

Walter Benjamin and William Corsaro's Contributions to a Human Rights Education Approach with Children¹

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- Walter Benjamin calls our attention to the existence of an ethical life shared by children.
- William Corsaro presents us the empirical data on children's collective organizations.
- Human Rights Education can be a viable source to increase children's social protagonism.

Purpose: This paper aims to discuss Walter Benjamin's Critical Theory and William Corsaro's Sociology of Childhood contributions to a Human Rights Education approach with children. Our intent is to investigate how children's personal experiences can enrich the construction of a differentiated pedagogical model, based on the promotion of attitudes and values infused in the human rights tradition.

Approach: We address this paper to a reflection on the expressions of agency, social engagement, and cultural productions in the course of childhood.

Findings: Our thesis is that Human Rights Education has to recognize the different ethical lives, or subcultures, that compose each educational environment, assuring children's autonomy and social protagonism in the process of identifying human rights violations and organizing strategies to assure social justice.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, Human Rights Education has been seen as an important model to assure the recognition and promotion of human dignity within different educational environments. It revolves not only around the rights of children to learn how to read, write, calculate, and acquire relevant skills of our academic syllabi, but it also entails the process of teaching attitudes and values towards an anti-violence culture.

As such, Human Rights Education (UNESCO, 2006) has been thought of as a strategy for identifying and tackling human rights violations in order to promote "understanding

and respect for all peoples, their cultures, civilizations, values, and ways of life" (UNESCO, 1974, p. 149). Encouraging the protagonist participation of citizens in their own communities, this educational proposal inspires the formation of subjects capable of recognizing themselves as agents of social transformation in the constant struggle for "the effectiveness of democracy, development, social justice, and the construction of a culture of peace" (BRASIL, 2007, p. 11; our translation).

The modification of ethical attitudes is possible through the coexistence of different agents, in the practical and aesthetical experiences that enable the collective elaboration of new paths of agency and social action. In his studies on the genesis of values, Hans Joas (2008) argues that there is an affective dimension in one's identification and commitment to a certain axiological system, which cannot be based upon rational-argumentative discourse. Human Rights Education, therefore, "cannot be achieved without active involvement of the participants and without taking into account their personal and professional experiences" (Moreira & Gomes, 2013, p. 522; our translation).

Hence, we believe that there must be an appreciation of the narratives, cultural beliefs, historical memories, and values that are part of the agents' paths in life. All of these can help us to create an educational scenario rich in experiences and discourses, but also an environment that respect and embrace the student's feelings, limitations, and perspectives on how to change their own communities. Thus, it is very important to assure the democratization of the access to the ethical experiences built within dialogue and collective construction of strategies to resist human rights violations.

In this paper, we rely on the Brazilian and UNESCO's guidelines on Human Rights Education in order to analyze how children's personal experiences can enrich the construction of a differentiated pedagogical model, based on the promotion of attitudes and values infused in the human rights tradition. This paper aims at questioning the existence of an ethical culture of childhood. And yet, if it is possible to access children's cultural world and get to know the differences between childhood and adulthood's culture.

Sociology of Childhood is a valuable source for some of the questions raised in this paper. Questioning the supposed immaturity of children, several Sociology of Childhood researchers took a step into observing children's routine and listening to what they have to say about their own lives (James & Prout, 1990; Sirota, 2001; Corsaro, 2005). The result was a reformulation of theories dedicated to understanding childhood, bringing up discussions about agency, social and political participation, and cultural production, among others.

In the sociological studies of childhood, we are particularly interested in the ethnographic research of William Corsaro. Corsaro's empirical studies articulates the recognition that children "collectively produce peer cultures and contribute to the reproduction of a wider society or culture" (Corsaro, 2018, pp. 86-87) through the interpretative reproduction of the reality shared by the adults. His works provide us an opportunity to question the passive role attributed to children's socialization and to admit that their daily lives are rich in social and cultural productions that, by carelessness or indifference, we are still reluctant to acknowledge.

Prior to the Sociology of Childhood, Walter Benjamin already pointed out the existence of a culture of childhood, whose singular communication standards to the world is described as a rebellion against adult's culture. Being a critic of the adultism that underlies psychological and pedagogical discourses, Benjamin (2002a) identified in the actions of children a potential space for the transformation of reality. For instance, as they play, children can rupture with a reality full of reified and naturalized objects, creating a universe filled with fantasies, artifacts, and values. The child's action is, therefore, social, creative, and revolutionary as it confronts the normativity established by the adults while presenting other concrete possibilities for social action.

