

Accompagnement: An Approach to Training towards Systemic Responsibility

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Abstract: The paper aims to provide an in-depth ecological reflection on education in a complex society, within the framework of systemic responsibility. Building on a theoretical study of 'world-centred education' (Biesta, 2022) - which encourages individuals to engage with the world - the concept of *accompagnement* will be examined in depth. This educational process recognises the importance of the world and, at the same time, promotes individual and collective actions to embolden participation in social reality. This process highlights the opportunities for action (affordances) that arise from the interaction and matching between individuals and their environment. From this perspective, personal and collective skills are developed, boosting complex thinking and joint responsibility.

Keywords: Education; *Accompagnement*; Responsibility; Affordance; Society

1. Introduction

This paper offers an ecological reflection on education in a complex society, aiming to understand how to educate from a systemic responsibility perspective.

Starting from the observation that there is an urgent need to learn how to exist, as human beings, "in" and "with" the world natural and social' (Biesta, 2022, p. 3), the paper will explore the concept of *accompagnement*¹ (Paul, 2004) as a way of encouraging protagonism, awareness, and personal emancipation within a relational framework. In particular, we will examine the process of problematisation within a collective that supports itself as a means of educating people about shared responsibility and planetary interdependence.

2. Moving towards education world centred

Which planet will we leave to our children? (H. Jonas)
To which children will we leave the world? (J. Semprun)

Morin (2014), at the beginning of his volume, 'Teaching How to Live', cites these two interconnected quotes.

¹ By virtue of the specificities of the approach of *accompagnement*, hardly translatable with an equivalent in English, the French term *accompagnement* will be used in the paper.



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On the one hand, Jonas's words prompt us to consider the ethical question of what kind of planet we will be leaving for future generations. Today, we cannot avoid the question of how we use the planet's resources and the ecological responsibility that goes with it. We will leave a world that is, in many ways, worse than the one we inherited (Giddens, 1990; Bauman, 2017). We are facing 'multiple, overlapping crises', widening 'social and economic inequality, climate change, biodiversity loss, resource use that exceed planetary boundaries, democratic backsliding, disruptive technological automation, and violence' (UNESCO, 2021, p. 8). This crisis affects the entire ecosystem in which humans live. At the same time, there is growing reflection on the equitable distribution of these resources, contrasting the excessive consumption of a privileged minority with the extreme poverty of a large proportion of the population. These are structural obstacles, which perpetrate 'inequality in finance, trade, technology and food distribution and security' (ONU, 2023, p. 6). For these reasons,

whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches grounded in sustainable development that leaves no one behind would make national prevention strategies more effective. They should be multidimensional, people-centred and inclusive of all the different components of society' (Ibi, p. 19).

The present ecological crisis is 'one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity' (Francesco, 2015, 119), therefore emerges how the relationship with nature and the environment is closely interrelated with human relations.

On the other hand, Semprun invites us to reflect on the educational and developmental prospects for the new generations. In the current era, the value of the past is overlooked, with the loss of valuable formative experiences for the present day (Bauman, 2017). At the same time, the uncertainty and complexity that characterise everyday life make it difficult to imagine the future, which discourages forward-thinking and action. Education becomes 'the foundation for the renewal and transformation of our societies', because it connects us 'with the world and others' and it 'helps us navigate a transforming and uncertain world' (UNESCO, 2021, p. 10). Promoting dignity and freedom for all is possible by educating people about their basic rights: 'education itself must become a site for the promise of equality to be fulfilled' (Ibi, pp. 73-74).

From an ecological perspective, the question of what kind of planet we will hand over to future generations is linked inextricably to how we raise and educate young people. 'Education nurtures understandings and builds capabilities that can help to ensure that our future is more socially inclusive, economically just, and environmentally sustainable' (Ibi, p. 10). This relates to what Biesta (2022) said about the idea 'that education should be *world-centred*, that is, focused on equipping and encouraging the next generation to exist "in" and "with" the world, and do so in their own right' (p. 3).

