

# **Fidelity to reason and adherence to reality with mindfulness practices: Problematicism and Contemplative Pedagogy in dialogue**

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## **Abstract**

The current pandemic emergency has and continues to put the health of the whole human community at risk, radically modifying many aspects of our life, but has also underlined and amplified the fundamental need to reflect on and address issues that are of major importance in our fields of study. These include the right to peace, the right to education and care for our children and our young people, especially the most vulnerable, and the educational responsibility of all (institutions and families) towards the new generations. Therefore, starting from a re-reading, also in a critical key, of the use of the practices of self-reflection and self-awareness of the Eastern tradition in Western educational contexts (De Simone, 2018), we will try to investigate the possible dialogue with Bertinian “Problematicism” in order to explore its potential, especially in terms of the operational repercussions that go in the direction of an individual’s emancipation from all dogmatic knowledge as well as from the social and cultural constraints that contribute to a definition of their dispositional knowledge, rigidly oriented towards selfish and superficial closures. Specifically, we will try to investigate a mindfulness protocol, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes et al., 1999), which works on different dimensions – acceptance, cognitive defusion, self as context, contact with the present, contact with values, committed action –, dimensions that seem interesting to re-read in a Problematicist key.

L’emergenza pandemica e il recente attacco bellico all’Ucraina hanno fatto emergere, ancora di più, la fondamentale di riflettere e di affrontare questioni, squisitamente di pertinenza dei nostri ambiti di studio, che riguardano il diritto alla pace, il diritto all’educazione e alla cura dei nostri bambini e dei nostri giovani, soprattutto dei più fragili, e la responsabilità educativa di tutti, istituzioni e famiglie, nei confronti delle nuove generazioni. Lungo tale direzione, e a partire da una rilettura, anche in chiave critica, dell’utilizzo delle pratiche di autoriflessione ed autoconsapevolezza di tradizione orientale nei contesti educativi occidentali (De Simone, 2018) si

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cercherà di approfondirne il possibile dialogo con il Problematicismo bertiniano al fine di esplorarne le potenzialità, soprattutto in termini di ricadute operative che vadano nella direzione di una emancipazione dell'individuo da ogni conoscenza dogmatica nonché dai vincoli sociali e culturali che contribuiscono ad una definizione della sua conoscenza disposizionale rigidamente orientata a chiusure egoistiche e superficiali. Nello specifico si cercherà di approfondire un protocollo mindfulness, l'Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes et al., 1999/2013), che lavora su alcune dimensioni, come accettazione, defusione cognitiva, sé come contesto, contatto con il momento presente, contatto con i valori, azione impegnata, dimensioni che sembra interessante rileggere in chiave problematicista.

**Keywords:** Problematicism; Contemplative Pedagogy; mindfulness; critical reflexivity; ethical awareness

**Parole chiave:** Problematicismo; Pedagogia Contemplativa; mindfulness; riflessività critica; consapevolezza etica

## 1. Introduction

Today’s complexity, characterised by environmental, economic and social tensions, aggravated by the pandemic and even more so by the war against Ukraine, undoubtedly places human beings in deep crisis. A crisis we must deal with now, and to which, in particular, we must give educational value, above all thanks to a rediscovered ‘presence’. A presence that we previously took for granted and that, no longer mediated exclusively by the screen of our digital tools, offers us a space for reflection in order to address issues, purely pertaining to our fields of study. These concern the right to education and caring for our children and our young people, especially the most fragile, and the educational responsibility of all, institutions and families, towards the new generations. A presence that must therefore be preserved and enhanced, since it represents the possibility of finally recovering a ‘space’ with the other that becomes a ‘symbolic place’ where we can regain possession of the social bond which, cultivated ‘properly’, settling into shared memory, promotes a sense of community, framing strong educational values. How can we best cultivate this space of regained presence with the other so that it becomes a place to welcome and ‘give space’ to the uncertainty and vulnerability, so characteristic of the current period, strongly appealing to the humanizing principle of a Pedagogy that wants to be defined as such?