In our intent to investigate how children can help us understand the possibilities of a Human Rights Education, we address this paper to a reflection on the expressions of agency, social engagement, and cultural productions in the course of childhood. To achieve our goal, the follo-

wing sections will be directed to the presentation of Walter Benjamin's philosophical analysis of children's agency and its relationship to new paths of social action, followed by William Corsaro's empirical documentation of what Benjamin presents as "culture of childhood", as well as the sociologist's perspective on children's social and cultural participation. Finally, we discuss the contributions of Benjamin's Critical Theory and Corsaro's Sociology of Childhood to a Human Rights Education approach with children.

2 CHILDHOOD CULTURE IN WALTER BENJAMIN

Walter Benjamin extensive framework has influenced several scientific areas and, at least since the 1980s, has become a theoretical force in studies on childhood and children's education (Galzerani, 2002; Kramer, 2006; Rossetto, 2011). In Benjamin's thought, childhood is much more than just a development stage towards adult life. It acquired the philosophical status of the unspeakable, or of what does not fit in the language corrupted and reified by the daily catastrophes and routines, given that the term *infância* [childhood], from its Latin roots, means not speaking. Its essence of the unspeakable is by no means related to the lack of experience. On the contrary, childhood is directly linked to the experience that can emancipate the future from the disfigured present and release humanity (Agamben, 1993; Witte, 2017). In barbarism, or in the ruins of the self-annihilation of culture, childhood, through play, is the space of reconstruction. In this section, our intent is to highlight, from Benjamin himself, what could be called childhood culture and the need for its empirical study.

What Benjamin realized about childhood, only scientifically formalized a half century later, can be described as a communication differentiated from adults' language, a rebellion against adult culture, a true "children's play commune" (Benjamin, 2005a). The polysemy of the term "commune" draws our attention both to a community of values and to the character of independence that the term carries since the end of Middle Ages. The recognition of childhood's own culture, with a particular ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) that expresses itself in playing, is characterized as a serious resistance to adultism and to a hypostatized essence of childhood as a phase of passivity towards adulthood.

The first contributions to the study of childhood we highlight in Benjamin works are found on his opposition to idealism, adultcentrism, and psychologism. Against the first, Benjamin denounces that the "bourgeois society hypostatizes an absolute childhood" (Benjamin, 2005b, p. 273), an essentialism of what it is to be a child is aggravated when adults describe such essence in an ethnocentric way. Children lose their agency and historicity when adultism and essentialism disguise as psychological science: "their [the pedagogues] infatuation with psychology keeps them from perceiving that the world is full of the most unrivaled objects for children's attention and use" (Benjamin, 2002b, p. 449). As one of Benjamin's biographers argues:

"In an extremely antipsychological and anti-idealistic way, he bases the formation of the child's identity in the socially conditioned space of one's daily life. Architecture and furniture [...] always emerge again [...] as a cipher for that false 'second nature'" (Witte, 2017, p. 13; our translation).

Hence, the child's action is that of deciphering the falsity of everyday life.

To become a child, therefore, is to grow up within the context of reified adult life, learning to decipher it at the same time as, in play, a world of magic and refuge is built. However, to live in an unfair and false world affects the possibilities of what the child may become. The unequal organization of the world transposes its falsity into the child's identity, being in his or her activity that the child experiments "rare moments in which [...] one becomes oneself, insofar one escapes one's class" (Witte, 2017, p. 14; our translation).

In his reflections on toys and games, Benjamin highlights the fact that adults impose cult objects, such as rattles that frighten evil spirits, to children who, thanks to their imagination, convert these objects into toys. Nevertheless, not every relationship with adults is an act of violence. The mother can be a model of the transmission of experiences through the narrative, which, long before speech, expresses itself in gestures and in the body: "caresses laid a bed for this current. I loved them, for in my mother's hand there were stories rippling, which I might later hear from her lips" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 363).

Thus, there would be in the child's world a subtle communication alternative to the common and reified language of everyday life. From the cozy gestures to narratives, passing through playing, there are the signals of experience. What we want to point out from here is another important leap in Benjamin's reflections: children are capable of this transgressive communication in relation to not only an adult or an object, in a monological way, but they create among them a childhood communication capable of morally adjusting and correcting the reified world of adults. In his essay² on the proletarian children's theatre, Benjamin explains this idea, which, without much effort, can be extended to a broader education.

