

# TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHICAL EDUCATION IN DIALOGUES BETWEEN CULTURES

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## ABSTRACT

The goal is to understand education from an anthropological perspective. To this end, we will focus on some concepts that are part of the conceptual constellation we will navigate. We will look at and listen to a concrete scene in which this perspective is conceived. We will conclude with contributions to defining criteria and questions to plan, implement, and evaluate educational settings.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to *reflect on and discuss education*, e.g., the specifically human actions of *educating* and being *educated*. The *school*, invented in classical Greece to learn, takes children out of their homes, out of their private spaces and times where they learned to eat, walk, talk, and other things to educate. A *pedagogue*, an enslaved person, takes them to another place, a *public* one. There, a world beyond the home will open up to them during a *free* period. I propose we give ourselves this “free” space-time for writing and reading to experience thinking about education together, in reflection and discussion, in a world without enslaved people.

Reading and writing (like the means of remote encounters provided by current technology) enable meetings in and from distant times-places. They are configured as a *place* (an *ára*: a specific portion of space for a certain time). We built it, and it constitutes us as a group.

I hope this text becomes a resource to view education more broadly, allowing for better addressing its problems.

We will go through an anthropological perspective to understand education (1) we will pause on some concepts that are part of the conceptual constellation in which we will navigate; (2) we will look at and listen to a concrete scene in which this perspective is conceived; (3) and we will conclude with some contributions aimed at defining criteria and questions to plan, implement, and evaluate educational settings (4).

This text aims to discuss open and provisional results. The presentation moves back and forth between solid dichotomies, with one foot in the clouds of theoretical abstraction and the other in the ground.

## AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION

### “Education” is used in many ways.

Although they seem to be discussing the same thing, very different issues are discussed when referring to education. This is a serious ambiguity because, without questioning the concept (how it is defined, its meanings and functions, why, for what, and how human beings *educate and are educated*), assumptions that prevent us from *thinking about education as such* are accepted. These assumptions even deny education.

Some believe education is *unnecessary, superfluous, or useless* due to alleged *biological* conditions that would cause some to be *unteachable* while others would be self-sufficient. Or because of the naive belief that educating is letting something that *is already* within each individual emerge. Or because they see education as merely a *means or instrument* for a country's particular purposes (expecting it to produce *development*, improve its *competitiveness*, provide work for its people, eliminate poverty, or teach how to survive with minimal resources).

But it is not possible to sustain a rational discussion about something without going through the “first operation of intelligence,” which consists of understanding what lies “behind the words,” that is, in defining the concepts (Thibaudeau, 2010, 21) [Translated quote from its original in Spanish].

We will focus the education on an anthropological framework and its *anthropogenetic* function. Education consists of the human activities of teaching and learning, which generate and provide continuity to hominization (anthropogenesis) and humanization processes. It integrates the internal processes of each group that has *become human* in a specific *place* (in which it exists and gives meaning) to make its *newcomers* human, thus continuing their special way of remaining human.

The processes of existence and consolidation of our species occur within different human groups in this variable, conflicting, and never fully closed processes, which are partially conscious. These processes, in turn, institute, continue, and modify the group and its habitat. Their origins are lost to us in infinite regression into the past, and their end appears undesirable and dissolves into an unpredictable and unprojectable future. Thinking about our human time, our historical being, requires placing *its rationality*

not in the static and timeless concepts of *beginning and end* but in the historical and contingent *meantime* of *human existence*: both personal and collective. It is not a matter of thinking about becoming by *ordering it* from the unmoving but thinking about it within life itself, in the spatiality and temporality where we *find ourselves and are being*. Places-times *where* different groups and people *meet*.

The *encounter* invites conflictingly to approach and to distance, to love and to hate, to coexist and kill, to get involved and to flee, to get together and to isolate. The encounter can be a clash (of cultures, rationalities, interests): not recognizing the other as human, wishing to exterminate them or, if not, to subjugate and use them, or at least isolate them. This path has multiple variants: the violent recourse to physical force, which is formed and accompanied by reasons, propaganda, and “education,” more convoluted ways that can spiral into “vertiginous” violence.

The moments and places of encounter (all of them, but here we particularly consider educational ones) can also be places of *dialogues*, advancing *through* or *among* the diversity of people and human groups despite and thanks to their different ways of feeling, valuing, thinking, and doing. Here, we support the alternative of transforming educational places-times (and others) into encounters of dialogue that, in essence, are always intercultural among cultures.

In the current situation of *globalization*, which makes the world a macro-space *between* cultures, considering “encounter” as problematic by recognizing the *conflictive, limited, and social* nature of humans, and adopting a radical, philosophical, and dialogical perspective in education, seems necessary.

## What Do We Mean When We Talk About Education?

Education is a phenomenon inherent to each human group. It basically consists of *shaping its new generations as humans, specifically as humans of that group*. Education makes human beings of that group distinct from others.

Each group becomes human in its own way: it generates its own ways of feeling, valuing, speaking, thinking, acting, imagining, constructing, believing, and creating. It constitutes its *culture* broadly: from giving meaning to both singular and collective existence to its ways of *working* in, with, and on “nature,” to imprinting its “spirit” in “ma-

terial” works: cave paintings, pyramids, skyscrapers, symphonies, epics, theories... Culture as a whole operates as a *system*<sup>13</sup> prior to each singular human, providing identity (self-importance) and meaning to the existence of the group and its members. In this way, they mutually recognize each other as humans and, as such, as valuable.

