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Article

Pedagogy, demagogy, and subjectness: Encounter and responsibility

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Abstract

The article delves into the nuanced relationship between pedagogy and demagogy, analyzing how they shape the educational experience. It highlights that when pedagogy loses its existential focus, it risks turning into demagogy, prioritizing control over education's transformative potential. The author argues for a pedagogy that values subjectivity, intuition, and the inherent uncertainty of educational encounters. Using poetic language, the author portrays teachers as oscillating between the roles of artists and entertainers, when addressing the responsibility consequent of the subjective encounter. The piece suggests that educational encounters should be approached with the same wonder as one feels when encountering the sea and other elemental beings, recognizing the interplay between the vastness of existence and human life's limitations. The astonishment consequent of these encounters engages both students and teachers in a shared journey of self-discovery, uncovering new facets of their identities through their interactions. Through autobiographical narrative and philosophical discourse, the work emphasizes the need for educators to engage deeply with the subjective dimensions of teaching, fostering spaces where both teachers and students can explore their identities and responsibilities in relation to each other and the world.

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Introduction: A Provocative Confusion of Terms

¿Quién es el mar? ¿Quién es aquel violento
Y antiguo ser que roe los pilares
De la tierra y es uno y muchos mares
Y abismo y resplandor y azar y viento?
Quien lo mira lo ve por vez primera
Siempre. Con el asombro que las cosas
Elementales dejan, las hermosas
Tardes, la luna, el fuego de una hoguera.
¿Quién es el mar, quién soy?

[Who is the sea? Who is that violent, ancient creature,
who's gnawing away under the pillars
of the earth, which is also one and many oceans,
and abys, and wonder, and chance, and wind?
Who stares upon the sea, sees it for their first time, always.
With the astonishment caused by elemental things,
wonderful afternoons,
the moon, or a blazing fire.
Who is the sea, who am I?]

Borges (1974, p. 943)

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I was a 7-year-old boy living in Sao Paulo, Brazil, during the '80s. My mother had given up on her previous career as an architect to teach in forward-thinking private elementary schools during the day while studying pedagogy at the university during the night. Like many in my generation, I was an unplanned and much-loved child. My unexpected existence in this world had this transformative consequence for her career. Maybe because of the frustration of seeing her working so hard and the unpleasant impact of school in my early life, I would ironically respond to my parent's friends when asking me what she did for work: She is a demagogue.

We never know what passes on children's minds when this type of confusion between words is made. My mother attributed this issue to the coincidence of sounds between the two terms. I remember her saying: no, Vicente, I am not a demagogue. I am a pedagogue. Indeed, these terms sound unmistakably similar to children. However, there was a strong critique of exploiting the democratic faith that was taking root in that tropical country, finally defeating 25 years of military dictatorship. I probably had a sense that demagogue was not a very nice term. My confusion was certainly not pleasant to any of my parents' friends. Today, I feel that this was an unintended provocation. Or, as Chavo, the continental sensation in Latin American television (Friedrich & Colmenares, 2017), would repeat daily for hundreds of millions of children: ¡Fue sin querer queriendo! [it was accidentally on purpose!].

Inspired by this biographical anecdote, this essay will poetically explore the overlaps between these terms beyond the sounds that draw them together. I intend to counterpose demagogic conceptions of pedagogy based on efficiency and control with a conception of pedagogy that recognizes the dimension of subjectness related to intuition and uncertainty. In this reflection, pedagogy refers to the responsibility of acknowledging and embracing the encounter. Demagogy, in contraposition, signifies denying this fundamental element of existence. When subjectification is rejected, pedagogy is sadly traversed by demagogy in the micro dimensions of society.

In tandem, the causes for this denial are rooted in the massifying and corporatizing forces that define the neoliberal agenda and transform pedagogy into "precise forms of technically legitimate teaching competence" (Adams, 2022, p. 109). These dominant ways of conceiving education undermine learning to the transferable skills level, preventing teachers and students from engaging in the existential dimension of their unique relationship. Consequently, turned into survival mode, the teacher's role becomes too close to that of a leader who often appeals to their students' desires, fears, and prejudices. Educators need to appeal to these artifices to keep students under control once they are morally and institutionally excluded from being "concerned with opening up existential possibilities for students" (Biesta, 2017, p. 3).

The complementary juxtaposition of art, aesthetical experience, and entertainment supports this reflection in offering a counterpart to demagogical conceptions of teaching and learning. This contrast helps us to consider the teacher's journey as a pendulum oscillating between these symbolic dimensions. On one side, art, aesthetical experience, subjectness, and educational praxis interplay towards self-expression, permeability, and shared wisdom. The encounter with elemental aspects of our lives, just as poetically portrayed by Borges (1974) in the poem that opens this essay, dislocates our fundamental relationship with the other, opening the astonishing possibility of sincerely asking who we are in the face of the responsibility that consubstantiates our existence. Conversely, as a denial of this encounter, entertainment and control dominate the performative aspect of the pedagogical praxis.

Consequently, this praxis becomes mainly a distraction, a subterfuge for the anxieties of students, families, and societies. Nevertheless, the caveat that teachers are far from responsible for this precarious aspect of their profession is crucial. Blaming them for pushing teaching too close to controlling entertainment would make the root causes behind this situation deeper and even more ingrained.

After presenting the theoretical argumentation comparing demagogy and pedagogy in the face of encounter and responsibility through the subjective realm of education, I offer an autobiographical narrative of a moment I faced a succession of encounters as a music teacher in Brazil. This narrative is written with several intentions, which are presented here in an unhirerarchical order: bringing this theoretical reflection closer to the tangible realm, disclosing personal experiences that may help other educators reflect on the existential aspect of their role, revisiting a crucial moment of my formation as a teacher and human being, and paying tribute to a much-beloved child and their family.

