The Academic Gesture and the Intercessory Thought: childhood and knowledge about childhood

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ABSTRACT – The Academic Gesture and the Intercessory Thought: childhood and knowledge about childhood. This reflection article, derived from the bibliographic review on the academic production of Professor Sandra Mara Corazza, describes the intercessory thought that her academic gesture produced and that allows us to recognize at least four contributions to the field of knowledge about childhood; with them, regions are made visible to advance in the deconstruction, reorganization, and understanding of childhood affairs. The intercessory thought points towards a region to be explored that demands action in the discursive and practical order and questions how we behave as the forms and possibilities that we build with and for the experience of childhood.

Keywords: Infantility. Discursive Field. Government. Childhood.

RESUMEN – El Gesto Académico y el Pensamiento Intercesor: infantilidad y saberes sobre la infancia. Este artículo de reflexión, derivado de la revisión documental sobre la producción académica de la profesora Sandra Mara Corazza, describe el pensamiento intercesor que su gesto académico produjo y que permite reconocer por lo menos cuatro aportes al campo de saber sobre la infancia, con los cuales se visibilizan regiones para avanzar en la deconstrucción, reorganización y comprensión de lo infantil. Tal pensamiento intercesor apunta hacia una región por explorar que exige una acción en el orden discursivo y práctico y que interroga los modos como nos conducimos, así como las formas y posibilidades que construimos con y para la experiencia de infancia.

The Academic Gesture and the Intercessory Thought

About the Intercessors

If the usual order of value hierarchies is not shaken, the secrets of knowledge do not run the risk of being uncovered (Foucault, 2014 [1968], p. 55).

For the Professor Sandra Mara Corazza

Intercessors are fundamental for thought, creation, and formation. Intercessors can be real, fictional, animate, or inanimate. The intercessors are not a place or a stable position, they are not an identity. An intercessor emerges when it is established with a discourse that seems to emanate from silence or come from outside the common places in which the institutional discourse moves (accepted, politically correct, etc.). An intercessor does not appear in the noise of a debate, nor from a duty to communicate; it emanates from silencing common places. An intercessor belongs to intense moments, it manifests itself as a gesture: an attitude and way of being in the shared and accomplice world to try another way of life (Deleuze, 1985).

The exercise of thought developed by Professor Sandra Mara Corazza at this time works as an intercessor for different fields of reflection and ethical, political, and aesthetic action in the academic world. Concerning the field of studies on childhood, its theoretical and methodological elaborations indicate, not only an understanding (archaeogenealogical) of how this region of knowledge is organized, but also a series that mirrors and evidences the production of truth about childhood that “[…] does not exclude a series of more terms, or complicated series, with bifurcations” (Deleuze, 1985, n/p) As an intercessor, its thought is a power through which it is possible to reconsider the conditions in which a discourse on the infantile subject emerges and a kind of infantility is built in modernity, the one that regulates what we are, do, and the relationships on which we organize the world.

The critical description of a knowledge’s field, the concept of infantility, and the commitment to new ethical-philosophical exercises concerning how we subject ourselves as infantile individuals constitute the reflections through which some shaping forces of the field are made visible, and theoretical and methodological tools are provided to advance in an analytical work that also answers the question of what we did and what we can do in the relationship with boys and girls as subjects of childhood.

The reflections that this thought offers us are derived from an archaeogenealogical exercise in two different layers of analysis: the first is linked to the critical description of the constitution of a field of study that refers to the historical and ontological condition of childhood affairs. (Corazza, 1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2000; 2002a); and the second, related to the philosophical reading of the childhood condition that we inhabit and transit in contemporaneity, which is committed both to recognizing the diversity of human life experiences in the first years of life, and
to constitute a possibility of fighting against the hegemonic forms of current behaving (Corazza 2002c; 2004).