Education is enculturation: an internal process within each human group through which each group provides its previous culture to the new members who will adopt it. It gives them the sense of being human in and of that particular group, which has been generating, transmitting, systematizing, repeating, changing, solidifying, or reinventing that culture through their experiences. This culture includes the resources available to new members to face the world and its changes without losing the sense of their lives.

## Education and Conflict

Human beings “of flesh and blood” are part of the same biological species with distinctive, exclusive traits, such as living in organized groups, having language, and being capable of reasoning. As we know, value, decide, and choose, we can act freely and are mutually responsible for our actions.

To educate and to be educated are human activities that we conduct with awareness, will, and freedom, conditioned by the culture and education that enable us to exercise them. Education is guided and carried out by assuming conscious strategies and practices. Hence, it is not mere repetition, growth, and reproduction of what is already given, as if we all shared the same language, goals, and techniques<sup>14</sup>. We are human, we are diverse. Educational activities are thought out, discussed, planned, and carried out in society and consciously.

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13 The Guarani *mbya* use the term *eko* (*reko*, *teko*), usually translated as “culture,” “customs,” etc., but they always translate it as “system.” They compare “our system” (the *mbya*) to “your system” (or the “whites”), and you have different internal coherence, which is not immutable. In their sacred music, they use violins and guitars, they speak several languages and use watches and calculators. They preserve their evolving cultural identity intact. They refuse to send their children to school. They ask for land that was taken from them. They suggest intercultural houses of wisdom. We talked with them as usual: drinking *mate* [A traditional drink made of caffeine and herbs].

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14 Reference of Biblical text on the Tower of Babel (Beresit or Genesis, 11, 1-9).

*Conflict* is, therefore, constitutive of what is human. To try to erase it would be to renounce being human. But it is difficult for us to assume the challenge and responsibility of being what we are: equal because we are diverse. Capable of desiring and valuing different things, thinking differently, and acting in the most varied ways in activities impossible for other living beings. Because we are different humans, we are in conflict. What the Greeks called *logos* (human language and reason) is a way to process our way of being or being in conflict, not to eliminate it. Wanting the end of conflict is wanting the end of human rights because it means not recognizing “other.”

The human consists of *interrupting* deterministic, unconscious, or extra-human processes by a specific human action. This specificity allows the possibility of freely and responsibly guiding educational processes so that we remain human.

The great educational challenge is to ensure that the human task of *humanizing through education in diversity* continues and deepens.

I will present the constitutive conflictuality of education from two different and complementary approaches.

## Education in Intercultural Conflict

We all become human by internalizing the culture of a specific group through endogenous educational processes, which leads us to consider the members of other cultures as *not equal* (as essentially inferior or superior). Those of us who have become human by living different and even contradictory millenary experiences tend to incarnate in others (persons or peoples) our fears, hatreds, or submissions to the point of personalizing in them our image of the monstrous and threatening or the ideal or good. We tend to embody in them the *models* of what should not be or what should be. What should be eliminated or should be emulated.

These tendencies occur when we feel inferior, in imitative educational models, to be able to reach (for example) the *development* of other countries, *copying them*, following their formulas, and measuring ourselves by their standards.

When we feel others are inferior, we attempt to transmit our languages, beliefs, habits, knowledge, techniques, and skills that would allow them to become “people like us,”

making them cease to be what they are. “Integrating” them into our society in a subordinate position or “excluding” them for their culpable failure to become like us.

The fact of cultural diversity and the conflicting difficulty of *understanding* each other make intercultural conflict a constitutive problem of current humanity.

Education can and must be thought through and discussed to guide collective decision-making processes with criteria that orient it towards a liberating and dialogical perspective.

Education is founded on transmitting of *past* experiences (past dangers faced together) by the ancient generations of a particular human group. The resources forged in their specific history to face what was then “different” and “new” might be inadequate for today’s challenges. This solid cultural foundation also provides meanings of human life and even resources to confront (consciously and unconsciously) unforeseen challenges. But these must be sufficiently ductile to constantly reformulate themselves to face something that *had never happened* but is indeed *happening* now and *could happen* in the future. Therefore, the mere application of outdated methods to new situations does not guarantee success and often dissemble creativity. Hence, it is necessary to have an education in which everyone questions their culture, reinterprets it, resignifies it, and reinvents it in the face of new situations.

That is why educational activities must include criteria for critical reflection, even on their own tradition and culture, and be open to the contributions of others, developing creative capacities. They should allow internal discussions and admit heterodoxies, apostasies, and conscientious objections that enhance each culture by opening it up and protecting it from its own sclerosis. In two rich and very different perspectives, Alberto Buena defends *dissent* and Forner-Betancourt advocates for *cultural disobedience*. The diverse experiences generated in the internal conflicts of each community should be included in the education of each culture, as well as the capacity to listen, openness to the new, willingness to change, and dialogue with others.

## Conceptual Constellation

I will present some ideas to consider for educating from a liberating perspective, both *intra-* and *intercultural* aspects. These are different approaches that, together, do not

constitute a system but rather a *conceptual* framework, with *seminal*, *protean*, and *fermenting* characteristics.

## Geoculture

Kusch (2000, III, 251 ff.) defines culture in these terms: “Culture is not only the spiritual heritage that the group provides to each one, and that is contributed by tradition. It is also the symbolic bulwark in which one takes refuge to defend the significance of one’s existence. Culture implies an existential defense against the new; without it, one would lack the elements to face an incomprehensible novelty” (id. 252).