These intentions are inspired by Pinar's (2023) evocation of currere as a theorization of the educational journey. In an embodied perspective traveling through time and subjectivity, I invite readers to “expand the inner space of freedom” (p. 1) in togetherness aiming to help “our children, our students, find their way out” (Pinar, 2009, p. 51) of the oppressiveness of presentism. It is based on a relational conception destined to enlarge the “space of freedom where the newcomer can reveal her singularity through speech and action, be witnessed by others, and thus make her appearance in the world.” (Phelan, 2015, p. 3). Through an autobiographical praxis, I revisit personal experiences to reflect with other educators on our existential role, aiming to reveal hidden layers of significance that are meaningful to us and, therefore, build a constructive mark on our coexistence.

Demagogy and Pedagogy: Art and Entertainment

The academic literature on education does not prominently mention the relationship between pedagogy and demagogy. However, there are mentions in the field of philosophy and political sciences. In the field of philosophy, Derrida (1978) approximated pedagogy and demagogy closely when critiquing the power imbalances hidden in language and theory: “Rhetoric may amount to the violence of theory, which reduces the other when it leads the other, whether through psychology, demagogy, or even pedagogy" (p. 106). In this reflection, Derrida refers to Levinas's account of being in the superation of a metaphysical conception, as formerly pointed out by Heidegger (Biesta, 2008).

In the field of political sciences, mentions of the relationship between pedagogy and demagogy were triggered by the 2016 presidential elections in the United States. There are examples in the topics of media studies (Moravčíková, 2020), political misinformation and Post-Truth (Snow, 2018), and demagogic rhetoric (McDonough, 2018). When making a historical account of the relationship between these terms, Steudeman (2019) observes how "[e]specially in moments of demagogic ascendance - the election of Andrew Jackson, southern secession, the era of McCarthyism, or our present moment [2016 US Presidential election] - calls for immunizing pedagogy has been particularly pronounced." (p. 298). These examples show how pedagogy has been seen as an antidote to demagogy at the macro levels of sociological and political analysis.

However, to the extent of this work, demagogy is not approached at the macro level of society. Because this article aims to explore the intersections with pedagogy in the educational praxis, my option is to metaphorically understand demagogy at the micro level of the teacher-student relationship. In this sense, demagogy is seen as the educator's ability to distract—the possibility of finding a subterfuge to deny the realm of subjectification in education. Therefore, demagogy is here portrayed as undermining the capacity to explore "the ways in which students can be(come) subjects in their own right and not just remain objects of the desires and directions of others" (Biesta, 2017, p. 28). Demagoguery is the escape from the encounter, the refusal of the calling to share responsibility for the other, and the denial of being subjected to the other. To counter the refusal above, I propose to consider the teacher as someone who pendulates between the figure of the artist and the entertainer. On the one hand, education as entertainment is a demagogical consequence of denying subjectification. On the other hand, the artist embraces the risky realm of the subjective encounter.

This comparison requires another caveat. As Hamilton (2024) notices, coincidences and differences mark art and entertainment, which are, in essence, not opposites. They "are inter-dependent concepts that must be understood in conjunction with other aesthetic concepts." (p. 1). The role of entertainment is to "give pleasure or delight by amusing, exciting or otherwise diverting the audience," while art "has a conscious aesthetic end" (p. 12). There is no original superiority in discerning art from entertainment, and a similar conception is represented in Gombrich's (1954) notion that "there is no such thing as Art. There are only artists" (p. 5). This comparison aims to get inspiration from the artist's intentional focus on aesthetics to shed light on the teacher's response to the encounter.

Therefore, the intention of thinking about the entertainer and the artist figures is not to diminish or compare the different ways of engaging with creative endeavors. The purpose is to use this distinction to explore better the subjective realm of education (Biesta, 2017). This distinction fosters a series of questions about teaching that are relevant to an in-depth comprehension of the teaching and learning phenomena. For instance, we commonly see high evaluations of teachers who are described as having reasonable control of their classrooms, are performative and engaging, make jokes, are proficient time managers, and create several dynamic variations of strategies to keep students entertained during their activities. However, how often do we ask ourselves about the capacity of teachers to enter into meaningful dialogue with students? How common is it to think of a teacher as someone open enough to linger with their students in existential questions? How regularly are teachers asked to narrate a moment in which they were confronted with a situation (Pinar & Grumet, 1976) in their classroom that astonished them to the point in which they had to question who they were after this experience?

Pinar (2023) centralizes the crucial curriculum question as "what knowledge is most worth?" (p. viii). The questions elaborated on above were created with a similar interest but applied to the teaching context. Inquiring about what demagogy means in the educational circumstance and approximating this reflection to the role of the artist and the entertainer is a fruitful path toward understanding what knowledge is most worth for teachers. Hopefully, engaging in these questions will help us avoid leaving our students alone when facing the subjective encounters that consubstantiate our educational journey.

Neoliberal Forces Suppress the Aesthetical and Political Aspects of Education

Amongst many factors, the demagogic state of pedagogy derives from the neoliberal forces that reduce crucial aspects of education. Phelan and Clark (2019) observed how capitalist forces have trapped us in consumerist and accumulative psychological sacrifice, "subjecting us as subjects of desire to a perpetual search for the thing" (p. 62). The perpetuation of the search for efficiency, control, and productivity leads to the objectivation of our lives in an eternal and anxious compensation for the loss of the substance of our existence. As we live for the desires and dreams of people living in much higher levels of privilege than us, our existence is constantly renovated as materialization in the other. We cumulatively project the loss of our subjectivity in the world, believing that at some point, this projection "will provide us with the satisfaction we crave" (p. 62).

Demagogy is the manipulation of this materialization, the exploration of our fears, anxieties, and prejudices, and the quest for entangling our subjective power. Within this entanglement, we are taken by the "fear of failure and aversion to risk [that] has led us to extinguish any vibrancy or vitality in education and hence to de-aestheticize as well as to depoliticize it" (Phelan & Clark, 2019, p. 65). Infusing vibrancy and vitality in education is a risky task pertaining to both the aesthetical and the political realms. The pathway that leads to this infusion passes through revealing, reflecting, and dwelling on the subjective laces that connect these realms through the intuitive dimension. The deep engagement with the aesthetic forces that compose our subjectivity releases the energy necessary for meaningful transformations in societies, as Raul Seixas once sang: "Sonho que se sonha só/ É só um sonho que se sonha só/ Mas sonho que se sonha junto é realidade" [A dream that is dreamt alone/ It's just a dream that is dreamt alone/ But a dream that is dreamt together is reality] (Seixas, 1974). Sparked by the refusal of dreaming in togetherness, demagogic initiatives manipulate us to dream the dreams of others, therefore castrating the expression of our subjective power in macro-dimensions of society.