Undoubtedly, the pandemic experience has brought the need for a paradigmatic change to the fore even more, in educational contexts, in order to foster practices centred on empowerment and empowering processes that allow students to move from a self-centred and passive perspective (Morin, 2000), to a generative heterocentric approach, increasingly declined in a solidarity key, through the provision of a new alphabet of generative practices aimed at favouring the encounter between people, problems and solutions (Vecchiato, 2019). How, then, can we re-model our educational action according to an increasingly emerging need for equity? And what does fairness mean? Becoming connected? Cultivating and promoting feelings of relational trust? Aspiring to common welfare?

To try to answer these questions, above all in operational terms, now more than ever it is necessary to wear an “epistemological apparel” in order to foster a “Pedagogy-in-situation” that concretely, with choice, commitment and responsibility, impregnates the action of critical reflexivity and the thought of integrated and dialectical planning (Frabboni, Pinto, 1994). An apparel that finds its most valuable fabric in Bertinian Problematicism, which, especially in the educational experience, can guarantee non-dogmatic rational resolutions, open to the dimension of the possible. Rational resolutions that require a philosophical awareness which, not guaranteeing absolute truths in themselves, albeit complex, always implies the making of choices, promoting a theoretical and practical attitude that is an indication of ethical-rational commitment (Bertin, 1968). An attitude that allows us to cultivate the courage of the possible and the challenge of difference, a difference that «must become the goal of educational action and represents the principle by which every man has the right not to be considered an indistinct element of a shapeless pluralism and/or means for functions that need him, transcending its awareness and above all his consent» (Bertin & Contini, 2004, p.138).

A philosophical awareness that can make use (and here lies the focus of this work) of the help of mindfulness practices, especially when declined in the perspective of a mindfulness Pedagogy which, recently developed

starting from the United States and spreading rapidly also in Europe, is characterised by an educational philosophy which, including experiential learning such as meditation practices, awareness and compassion for oneself and others, conceives education as the gradual and integrated development of the person within society, considering the intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions as sources of learning that are equally important for global growth (De Simone, 2016), favouring, alongside traditional ‘third person’ academic practices, a ‘first person critical’ approach, which fosters a conscious understanding of the role of previous thought and experience, as well as of relational and social conditionings.

## **2. Problematizing awareness: complexifying the interaction between reason and reality to broaden the dimension of the possible**

Before offering a certainly non-exhaustive description of what is meant by Contemplative Pedagogy and mindfulness, we cannot fail to reflect not only on the opportunity to frame the latter in a problematicist key, but also, and above all, on the possibility of considering Bertinian’s Problematicism itself, with its fidelity so ethically oriented to a radical criticality, an approach that is still extremely appropriate to the solution of the problems of our present.

In favour of an affirmative answer to the second question, it is firstly worth recalling the largely anticipatory criticisms that Bertin addresses to modernity, starting with its rational products, disseminated by the mass media (today ‘social media’), increasingly standardizing and ratifying, products against which to oppose, in educational contexts, promoting it,

«an intelligence that knows how to fight against what is preconceived, specious, rhetorical, mystifying. The duty to see clearly, to get accurate information, to get documentation, to consider issues from multiple points of view; the refusal to form opinions and beliefs under the pressure of emotions or suggestions, the distrust towards slogans and in general towards the advertising and propaganda organs (whose messages, and this concerns above all cinema and TV, it is necessary to know how to demystify), an attitude towards people, things or situations made of clarity and understanding, the need for concreteness of reasoning and its ‘operational’ effectiveness, precision and loyalty in the discussion» (Bertin, 1968, p. 128).

An intelligence to be cultivated through a very clear methodological framework (that of Bertin) that provides an equally very effective working model, thanks to a precise neo-Kantian critical-transcendental approach, inherited from Banfi (1926), which considers «reason as a principle of clarifying and resolving the problematic nature of experience, combining it with the reason - drawn from positive existentialism - of the ‘possibility’ of such a resolution (which means not only the possibility of success, but also of failure), and therefore of the need for an ‘ethical commitment’ to achieve it» (Baldacci, 2018, p.1).

