

Chapter 21

Small, Silent, and (In)Significant: Childhood as a Minoritarian Experience of Education



Magda Costa-Carvalho

Eu acho que isso é a filosofia em si: pega numa ideia simples e torna-a especial (I think that this is philosophy: take a simple idea and make it special. English translation by Ricardo Rozzi and Roy May).

Afonso Junco (12 anos)

Il existe d'autres cas où, pendant un temps plus ou moins long, une catégorie a réussi à en dominer absolument une autre. C'est souvent l'inégalité numérique qui confère ce privilège: la majorité impose sa loi à la minorité ou la persécute. Mais les femmes ne sont pas comme les Noirs d'Amérique, comme les Juifs, une minorité: il y a autant de femmes que d'hommes sur terre (There are other cases where, for a shorter or longer time, one category has managed to dominate another absolutely. It is often numerical inequality that confers this privilege: the majority imposes its law on or persecutes the minority. But women are not a minority like American blacks, or like Jews: there are as many women as men on the earth.) English Translation: Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books, New York, p. 27).

Simone de Beauvoir, Le Deuxième Sexe, p. 22

No pretende la Ética de la Liberación ser una filosofía crítica para minorías, ni para épocas excepcionales de conflicto o revolución. Se trata de una ética cotidiana, desde y en favor de las inmensas mayorías de la humanidad excluidas de la globalización, en la 'normalidad' histórica vigente presente. Las éticas filosóficas más de moda, las standards y aun las que tienen algún sentido crítico, con pretensión de ser pos-convencionales, son éticas de minorías (claro que minorías hegemónicas, dominantes, las que tienen los recursos, la palabra, los argumentos, el capital, los ejércitos) que frecuentemente pueden cínicamente ignorar a las víctimas, a los dominados y afectados-excluidos de las "mesas de negociaciones" del sistema vigente, de las comunidades de comunicación dominantes. . . (The Ethics of Liberation does not pretend to be a critical philosophy for minorities, nor for exceptional times of conflict or revolution. It is an everyday ethic, from and in favor of the vast majority of humanity excluded from globalization, in the current historical 'normality' in force today. The most fashionable

philosophical ethics, the standards and even those that have some critical sense, pretending to be post-conventional, are minority ethics (of course hegemonic, dominant minorities, those who have the resources, the word, the arguments, capital, armies) that can frequently cynically ignore the victims, the dominated and affected-excluded from the 'tables of negotiations' of the current system, and of the dominant communication media. . . . English translation by Ricardo Rozzi and Roy May).

Enrique Dussel, Ética de la Liberación, p. 15

Les minorités et les majorités ne se distinguent pas par le nombre. Une minorité peut être plus nombreuse qu'une majorité. Ce qui définit la majorité, c'est un modèle auquel il faut être conforme: par exemple l'Européen moyen adulte mâle habitant des villes. . . . Tandis qu'une minorité n'a pas de modèle, c'est un devenir, un processus. On peut dire que la majorité, ce n'est personne. Tout le monde, sous un aspect ou un autre, est pris dans un devenir minoritaire qui l'entraînerait dans des voies inconnues s'il décidait à le suivre (The difference between minorities and majorities isn't their size. A minority may be bigger than a majority. What defines the majority is a model you have to conform to: the average European adult male city-dweller, for example. . . . A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it's a becoming, a process. One might say the majority is nobody. Everybody's caught, one way or the other, in a minority becoming that would lead them into unknown paths if they opted to follow it through. English Translation: Deleuze, G. (1995)

Negotiations, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 173). Gilles Deleuze, Pourparlers, p. 235

Abstract It is possible to question and deconstruct the roots of some educational conceptions of childhood through approaches that find different ways of thinking about children, childhood, and even to experience education. Philosophy has contributed to some of these approaches by deconstructing and reconstructing the Western dominant ideas of rationality and its uses in education. In this chapter, I will approach these critical movements through disruptive provocations grounded in three concepts: *small*, *silent*, and *(in)significant*. These concepts are commonly associated with descriptive and normative images of childhood: what it is and is expected of children. By retaking these concepts, I will problematize the impact of Western rationality on the ways education has been thought and practiced.

Keywords Philosophy · Childhood · Minority · Political Agency · Voice

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21.1 Introduction

This reflection begins with three concepts—small, silent, and (in)significant—to reconfigure childhood from the margins, and also to question what they might say, on the one hand, about the social stigmatization and political oppression of childhood and, on the other hand, as affirmative powers of different educational practices. The hermeneutical use of small, silent, and (in)significant helps us reevaluate the importance of disregarded voices in educational experiences.

