differences exist, *post-hoc* comparisons were made using the Bonferroni method (Table 5). The results confirm that statistically significant differences were found in those who considered themselves very religious, who were on the political Right, and who consumed some pornography.

TABLE V. *Post hoc* test on the distorted thinking by religiosity, political leanings and consumption of pornography.

	Religiosity (I)	Religiosity (J1)	Difference of means (I-J1)	Religiosity (J2)	Difference of means (I-J2)
IPDMUV-R	Not at all	Somewhat	-.471	Very	-.857*
	Somewhat	Not at all	.471	Very	-.385
	Very	Not at all	.857*	Somewhat	.385
	Political tendency (I)	Political tendency (J1)	Difference of means (I-J1)	Political tendency (J2)	Difference of means (I-J2)
IPDMUV-R	Left	Centre	-.434	Right	-1.088**
	Centre	Left	.434	Right	-.654
	Right	Left	1.088**	Centre	.654
	Consumption of pornography (I)	Consumption of pornography (J1)	Difference of means (I-J1)	Consumption of pornography (J2)	Difference of means (I-J2)
IPDMUV-R	Not at all	Almost none	-.429	Low	-.817*
	Almost none	Not at all	.429	Low	-.388
	Low	Not at all	.817*	Almost none	.388

A multiple linear regression analysis was undertaken using the *Introduction* method to study whether the independent variables sexism (hostile and benevolent), gender, religiosity, political leanings and consumption of pornography predict cognitive distortions as measured by the IPDMUV-R scale (Table 6). According to the results obtained, the hostile (β = .369; p < .05) and benevolent (β = .232; p < .05) components significantly explain the IPDMUV-R score positively, which indicates that the higher the hostile and benevolent sexism score, the higher the scores that are obtained for cognitive distortions. With regards to the coefficient of determination, we obtain a score equal to adjusted R^2 = .316. This indicates that both variables (hostile and benevolent) predict 31.6% of the variability of the cognitive distortions variable. The variables sex, religiosity, political conservatism and consumption of pornography do not predict cognitive distortions (p > .05).

TABLE VI. Prediction of the distorted thinking according to the components of sexism, religiosity, political leanings and consumption of pornography.

	B	**SE**	**Standardised B**	**t**	**p**	**VIF**
Constant	.116	.620		.187	.852	
Hostile sexism	.099	.013	.369	7.645	.000	1.863
Benevolent sexism	.073	.015	.232	4.960	.000	1.760
Sex	-.155	.232	-.027	-.668	.504	1.300
Religiosity	.021	.140	.005	.147	.883	1.121
Political conservatism	.206	.140	.054	1.464	.144	1.083
Consumption of pornography	.047	.138	.014	.342	.732	1.284

Note: B = Unstandardised coefficient; SE = standard error; standardised B = standardised coefficient; t = Student's T; p = significance; VIF = variance inflation factor.

The model analyses the direct and indirect relationships between five observable variables (Figure 1): the hostile component, the benevolent component, distorted thinking about women and the use of violence (IPDMUV-R), political conservatism and religiosity. The model's goodness of fit is acceptable: $\chi^2 = 19.872$, gl = 5, *p*-value = .001, GFI = .990, AGFI = .969, NFI = .930, CFI = .946, RMSEA = .62. As can be seen, the structural model explains 25% of distorted thoughts, 3% of political conservatism and 5% of religiosity.