These two layers of study are organized from a philosophical reading in which analytical and methodological instruments are interwoven – Derrida’s deconstruction, Foucault’s genealogy, and Lacan’s conceptualizations, among others (Corazza, 2004) – to describe the way discursive relationships and the knowledge, constituted in the modern episteme, produced specific modes of subjectivation of children, as infants, and adult subjects until today. The two layers of this critical reflection on the childhood condition intertwine and complement each other, constituting a thought that is large in possibilities for research, since

[...] where the infantile ends, in the same place, on the same limit, here where a certain specific concept of childhood ends, here, where a certain historical condition ends -ontological, deontological, ascetic; teleological and eschaton-theological– of the infantile, precisely here, a new history of infantility begins. The infantile now has the opportunity to announce itself, to promise itself, to restart itself: like the humanity other of the infantile, of the other infantile, and the infantile as another. If the onto-theo-archaeo-teleology seized it, neutralized it, and finally annulled its historicity, it is about thinking of another form of history, perhaps another register of the political (Corazza, 2014, p. 129).

The reflections that come from the analytical exercise around childhood as a concept and as a life experience open, on the one hand, a wide spectrum of possibilities to identify the origin and emergence of the discursive field of childhood (Marín-Díaz, 2010; Marín-Díaz; León, 2018), an associated study space, the one that would have been configured in the last four or five decades; and, on the other hand, a critical-political task to advance in an educational theorization with new possibilities for research and educational practice.

The History of Childishness and the Specters of Modernity

Formal investigations, those that are institutionalized in faculties and undergraduate and postgraduate curricular programs, almost always require a balance of research and theoretical productions carried out by the academic community – books, articles, research, theses, dissertations, etc. – it shows not only the knowledge of the field of study by the researchers but also the place where the problem is located and the question that guides their study. These balances, although they are usually exhaustive, generally constitute a part – rarely the most important part – of the research reports or the publications derived from them. However, in the thesis História da infantilidade: a-vida-a-morte e mais-valia de uma infância sem fim (Corazza, 1998a) and the book Infância & educação. Era uma vez... Quer que conte outra vez? (Corazza, 2002a), an
analytical and critical balance is presented as a significant conceptual and methodological contribution to thinking about childhood, that is, how a set of relationships and practices for and with children were historically defined.

From a methodological perspective, the commitment to an archaeogenealogical reading derived from the use of Foucauldian tools allows us to describe the constitution of the field of studies on childhood around the work of Ariès (1986; 1987) and identify a set of categories that articulated the discourse on it – “discovery”, “invention”, “concept”, “nature”, “consciousness”, “sensitivity”, “feeling” (Corazza, 2002a, p. 83). Ariès’ work is pointed out as the condition of possibility for the development of a large number of works in which his theses were reviewed, studied, criticized, opposed, refuted, or validated – mainly DeMause (1982), but also Pollock (1990), Flandrin (1976), Demos (1970), Shorter (1975), Stone (1974), Firestone (1970), among others. In this case, two main axes organize the studies: the historical, with those works that analyze childhood as a cultural category invented between the 18th and 19th centuries; and the socio-cultural with research on the colonization of childhood by the market of services offered by expert adults.

The first theoretical contribution of this archaeogenealogical view is the description where it recognizes and orders the discourses on childhood, pointing out focuses of attention, recurrences, and contrasts in the analyses, while referring to important routes to advance other investigations. The historical line that was developed in a privileged way in the decade of the eighties, is characterized by: a) three ideas shared by studies based on Pollock’s work (1990) – before the 17th century there was no concept of childhood, parent/child relationships were merely formal, and only at the end of the 18th century was childhood re-signified –; b) five factors pointed out in the studies as relevant to the modification of the concept of childhood in the 17th century – the emergence of the education system, changes in the family structure, development of capitalism, the emergence of the spirit of benevolence and parents’ emotional maturity –; c) significant criticisms of the historical perspective associated with a kind of obsession to find the origin of the feeling of childhood, with the documentary sources used in the different investigations, with the historical periods analyzed and compared, with the moment of emergence of the concept and, finally, with the practices not necessarily of carelessness, violence, mistreatment or indifference; d) the recognition of the transformation in relations with children that, since the 17th century, would have improved, according to studies of social history, psychohistory, theory on infant care and the development of public policies related to the childhood; and e) the development of historical studies in the line of institutional policies of care, indicating that before modernity there was no denial or ignorance of childhood, then it is necessary to recognize practices of affection and care in parents/children relationships as an invariant form of human relationships (Corazza, 1998a; 1999; 2002a; 2002b).
In the sociological line, the analysis of childhood as an object of consumption stands out, which occurred mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 19th century, two sets of studies are recognized: the first around the resignification of childhood, mainly in middle- and upper-class families, with the emergence of professionals and experts in the education and care of children – Plumb (1975), Fonseca (1989), Tucker (1982), and Walzer (1975) –; the second on the permanence and extent of neglect, and in some cases exploitation of children, particularly among families and groups of disadvantaged or poor social classes – Ariès (1986; 1987), Badinter (1985), Pinbeck and Hewitt (1969), Shorter (1975) and Stone (1974). In the 20th century, the characterization focuses on the transformations associated with the nurture and care of infants, which would have contributed to the modification of a set of social and cultural relations, whose emphasis would be “[…] on the care of children [who] passes from survival and moral formation to responsibilities with mental health and social and economic adaptation” (Corazza, 2002a, p. 115).

