

María G. Amilburu*

ORCID: 0000-0002-2161-5181

Madrid, Spain

Love and Education. Love in Education

Miłość i wychowanie. Miłość w wychowaniu

Abstract: I will present in this paper some insights about the type of love that is needed in education according to some ideas presented by C. S. Lewis, Daniel Pennac, Joseph Rassam, Massimo Recalcati and François X. Bellamy, among others. After considering four anthropological assumptions that teachers must keep in mind for an adequate hermeneutics of human beings, education is presented like a kind of craftsmanship, not as a mechanical production. This endeavour is understood as *an act of love* towards the students, and towards the wisdom that is condensed in the cultural traditions – scientific, humanistic, religious, artistic, etc. – we have inherited, and must pass improved to next generations, as their legitimate human inheritance.

Keywords: education; love; tradition; teaching and learning.

Abstrakt: W artykule zawarto refleksję na temat rodzaju miłości, która jest potrzebna w edukacji, zgodnie z niektórymi ideami przedstawionymi między innymi przez C. S. Lewisa, Daniela Pennaca, Josepha Rassama, Massimo Recalcatiego i François X. Bellamy'ego. Po rozważeniu czterech założeń antropologicznych, o których nauczyciele muszą pamiętać, aby uzyskać odpowiednie rozumienie istot ludzkich, edukacja jest przedstawiana jako rodzaj rzemiosła, a nie jako mechaniczna produkcja. Przedsięwzięcie to jest rozumiane jako akt miłości do uczniów i do mądrości, która jest skondensowana w tradycjach kulturowych – naukowych, humanistycznych, religijnych, ar-

* Prof. María G. Amilburu, Faculty of Education, The National Distance Education University (UNED), Madrid, Spain; email: mgamilburu@edu.uned.es

tystycznych itp., które odziedziczyliśmy i musimy przekazać następnym pokoleniom jako ich prawowite ludzkie dziedzictwo.

Słowa kluczowe: wychowanie; miłość; tradycja; nauczanie i uczenie się.

1. Introduction

‘God is Love.’ With these three words from the 1st Letter of Saint John two important texts begin – the Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, by Benedict XVI and the book *The Four Loves*, by C. S. Lewis. Both have inspired the content of these pages dedicated to considering the place of love in the process of education of human beings.

God who *is Love*, created man in his image and likeness, *out of love* and *to love*. Therefore, human life cannot be adequately understood, nor can it reach its perfection in absence of love. According to God’s plan, every human being should have the right to come into this world because of an act of conjugal love. And human life, barely conceived, is entrusted to the loving care of his or her parents, so that it can flourish biologically and existentially. Every human being is a creature willed by God in his or herself, and only an unconditional, selfless, absolute love – as an image, although imperfect, of the love of God the Father for each one of us – is appropriate to welcome, take charge and provide this new life with everything that is needed in order to achieve the fullness to which he or she is called.

Thomas Aquinas affirms that education constitutes the natural continuation of human generation. And it is possible to add that, in a similar way to generation, education should have its origin, and be presided over by acts of love. This reminded me of an event from my own personal history that I have already mentioned somewhere else (G. Amilburu, 2007). The person who most influenced the orientation of my professional future towards teaching, used to say that only those who *love* the students entrusted to them could be good teachers. At first, it seemed to me an exaggeration, but over the time I have verified the truth in those words, and the intrinsic relationship that links love to education.

I will present here some ideas about the type of love that is needed in education, as have been pointed out by classic and current authors, like Daniel

Pennac (2008), Joseph Rassam (2015), Massimo Recalcati (2014) and François X. Bellamy (2018), among others, in order to better understand this point.

2. Anthropological assumptions for an adequate hermeneutics of human beings

We, all human beings, belong to a single biological species; we share one and same nature that constitutes the ultimate foundation of our radical dignity and equality, as recently remembered in the Declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas infinita* (April 8, 2024), regardless of physical, cultural, or social differences, and those concerning degrees of intelligence, capabilities or ability, etc.