This reflection leads us to consider the centrality of the world. Rather than falling back into ancient dualisms that see either man at the centre of the world or man as subordinate to society, but also, rather than taking up child-centred or curriculum-centred education, Biesta (2022) proposes a synthesis that enables us to embrace personal agency within a vision of planetary interdependence (Morin, 2014).

Each is therefore to be understood as a 'subject' or 'subject-ness' in the sense of 'originators of our own actions', but also subject to 'what the world, natural and social,

“does” with our “beginnings” (Biesta, 2022, p. 3). The person recognises himself or herself as a human being within a broader reality, towards which they learn to take responsibility and feel a sense of shared responsibility.

At the same time, 'to exist as a subject “in” and “with” the world' means recognising that the natural and social world 'puts limits and limitations' on what we can expect and what we can do, which is closely intertwined to the questions of democracy and ecology (Biesta, 2022, p. 3). As UNESCO's Report (2021) affirms: 'developing skills to analyse inequalities and nurture critical consciousness is a way to support participatory engagement and, in this respect, human right education strongly supports education for citizenship' (p. 73).

In the field of education, two challenges arise: outlining paths that give each individual full prominence in their life choices, and educating them about the meaning of limits. According to Le Breton (1991), limits 'respond to an anthropological necessity', as they allow individuals to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, recognise themselves and others (Ricoeur, 1993; Schmitt-Richard, 2022) and restore value to existence. Education therefore provides a framework for learning to decentre themselves, grasping oneself in interdependence with others and promoting attitudes of solidarity and responsibility.

According to Jonas (1984), it is precisely the imperative of responsibility that becomes an essential element. Human power becomes one's destiny and increasingly the general destiny. For this reason, everyone is called upon to reflect on how to exercise his or her power of action consciously: 'Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life' (Jonas, 1984, p. 11). In the era of technical civilisation, which has become 'omnipotent', the future of humanity is the primary responsibility of collective human behaviour. The appeal of the presence of the other is the birthplace and nourishment for morality (Bauman, 1997). However, reality cannot remain circumscribed in the I-Thou relationship; it is necessary to introduce a Third in the relationship, which in turn opens to reflection on justice in society and, at the same time, broaden the horizon to the surrounding world, that call for global responsibility and solidarity. In an age characterised by a high degree of complexity, the challenge lies in recognising and deciphering a multitude of 'wicked problems' (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The ever-changing nature of reality, the interrelationship of multiple factors and the coexistence of opposing and contrasting factors (Tabacchi, 2025) require the search for new strategies of understanding, in the awareness that no definitive answer or solution will be found (Cadei, 2021).

3. *Accompagnement* as a way to 'be at home in the world'

In this perspective, the goal becomes learning to exist as a subject “in” and “with” the world (Biesta, 2022, p. 3). But how is it possible to orient oneself in a world without reference points? (Fabre, 2011). Arendt (1994) recalls the challenge to 'reconcile ourselves to reality', that means learning 'to be at home in the world' (pp. 307–308). From a pedagogical perspective, it is essential to consider how to educate in this way.

One possible approach is *accompagnement*, which favours the rediscovery of the individual as a subject and the assumption of shared and systemic responsibility. This practice comes from the postmodern socio-political system and it is an attempt to respond to specific needs of individuals and society (Le Bouëdec, 2002).

There are many forms of *accompagnement*, which constitute a 'nebula' of practices, including coaching, mentoring, counselling, consultation, tutoring, social mediation, educational mediation, internships, socialisation, companionship² and sponsorship³ (Paul, 2004). These practices share a focus on otherness, relationships, and the activation of reflexivity regarding action. In this way, the value of individual's experience and actions is recognised, giving them the power to act.

Accompagnement develops from four recurring aspects.