"The overhasty, unrelaxed process of educational labor that the bourgeois director performs - far too late - on the bourgeois actor no longer applies in this system. Why? Because in the children's club no leader would survive if he attempted in the authentic bourgeois spirit to influence the children directly as a "moral personality." There is no process of moral influence here. There is no direct influence either. [...] What counts is simply and solely the indirect influence of the director on the children as mediated by subject matter, tasks, and performances. The inevitable moral processes of compensating and providing correctives are undertaken by the children's collective itself. This explains why children's theater productions inevitably strike adults as having authentic moral authority. There is no superior standpoint that an audience can adopt when witnessing children's theatre. Everyone who has not quite sunk into feeble-mindedness will perhaps even feel ashamed." (Benjamin, 2005c, p. 765)

The playing and its consequences are not restricted to the child's environment. "After all, a child is no Robinson Crusoe; children do not constitute a community cut off from everything else. They belong to the nation and the class they come from". Playing is not a segregated act, but "a silent signifying dialogue between them and their nation" (Benjamin, 2005d, p. 116) that can be deciphered.

If we take into account that childhood is collectively endowed with its own code, a childhood grammar, we can say that it constitutes an ethical community. At this moment, it is worth to recall one of Benjamin's first publications, on moral education, where he claims that "the ethical community systematically experiences the conversion of the norm into a legal empirical order" (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 14). We shall remember that, for Benjamin, freedom is a condition for ethical life, which can only assume an empirical character in the community's ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). The term "norm", therefore, states much more a "normativity" than an adequacy to "normality". Concisely, childhood is empirically characterized by a culture with norms and its own code. The damages of the adult's ethnocentrism as violence against children and blindness to the opening of history, by means of the experience of childhood, of non-language, could be revised from childhood anthropology. "Such an anthropology would be nothing other than a debate with child psychology, which would have to be replaced with detailed records [...] of the actual experiences [...] of children in kindergartens" (Benjamin, 2005b, p. 275).

If we did not completely sink into stupidity in relation to the culture of childhood, perhaps it is still possible for us to feel ashamed. This feeling can mobilize us to struggle for the recognition of childhood, towards the comprehension that the subtle communication of children is not an

easy topic: “almost every childlike gesture is a command and a signal in a world which only a few unusually perceptive men [...] have glimpsed” (Benjamin, 2005c, p. 767). One of the most outstanding among such perceptive men, today, is William Corsaro.

3 WILLIAM CORSARO AND INTERPRETATIVE REPRODUCTION

In order to unravel a universe of silent signals, we must build up, among children, an interaction as authentic as the expressions of their culture. Being an atypical adult is a difficult mission; however, the sociological experiences of William Corsaro show us that sensibility can be an important step taken on our way to the acknowledgment of children's agency and social protagonism. In this section, we aim to present the paths taken by his sociology towards the careful acquisition, documentation, and analyses of detailed records capable of apprehending, without falling into the same errors of psychological idealism, the everyday aspects of a childhood culture.

As Walter Benjamin, Corsaro identifies the existence of a symbolic barrier that prevents us from giving voice to children's cultural productions. In our attempt to protect them, we usually direct our attention to what we can do to guarantee that they will “become healthy, happy, and productive adults” (Corsaro, 2005, p. 02). This approach, encouraged by child development specialists, emphasizes the child's journey towards the achievement of the skills and competences required for adult life.

Corsaro (2018) exposes the adultcentrism behind this perspective by revealing its progressive and individualistic connotation, whose primacy for the prospective analysis of individual development blinds us to the wealth of childhood cultural productions. The author invites us to break free from the individualist doctrines that consider children's socialization as a linear process of mere adaptation and internalization of society, for the reason that socialization is also “a process of appropriation, reinvention, and reproduction” (Corsaro, 2018, p. 18).

In the friendly confines of everyday life, children are capable to reproduce the adult world scenarios and to interpret them creatively, finding, among the mutilated possibilities within adult's constricted routines, new ways of subverting the order of things.

In his attempt to conceptually apprehend the experiences of the creative appropriation of reality, Corsaro (2009a) adopted the concept of “interpretative reproduction” to refer to the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society, as well as their role in the production and modification of culture. “Central to this view of socialization is the appreciation of the importance of collective, communal activity — how children negotiate, share, and create culture with adults and each other” (Corsaro, 2018, p. 18). Therefore, the concept arises in opposition to both the adultcentrism and individualism present in the traditional theories of socialization and human development, emphasizing children's agency and the collective character of their social participation.

