


## The education of the child in the 13th century: reflections on importance of christian formation in the perspective of Ramon Lull

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### Abstract

In this article, we propose to present a reflection on the conceptions present in the education of children in the thirteenth century. We start from a bibliographic review, in which we seek to present arguments based on consolidated writings on the belief in the importance of an education in which the guiding principle was the Christian faith, but which gave similar value to the learning of science and the liberal arts for human training. Our study will be based on Ramon Lull and his work *Doctrina Pueril* (1274-1276). Such an essay was written and directed to his own son (Domingos); presents precepts on how to educate children, with a view to the formation of a subject with faith and virtues necessary for social life. Finally, it is hoped that this study can stimulate new discussions and reflections to think about the education of children in different historical periods.

**Keywords:** Education of the child. Middle Ages. Cultural heritages.

### A educação da criança no Século XIII: reflexões acerca da importância da formação cristã na perspectiva de Ramon Lull

#### Resumo

Neste artigo, temos como proposta apresentar uma reflexão sobre as concepções presentes na educação das crianças no século XIII. Partimos de uma revisão bibliográfica, em que buscamos apresentar argumentos com base em escritos já consolidados sobre a crença na importância de uma educação na qual o princípio norteador foi a fé cristã, mas que deu valor semelhante à aprendizagem da ciência e das artes liberais para a formação humana. Nosso estudo terá por base Ramon Lull e sua obra *Doctrina Pueril* (1274-1276). Tal ensaio foi escrito e direcionado ao seu próprio filho (Domingos) e apresenta preceitos acerca de como se deve educar a infância, tendo em vista a formação de um sujeito com fé e virtudes necessárias para a vida social. As reflexões apresentadas no artigo evidenciam a importância que se dava, desde a Idade Média, para uma formação que desenvolvesse a humanidade de cada indivíduo,



embora, o contexto da época aponte para uma educação com íntimas ligações com a religiosidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação da infância. Idade Média. Heranças culturais.

## 1 Introduction

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Classic authors acquire this characterization because their ideas continue to respond to everyday problems through intrinsic connections with current reality. So that, even with the passage of time, they continue to serve as a basis to raise reflections about propositions that are being debated in other historical moments. Thus, the classics "[...] come to us bearing the marks of the readings that preceded ours, and behind them, the traces they left in the culture or cultures they crossed, or, more simply, in the language or customs" (CALVINO, 1993, p. 11). That is, a work or a classical scholar expresses knowledge that surpasses time and becomes cultural heritage and patrimony of humanity.

In this article, we present some considerations about the work *Doctrina Pueril* (1274-1276), by the classical philosopher Ramon Lull. A historical moment in which education was focused on good behavior and civility. The work also recalls the "guides" for child education left by Erasmus of Rotterdam, such as the work "*De civilitate morum pueriliu*", or "On the civility of children", from 1530, considered to be one of the first publications aimed at child education. It is, therefore, a manual with advice and suggestions for teaching young children.

The understanding we have of childhood is circumstantial to the sociocultural characteristics of the historical time we live in. Thus, it is not possible to analyze childhood at all times in history in the way we know it today, or with the same focus. Such assertions are present in Ariès (1981). In this work, the historian presents a conception of childhood that varies according to the time, the social conjuncture, and the different individual, family, social, political, economic, and geographic scenarios.

Health and hygiene conditions in the 13th century were precarious (HEYWOOD, 2004, p.87). The infant mortality rate was very high, most children could not even make it through the first years of life, and those who survived early childhood had to face their





days with adults who little understood the specificity of this phase of life, and who assigned them activities similar to those performed by themselves. In the Middle Ages not much time, care, and effort was invested in a small human being "[...] who was so likely to die at a young age" (HEYWOOD, 2004, p.87).

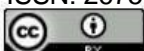
Heywood (2004) emphasizes that even though, in this period, some care was devoted to the very young child in its early years or reserved for those who possessed financial and social privileges. Once past this early stage of human existence, children were incorporated into the world and activities of adults (LEVIN, 1997).

In the 13th century, the education of the child was focused on the development of character and reason, aiming at good behavior, with the predominant participation of the principles of the Church assisting the family in the task of educating. It was sought, through education, to form a loyal, honorable, and respectful citizen, who acted driven by Christian precepts in the face of dilemmas, conflicts, and the daily life of society, that is, it was formed for civility.

Our study is based on Ramon Lull and his work *Doctrina Pueril*, or *Doctrine for Children* (1274-1276). In this text, Lull argues that the child's education is based on family examples, i.e., it begins in the family and there one learns the first and most important lessons and teachings to be able to live ethically and fully in society.