Bertin’s criticism of modernity is still very current and also proceeds with regard to the pathologies that derive from modernity itself, trying to solve them; it is therefore possible to recover fruitful vital legacies from this criticism. Yes, because more than 50 years after the first publication of his *Educare alla ragione* [*Educating to*

*Reason*](1968), the socio-political situation has not changed at all, indeed it may even have worsened, as if in retrospection Bertin’s words turned out to be very prophetic: «the civilization of the latter [the developed countries] seems to be characterized by the overwhelming power of ‘consumption’, rather than by respect for ‘dignity’ and by the concern to ‘liberate’ man» (Bertin, 1968, p. 13), for which it appears very necessary

«to mobilize the forces of culture entirely against the threat of alienation and reification, contained in the race for the well-being of the civilization of consumption, in whatever form it manifests itself or in any case is mystified: in this way can the arts, fiction, poetry, music, theatre, cinema, know how to clarify to man, with the irreverent and contesting language that characterizes them today, the problematic structure of his destiny and the consequent inevitable restlessness of his existential condition» (Bertin, 1968, p. 15).

In line with Bertin’s vision, it is in this direction that a pedagogical discourse anchored to a complex theoretical position can offer an indication of reflective processes capable of promoting critical intentionality, but at the same time open to the multiple paths of the possible, and therefore to the design of utopian educational paths oriented to creative difference, in which it is possible to try to frame mindfulness and Contemplative Pedagogy. Also, because

«pluralism incorporates the recognition not only of the - absolutely indisputable - multiplicity of the perspectives of value within the socio-cultural experience dominated by the anthropological specificity of the various cultures, but also of its possible validity for the enrichment and expansion of experience itself. It constitutes, in fact, an essential element of knowledge both in the philosophical and in the scientific aspect, agreeing in rejecting any dogmatic presupposition» (Bertin, in Bertin & Contini, 2004, p. 67).

In this sense, Contemplative Pedagogy, on the philosophical level, and contemplative science<sup>i</sup>, on the empirical level, can certainly make a contribution. Let’s start by introducing Contemplative Pedagogy, sometimes called Contemplative Education, which can be described as «a series of pedagogical practices designed to cultivate the potential of the mind (presence, attention, will) and of the body, in a relational and ethical context in which the qualities of personal growth, learning, coexistence with others and altruism are nourished and strengthened» (Roeser & Peck, 2009, p.119). Being a complex philosophical and pedagogical approach, using a wide range of practices that go beyond the meditation of Buddhist origin, a «processual, systemic and recursive, as well as ‘enactive’ approach, favouring creativity, problematization, the historical/embodyed/contextual, distributed and non-linear dimension, contemplative pedagogy promotes ways of teaching and learning capable of embracing body and mind, thoughts and emotions» (De Simone, 2018, p. IX). We are talking about an educational approach which, as mentioned, despite using educational practices deriving from multiple contexts and traditions<sup>ii</sup>, was inspired, especially as regards the mindfulness practices that we will describe below, mainly from Buddhism.

Firstly, because for more than 2,500 years, the contemplative traditions of India have developed highly sophisticated curricula and corresponding series of practices with which the refinement of awareness, attentional

training and ethical development of individuals can be cultivated (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Lutz et al., 2007). Secondly because, and many times in the West, as we will see later, this dimension appears underestimated, the ‘Right view’, one of the first pillars of the Eightfold Path on which Buddhism works, is the foundation of all ethical action, as in the moment in which we have a Right View, our thought is Right Thought, our word is Right Word and our action is Right Action. And in fact, starting from this vision, Bertin’s dialogue between Contemplative Pedagogy and Pedagogical Problematicism immediately appears rich in suggestions, being able, ‘right view’ and ‘right action’, to decline in a ‘Bertinian’ key on two levels.

