

CONTRIBUTO TEORICO

Beyond Technical Competence: Green Skills as a Pathway to Humanising Adult Education

Oltre la Competenza Tecnica: Le Green Skills come Via per Umanizzare l'Educazione degli Adulti

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ABSTRACT ITALIANO

In un contesto globale segnato da iper-digitalizzazione, tecnicizzazione e fragilità relazionale, i processi di professionalizzazione degli adulti si trovano a fronteggiare forme inedite di incomprensione, polarizzazione, prepotenza e conflitto che minano il benessere personale e comunitario. Tale scenario richiama la necessità di ripensare l'educazione degli adulti come spazio di ridefinizione culturale e antropologica, in cui l'acquisizione di competenze non sia confinata all'efficienza tecnico-operativa. Il saggio propone un contributo teoretico sulle green skills e l'educazione del carattere come risorse pedagogiche capaci di sostenere processi di umanizzazione nei vari contesti di formazione degli adulti. Le green skills, intese non solo come competenze orientate alla sostenibilità ambientale, ma come disposizioni ad agire consapevolmente e responsabilmente verso sé, gli altri e il pianeta, emergono come ponte tra formazione professionale e sviluppo integrale della persona umana.

ENGLISH ABSTRACT

In a global context marked by hyper-digitalization, technicization, polarization, and relational fragility, adult learning environments increasingly encounter misunderstanding, conflict, and hostility that undermine well-being in family, professional, and civic communities. This contribution argues that adult education must be reframed as a cultural and anthropological space where technical competences are integrated with ethical, relational, and ecological dimensions. Green skills, understood as dispositions to act consciously and responsibly toward oneself, others, and the living world, offer a bridge between professional training and holistic human development. Character education, grounded in the reflective cultivation of moral and civic virtues, contributes to shaping learning environments that regenerate relationships and promote peaceful coexistence. The article discusses pedagogical implications for designing more humane and sustainable educational ecosystems.

Introduction

In recent years, the professionalisation processes of education and training practitioners have become increasingly intertwined with deep socio-cultural transformations. Hyper-digitalisation, the growing technicisation of educational work, discursive polarisation, and the fragilisation of interpersonal relations are reshaping learning environments and the professional profiles required across educational sectors. In the Italian context, these dynamics are reflected in a visible decline in the attractiveness of care- and education-related professions, with concrete implications for service continuity, professional access pathways, and the quality of educational provision (Del Gobbo & Federighi, 2021).

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This phenomenon aligns with a wider international debate that, for decades, has highlighted the diminishing appeal of educational professions and the necessity of rethinking their roles, identity and cultural value (Santiago, 2002; National Education Association [NEA], 2022).

At the same time, the ecological and digital transitions call for learning systems that are capable of responding to new forms of complexity. Adult education can no longer be understood solely as the acquisition of technical-operational competences; rather, it must integrate ethical, relational, and ecological dimensions that sustain human coexistence and responsibility towards the living world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2025).

In this perspective, character education—conceived as the reflective cultivation of moral and civic virtues, and as a disposition toward dialogue and peace—emerges as a key pedagogical resource for orienting adult learning toward identity maturation and responsible coexistence. (Arthur et al., 2017; Mortari, 2017).

Green skills, understood not merely as technical competences for sustainability but as practices of care, attentiveness, and responsibility toward oneself, others, and the environment, can serve as a bridge between professionalisation and the integral development of the person. (Noddings, 2013; Nussbaum, 2011) They contribute to shaping humanising educational ecosystems, in which relational value, dialogical engagement, and shared responsibility form the foundation of educational quality and social cohesion. (Biesta, 2022).

Within this framework, the aim of this contribution is to deepen the theoretical relationship between character education and green skills in adult education and training, discussing their potential role in contemporary professionalisation processes. The underlying hypothesis is that a formative model oriented toward humanisation—capable of integrating competence, reflectivity, and care for the living—can offer a pedagogically grounded response to the tensions currently affecting educational services, professional contexts, and civic communities.

Theoretical Framework: Character Education and a Humanizing Orientation in Adult Learning

The notion of humanization in education refers to the creation of conditions in which individuals are acknowledged in their dignity, uniqueness, sensitivity, relationality, and capacity to act freely, responsibly, and ethically.

In the pedagogical field, promoting a humanizing orientation in adult education essentially means resisting reductionist views of learning that privilege efficiency, productivity, and the merely instrumental acquisition of competences. Instead, it calls for supporting the holistic development of each person, with particular attention to individual character and relational modes of interaction.