Thus, education can be considered an *intracultural* function of hominization. *Our* culture conditions us; it makes us members of the same *human condition* as others, and, in that very act, *it differentiates us from other humans*.

However, Kusch arrives at this conception by reflecting on his “fieldwork.” He feels a great distance between the researcher and the investigation and understands that the difference lies “in the cultural mode that has been embodied in each one.” It is “a difference of perspective and code” and, as such, “questions the possibility of real communication.” It presents us with the risk of being “untranslatable” and unable to communicate from one group to another. Kusch highlights the difficulty in specific experiences where the interlocutors cannot understand each other due to cultural differences that condition the meaning of life for each. Therefore, “a dialogue is, above all, a problem of interculturality” since “the existence of the interlocutors” is at stake (Kusch, 2000, III, 251 ff.). Thus, it is not only a communication problem or transmitting or exchanging messages; it is a matter of life or death; it is a matter of *dialogue* between cultures.

With the idea of *geoculture*, Kusch intimately links the place of residence with human life. He adds “another matter, which is achieving an *existential domicile*, a zone of habituality in which one feels safe.” There is this mutual implication: “the group’s thought (...) takes on the task of clothing the habitat with a cultural landscape,” which, thus, “is always subject to a culture;” and, at the same time, “it is a thought conditioned by the place.” It “refers to a firmly structured context by the intersection of the geographical with the cultural.”



The concept of geocultural unity, this “idea of a thought resulting from an intersection between the geographical and the cultural,” leads him to question “absolute knowledge.” No knowledge that is unlocated, uprooted, deterritorialized, or deculturalized. And it is not about “establishing *ad hoc* a so-called universal thought, but about discovering in the gravity of thinking, that is, in the ground that sustains it, a real picture of itself that encompasses all the variants of its way of being universal.” This “constitutes the restitution of a real model.”

## Place

It is about working in every specific *place* where *education* occurs: educational places. A “place” is not a hollow “container” within which things and events are placed or occur. No pre-defined “things” are then put in relation to each other.

In other words, a *geo* point of view does not proceed by mechanistic analysis. It does not separate the “simple” parts to consider them outside the relationships in which they are and then reconstruct the complex real unity of, for example, a clock. It proceeds inversely: it ventures into the complex unity of the concrete place that is being constituted as such while at the same time constituting its parts in that relational place. From this perspective, the place implies time, duration, history, change, and incompleteness: it is being constituted and it is under construction. Its plans and projects are not pre-given (no clock is already made at the starting point). Thus, they operate as guidelines for the path rather than as goals to be reached.

On the other hand, no place is *isolated*; it exists in and among others with which it is already in relation, affecting its interior as it influences the exterior.

I propose thinking of *educational* places (formal and informal: every classroom, every experience, every institution -educational system, school, family, neighborhood, mass media, ICTs-) as scenarios that are “among” cultures, where specific scenes of *intercultural encounters* occur,<sup>15</sup> with actors who have been shaped in other *endogeocultural* educational scenes. Each scene has its beginning, *duration*, and conclusion, opening up to *subsequent* spaces that are quite unpredictable.

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15 Of course: also, inter-generational. But all dialogue involves interculturality.

I speak of “scenes” as each of these can be considered a unit in itself: *Temporo-spatial, geo-historical*, in which interlocutors, previously forged in different *geocultures* meet (in the sense of come into contact and in the sense of they are. A contingent, *new, defined, changing, finite* unit.

The idea is to try to understand its own movement *while it* is becoming, in the *meantime* of each concrete scene. Because it is that historical *meantime* that must be understood and acted upon since it is *in* this *meantime* that our existence unfolds, and *from* this contingent condition, we think, act, and live. It does not seem right to me to try to understand the historical and changing from immutable to eternal. Nor *ordered* by *obedience* from *principles* nor *ordered* by post-historical projects.

## Actors

In every “discovery” that there is another, in every encounter with another, the existence of all interlocutors is at stake. And it is an interculturality problem.

The space *between* cultures opened up when encountering others appears as a void where something unpredictable *occurs*. It is *a place of unexpected encounters with the unexpected*. It is better not *to seek them*. If they happen, one is on alert; mechanisms of defense and mutual distrust operate. It is best to leave the field, cross to the other side of the street, *avoid* the encounter, return to the shell, retreat, and take refuge in that zone of habituality where one feels safe.

The encounter is sometimes *sought* and sometimes *unavoidable* or sought by some and unavoidable by others. Thus, the encounter *occurs*; it happens; it makes a place for itself. This place can be confrontation, fight, violence, or war; a *conflict, a clash of civilizations*. For one, the *other* is not a problem: they already know what to do with them. For others, who want to live their own lives, it is a problem. The temptations to *defend* oneself, to kill, or to isolate oneself as *security* measures are strong.

Proposing dialogue is to *seek it, to want it, to want it to last, to want* the other: it is a condition of becoming human. Not wanting the encounter or not wanting it to last is not accepting to be human.

It is not dialogue if it is merely converse between those who maintain their group's purposes, values, or interests and negotiate agreements, provisional armistices of armed peace, and alliances using *strategic reason*. It is not dialogue when it is only *geopolitical*, when pre-constituted entities (state, country, bloc) enter the strategic game, always calculating *against* others, defining *friends* and *enemies*, and turning politics into a weapon of war. That is for those who want the same toy and fight over it, like those German princes and brothers who are equal even in their desire: Milan.