The refusal of dreaming in togetherness is manifested in education as the denial of everything that is not controllable, consumable, or reifiable. As Biesta (2017) noted, "the rise of the language and logic of learning" (p. 1) diminished the teacher's role in school and society. Due to a discourse based on efficiency and success, the centrality of individualistic learning engenders the conception of teaching as facilitation to the detriment of the more existential aspects of education. Consequently, teachers are cast out of education's most beautiful, and I suggest, artistic and aesthetic element: *subjectness*.

Subjectness in a World Perishing and Rebirthing in Becoming

Cada um sabe a dor e a delícia
de ser o que é
[Only one knows the pain and the delightfulness
of being what one is]
Veloso (1986)

Biesta (2017) understands education as functioning in three different "domains of education purpose" (p. 28): qualification, socialization, and subjectification. Qualification relates to the systematization of knowledge, information acquisition, and development of thinking abilities connected to instrumental reason, logic, and deduction. Socialization refers to the realm of

relationships, immersion in cultural traditions, introduction to behavior expectations, and certain ontological aspects. Subjectification relates to our "formation as a person" (p. 28) and to the responsibility consequent of "the freedom to do what only I can do" (p. 5); the subject realm is composed of the ways in which we can become owners of our own suffering and deep desires.

These three purposes are inseparable. Our social orientation is deeply impacted by the information we possess and process, as well as who we are. Our subjective apparatus will influence how we receive and process learning in the same sense that it is blended with our social relationships. We are constantly being transformed as subjects by knowledge exchanges and social experiences. This symbiotic relationship is the reason Biesta (2017) points to a "meaningful balance" (p. 29) among these three domains since one can reduce the other when taking too much space within the limits of the educational endeavor.

Biesta's (2017) theorization of these three functional domains of education supports the understanding of subjectness, which lies at the core of subjectification. As a concept, it relates to the encounters, interruptions, and suspensions in our lives. We are in constant conflict with the other, in continual imbalance with the world. As Siba Siba e a Fuloresta (2007), Brazilian poet, sang: "Cada vez que eu dou um passo/ o mundo sai do lugar" [Every step I take/ the world moves]. Conflict displaces our perspective, opening space for the emergence of our subjectness. An emergence consubstantiated as a response to a call for living, thriving, and sharing responsibility for what Arendt (1954/1961) called a "common world" (p. 196), a world that constantly perishes and rebirths in becoming.

As Arendt (1954/1961) conceptualizes, the dreams and hands that create and experience the world grow old and die as new dreams and hands arise. The world needs new beginnings, as the new generations need their past. Education then has a paradoxical conservative and renewing task by protecting the world from the child and the child from the world, teaching "what the world is like" (p. 95), and preparing new generations to breathe life again in the perishing ways we do things. As Gordon (2001) noted, Arendt does not conceptualize tradition as a direct link between generations. On the contrary, tradition also means "a series of innovations" (p. 3), composed of the culture's breaks and disruptions caused by each new person entering our world. This is the reason why Biesta (2017) notes that we become a "subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely as the one who began an action and the one who suffers from and is literally subjected to its consequences" (p. 10). Our subjectness lies both in the actions we initiate and in the capacity to be addressed, demanded, or affected by the consequence of our and the other's actions.

In this sense, subjectness emerges as a response to the present, to our lived experiences, to the constant displacement and resumption that characterizes the human condition. True loneliness is never possible. We exist in strangeness with the world and with ourselves. Inviting, calling, and even demanding each other for the responsibility and enjoyment of this condition is a critical element of existence. This invitation is a foundational dimension of the teacher's role, and it is our responsibility as a society to acknowledge and nurture it.

In this sense, acknowledgment and nurturing imply the understanding that this calling cannot be just facilitated, evaluated, or controlled. It is more than just rational, explainable, and probably not entirely understandable. The best we can do is to conceive it as an unfinished

attempt[2]. Teachers cannot be held entirely accountable for it. We can hold teacher education, policymakers, and higher-level stakeholders responsible for ignoring the existential purpose of education. However, in the dimension of the pedagogical praxis, subjectification cannot be an obligation, a task, or a controlled outcome of an experience. This calling pertains to the intuitive realm, originated in the will that students should be able to "encounter what comes to them from 'beyond' their sense-making" (Biesta, 2017, p. 38). Teachers need theoretical, cultural, and institutional support to make this attempt possible. They must enter the risky realm of deep relationships infused by volition, uncertainty, and even absurdity. They must navigate the delicate balance of an invitation to an honest dialogue involving self-expression, acknowledgment, permanence, and fluidity. Teachers must be empowered to be vulnerable and permeable to launch themselves on this risky and fundamental journey.

Art, Subjectness, and Teaching

Metaphorically speaking, this journey through a pedagogy that embraces subjectness can be compared to the arts in the sense that it paradoxically derives from embodied preparation and spontaneity. When observing children's drawings, Pablo Picasso's iconic saying sheds light on this paradox: "When I was the age of these children, I could draw like Raphael: it took me many years to learn how to draw like these children." (Ratcliffe, 2018). Picasso's saying contains two faces of the artistic challenge: Technique development, mainly based on study and the pursuit of mastering a particular intent, and the dissolution of this first process in spontaneity, an idiosyncratic journey that pertains to the intuitive realm.