A human being – each one of us – is not a simple reality but a complex microcosm in which can be distinguished – but not separated – multiple dimensions which are integrated into our organic unity. A human being is corporeal but is more than his body; he is an individual subject who needs the society made up of his peers to survive and fully develop. We humans are multifunctional beings, and our cognitive and operational capacities are oriented towards *practical* action as well as *technical-artistic* production and *theoretical* contemplation. Each one of us experiences a series of material, biological, cognitive, affective, aesthetic and transcendent needs, that must be satisfied... It is precisely this complex kind of being who is the subject who needs to be educated.

To adequately address the educational task, it is essential to consider four basic assumptions that summarise *the truth of human beings*. If these assumptions are ignored or despised, education is built upon moving sands, on emptiness, or on a mistaken reductionist idea of the subject: the person who is to be educated. These four assumptions are the following:

2.1. We are corporeal beings, located in space and time

That human beings are part of the animal kingdom is one of the few statements on which there seems to be nowadays a universal consensus. Although it has been recently questioned from animalist positions whether it is correct

to consider human beings *superior* animals, the animality of our species and, specifically, the fact that we belong to the order of mammals, is not usually questioned. Our corporality places us among the pack of material beings, subject to physical laws; and among the group of living organism, which grow and develop according to the laws that govern biological processes.

As material and living beings, our bodily condition inexorably places us in a set of coordinates of space and time. To exist in bodily and historical terms means that human beings cannot completely overcome the limits of the earthly situation, so space and time referents are a necessary presupposition for understanding oneself and the world. One's own existence is played out in *this* space and in *this* time: we are free beings, but human life is a *placed* existence. Ignoring or trying to suppress one's own context and the history that has forged it, is as vain an attempt as trying to get out of one's own skin. We live, inserted in a place, a time and a cultural tradition that shapes us and provides the necessary tools to acquire knowledge about reality around us and to understand ourselves.

Besides, human temporality is not structured as mere individual duration, but the biography of each person is part of many other stories that, when viewed from the perspective of a community, are understood as *traditions*, which are plural and historically changing. Currently, the phenomenon of globalisation, and universal access to the Internet have modified our spatial-temporal situation, and it is necessary to take this into account. It is possible to establish synchronous relationships with many of our contemporaries by sharing the present with them at a planetary scale. But, at the same time, the current digital presentism erodes the experience of the diachronic dimension of one's own life, destroying the capacity for attention and the development of memory, decreasing the ability to extract teachings and experiences from the past with a view to project the better future that we would like for us as persons and as a society.

2.2. We create culture, and we need culture

As intelligent beings, we humans can discover, understand, use for our own benefit and intentionally transcend – although not suppress – the physical and biological laws to which we are subject. The plasticity of our organism

and our intellectual capacities make cultural creation possible and necessary at the same time. *To become fully human*, it is not enough to belong to the species; it is also necessary to have been enculturated, that is, to internalise a particular culture.

Thanks to the production of culture humanity has accumulated, generation after generation, an enormous amount of knowledge; and has acquired an immense power of action. Thus, human beings who come now into this world not only possess the biological and rational capacities of *homo sapiens sapiens*, but they also inherit a cultural legacy – knowledge, institutions, legal systems, utensils, techniques, works of art, etc. – forged over the centuries, which exponentially multiply their possibilities of knowledge and action, and the quality of their life. But this cultural heritage is not assumed passively, as is the case with genetic heritage, but rather it is necessary to understand, internalise and make it one's own. And education is largely oriented towards this goal.

2.3. Dependent and vulnerable beings

The third assumption that needs to be considered is the dependence and correlative vulnerability of our species: human development is unfeasible without the help and cooperation provided by our peers. No one has given life to himself, survival – particularly during childhood – the acquisition of language, etc., show that we are not autonomous or self-sufficient beings, but deeply dependent on each other. Associating, seeking support, help, protection, company and consolation from others are spontaneous attitudes in every human being who, in the words of Aristotle, is by nature a social animal.

The high degree of independence and personal autonomy that characterises adult individuals of our species can only be reached thanks to the network of multiple previous dependencies. Therefore, although in contemporary education there is a lot of emphasis, and rightly so, on the forming of autonomous people, able to think and decide for themselves, etc., it is also necessary, even more strongly to acknowledge everything that has been given to us, that makes it possible to mature into adulthood. Consequently, it is a duty of justice to foster in education attitudes of gratitude for what has been received.