The first level concerns the ‘methodological’ distinction that Bertin makes between the Philosophy of Education, with its aim of theoretical understanding, and Pedagogy, which is essentially responsible for the pragmatic task of educational choice, a distinction capable of promoting critical rationality in the dual theoretical-deductive and historical-inductive direction (right view), capable of guiding practical awareness with a strong ethical character (right action)<sup>iii</sup>. «*Problematicism* therefore seems to be a hypothesis capable of realizing an effective connection between theory and practice, giving adequate emphasis both to the theoretical interpretation of the educational experience and to the need for its rational guidance. To remain consistent with Problematicism, however, it is necessary to make a non-dogmatic yet critical use of this hypothesis: it must be considered only a working hypothesis» (Baldacci, 2010, p.74).

And, secondly, the heuristic power of the Problematicist perspective, in the dual meaning of theoretical reflection and ‘existential planning’, provides us with an epistemic and empirical model capable of promoting choices, never absolute and definitive, which always imply, and together, a ‘fidelity to reason’ (again, ‘right view’), understood as an anti-dogmatic principle, and an ‘adherence to reality’ (again, ‘right action’), in the sense of value guidance aimed at building educational systems consistent with an increasingly democratic and fair social vision.

«Adherence to reality and fidelity to reason presuppose historical awareness, that is, awareness of the profound unity that must bind [...] past present future, so that the rational need (instead of stopping in the limited context of the present or exhausting itself in abstract of the past or utopically hypothesizing the future) is oriented to the future: a requirement that constitutes above all a task to be carried out directed towards the future. In order to derive, from the consideration of the situation, the most appropriate indications both in relation to the problems emerging from the present and the concrete possibilities of action, and in relation to the far and near precedents that have contributed in the past to the genesis and physiognomy of the situation itself» (Bertin, 1968, p. 39).

In this direction, the ability of Problematicism to highlight the constant interaction between reason and reality, a reason always in crisis but precisely for this criticism, capable of promoting, in historical reality, the value of creative difference by offering itself to a horizon of possibilities which always requires a fight against anti-dogmatism, it would seem to be able to welcome the contemplative vision above all in terms of operational repercussions that go in the direction of an emancipation of the individual from all dogmatic knowledge as well as from the social and cultural ties that contribute to a definition of their dispositional knowledge, rigidly oriented towards selfish and superficial closures.

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Not without reflecting on the risk of uncritically connecting two educational visions, Contemplative Pedagogy and Problematicism, visions that arise in such different space-time contexts. First of all as, deriving from religious traditions with a rich historical and textual background such as Buddhism, contemplative practices make two profoundly different worlds dialogue: East and West. In this regard, the well-intentioned efforts to secularize contemplative practices such as mindfulness, «providing scientific evidence for its efficacy in order to obtain epistemic credibility and introduce it to wider audiences, could on one hand be a strong point but on the other, at the same time, also the weak point due to the risk that one runs of impoverishing the rich contribution that contemplative practices, located within a broader ethical framework, could give to human life and to education» (De Simone, 2018, p. XII)<sup>iv</sup>.

For example, the ‘Western’ emphasis on the transformation of internal conditions could lead to the neglect of external conditions, as structural inequalities inherent in social contexts, ‘intending’ contemplative practices as practices aimed at privileging individual well-being rather than the loving attention to the world and to others, so much so that some critics speak of ‘McMindfulness’ (Purser & Loy, 2013), referring to the risk of a ‘commercialisation’ of awareness practices, always lurking especially in the American context. The risk is to cultivate ‘right view’ as an end in itself, not connecting it to ‘right action’. Numerous researchers have moved in this direction, seeking to investigate the ethical assumptions relating to the use of mindfulness practices in educational contexts. In this regard, similarly to Hyland (2014), Bazzano (2014) warns of the possible risk of exploiting the practice of mindfulness to promote ‘faster’ learning outcomes, while Brazier (2013) highlights a tendency to turn to practical mindfulness, solving practical problems while neglecting «broader questions of purpose and meaning» (Brazier, 2013, p. 117). Decontextualized from its ethical assumption, therefore, the practice of mindfulness can generate or strengthen self-centred values by leading the individuals who practice it to privilege their own personal well-being rather than ‘loved’ care for others (O’Donnell, 2015; Hyde & La Prad, 2015). Similarly to the risk that is run by promoting an education in reason not intimately connected to the Bertinian ethical principle of “realize yourself, realizing the other”, a principle that arises in the educational field, as a «commitment to plan one’s existence in the world, with others, in the awareness that there are no alternatives to the relationship and that in order to live the latter - not having absolute parameters of truth - it is necessary to make responsible choices, accepting limits and provisionality in a perspective of overcoming that redeems them from the risk of acting from alibi» (Contini in Bertin / Contini, 2004, p. 166).