Mario de Andrade, the Brazilian essayist, poet, and researcher who is a fundamental reference of the modern art field in that country, described these two faces when juxtaposing the artist and the artisan (Andrade, 1943/1963). For the author, artisanship is the part of the artist's technique that can be taught, shared, and organized. Although fundamental to artistic creation, artisanship does not identify the artist. The artisan living inside every good artist is responsible for the aesthetic rigor of the creation, the aspect in which the values of the artistic work are collectively built. On the other face of the artistic creation lies the concretization of an inner truth of the artist. This second element obeys the secret whims and imperatives of the subjective being, emerging from the personal processes that differentiate the artist from the others. Those are the aesthetical aspects that make it possible to distinguish one artist from the other, the delicate balances that cannot be taught but are developed in constant shocks with and rereadings of the common ways of doing art. New beginnings and innovations that renovate the ways in which art is produced and change the ways in which we see ourselves. Substantial benefits arise when conceiving pedagogy within these two complementary elements of the artistic endeavor in the face of the encounter.

An allegorical sense can support this artistic two-faced account of pedagogy. On the one hand, just like the actor who reads the play script several times and reviews their lines before entering the stage or the painter who incessantly repeats their brushes, searching for a particular shadow or effect, the teacher studies, repeats, and anticipates the many aspects of an educational situation. Teachers constantly review the content and the didactics of their classes. In this preparation, they constantly self-interrogate the infinite aesthetic elements of

[2] Absurdity again, "Fail Better" (Becket, 1983, p.7)

their body language and voice intonations. In an embodied metacognitive process, teachers take distance from their education performance to observe themselves in the mirror of their performative creation. In this observation, they refine their technique, anticipating the possible outcomes of minimal variations of these aspects for their students, just like a musician who incessantly repeats a musical passage, searching for a singular interpretation. In Andrade's (1943/1963) analogy, this face of the teacher's role would be comparable to the artisanship of teaching.

On the other hand, such as the same actor who tries to forget everything before releasing their emotional discharge when taking the stage aiming to give life to their character, teachers often try to learn to free their minds to provide space for spontaneity when entering their classroom. This is an entirely personal process, comparable to Andrade's (1943/1963) description of the desires and subjective processes that emerge from the personal experiences that distinguish the artist. In this process, for instance, to avoid being like a musician who sounds mechanic and uninterested when too attached to their pre-planned ideas, a teacher must leave the lesson plan aside to enter the flow state necessary to conduct an educational process properly. In all due proportion, such as Picasso, who unlearned the mastery of his technique to learn to paint like children, teachers must abandon the meta-cognitive auto-surveillance side of their role to embark on the risky state of spontaneity. A state that pertains to the same intuitive realm of subjectness. A state beyond sense-making, pre-linguistic. A state in which teachers will be open to encounters, conflicts, and interruptions that characterize the educational relationship.

Encounter, Astonishment, and the Imminence of a Revelation: A Memory of a Future

Wang (2021) poetically described creative educational processes as "a whole-being engagement in which meditative embodiment, aesthetic attunement, and improvisational action come together to breathe vitality into teaching, learning, and curriculum." (p. 3). An artistic account of pedagogy implies opening spaces for surprise and astonishment, engaging with the improvisational aspect of education. However, this improvisation needs to be nurtured; it requires preparation and openness. It is a paradoxal prepared spontaneity. The repetition of the unknown. A memory of a future. Something that is learned and unlearned at the same time. The vitality of pedagogy, as the vitality of art, pertains to this paradox.

When searching for this vitality, past and future are lingering in the teacher's present within this paradoxical process. These temporal dimensions dwell in the unsustainable lightness that results from the encounter between memory and novelty, suspended by uncertainty. An encounter between the child who sees the world for the first time and the teacher who presents a past their students do not yet know of. An encounter between the teacher, who does not know what novelties the child will bring, and the child who relies on their past to understand the future their teacher will suggest. An encounter that is driven by the responsibility for our shared world and by the fragility of the human condition. An encounter with our strangeness to ourselves. An encounter that will make both students and teachers ask: Who am I in the face of this responsibility?

As a society, we need to learn to see this encounter in a similar way as Borges's (1974) astonishment by the sea and other elemental things: "[el mar], quien lo mira lo ve por vez primera, siempre" [Who stares upon the sea, see it for their first time, always] (p. 943). The sea, the unencountered cradle of life's creation, challenges us at every glance, at every imaginary step taken as we dive into its symbolic infinitude. When facing the immensity of the elemental

entities that created us, the sun, the moon, the stars, or the myth, in an existential encounter with the other, the astonishment at the finitude of life conflicts with the immensity of the human dream and challenges us to face the essential question: “¿Quién es el mar, quién soy?” [Who is the sea, who am I?] (Borges, 1974, p. 943). Students and teachers are entangled in this journey through the subjective realm, subjected to the revelations that make us wonder throughout our inevitable conflict with the other, to our strangeness with ourselves. As a society and singular entities, we choose to respond or deny this calling from infinity.

This fundamental wonder resides in the encounter with this immensity and the encounter with simple elements of life. It lies in expansive narratives, such as the sea and the moon, and daily encounters with less impactful or notorious elements. Borges (1974) poetically described the aesthetic experience as an emersion consequent of these encounters. As noted by the author, music, states of happiness, mythology, masks created through time, certain twilights, and certain places want to tell us something, or they say something that we should not have missed, or they are about to say something. “Esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce” [this imminence of a revelation, which does not occur] (p. 635), signifies the aesthetic experience . As Schonmann (2020) noted, it is crucial to remember aesthetic and artistic related but not identical terms. While art refers to the "act of creation" (p. 12), aesthetics is linked to the appreciation. However, the link between the two is entirely relevant to this reflection on subjectness as "[a]esthetic aspects of experience complicate and even defy explanation because people experience some things in ways that cannot be communicated in words" (p. 13). Once more, the realm of subjectness imminently breaks through in suspension. In artistic creation or aesthetic appreciation, our strangeness with the other is pronounced, opening meaningful spaces for encounters where language does not reign. This is why Borges (1974) describes the aesthetic experience as the immediacy of an incomplete revelation. The suspension of the logic of language, consequent to the encounter, creates space for different ways of conveying meaning in the profound, intuitive realm of subjectness. Each teacher should be entitled to pursue personal ways of supporting students in the quest for these suspensions. In an exciting resonance, Leggo (1999) captures a found idea when reflecting on the teacher's manner:

> on the edge of morning
> a heron stands still
> in the slough near the dike
> where I walk daily.
> gulls hang in the sky.
> A sea lion rests with the river.
> an eagle watches from the tallest alder.
> the whole world lingers.
> This is the teacher's way (p.125).