Understanding humanization as a new epistemic instance within educational theory implies recognizing the complementary—and indeed foundational—educational value of green skills, especially reflexivity, dialogue, relational reciprocity, and the cultivation of

moral and civic virtues as constitutive dimensions of the educational process. (Nussbaum, 2011; De Angelis, 2025; Ricoeur, 1990)

This perspective is grounded in a pedagogical anthropology that views the human being not as a mere executor or problem-solver but as a unique, unrepeatable, self-aware, and free subject: capable of self-determination, responsibility, care, shared meaning-making, and, above all, self-correction—meaning the capacity to recognize one's own errors and those of others, and to strive for self-improvement.

Within this framework, character education should not be understood as moral indoctrination or simple behavioral correction. Rather, it takes shape as the intentional and reflective cultivation of inner dispositions and metacognitive and relational abilities that make human coexistence possible. These include a sense of justice, compassion for the suffering of others, prudence, humility, gentleness, courage, and the persistent pursuit of peaceful dialogue capable of bringing differing positions into convergence. (Arthur et al., 2017).

Such an approach aligns with a relational view of ethics, where moral formation emerges from lived experience, dialogue, narrative, and encounters with others. (Noddings, 2013; Mortari, 2017).

Character formation is therefore inseparable from the environments in which people live and learn; it takes shape within ecosystems of meaning, shared practices, and community belonging (Noddings, 2013; Mortari, 2017).

From the standpoint of adult education, the epistemic choice to adopt a reflective and humanizing orientation involves, first, the ontological recognition of the constitutive identity of the adult person. To recognize the adult as such is to acknowledge both the strengths and limitations of human nature, as well as the access points within adult ontology upon which education can build in order to counter the current tendency to anesthetize minds and consciences in the face of the banality of evil and the spectacle of others' suffering.

Secondly, adopting a reflective and humanizing orientation in adult education requires viewing the adult not only as a bearer of pre-existing professional knowledge and skills but also as a subject in fieri, continually engaged in processes of identity re-elaboration and value clarification.

Transformative learning theory has shown that adult development is characterized by the critical revision of the assumptions and interpretive frames through which individuals understand the world (Mezirow, 2018).

Contemporary sociocultural contexts—marked by acceleration, rapid change, communicative fragmentation, and weakened community bonds—can, however, hinder these reflective processes. This raises a crucial pedagogical question: how can adult education contribute to forming subjects capable of resisting logics of instrumentalization and acting responsibly within ecological and social relations of interdependence?

Recent philosophical-pedagogical contributions offer a possible answer. Biesta (2022), for example, proposes a world-centred view of education in which the aim is neither adaptation to existing systems nor mere individual autonomy, but the cultivation of a responsive and responsible presence in the shared world. For Biesta, education is the

process through which the subject encounters the world as something that matters and that calls for care (Biesta, 2022).

This perspective resonates with the emerging notion of humanizing educational ecosystems, in which the integrity of relationships—among individuals, communities, and the environment—constitutes a central criterion of educational quality. Within this conceptual horizon, character education does not appear as an accessory component but as a guiding principle of adult learning. It calls for reconnecting competence with meaning, knowledge with responsibility, professional education with the ethical task of coexistence (Nussbaum, 2011; De Angelis, 2025).

This provides the theoretical foundation upon which the next section will reinterpret green skills: not as isolated abilities, but as dispositions rooted in a broader ecology of care for oneself, for others, and for the planet.

Green Skills as Human, Civic, and Ecological Dispositions

When discussing green skills, the most evident risk is to reduce the topic to a purely technical-functional dimension: a set of operational competences needed to adapt to labor market transformations in a “green” direction. In international policy documents, these competences are often described as the ability to assess the environmental impact of actions, to employ sustainable technologies, and to manage resources efficiently. (OECD, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).

However, a strictly instrumental reading obscures the deeper nature of what is at stake. Sustainability is not merely a sector; it is, first and foremost, a way of inhabiting the world—of being with oneself, with the Other, with others, and with the planet.

From a pedagogical perspective, green skills should be understood as ethical-relational dispositions rather than technical abilities. They point to an inner orientation, an existential posture that entails attention, responsibility, and care. Mortari (2017) has shown that care is not merely an action but a form of thinking and feeling: a way of perceiving reality as something that concerns us and calls upon us. Noddings (2013) emphasizes the relational locus of ethics: one learns to care not through abstract instructions but through embodied experiences of reciprocity and recognition.