In ultimate analysis, Contemplative Pedagogy and Problematicism can dialogue as long as this dialogue is critically considered, not only respecting mutual differences, but also through their enhancement. And also because it is precisely the wealth of ethical and educational implications of the idea of difference that allows us to cultivate the dimension of the possible, a possible that «concerns the quality of an existentially renewed life, and not the mere spread of ‘well-being’» (Bertin, in Bertin & Contini, 2004, p. 83). And it is thanks to the recovery of difference that «the ethical-political commitment will not be exposed to tragic disappointments due to the false purposes towards which it is diverted and above all by the mirages of happiness and well-being that accompany it» (Bertin, in Bertin & Contini, 2004, p. 84).

On the other hand, in his reflection on the meaning of education and the role of Pedagogy, Brezinka (2011) describes the rapid cultural changes that have affected today's society, and that have made the individual bewildered, insecure, fragile. To counter the “spirit of the times”, which Brezinka (2011) defines as individualistic, rationalistic and hedonistic, man must not lose sight of the common ideals and the most significant cultural assets of his community. And staying anchored to traditions is a way of not getting lost in today's turbulent chaos of economic, scientific and cultural changes. And, in this sense, Bertinian's Problematicism is fully a part of our cultural tradition, although in a way, I believe, that is still insufficient and not yet adequately valued. And therefore the ‘there-and-then’ from which these fruitful visions, Problematicism and Contemplative Pedagogy originate, is enlivened in the ‘here-and-now’ through a highly necessary conscious intentionality to work educatively to promote processes of fidelity to reason/right vision and adherence to reality/right action, portents of openness to the possible: at all levels.

### **3. Contempl-a(c)tion: mindfulness between fidelity to reason and adherence to reality**

The best known and most widespread contemplative practices are certainly mindfulness practices. Mindfulness can be defined as the «process of paying attention in a particular way: intentionally, in a non-judgmental way, to the flow of experience in the present moment after moment» (Kabat-Zinn, 1994/1997, p.16). Evidence comes precisely from the scientific field to support the effectiveness of mindfulness practices, in educational contexts, in working on various aspects of the development and education of the person, from cognitive to emotional, from physical to interpersonal<sup>v</sup>. Ranked side by side with that direction, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (more briefly ACT) (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 1999/2013) is one of the most scientifically validated mindfulness protocols, especially in educational contexts (De Simone, 2016, 2018). In this regard, making extensive use of not only linguistic tools, such as metaphors and paradoxes, but also of many experiential exercises, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy can be considered to all intents and purposes a protocol that uses meta-cognitive and meta-emotional working tools, therefore promoting instruments of self-reflection and self-training. It is a protocol that proposes a model, called ‘hexaflex’, which works on six dimensions considered ‘dysfunctional’ because they are responsible for what is technically defined as ‘psychological inflexibility’, promoting the cultivation of six “virtuous” opposite processes:

1. Fusion *versus* defusion: being fused means being trapped in one's thoughts and emotions, causing them to dominate our awareness and thus have a great influence on our behaviour. Fusion is the polar opposite of the process of defusion, which is to understand the true nature of thoughts and respond to them based on their usefulness, rather than in a literal manner. More simply, improving defusion skills means looking at thoughts through the filter of thoughts, noticing them by letting them come and go, rather than getting trapped in them.
2. Experiential avoidance *versus* acceptance: this is the attempt (completely spontaneous in each of us) to change the shape, frequency or intensity of internal events such as thoughts, emotions and memories. In simple terms, experiential avoidance refers to the tendency to eliminate or distance emotional



experiences or unpleasant thoughts. At the opposite extreme, in “virtuous” terms, there is acceptance, that is, leaving room for thoughts and feelings, regardless of whether they are pleasant or painful, abandoning the fight and getting fully and defencelessly in touch with thoughts and emotions, so that experiential avoidance ceases to be a barrier to action.