Additionally, I present three projects as differentiated readings of the potentialities present in educational spaces and times. The three educational practices presented in this chapter aim, then, to simultaneously illustrate the lines of analysis that we defend, as well as to give visibility to emancipating and challenging projects. Practices of disturbance, destabilization, and disruption (Murriss 2016, p. 200) are ways to resist the macro dynamics of public policies and common institutional discourses. I present these practices as possible examples among others to inspire educators to engage in distinctive ways of understanding childhood education. I have chosen, then, three differentiated examples:

- The first is entitled *Em Caxias a Filosofia Em-Caixa?* [Does Philosophy Fit in Caxias?] (2014) and consists of a university extension project in a school on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- The second—field environmental philosophy—covers an environmental education project in a research, education, and conservation center in the Cape Horn Biosphere Reserve, Chile.
- The third refers to a set of practices carried out by the educational service *Fábrica das Artes*, part of the Centro Cultural de Belém, in Lisbon, Portugal.

The geographical, thematic, and institutional heterogeneity of these experiences offers a diversity of proposals that cross through education, childhood, and philosophy. These proposals resist social and political hegemony that excludes oppressed and underappreciated “minorities.” Likewise, I propose a reconfiguration of the small, the silent, and the (in)significant things and events in our daily life as educators and, most of all, as readers and learners of the worlds in which we live.

Is it, then, that to be in education in a *childlike* manner means to be small, silent, and insignificant? Or is it that by being attentive to what is small, silent, and insignificant can make us sensitive to the rhizomatic “minority fields” of difference?

21.2 Minority as Affront: The Childhood of Questioning

What can emerge from decolonizing educational encounters, which reshape the experience of childhood according to difference and uniqueness? Above all, what emerges is embodying education driven by dynamic relationships rather than those ruled by efficiency, success, productivity, or profit. Grounded on these dynamic

relationships, educational places and times can be rethought as moments for the small, or what is (almost) not seen; for the silent, or that which is (almost) not heard; and for the insignificant, or that which (almost) does not matter. At another scale, education might expand images (becoming a diffractive lens), sounds (becoming a babel-like amplifier), and senses and meanings (becoming playful).

What can our educational encounters become if diversity and singularity are enhanced over homogeneity and universality? How important is the reconfiguration of minority processes, a theme we will retake later, which are generally little considered in schools and in other educational contexts? What forces do we need in order for these processes to assert themselves as places and times of forgotten marginalities? What changes are required for education to welcome everyone, especially those from the peripheries, in effective ways and not through mere empty abstractions?

An education born from the affirmation of childhood as a small, silent, and (in)significant force can be envisioned as a form of life that is distinct and that suspends adult normativity (Kennedy 2020). This is a vision from the reverse side of a colonizing process of thought that (since the beginning of Western civilization and in different geographical points) has imposed a logocentric and adult-centric model of reason. A masculine, adult, white, heterosexual, European, and urban rationality (the dominant standard of humanity of the so-called modern industrial and Euro-Western societies) has been imposed as normative (Mallory 2013; Gare 2022).

I begin the chapter with three thinkers: Simone de Beauvoir, Enrique Dussel, and Gilles Deleuze. These authors provoke us to rethink the notions of majority and minority beyond mere numerical or mathematical indicators. Rather, majority and minority are defined as political relationships with diverse people and contexts. Beauvoir, Dussel, and Deleuze argue that the concepts of “majority” and “minority” are masculine criteria used for segregating individuals into the category of “other.” Moreover, these criteria are turned into social and political norms or patterns of relationships that the “other” must conform to.

Politically, majority is the entity that imposes a model. Retroactively, majority is that which is produced by the same model. It is a self-immune and exclusionary model. Therefore, the majority that imposes the model does not need to be more numerous. It is enough for it to be the normative pattern.

By denouncing the underlying meaninglessness of masculinity as majority, Beauvoir (1976) highlights the political nature of the dualistic division between those who have the power of speech and those who do not. In turn, Dussel (1998, p. 15) refers to the power relations involved in the hegemonic legitimization of certain groups and perspectives, inverting the use of concepts and referring to *the vast majorities of humanity excluded* from the discourses and practices in force in the globalization era. Complementarily, Deleuze (1977) relocates the problem and discovers how minorities can take advantage of a multiplicity of ways to challenge the system. By redefining themselves as “becoming-other” as dynamic transformers (*devenir*) or kinks in the system, minorities challenge normative models. From Beauvoir to Deleuze, we witness a decisive reversal in the use of these concepts,

moving from denouncing the colonizing excesses of the majority to reconstructing minorities as potentially decolonizing dynamics.

