

Pedagogical love and prosociality in school education in Slovakia

Abstract: Ethical education has more than a twenty-year-long tradition in Slovak education and still evokes discourse both in the professional community and among lay public. Therefore, alongside with practical measuring of efficiency of prosociality, research activity is focused on examination of ethical, philosophical, anthropological, psychological and pedagogical foundations of social relationality with regard to contemporary valid conception of ethical education in school education in Slovakia. Since the notion of prosociality is relatively unknown in the philosophical-educational discourse, the submitted paper offers several ideas on connection between prosocial behaviour and moral-philosophical thinking. At the same time, it briefly discusses the importance of presence of pedagogical love in education while implementing prosociality in contemporary school education in Slovakia.

Keywords: pedagogical love, responsibility, education, ethical education, prosociality

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Introduction

Education is an example and love, nothing more.

F.W. Fröbel

In the course of human history, many thinkers have left a legacy of their understanding of the world to future generations. Not all of their statements have been of permanent validity and many of them seem to have been just *bon mots* in the given historical or situational circumstances. At first glance, even the idea of F.W. Froebel may appear rather simplified, however, in principle, it captures the value foundation of education in every historical epoch. Humans are creations of love and relationships and they need one another for meaningful existence. If we can see, even in the contemporary “post-educational era”, the sense of pedagogical discourse in thinking about the essence and forms of the formation of human beings in connection with the reflection on the desired ideas of human character, thinking and action, then this idea should be part of the very core of pedagogical thinking and pedagogical life. attitude at all. That is why we should not lack the courage and ability to formulate an ideal of education that respects the image of man and the dimension of the holistic development of his personality.¹

Education needs to have the anthropological paradigm clearly defined. The development of understanding of a person in the modern times proved that love and relationality are necessary for every human being and their destruction brings destruction to values and thus, for a human being, it is dimension *conditio sine qua non*.² As Rimbaud, the Damned Poet, put it, love has to be “reinvented”; it is not sufficient to protect its status quo. Human beings live in a primarily personal world, in which they create personal relationships with one another and, thus, participate in the development of social relationships. They do not lose their individuality in these relationships, on the contrary, they confirm and realise it. Each person is original and unique in their bodily, spiritual and character structure. As an open being they need love for the completion of human creation. The relationship to the Other enables people to form the dimension of their own ‘I’, with a corresponding moral self-awareness that can be examined only from the entirety of personal relationships representing the “...ethos of a certain society, its culture and religion”.³ According to Frankl, love is “the final and the highest thing that a human being may achieve” and “...it makes a person prescient,” adds M. Scheler.⁴

¹ M. Strouhal, *Teorie výchovy*, Praha 2013; I. Podmanický, *Teória a prax etickej výchovy 1*, Trnava 2012.

² I. Podmanický, Z. Podmanická, *Absencia „communio“ pri dospievaní*, “Studia Scientifica Facultatis Paedagogicae” 2017, Vol. XVI, No. 3, pp. 7–16.

³ M. Mráz, *Východiská a zmysel výchovy*, [in:] *Etika a etická výchova na školách*, Trnava 2002, p. 39; T. Špidlík, *Duchovní jednota Evropy*, Olomouc 2007.

⁴ P. Tavel, *Zmysel života podľa V.E. Frankla*, Bratislava 2004, p. 88.

Love as the base of each personal relationship is the greatest discovery that originated in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. As the fundamental motivation source for formation of relationships, it is awaiting its complete realisation. Once human beings do not see a person or a thing that they care for and see only themselves, they do not have a motive for self-realisation, which appears as a consequence of fulfilment of meaning. The German word for meaning comes from the Old German word *sinnan*⁵, which means to wander, go, head somewhere, attempt something. Humans need motive on their life journey. Similarly, the same holds for the desire for happiness. Happiness, too, needs a motive. If humans care only for happiness, they lose the reason to be happy for. Happiness should not be the finality of our efforts, but rather its accompanying phenomenon, a consequence. It can be stated that happiness is demonstration of a well-lived life.⁶