Leggo (1999) describes a teacher who is open to the possibility of delayingness. A teacher who "remembers the past" (p. 126) while curiously lingering in the present and hopefully observes the future, distractedly waiting for an uncertain routine of events. Here, one more time, the aesthetic experience and the astonishment sparked by the encounter with the other are in suspension. Here, one more time, this encounter is portrayed as a kind of spontaneity training; it involves a repetitive improvisation in a reiterated openness to the unknown. Here, one more time, wonder, fired by this encounter with the other, reconnects us to the immensity of the world, the daily events of our ordinary life, and our subjectness: "[O]n the edge of the day I/

dance and laugh all the ducks/ in the slough in the air./ our wild line scribbling/ writes the earth, writes us/ in the prepositions/ which connect all/ the parts of the sentence." (p. 126). In this context, the connection of the sentence is the reintegration of language with the primal experience that precedes it, which is the consubstantiation of the meanings of aesthetical experience into words. Therefore, the teacher's prepared spontaneity opens space to constantly remaking subjectification, reintegrating their whole world through language in a continuous open dialogue with the other.

In the sense of this spontaneity preparation for the encounter, art, aesthetic experience, and the teacher's journey through subjectness are memory and astonishment altogether. On the quest for a pedagogy that embraces these aspects, it is crucial to remember that those elements are not delights reserved for talented artists graced by divine gifts. We all are privileged with aesthetic sense and artistic creation. As Gombrich (1954) insightfully noted when reflecting on art history, in everyday life, anybody "has experienced this strange sensation of balancing forms and colors without being able to tell exactly what kind of harmony [they are] trying to achieve" (p. 14). In this account, the aesthetic experience again emerges as a peculiar feeling, an intuition. As much as we may not be able to know exactly what we're looking for with this experience of arranging flowers, there is a hunch, a hidden image that invites us to experiment and pursue. We do well in dwelling on this paradox when reflecting on pedagogy's dimension of subjectness because, in terms of the encounter, education is also suspension; it is the pursuit of our intuitions, of strange sensations, that the particular memories of what the future will bring us will emerge.

A Narrative of Encounters

> I think that one of the best things that I have done in my life,
> better than the books I have written,
> was never allowing to die in myself
> the child who I could not be as well as the child who I was.
>
> Freire (2001, p. 101)

In investigating the connections of pedagogy, demagogy, and subjectness, I want to offer a narrative on a succession of encounters I experienced as an early childhood music teacher in Brazil. The unfolding of these encounters was fundamental in evidencing my responsibility as an educator in dealing with the subjective aspect of my professional role at the time. My intention with this narrative is to bring the questions presented in this article closer to the experiential realm. This delicate story was written in accordance with the family involved, who agreed with the disclosing of these details as a way of supporting other educators dealing with life and its impermanence. This is written as a tribute to Lucas and his dear family.

First: A Musical Encounter

It was 2016, and I had completed ten years as a music teacher at Escola da Vila, a forward-thinking private school in Sao Paulo, Brazil. I was very comfortable in my position. The ideas about what songs to teach and projects to pursue would quickly come to my mind. I had accumulated a vast repertoire of songs, musical games, and engaging activities. My students would easily participate in my proposals. I had no significant conflicts with other teachers, students or parents. A very relevant part of the school community appreciated my work.

My family was part of the school. Mylo, my daughter, had recently finished the first school cycle, passing to Grade 1. André, my son, had just initiated the first cycle. He was about to be three years old and had just started what is called Group 1. My brother studied there from 1993 to 1999. My mother started working at the school in 1992 and retired at the end of 2024, after 32 years of service. That school felt like home to me.

Lucas was almost five years old and had been my student since he started his first cycle at Escola da Vila in 2014. He was a very sweet and relational child, capable of engaging with many different friends. He had a sweet, high-pitched voice, a gentle smile, and an interesting way of laughing. I have a vivid memory of the sounds of his laugh. One of my responsibilities in the school was to conduct the musical performance at the end of the school year, which happens in December in Brazil. This was the main event of the early childhood cycle in the school. It was a rite of passage, very important for the community. The proximity to Christmas and New Year's Eve also helped build this ritualistic character. Families and extended families would massively attend.

In 2014, Lucas was three years old, and he went through this process for the first time. He got terrified by the idea and did not present. From the very beginning of the school rehearsals, he had made it clear that he wouldn't participate. His classroom teacher called the family to warn about his determination not to take part in it. On the day of the event, things unfolded just as expected. He refused to enter the stage and watched the performance, clinging tightly to his mom. She later told me that his small was trembling uncontrollably, and as they left the school and reached the car, the tension overwhelmed him completely, and he vomited. One year later, at the end of 2015, Lucas was much more comfortable in the presentation. He would jump and sing loudly on that stage with me. I later learned from his family that many parents who had attended the 2014 event were cheering for him this time, hoping he would sing and have fun—he was very well-loved by the class families. That's why during these songs, he made a point of singing louder than anyone, jumping enthusiastically, and holding hands with his best friend. Looking at the parents, it was as if he was expressing a sense of triumph. What a blast!

The performances happened in a big and white auditorium, with more than 80 family members in the audience. It was scary for lots of three-year-old children. Even the fourth and fifth ones were afraid. Although the situation was very challenging, it was an exciting moment, an encounter. With its transformative power, music can compress everything in the present: Feelings, emotions, and sensations. Our past became represented in the songs, while our hopes for the future were shining in those childish eyes. So much can be synthesized in a rhythmic moment. As a wise Malinke musician said: "Tous les choses c'est du rythme" [everything is rhythm] (Thomas Roebers, 2010). Rhythm is a force that connects us all to the present in the millisecond that one hand hits the skin of a djembe. If one learns the old ways of connecting with it, one will feel it. Under the diaphragm, close to the Japanese Ki. Our vital energy. A drum beat, a void, a displacement, a reconnection. A calling.

