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Educational Value of Accompaniment Pedagogy

ABSTRACT

Pedagogical work supports the development of the pupil by helping to achieve well-being, harmony in relationships with oneself and the environment, and, consequently, one's goals. However, this vision of human development in pedagogical practice may take various forms. The article presents the vision of pedagogical support which results from the perception of humankind and personal development in terms of accompaniment pedagogy, also known as Jesuit pedagogy. The subject of reflection is the spirituality that arises from the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Its uniqueness lies in its theocentric and Christocentric perception of the world and humankind. In this spirituality, two principles deserve special attention—*magis* and *cura personalis*—which, both in practice and in scientific reflection, seem to lead to a synergistic effect. Referring to the message contained in these principles, the article presents the possibilities of using accompaniment pedagogy in everyday educational interactions.

KEYWORDS:
spirituality, education,
pedagogy of
accompaniment,
synergy in education,
personalism

Introduction

If not every pedagogical trend, then the vast majority of them, presupposes supporting individuals in achieving their life goals. The success of these goals relies on a number of factors, including the harmonious interaction of those involved in educational

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and upbringing processes, which can produce a synergistic effect. In this article, I intend to present a vision of such interaction in terms of accompaniment pedagogy, also known as Jesuit pedagogy, inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. This booklet offers several educational principles: identifying goals, fostering independence and responsibility, systematically guiding the educational process while adapting to individual needs, actively seeking truth and personalizing it for one's development, and caring for the well-being of others. The Jesuits adapted these principles for educational purposes and integrated them into their school system (Marek 2017: 35).

Sources of accompaniment pedagogy

Accompaniment pedagogy falls within the tradition of Christian pedagogy, characterized by theocentric and Christocentric views of the world and humanity. Its uniqueness results from the spirituality of the *Spiritual Exercises* by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). This classic work of Christian spirituality should not be regarded as a deliberate, complete and exhaustive treatise on the inner life and the pursuit of perfection, but rather a practical guide to help retreat participants overcome personal weaknesses and organize their lives according to God's will. Therefore, its contents are not theoretical or abstract reflections, but practical suggestions on how to arrange one's life in complete submission to the will of God. It includes guidance on meditation, examination of conscience, and other practices aimed at developing one's inner life during retreats.

The term "spirituality" itself is considered simple yet indefinable. It conveys a community of "the meaning of value and sense that governs certain structures. These can be individual meanings of life, situational meanings, but also corporate, national, and religious meanings" (Ablewicz 2007: 77). The term first appeared in literature in the fifth century with a religious (Christian) meaning originally. Over the centuries, it has acquired various dimensions, but it consistently expresses humanity's aspiration to unite with God and establish a relationship with Him. In essence, "spirituality" describes the spiritual experiences of believers, born from the personal experience of faith and the desire to live with God in happiness and love (Marek 2017: 96–97). This effort involves understanding oneself and

one's life in the light of the Gospel, as communicated within the community of the Church. Christian spirituality, understood in this way, manifests in many forms of spirituality among different religious groups and individual believers (Chmielewski 2002: 230).

St. Ignatius of Loyola stands out among the notable figures who emphasized Christian spirituality. In his view, spirituality is theocentric since it views God not as an abstract or philosophical concept, nor as someone distant and unattainable, but as unconditionally loving Love. This love is discovered primarily in Christ, who is the mediator between God and humanity and humanity's Savior (Misiurek 2002: 348–349; Fleming 2013). Ignatius viewed Christ as “the God who reveals the depths of the Trinity, leaning over humanity in an ongoing act of love. It is Love that creates, sustains, saves, and attracts. According to St. Ignatius, it is only in Jesus Christ that the true God can be encountered, and this is a total work of grace” (Wójtowicz 2010: 63–64).

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For Ignatius of Loyola, God is the absolute value and the source and goal of all good. To Him, all other values should be subordinated, including humanity, whose overriding duty is to care for the greater glory of God and to find Him in all things (Łacny 2010: 153). This attitude involves growing in service to God and bringing glory to Him. In these contexts, the terms characteristic of Ignatian spirituality emerged: service “for the greater glory of God” (*ad maiorem Dei gloriam*) (Piechnik 2003: 8) and “helping souls.” These concepts embody the readiness to help people honor God, thus achieving the fullness of life called “immortality” (life with God without end).

Such spirituality presupposes human desire and the effort to seek and choose what is most helpful in serving God, contributing to His greater glory and facilitating human development. The adjective “greater” expresses the human desire to cross boundaries and set new goals that support personal growth. It is not about comparing one's actions with others' achievements or measuring one's own progress in inner life by some absolute yardstick. Instead, it is about “the surest

possible development of the individual at each stage of life, with the readiness to continue developing throughout life and the motivation to use one's gifts for the good of others" (*Podstawy edukacji ignacjańskiej* 2006: 27).