The illusion of the French revolution that only an educated human, freed from superstitions, can be happy was shown to be false and at the end of the 20th century it was replaced by the illusion of consumption that saw realisation of happiness mainly in unlimited saturation of one's own needs. This moment was manifested also in interpersonal relationships, when focus solely on oneself brought the postmodern human being a feeling of loneliness, alienation, because relationships were overmaterialised, overrationalised and "pragmatically" aimed at using or abusing. The absolute desires of human beings cannot be fully saturated by education, wealth or power. If they do not implicitly include a "higher idea" from the perspective of needs, they have significant limits, they can even project a pathological perception of power or wealth. For "...neither a person nor a nation can exist without some higher idea" (F.M. Dostoyevsky).

We can be happy due to relationships that we establish and experience at a vertical and horizontal level. *Anthropos*, in his verticality, is capable of an "upward view", leaves his secure place (*securitas*), gets to know the world and transcends it through his view, stands on his own feet and as a being *in via* in the role of a wanderer searches for his journey. Legs are one of the hallmarks of a person that highlight their ability to communicate and create new paths in their horizontality through communication – to connect with other people, which is the basic presupposition of establishment of each *communion*.⁷

In the process of identification, human beings are able to recognise and establish basic relationships to themselves, to the Other, to the world, to transcendence, which is a natural demonstration of a trichotomy structure of their being. Acceptance of *xenos* (difference) of the Other emerges from the need to establish positive relationships with the Other (*affiliations*) but at the same time, it emerges from the condition to

⁵ A. Grűn, *Kniha otázok a odpovedí*, Trnava 2010.

⁶ V.E. Frankl, *Hľadanie Boha a otázka zmyslu*, Bratislava 2009.

⁷ I. Podmanický, *Etická výchova ako súčasť školskej edukácie v polarizovanej spoločnosti*, [in:] J. Kaliský, *Dobro a zlo, alebo o morálke I*, Banská Bystrica 2013.

cope with the alien, unknown, different (*alienus*). The alien, however, is something that can lead not only to carefulness or rejection, but also fascination (*fascinum*) and acceptance as something attractive. The anthropological-personalist approach confirms that the ability to love and the need “to be loved” are deeply rooted in human nature to “be a person” in his/her spiritual and social being heading toward absolute future.⁸

Without love, as B. Vysheslavtsev puts it, a person would be satanic, which has been certified by the past several times. To be a person in his/her essence means sharing, willingness to live, self-actualisation and doing all the good that one is capable of. Thus, love is not focused only on itself, on the contrary, it eliminates egoism. The evil of egoism does not reside in the fact that humans value themselves too much, attribute themselves unconditional importance and eternal value, they are right; it resides in the unjust denial of this importance in others.⁹ Plessner emphasised that humans are reasonable beings, however, they are immeasurable, open, having certain weaknesses, which constantly force them to look for a new relationship to themselves and the Other, to the world and the Absolute.¹⁰ The personal character of an individual emerges precisely from these relationships. The extent to which human beings handle their path, what they fill it with, depends on the conditions they have grown up in. They may live in a barren environment, knowing only fear, lack of interest, carelessness and indifference, or they may live in an educational environment respecting specific rules, full of stimuli and interest in others, filled with an atmosphere of empathy, understanding and love.

The contemporary generation of children is often marked by the educational straying of their parents and teachers who do not know how and what to lead them to, or what vision of life they should help to show them. These elements are also transferred to educational institutions. Many school facilities (including faculties of education) are not the place of real education and preparation of pupils and students for life, understanding of the world and searching for their place in it (nevertheless, university education has a specific purpose). Parents do not only bring their children to life, but also to the world, i.e. regarding education, they are responsible not only for the life and healthy development of a child, but also for the continuation of the world they are connected to. At the same time, as a matter of paradox, unless he/she is ready, a child needs to be protected from this world in a traditional family environment. Once a human life is exposed to the world without protection of his/her intimacy, privacy and safety, his/her vitality is lost.¹¹

⁸ A. Rajský, I. Podmanický, *Človek človeku. K prameňom etickej výchovy*, Trnava 2016.