FIGURE I. Proposed structural model
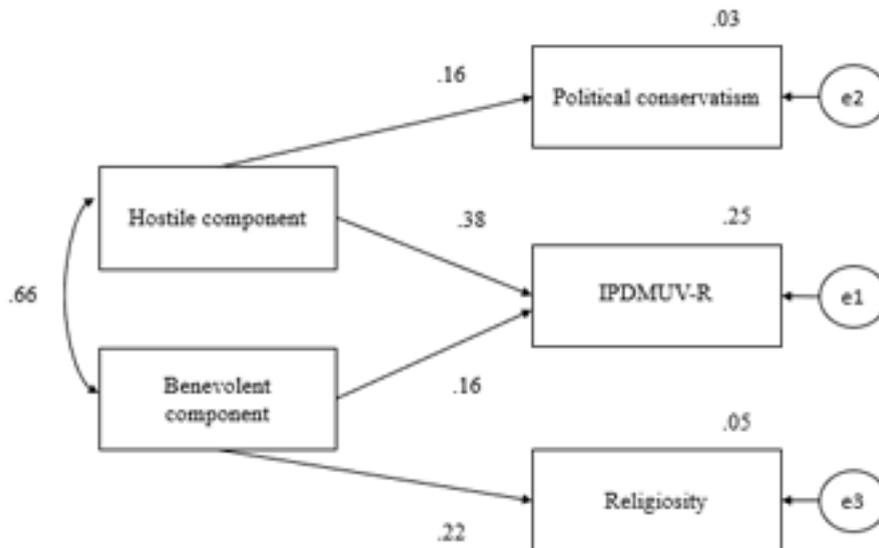
The significance of the relationships between the different variables was studied to analyse the suitability of the model (Table 7). All the weights are significant at the *p* < .05 level. The components of sexism directly affect distorted thinking ($\beta_{hostile}$ = .382, p = .000 and $\beta_{benevolent}$ = .161, *p* = .000); the hostile component has a direct effect on political conservatism (β = .160, *p* = .000) and the benevolent component has a direct impact on religiosity (β = .217, *p* = .000).

TABLE VII. Standardised regression weights in the model's relationships.

Causal relationships			Standardised regression weights	P
Hostile sexism	ó	Benevolent sexism	.656	.000
Hostile sexism	ð	IPDMUV-R	.382	.000
Benevolent sexism	ð	IPDMUV-R	.161	.000

Causal relationships			Standardised regression weights	P
Hostile sexism	ð	Political conservatism	.160	.000
Benevolent Sexism	ð	Religiosity	.217	.000

Discussion and conclusions

Identify the cognitive biases related to gender stereotypes and the justification of violence is essential within primary prevention (Echeburúa et al., 2016). This paper therefore analyses the acceptance of distorted ideas about women and the use of violence among adolescents in Castilla-La Mancha and reports new gender difference data, as well as data on the relationship between these cognitive biases about sexism and other variables such as religiosity, political conservatism and consumption of pornography, given that they could influence the beliefs that sustain inequality and GBV among adolescents.

To begin with, the mean accepted biases among adolescent boys and girls in the sample was 4.50 and the mean score with respect to sexism was 48 points; scores were similar in both components of sexism. As for other characteristics of the participants, more than half of the adolescent boys and girls considered themselves not very or not at all religious, about 46% were on the political Left and more than 63% stated that they had not consumed any pornography. In line with what other studies of adolescents have found (Ubillos-Landa et al., 2017), there are differences between boys and girls; the degree of acceptance of cognitive biases was greater among boys. A greater percentage was only found in the girls' group with respect to item 8, related to the idea thar abuse could be a sign of concern for them, hence studying these distorted ideas among adolescents is fundamental bearing in mind that there are difficulties in recognising certain behaviours as abuse and not as a demonstration of love (Francis & Pearson, 2019; Rivas-Rivero & Bonilla-Algovia, 2020). Sexism scores by sex were also found to be higher for boys than for girls in the study, in line with other research with adolescents (Montañés et al., 2015; Recio et al., 2007), albeit, although some papers have reported higher levels of benevolent sexism in girls (Recio et al., 2007), in general,

the boys in the sample were more likely to agree with both the hostile and the benevolent components of discriminatory attitudes against women.

It should be noted that the results show a moderate effect association between sex and the hostile component of sexism (d = .43). Differences were also found between both groups by political leanings, with boys being more Right-leaning than girls, as was greater exposure to pornographic content, a relationship in which the analyses reveal a high effect size (d = 1.03). These findings are particularly relevant, since this consumption is an important risk factor in the committing GBV (Brem et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2016) and in the representation of women as sexual objects (Gallego & Fernández-González, 2019), which makes evident the need for intervention, since there appear to be high rates among the adolescents who resort to pornography for sexual education (Rothman et al., 2015). However, the adolescent boys and girls in this study reported that the consumption of pornography was low, although the boys self-reported having consumed it to a greater extent than girls. Lastly, no differences have been found in religiosity according to sex, although the mean was slighter higher in the group of adolescent girls.