Phenomenology of everyday life offers decisive support in this regard. Merleau-Ponty (1945) reminds us that “we are in the world before being consciousnesses that represent it,” meaning that our relationship with the environment is original, primary, existential, bodily, and tacit.

Before knowing, we perceive; before deciding, we find ourselves already involved. A plant that dries out on the balcony, the sound of leaves in autumn, the shifting light of the seasons: these minimal experiences, if approached with reflective awareness, reveal our co-belonging to the same fabric of being and existence.

As Ingold (2011) argues, the human is not “above” nature but “within” it—with an environment that shapes the person even as the person inhabits it.

If these perspectives are kept in view, it becomes clear that green skills cannot be conceived solely in functional or performative terms. Rather, they express the human capacity to conceive of one’s being-in-the-world and, more specifically, to perceive one’s

shared belonging—to recognize one's interdependence with the other/Other and with the surrounding world.

Green skills therefore do not merely support work-related competence; they shape the way adults observe, read, and interpret their presence in the world.

This entails the development of a threefold dimension: anthropological, civic, and communitarian. Such development requires acknowledging that well-being can never be understood in an egoistic or individualistic sense but must be conceived communally, universally, and planetarily.

Moreover, well-being is never an individual achievement; it is always the result of converging causes, relational dynamics, and delicate shared equilibria.

Hannah Arendt reminds us that recognizing well-being as a communal good also entails assuming responsibility for alterity and for the world, that is, taking care of the quality of the shared space and of others' lives (Arendt, 1958).

Working on these dispositions in adult education means introducing practices that are not only cognitive but also narrative, experiential, and reflective. Among these practices, we may highlight:

- exercises in attention to everyday life;
- Contemplative and meditative engagements with nature and creation;
- Dialogues grounded in lived experience rather than abstract opinions;
- Narratives of virtuous examples and convivial relational practices;
- Narrative processes that allow individuals to reconstruct their relational fabric with the world;
- Forms of communal learning in which the "we" is not given but must be continuously built.

Green skills understood in this way may become, first, a form of existential anthropology and, subsequently, a form of education for dwelling—an approach that helps rediscover that the Earth and the other/Other are not objects at our disposal but subjects: realities that are inviolable, whose earthly destiny of flourishing or suffering is inevitably intertwined with our own.

Green skills, interpreted in this manner, constitute, on the one hand, a bridge between the demand for professionalization and the need to promote integral human formation—between the requirement for efficiency and the search for meaning. In this sense, green skills can reconcile work and existence.

On the other hand, when anchored in a solid existential anthropology, they may represent a new pathway for humanization in an era marked by individualism, narcissism, relativism, nihilism, and the multiple forms of global social polarization that render the existence of the human family highly contingent and precariously balanced between criticality and possibility.

Professionalization and Adult Education: Critical Issues and Possibilities

The theoretical reflection developed thus far highlights a close relationship of interdependence linking the specific demand for adult professionalization—aligned with

the multiplicity and heterogeneity of contemporary work environments—with the deeper and more radical demand for the global human formation of adults.

Recognizing this does not simply mean recalling the prior, foundational, and epistemic role of pedagogy understood—in Comenian terms—as a *Didactica Magna*, that is, as an illustrious art of teaching grounded in the ideal of universal education (“everything to everyone”). It also entails acknowledging the most evident criticalities of our time (Comenius, 1657/1971).

In today’s cultural context, increasingly dominated by competitive profit logics and by the partial rationalities of digital algorithms, even the most vital expression of human power and creativity—work—risks being reduced to a collection of know-how fragments, soulless segments of predetermined and alienating operational protocols endlessly repeated to sustain an anonymous and at times irrational productive cycle.

The term know-how, often employed superficially though rich in layered meanings, denotes the set of practical competences, technical knowledge, and operational capacities that make it possible to concretely carry out an activity or a production process.

It includes knowledge of specific “segments” or “algorithms” of the process—how something is done—but also, more broadly, accumulated experience, practical solutions, craftsmanship, and all those forms of tacit understanding that rarely appear in manuals.

Possessing know-how enables professionalization, yet it does not guarantee that adults are adequately formed—humanistically and humanizingly—to perform a given task.