To emphasize the importance of concern for the glory of God, St. Ignatius used the Latin adverb *magis* (more, better). In this context, it means to grow stronger, love more, go further, in order that, apart from God, you may desire and choose only what leads you to the goal for which you were created (St. Ignatius of Loyola 2013). Following the principle of *magis* helps one understand that one can always take the next step as compared to where one currently is. Moreover, the effort put into such development glorifies God. This "desire, seeking, and choosing what best serves God for the greater glory of the Divine Majesty and the good of souls animates the entire spiritual exercises, their soul and immanent directive, a constant and unchanging orientation" (Królikowski 2022: 167). St. Ignatius emphasized that love, being unlimited in principle, always wants more and always strives for the highest peaks. Thus, it becomes a guiding life principle, showing that one should always choose and desire solutions that most fully contribute to their ultimate goal.

Deciding to be guided by the principle of *magis* is possible through spiritual discernment, which enables a person to recognize and choose the good around them (Polish Provinces of the Society of Jesus 2017: 101). In Jesuit spirituality, discernment is considered the art of inner, spiritual discovery, revealing the direction in which the desires of the human heart lead. Without the capacity for discernment, people succumb to impulses that prevent them from making responsible decisions that strengthen their harmonious relationship with God and the world. However, discernment alone is not a recipe for a successful life. Instead, it fosters an attitude that is open and free from disordered attachments (Steczek 2007: 80–81). Skillful discernment helps separate what causes confusion from what is valuable, enabling a person to make free decisions (Jurado 2002: 21–22). In St. Ignatius of Loyola's understanding, discernment is meant to provide the impulse to make the right choices in both external and internal life.

In the spirituality promoted by St. Ignatius of Loyola, discernment helps individuals seek "the greater glory of God" and bring

“greater help to souls.” This help primarily refers to the development of the inner life by awakening the conviction to seek and find God in all things and to honor Him above all other values in daily life (Loyola 2013; Lambert 2001: 15). In this activity, one should engage not only their feelings but also their reason and will (Lambert 2001: 22). This requires an inner effort to work on oneself, going “beyond a purely egoistic preoccupation with oneself.” [St. Ignatius—note Z.M.] emphasized that in making this effort, one “will progress in all spiritual matters to the extent that they free themselves from self-love, their own desires, and their own interests.” A step out of oneself is a step towards others (Lambert 2001: 15). This involves growing in religious faith and acquiring the ability to know and accept God and His love (*Podstawy edukacji ignacjańskiej* 2006: 33; Jalics 2017). This attitude should stem from respect for human dignity. The spirituality outlined by St. Ignatius consists in accepting values and attitudes that grow out of the Gospel, nurturing Christian customs, and ensuring a person’s integral development (Fleming 2013).

Another aspect of Ignatian spirituality points to the importance of cherishing established traditions related to permanence, which endures unlike fleeting trends because it stems from a history, culture, or religion that the person recalls and accepts, helping them find their own identity (Nikitorowicz 2007). Moreover, understanding and embracing these traditions provide motives to justify specific behaviors. For St. Ignatius Loyola, tradition sensitizes individuals to the need to engage in the process of returning the created world to God through personal service to His Divine Majesty. The essence of this service is to do the will of God. The motives for undertaking this service are found in the awareness of one’s own sinfulness and inclination to evil, as well as in the love of God who, through Jesus Christ, appeals to humanity to convert and live with God. This initiative requires constant spiritual (inner) effort, enabling one to overcome personal weaknesses and organize their life according to divine law, thus acquiring the virtue of “self-management” (Kolvenbach 2003: 131–134; Michalski 2004: 15). It fosters an inner conviction that life is lived for God, who is the highest good and happiness (*Wprowadzenie do ćwiczeń duchownych* 1968: 8–9, 79; Poznański 2010: 45).

St. Ignatius of Loyola understood that a person’s inner development may be disturbed and distorted by the action of an evil spirit,

a challenge he faced in his own life and observed in those undergoing the spiritual exercises. In order to prevent this danger, retreatants should have a companion, commonly referred to as an exercise director. The director's role is to accompany and support the retreat participant, helping them cooperate with their Creator and Lord in their choices (St. Ignatius of Loyola 2013). The spiritual director aids the retreatant in defending against all kinds of illusions by explaining certain principles of the interior life and exposing falsehoods. This, in turn, requires listening to the retreatant's shared spiritual experiences to understand and, if necessary, explain their inner states (joy, sadness, loneliness). The spiritual director should also raise awareness of any difficulties or obstacles to the retreatant's inner development. However, the director must never suggest or encourage one to make a particular choice; the choice belongs solely to the retreatant (Marek 2017: 40–41).