3. Dominance of conceptualized past and future and limited self-awareness *versus* contact with the present moment: as an effect of avoidance and fusion, there is a tendency to lose contact with the present moment, that is, with the experience in the here-and-now; the immediate consequence is that a lot of time is spent ruminating on the past or planning and predicting the future. In this case, it is also possible to identify a corresponding opposite process, i.e., contact with the here-and-now. Promoting awareness of the present moment allows us to accurately perceive what is happening and then use all the information to adequately modulate behaviour (Harris, 2011). When we are in contact with the present moment, in fact, we are more flexible and responsive towards what is really happening, inside and outside of us.
4. Attachment to the conceptualized self *versus* self as context: this refers to the tendency to bind with force and to adhere rigidly to a self-formulated description of oneself (whether positive or negative), to a narrative of oneself, based not only on objective data but on evaluations on the role we have, our desires, our strengths and shortcomings, what we love or hate. At the opposite pole is the concept of self as context: connecting with a part of oneself which constitutes a “point of view” from which it is possible to observe thoughts and feelings; it is a place where these thoughts and feelings move, a place from which we can observe our experience without being involved in it: I can notice my thoughts, my emotions, my body, the outside world; I can also notice my own noticing. What is noticed changes continuously, while the perspective from which the process of noticing originates remains unchanged (Harris, 2011).
5. Lack of clarity or contact with values *versus* contact with values: in some cases, behaviour is mainly driven by fusion (i.e., rigid attachment and dependence) with ineffective thoughts and avoidance of unpleasant experiences, rather than from what matters to us in life. This inevitably causes poor motivation, a lesser sense of vitality and fullness, meaninglessness. On the contrary, clarifying and getting in touch with values means clarifying what is important, our deep desires for what we want to be and do. Values can be generically defined as “desired overall qualities of ongoing action” (Hayes et al., 2006; Harris, 2011). Clarifying values and connecting with them helps the person to use them as a guide and motivating factor for action.
6. Lack of action or ineffective, non-functional actions *versus* committed action: this expression refers to the presence of ineffective modes of action, which do not work because they are not able to guarantee a rich, full and meaningful life for each of us. These can be impulsive and automatic actions, rather than conscious ones, or actions aimed at avoiding rather than pursuing a value or, again, complete inactivity. At the other extreme we find committed action. Working on this process means increasing the ability

to act in the desired direction: the values are used to set objectives and the objectives, in turn, are broken down into specific actions.

In general, the objective that arises through ACT is to increase flexibility, acquiring the ability to implement conscious, valuable and effective actions and to be available to accept and manage the natural process, in emotional and cognitive terms, of being present in the here-and-now.

If we want to read them from a Problematicist point of view, these aspects could prove useful for promoting a ‘radical’ Pedagogy, a Pedagogy that supports the culture of responsibility, the need – now more fundamental than ever – for choices, never given in an absolute and definitive way but which always imply at the same time a fidelity to reason, understood as an anti-dogmatic principle, and an adherence to reality, in the sense of a guiding value aimed at building educational systems consistent with a democratic social vision and the reduction of forms of inequality and alienating individualisms (Bertin, 1968). It is an education that requires, and, it is hoped, is supported by, contemplative practices, the promotion of an anti-dogmatism that avoids sterile judgments and opens to active and integral commitment, which is always an “idiosyncratic” commitment, the result of one’s own rational work but which unites, in its effort, all men, in the universality of direction (Bertin, 1951).

There are multiple examples and suggestions in this regard: here are some of them. First of all,

«there is a profound ethical, as well as epistemological, implication in metacognitive awareness: it concerns the recognition of the legitimacy of the points of view of others, even those we do not share and, above all, the assumption of responsibility related to looking in the face of one’s own limits and leading back to them – rather than blaming others – of the goals not achieved, or the missed encounters» (Contini, 2009, p. 17).