2.4. Created, fallen and redeemed

Finally, a fourth assumption that we should not ignore, especially in the context of a Christian-oriented pedagogy, is that human beings are fallen and redeemed creatures. We no longer live in Paradise, and to the limitations inherent to our created condition we must add the weaknesses and darkness that are the consequence of the original fall. Certainly, we have been redeemed by Christ, but the wounds caused by sin in our nature have not completely disappeared. And it is not only human weakness and vulnerability that we experience, but also the evil that sometimes inhabits in human hearts.

Therefore, recognising each human being as a creature loved by God, fallen and redeemed by Christ, is the firm foundation on which it is possible to build and to accomplish any educational activity in a realistic and hopeful way.

3. Education as a craft. Educational relationships

Educating human beings is one of the noblest activities that a person can undertake (Pennac, 2008). It is not comparable to the productive task of manufacturing objects, no matter how sophisticated they may be. Education is more like an artistic creation, and it is guided by moral principles inherent to the action itself, which allow distinctions to be made between good educational practices from those that are not. That is why the work of teachers has traditionally been described as a craft.

There are, no doubt, technical aspects that must be mastered for the proper development of education, but these are not the most important. Non-mechanical dimensions are the more crucial ones, since a good educator must respond to the challenges and needs that each person, in each occasion may demand.

Maritain, quoted by Rassam (2015) points out that education is an art that imitates the paths that nature follows in its own operations. In a certain sense, education is similar to agriculture or medicine because, despite all the external stimuli and guides that the teacher, the farmer or the doctor can provide, the impulse towards human excellence, the growth of the plant or

the recovery of health, come fundamentally from within the living being. External stimuli can only facilitate these processes, although this help may prove necessary on many occasions.

But an educator does not have the same freedom as an artist, who can do whatever he wants or occurs to him and is only limited by the physical conditions imposed by the material he works with, and by his own artistic abilities and inspiration. On the contrary, the task of educators is subject to important requirements of moral, scientific, social and political order, and this is why teachers assume a serious responsibility in their work. Consequently, prudence is one of the most necessary virtues in education, because teachers perform in the intermediate ground that runs between the almost infinite personal creativity of the artist, and obedience to mechanical rules characteristic of technical work.

Gusdorf (1973) wrote a classical work on *educational relationship* and the similarities and differences that are observed between education and other types of interpersonal bonds, such as those established between parents and children, employer and employees, officer and soldiers, master and disciples, doctor and patients, priest and faithful, actors and audience, etc. Here it is interesting to consider the relationship that is established between the teacher and the students in the context of educational institutions. These relationships can reach levels of great intensity, leaving a decisive mark on the lives of the subjects involved (Rassam, 2015). This is so because the act of teaching can be considered a bi-directional positive enrichment like the one that happens in osmotic processes (Steiner & Ladlaji, 2020).

Education creates a peculiar bond between teachers and students and belongs to the category of *helping professions*: those that aim at improving the situation of one of the parties involved, which is considered more vulnerable. Among the best-known helping professions, Medicine and Nursing stand out – their purpose being to improve people’s physical and mental health – and Education, that aims to banish ignorance and develop human capabilities so that, from early childhood and according to the age of the subjects of education, they can achieve their existential goals.

Teacher-student relationships decisively influence the quality of education and are usually considered ‘one of the most important resources for the educational task to be successful’ (Romero et al., 2019, p. 8). From this it follows that to respond to current educational challenges and problems,

adequate training of teachers in interpersonal skills is recommended (Zehm & Kottler, 1993, pp. 42–51).

The influence that the teacher exerts on his students covers a much broader area than what happens between the four walls of the classroom, although it is just to acknowledge in all its depth the weight that a single class can have in the life of a student. As Recalcati (2014, pp. 6–7) points out, an hour of class can open up a world, it can be the time of a definitive encounter, of a radical discovery that can transform a life for good.

The educational relationship in the classroom is not only a matter that involves two people; it involves the interaction between three actors who influence each other: the teacher, the student and the subject matter, discipline, or field of knowledge that is taught and learned. Thus, education is better understood with the image of a triangle than with a bilateral relationship, because there are three protagonists acting on scene: *the teacher, the discipline and the students*.