Without delving fully into Nonaka and Takeuchi’s organizational knowledge theory, it is reasonable to affirm the insufficiency of know-how alone within adult education (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Know-how answers the how, but not the why or the for whom of an action or procedure. Consequently, it may exclude reflective intentionality and the responsible, conscious agency of the adult.

To express this idea of purpose or rationale in English, one might use terms such as know-why—indicating the understanding of reasons, principles, or aims behind an action or process—or, in more managerial language, purpose awareness or sense of purpose, both referring to awareness of why something is done and whom it ultimately serves (Nonaka et al., 2000; Nonaka et al., 2009).

With the aim of overcoming the current partial vision of adult education—which often reduces learning to the acquisition of technical competences, or at most to know-how, a limitation that must be addressed—this paper argues for the necessity of consistently integrating know-how with know-why.

If know-how enables competent action, know-why enables conscious action.

In many contemporary organizational contexts—management, design thinking, and others—there is a growing effort to hold these two dimensions together. Increasingly, it becomes evident that awareness in action represents a new pathway for humanization in adult education and for the development of green skills.

Professionalization as a Practice of Care: A Pedagogical Challenge

If one wished to reconcile the demand for adult professionalization with that of broader and more holistic education using a single expression, one could speak of the professionalization of adults as a practice of care—care of oneself, of others, and of the world.

This formulation aligns well both with the idea of education—already recalled in the previous section and understood by Comenius as *Didactica Magna*, that is, as an illustrious art of teaching—and with the idea of *Pampaedia*, namely, universal education.

Comenius, in fact, recognizing the social and political role of education, argued that education should be a right for all and last throughout life, so as to prevent humanity from falling into various forms of dehumanization and to promote peace as well as moral and social renewal. This concept, highly relevant today, can be fruitfully contextualized within contemporary pedagogy.

If we assume that professionalization, in times of ecological transition, must take shape as a practice of caring for oneself, others, and the world, it becomes useful to observe how such practice emerges more in everyday gestures than in grand declarations. Care is not so much a content to be transmitted, but rather a relational posture built over time and through experience (Noddings, 2013; Mortari, 2017).

Educators and trainers who recognize themselves in this perspective first learn to develop an awareness of interdependencies: every didactic or organizational decision is interpreted as an element within a network of effects that exceed the immediate moment, influencing future relationships, practices, and contexts (Ingold, 2011; Del Gobbo & Federighi, 2021).

Care also requires a relational sensitivity that unfolds in the folds of the everyday—in prolonged listening, in a shared silence, in the recognition of a quietly emerging difficulty—practices in which the educator's presence becomes a transformative instrument (Noddings, 2013; De Angelis, 2019).

Here, the phenomenology of lived experience is illuminating as Merleau-Ponty and Ingold show, bodily perception and sensory experience constitute the primary basis of our relationship with the environment; a neglected balcony or the smell of soil after rain can become educational opportunities if received with reflective attention (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Ingold, 2011).

Recognizing educational contexts as ecosystems means abandoning the idea of neutral spaces: the arrangement of furniture, the time allocated to activities, the ritual practices that open and close the day, the care of shared objects shape the quality of educational relationships and the possibility of cultivating collective responsibility (Mortari, 2017; De Angelis, 2021).

At the same time, professionalism unfolds as responsible action in the shared world: not an executive function, but a form of ethically oriented existence, in which responsibility arises from the awareness that words, gestures, and decisions contribute to shaping the social fabric (Arendt, 1958; Sennett, 2012).

Finally, teaching and training for sustainability means, for pedagogy, beginning to develop educational practices that foster a renewed capacity for critical thinking and for the transformation of habits (Mezirow, 2018): not merely the transmission of “green” techniques, but education to recognize one’s interdependence, to narrate one’s practices, and to promote shared actions that safeguard relationships between people and the environment (Nussbaum, 2011; OECD, 2025).

Within this weave of sensitivity, attentiveness, and responsibility, educational professionalism is redefined as a work of daily care—quiet, patient, and inevitably exposed to fatigue—yet essential in sustaining processes of change that are genuinely human and sustainable (De Angelis, 2025; Del Gobbo & Federighi, 2021).

Towards Humanizing Educational Ecosystems

Viewing adult education as a space that cultivates humanity means imagining environments that go beyond simply transmitting knowledge or skills, focusing instead on nurturing meaningful encounters between people and the world. A humanizing educational ecosystem, in this sense, represents a relational and symbolic network in which participants are not isolated units, but integral parts of a living web composed of bodies, stories, practices, rhythms, and shared materials.