The geocultural perspective does not conceive *subjects or actors as essences of already definitively constituted entities* but as *self-constituting agents* and of the *places* where they are with others. None is in *the* absolute knowledge that they want to transmit to others. It is a matter of advancing *through different ways of being human*, in dialogues, in a permanently open process of human constitution (individual and collective), of *coexistence* among various people.

Our proposal to consider educational *scenes* includes the actors participating and constituting their own movement.

## A Scene of Encounter Between Cultures.

With the outlined perspective, we analyze a concrete *encounter between cultures* in the context of a research project between social scientists and young people from the *cantegriles* (shanty towns in English) of Montevideo. The former was interested in recording and understanding the meaning (or meaninglessness) that the latter attributed to formal education. I will mainly focus on the discourse by one of these, whom they called "Kevin."<sup>16</sup>

## Limitations, Realities, and Potentialities.

A space and time are generated where people from *different cultures* (researchers and the research) *meet*, a *place between* cultures.

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16 See hypertext "Educational experiences of a young man in a Montevideo shantytown."

However, the process that unfolds is *internal* to an activity (research) that belongs to one of the cultures that meet there, not the other. The scenarios, the selection of the young participants, the activities to be carried out, and the time to be dedicated to them were carefully designed and prepared (*invented*) by the researchers as suitable instruments to fulfill the purposes of a certain culture.

At the same time, these activities open, create, generate, and produce and are places of *intercultural encounter*. They are *guided* by researchers, who enable the circulation of the young people's words—*make them speak*—and make them *listeners* (and later interpreters) of the voice of others.

It is not an educational place nor one of dialogues. There is no exchange, discussion, feedback, suggestions, decision-making, or proposals for future actions. Nor is there violence or denial of the other. It would seem that once finished, no paths remain open for continuity or follow-up. There is no continuation of activities towards *intercultural dialogue*.

It was a strong *educational experience* for its participants. It will impact those young people who are not usually listened to by others, nor do they speak. It will influence them in unpredictable ways in their future actions. But we will not know that. They are not from our culture, from our group.

For the researchers, it was a tense and productive *educational* experience, learning, thinking, growing sensitivity, commitment, and intellectual demand experience. It will influence their future actions, and we are finding out about this because they communicate it to their communities, paving the way for new *scenes*, which, in some way, will continue their movement in other *places*. I even wrote a joint article with some of them.

However, there still needs to be places for sustained intercultural dialogue.

## What Educational Problem?

What educational problem occurs in this scene? Considering this will enable us to consider how *to reposition the discussion about current educational issues* using the framework of intercultural dialogue.

In the presentation I just made, I assumed that between the researchers and young people from the Uruguayan *cantegriles*, there is a distance similar to what Kusch identifies between peasants and researchers in northern Argentina. This distance is not smaller than that which separates the authors of the Altamira paintings from the tourists who manage to visit them.

It could be misunderstood that the Argentine researcher, who assumes a tradition with Western roots, understands that the difference in crops by peasants of indigenous cultural tradition is evident, which creates an intercultural gap and blocks dialogue. Therefore, this does not apply to the relationship between young people from Montevideo and teachers, professors, and researchers from the same place.

On the contrary, considering the discourse of “the Kevin” about education will allow us to discover the geocultural gaps created everywhere in today’s world and lead us to think about educational problems from a different perspective.<sup>17</sup>

In Uruguay, it is believed that one of our primary *educational problems* lies in the difficulty of (re)integrating marginalized young people (the “neither-no,” those who neither work nor study) into the formal educational system, which is expected to transmit knowledge and useful skills to compete under equal opportunities in today’s world. Conventional *social-educational policies* promote various more or less specific actions for this purpose.<sup>18</sup> Even the Army has offered to *educate them*.

Based on the investigation, it emerges that the issue of school dropout or failure is not the educational problem of these young people. It is the failure of an education system that denies their otherness, attempts to change their ways of being, and *transfers them* to cultures, spaces, and groups that are *foreign* to them. They resist this, even if it means staying away, but remaining in the slums, squares, streets, and other “non-places” of the city.

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17 I found this observation by Kusch illuminating: “...our resources are from another culture which is the popular one” and “as I already demonstrated once, it is ‘Indigenous’ but in the sense of non-colonized, in the same measure as French slang generates Indians in the suburbs of Paris” (“Aportes a una filosofía nacional” 1979, in OC. IV, 27). My proposal is to think of liberating education as places of inter-geo-cultural encounter in dialogues.

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18 At the time of the research, the young people interviewed were in official “reintegration” programs.

## Educational Institutions According to Kevin

From primary school, Kevin feels at least uncomfortable in a formal education strange to his life. He learns to adapt to a world that is not his own: “not to be out of place, to have respect for older people.” He learns to remain silent and obey: “They told me something; I kept quiet and did it.” Submission and silence are survival strategies too: “I knew it would serve me.”

His rejection of a secondary education that rejects him is expressed in a term that marks a radical valuation distinction between the ‘us’ of the young people from cantegril and everyone involved in education (teachers and students). “They are arrogant, you can tell, the way they talk, the way they look, the way they all stand together,” “they are all arrogant.” An anthropological and ethical distinction criterion that guides judgments and (re)actions that deny those others. And it suggests violent actions: “It makes you want to... all of them together, tie them all up and slap them in the face!”