Beauvoir's liberation from patriarchal models to re-situate women could also be applied to pedagogical and political educational models. Traditionally, one does not walk with children by following their steps. Never. The dominant majority (which may be the numerical minority) designs and implements the rule. It marches ahead of the children. This majority is the constant parameter against which one evaluates, serving as a normalizing device (Deleuze and Guattari 2007, pp. 145–146). The model installs itself. It governs. It dictates. It founds hierarchy and, noiselessly or silently, subjects and excludes. The *white heterosexual European city-dwelling, standard-language-speaking adult male* is the diffusing center of the majority's dominant model (Deleuze 1988). A certain concept of *logos* (abstract analytic discursive reason) is added to this modeling pattern of being properly human.

Deleuze and Guattari (2007, p. 146) distinguish two meanings in the idea of "minority":

- As objectively definable individuated states, entities with concrete ghetto territories (opposed to the majority).
- As moving germs that set up uncontrollable movements ("becoming-other" or "kinks" that destabilize accepted norms).

Deleuze's distinction between minority as ghetto and minority as subversive movement is crucial if one's thinking avoids being booby-trapped: recognizing the political dimension of minority is distinct from wanting to replace the established majority with another. It is thus a matter of asserting a different way of life, of seeking to *become a minority*. Becoming a minority disturbance means affirming multiplicities and variabilities that disturb, and sometimes implode, standardized logic. Consequently, it is an affirmative underground movement, which introduces strangeness and fracturing into institutions. These minority "disturbers" catch up with us like subterranean snakes, furtive, and not always visible, dynamically spreading between the cracks of the established order, lurking on the unsuspected margins of the models, and moving potentialities that at every moment crack the established domain.

What might happen in education if this were the challenge? What worlds would be born if we exchange fixed, unquestioned states for processes that affront? What if we allow education to be invaded by subterranean times and spaces of childhood as affirmation, difference, and questioning? Becoming a minority? Thinking from the margins?

21.3 Education as *Smallness*

Thinking about the use of words shows the immensity of meanings that run through them, the ambivalences in which they are constructed, but also the colonizing tendencies of the subterranean processes of signification. Beauvoir, Dussel, and

Deleuze suggested meanings of minority that bring it closer to an idea of childhood conceived as a resistant force of the voiceless (in Portuguese, *in-fante*; from the Latin *in* [= not], *fari* [=speaking], plus the suffix *nte* [=agent]), of those on the periphery.

Let us now consider the first conceptual intensity that we relate to childhood: *small*. Small is currently attributed to children. To it we can add expressions such as “underage” or “juvenile.” These meanings establish a magnetic field (again with quantitative roots, but extending beyond it) that distinguishes the *larger* (in size, intensity, or duration) from the *smaller* (underprivileged, insufficient, flawed, weak, limited). The larger occupies more space or attention; it imposes itself. The smaller is disregarded, relegated to non-places, or forgotten places. Larger and smaller are exclusive binary concepts (one is either larger or smaller).

An analogy between children and so-called savage human beings echoes distant cultural imaginaries (Rollo 2016). Children and Indigenous people belong to the category of the “not yet” of the city and the civility of laws, viewed as “ungoverned savagery and backwardness.” These people are assigned to a life in darkness, in unprepared obscurity. Rollo presents an analogy between children and other individuals without political agency who must be redeemed by the “benevolent modern age.” The modern age is an “age” in the literal chronological sense of the moment of acquisition of speech, or rationalized mode of speech, in which children and Indigenous people enter into a process of proper humanization. The modern age views them as products that need “to be formatted” by a model that aims to insert them into fora of social and political participation.

However, modernity was also the arrival of industrialized exploitation, of macroscale production, of exclusionary democratic ideals that privileged only certain voices and disabled others (Rollo 2020). Therefore, a critical movement is to recognize “invisible and unviable smallnesses” as affirmative powers, which differentiate and make educational experiences concrete. This perspective lives with fissure, with rupture, with difference; it is not tempted to create a comprehensive and tension-free narrative. Argentine social critic Walter Mignolo refers to the notion of deconstruction forged by French philosopher Jacques Derrida. In the context of decolonial cultural studies, he proposes the “colonial difference” as a critical stance before the violence generated by hierarchies of privilege over subaltern discourses (Mignolo 2003). This effort entails overcoming the normative and exclusionary dualism of dominant majorities:

savage—civilized
 nature—culture
 emotion—reason
 ignorance—knowledge
 child—adult
 little—big

Along these lines, Westernized rationalist humanist thinking has contributed to instituting the inferiorization or colonization of childhood (Murriss and Haynes 2018). Unsettling the binaries of dominant educational conceptions allows rethinking childhood from non-quantitative, non-rationalist, and non-adult logics.