As Bateson (1972) observes, no educational process can be understood in isolation from the web of relationships that supports it: learning is not an individual act, but a movement within a field of interactions that encompasses the environment, institutions, and forms of life.

Within this framework, the educational ecosystem is not a neutral backdrop but a condition of possibility for education itself. Physical spaces, temporal rhythms, ritual gestures, forms of language, bodily expressions, and shared memories all shape the ways in which people think, meet, and recognize one another.

Ricœur (1990) reminds us that coexistence is built through the weaving of gestures and words that honor others as interlocutors deserving of attention, rather than as objects.

Humanizing educational contexts, therefore, involve fostering authentic relationships in which each individual can emerge as a speaking subject.

In this light, character education and ecological literacy are not separate strands but intertwined dimensions of the same anthropological process. Supporting ethical and civic development alongside environmental sensitivity represents a unified exercise in adult belonging. When an educational environment encourages dialogue, attentiveness to daily details, mutual respect, kindness, hospitality, and reflective listening—to both oneself and others—it cultivates a sense of “we” rooted in lived experience rather than abstract norms (De Angelis, 2025; Mortari, 2017).

Humanizing educational ecosystems can be identified by several key features:

- Centrality of relationships, understood as spaces of mutual recognition rather than instruments for achieving measurable outcomes;
- Care for space and time, recognizing that the environment shapes learning as much as the content itself;

- Shared narratives, allowing individuals to find meaning in their experiences and feel part of a broader story;
- Responsibility toward the world, prompting reflection on each action as embedded within a delicate web of interdependence and coexistence.

This approach is not about introducing new teaching methods, but about shifting the perspective—from the logic of performance to the logic of educational hospitality. It is renewed each time an adult is received not as someone lacking, but as a traveler, a pilgrim: a subject in motion, seeking meaning and direction, capable of mistakes and transformation, throughout life.

Professional development guided by the goal of sustaining a balanced, wise daily life—while continuously respecting those around us—does not produce mere technicians of knowledge, but custodians of relationships: individuals capable of fostering genuine, lasting connections that can strengthen resilient communities, which together can work to create a better future.

Operational Perspectives: Designing and Evaluating Practices of Humanisation and Green Skills in Adult Education

From a more operational perspective, if green skills and character education are understood not merely as theoretical principles but as pedagogical orientations capable of concretely informing adult education practices, it becomes necessary to reflect on the concrete and specific conditions that make it possible to construct truly humanising and sustainable educational ecosystems.

In this sense, rather than proposing rigid models or prescriptive protocols, it appears more appropriate to outline a number of guiding criteria and educational devices that may orient the design, implementation, and evaluation of adult learning pathways.

A first level concerns the design phase. The primary guiding criterion proposed here for educational planning is the awareness that learning pathways specifically oriented towards care of the self, of others, and of the world, in order to be genuinely effective, should rest upon at least four fundamental conceptual elements:

- a) Centrality of the adult person as a reflective subject: The adult is recognised not only as a bearer of professional competences, but as an identity in continuous transformation, capable of questioning values, responsibilities, choices, and the consequences of his or her actions
- b) Integration of technical, ethical, and relational dimensions: Education does not separate knowing how to do from knowing how to be; rather, it constantly places professional competence in dialogue with ethical disposition and civic responsibility.
- c) Education to interdependence: Educational practices explicitly highlight the connections between individual action and collective impact, emphasising the shared nature of human and planetary well-being.
- d) Care for environments and contexts: If the learning environment is conceived as an educational ecosystem, then spaces, times, relationships, and languages are not neutral, but generative dimensions of meaning and responsibility, which must be intentionally chosen and designed with expressive care and aesthetic sensitivity.

The educational devices and operational orientations for adult education outlined above may be translated, at a practical level, into pedagogical practices that are highly formative, transformative in terms of intra- and interpersonal relationships, and profoundly humanising, such as:

- narrative-reflective workshops, in which adults analyse their professional experience starting from critical incidents, conflicts, errors, and ethical dilemmas;
- dialogical practices and communities of inquiry, which promote reciprocal listening, critical thinking, and the capacity to converge despite differences and conflict;
- experiential devices fostering contact with the natural world, even minimal but regular, ideally daily, aimed at developing a capacity for transcendence, understood primarily as cognitive and emotional decentring and awareness of one's ecological belonging;
- pathways for relational virtue and civic responsibility, which help connect micro-level professional and relational practices with broader, long-term social impacts capable, over time, of changing the face of individuals and communities;
- forms of cooperative and mutual learning, in which the "we" is not presupposed but is continuously constructed through shared action.