When educational institutions can no longer offer these adolescents anything other than *repeating* courses, they try to *retain them* by making it *mandatory* or *attractive*, and by creating ways to *reintegrate them*. But they drop out, come back in, and gradually withdraw. They are stigmatized: *dropouts*, *failures*, “*neither-nor*” They assume failure as their own.

Kevin finds no place in the world; he will live without meaning, and he will die soon: “I regret being born, I am sick of being alive, I am a bandit, my life is a garbage dump, at 25 I will die”.

Soon, the repressive system comes into play. Delinquent (or not), Kevin is interned in a INAU “home.”<sup>19</sup> There, he learns to “learn a hard lesson,” to have “good behavior,” and to avoid punishments. But the rejection deepens: “I hated everyone.”

He begins to take an autonomous (supportive, rebellious) moral position: “I do not get anyone’s rules; I do not like orders; I make my own rules.” Also supportive: “I always helped.”

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19 Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents”

## The Real School According to Kevin

Kevin says he did not learn “anywhere; everything was on the streets,” “all alone, without anyone.” A very specific “nowhere” and among many with “the love of my life and my nightmare,” “/I learned/ to listen, to give advice, to not feel alone.” “On the streets, you will find love, you will find respect, you will find hatred, friends, you will find enemies. You will find many things, but at the same time, you will find nothing.” Meeting place: of everyone and no one; of everything and nothing: “This is the school, this is the real school, that of always studying, filling notebooks with words, that is not school, this is school.”

When Kevin is asked to imagine an educational place, learning appears in the sense of an *encounter* between humans that enables the configuration of meanings, human lives: “A place where life is learned. You have to learn, learn to walk, learn to see people, learn to listen to them.” A place to learn to be human among humans. A place to continue and deepen the vital encounters of *the street*, opening them up beyond the close group in dialogue with others who are geographically, culturally, and age-wise different. Education as vital encounter, reflection, and dialogue, not as the accumulation of knowledge that might be helpful.

It is also a place to learn to *survive* in a world where relationships, the value, and the meaning of things and human beings are subordinated to money: “Learning how to manage money, learning what money is; many things.”

## Meanings Attributed to Educations by the Actors

The research suggests that adolescents who have been through the formal public education system perceive it as a “void”, a “nothingness”, an “absence of meaning”, a space and time where nothing happens to them, which “does not affect them.” According to this, this experience would have no educational effects. It would be something like a non-education, something that does not take place, a timeless non-space, a non-geoculture, a suspension of the human.

In contrast, they also conclude that these young people attribute to this education the significance of actions against them, “to deny and negate who they are;” they ex-

perience it as an “alien,” “strange,” “arbitrary, absurd or unfair” education, which does not allow them to “form” or “transform” themselves and that inscribes “failure as a mark” in them (Ruiz Barbot, 2015). An institution, then, that affects them, alienates them, a danger that threatens their existence; a form of attack on their way of life from which they must defend themselves. In this line, intercultural conflict and the conflict between different ways of being human are more adequately visualized.

*Meeting* places become areas of conflict, of imposition of some over others. The research observes that educational institutions (their actors, broad sectors of society) perceive these young people as *responsible* for situations of social insecurity. They are placed “as foreigners” or as those who “do not learn,” “cannot,” “do not know.” Or “who do not want to learn, who do not want to be someone in life.” Or who have “learning difficulties” or “social pathologies.” They are constituted as *the problem*: they are “dangerous,” “violent,” “aggressive,” “anomic,” They are “freaks;” they are “what one should not be.” “They would have to (...) be corrected, straightened out, normalized, silenced, denied.” “The pedagogical order must erase them.” They must be taught that it is wrong to be this way and that it is right “to be that which they are not, that which they are not being and that they will never be” (Ruiz Barbot, 2015) [Translated quote from its original in Spanish].

I am proposing to change the point of view that makes educational spaces places of conflict and imposition of one way of being human, one sense of existence over others. Rethink *public education* as an *agora* that *starts* from cultural diversity and its conflicts among its actors to create *educational places* that are rather places of *intercultural encounters and dialogue*. Each *classroom*: a scene of encounters and dialogue between cultures and people. Discussions on education and places of dialogue between cultures.

## Citizen Geocultures and their Educations

The “globalized” world produces territorial fragmentations. In luxurious gated communities, elite schools, and clubs, the children and grandchildren of the major consumers wall in. Very close (in “blind spots” of the center,<sup>20</sup> in abandoned places that turn into

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20 For example, a study of “kilometer 0” (Plaza Libertad or Cagancha) and the “Old City” of Montevideo can be seen (Fraiman and Rossal, 2011).



slums, in nooks and crannies of streets and squares, on the edges of cities, but always at *immeasurable distances*, as in “parallel worlds,” invisibilized from each other, speechless, without communication, with mutual fear), the discardable and non-recyclable “waste” of “competitiveness” and consumerism accumulates: garbage, lead, people. Makeshift homes, *cantegriles*, and other types of long-lasting, increasingly extensive, and growingly populated precarious housing units “sprout” in these places, *habitats* covered by the cultures that form human groups in this “intersection between the geographical and the cultural.” Human beings *from* and *in* “new” *geocultural units*, where “Indigenous” people are generated in the sense of “non-colonized.”