- *The centrality of the subject.* Those who receive support are the subjects and protagonists of their own life choices. For this reason, those who provide *accompagnement* are expected to recognise individuals' potential and skills. They should view themselves not as experts, but as individuals who stand alongside and support others.
- *An overview.* Being close to others implies value equality, countering the risk of asymmetry between subjects.
- *A path.* *Accompagnement* means walking alongside someone on part of his or her journey towards a shared goal.
- *A transition.* *Accompagnement* is temporary and occasional, involving a transition from a starting point to a point of arrival.

It is therefore an approach that unfolds from four pre-eminent dimensions (Paul, 2004):

- the *relational dimension*, as it is based on the 'relationship with the other';
- the *temporal dimension* is also important, as it is necessary to respect the rhythm of those being accompanied;
- the *situational dimension*, since following the person involves implementing a displacement movement;
- the *project dimension*, in which the initiative and the choice belong to the subject.

Accompagnement involves movement and transition from the known to the unknown, creating a gap between reality and expectation. This generates an intrinsic dynamism that implies decentralisation and a change in the positioning of those who provide support.

It is noteworthy, as *accompagnement* intertwines the processes of individualisation and social solidarity (Bec & Procacci, 2003). The former involves taking responsibility for oneself and realising one's potential, while the latter involves supporting others and fostering a sense of community.

The viewpoint of *accompagnement* represents a significant paradigmatic shift, indicating the transition from viewing the individual as an 'anonymous object' to considering them as a subject, actor, and protagonist of their own life project (Paul, 2007). *Accompagnement* is a relational process in which someone - who encourages formative and transformative processes - supports the individual's personal growth. This leads to a deep understanding of oneself and the world, and the definition of existential plans and mutual humanisation (Paul, 2004). Those providing *accompagnement* are called upon to encourage complex thinking by problematizing situations (Fabre, 2009; Paul, 2022), raising awareness and fostering autonomy.

² Companionship [*Compagnonnage* for Paul (2004)] is a practice of transmission and learning, a formative process based on a relationship of filiality.

³ Sponsorship [*Parrainage* for Paul (2004)] is an insertion compliance and an adaptation support.

As a relational process involving an 'I' and a 'you', or an 'I' and a 'we', it prioritises relationships, reciprocity, and co-constructed thought (Paul, 2004; Vial & Caparros-Mencacci, 2007). There is a strong emphasis on meaning, values, ethics and the common good. This is particularly important since the presence of the other prompts self-reflection and provides a context for initiating a process of 'recognition' (Ricoeur, 1993). In particular, a triple recognition process is favoured:

- *belonging to the human race*, this gives rise to the idea of sharing the human condition;
- *subject-citizen status*, which comes with rights and duties, fosters a sense of belonging to society;
- *personhood*, which is anchored in a lineage and culture, encompassing history, projects, fears, hopes, beliefs and values (Paul, 2020).

'Reciprocity and mutuality' become tools for constructing a community, understood as a space for expressing the self and otherness (Ricoeur, 1993). The *accompagnement* process is emerging as a global approach (Paul, 2020), that integrates the personal dimension and the interaction between individuals and their environment:

- *Individuation*, concerns the relationship of the person to his or her unique and singular self and with his or her close environment, with the aim of achieving fulfilment;
- *Sociability*, refers to the relationship of the person to their social and cultural environment, in term of belonging and bonding;
- *Societal*, concerns the relationship between individuals and society, through the acquisition of social norms, and the exercise of rights and duties. The ultimate goal is emancipation.

4. Process of *accompagnement* as a collective approach

Another advantage of the *accompagnement* is that it is a practice that can be carried out in a group setting. This allows personal or shared issues to be addressed within a collective framework. Each individual can find his or her own narrative space within the group, in an environment that is free from judgement. The group creates a positive interdependence between the participants (Paul, 2020). Furthermore, the group provides a space in which individuals can learn to take on shared responsibility, promote solidarity and cultivate proactivity. *Accompagnement* is an approach that contributes to local social development through interrelated processes (Dumas & Séguier, 1997):

- *The process of raising awareness*. According to Bandura (1986, 2001), people are subjects of human agency, which influences one's functioning and life circumstances intentionally.
- *The organisational process*. Subjects have their own autonomy and they are able to self-organise, proactively approach issues, regulate their own behaviour and reflect on their actions. They make decisions and organise effectively.
- *The mobilisation process*. People are agents that exercise their power to act. 'To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances' (Bandura, 2006), that is, to assume an agentic perspective toward human development, adaptation, and change (Bandura, 1986, 2001).
- *The collective action*. There is a cross-cutting work among the actors involved. The whole group is involved and is called upon to examine the causes of collective difficulties affecting everyone.