Within these practices, the dimension of care is not an abstract object of teaching, but a lived, narrated, discussed, and continuously reworked experience.

Indicators for Educational Evaluation

The real impact that the operational perspectives of humanisation and the development of green skills in adult education, outlined in the previous section, may have in the short, medium, and long term needs to be evaluated in ways that are concrete and coherent with the intended aims. While avoiding reductionist forms of measurement—which risk obscuring or distorting the multilayered and complex nature of the educational processes under consideration—it is nonetheless possible to identify some simple qualitative indicators that may orient the evaluation of practices and contexts.

Among these, and by way of exemplification rather than exhaustiveness, one might consider: the quality of educational relationships (trust, respect, mutual recognition); the level of reflexivity and ethical awareness developed by adults in training; the capacity to assume responsible and participatory decisions; the care devoted to environments, temporal rhythms, and shared materials; and, finally, the development of a sense of communal and planetary belonging, together with the concrete impact on everyday life choices.

Ultimately, alongside the operational reflections introduced in this concluding section, it is important to recognise that the orientations proposed here cannot be reduced to a new teaching methodology, nor to an operational technique for educational action and evaluation to be followed mechanically. Rather, they should be understood as a reflective strategy of practice, to be adapted and shaped according to different educational contexts.

Only in this way can the identification of flexible and practical guiding criteria foster a genuine cultural transformation capable of conceiving professionalism as a daily practice of virtue and responsibility; learning as an experience of friendship and belonging; and

green skills as a new form of ethical and ecological citizenship, capable of deeply transforming intra- and interpersonal relationships.

In this sense, the operational dimension neither weakens nor diminishes the theoretical perspective developed in this paper; instead, it roots it in the concreteness of adult educational life, making it genuinely generative and epistemologically grounded in an educational knowledge and relational practices that are already, at least in part, present within the rich Western philosophical and religious tradition—though still insufficiently recognised and valued within pedagogical discourse.

Human Dignity, Anthropocentrism, and Responsibility toward Life

With reference to the millennia-long heritage of the Western cultural tradition, it appears necessary to clarify the idea of an anthropological “excess” of human dignity that runs throughout this manuscript.

This excess is not understood as a disposition toward supremacy or despotic domination, but rather as a specific ethical vocation that introduces and promotes a renewed form of anthropocentrism: relational, responsible, and custodial.

At first sight, the emphasis placed in this contribution on the dignity and inviolability of every human life may seem to express a markedly anthropocentric perspective, potentially in tension with an educational orientation attentive to ecological responsibility and care for all forms of life. However, the anthropological framework assumed here does not endorse possessive or dominative anthropocentrism. Instead, it articulates a relational and custodial understanding of the human being.

This perspective is situated within a long philosophical and theological-pedagogical tradition in which the human person is conceived as a unique moral subject—capable of reflexivity, responsibility, and ethical deliberation—precisely because constitutively relational. Within this horizon, the human being holds a distinctive ontological status not in order to exercise power over the living world, but to serve, protect, and care for it (Jonas, 1984; Ricœur, 1990; Nussbaum, 2011).

From this perspective, recognising the incommensurable dignity of every human life—*imago Dei*—neither denies value or respect to other living beings, nor legitimises their instrumental use.

On the contrary, the acknowledgement of an ontological hierarchy among living beings—one that does not negate the intrinsic value of non-human life but assigns to human existence the inalienable task of love, responsibility, and moral care for creation—grounds an intensified sense of responsibility toward all forms of life and toward the world we share. It may thus represent a possible foundational nucleus for a renewed epistemological architecture of pedagogical knowledge.

This vision resonates with contemporary ethical and pedagogical reflections that reinterpret anthropocentrism not as an exercise of supremacy, but as a task of guardianship, relational belonging, and responsibility toward the world (Arendt, 1958; Biesta, 2022; Francis, 2015).

In educational terms, this means fostering in adults the awareness that the uniqueness of human dignity never legitimises destructive superiority but calls instead for an even deeper commitment to respect, care, and gentleness toward every living being—understood as an inestimable gift entrusted to each person.