⁹ V.S. Solovjov, *Zmysel lásky*, Bratislava 2002; I. Podmanický, *Etická výchova ako cesta človeka k človeku*, [in:] P. Vacek, D. Vrabcová, M. Maněnová (eds.), *Výchova k dobru*, Hradec Králové 2016.

¹⁰ M. Mráz, *Problém utrpenia a jeho riešenie v medicínskej etike*, Trnava 2000; H. Rotter, *Osoba a etika*, Brno 1997.

¹¹ H. Arendtová, *Krize kultury. 4 cvičení v politickém myšlení*, Praha 2004.

Teachers should take into consideration that a child is for them an alien, unready human, new in the world and, at the same time, in the process of formation. However, the task of a teacher is not to provide manuals on how to live, but to teach a child to get to know the world. School should not replace the world, or family; it should be an institution that assists children in the transition from the family environment to the world. Parents and teachers, through the way and quality of education, demonstrate whether they love the children so much that they do not cast them off from the world, do not leave them without any help and give them a chance to create something new in this world.¹² Therefore, usefully, one of the basic principles of education is the unity of educational environments and cooperation of family and school. Both environments differ from one another in their importance and corresponding tasks, but both need to bear in mind the good of a child and, thus, they need to be filled with love and tactfulness. **Love cannot be demanded, it must be given freely.** Then, it is honest, unselfish and sensitive. On the outside, it is represented by tactful behaviour. A child is a creation of love, rituals, touch; thus, they need contact for their healthy development. Based on the original Latin equivalent ‘*taktus*’ – touch¹³, it can be metaphorically stated that while working with children, it is important to “touch them sensitively” not only physically, verbally, but also by our overall approach¹⁴. “Wild honesty” is not an optimal expression of tactfulness.

Pedagogical love in ethical education

The notion of pedagogical love has disappeared from contemporary educational discourse and a part of the professional public considers it inaccurate, vague, misleading, non-scientific and impossible to be implemented in educational conditions. For example, a German pedagogical dictionary states that the subject word pedagogical love is pre-scientific, even non-scientific in the contemporary period of professionalisation, scientification and planning of education. However, pedagogical love should not be abandoned unless we want “...education to become an unkind formation”.¹⁵ It is not easy to capture love in notions, but it has an irreplaceable place in educational practice and pedagogical theory. Among other things, school does not mean only an institution with a building and material equipment, where pupils and students achieve a certain degree or type of education. Pupils cannot be perceived as material that we process according to our view, but as unique living beings having their

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ In the past, it was understood as a quality of caregivers who while working with seriously ill patients, had to touch them very carefully so that it hurt them the least while positioning them on a bed, for instance (T. Špidlík, *Vatikánske promluvy s humorem*, Olomouc 2010, p. 126).

¹⁴ The overall approach is understood as a selected type of educational style of a teacher or a parent.

¹⁵ W. Bohm, *Wörterbuch der Pädagogik*, Stuttgart 1988.

life story, longing for discovery of themselves and the world. Every child wants to be discovered and assured that they are special and needed for this world. Therefore, it is possible to say that school means foremost people. In its environment, the power field of the relationship teacher–pupil is created, which is one of the key moments influencing education. Discussing education, relationships are discussed; discussing relationships, time is discussed. Every education is carried out in specific relationships and these are carried out in specific time and space. And this is not possible in an unkind environment.