My students responded so differently to this calling: To the affection that becomes sound, that becomes energy, movement, and comes back to be intention again. The rhythmic energy that hatches in joy and in many other ways of feeling and being. This calling made Lucas get on that stage with me; it made so many children present at those moments. And, with them, the families, the teachers, and the school staff would be present too. In this encounter, we cannot control how music expresses its amalgamation power through ourselves. We can only acknowledge it and let everyone be. Because at that ritualistic moment, in front of that caring

and expecting audience, some kids were thrilled, some were very shy, some were distracted, some were astonished, and some were chilling. However, together, we were all children. We were present. Present to the encounter. Present to the child within. Childhood is our capacity to be present in the encounter. Childhood is much more than a temporal marker. I am glad Lucas was there present with me. Our encounter is now present in my memories and dreams, and I hope this story can help other educators deal with life and its inevitable transience.

Second: A Birthday Party and the Encounter with Life and its Impermanence

It was the beginning of April 2016, on a beautiful Sunday, when we celebrated my son's birthday. André was becoming three years old. He still had that cute baby resemblance, marked by a little round belly and those soft curly hairs. His eyes would smile together with his whole face. Everyone was full of music and energy when we sang Happy Birthday. Andre's face, looking at the crowd, will be forever imprinted in my chest. Today, he still resembles a baby to me. Our kids always do.

Memory is a trickster; it sings stories in our ears when we sleep so we can continue dreaming after waking up. Sysifus does not need to wait for the stone to roll down the mountain to feel or imagine joy. We will always have our memories to transform that desertic hill into something familiar. Carrying that rock upwards can be so many things. It can be a way of feeding our families. It can be a way of fulfilling our childhood dreams. It can be a way of giving our kids a birthday party. It can be a way of becoming the adult that would have protected the child we were. It can be a way of solving a significant problem that affects our community. It can be a way of becoming a hero. There is becoming in every sacrifice. Every mourning resembles a celebration of life. I say that with all my respect to the ones who left this world and those who stayed. Even in the face of the greatest adversity, our memories and dreams make life always be somehow celebrated.

As Renato Russo, a Brazilian poet, once sang, "tudo é dor/ e toda dor vem do desejo/ de não sentirmos dor" [everything is pain/ and all pain comes from the desire/ of not feeling pain] (Legião Urbana, 1989). Subjetification lies in the ownership of our pain and desires, sentiments that only exist in relation to the other. I cannot desire myself, as I cannot hurt myself in my subjectness. I cannot auto-inflict pain without making myself an object of my existence. As in Sartre's (1945/1962) iconic saying, "L'enfer, c'est les autres" [Hell is other people] (p. 91). We are all entrapped in the inexorably communal cell of the human condition: "Into whatever I say about myself someone else's judgment always enters. Into whatever I feel within myself someone else's judgment enters" (Sartre, 1976, p. 199). Absolute solitude is never possible. Identity is relational, which is why we need birthday parties and why children love them so much. A birthday party is another event that is so full of encounters. And, like life, an encounter exists in the space between permanence and impermanence.

Lucas arrived at Andre's party with his parents, Yuri and Roberto, and with his brothers Vitor and Tiago. Vitor was André's good friend; they studied in the same classroom in Escola da Vila. I was happy to see Lucas and Vitor playing with everyone at the party. They had one scooter each, riding it all over the concrete court. However, they did not stay long. Lucas was not feeling well, and they had to leave early. I remember when Roberto, Lucas's father, said goodbye. After the party ended on that Sunday evening, we went back home. The following day, I didn't hear any news about Lucas. On Tuesday morning, I received a text from Yuri, his mother, informing me that he had passed away. It was a strong shock. I could not believe my eyes.

After making several phone calls and canceling work commitments, I went to attend the funeral on that Tuesday. My mother came with me. I didn't know what to say, think, or feel. I felt like a stranger to myself. My heart was in pieces. I was not prepared to be part of a situation like this. I do not think one would ever be. I remember that Rogério, Lucas's uncle, was responsible for saying brave and essential words when we were giving farewell to the physical presence of that much-beloved child. These are the words I carry in my memory today: "Lucas foi uma criança alegre, cheio de amigos. Ele sempre tinha uma brincadeira. Abrace seus pais, beije seus filhos, agradeça pelos momentos de vida" [Lucas was a cheerful child, full of friends. He was always playing games. Hug your parents, kiss your children, and be thankful for your life moments]. That speech deeply impacted me. Not only by the words chosen by Rogério, but also by his presence. Something about his voice tone, his facial expression, or a combination of the two.

At some point during the funeral, I met Carol, Lucas's aunt. She gave me a long hug, crying deeply, and thanked me for the joyful moments in the music classes. She also told me that during the painful hours that succeeded Lucas's departure, the family remembered Lucas's performance in the music performance at the end of 2015, when he had overcome his discomfort with being on that stage in front of the school community. She told me that this remembrance comforted the family. Lucas's excitement with his achievement in 2015 became a story for them. Some of the songs we sang together were remembered. His happiness about overcoming that challenge became relevant in that delicate moment. Because of these encounters, I started to feel that I was developing a meaningful relationship with Luca's family.

Third: Encounter and Responsibility

Classes were cancelled in Lucas's classroom on the following day, and the school made a sage and supportive decision. They invited a psychologist to speak to the teachers and parents of the whole early childhood education cycle. She specialized in loss and mourning. This action was a fundamental step to address the situation. No one knew how to speak to Lucas's family or how to approach the subject with the kids in the classroom. Our emotions were all over the place. All the teachers in the early childhood cycle gathered in the music room to meet with the psychologist. We were all in a circle, and she asked us to speak out one question that we had in our minds. The group raised several thoughts about how to approach the topic in the classroom, anticipated a few scenarios, children's questions and interactions with the families. I was deeply concerned about how to help kids navigate those feelings without losing their humanity. I asked her this question. I had a feeling that we could rush kids to overcome that situation. The anxiety that children could be traumatized by that event could have led teachers and parents to try to ease the burden and prevent them from grieving.