Upon entering school, Kevin is already being shaped by the geoculture of the group to which he has been assigned individually (singularly and collectively with his families, neighbors, and “peers”). He continues to educate himself in *his* group’s own ways of being. The *particular* culture embodied in these young people enables them to build their meanings of life through their experiences. He continues to be educated in the *cantegrile*, in the harshness of the *street*, among his own people, despite his mother abandoning him and his father dying. His circumstances condition him, but they do not *dehumanize* him; they enable an *endogenous* development, though oppressed.

From *his* geoculture framework, Kevin responds to questions about the meaning of education with his rejection of formal education, which represents another way of being human. He responds to acts of education that do not fit into his development and change process but rather aim to *make him different*, to erase his own significance (his identity), and to include him in subordination to another system.

### **The problem of the continuity of his hominization in an intercultural context is raised**

The idea of using the notion of *geoculture* to think interculturally about the educational encounters that take place in small and specific “public education” settings to transform them into spaces of *dialogue*. This highlights potentialities: a) considering everyone as humans; b) viewing educational spaces as places *between cultures*, and not *internal* to one culture that presents itself as universal; c) placing the *teacher* and their *students* in a joint process of improvement through dialogue.

## For Liberating Education from the Perspective of Dialogues Between Cultures

Thinking about *current educational issues* regarding *homanization* processes allows to: (a) outline the *field of education* as a fundamentally *intracultural* process (internal to each culture, which *makes human beings equal as such*, while *making them different from other humans* in the same process); and, therefore, (b) in the multiple places shared by groups and human beings (which today span the world, including “virtual” spaces), it is required to generate spaces *for intergroup and intercultural relations* that consolidate the basic characteristics of the human condition (its variability in diverse societies and cultures of equal condition), and advance in the construction of broader human places.

Although this approach provides a broad orientation criterion for thought and action,<sup>21</sup> it seems to me that adopting the proposal in the educational field is, on the one hand of particular importance and, on the other hand, perhaps less difficult to *try*.

### An Intercultural Perspective for Education

I propose to view educational settings (particularly classrooms) as places of *encounter between* different cultures: (a) the one that gives meaning to the school institution as responsible for incorporating new generations or people who are born or arriving in the territory of a country; and (b) the multiple cultures in which the members of the groups coexisting in formal education are simultaneously being educated—in very different spaces and ways—.

*Public education*, in various nations endeavored to eliminate the *domestic* (separate, private) educations, which were restricted to socioeconomically diverse groups and endowed with *privileges* over others and *open the world* to everyone in the *non-domestic space* of the *public school*. By seating the child of the rich and the poor at the same school desk, giving them the hope of consolidating a nation in internal peace. It sought to homogenize the national culture based on a homogenization that would ensure coexistence within the nation by providing the same education to the children of *gauchos*, doctors, and migrants from the most diverse origins and cultures. The assumption of a universal culture and the ignorance of the *cultural* diversity it entailed

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21 It can impact academic discussions (interdisciplinary, intercultural) and public discussions of policies and regulations at the macro, meso, and micro levels.

led to conflicts linked to religious issues considered *private*, turning *public* education spaces into places of neutrality, reluctant to discussion and dialogue. This, however, gave rise to long and unresolved debates.

Currently, *public* education tends to be reduced to the most impoverished and marginalized sectors, more along charitable lines to address the knowledge gap between these sectors and the privileged ones. It *provides them* with tools to solve their “deficiencies” (not the material ones, of course) that allow them, individually, to “compete” on “equal opportunities” with others to “insert” themselves into the same system that produced their impoverishment and that shows no signs of stopping the creation of spaces such as the *cangetriles*.

Nowadays, public education is not discussed by assuming dialogue as a central function. Rather, discussions about it are not *public* and almost never focus on medium and long-term aspects. Similarly, private education is also removed from *public* discussion. Thus, the education of the *elites* is entrusted to *the private* sector. This effectively returns us to a situation analogous to those before the institutionalization of public education.

Globally, education plays an important role in reproducing the current system. It shapes human beings as if they were of a single universal culture, consistent with the current system, supposedly necessary, desirable, and a guarantee of continuous progress. It transmits ways of thinking, behaviors, knowledge, and skills suited to survive in that world and sustain it with their work.

I suggest considering that current education, both formal and informal (of schools, of various educational settings in which we still call “families,” neighborhoods, and streets, and through the media). It must not be thought of in the various ways of imposing a single type of human being, integrating into a single “world-system,” or a “culture” or “civilization” considered universal. I propose to think about, discuss, and act upon *all education* as a place of *intercultural dialogues*, moving through the different *logos* in which humanity exists.

Euclides Mance proposes the concept of *bem viver* (good living in English) as a “horizon of meaning for the integrated realization of public and private freedoms and for the praxis of liberation aimed at expanding and always improving them” [Translated quote from its original in Spanish]. Along these lines, I hope that my proposal contributes “to the critical understanding of the concrete realization” of these freedoms and praxis

and that the criteria I propose below can operate as “indexes of concrete reality, affirmed or denied in the life of every person at various levels”. Hence, it enables criticism of “relationships of oppression and injustice” and allows, “especially, the criticism of one’s own praxis of liberation.”