“In the experience of great love,” Guardini wrote, “everything becomes an event in its environment”.¹⁶ If pupils experience it from their teacher, it affects their performance and relationship to the given subject or the environment positively, but also, they handle seemingly unsuccessful situations more easily. They learn to accept failures as a part of their life journey. In such understanding, pedagogical love relies on reason and its specific manifestation is kindness. Reason determines the strategy that needs to be followed and kindness indicates its tactics. Reason fulfils the function of the highest regulation principle. It is not only an organ of knowledge but a faculty that leads to morality. On the other hand, kindness helps to create interpersonal relationships and harmonious, efficient communication.¹⁷

In Slovak education, one of the subjects that can hardly be carried out without love is ethical education. It was included in school education in Slovakia in 1992¹⁸, aiming at aiding a young person in their preparation for life and relationships, and the development of generally accepted values and principles (dignity of humanity, respect for life, etc.) connecting people of different opinions or confessional orientation. At the same time, it had an ambition to offer specific models of behaviour together with its role models. There is an advantage of role models presented in this way; we do not have to personally agree with the religious views of, for example, Mother Theresa, A. Schweitzer, M.L. King or M. Gandhi, but their behaviour may be attractive for every unbiased person. The power of ethics is assessed by the behaviour of the saints, not the foolish ones ‘*cuius deus venter est*’.¹⁹

The Slovak conception of ethical education did not emerge, in contrast to other pedagogical projects, as an outcome of the long-term systematic experience of a research team, but as a result of existential need. Socialism left behind disruption both in the economic and moral field. Therefore, after the “Velvet Revolution” in 1990, at the then Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education of the Slovak Republic,

¹⁶ L. Guissani, *Riziko výchovy*, Praha 1996.

¹⁷ R. Sarka, *Nadčasovosť v Pascalovej apologii*, Košice 2006, Vol. XVII, No. 1; I. Podmanický, *Etická výchova...*, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ Ethical education was included as a compulsory ‘optional’ subject in alternation with religious education at first only at the lower secondary level of primary schools. At present, it is taught in all grades at primary schools and in the first two years at secondary schools.

¹⁹ [Whose God is their belly]: U. Eco, C.M. Martiny, *V čo verí ten, kto neverí?*, Bratislava 2015, p. 113.

an expert group led by Ladislav Lencz was created whose mission was to terminate the socialist deformations in the field of school education and to search for foundations for new conceptions of educational initiatives. The output of these efforts was the creation of a conception focused on development of prosocial behaviour – the conception of the subject Ethical education²⁰ that L. Lencz built on four mutually interconnected elements – vision, educational program, methods and style of education.²¹ The mutual dependence of individual elements is illustrated in the following scheme²²:

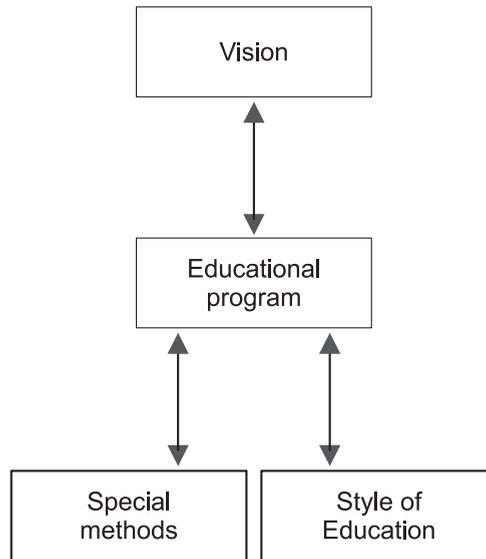


Figure 1. Components of ethical education

Source: Krížová, Podmanický *Etická výchova – výchova k prosociálnosti...*²²

The vision of ethical education is a prosocial human who is morally mature, assertive, communicative, creative, emphatic, cooperative, able to perceive the interests of others and has healthy self-esteem. So that this **vision** may come true, it is necessary to have a certain knowledge and basic skills (**educational program**), which is supported by the teacher's approach to pupils (**style of education**) and selected

²⁰ Members of the expert group carried out an in-depth analysis of tens of theoretical and experimental works focused on character education and moral development of an individual. Studies by E. Staub, P. Mussen, N. Eisenberg-Berg, D. Bar-Tal, V. Battistich, D. Solomon, K. Ryan and R. Roche-Olivar proved that prosociality is significantly statistically related to a great range of positive personality features such as higher level of empathy, assertiveness, quality communication, creativity, self-control, patience, respect to the Other, responsibility for one's self and others.