- *The process of emancipation.* Emancipation is fundamental to the establishment of social relations and is the cornerstone of any strategic proposal for change (Garibay & Séguier, 2009).

The *accompagnement*, within the group, guarantees a space for sharing words, listening to others, and transitioning from reflexivity to action and vice versa. The members of the group do not bring their own considerations, points of view, suggestions or solutions, but rather questions that can allow the other to narrate and delve further into the situation. In this way, the group facilitates the analysis of the situation and allows identifying the contradictions inherent in it, better understanding themselves and the world. This allows everyone to find solutions to problematic situations (Fabre, 2009), recognise new opportunities of action and transform reality. Therefore, it is a matter of learning to think in a complex and critical way, continuously intertwining the relevant dimensions to face the challenges of daily life and increase the ability to choose. Listening, self-expression, taking risks and mutual understanding are the tools that foster personal and collective emancipatory processes. This approach also helps to broaden one's perspective, in the context of learning to 'be at home in the world' (Arendt, 1994).

The group trains in self-governance and establishes practices that encourage mutual exchange. This is a principle of shared responsibility that fosters cooperation and greater interdependence (Paul, 2020).

At the same time, members of the group become 'actors in their own transformation' (Martin et al., 2005), involved in the analysis process to co-construct meaning (Paul, 2020, p. 21). Active listening within the group encourages non-violent communication, aiming to build bridges rather than walls. In this way, it is possible to hone ecological and digital citizenship skills, as well as learn how to take on responsibilities within a collective framework, where every individual's contribution is valued.

The rediscovery of solidarity and responsibility becomes the condition for cultivating moral and social development and seeking planetary solutions (Morin et al., 2003). There is no personal gain except the possibility of initiating reflective processes regarding oneself and one's life.

The UNESCO's Report (2021), 'Reimagining Our Futures Together', calls for a rethink of education through a new social pact based on cooperation, solidarity and shared responsibility for education. The *accompagnement* involves taking systemic responsibility, whereby individual and collective actions are implemented within social reality. It is useful here to refer to the concept of affordance. Affordance describes the opportunities for action that arise from the interaction between the individual and their social and virtual environments (Gibson, 1979).

The interplay between the capabilities of the individual and the functionality of the environment creates a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The concept of affordance enables us to recognise perceptible and possible actions that can enrich the development of personal and collective skills in a virtuous circle (Cadei, 2024). This virtuous circle is possible when individuals are able of inhabiting spaces, even virtual ones, with intelligence, creativity, and responsibility.

5. Conclusions

In the presented contextual framework, *accompagnement* is believed to provide a way of problematising life situations (Fabre, 2009). It facilitates more complex thinking and opens up new perspectives.

The *accompagnement* is based on an educational dimension, and is therefore inscribed within the realm of emancipatory practices (Paul, 2020). This approach is founded on awareness of a subject's or group's resources and potential, understanding of the problematic situation, definition of shared goals, and recognition of personal and collective agency (Dumas & Séguier, 1997).

The reflections can be traced back to Ricoeur's (1993) definition of ethos as the perspective of the “good life” with and for others within institutions. Aspiring to a 'fulfilled life' is about following one's own hope of being happy and striving for the best. Within this framework, *accompagnement* encourages us to become 'citizen protagonists', consciously and critically engaged in constructing a global civilisation (Morin et al., 2003), where we recognise our interdependence and the interconnectedness of the individual and the planet. The goal is a horizon of social justice, the result of continuously refining complex thinking from a perspective of solidarity and shared responsibility.

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