An essential element of interpretative reproduction is the predictability of routine, as its habitual character “provides children and all social actors with the security and shared understanding of belonging to a social group” (Corsaro, 2018, p. 19). Consistent in themselves, but always in transformation, cultural routines provide the necessary confidence for children to deal with the doubt, conflict, and anguish of not understanding the language shared by adults' world.

The feeling of belonging to secure and predictable routines allows them to become aware of new possibilities and creative experimentations. “By participating in the routine, children are learning a set of predictable rules that provide security, and they also are learning that a range of embellishments of the rules is possible and even desirable.” (Corsaro, 2018, p. 20). By doing so, the child “overcomes the illusory barrier [...] and passes through colored textures and brightly painted partitions to enter a stage” (Benjamin, 2008, p. 226) where it is possible to live the narrative constructed in one's fantasies.

Playing is perhaps the most privileged interactive space where interpretative reproduction can embrace the production of new narratives. When spontaneous, the act of playing announces the transformation of the objects arranged in the world and invites the child to shared interactions, since

“Kids are social. They want to be involved, to participate, and to be part of the group. I saw little solitary play in my many years of observation in preschools. And when children did play alone or engaged in parallel play (a type, most common among toddlers, in which children play alongside of but not really with each other in a coordinated fashion), it seldom lasted for long. They were soon doing things together.” (Corsaro, 2005, p. 36).

Reunited, children organize a playful community: roles are defined and the plot of the narrative, even though built up in the course of playing, is consensually established between peers. This children's play commune, which turns its gaze to the residual elements of the adult world, collectively composes what the author calls “peer culture”. As “general subcultures of a wider culture or society” (Corsaro, 2018, p. 157), the peer cultures are defined as “a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and interests that children produce and share in the interaction with their peers” (Corsaro, 2009a, p. 32; our translation).

Constantly under adults' care or guardianship, children find in their peer culture a potential space to claim for the recognition of their own autonomy. Children satirize our habits, question our values, and redefine the patterns we institute as truth by means of apparently harmful interventions. Their revolutions confront adult authority, crying out for a new normative organization of the shared reality.

However, the individual acquisition of this sample of freedom is not the most important thing: the guarantee that all the members of the children's play commune will be able to enjoy the conquered autonomy is (Corsaro, 2005). “By sharing a communal spirit as members of peer cultures, children come to experience how being a member of a group affects both themselves as individuals and how they relate to others” (Corsaro, 2018, p. 185).

As a mean to unravel this dialogue of silent signals, the researcher had to carefully establish his participant status as an atypical adult, someone who was not worried to empirically prove what the child development specialists say *about* childhood. Corsaro developed detailed records that capture the “everyday” aspects of children in their peer cultures, that is, “their routines, the beliefs that guide their actions, and the language and other symbolic systems that mediate all these contexts and activities” (Corsaro, 2009b, p. 85; our translation). The preference for the ethnographic method is related to its descriptive power; to the possibility of documentation through the analysis of conversations and recording in audio or video; to the method's ability to “incorporate the form, function, and context of the behavior of specific social groups into the data” (p. 83; our translation), by means of the immersion of the researcher in the context investigated. The interpretative evaluation of the collected data oscillates between a microscopic and holistic analysis of the creative experiments of the peer culture: each interaction is investigated in its singularities; yet, “the multiple contexts in which these behaviors occur and the socially established codes of communication from which they derive” are taken into account to describe “the event and how it was understood by the actors themselves” (Corsaro, 2009b, p. 86; our translation; see also Geertz, 1973).

Another critical aspect of Corsaro's protocols is the flexibility of the method and its self-correction. Although there is an outline of the structural dimension of its empirical observation, the research with children should not expect that the creative experiments of childhood turn into static and predictable actions. Faced with the spontaneity of the agents, it is up to the researcher to reevaluate one's methodological strategies and to correct them throughout the whole process, since

“It is impossible for the researcher to foreknow how to formulate interview questions that are applied to participants whose communication standards differ from one’s own. More than that, how to present one’s research and oneself as a researcher to informants, and how to position oneself in the social sphere in order to allow a better observation of the phenomenon of interest.” (Corsaro, 2009b, p. 87; our translation)

In this way, the researcher’s job is to “attribute meaning to observations of specific activities and behaviors” (Corsaro, 2009b, p. 85; our translation) by calling attention to what children do when they are together, making them consultants of the empirical data’s interpretative analysis.