This area of study also includes works that refer to the disappearance of childhood’s death – Postman (1999), Trisciuzzi and Cambi (1989), Winn (1983), Berger and Berger (1983), etc. It is a metaphor that is present in the analyzes that explain current events and transformations and where the death, destitution, or disappearance of childhood refers “[…] both to the weakening of the borders between the ‘adult world’ and the ‘child world’, as well as its condition as a slow and inexorable process” (Marín-Díaz; León, 2018). Analyzes in this line point to the weakening of the family organization, the deficit of social structures and government organizations, as well as the presence of new forms of communication and information, as causes of a process of “de-infantilization” that is evidenced by the presence of “[…] infant-adults and puerile-adults” (Ghirardelli, 1994, p. 554 apud Corazza, 2002a, p. 121).

The review of studies on contemporary childhood in Brazil and Latin America describes a kind of “suppression of childhood”, which would not be exclusive to these latitudes, and which makes visible the experience of “children without childhood” present in different groups and social classes. This new condition operates as an indication of a new stage of undifferentiation, which does not mean the return of that stage described by historians and whose “overcoming” would be immanent to the process of constitution of modernity, but this is the evidence of concrete life experiences that flee from the concepts and notions with which it is intended to define what is childness. It deals with the social conditions in which they have verified

[…] the extremes of the realities outlined today for children: one is that of the excluded, murderous, suicidal, abused, or sold infant, and the other one is that of the consumer infant of the electronic world and the Internet, for whom adults are in a position of sellers or buyers in the task of satisfying their wants and needs. […] these theses and figures proposed by Narodowski and by the authors
The Academic Gesture and the Intercessory Thought

who study the childhood's death as a result of the media, a vision of childhood is outlined as a passive ‘public’, an undifferentiated mass that has little or no criteria and responsiveness (Marín-Díaz; León, 2018, p. 52).

The descriptive exercise of studies on childhood traced a map, drew the borders of a territory, and pointed out the landmarks that laid the foundations for modern thought on it, as recognized in the research conducted by the social sciences, particularly in history, sociology, and psychology. The reading of the field of knowledge of childhood using archaeological tools not only allowed the description of a wide documentary corpus but also the possibility of identifying and describing the discursive operation that accompanied the appearance of modern childhood from an enunciative regularity not perceptible using other perspectives or methodological arsenals. This discursive operation would be

[...] a constituent of the western discourse about the infantile and operated by two active axes: 1. One of the exemptions from primordial guilt and, therefore, innocence. 2. Another one of indirect participation in guilt and, therefore, the possibility of guilt. By inventorying an interdiscursive analysis in the field of religious discourse, the Bible, and in the educational field, the Magna Didactics, I will have, at the opportune moment, the conditions to examine some displacements of this double axis towards categories of thought and political practices of the government of the infants, whose archeology finds its strongest points of inflection in the sacrament of baptism and the educational pastoral (Corazza, 2002a, p. 139).

Concerning this operation, the second theoretical contribution of this analysis on childhood studies is verified. It is an unusual reading of the way how childhood was configured and the way we understand and think about infants until today. In this case, the intersection of two discursivities distant in time, the religious discourse, and the pedagogical discourse, with the consequent transposition of their privileged techniques – baptism and educational pastoral – involved thinking of the enunciative position of Comenius as “[...] a position of operation in educational discourse, enhancing school practices of more than three centuries in the West. Practices that, to talk about childhood, articulated knowledge and religious with scientists and politicians powers” (Corazza, 2002a, p. 140).