Children as the small, marginalized other, treated as an adult's property, as the economically disenfranchised of society, as the epistemically incomplete, or even as the cultural outsider of political discourses, is no longer the only available picture (Kennedy 2010). Seen as the stranger, the foreign, the outsider that transgresses the majorities, the child can assume a privileged epistemological place: "Like women, persons of color, or others marginalized by Eurocentric and patriarchal personal, interpersonal and social constructs, the child's location in the social and natural world affords her an 'epistemic privilege'" (Kennedy 2010, p. 15).

From this "displacement," childhood opens up as a perspective beyond the chronological (Kohan 2011) that breaks the limits, brings unsuspected questions, breaks with the dualism child–adult, educator–educated, small–large, by uninstalling the forces of the dominant majorities. Borders no longer make sense as markers of the norm and a non-instrumental experience of education is made possible, a *minor education* (Gallo 2002).

21.3.1 A Critical Educational Project in Brazil: Does Philosophy Fit in Caxias?

A philosophy project conducted in different Brazilian schools that resists the ideal that education formation of children is to create future citizens allows us to revisit the concepts outlined above (Kohan 2011, 2014). Walter Kohan, past president of the International Council of Philosophical Inquiry with Children and professor at the Center for the Study of Philosophies and Childhood, State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (NEFI/UERJ 2021), has led the project *Em Caxias a Filosofia En-Caixa?* [Does Philosophy Fit in Caxias?]¹ (Kohan 2014). Since 2007, he has coordinated a team of NEFI/UERJ students, researchers, and teachers from the Municipal School Joaquim da Silva Peçanha, in the municipality of Duque de Caxias in Rio de Janeiro, to practice everyday philosophy with children and resist the hierarchical standardization of educational times and spaces (Omelczuk 2016; Gomes 2019) (Fig. 21.1). The aim is to promote thinking that differs from the dominant social, cultural, and political forces (Kohan and Olarieta 2012).

Inhabiting the place of "not knowing" within an institution whose social recognition is marked by the authority of knowledge is not an easy task. Learning to be comfortable in this place is one of the greatest challenges and values of this Brazilian project (Omelczuk 2016, p. 239). Students have "the possibility of getting in touch with childhood thought that teaches them that knowledge is always partial, therefore, subject to being questioned" (Kohan and Olarieta 2012, p. 245). *Em Caxias a Filosofia En-Caixa?* focuses on the promotion of thought encounters in unforeseen

¹The title is a play on words and the name of the municipality where the project occurs. Caixa in English is "box," but since the name of the municipality where the project takes place is Caixa, the literal translation would be: "In [the Municipality of] Boxes, does philosophy fit in boxes?"

Fig. 21.1 Children and teachers practicing philosophy at the Municipal School Joaquim da Silva Peçanha, in the municipality of Duque de Caxias in Rio de Janeiro (NEFI Archive). Photographs by NEFI/ Vanise Dutra Gomes



and unpredictable relationships with what is known and what is not known. With no distinctions inhibiting speech, everyone begins by unlearning the habits that prevent this shared and egalitarian experience of thought. It is about presupposing a condition of equality amid difference, between the small and the less small, about offering opportunities so that everything that concerns us can be problematized, even—and

above all—that for which there seem to be no viable alternatives (Gomes 2016²). To educate is to expect the impossible, the unexpected. It is not being paternalistic to the little ones, to the minors, to the minorities nor wanting to integrate them, or model them, according to the established status quo of the institutions. It is about accepting multiple paths from philosophical experiences and thoughts as a practice leading to liberating, creative transformations. This is especially for those who are placed on the margins: Of course, it is important that the poor and the dispossessed, those who have been silenced for centuries, embrace their fundamental right to speak and to express themselves. But if we are really interested in their speaking in their own voices, and not in the voices of the ventriloquists of popular culture, the corporate media, the political, academic, or therapeutic elites, or, even more directly, in the voices of market or capital, the issue of enabling the voices of the marginalized becomes more complicated (Kohan 2011, p. 348).