Corsaro’s ethnographic documentation reveals a moral, creative, and communitarian grammar that does not fit in the adult hypostatized discourse about childhood. With sensitivity to listening what kids have to say, the sociologist has broken some of the symbolic barriers that marginalize childhood in an attempt to draw a new course into researches with children.

Among children’s play community, the renowned professor became an atypical adult who, as a child he studied would say, sometimes “does not know what he’s talking about” (Corsaro, 2009b, p. 98; our translation). The unprecedented experience of witnessing the interpretive reproduction in action allowed Bill, affectionate nickname given by children, to have the honor of being invited to participate in the magic experience of seeing the world through the eyes of a child, acknowledging, in the most authentic way, that “social participation and sharing are the heart of kids’ peer culture” (2005, p. 37).

3 HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Although they are influenced by different experiences and theoretical references, Walter Benjamin and William Corsaro’s arguments point out to the interpretative reproduction of our own attitude towards childhood. The authors give us indications of the existence of an ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) in peer culture, as they unravel the symbolic barriers that prevent us from acknowledging the creative and cultural autonomy of children’s play commune.

In this scenario, if we are in agreement with the world guidelines on Human Rights Education, then it is worth considering children’s own contribution to ending “the structures of injustice and social discrimination” (Brasil, 2013, p. 37; our translation).

In Brazil, the Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente [Child and Adolescent Statute] is structured around the legal recognition that children are social agents entitled with “civil, human, and social rights guaranteed in the Constitution” (Brasil, 1990; our translation). The ethical-political commitment with children’s citizenship follows the recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Arantes, 2009). The Convention assures, in its 12th article, to “the child, who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child” (The United Nations Organization, 1989, p. 04).

The freedom of thought is extremely important for children to partake on their community, accessing “information and ideas of all kinds” (The United Nations Organization, 1989, p. 04) in order to seek out for participation in problem-solving discussions. Nevertheless, whenever we turn our attention to the empirical implications of these set of laws and international recommendations, we realize that children are still excluded from decision-making spaces in their own families, communities, and society in general.

As previously discussed, cultural obstacles prevents us from acknowledging children’s agency and social participation. In an attempt to assure the materialization of their fundamental rights and human dignity, we have neglected children’s right to be heard. Adults have been not only leading the debates on children’s political agenda, but we have also determined what is required for a child’s “healthy and harmonious development” (Brasil, 1990) without even listening to what

they have to say about their own lives. By overstepping their right to speak for themselves, we have been undermining the expressions of agency and social participation children try to communicate us every day.

Even though we can list several advances in this matter, children are still defined as individuals in process of development, who within the social structure are conditioned to the internalization of the normativity instituted by adults (Qvortrup, 2009). Thus, the possibilities of agency in the course of childhood are often limited to children's "private internalization of adults' skills and knowledge" (Corsaro, 2018, p. 128) that could assure their passive integration into society.

If we consider children's agency as a passive process of social adaptation, then the function of the school is to adapt the child to the reality and social codes shared by adults. When intended to adapt the child for an adult life, education contributes to the reproduction of a socio-cultural structure that neglects the child's experience and social contributions. Considering that, viewed as incomplete subjects that require the protection of an adult, children's actions would only have social value if their means and consequences corroborated with the maintenance of the normativity instituted by adults.

Therefore, Human Rights Education must be established as a potential space for the recognition of children's agency and social participation. It is imperative that educators can guarantee children's autonomy and social protagonism in the process of identifying human rights violations and organizing strategies to assure social justice.

In order to do so, it is fundamental to put aside attitudes and discourses that guide us to the marginalization of the narratives and ethical experiences produced within the culture of childhood. In addition, the educational environment must develop a sensitive listening to the opinions, moral grammars, belief systems, and artifacts produced by children themselves as they collectively organize their own peer cultures.

In this process, the educator's role is not restricted to the observation of children's interactions and moral grammars. As we have previously discussed in Benjamin's philosophical articulations, childhood culture is not immune to the social structures that establish inequalities and violence. Children also reproduce the injustices they witness in their daily lives, whether in their interpretative reproduction of reality or in their interactions with other children.

Thus, as mediators in the process of learning about and putting human rights into practice, our role is to disrupt the reproduction of violence and help children to reflect on the consequences of attitudes, values, and discourses that violate human dignity. In order to assist them, we must create an environment where children can feel safe to share their feelings and limitations, learning with them how to choose new paths of agency and social action. As a two-way street, this process demands our commitment to the interpretative reproduction of the hypostasized reality that we, adults, have learned to naturalize and unlearned to transform.