And today it is especially important to underline the centrality of what *is taught and learned*, because if this were missing, it would not properly be an educational relationship (Solé-Blanch, 2024). As Bellamy rightly states, ‘having something to teach is the only foundation and argument to find ourselves in front of the students, to demand their attention, their respect’ (2018, p. 40). A good educational relationship is one that satisfies the existential needs of human beings; and we must remember that to acquire knowledge is the most universal human need as Aristotle already referred to at the beginning of his *Metaphysics* when he wrote: ‘all men naturally desire to know.’

To get to know something, it is necessary to learn it and, usually, this is only possible with the help of another human being who teaches it. However, the fear of a possible accusation of dogmatism or indoctrination has caused a serious *transmission crisis* in contemporary Western culture (Bellamy, 2018); and this is why it is more necessary than ever to highlight or underline the need and the importance of what we have called the third element: the transmission of knowledge accumulated by humanity in scientific, humanistic, religious and cultural traditions.

Modern pedagogy has made inestimable progress by insisting on the need to carefully analyse and never lose sight of the human subject. The error occurs

when the object to be taught and its importance are forgotten; and when the cult of the means – not in order to the end, but in themselves – leads to a kind of psychological adoration of the subject (Rassam, 2015, p. 101).

Good results in education largely depend on the style of the teacher. It is not just a matter of techniques or methodologies. The peculiar style of a teacher depends on his or her personal way of relating to the subject matter and to the students, establishing bridges between them in that triangular relationship we have mentioned.

Good teachers carry out their task by establishing a three-way loving dialogue with themselves, with the discipline and with the students, in a conversation that must be presided over by humility, love of truth, desire for service and the openness to learn. Teaching a subject is not comparable to dispensing information or distributing content, as if teachers were postmen delivering mailing letters. Because teachers teach and educate, and everyone – teacher and students – learn. Education is a joint action that looks different when viewed from the perspective of the teacher and that of the student, because both maintain a different relationship with that third element: knowledge – theoretical, scientific, and practical knowledge – that is possessed, transmitted and acquired. And in this process, not only people but knowledge itself is transformed, because while teaching, the teacher brings back to life everything he has learned and has formed him as a person and as an educator.

In this sense, and despite the rejection of this position that is held in postmodern forums, it must be considered that the teacher's main task, his fundamental mission, is to transmit culture – knowledge, not just skills and attitudes – if he wants to educate his students. If this is not considered, the educational work can be distorted, thinking – as it is sometimes said – that the proper and main purpose of the school is for the students to be happy. This would be such a serious pedagogical mistake as to assume that, since an architect builds homes and living in them makes people happier, the specific purpose of architecture is to make human beings happy. But this is not the case, because

the architect's own mission is still to draw up plans, build walls and roofs. If you explain to him that his mission is to make people happy, you run the risk

of leading him astray, and even more so if you prohibit him, at the same time, from building the house (Bellamy, 2018, p. 153).

In Western societies afflicted by the transmission crisis we have mentioned before, an unprecedented rupture in the history of humanity is taking place: there is a generation of adults that refuses to transmit to the next what rightly belongs to the youngest: the set of knowledge, points of reference, and immemorial human experience that is their legitimate inheritance. Therefore, without downplaying the need for teachers to receive adequate training in competencies and interpersonal skills to carry out well their work, it is urgent to become aware and to emphasise the serious responsibility that teachers have: to transmit knowledge, and to facilitate the next generations the appropriation of their cultural legacy. And it is not indoctrination but quite the opposite, because in doing so, they offer the students the tools they will need to exercise critical thinking, to learn by themselves and to make valuable contributions for the future. Transmitting knowledge and culture is to acknowledge, to value and to be grateful for the work of those who preceded us, because if today we can see further than them, it is because we stand on their shoulders. And it is also an act of justice toward the future generations because they are the legitimate heirs of a legacy that we have also received.