From this perspective, it was possible to organize a novel thought about how childhood was configured in modernity and to argue that, although the reviewed studies on childhood present it as a historical production of disciplinary power in the 17th and 18th centuries, an archaeological view makes visible that what we call childhood emerged before this period, articulated with processes and practices different from those usually described since power relations were established in those processes and practices, whose discursive origin was found in the register of spiritual power. In this way, it is possible to affirm that

In other words, on the one hand, the methodological operation with the archaeological tools allows connecting two emergency surfaces belonging to two different discursive formations and chronologically separated by several centuries: the Bible and the Magna Didactics. On the other hand, the genealogical reading allows us to recognize a technical thread of a pastoral nature activated by practices such as baptism and school education, through which a type of power is exercised that binds the grownups to the little ones: in a first moment – that one from the Bible – due to children's innocence and ahead of original sin and, in a second moment – the one from the Magna Didactics – with possibilities of guilt or effective guilt; it is in the second moment that the conception of childhood was transformed while spiritual power was modified as an effect of educational practices (Corazza, 1998a; 1999; 2002a).

This archaeogenealogical reading connects two different documentary sources; it describes a discursive displacement that supposes two ruptures through which the position of “infantile subject” fulfilled another cultural function and installed the discourse of “childness”. As an effect of this reading, it is possible to understand that the inversion in the ways of thinking and understanding the infantile condition was a correlate of a discursive operation where were defined the qualities, the ways, the state, and a kind of particular characteristics of the “infantile being” or a condition of “childness” and that transformation meant the loss of the superiority of children as a spiritual model and their necessary subjection to an educational pastoral (Corazza, 1999; 2000). The transformation can be read by reviewing an inversion that will be fundamental to our modern ways of being:

The first moment – the one from the Bible – emphasizes the strategic level of power for the production of the infantile: it takes the disembodied spiritual power of childhood over adults and, almost in the same movement, goes on to reorganize and ground power over the children's body; the second – [...] From the Magna Didactics – operates at the tactical level, because it speaks properly of the corporeal power that will be exercised over the child, speaking of it to exercise it better. Both will find their maximum turning point in school education (Corazza, 2002a, p. 153).

The childness condition joins the register of government practices and a particular form of educational pastoral articulated with modern disciplinary governmentality, in this framework pedagogy is configured as knowledge about education, knowledge about one of the main arts of modern government (Noguera-Ramirez, 2011). In this discursive plot a childness characterized by some “[...] enunciative regularities is synthesized: 1) the infantile exists. 2) It is specific. 3) It is innocent 4) It integrates humanity. 5) It is guilty: it sinned, is irrational, is immoral. 6)
It must be educated, rationalized, moralized, saved” (Corazza, 2002a, p. 158).

With these two reflections on the knowledge of childhood, the door is opened to a new historicization of educational practices and the configuration of a position of child subject, articulated to modern government practices and in particular to educational ones. It is an analysis that recognizes a childishness’ device in which two historical-philosophical matrices are articulated: the pastoral – with its baptismal strategy – and the governmental disciplinary – the school educational tactic.

Thanks to the device of childishness, modern power extended its network to the smallest movements of the child’s body and soul, through the historical construction of that specific technology of the self: the baptism of children. It was through baptism that various factors – body, knowledge, speech, power – were brought into the common ground of conversion and control of what is specifically infantile. In the same way, it extended its network through the technology derived from it: the schooling of children. The two technologies constituted childhood historically, and not as a religious, biological, sociological, or psychological reference (Corazza, 2002a, p. 185).

In the description of a kind of device of infantility in modernity are collected, roughly, two contributions of an analytic that is organized in an archaeogenealogical perspective and seeks to understand the childhood experience in which the new ones are immersed by birth (Arendt, 2016) for nearly four centuries. This light on the field allows the review of several of the truths that have laid the foundations for studies on childhood until today and, from it, it is possible to think about the life experiences lived by boys and girls within our Western societies since it seems that childhood was not “assumed, made effective, practiced as specific age, stage, or identity. In other words, “[...] never existed in fact in our cultural, social, and subjective practices, such dawn of our lives, of our beloved childhood...” (Corazza, 2002a, p. 196).

The Infantile, Lived Experience, and the Contemporary

Do you want to know about the K. function?
ask the minors... they do not
point to the oedipal reality nor the
childhood memory
that false childhood that never existed nor the
promise of marriage
that captures desire in an assemblage that
neutralize and reterritorialize
cuts it off from its connections and
marks the failure of their metamorphoses (Corazza, 2014, p. 65).