I remember that the psychologist offered essential insights in that we all, including children, spend our whole lives learning how to deal with loss and that there is no ideal way of knowing this. She did not invalidate the concern that our students would have this experience being so young. However, she opened our eyes to the understanding that we could deny this meaningful learning when avoiding talking about this experience. This was going to be a crucial event for our students. She also oriented the teachers to engage in conversations with Lucas's family, letting them lead the way in expressing themselves. It would be impossible to

predict the ways in which the events would unfold, and we needed to be open to acknowledge their actions and reactions. The construction of ways of coping with our loss should be built together. A similar message was conveyed to the parents of the early childhood cycle in a separate meeting. Classes returned on Thursday, three days after Lucas became only present in our memories and dreams. I worked in another school and could not be present when the kids arrived that day. Alê, the classroom teacher, and Gustavo, the class assistant, welcomed them. Alê has an exceptional quality. We worked together for 15 consecutive years teaching in early childhood. We have been through a lot together, and I have never seen her in bad humour. She has a soft way of dealing with life. I think it is just her nature. She is more experienced than me and I learnt a lot working with her.

I joined the kids on Friday, the following day, and I could see that Alê was very emotional. There was so much vulnerability in how she received the kids through the classroom door that morning. I could sense a delicate mix of tenderness, softness, preoccupation, and sadness. I carry a vivid memory of an image of her on that day. Her left hand in her chest. Her head pending to the left side. Her facial expression. This imaginary photo comes to my mind each time I remember that moment. The kids were very intense when arriving at their class. They were loud, agitated, and observant. So much adrenaline. We could barely see the energy materializing in the air because the environment was so dense. They were received in the traditional cantos [corners]. We always had that to receive the kids to their school day. At least four corners were prepared in the class with different student activities. Students could choose between reading, drawing, playing with specific toys, and games. Kids were mingling in these corners and starting their day while we played games in conversation with them.

I don't have an exact memory of the events of that day eight years ago, but I remember asking Alê's permission to get my guitar and invite the kids to sing. I remember what I felt. I did not know what to do. What was I supposed to say? What was I supposed to feel? How could something like this be fair? How could I be alive? How can we find any balance or purpose in this world? I remember Lucas's sweet, high-pitched voice. I remember his innocent look. His laugh is still with me. I remember sitting down on the floor with the children in a circle with my guitar in my lap. It was the signal. They started to gather in the circle, and I started fingering the chord melody of Superfantástico [Superfantastic] (Balão Mágico, 1983), an upbeat children's song that the kids loved so much. They instantaneously started to sing: "Superfantástico amigo/ que bom estar contigo/ no nosso balão" [Superfantastic friend/ how nice to be with you/ in our balloon]. Children were shouting the song away. The intensity of that emotional discharge marked me. There was some rawness in their emotional expressions. Everything was out of key: intensity, rage, chaos, defiance. All in the air, all over the place. And at that moment, I felt music amalgamating power again. It was there, blending our identities, crossing the borders of our existence. Calling me again, haunting me again, and dissolving our boundaries in alterity. Catarsys. Infinity. An undefined emotion connecting us all. A blend of affections through that dense air. And then, I started to understand that, in that situation, I had a responsibility related to the "freedom to do what only I [could] do" (Biesta, 2017).

Music has always been part of a series of encounters in my life. It occupies the space of religion in my life, having this function of reconnection, of transcendence. My father gave me his guitar when I turned 22 with a note: Pra você conversar com os deuses [For you, to talk to the gods]. After years of studying and playing music with children daily, I became sensitive enough to catalyze collective emotional discharges. This was my personal touch as a teacher. Although I

had some skills in terms of teaching, such as having a vast repertoire of songs and musical games, what defined me as a teacher was being able to channel collective feelings, facilitating the process of being together through music. More than pointing out when my students were or were not out of key or tempo, for instance, I focused my work in early childhood education on bringing a ritualistic dimension to my students' day through music. Therefore, I felt prepared to be a lightning rod, a vehicle of theirs, and my emotional discharge in this delicate situation. As a natural consequence of my work conducting these daily rituals and the end-of-year musical performances, I came to understand what I owed to Lucas and his family. The responsibility consequent of these series of encounters led me to realize that I should start to channel this collective emotional discharge, and that's what I started to pursue.

This pursuit found echoes in Lucas's family's reaction to the event. Lucas had not only siblings in the school but also two cousins. Carol, his aunt who had given me a long hug during the funeral, was their mother. She came to the school to pick them up one day, and we met in the corridors. She then repeated the story about the importance of the songs and the moments of joy Lucas experienced during the 2015 musical performance. A few days later, I met Yuri and Roberto, Lucas's parents, at the school, and they brought up the same story again. Yuri and Roberto demonstrated strong resilience in the unfolding weeks and months of that event; I was very impressed by their capacity to show their vulnerability to the school community, remain present, and communicate their process. It was a life lesson to me and many of the other members of our school. We didn't know what to expect, but their openness and presence inspired us to keep searching for ways to deal with the situation. Yuri often used social media and other means to get into conversations about Lucas, his siblings and the rest of the family. School professionals frequently commented on her posts, and we felt confident about approaching the family and speaking about the event and its consequences.

This confidence was always mixed with tenderness and respect. The conversation with the therapist and other professionals in the school made it clear that Yuri and Roberto would show us the way. However, we could always suggest ideas. One of our conversations profoundly marked me when we were talking about Lucas. I told Yuri, "Sorry, I do not know the best way to talk to you about Lucas." And she responded, "You do not have to worry; it is always good to talk about him." This communication with the family empowered me to keep pursuing my intuition: Music could be essential in ritualizing that moment. It could help create meaning. It could help give sense to the experience. So, in conversation with Lucas's family, Alê, the students, and the other school professionals, we started to consider how to ritualize that process, and music became a fundamental aspect. We remembered and talked about Lucas in so many moments, a process that lasted the rest of the school year, continuing for approximately eight months.