4. Love and loves. The love between teacher and students

In *Metaphysics*, Book VI, Aristotle says that *being* is said in many ways. His formulation of the analogy of being overcame the obstacle in which pre-Socratic philosophy had bogged down, because Aristotle's proposal allows to avoid the rigidity of Parmenides' univocism without falling into the fluid equivocity of Heraclitus. The multiplicity of the senses of the Aristotelian being is not devoid of unity, since there is a fundamental meaning that unites them all and relates to each other: the substance or entity that is, in a prior sense, that of which *being* is predicated.

Something similar happens to the word *love* as it happens to the word *being* in the sense that Aristotle points out. A simple consultation of any dictionary reveals the breadth of meanings which the verb *to love* and the noun *love* embrace. This lack of univocity is even more stressed in languages

in which this same word is used to designate both a sensitive emotion and the act of the will – namely, the adherence to *a good presented as such* by the intellect. Experimenting a sensible love and acting out of decision of will do not always go hand in hand, because they are related but independent in themselves. It is a common experience that a person can intellectually want something without feeling any sensitive emotion about it, and vice versa. Nevertheless, the substantial unity of human nature requires that human beings achieve a certain congruence between human natural tendencies: the sensitive and the intellectual. We will come back to this point later on.

When speaking of *love* in what follows we refer to the act of the will, the *rational appetite which tends toward goods that are presented as such by the intellect*.

More than half a century has passed since C.S. Lewis wrote a little book that has not gone out of print since then and continues to arouse interest among young people and others who are not so young anymore, because it illuminates essential aspects of human existence. It is *The Four Loves* and in it Lewis highlights and analyses the analogical dimension of love, of human loves. Benedict XVI cites this work in his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, when considering the two forms of love formulated in the classical Greek tradition: *eros* and *agape*, which Lewis refers to as *need love* and *gift love* respectively. Lewis's analysis of the analogy of love is very subtle, and he distinguishes beyond these two types of love that, in a certain sense, encompass all the others. He also mentions other forms of love that arise in the context of interpersonal relationships – affection, friendship, *eros* and charity – as well as other kinds of love that link human beings with nonpersonal realities, such as certain objects, places, countries, food, institutions, circumstances, etc. This is not the time to develop in detail the characteristics of all of them, but those interested in these questions will find this work very suggestive.

Having in mind the distinction between love as an *emotion* and love as an *act of the will*, the analysis of the types of love presented by C. S. Lewis suggests the type of loving relationship that would be convenient for the teacher to establish with his students. Because, as we have already said, education should be developed as a loving relationship.

First of all, it is not a question of the teacher having to experience a loving feeling towards the students. Emotions are fickle mental states, which the subject cannot always govern as he would wish. The love that should guide

education is characterised by being a determination of the will that leads to wanting the good of and for the students.

It cannot be demanded from teacher that this love should be unconditional or absolute love, as should be the love of good parents for their children, because the students do not depend on their teachers in all the spheres of their lives, as it is the case in relation to their parents. Nor should it be like the love that unites spouses or lovers, because in this case, bodily communication is an essential part of the relationship, and this must be strictly excluded from education. And, strictly speaking, it is not possible to consider it as friendship, because true friendship can only exist if there is a certain equality between friends; and education in itself is always an asymmetrical relationship between subjects who are not on the same level in an essential dimension. Education, as parenthood, requires another kind of love.

To teach, to transmit culture, is *to give something to someone*. To *have* something is a necessary condition to *give* it; and it is also important to consider the characteristics of *the person* to whom something is given, because *giving* is not throwing away; it implies that someone is willing to *receive* it. A good teacher, in addition to knowing the contents of the subject matter, must try to know his students, who are not only different from each other individually, but also when they are considered as forming a class. This personal knowledge of the students, to the extent that is possible, is what allows teachers to wish the best for them, to acknowledge their possibilities and limitations, and to rely on the good qualities of each one and of the group to pull everyone upwards towards higher goals. This attitude that looks first to the good qualities every person possesses, has greater educational effectiveness than trying to eradicate defects. It is better to act moved by a counterfactual optimism, which assumes that the student already possesses that quality that he lacks, so that he makes a positive effort to acquire it.

Knowing and loving the students means adopting a respectful and benevolent attitude towards them. It allows the teacher to look at them favourably and establish – at least on his part – a warm relationship, conducive to build up mutual trust. Zehm and Kottler (1993) point out three attitudes that help teachers to create the appropriate climate that allow students to trust in them:

- a. *Being in*: putting oneself in the student's place, to understand their point of view, their needs, their problems.