This educational *smallness* is the smallness of creative impossibilities, in the adversities and restlessness of marginal and, at times, indigent and inhuman daily lives. However, more than an additive and integrative solution for the “small,” which would still be hostage to an exclusivist and institutionally homogeneous background, the proposal is that of education as experiencing *smallness*. Or education as a movement of *smallnessing*.

21.4 Education as *Silencing*

Refusing exclusionary binaries allowed us to rethink the meaning of small. The aim is not to advocate that children are also capable of abstract reasoning, behaving just like adults, or maintaining dialogues that can be deemed philosophical. Instead, the aim is to replace a colonialist paradigm of childhood education with a decolonial paradigm of childhood education.

In recent decades, the approach to schooling as an instrument at the service of a certain conception of efficiency has become the majority. As instruments of a society driven by production, school programs and curricula are often evaluated according to their potential impacts in the production machinery. Currently, education is not a place of emancipation but of homogenous instruction in which fewer and fewer students are educated to be critical protagonists of their own lives (Biesta 2020), or even to hear the sounds of their own voices. Nevertheless, as with our exploration of the concept of “small,” can the idea of silencing conceal other challenges for education?

The absence of speech that childhood carries from its etymology (*in-fans*) can be read in at least two ways.

²This and many other books related to the project “Does Philosophy Fit in Caxias?” are available on NEFI Edições website, free of charges: <http://filoeduc.org/nefiedicoes/editora.php>

First, childhood silence can be understood as a defect or a lack, reinforcing the idea that children are on the way to full human development, where (and only where) they are ready to acquire speech privileges. The silencing of childhood as a form of pedagogical bio-power shakes the established parameters of collective existence. What voice is muted when only one voice is allowed to be heard?

Second, the silence of childhood can be read as a presence, affirming resistance to the dominant rhythms that, within education, impose a productive conception of learning. These silences are marks of resistance in school spaces and times. When we remain in the primordial soup of unspoken potentialities, how can educational instances be transformed?

This question reminds me of the character of the nineteenth-century short story by Herman Melville *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street*. Bartleby is a young man who was hired as a clerk by a Wall Street lawyer to copy documents. After a time, with an affirmative silence, Bartleby escapes into the powers of imperturbable suspension, avoiding work by replying, “I would prefer not to” (Melville 2016).

The former question also reminds me of Mozambican writer António Emílio Leite Couto, better known as Mia Couto, who refers to childhood in terms similar to the idea of going back to the unheard, to a first language, a language of chaos, an unspeakable language where everything might have any name:

Childhood/Infancy is not a time, it is not an age, a collection of memories. Childhood/Infancy is when it is not too late. It is when we are available to be surprised, to let ourselves be enchanted. Almost everything is acquired in that time when we learn the very feeling of Time. The truth is that we maintain a relationship with the child/infant as if s/he were a minor, lost in a precarious state. However, childhood/infancy is not just a stage towards maturity. It is a window that, whether closed or open, remains alive within us. (Couto 2009, p. 110)³

In educational encounters, when silence interrupts the expected and anticipated continuous flows of speaking and learning, each one—child and adult, regardless of age—is able to return to themselves. In their uniqueness and difference, they return to their freedom. Philosopher Igor Jasinski understands moments of silence as possibilities for education to be experiences that create unpredictability, rather than submission driven by the “productive and producer” model. He emphasizes the importance in the classroom of maintaining moments of intense silence—times that diverge from linear, sequenced, and productive communication flows (Jasinski 2016). The experience of philosophy in education limits the suspension of inoperability in the relationship between adults and children (Jasinski and Lewis 2015). It is this inoperability that frees education from the logic of results by replacing it with the practice of unpredicted potentialities.

The silences that settle after certain questions are asked and the questions that spring from certain silences are moments of uncertainty and expectation that are fundamental in education. These moments resonate with the production of these silences in the unspeakable language of Mia Couto or in the irreducibility of

³Translation by Ricardo Rozzi and Roy May.

Bartleby. More than filling educational mediation with productive sounds, it is choosing *to fine-tune silences* (Couto 2016).

Silencing does not mean refusing voice nor giving adults the privilege of choosing who speaks. This understanding also departs from the so-called silent pedagogy, which is a strategy that cooperates with the “adultization” and “learnification” of education by proposing a fixed and deliberate use of silence defined by teachers (Ollin 2008). On the contrary, the silence I refer to is an egalitarian invitation to suspension, to a halt as resistance to the dominant and shaping institutional logics and dominations.