²¹ L. Lencz, *Metódy etickej výchovy*, Bratislava 1993.

²² O. Krížová, I. Podmanický, *Etická výchova – výchova k prosociálnosti. Študijný materiál pre pastoráciu mládeže*, Bratislava 2001, p. 2; I. Podmanický, *Teória a prax...*, op.cit.

methods through which the pupils develop moral judgment and necessary social skills (**special methods**).

The vision of prosociality implies not only education of an individual but also the establishment of a cooperating community within a social group. A community, *communio*, adjective form *communis* (mutual, common, biding), core of the word *munia* – responsibility, burden, task²³, enables a child to mature socially, to prepare both for the establishment of his/her own communion (family) and to acceptance the “burden” and responsibility of involvement in the communion of public life.

The very notion of prosociality is relatively new, not anchored in many scientific disciplines yet. The first authors who independently of one another introduced the term prosocial behaviour to psychology were D. Rosenhan and G. H. White.²⁴ From the etymological perspective, the base ‘*pro*’ means in front of (something), a place in the front or in front of someone in the sense of protection or good in favour of the other. The second part of the word – ‘*socius*’, ‘*socia*’ has several equivalents of meaning, such as companion, helpmate, coparticipant, ally, i.e. someone who is allied to someone else.²⁵

From the vertical perspective, prosocial behaviour represents a level of benefit that it brings to a recipient or the entire social group. Therefore, many authors²⁶ included it in the space of antinomic dynamics as an antithesis to antisocial²⁷ behaviour. Prosocial behaviour has three inter-related levels: cooperative, helping and altruistic.²⁸ While characterising the notion of prosociality, the view of the other human, who we see in them, is therefore important. For example, someone who is dependent on us, or we need them, or threatens our interests, or they need something, or they are important to us, fulfil us with something. Thus, we hold them for a rival or a partner, companion and ally, with whom it is/is not worth establishing social bonds.²⁹ From this perspective, it is possible to understand prosocial behaviour as behaviour that brings benefit (good) to another person (group) that is not motivated by duty (deontological ethics), nor affection (teleological ethics) but by an unselfish care for the good (benefit) of the Other (altruism). Good is not a dead notion, it has its specific

²³ F. Novotný et al., *Latinsko-český slovník*, Praha 1955.

²⁴ M. Mráz, *Problém utrpenia a jeho riešenie v medicínskej etike*, Trnava 2000.

²⁵ F. Novotný et al., *op.cit.*, pp. 314, 472.

²⁶ E.g. J. Reykowski, Smoleňka, J. Křivohlavý, E. Staub, R. Roche, and others.

²⁷ Antisocial behaviour – behaviour aimed against social subjects even at the cost of breaching legal or moral norms.

²⁸ I. Podmanický, A. Rajský, *Prosocialita a etická výchova. Skúsenosti a perspektívy*, Trnava 2014.

²⁹ In addition to the well-known definitions by R. Roche, E. Staub, P. Müssen and N. Eisenberg, L. Páleník, L. Lencz, etc., each emphasising a different dimension of prosociality (an interesting and necessary one), the author of the paper inclines to the view that, in general, prosocial behaviour is understood as behaviour aimed at help in favour of other persons or groups or social aims without the actor of the behaviour getting outer reward (M. Brestovanský, A. Rajský, I. Podmanický, *Prosocial education project implemented in the Slovak Educational System*, Paper presented at the 14th European Congress of Psychology, 7–10 July 2015, Milan).

compendious content denoting the essence of what is dignified, honourable and precious (in the natural and transcendental sense). Its value grows with our awareness of urgency, fullness and richness of the given situation. In the words of T. Aquinas, we may say that good is what is reasonable and essential to be done right here and right now.³⁰ This moment is also reflected in teaching ethical education. Its vision and processual side imply a process of education, formation and training aimed at acquisition of virtues. The basic principles that are a necessary part of teaching ethical education are illustrated in Figure 2.