As a result of their research with children in the Amazon region of Brazil, Karlsson and Silva (2017) argue that the construction of an educational environment that embraces children's social protagonism rely on the transformation of the educational models based on the docilization of children's bodies through obedience and the imposition of a set of rules, norms, and time schedules that suppress the creative expressions of their agency. For the children interviewed in the course of Karlsson and Silva's research, the teachers' authoritarian posture prevented them from learning with each other, since the absorption of school content was more important than sharing their perceptions and the experiences they lived within their families and communities.

What this experience teaches us is that we have to overcome the social and cultural structures that treat children as incomplete and immature, recognizing their right to be heard and to have an active participation in the social spaces they occupy. In a human rights educational program, we are compelled to prioritize listening over saying, giving children opportunities to express their opinions without the fear of being reprimanded, to participate on the elaboration of the school's activities and routines, to create new moral grammars with their peers, and (re)learn how to be protagonists of their own lives.

5 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

From Benjamin, we have learned that the word “childhood” carries the complex meaning of another culture that expresses its experience beyond language or, at least, apart from the reified language. It is not a philosophical abstraction, but an empirical order that profoundly connects children and community, denouncing, if we analyze carefully, the passivity imposed to childhood as only a phase towards adulthood.

That is why Benjamin calls our attention to the expressions of agency in the course of childhood, to the children’s ability to decipher and subvert the falsehood of adults’ everyday life. As mediation between the child and his or her community, we can identify a double relationship with adults and the existence of a relationship between children. The first may be both the imposition of a cult of adult culture, which can be creatively transformed into playing, or as the transmission of experience through the gestural or oral narrative. Among children, Benjamin points to a childhood empirical order, the culture of childhood.

With Corsaro, we have the data on children’s collective organizations, the empirical realization of those detailed records from anthropology of childhood proposed by Benjamin in the first half of the 20th century. In his *Sociology of Childhood*, the sociologist presents us records of playful situations that reveal children’s expressions of agency and social participation. He reminds us that the routines constitute an ethical life in which children can creatively reproduce the wider culture from their childhood subcultures, something that he denominates “peer culture”. Moreover, Corsaro’s work offers a creative review on what is to be an adult inside childhood culture. It is close to what Benjamin understands as the adult as a transmitter of experience, but also highlights the adult as a receiver of children’s experience.

In this scenario, Human Rights Education must recognize the different ethical lives, or subcultures, that compose each educational environment. It is imperative that educators are able to guarantee a sensitive listening to the expressions of children’s autonomy, agency, and social participation, but also to help them realize how our own attitudes and values can reproduce violence and establish social injustice.

As Brazilians, the opportunity to write this paper presents itself at a critical moment in the field of human rights. The authoritarian posture of our current president is a threat to participatory democracy, as well as to the attempts to expand the right to social participation. For this reason, deepening the debate on children’s social and political protagonism and their right to active participation in their families, schools, communities, and in society in general has become imperative for us.

If we consider Human Rights Education a viable source to increase children’s social protagonism, we have to reflect on its social impact. What are the concrete conditions for its materialization? Which methodologies can help us to promote cooperation between different social agents and engage them in the daily struggles for Human Rights? What are the political, ethical, social, ethnical, and cultural challenges for the application of Human Rights Education? Beyond that, we have to analyze how adult-centrism has affected the formulation of public policies and institutional strategies to promote children’s right and define their political agenda.

These questions have been circumscribing our current researches, in which the writings of Benjamin and Corsaro have been helping us not only to overcome the socio-cultural barriers that prevent us from acknowledging children’s agency, but also to become atypical adults, teachers, and friends worthy of being on the trenches by their side.

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ENDNOTES

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² We are grateful to one of our anonymous reviewers for drawing our attention to the aporetic character of the Benjamin's pedagogical advices, which are part of an abandoned program. It is worth mentioning that Benjamin did not idealize childhood as a lost paradise to be relived. According to Jeanne Marie Gagnebin (1997), what interests Benjamin is the attempt to elaborate a double experience with childhood: that in the present, the adult can reflect on the paths not covered in the course of childhood in order to realize the possible forgotten or repressed in a critical reinterpretation of adult life. For the author, the child "sees what the adult no longer sees, the poor people who live in the pores below the window, or as smaller figures on the base of the statues raised for the winners" (Gagnebin, 1997, p. 182; our translation). Our approach in this paper is based upon a Brazilian researches' tradition that has found in different educational contexts – quilombola, indigenous, and the Landless Worker's Movement – resonances of Walter Benjamin's reflections.