Both the small and the silent offer opportunities to deconstruct the universal presuppositions implicit in the scientific knowledge of dominant rationalist-logocentric adult education. Instead, it opens opportunities to rediscover the singularities of ecosystems and the beings that inhabit them. The logic of efficiency and the discourse of modernization and economic growth marginalize and impose the globalizing structures of oppressive majorities. It is, therefore, important to reconfigure categories such as small and silent, promoting encounters with multiple ways—children’s ways—of experiencing and building the world.

21.4.1 The Miniature Forests of Cape Horn, Chile: Experiencing the Small and Silent

In different educational environments, the small and the silent can be the center of refuge experiences and the affirmative power of different ways of experiencing ourselves in relation to others. In my second example, we encounter the small and the silent for an inversion of the common rhythms of education: the miniature forests of Cape Horn. A project conducted by the Universidad de Magallanes in Chile and the University of North Texas in the USA invites us to encounter biodiversity at the scale of tiny living beings (Rozzi et al. 2006). The project is based on an ethical biocultural approach (Rozzi 2013). Its *field environmental philosophy* methodology has generated novel activities such as “ecotourism with a hand lens.” This activity was born out of a borderline experiment after, in 2000, Chilean biologist and philosopher Ricardo Rozzi got lost and inadvertently fell into a peat bog. The experience earned him a few hours of direct contact (although fearing for his own survival) with tiny plants in all their diversity and exuberance (Rozzi 2012). The episode was decisive for his idea of “change of lenses” for conservation and the proposal for valuing the non-human other through the creation of the UNESCO Cape Horn Biosphere Reserve (Rozzi et al. 2008a).

The need for direct encounters with living beings co-inhabiting their habitats at scales quite different from the specifically human macroscale environment inspired the creation of educational programs at the Omora Ethnobotanical Park. This park, at the southern end of Chile, includes *outdoor educational experiences* for observing tiny plants and other organisms in their “miniature forests” (Tauro et al. 2021). In



Fig. 21.2 Preschool and school children visiting the Omora Park for experiencing “ecotourism with a hand lens.” This involves observations with a magnifying glass, drawings, composing metaphors, designing interpretive signs, and celebrating with the community (Rozzi et al. 2010a). Photographs by Yanet Medina and Sergio González Ayala (Omora Park Archive)

local workshops, the participation of children from local schools in Cape Horn has been fundamental in the implementation of ecotourism with a hand lens (Fig. 21.2). Children, teachers, and community Indigenous elders gave colloquial meaning to the image of the “miniature forests of Cape Horn” (Rozzi et al. 2010b). The slow rhythm of the educational experience with these small and silent “forests”:

gives us a hand lens that broadens our mental, perceptual and affective image about nature and about our relationship with it. The observation of the diversity and the unity of life ethical, aesthetical, and ecological dimensions that complement the narrow economic perspective that currently prevails in the relationship of contemporary society with nature. (Rozzi 2012, p. 23)

The Omora Ethnobotanical Park is based on *field environmental philosophy*, an educational approach that rejects the imposition of global development models that marginalize concrete singular realities, promoting the diversity of life(s) and ecological knowledge in local and regional communities, human, non-human, and other-than-human (Rozzi et al. 2008b). In this context, *field environmental philosophy* proposes an encounter with biocultural diversity as a direct experience of co-habitation with beings in ecosystem interaction, often overlooked by current educational models and decision-making processes in the public sphere (Rozzi et al. 2010b). Over two decades, this transdisciplinary project has been able to enhance crossovers between academic research and actors in the public sphere such as policy makers, in a collaborative way that involves people and institutions. Through collaboration between diverse school contexts, Indigenous communities, educators, researchers, and artists, the Omora Park has brought together partners of these children from preschool to community elders around the protection of biological and cultural diversity (Rozzi et al. 2008b).

The slow and silent experience of ecotourism with a hand lens contrasts with the current rapid worldwide depletion of biodiversity. In recent decades, we have witnessed a massive extinction of humanity's cultural heritage linked to an "extinction of experience" (Maffi 2001). The protection of biodiversity will be utopian unless it is combined with the preservation of cultural diversity. It is paradigmatic that of the approximately 6000 languages that currently exist around the world, half are spoken by communities with less than 10,000 inhabitants and that half of that half is spoken by communities with 1000 inhabitants or less (Rozzi 2013). In other words, most of the world's linguistic diversity belongs to small communities of numerically minority peoples. But how can these minorities affirm themselves as *becomings* that destabilize certain logics? Or as subversive movements that call the attention for different ways of life? It is necessary to recognize that, in *field environmental philosophy* perspective, the loss of *natural biodiversity* is not the core of the contemporary environmental crisis, but rather the loss of *biocultural diversity*. This refers to the multiplicity and deep interrelation of the manifestations of life on Earth, understanding life in its biological and cultural dimensions, within the framework of a complex socio-ecological system in constant co-adaptation (Maffi and Woodley 2010).