I propose discussing some *criteria* for thinking, conducting, and valuing liberating education from the perspective of intercultural dialogue. I attempt to articulate this perspective by transforming educational spaces into places of ‘intercultural dialogue’ with reflection and practice on *philosophical education* experiences that demand, promote, and develop education in dialogues, taken to their deepest and most radical levels.

## A Philosophical Function for Dialogues Between Cultures

The last generations of philosophy teachers in secondary education in Uruguay (in dialogue with colleagues from other countries) have collectively experienced the challenge of facing the responsibilities of “teaching philosophy” and “teaching how to philosophize” in a liberating way in the current challenging global, regional, and national contexts. In our teaching practices and in reflecting and debating them, problems emerged, and perspectives opened up that progressively led us to change the most usual ways of conceiving, planning, practicing, and valuing the teaching of philosophy, understanding it as a practice that is both philosophical and educational, as philosophical education. We have been modifying the ways of approaching it and the contents of its curriculum. We groped our way through *didactic-philosophical* paths and innovative experiences, and we focused on the concept we call the philosophical function, the essential philosophical contribution to any liberating education. A complex, problem-posing to all knowledge, radical, intellectual, and ethical demanding function, which education, in different degrees, fulfills or denies. Although partially, this notion materialized in creating the fertile curricular space called “Critique of Knowledge.”

Furthermore, philosophy, in its strict sense, is intrinsic to the genesis and development of the so-called “Western” culture. It is the *most critical and controversial space* within that culture, where opposing cultures attempt to engage in dialogue. For this reason, the role of philosophy becomes empty when it is enslaved to serve purposes taken for granted or socially legitimized at a specific moment in its history (theology, science,

revolution).<sup>22</sup> Philosophy is not a means or an instrument; it is a space for radical discussion among the most divergent conceptions and disciplines, a space where the beliefs, convictions, and certainties of each time, each group, and each individual are intertwined; however, it is never completely confused because its *critical radicality*. In other words, philosophy is the space of *non-closure* in any culture or certainty, the space where each one —without denying itself— *opens* up to *dia-pathos* (per-pathos in English), *dia-ethos* (per-ethics in English), and *dia-logos* (per-logos in English) with others; of breaking the war, of *opening* up to the uncertain, to a future that is not merely repetitive, and therefore, risky. Unsurprisingly, it unfolds in a multiplicity of opinions and practices, always in conflict with each other and always fruitful.

Simultaneously when “Western culture” (also a *product* of its *philosophy*) can present itself as the embodiment of universal culture, factually enabled by the scientific-technological “revolution,” paradoxically, philosophy appears as a completed task,<sup>23</sup> as already useless. This is because the accumulation of technologies and methods (which daily open up unprecedented problems) also seems to guarantee the *continuity of innovations* that (on the condition of not thinking about them, making their context invisible, or disregarding them; their effects and consequences; of the harmful aspects generated by their deployment) would be sufficient to achieve *well-being* and to maximize the *benefit* of each and everyone. Thus, there would be no *place* for *dia-logos*. Nor for a *philosophy* that is, once again, servile.

The belief in philosophy’s obsolescence rationalizes the constant severings of its teaching (or its banal curricular “mainstreaming”). This is not because one must release from something nonessential but because it is an inconvenient space. Philosophy can be a *place for dialogue* and collective processing of conflicts, through diverse feelings, values, words, and reasons. It can be a place for listening, doubt, questioning, argumentation, dialogue, experimentation with alternatives, and liberating education. But to dominate others requires certainties.

However, philosophy’s liberating potential does not occur automatically or mechanically simply because there is (or is not) a formal curricular segmentation

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22 The scholastic formula *Philosophia ancilla theologiae* (philosophy is the slave of theology) does not change this subordination (which reduces it to rhetorical tricks to convince of what is already accepted) because it is considered a slave of science or a weapon of revolution. The idea of “philosophy” is permanently in question.

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23 A key text in this regard is Heidegger’s: “The End (or end) of Philosophy and the task of Thinking.”

called “philosophy.” In research conducted with colleagues, we advanced in *didactic-philosophical* aspects, which enable and provide a foundation for *orientation criteria* that originate in *our* culture but also manifest possibilities to influence the opening and development of intercultural dialogues. Radical reflection and debates require an awareness of one’s own limits, the need and search for *others*, and *the other*, paths of coexistence.

## Some Characteristics of Philosophical Education

We have been developing tentative criteria to educate in groups of teachers concerned with philosophical education in our specific context, in dialogue with others. In our school classes and courses at the secondary level, we have students who will pursue a wide variety of professions, trades, or jobs. We want to make them and the areas of professional training in philosophy and its teaching become *philosophical spaces*. We want them to have in themselves the characteristics of the philosophy, aiming for those who go through this experience to have the possibility to act philosophically in the public and private spaces where their lives develop.

This collective effort impacts several fields that we will not delve into here.<sup>24</sup> I will limit myself to briefly outlining some of the *characteristics of philosophy* that we consider relevant as criteria for guiding and evaluating educational spaces that aim to be emancipatory. Perhaps they can be synthesized in the *abnormal* nature of the philosophy, in the sense of not taking any *norm* for granted without critical analysis, without discussion, and without considering alternatives.