The essay *Doctrina Pueril* has characteristics analogous to a pedagogical project for the XIII century, in which Lull writes to his son Dominic guidelines that had the objective of guiding a path and indicating the main actions that would end up in the good education of the child. A Christian education that would guarantee good coexistence and that would lead this future adult to follow his own paths so that one day he could reach the salvation of his soul.

This article is characterized as a literature review, which for Cooper and Hedges (1994), symbolizes the analysis of the most relevant studies published on a specific content. It is an attempt to rediscover, reflect, highlight, and summarize the knowledge placed therein. Therefore, a conception is advocated based on the evidence found in the existing literature, and new literature is created, incorporating the knowledge, information,





data, methods, systems, thoughts, and practices already consolidated by academia and science.

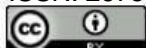
We aim to present a reflection about the conceptions present in the education of children in the 13th century. From the arguments presented here, it is expected to stimulate new discussions and reflections to think about the education of children in different historical periods. It is not, however, to raise comparisons of the past with the present, but to remember that, according to Montaigne, another scholar of the medieval period, education has always been an object susceptible to review, distrust and change: "I aim here only to reveal myself, that perhaps tomorrow I will be another, if a new learning changes me" (MONTAIGNE, 2002, p. 221).

In this context, we understand man as a creative, transforming and historical being, that each generation begins life in a world of knowledge, information, objects and phenomena created by previous generations, thus, the movement of human history is only possible when we reorganize, observe, reproduce and transmit the knowledge we incorporate from previous cultures to new generations.

## 2 Child Education in the 13th Century: an Intense Connection to the Church and Christian Values

Ariès, in his studies gathered in the book "Social History of the Child and the Family" (1981), discusses the positions occupied by the child in the society of each historical moment, especially in the medieval and modern context. These variations, in the understanding of childhood, were articulated with the education that should be offered to this phase of human life.

Understanding the different characteristics of education and childhood in each historical moment is important, because it is through the understanding of history that man becomes aware of the socio-cultural and historical transformations. That is, consciousness breaks with the naturalization of what is established, so that "[...] there is nothing more profitable than history to acquire prudence, nor more powerful than it to awaken virtues, more healthy to heal the wounds of the Republic, nor more pleasurable





for the enjoyment of life" (OSÓRIO, 1804, p. 3). For this scholar, man must seek to know the process of culture creation and the historicity left behind by previous generations. Assertions in the same direction are present in the studies of Le Goff (2003, p. 210).

Understanding time in societies, the distinction between the present and the past, implies this escalation in memory and this liberation from the present that presuppose education and, moreover, the institution of a collective memory alongside individual memory.

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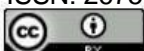
Education in the Middle Ages was closely linked to the Church. Many schools even functioned in spaces attached to the cathedrals. Thus, the Church had the mission of disseminating education and culture to children in the medieval period, since religious habits were an important channel for education.

Moreover, it was in the Church that the culture and knowledge inherited from Classical Antiquity was concentrated through books, parchments, manuscripts, and documents. These were often kept in monasteries and universities.

The priests and monks had practically the entire monopoly of erudite culture. According to Manacorda (2006), the interventions of the clergy changed the teaching contents, that is, the content bases worked in the classical Greco-Roman culture were gradually modified, giving space to religious and biblical-Christian teachings.

De Cassagne (2015) states that the monks created childcare institutions similar to true "kindergartens" in their monasteries, and sought to receive indiscriminately all who sought these spaces in search of education for their children. These educational systems were radically opposed to the prevailing pedagogical practices of the barbarian populations, because they were based on coldness in human relations from childhood on, a way to brutalize the hearts of children preparing them for war and violence. The monks, on the other hand, taught love, ethics, responsibility, respect, serenity, and honor, that is, a teaching focused on good behavior and civility.

In these monasteries, children were taught up to the age of fifteen. The teachers were clerics from minor orders and taught the seven liberal arts: grammar, arithmetic, rhetoric, astronomy, logic, geography and music, as well as biblical studies. These





disciplines would later serve as the basis for building the curriculum of many universities for many centuries.

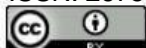
According to Bettenson's studies (2001), the monks valued children and developed a directed, integral and egalitarian education process, which can be observed in the Carolingian monastic schools. According to this scholar, these schools even gave preference to the children of slaves and serfs, to the detriment of the children of free men and noblemen, a way to instruct an even wider group, as to religious and doctrinal orientation.

The education of the child in the Middle Ages, more specifically in the 13th century, also understood the importance of learning science and the liberal arts, however, the educational approach aimed to lead the child to learning that would not take him away from the ways and pleasures of God.