Therefore, the data show that there is a greater degree of acceptance among boys in the sample with respect to the traditional gender stereotypes, the use of violence as a normalised way of resolving conflicts in couples and discriminatory attitudes towards women, which may be a reflection of the privileges that have been granted to men in which male domination is legitimised (Rodríguez et al., 2006) through various agents of socialisation (Perrin et al., 2019; Spruijt et al., 2019), making it difficult to eliminate GBV (Read-Hamilton & Marsh, 2016). Research into adolescents is therefore necessary to show evidence of a problem that requires immediate educational intervention (Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero, 2019; Muñoz Fernández et al., 2019; Navarro et al., 2019), as well as development of specific training plans for the teaching staff.

Differences between groups when it comes to religiosity, political leanings and consumption of pornography should be added to the list of distorted ideas about women and the use of violence. As the *post hoc* tests showed, there were differences between those who scored higher on religiosity, political conservatism and who consumed some pornography. These findings are significant, given that there is not an abundance of studies referring to these variables according to distorted ideas about

GBV, above all at a developmental stage at which adolescent boys and girls are acquiring competences in developing affective relationships (Muñoz-Fernández et al., 2019) in which it is necessary to identify the influence of the prescriptions that sustain inequality (Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero, 2019; Glass et al., 2018; Navarro-Pérez et al., 2019). Even so, it is discriminatory attitudes towards women, in both its hostile and its benevolent components, that predict the distorted ideas about women and the use of violence, as reflected in the results of the regression analysis.

According to the structural equation model, sexism is directly related to distorted thoughts about women and the use of violence (IPDMUV-R); however, its relationship with religiosity and political conservatism is indirect, since, in the model's fit, religiosity is related to the benevolent component and political conservatism to the hostile component. Consumption of pornography was eliminated from the equation due to the low quality of the fit indices in their interaction with other variables. However, the adolescent boys and girls in the sample show a low percentage of pornography consumption that may have influenced these results. Although evidence has been found about the relationship between religiosity and sexism (Haggard et al., 2019; Hellmer et al., 2018; Mikolajczak & Pietrzak, 2014), political conservatism and sexism (Christopher & Mull, 2006; Sibbley et al., 2007), in this paper they are indirectly related to distorted thinking, hence new approaches are opened in the study of this association.

This paper has some limitations. To begin with, the sample size would have to be increased, since the sample is not representative of adolescents as a whole, although it does provide relevant information to trace other perspectives in research into adolescents. On the other hand, an instrument would have to be included to study social desirability, since the explicit formulation of some statements may cause them to be under-represented. It should be noted that IPDMUV-R refers to heterosexual relationships. In this regards, it should be added that the sexual orientation of the people who took part in the study was unknown; this aspect could be considered in future papers. It would be desirable in future research to expand the sample and include the affective and behavioural dimensions of attitudes, as well as to delve deeper into the variables that analyse religiosity, the consumption of pornography and political positioning using proven instruments, and to include sexual

orientation and study this variable with respect to the social cognition analysed. Even so, the paper presents significant information and makes it possible to delve deeper into the cognitive biases among adolescents that legitimise violence, given that the study of these distorted thoughts is relevant both to detecting the acceptability of violence, and in educational intervention (Echeburúa et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2014). The data underline the importance of co-education and of including the gender lens in teacher training in order to prevent and eradicate any type of sexist attitudes (Rivas-Rivero & Bonilla-Algovia, 2020), aimed at achieving the gender equality laid out in the Sustainable Development Goals and at building societies and cultures that have eradicated all forms of violence and discrimination against women. Bearing in mind that GBV is a serious health public health problem (McCarthy et al., 2018), that tolerating it affects all age groups and that the figures for violence during courtship are alarming (Rubio-Garay et al., 2012), it is necessary to continue to contribute to eliminating it through intervention programmes based on equality, deconstructing the distorted ideas about women and the gender roles traditionally transmitted, as well as to detect the risk factors that promote the socialisation of these distorted beliefs that slow development and social progress.

Acknowledgements

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