Tenets of the pedagogy of accompaniment

The features of Ignatian spirituality described above were applied in the educational system developed by the Jesuits from the 16th century onwards. These principles were put forward in the document *Ratio atque institutio studiorum SJ* (abbreviated as *Ratio studiorum*), published in 1599 (Piechnik 2003; Inglot 2007: 89). The significance of this document for Jesuit education is evidenced by its approval by the order's highest legislative body, the General Congregation, in 1616. Rather than being a theoretical treatise, the document was prepared in the form of practical rules for the Jesuits to achieve specific spiritual, pedagogical, and didactic objectives. It describes detailed norms for the programs and teaching methods used in Jesuit educational centres, serving as a handbook to assist teachers and pedagogues in the day-to-day management of schools and teaching (Inglot 2007: 90). This system remained in force in Jesuit education until the order was abolished by Pope Clement XIV in 1773.

When Pope Pius VII resumed the Order's activities in 1814, the Jesuits renewed their efforts to reconstruct their educational system, which is based on Ignatian spirituality. According to the Gospel, this system aims to educate students to achieve the good acquired through the integral development of humanity in the biological, intellectual,

spiritual, and moral dimensions. The harmonious development of humanity ensures respect for the proper role of each participant in the educational processes. This process primarily involves understanding that the human being is not an absolute value. Therefore, in education, which is understood as a mutual interaction between the educator and the educated, neither party can fully and sufficiently achieve life's perfection. Its only giver is the personal God in whom one trusts.

The fruits of long discussions and work are two documents: *Charakterystyczne cechy jezuickiego wychowania* [Characteristics of Jesuit Education] and *Pedagogia ignacjańska. Podejście praktyczne* [Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach] (Podstawy edukacji ignacjańskiej 2006). The educational model presented in these documents is based on spirituality growing out of the *Spiritual Exercises* and on the philosophical and theological current developed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries called Christian personalism (Marek 2017: 136). According to its assumptions, the personal God is an absolute value for humanity. It is also to Him that all other values are subordinated, including humanity, which is described as a “derivative being,” i.e., dependent on God (Zdybicka 2006: 282–289).

In order to meet the challenges of Christian personalism, education must include not only empirical and intellectual knowledge, known as natural cognition, but also supernatural (religious) cognition. Supernatural cognition complements the knowledge gained from everyday experience, empiricism and intellectual reflection with insights that natural cognition cannot access. This type of knowledge, derived from divine revelation, does not provide irrefutable empirical evidence. On the contrary, it requires thoughtful reflection and faith based on the authority of God communicating specific truths (Marek 2017). In the Christian understanding, these two forms of knowledge are complementary and never mutually exclusive, as each accesses different aspects of truth. The ability to use both forms of knowledge encourages further search for truth (Marek 2007: 103–104; Mol, Paślawska-Smęder 2022: 79).

In Jesuit schools, educational processes are inspired by Ignatian spirituality and the principles of Christian personalism, which posits a theocentric perception of the world and humanity. Consequently, these processes are influenced by the relationships among the

student, the teacher, and God. The relationships that the educator and the student establish with God are particularly important. This is based on the concept of the image of God, which refers not to visual representations but to the experience of His presence and action in human life. Contemporary individuals encounter such experiences in the pages of the Bible, discovering that God is always supportive and actively involved in their pursuit of the highest good, which Christians call eternal life or immortality.

In the Jesuit educational model, the educator-teacher plays a significant role. It is not enough for the teacher to merely transmit knowledge in a proper way. The teacher must also accompany the student in their educational and maturation processes. The role of the director of the spiritual exercises serves as a model for this role. Like a spiritual director, the teacher should act as a companion in the educational processes, assisting the student in their endeavors. Following the example of the spiritual director, the teacher provides necessary explanations of complex matters related not only to academic knowledge but also to aspects of human life, always respecting the student's freedom and choices. The teacher can neither act as an arbitrator of the student's life decisions nor do anything on their behalf. This approach helps the student realize that they shape their future and humanity. Following Saint Ignatius of Loyola's instructions to the directors of the exercises, the teacher can add, explain, and indicate potential difficulties in the ongoing educational process. Unlike the somewhat conservative role of the spiritual director, Ignatian pedagogy promotes all forms of student activity, incorporating not only intellectual faculties but also emotional and volitional capacities into these processes.