### 3 Ramon Lull and Religious Education

Ramon Lull was one of the most important writers, philosopher, poet, missionary and theologian of the Catalan language, he left writings also in Arabic and Latin. He was born in Palma de Mallorca, Spain. The exact date of his birth is not known, but it is estimated to have occurred between late 1232 and early 1233. For Eco (2014), the place where Lull was born was crucial for his cultural and personal formation and for his productions, because Palma de Mallorca was a crossroads where visitors and inhabitants practicing Christian, Islamic, and Jewish cultures passed through. This cultural and linguistic diversity gave Lull the opportunity to get to know these cultures. Most of his works are known to have been written, initially, in Arabic and Catalan.

Ramon was the son of a well-to-do family. At the age of 22 he married Blanca Picany and had two children: Dominic and Magdalene. Dominic is the person to whom he addresses the conceptions presented in the work *Doctrina Pueril* (ECO, 2014).







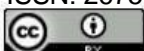
In 1263, Lull converted definitively to Christianity and started living motivated by the missionary attempt to convert the "infidel". In 1314, at the age of 82, Ramon Lull traveled to North Africa, where he was stoned by an angry mob of Muslims in Tunis, Tunisia, due to religious clashes. Bruised and very ill, he was taken to his home in Palma de Mallorca and died a few months later, in 1316.

Between 1275 and 1276 he wrote the *Doctrina Pueril* for his son Dominic, in which he points out the importance of human formation from early childhood. In *Doctrina Pueril*, the author defends a triple of primordial elements for the education of the human being: faith, knowledge, and rational movement.

The work departs from one of his own writing styles, based on inter-religious dialogue. In it, Lull constructs his text in a manner similar to a dialogue with his son. His desire is to present arguments capable of making his son and other readers understand that the society in which they lived contributed to the corruption of individuals.

For Lull, the behaviors stimulated in the social environment, expressed in the seven deadly sins: anger, gluttony, lust, greed, envy, acedia, and pride, distanced man from his creator. These actions distorted the seven human virtues: faith, hope, charity, temperance, prudence, justice, and fortitude. Lull argued that the education of children should be based on these virtues, because they were the way to form a just and disciplined citizen, and they brought the individual closer to his salvation.

Lull also criticized the concern of men to devote much time of their lives to work, when the objective was only to accumulate wealth and patrimony. For him, craft that was exercised only in the sense of amassing material goods did not direct the soul to salvation, to understanding, or to happiness. "[...] you can have and possess the riches of this world, and be poor in spirit" (LULL, 1961, p. 62). Therefore, according to Lull (1961, p.24) "The greater your riches, son, the more you will be guilty if you do not do what good you can, and you will be forced to hear the cruel sentence of God.





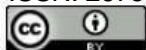
Lull, through his work, strove to show his son and the society of that historical moment that life on earth was quick and temporary, and that faith was the most important feeling an individual could have, because it would lead to eternal life. That the understanding of science and the arts were important "[...] understanding is the power of the soul" (LULL, 1961, p. 62), but, such knowledge would have no value, if it took him away from the creator, "Son, many men have science by learning. But, the science which the Holy Spirit gives is infused and is far greater and nobler than that which man has learned in his master's school" (LULL, 1961, p. 62). Concerning knowledge and wisdom, Lull also asserts that:

Through the wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives, man knows where he comes from, what he is, where he is, where he is going, what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do. So if you, son, desire to have wisdom in all these things, strive, as far as you can, to love, honor, and fear the Holy Spirit, who gives such gifts (LULL, 1961, p. 27).

Lull understood the value of learning science and liberal arts for human formation and stated that knowledge can be acquired through two ways, but with different aspects: in the first way, knowledge is acquired through reason and man makes use of such information to meet his own designs "Many are the men who love to have science but cannot have it, because they have no clear understanding" (LULL, 1961, p. 27). The second way of acquiring knowledge concerns faith and reason, given by the Holy Spirit and causes man to have actions based on principles that lead to salvation and high spiritual knowledge "Son, the Holy Spirit enlightens man's soul with understanding, as the burning candle enlightens the room or as the brightness of the sun that enlightens the whole world" (LULL, 1961, p. 27).

These understandings, for Lull, enable the acquisition of intelligence and promote the comprehension of issues that cannot be understood through reason. In this sense, Ramon Lull states that:

Beloved son, the Holy Spirit gives your understanding the things you can understand [...] And if you understand yourself and this world, it is the Holy Spirit who gives your understanding the ability to understand yourself and this world [...] Ah, son, so many men are imprisoned, deceived, betrayed, and killed because







they lack understanding [...] Beloved son, greater than castles, towns, cities, and kingdoms is the high and exalted gift of understanding that the Holy Spirit gives to man. For the king who does not have the subtle understanding cannot know God, himself, nor what God gives him; but the man who has a subtle understanding knows God, himself, and is grateful to God for the goods He gives him (LULL, 1961, p. 27).

9 This stance, regarding what should be considered when educating a child, also appears almost three centuries later, precisely in 1580, when Montaigne publishes "Essays". This French philosopher asserts that the child should be educated "[...] among wise and intelligent people" (MONTAIGNE, 2002, p.258).