Fourth: Encounters with Continuity

Our first collective action was Monday, the seventh day after Lucas left us in physical presence. We decided to create a space in the playground for the whole community to write messages in solidarity with Lucas's family. We prepared baskets with different sorts of paper cut into various shapes and colours, a great variety of pens, and lots of coloured pieces of string cut to 20 to 30 cm—the messages we all tied by the families over a big wooden structure part of the playground. To start the process and ritualize the moment, we sang a song with all

the students of the cycle. The messages stayed there for a few days. During the following weeks, Alê organized several different moments with the kids so that they could engage in conversations and express their feelings about Lucas. Our students shared powerful thoughts. These conversations were often put into other mediums, such as drawings and paintings. Meanwhile, I started to think about which songs would speak to that moment, taking them to class and showing them to the kids while asking which ones they would like to sing.

With time, we started to understand the situation better, and more ideas began to arise in conversations with Lucas's family and our students. After a few weeks had passed, we started to plan what to do for our Festa Junina, a traditional celebration that happens in June all over Brazil. Lucas's birthday occurred on April 25, and his family organized a ceremony with the other students in a municipal park. They spent the morning playing and released several balloons up in the air. I saw the images on Yuri's Social Media. In conversation with Lucas's parents, I proposed starting the Festa Junina with a procession. Each child held a balloon while walking, singing one of Lucas's favourite songs: Pomar [orchard] (Palavra Cantada, 1996). This delicate, responsorial song became known in the class as Lucas' favourite song. We sing the name of the fruit, followed by the name of the respective tree: *Banana, bananeira/ goiaba, goiabeira/ maça, macieira/ jaboticaba, jabuticabeira* [Banana, banana tree/ guava, guava tree/ apple, apple tree/ jaboticaba, jaboticaba tree]. Lucas loved this song and had a particular way of changing one of the tree names. We incorporated this change when singing it. After the procession arrived at the circle where the celebration continued, we sang another traditional song of the Festa Junina: *O balão vai subindo* [The balloon goes up]. We released the balloons at this moment in reference to what was done on Lucas's birthday. This planning made sense to the students, who could previously understand what and why we did.

We also planted a tree for Lucas in the school playground. Students always cared for it, watered it, and checked how the tree was doing. After painting it, we decided to do one more tribute to Lucas, so we recorded a video singing Pomar [orchard] (Palavra Cantada, 1996) one more time in front of the three and sent it to the families. Toward the end of that year, the musical performance started approaching again. I then started talking to the students about what to present. We collectively decided to pay one more tribute to our dear friend. We invited his family to the presentation; they sat in the first row. I said a few words at the beginning. We played the video recorded in front of the three and sang the songs we had decided to include. Lucas's family was all there. The children were joyful, and Lucas's presence was acknowledged by that group one more time.

As I later learned from Lucas's mother, the performance of André's and Vitor's class also stood out profoundly. One of the songs introduced to the group was "Chocolate," (Monte, 1989). For Vítor, in particular, the song became symbolic, specially the line, "Não adianta vir com guaraná pra mim, é chocolate o que eu quero beber" [Don't bother bringing me soda; it's chocolate I want to drink]. No matter how many new toys, friends, or cool cartoons came his way, what Vitor truly longed for was his older brother. Maia's (1971) heartfelt lyrics also resonated profoundly, "Vou pedir pra você voltar, eu te amo, eu te adoro, eu te quero bem..." ("I'll ask you to come back, I love you, I adore you, I wish you well"). It became, in its essence, an expression of a deep desire for Lucas to return, one more relevant emotional discharge. These performances were also my farewell to that process. Although Lucas's presence is still with me today, my responsibility as a teacher in dealing with the ritualization of his absence was resolved. However, one final message was left dwelling in the space of the inexorable unresolvedness of this experience. One of the songs chosen to be sung by those children is

very close to my heart: Tempo Rei [king time] (Gil, 1984). This song speaks about the inevitable passage of time and what it does to our senses and cognoscence: Não me iludo/ Tudo permanecerá do jeito/ Que tem sido/ Transcorrendo/ Transformando/ Tempo e espaço navegando todos os sentidos [I have no illusions/ Everything will remain the way it has been/ Transcending/ Transforming/ Time and space navigating all the senses].

I did not intend for my students to understand the meaning of those complex metaphors and their connection to this process. However, something in me needed to sing that with them. I cried silently, singing that song with them many times that year. This was my secret message to everyone. My enigma. One of the delicate balances I pursued in arranging the flowers needed to say farewell to Lucas's physical presence. I know that the sense of responsibility sparked by that event will be forever imprinted in my chest, along with my children's smiles over a birthday cake. I will make sure I remember them so I can continue to carry the rocks over the mountains of our shared existence.

Conclusion

As Biesta (2008) pointed out: "the question of what it means to be human is also—and perhaps even first of all—an educational question." (p. 198). When we as a society deny dwelling in this intrinsic element of pedagogy, we remove a foundational aspect of the teacher's role. Insecure of their relevance and contribution, teachers need to appeal to gimmicks to keep students entertained. They need to dodge the uncomfortable encounters and all the uncertainty that comes with it. They imagine that they need to control the learning situation thoroughly, and the transfiguration of pedagogy in demagogy becomes an enormous probability. Although, as Adams (2022) observes, "pedagogy points in myriad directions depending on who is speaking/writing, for whom and why" (p. 109), there are common elements that need to be discussed to create meaningful dialogue within different subgroups of societies. The dimension of subjectification is one of these elements of commonality, as it perpasses all aspects of the educational endeavor. It is a highly complex dimension that pertains to the intuitive realm. Through this essay, I intended to persuade and empower readers to reflect on the aesthetical and artistic elements of teaching and their relationship to this dimension. I hope to empower students and teachers to attempt to respond to the encounters posed in their journeys, dwelling on the existential question: Who am I in the face of this responsibility?

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