In an archaeogenealogical methodological record, and from the description of the historical configuration of a childishness device in a reli-
gious and educational matrix, the analytical task that asks what we will do with what we made of childhood was projected. This second layer is the one in which the critical reading of the infantile condition is proposed in its crossings and complementation with the educational and contemporary present that was announced in the closing of *Infância & educação. Era uma vez...Quer que conte outra vez?* (Corazza, 2002a). With this theoretical and analytical projection, intercessory thought is organized and operates at another level of reflexivity through the courses, research, conferences, and various academic activities that professor Corazza developed during almost three decades of activity (Corazza, 2002c; 2004; 2010, etc.).

The philosophical reading of the sediments found in the historical formation of a field of discourses on childhood, as well as the thick and more or less uniform layers that precipitated the diversity of human experiences in the first years of life, emerge as possibilities to critically theorize education and society, but also to test analytical instruments, categories, and concepts, procedures and methodologies, writings that allow us to fight against the hegemonic forms of modern subjection that act in the current forms of behavior driving.

Vestiges of this procedure in thought are collected from the records of the teaching spaces guided by Professor Corazza at the Post-graduation Program in Education (PPG-EDU), of the Faculty of Education (FACED) of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). They evidence the study and training exercises in which the teaching activity and the investigative task crossed to the point of not being differentiated and in which an analytical gaze was maintained where the question about childhood did not stop appearing: a) “[...] to experience, collectively, different expressions and problematizations of childhood and the curriculum” (Corazza, 2014, p. 56); b) study “[...] the philosophy of Deleuze in intersection with Nietzsche's philosophy, to organize investigative practices on the events of childhood and the curriculum” (Corazza, 2014, p. 57); c) carry out the “[...] study of schizo-research in the philosophy of difference, in its productivity to agency researching practices in education on contemporary childhood and curriculum theory” (Corazza, 2014, p. 57); among others.

Childhood, infantility, or the infantile, in addition to being a recurring theme in seminars, is also a recurring theme in some articles and conferences in which the new analytical layer takes shape and the thematization – using categories such as becoming, singularization, immanence, event, contingency, flows, etc. – sheds light, inquires and questions the infantile in us. In other words, in this stratum appeared notions and experiences of the childhood that we were and, with them, a kind of luminosity on an analytical region little explored in the investigations and reflections of the field.

Impersonal, children speak with indefinite because they discover that they are before all manifestations of the subjective, without anything personal, rational, or conscious:
The Academic Gesture and the Intercessory Thought

just pre-individual singularities (Leclercq, Scherer). Left in an indefinite, which belongs only to the sensible, in a pre-reflective consciousness without Self, children can only be artists like the art that says the same things as them: they do not order a place of childhood, but paths that take childhood out; that rest on the oblivion of the own childhood and places of passage; that traverse erratic lines of the material of childhood, displacing rings, opening, and closing doors, connecting and disconnecting zones, shooting arrows, making world-historical trips, making the birds fly that peck at the windows and becoming in their education (What the kids say) (Corazza, 2002c, p. 2).

In this line, a new contribution to the field of knowledge of childhood emerges, and the intercessor points to a region to be explored. The themes and categories that emerge in fragments on which philosophical concepts are operated open new lines of study and reflection, but also require tasks of deconstruction and even destruction of the discursive and practical order of the field of knowledge. Beyond a theoretical theme or a methodology to investigate, a political and ethical exercise is proposed on the ways of knowing; it is an invitation, a challenge to think in another way about what has already been thought, which questions how we behave, as well as the forms and possibilities that we build with and for the childhood experience that we were and those that we would be, if that were the case, in current forms of social organization.

Experimentation with categories and tools derived from the philosophy of Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Bergson, among others, contribute to the construction of questions that interrogate current relationships with children, but also with the specters of childhood that accompany adulthood. In this sense, it is not strange that questions arise not only about the subject of the pronoun that is not present in what the child says, but also about identification, the real, the body, the time...