In *Doctrina Pueril* (1275 to 1276), Lull reiterates the relationship between the learnings that are acquired in the family environment and throughout life, with those necessary for scientific and citizen training "[...] through the education of the body, the education of the soul is accustomed, and through the education of the soul, the education of the body is also accustomed" (LULL, 1961, p. 79).

The work *Doctrina Pueril* (1275 to 1276) can be defined as a guide that aims to instruct parents in the education of their children. This education, for Ramon Lull, should start very early, because, "[...] children, in the beginning, get used to good education rather than bad" (LULL, 1961, p.78). Thus, the child's education would have as a pillar the family examples, i.e., it starts in the family and there learn the first and most important lessons and teachings so that one can live ethically and fully in society.

The man who wants to educate his son well should not have a badly educated man in his house, so that his son doesn't receive a bad education. And the lady who leaves her child when she leaves home should stay with her. Do you know why? So that she won't believe the bad servant (LULL, 1961, p. 83).

Montaigne (2002), in "Essays", critically analyzes the society of the sixteenth century from various topics such as the importance of teaching through family examples for the proper formation of the child, among other topics. For this, he used the relationship established with his own father as an example [...] he had been advised to make me appreciate science and duty by an unforced will and by my personal desire, and to educate my soul with all gentleness and freedom, without rigor or imposition" (MONTAIGNE, 2002, p.260).





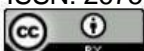
The previous excerpts are examples of studies from the medieval period that argue that, what the child witnesses at home and family memories, can define what kind of character he will come to have. For Perin and Oliveira (2018), Lull's education proposal demonstrates the author's social concern regarding the way parents educated their children, in this period. The authors state that, for Lull, "[...] it was necessary that parents had, from an early age, a special attention to the formation of their children" (PERIN; OLIVEIRA, 2018, p. 236).

To accustom your child to remember, to understand God and to love the Church is to accustom his will to love God, his father and mother. The memory that remembers, the understanding that understands, and the fear that is ashamed engender the will that demeans faults and loves virtues. Therefore, the child must be brought up with ashamed fear so that he has a love of good and a dislike of evil (LULL, 1961, p. 83).

The wrong behaviors towards the child would be very harmful and would have the power to interfere with his body and soul, because, they can direct the child to habits and paths that lead to "[...] mortal sins, which decimate the soul and yet are considered natural" (LULL, 1961, p. 84), in adulthood. "Therefore, the child should not be brought up in an unhealthy place and should not be accustomed to the odors that move him to vanities, inconveniences, and cogitations" (LULL, 1961, p. 79).

There are several other points regarding the education of the child to be discussed based on the work *Doctrina Pueril*, the manual is organized in 95 pages with topics that discuss training with a view to good behavior, civility and religiosity.

We could, then, present other discussions on topics also discussed by Lull in his *Doctrina Pueril*, such as greed, pride, envy, and many others, however, our intention is not to exhaust the discussions on the positions and arguments present in this text, because there is the natural delimitation of an article, it is only hoped that this study can stimulate new discussions and reflections to think about the education of the child in different historical periods and the compression that forming a good citizen through education is a concern of generations that came long before us.



## 4 Final considerations

The Doctrine for Children (1275 to 1276) by Ramon Lull is characterized as a pedagogical project aimed at the formation of a human being with moral and Christian principles, inclined to the collective good, to peace and to the salvation of the soul.

The guidelines are intended to develop humanity in children, bringing them closer to the good teachings, so that they can awaken, from a very early age, love for others and the fear of God. Throughout the work, the author shows that if the child, from a very early age, is well guided and educated, he becomes a loyal, honorable, respectful, and aware adult of his social role, able to act for the collective good rather than for subjective or private actions. The reflections presented by Lull show the importance that was given, since the Middle Ages, to an education that would develop the humanity of each individual, although the context of the time points to an education with close ties to religiosity.

Today, we fight for an education based on the principles that make up laicity: freedom of conscience, equality, and separation between State and religions, but we continue to search for the formation of a subject with the capacity to manage his social relations responsibly, who can live in a civilized way with people of different beliefs. In this way, this work, in some aspects, is still current, as long as religious views do not get in the way of teaching, do not transform the transmission of school contents, and do not influence the socialization of the students.

This is the importance of studying a classic, because "[...] they are like spider webs: dense, concentric, transparent, well-structured and solid" (ADORNO, 1993, p. 75) and continue to answer questions of historical times so different from those in which they were written, that is, even if there are historical

transformations, the classic works and scholars continue to help in the understanding of different times and audiences, and provoking critical reflections.

Finally, these works and scholars continue to spark new considerations, even though they were written, as in *Doctrine for Children*, about eight centuries ago.

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