With respect to the dimension of de-centring:

«if the first problematic figure, the absence of univocal meanings - referable to events, categories or human behaviours - can help us recognize and overcome our cognitive egocentrism, making us aware of the legitimacy of points of view diverging from ours and of the opportunity to listen to them and communicate with each other, the encounter with ambivalences in the world of my emotions can force me to look them in the face, to recognize and name them, freeing myself from unawareness and emotional illiteracy» (Contini, 2009, p. 30).

And yet:

«projecting beyond the present, towards a world of the possible that is still undetermined - yet to be discovered, to be designed, to that we usually practice and facilitates a distancing that, while making us more critical of the existing, can make us to glimpse scenarios and representations for which the conditions of feasibility are not given today, but which, in the meantime, we become capable of thinking and prefiguring» (Contini, 2009, p. 39).

ACT, with its strong reference to action<sup>vi</sup> and promoting an awareness that sees meta-dimensions as fundamental dimensions, both on the cognitive (defusion) and emotional (acceptance) side aimed at assuming

responsibility (committed action intended by a connection with one’s own values)<sup>vii</sup> goes well with Bertin’s philosophy of education understood as a «critical-phenomenological analysis of the educational experience» (Bertin, 1968, p. 52), which in itself comprehends the main theoretical devices: analytical-reflective and hermeneutic-propositive. A philosophy, therefore, which has the three-fold objective of promoting «a well-made mind», “emotional literacy”, and “resistance in solidarity with others» (Contini, 2009, p. 79).

#### 4. Concluding reflections

Undoubtedly we find ourselves the protagonists of an epochal revolution. While on one hand, in formal educational contexts of all levels COVID-19 has put a strain on one of the fundamental dimensions of education, especially in the Humanities: participation, the recent war against Ukraine, on the other hand, has made the perpetuation of injustices and dehumanizing actions that are still too incapacitating even more ‘evident’, thanks to technological progress. In this direction, today more than ever, living in the “global risk society” (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2012), we are asked to focus attention on an educational work that focuses on the processes of sharing, socialization and negotiation that several minds put together while they learn, and which promotes the construction of communities in the direction of “commitment, planning and difference” (Contini, 2009). The emergency in progress can, and must, be an opportunity to work on an evolution of educational paths based on new scenarios, which place the cohesion of the protagonists involved as a basis for educating to the practice of social and individual behaviours coherent with what is happening to us. Today we are all exposed to different types of global risks, but precisely this traumatic vulnerability must increase everyone’s responsibility: we are an «existential community of destiny» (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2012, p. 86).

Contemplative practices could help to work educationally, especially if placed within the Problematicist framework, in this direction. Yes, because, if an “education of resistance” (Mantegazza, 2003) requires practices based «on a continuous exercise of self-reflexivity and meta-reflexivity by a pedagogy that, aware of the role of the “world of the mind”, is able to select the information and the implicit and explicit messages that circulate» (Contini, 2009, p. 71), therefore it is attentive to cultivating the most rigorous and radical critical sense, it is also necessary «to educate to eccentric modalities of relationship, diverging from the dominant ones, within which kindness and compassion, affection and respect find a place, up to authentic solidarity towards not only other humans, but all that live» (Contini, 2009, p. 72).

In Buddhism there is a practice called *metta*, a Pali word meaning ‘unconditional loving kindness’, which represents one of the ten paramitas, or virtuous and positive behaviours enlightened by higher awareness and knowledge, from the Theravada school of Buddhism. The object of *metta* meditation is to develop kindness, friendliness and compassion towards all beings. The practice usually begins with the cultivation of compassion and love for oneself, then for loved ones, friends, strangers and, finally, for enemies (Salzberg, 1995). The *metta* practice of ‘unconditional loving kindness’ cannot fail to evoke the Continian ‘waste’ as an emblematic figure of educating (Contini, 2009). The rejection of the outdatedness, marginality, poor visibility of an educator who takes into account such unpopular dimensions, weak compared to the dominant thought: justice, peace,

respect, solidarity, dimensions however with a precious utopian function for the pedagogical conscience, or «that of anticipating, on the level of the possible, educational objectives for which the conditions of feasibility are not given today, but maybe tomorrow» (Contini, 2009, p. 17), but surely, and necessarily, objectives to be pursued and built with commitment ethical.