Respecting these principles is crucial for the meeting of I and Thou.³¹ The difference of the Other is uncovered in a dialogical community, where others let us know themselves in a “space” of mutual acceptance and respect. The Buberian idea that “relationship is mutuality”³² is an unconditional inclination to the Other with an unconditional moral value. It is dialogical “mutuality” in which a better understanding of a partner in a dialogue as a person in their sovereignty and dignity is born. A dialogue is not understood as a polemic concurrence, it is rather a clarification of standpoints aimed at a better understanding of the Other. A human being is a dialogic being who does not become anything and is not in a monologue. Confrontation is not a dialogue. A good dialogue is a path to understanding because it assumes an effort for mutual understanding and respect, and an acceptance that we might be wrong and the Other might be right. Metaphorically speaking, from the perspective of philosophy (even though through etymologically imprecise understanding of the notion *dia-logos*), the truth and meaning of life need to be sought and understood through speech (*dia* – two persons talk to each other – processual side) and word (*logos*). Then it may be assumed that dialogue will be an expression of interest in the Other, their opinions and attitudes.³³

³⁰ R. Guardini, *Dobro, svedomí a soustředování*, Praha 1999; Dojčár, [in:] I. Podmanický, A. Rajský, *Prosociálnosť...*, *op.cit.*

³¹ M. Buber, *Já a ty*. Praha 2005, pp. 38–39.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 48.

³³ J. Poláková, *Smysl dialogu*. Praha 2008; I. Podmanický, Z. Podmanická, *Absencia...*, *op.cit.*