*Fermentality.* The *philosophy* must be and remain “in a state of *ferment*”: “more amorphous, but more plastic, alive and fermented” (Vaz Ferreira, 1938) [Translated quote from its original in Spanish]. Something must *happen* in philosophical classrooms; it should be a vital experience for everyone. To be amazed by the unknown and barely glimpsed, shake the rigidity of what is already known, question the obvious, encourage the questioning and restless impetus, and give rise to the boiling of proposals and the demand to strive to find paths. It cannot develop within predefined shackles nor

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24 For example, in efforts, which are quite successful, to effectively transform the teaching of philosophy so that it would have these characteristics, to include elements of such education from early childhood and throughout life, to guide the training of teachers in this regard.

culminate in unmoved answers, absolved from criticism and closed to new problems. The life of this trait in classrooms enables the recovery of education from its confinement in an excluding, classifying, selecting, elitist *normality*, or supposedly inclusive in its immobility, but denying others. The philosophy must recover and maintain its *state of ferment*.

*Originality.* Every *philosophical work* is an original. It does not reiterate the previous stories that feed it: it *updates* them. Every philosophical experience in education is a philosophical original. Even in routine, even in repetition, its originality lies in the unique character of the ephemeral place and time that educational spaces are, which move encounters and disagreements, misunderstandings and aggressions, ideas and debates, and interpretations and inventions among different people. Each classroom is *an educational work* between teachers and students. A living work enjoyed or suffered and then valued and discussed, with *original* and unpredictable *philosophical effects*.

*Insecurity, fallibility.* The *rigorously philosophical* is and is known to be fallible and debatable. There are no *norms* that guarantee the intended or projected *effects*. There is no *resource* that always works: every success can be turned into an obstacle; every failure can open paths. There is no educational *mandate*. The philosophical classroom lives in the open, in uncertainty, without guarantee, at risk. That is why it is *educational*.

*Non-obsolescence.* Every philosophical *product* (every *work of philosophy*) is current, and all its *instruments* are valid. The philosophical restarts each time with radical ruptures regarding something that does not thereby become obsolete. It lives in dialogue and debates even when it tries to make it impossible.<sup>25</sup> Technologies quickly become obsolete, replaced by more efficient ones that make them useless, broken, irretrievable, and abandoned. The philosophy discusses meanings and purposes that are not technical matters. Its questions can always be reconsidered, its conclusions questioned, its works revisited, and its instruments reused. It is not, for example, about replacing one philosophy (or one education) with another “new,” more effective, as one discards an old cell phone to acquire the most powerful and newest one (or does not, waiting for the *future novelty*), or does not know where to throw away their ephemeral *fax*. It is a matter of thinking, questioning, discussing, dialoguing, creating. In this task, no resource can be discarded.

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25 Deleuze and Guattari say that philosophy makes dialogue impossible. By asserting this, they enter into dialogue with those who claim (like Castoriadis) that philosophy is dialogue.

*Radicality.* It is the challenge of addressing underlying, principle, radical, and in-depth problems. It is not merely about liking and positively valuing one's own culture but also recognizing it as problematic, limited, and in need of change. Radicality is a risky challenge in education because it educates vulnerable human beings and this occurs in places of conflicting encounters between cultures and generations with different degrees of power. It is necessary to find ways to unite radicality and care for each other and oneself, ways of building spaces of *experience*, and ways of facing dangers together. But truly *overcome them*. There is no radicality without *care*, and without radicality there is no true care.

*Democratic, egalitarian criterion: No selection of interlocutors.* Educational and philosophical institutions *selected*. Often, they were designed to justify and consolidate social differences. Even today, it is difficult to conceive educational and philosophical forms that do not hierarchize, that privilege some over others, the teacher over the student, the "wise" over the "ignorant," the philosopher over any *sophos* (wise person in English). And this is beyond the intentions. The enduring idea that *merits* justify *privileges*—even the privilege of simply existing. But *philosophizing* is everyone's activity; *educating* implies that we are all *educated*, *educable*, *student*, and *educators*. Selecting interlocutors is closing oneself off to dialogues. In the Socratic *back-and-forth* education, the teacher selected disciples from "*suitable souls*." Plato writes his dialogues, thus making them for everyone; he exposes his *philosophical work* before "anyone" (even his un-pre-dictable future) who wants to discuss *with*, *against*, or *despite* it, keeping the dialogue open between new discourses and new interlocutors. For the philosophical—as for the educational and the human—everyone is competent and, at the same time, fallible. That is the foundation of democracy. Not a universal noise in which everyone speaks at once, but a multiplicity of intercultural spaces of in-depth dialogue without restrictions or end. Nothing human is external to any human; thus, everyone is competent in the philosophical. *Nothing human is external to the philosophy*, and everything human concerns it. It is the basis of all democracy and education.

*Dialogicity.* The activity of *philosophizing* that gives rise to different *philosophies* emerges as a *critical reflection* on itself and as the *creation and refinement of concepts and tools* to better understand (ourselves). *Philosophical radicality*, which questions its own principles, must also engage in *discussion with others*. It is not about *reducing differences* between interlocutors so that everyone knows and thinks the same thing but rather about progressing in dialogue. A philosophical classroom should not be monological. In reflecting on dialogical philosophy classrooms, the necessary elements for advancing toward an education in intercultural dialogue begin to emerge and develop.



*Openness.* Dialogue has *no tribunal*. A process of building a life together in dialogue cannot admit a final ruling, a final arbitraion, or a final judgment. It is always understood as fallible and open to debate by everyone. It remains open to new internal and external dialogues. Openness is both the cause and result of a process that continues to be contingent, historical, and “unfinished.” Humanity is real in its duration and its *place*.

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