In this sense, an educational project centred on human dignity and one oriented toward ecological responsibility are not in tension, but mutually sustaining.

Conclusion

The era in which we live compels profound changes in the way we conceive being and existence, and in the ways, we inhabit the world—through our actions and relationships, within families, communities, workplaces, and the planet as a whole.

This represents a crucial challenge for pedagogy. Indeed, pedagogy is called upon to undergo a genuine epistemic metamorphosis, shifting the center of knowledge from the object—the content of human learning—to the subject: the human person, understood both in their constitutive ontology and in the phenomenology of everyday lived experience.

Such a metamorphosis requires a profound and renewed perspective on humanity, society, politics, contemporary history, the planet, and the potential for self-perfection inherent in each individual. It demands a radical transformation of pedagogical statutes and practices, as well as a new anthropological framework open to the transcendent, because, through the teaching of a good life, humanity can be guided toward transcending the crossroads at which we currently stand.

This crossroads confronts individual freedom and communal life with urgent choices: good or evil, peace or war, superficiality or responsibility, rote learning or wisdom, indifference or care, sharing or selfishness. The stakes affect not only personal well-being and quality of life, but the very existence of individuals, societies, and the planet.

Contemporary history—with the banality of evil, pervasive inequalities, violence, planetary threats, and daily dehumanizing crises—calls for pedagogy to exercise epistemic humility and to initiate a true metamorphosis of education.

The crisis of attractiveness of educational professions, the fragmentation of training pathways, and the growing technicalization of practices—problems that educational metamorphosis could mitigate or even resolve—are not merely organizational issues. They signal an anthropological, existential, and spiritual rupture, a loss of meaning and purpose in education that must be addressed.

It is essential to rediscover the beauty and significance of education as a gratuitous act of recognition of the dignity and inviolability of every human life. As an expression of authentic, selfless love for others, as care, attention, stewardship, hospitality, and personalized guidance across all stages of growth, education renews individuals and society and enables the co-construction of a better humanity and more peaceful, fraternal coexistence among equals.

The perspective developed here argues that the integration of hands-on educational care, character education, and green skills is not merely a curricular innovation, but a rethinking of the meaning and aims of educational professionalism. In particular, when

green skills are understood as ethical-relational dispositions rather than narrowly defined competencies, they reconnect education to its original root: the awareness that we are relational beings, and that every act of knowing, every gesture, every decision leaves a profound mark—positive or negative—on the minds and hearts of others, embedded in a broader web of relationships that can be nurtured and developed, severed, or repaired and restored.

Character education—conceived as the reflective cultivation of human virtues such as hospitality, gratuitous love, kindness, peaceful coexistence, generosity, responsibility, fidelity, love of learning, and diligence—provides fertile ground for the vital energies and moral dispositions that Maria Montessori identified in *The Secret of Childhood* (1936) as naturally present in every person and as accessible points of entry for the educational endeavor. These energies can germinate, develop, take root, and become lived experience (Montessori, 1936/2022).

In this emerging landscape of possibilities, humanizing educational ecosystems represent spaces in which these dimensions can intertwine and become tangible. They are environments where adults can see themselves not as mere knowledge workers or competence operators, but as relational subjects, called to participate in the patient and persistent co-construction of their best selves, the flourishing of others, and the betterment of the world—starting with the environments in which they live and work.

Here, educational professionalism reveals its highest form: not in efficiency, but in active presence; not in control, but in trust and loving attentiveness; not in judgment or performance, but in the gift of time, shared reflection, inquiry, and the capacity to welcome diversity, including opposition, forgiving one's own and others' errors with patience, and never losing faith in the potential for human perfection. This nurtures conditions for authentic, shared, and widespread humanity across all environments, first private, then public.

If adult education can be guided in this demanding and inspiring direction—toward care for oneself, others, and the world—then the educational endeavor may appear in all its beauty, not as one task among many, but as the greatest work of love one can undertake. It will no longer be a grueling, frustrating, and poorly rewarded profession, or a duty to be fulfilled, but the essential cultural practice foundational to every authentic democracy and the workshop of human lives lived fully, according to individual talents and uniqueness.

Education, understood and lived in this way, will inevitably attract young people eager to invest themselves for their own development, the flourishing of others, and a better future for all. And, perhaps, if Blaise Pascal's wager holds true, such a pedagogical stance could make each of us far more serene and prepared to face any possible meta-historical judgment (Pascal, 1670/2020).

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