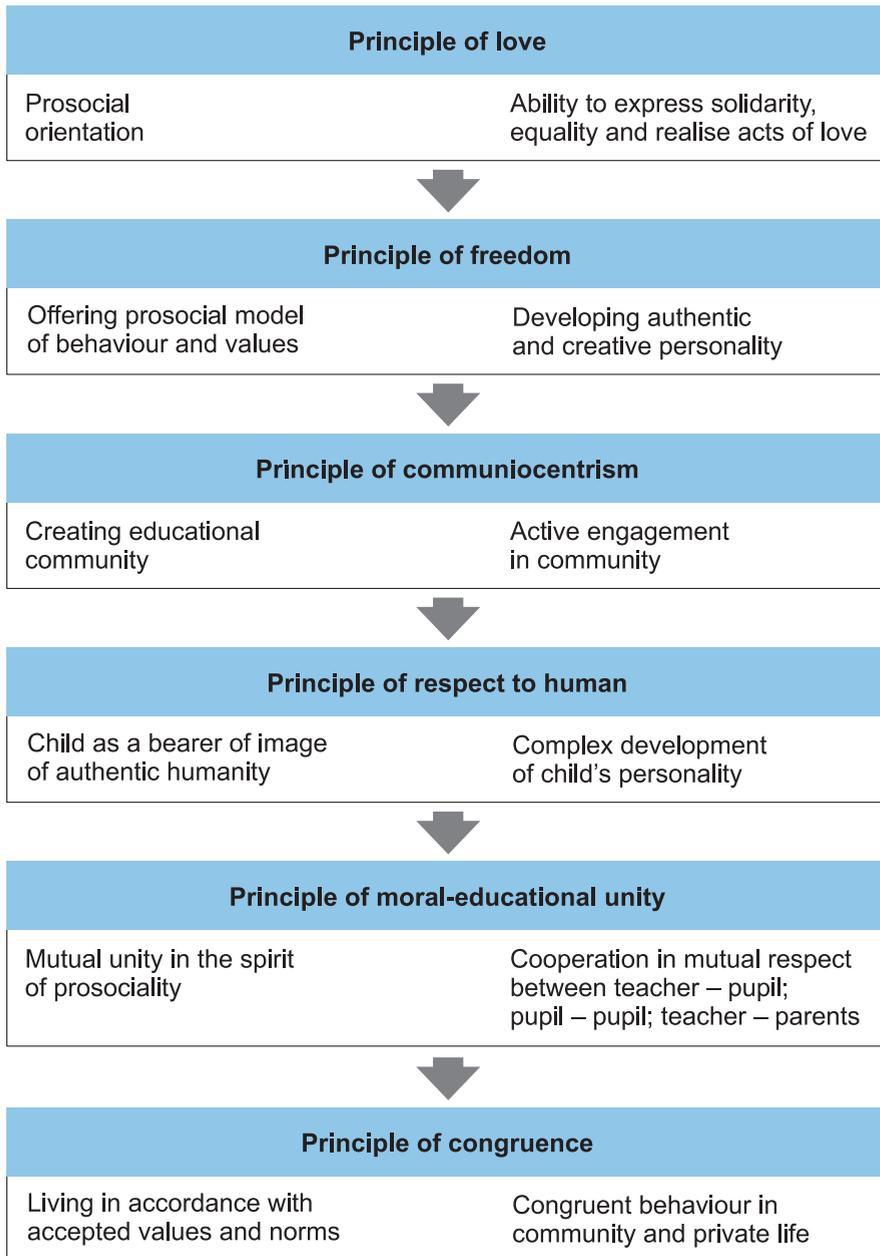


Figure 2. Principles of teaching ethical education

Source: Author.

Conclusion

The development of prosociality as a vision of ethical education, including an appropriate pedagogical-psychological application, is one of the effective ways encouraging the development of personality, its intellectual, ethical and religious abilities, as well as moral thinking, which positively influences the establishment of valuable interpersonal relationships. Research on the education of pupils toward prosociality³⁴ proved positive changes in the overall atmosphere of educational community, in both pupils' and teachers' behaviour. It also proved the importance of a positive relationship between a teacher and pupils. Prosociality encouraged a positive relationship to the taught subject and the preferred model of behaviour. More than 25 years of empirical and research experiences implementing ethical education in Slovakia suggest that one of the key pillars of effective implementation is the art of pedagogical love. Essentially, it is an art that can be learned, which should be respected by pedagogical theory.

Love (SK: *láska*; PL: *miłość*) and kindness (SK: *milosť* PL: *łaska*) are not just mirror images of perception of the notions in the Slovak and Polish languages, where the Slovak meaning of love means kindness in Polish and the Polish meaning of love means kindness in Slovak. These are two mutually interconnected terms that carry deep symbolism not only in a theological sense but also at the natural human level. Even if love is understood as one of the fundamental constituting elements of human beings, and even if human beings crave it, it is not possible to enforce it, it is a gift, kindness, voluntary act or manifestation from the other person. Something that was given to a human being without their credit because they are loved for their essence.

The basic fundament of realisation of kindness is love. If we do something for others from love and solidarity, we give them kindness; and if someone acts like this for us, we are given kindness. This fact applies not only in common situations but also in stressful ones (e.g. in case of violation of rules). Then, kindness looks at what can be done with the guilty person – enable the development of a better human through education. That is why, once pupils experience manifestations of love and kindness from their teacher (parent), they feel accepted, their self-respect grows, they learn to open themselves to others, become aware of their own “transgressions” and learn to correct them. They are preparing to establish their own relationships. In present relationships, a teacher educates pupils for their future relationships.

Love, kindness, respect for others are not archaisms that do not belong to modern pedagogy. On the contrary, the more structured and complicated social and cultural life is, the greater the need for love, kindness and respect in families and educational

³⁴ For example, in 2014–2018, Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, Trnava University has been carrying out research focused on the development of prosociality of pupils at primary schools. The course of research and results that have been obtained so far are processed in publications: I. Podmanický, A. Rajský, *Prosociálnosť...*, *op.cit.* and A. Rajský, I. Podmanický, *Človek človeku...*, *op.cit.*

institutions. For a teacher (parent), respect for a human being from the first moments of his or her creation is not just a general feeling, but is acceptance of responsibility for the creation of a specific human being. Then, it may be assumed that the pupil will be led to fulfilment of a triad, formulated by J. A. Comenius, “know – act – want (love, choose)”.

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