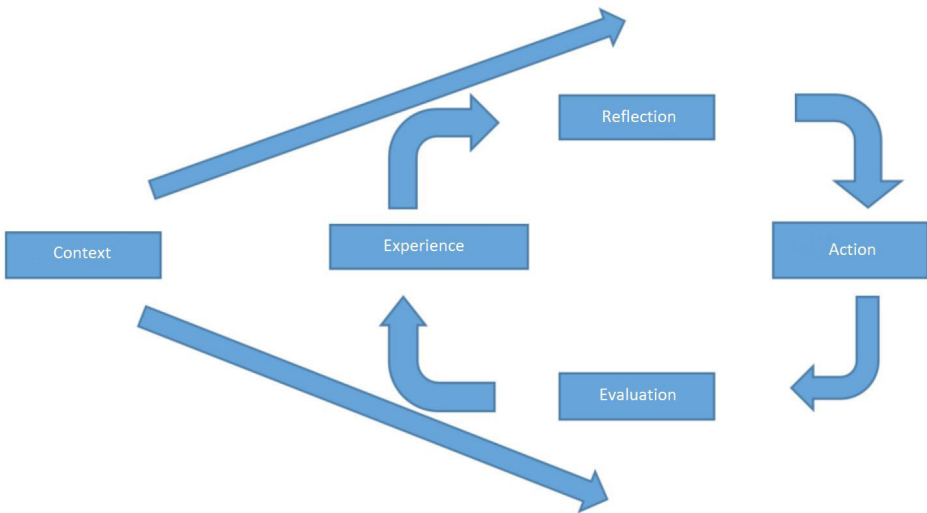
The effectiveness of educational interactions hinges on the relationships established among educational entities. Therefore, in accompaniment pedagogy, trust, along with witnessing, constitutes essential elements of educational processes in their broadest sense. It should be remembered that building trust involves more than presenting rigorous intellectual arguments; it entails demonstrating the right attitudes towards life. Therefore, teachers should be aware that "witnessing is something different than teaching. While teaching emphasizes argumentation, successive steps towards effectiveness, mental operations, and drawing appropriate conclusions from

actions, witnessing highlights interests, experiences, involvement, and outward expression. In this sense, the witness does not so much discover as transmit existing values to those they testify to” (Marek, Walulik 2019: 244). Both trust and witnessing help teachers understand each other’s perspectives, life circumstances and arguments concerning the issues they deal with (Marek 2017: 57–58, 243).

Jesuits express their concern for individual well-being through the Latin term *cura personalis* (Casalini 2019: 123–134). This term underscores the imperative of supporting individuals in their comprehensive development. The essence of such assistance encompasses initiatives aimed at fostering holistic personal growth and maturity in both natural and religious dimensions. Essentially, it involves cultivating a mindset that encourages taking risks beyond one’s self-interests to be receptive to others’ needs (Marek 2017: 205–206). This approach affirms that the educational model growing out of Ignatian spirituality is fundamentally concerned with human formation. It prioritizes the holistic (natural and religious) development, growth, and maturation of individuals on their journey to acquire and refine both theoretical and practical knowledge essential for serving the greater good.

Principles of accompaniment pedagogy

Rooted in Ignatian spirituality and Christian personalism, the principles of Jesuit pedagogy are detailed in the documents *Characteristics of Jesuit Education* and *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (Podstawy edukacji ignacjańskiej 2006). The main approach is illustrated in the diagram below:



Source: own elaboration.

The first key element of the Jesuit model of education is recognizing the context of the student’s life. This involves teachers being aware of the socio-cultural factors and conditions that significantly influence the student’s functioning in society. Understanding these factors helps teachers adapt their instructional strategies to meet the real needs and expectations of the student. The goal is recognizing the subjectivity of the young person and acknowledging their individuality. This perspective positions the teacher as a companion rather than an authority imposing a particular way of thinking and acting.

The next steps in this educational model involve the student recalling and verbalizing their experiences related to the issue at hand and reflecting on its significance for their life (Marek 2017: 44–47). In the diagram, this step is termed “reflection.” It involves discerning the meaning and causes of the current situation. To engage in such reflection (discernment), the student must utilize their intellectual, emotional, and volitional resources in order to understand better the value and significance of their daily experiences. This process helps the student categorize the influences of their environment and culture as “good” or “bad” (Marek, Walulik 2020: 182). Over time, the student develops the ability to interpret reality independently and responsibly, taking ownership of their decisions (Gallagher 2008: 314). A distinctive feature of this pedagogy is that it not only

encourages broad reflection on recalled experiences but also inspires and empowers the student to make sometimes difficult decisions. This phase is termed “action.” It aims not only to prompt a moral assessment of the situation but also to lead to specific actions based on the prior discernment.