- b. *Being for*: supporting the students, being on their side and in their favour, as long as evidence does not force the opposite.
- c. *Being with*: accompanying them on the path of education by committing to the same task with them.

These three features show the kind of love that is required from a teacher in relation to his students. This is real, true love, even if sometimes the students are undisciplined, aggressive, or not in the least interested in the subject and remain in school against their will, only due to legal imperatives.

When the verb *to love* is understood – primarily and fundamentally – as an act of the will, it can be defined as: ‘to seek the good for someone.’ Teachers can engage effectively in education only if they want the best for their students: that they acquire knowledge – intellectual good – and be good people – emotional and moral good. And it can be said that, after the love of parents, that of teachers is one of the most genuine loves on earth, even though this does not necessarily mean that the teacher should always experience a sensible affection towards them. Nevertheless, it is easy to end up feeling also this type of affection on many occasions.

Although we are dealing here with the love necessary for the educational task in general terms, it is important to pay attention to the fact that formal education, or schooling, covers a very broad period in the life of students: from primary education to university. Obviously, the characteristics of the relationship that arises between the teacher and his students vary greatly throughout this period, due to the psychobiological development of the students and, to a lesser extent, to the stage in the professional development of the teacher. But to study in detail the type of mutual affection that arises when the student is an infant, adolescent or in youth, requires a detailed study that is not possible to undertake here, due to the characteristics of this work.

When a teacher experiences sensible affection towards his students, it is recommended to ask himself to what extent it is prudent to become emotionally involved with them. No doubt, this is a difficult question that does not have a single easy answer. When it is addressed in general terms, Day (2004) suggests that excessive emotional involvement with one’s own work and with the students may lead – among other non-minor dangers – to *burnout* on the part of teachers. A consciously maintained attitude of detachment minimises this risk but can end up in cynicism and disinterest. It is necessary,

therefore, to maintain a careful balance and not forget that there is a big difference between encouraging sentimentality and cultivating a sincere interest in helping the students.

Excessive emotional involvement with the students also has another danger: that the teacher may suffer painful disappointments. It is necessary to put into practice the attitude that Rassam (2015) described as a *seraphic indifference*, which is not coldness, but the practical demonstration of the teacher's maturity, that will also help the students to grow mature.

It is advisable for the teacher to establish certain limits to his concern for the students, for at least two reasons: the demands of the nature of the teacher-student relationship, and the need to preserve his own physical and mental health. Regarding the first aspect, although it is appropriate that the teacher's relationship with the students should be presided over by love, it is worth remembering that the educational relationship does not require this love to be unconditional. And it is also good to keep in mind that the teacher-students relation is different from that of the master-disciples, because while it is appropriate for the disciples to maintain a kind of chronic dependence in relation to their masters, this is not good in the case of teachers, who must seek the growth and development of their students to the point of wanting to make themselves unnecessary.

In relation to the second, in the same way that doctors are advised to keep emotional distance from their patients to do well their job, it is not good for teachers to become excessively emotionally involved with their students, to avoid their own psychological distress. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish and separate in practical life some issues that nevertheless should be integrated at the level of intention. Regarding the *mentality* – the personal way of seeing reality, facing issues, etc., it is important for teachers to achieve a strong coherence between their personal and professional identity. But when it comes to the specific *distribution of time* – every day, every week, every month, every year – it is necessary to establish a clear distinction and set the limits between profession and personal life. If these dividing lines are not well marked, one's own physical and mental health, and family and friends' relationships, will end up badly. The whole life of the teacher will be impoverished because of an excessive dedication to the teaching profession and the students.

5. Concluding remarks

From what has been said, it follows that the teacher should *love* his students, and this kind of love means to provide a range of goods for them. What kinds of goods? These which are the *aims of education* – the acquisition of knowledge, skills and virtues. The love of teachers for their students shows itself in helping them to flourish, to achieve human excellence, which presents different nuances depending on the age – childhood, adolescence, youth – and personal conditions of each one of them, and of the subject matter that is taught.

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