The extinction of experience is even more drastic due to the pervasive process of biocultural homogenization and its influence on education (Rozzi 2013, 2018). What biological and cultural microcosms do we not want to ignore due to the prevalence of majority and homogenizing biocultural monocultures? Which types of education do we need to foster biocultural conservation? What childhood or minority actors do we not want to exclude from broader pictures of education? Are adultism, futurism, and formation ways of homogenizing educational experiences? Are these also ways of suppressing childlike fashions of living and experiencing the world (through small, silent, and insignificant educational experiences)?

21.5 Education as (In)Significant Living

The small and the silent can be marks of a return to childhood that focus resistance against the global, homogeneous, universal, and totalizing rhetoric of the dominant pedagogies (adult, futurist, and formalist). But what about meaning? To what do we regularly attribute meaning? What do we consent to in our educational practices? The perspectives we are dealing with now converge to the importance of re-signifying educational times and spaces beyond the reproductive, homogeneous, and hierarchical logic that runs through school institutions.

The insignificant is another category usually attributed to childhood; children and their environments are often understood as without value or interest. Childhood is, in this context, understood as the "not yet" to someone who is not given a properly significant place or is seen as a lesser producer of meanings; as smaller and almost expendable senses; as senses that register only to mark the beginning of the journey toward the perfecting represented by the adult world.

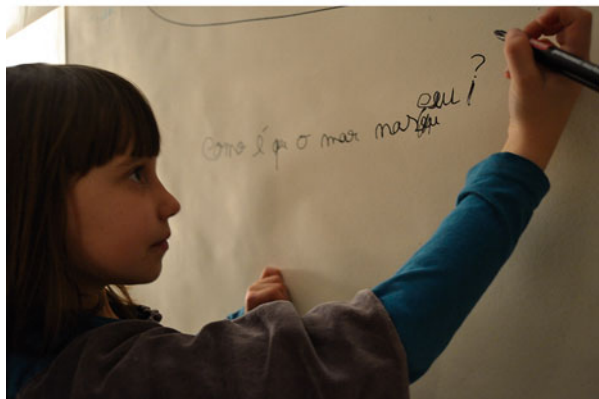
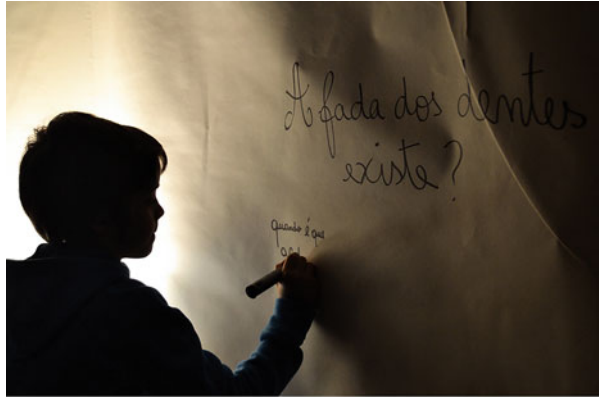
However, what can happen if we graphically mark a tension within the very word “significant”? (insignificant [un-meaningful]). What can become (in)significant in infancy (in-fancy)? In Portuguese, the prefix “in”—inherited from the Latin language—can mean negation (as *indispensable* or *illogical*), but it can also mean an inward movement (as in the words *introduce* or *induce*). Could we then look for other semantic possibilities in the word (in)significant? What if, in relation to childhood senses, the prefix “in” (significant) meant an inward movement, and not a negation? What could be significant within childhood itself? To what things and dynamics do children attribute meaning? Is there any specific aspect to the meaning of the experience made by the children? Is childhood itself its own way of meaning? Or, then, is there a privileged *childlike* relationship with the meanings of the world? What relationship would that be? Who would be allowed? What will be the childlike (in)meanings? What will a childlike relationship with meanings be?