The final link in the Ignatian education model is to help the student acquire the ability to critically evaluate what they have achieved so far in terms of their own development and maturity. This phase, called “evaluation,” aims to assist students in discovering and imitating models for establishing interpersonal relationships, and through cultivating these relationships to become men and women for others—according to the principles of *magis* and *cura personalis*, which are central to Jesuit spirituality. At this stage, as in earlier ones, the teacher has the obligation to accompany the student in order to provide greater objectivity in evaluating their own life history (Marek, Walulik 2020: 162) and helping them avoid excessive personal involvement.

Accompaniment pedagogy supports the effect of synergy

The activities of an educated person in the educational field are influenced by the values they accept, which, in the Ignatian spirit, should relate to three entities: God as the absolute value, the teacher, and every other person as God’s creature. This approach can result in a new quality of life by transcending various dimensions of existence (Mol, Paśławska-Smęder 2022: 79), enriching the understanding of well-being, and broadening the recognized life meanings. In this process, as in previous ones, the teacher—the person accompanying the student—has an important role to play. The teacher should to inspire the student to independently reflect on experiences, subjects, ideas, and their hidden meanings, using available forms of cognition. These strategies aim to induce a synergistic effect (Brzostek, Krysztofik 2022: 313). However, this is not a question of amplifying quantitative or qualitative processes but of the emergence of a new, additional quality in the person’s life that was not there before (Walulik 2011: 141), providing them with new “capital” that will enable them to reinterpret their own experiences. This approach strives for a fuller understanding of oneself and one’s existence, and for offering

new motives to act and adopt certain attitudes (Milerski 2022: 136). Such opportunities are provided by pedagogical initiatives based on Christian theocentrism and the ability to use religious cognition (Marek 2017: 198). It should be borne in mind that the level and intensity of interpersonal relationships, as well as the relationship with God, determine the synergistic effect (Marek 2017: 90).

In light of the principles of accompaniment pedagogy, it can be assumed that inducing a synergistic effect helps a person reconstruct their thinking and actions according to newly learned realities. This seems to be confirmed by ongoing research (Paśławska-Smęder 2021), which shows that creative living and education—shaped by various contexts: external (environments that institutionally or occasionally engage in educational activities, whether planned or unplanned), internal (the individual's ability to recognize intuitions through their conscience), and transcendent (respect for the existence of God)—play an important role in inducing the synergistic effect. Respect for God enables transcending knowledge and life experiences, which brings new light to understanding experiences in relation to life decisions. Including these contexts of human life in educational practice allows for a fuller understanding of one's own life story, as well as that of others. This, in turn, gives life a new quality (Paśławska-Smęder 2021).

The synergistic effect can also occur without the transcendental dimension. Monika Tryburska's research on vocational counselling in Polish schools shows this regularity. She found that external and internal contexts alone also produce a synergistic effect. By evoking these contexts, individuals (students) can better identify their strengths and weaknesses necessary for specific professions. Tryburska also noted that the intensity of reflection on experiences significantly influences career choices, as it amplifies the motivation to pursue a profession and the ambition to create good (Tryburska 2022).

Conclusion

Based on the above considerations, it is evident that a key feature of accompaniment pedagogy is the effort to elicit as much activity as possible from the student. This model of education presupposes a meeting of individuals oriented towards a clearly defined goal,

which encompasses both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of human life. It assumes that the student is not left alone to rely solely on intuition but that the teacher remains close, overseeing the entire process. The teacher's role is reduced to that of a witness who seeks the truth, explaining it rather than imposing it. Significantly, this search for truth includes religious knowledge, which allows a person to see problems from God's perspective. This approach helps individuals achieve a greater maturity and acceptance through a new understanding of life based on harmony with themselves, their environment, and God.

When applied to educational practice, accompaniment pedagogy, like any pedagogical influence, does not automatically produce the effect of synergy. However, by fostering the student's optimal activity during educational processes and awakening a sense of closeness and friendliness among all participants (teacher and God), there is a high probability of achieving a synergistic effect. This suggests that accompaniment pedagogy can inspire teachers to interact with the subjects of education. For those with a religious worldview, this cooperation will involve respecting God and the resulting consequences. For those with a different worldview, it will refer to humanism. In both cases, the primary goal of the educational process and the achievement of a synergistic effect is to enable the student to recognize and strive for the good they desire.

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