I conclude with the hope, for this epochal revolution we are experiencing, of the advent of humanizing ‘pandemic’ processes, also thanks to educational practices oriented in this direction.

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<sup>i</sup> Contemplative science can be considered as a movement within the broader field of sciences that takes a leap beyond scientific materialism, integrating approaches such as neurophenomenology into its work. Contemplative studies in fact aim, through scientific experimentation and the application of contemplative practices, to study their effects in people involved in contexts such as education and care. For further details on the topic, as well as the link between science and Contemplative Pedagogy, refer to the volume: De Simone (2018), *L'autoconsapevolezza tra Oriente e Occidente. Una prospettiva pedagogica [Self-awareness between East and West. A pedagogical perspective]*. Liguori Editore.

<sup>ii</sup> Contemplative Pedagogy is fed by various sources ranging, for example, from the philosophical schools of ancient Greece to monastic monotheistic traditions, from contemplative communities to the philosophy of North American transcendentalists, and for this reason different practices are used, from mental to social, from political to practices centred on the body or personal conduct: yoga, singing, narrative practices, ritual exercises. A variety of practices, within a single vision that allowed the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society to create “the tree of contemplative practices” (The Tree of Contemplative Practices – The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society: [www. contemplativemind.org/practices/tree](http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree): last visit 20/01/2022). Each branch of this tree represents a contemplative practice. By way of example, one of the main branches of this tree, called “activism”, contains a series of practices aimed at creating a social conscience in favour of social change, not only in reference to individual contexts but as a struggle, above all, against the current prevailing, standardizing and patriarchal social model (Naranjo, 2007/2009).

<sup>iii</sup> The issue was also dealt with in the article: De Simone (2021), La presenza “ritrovata” foriera di apertura al futuro: spunti per una pedagogia della resistenza [The “rediscovered” presence indicative of an opening to the future: ideas for a pedagogy of resistance]. *Metis. Mondi educativi. Temi, indagini, suggestioni*. 11(2) 2021, pp. 171-192.

<sup>iv</sup> For a critical reflection on the ‘uprooted’ use of mindfulness practices in Western contexts, see De Simone (2018).

<sup>v</sup> For a certainly not updated or exhaustive bibliographic review of the use of mindfulness practices in educational contexts, from kindergarten to University, refer to the chapter entitled: “La mindfulness in ambito formativo: dal benessere ai processi di apprendimento [Mindfulness in training: from well-being to learning processes], in De Simone (2016), *Coltivare la presenza. La mindfulness nei contesti educative [Cultivating presence. Mindfulness in educational contexts]*, Luciano Editore (pp. 95-128).

<sup>vi</sup> The name of the protocol itself is more than a simple abbreviation, it must in fact be read as a single word with clear reference to the verb “to act” in the English language (“to act”).

<sup>vii</sup> It is important to remember that, from an embodied and integrated perspective, the dimensions on which ACT works are largely overlapping and therefore distinct for purely educational and research purposes.

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metacognitive skills. Recently she is dealing with the possible links between contemplative practices and critical pedagogy, especially as regards the Freirian matrix of the pedagogy of the oppressed. A very last interest of research has to do with a reflection on the theme of freedom. A very last interest of research has to do with a reflection on the theme of freedom. Starting from the analysis of the history of philosophical thought, where numerous interpretative models have developed, such as to characterize freedom as a "philosophical problem", she is trying to deepen its educational scope, not without passing through studies neuroscientific, as well as reflecting on possible practices of education to freedom. She has published, in addition to numerous articles in scientific journals, the monographs *Coltivare la presenza*, Luciano Editore, 2016 e *L'autoconsapevolezza tra Oriente e Occidente: Una prospettiva pedagogica*, Liguori Editore, 2018, *Libertà in educazione. Percorsi teorici*, FrancoAngeli, 2020.

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