In the presence of the small, the silent, and the (in)significant, what challenges can be opened up in different educational spaces and times? The same effort of attention, of course. A slowdown of the step. The small, the silent, and the (in)significant ask us to pay attention to what cannot be found in the global, in the macro, in the noisy, in chronological efficiency, in the certainty of already defined meanings. The small, the silent, and the (in)significant request an interruption. This interruption requires different modes of experience in addition to the dominant signification processes. The rhetoric of modernization and economic growth, universalized in educational discourses and practices, produces and installs certain pre-established meanings (Rozzi 2013). However, despite the homogenization that crosses our institutional spaces, it is possible to find fractures that pave the way for childhood to assert other forces, minority actors, variations, and seismic movements.

21.5.1 Fábrica das Artes in Lisbon, Portugal: Creation of Meaning

The educational example that we chose to illustrate a possible configuration of this childhood relationship with meanings is perhaps one of these seismic movements. Within the scope of the Cultural Center of Belém (CCB 2021), in Lisbon, Portugal, several transversal projects have been developed in recent years aimed at “all childhoods” (Wallenstein 2016, p. 3). The provocation begins with the idea that childhood is plural, multiple, and that it can belong to everyone (no matter what is his or her age). The cultural and educational program of Fábrica das Artes at CCB focuses on the intersection of knowledge and actions from the performing arts (shows and workshops) that bring together different audiences: children and adults, schools and families, educators, scientists, philosophers, actors, and artists (Fig. 21.3). They all intersect as childhood, around specific themes (artistic thought and contemplation, curiosity and neuroscience, childhood), seeking to build what a collaborator with one of the projects, Portuguese philosopher José Gil (2014), designated as a

Fig. 21.3 Children and teenagers in different activities at Fábrica das Artes, Centro Cultural de Belém, in Lisbon (Fábrica das Artes-CCB Archive). Photographs by “CCB/ Manuel Ruas Moreira”



consistency plan, that is, moments when different actors connect through the cross-fertilization between philosophical questions and artistic creations, scientific experiments, and performances.

Committed to the democratization of the processes of artistic creation, as well as to the events of philosophical thinking or scientific production, the activities of Fábrica das Artes take place not only in the Centro Cultural de Belém building, but also in schools and other educational institutions. Children are involved from the beginning of the programming design, mixing the different moments of work with their new and challenging look, but not just children, chronological childhood. Other childhoods are also protagonists in the re-significant work of Fábrica das Artes, a work of recovering tenuous voices and their transformation into propellants of ideas:

The natural relationship between childhood, art and philosophy, the childhood of philosophers and artists, their curiosity, their way of looking at things, of seeing the dimension of the sensitive, of positioning before them, of *play* with elements from life and the world, from the game of variables, in short, the approximation between the childhood experience and the experience of artists and philosophers can be aggregated through the idea of “becoming-child.” (Wallenstein 2014, p. 17)⁴

Searching in the small, the almost invisible, the silent, the (in)significant of sensitive and delicate things, that which is childhood in all of us, the adultist and hegemonic representations of time, of adulthood within education, are rethought. Through research and transversal experiments, Fábrica das Artes places itself at the interface between educational and cultural institutions, resisting the ghettoization of childhood through transforming experiences.

As with the initiatives *Does Philosophy Fit in Caxias?* and field environmental philosophy at the Omora Park, the Fábrica das Artes chooses to build another kind of school. It is a “school to come,” which emerges as a critical counterpoint to the standardization by prevailing hierarchical education (Ramos do 2016). The school to come, the school of minor childhood—small, silent, and (in)significant—is, above all, an invitation to refuse reproductions and recognitions that kill questions, to refuse the main paths that erase unpredictability, and to create experience and knowledge (instead of just replicating them). It is an invitation to escape, to ease into the idea that nothing is completed, that everything is to be done, that everything is to come, and that everything is in the making.

I have finished writing. However, a smallness attracts my attention. So far, I have left this chapter’s first epigraph in silence. Almost invisible by the age of its author, the opening sentence remained silent: *I think this is philosophy: take a simple idea and make it special*. I placed this affirmation by Afonso Junco, perhaps the smallest of voices, the most distant and almost inaudible, before the philosophers consecrated by historical chronology. He is a 12-year-old boy who lives in the Azores, one of the nine islands of this archipelago in the European periphery: a childhood periphery in a peripheral geography. In a short, almost silent, and apparently (in)significant sentence, I begin and I end the chapter. If philosophy is the movement of taking a simple idea and making it special, just like Afonso teaches us, then one’s encounter with childhood could be this space–time of taking the smallest and turning it into an affirmative minority: an opportunity of receiving what happens and making it

⁴Translation by Ricardo Rozzi and Roy May.

diverge, of resisting indifference, and of allowing education to be a true creation of meanings. Is this not after all the only authentically possible gesture in education?

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