At what time does that infantile live, if it does not correspond anymore to one of the stages of human life? At what time other than the present, which is the only time for children’s bodies and the states of affairs of childhood? Now, the infantile experiences one of the two simultaneous readings of time: Aion – the infant time. Superficial time of incorporeal events, taken in their relationship with becoming, which refers to the past and the future simultaneously; and it is opposed to Chronos, which represents time in its relationship with the vast and profound present. Childhood time, which emphasizes the omnipresence of chaos or contingency, not as the confused and indeterminate, but infinitely dividing itself into past and future, always dodging the present; time, in which only the present exists in time and absorbs the past and the future, but only the past and the future insist on time and infinitely divide each present (Corazza, 2004, p. 4).

Another interesting line is redefined in this way, it is not a new topic; however, the tools are new and the categories to study the childhood-
curriculum relationship. Fourth contribution: new analytical tools to think about old relationships and a path that can be revisited and explored in the field of knowledge of childhood. A procedure called noology – the study of the images of thought – (Corazza, 2002b) is evaluated and it is pointed out that those who investigate the images of the curriculum and childhood do not do so to verify whether they exist or not but to rethink them and make them differently. In this case, it is committed to promoting a thought that tries to break the mimetic controls installed in the myths built around what childhood and the curriculum are and what they ought to be: they would be “[…] open totalities that change incessantly, through research that triggers, affirms and risks” (Corazza, 2010, p. 2). This route of theoretical-methodological research is committed to a renewed and renovating thinking about what we know, but also about what we do about childhood: a thought “[…] insolent and fictitious that thinks about regulated changes, taking research in education, the curriculum of the infancy and the infancy of the curriculum as pure events and infinite variability” (Corazza, 2010, p. 2).

In general, the intercessory and provocative approach of Professor Corazza proposes challenges and sheds light on the knowledge about childhood and the forms of childness that human societies have built, practiced, and experienced with this second layer. Between the two strata – and as a result of the force of thought – we have among us instruments and renewed conceptual and analytical equipment to develop studies that seek to recognize the diversity of forms and experiences of childhood and of what is infantile in us; new scholars and researchers, who with other perspectives and other analytical and methodological tools, insist with their work and ethical lifestyles on the necessary openness for “[…] the advent of a luminosity and a way of enunciation that, finally, end up recognizing in the diversity the singularities of our infants” (Corazza, 2014, p. 128); and a critical line, a new perspective and directions to draw and explore with the demand for other ethical and political positions regarding research and knowledge. Research and knowledge that are committed to revealing

 […] the infant portion of modern individuals that we still are, [and that] we can continue the form of struggle against what binds us to ourselves and submits us, in this way, to others: struggles against subjection, forms of subjectivation and submission of our subjectivity. In this way, perhaps we can promote new ethical exercises of freedom practices around the forms by which we were subjectified as children, and that was imposed on us many centuries ago. In these revived relationships – in which consciousness becomes modest and the body is the result of chance and not of a continuum –, the contemporary childness seems to fight with childhood weapons (Corazza, 2014, p. 128).
The epigraph of Foucault (2014) with which I began this article accompanied the writing of this text-tribute, text-recognition, text-admiration, and text-saudade. Fearful writing, since for it, that major writing was visited in which the vibrant and challenging restless thought of Professor Sandra Corazza becomes visible. A thought that does not stop appearing repeatedly when reviewing her articles, her memorials, her courses notes, her research projects... She made from that “[…] shaking the usual order of value hierarchies” an academic, ethical, and political project. Her intercessory thought is the result of an increasingly strange academic gesture in our ways of living the university and doing intellectual work, her gesture offered us a refreshing and different thought that is verified in the categories with which she operated to proceed in a risky way in the discourse, but also in a challenging and renewed attitude towards knowledge, the academic world, teaching, childhood, life, in which that unique way of being in the world was drawn.

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Notes
1 All quotes from Professor Sandra Corazza’s publications are author’s free translation.
3 An interesting example of the expansion and use of these analyzes appears in Corazza (1998b) with an interesting analysis of the baby hatch or foundling wheel as an emblematic device that articulated antique infanticide and exposure with modern taking in and raising, in order to guarantee the moral correctness and productive efficiency of the infant body.
4 This concept of gesture shows up in the philosopher Edgar Garavito’s thought and it is used by Noguera-Ramírez (1991) to analyze the force which comes from a pedagogical thought like Herbart’s.

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The Academic Gesture and the Intercessory Thought


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