



Can There Be a Recourse to a Philosophy of Love? A Confronting Question at the Heart of a Poor Pedagogy

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Abstract

The question of love and its place in pedagogy has brought diverging views and disagreement. It would appear to be creating more problems than it solves. On one hand, the contention lies on the discussion of love as something extraneous to our being by using an *either-or approach*. On the other hand, it lies on the understanding of love as something bereft in our shared human experience especially in moments of suffering. These problematic approaches have led to disagreements among those who subscribe to the place of love in pedagogy and those who propose that love does not have any place in education. I hereby propose an alternative approach; one that encourages *willing* the good of the other for the *other*. If all educational endeavours and all the opposing positions on love and its place in pedagogy is done based on promoting *the good of the other*, then love is essentially and existentially integral in education because love *is* for the good of the other. This became apparent to me through a ‘poor pedagogy’ that opened the door for a transformative learning curve. I explored this insight philosophically through a discussion of the Socratic way that shaped the ancient Greeks’ understanding of love and education. I relate this understanding to my personal teaching experience and then examine the implication of love for education as something that influences positively the educational experience of both teachers and students in their pursuit of the highest good, manifesting in the reward of love as *love*.

Keywords Philosophy of love · Poor pedagogy · Love and education · Socratic way · The good of the other · Pedagogy

*What, do you wish to know...?
Know it well, love was [its] meaning.*

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*Who reveals [this] to you? Love.
What [was revealed] to you? Love.
Why [was] it [revealed] to you? For Love.
Remain in this, and you will know more of the same.
Julian of Norwich, Showings, (1978, p. 342).*

Introduction

If Julian of Norwich was right about the centrality of love and the reward of love as *love*, then the very existence of humanity is characterised by love. As a woman who survived the Black Death and had witnessed its horror, she understood the kind of love that is borne out of suffering (Fulloon, 2021). This love is part of the very definition of our being, notwithstanding our best efforts to deny it. No wonder Teilhard de Chardin (1962) understood love as the very structure of our universe. He knew that everything about the universe and our place in it, is characterised by the very existence of love. Now, this is not the kind of love that gives you a warm cosy feeling, this is the love that is steeped in the very nature of all humanity. We feel it, we breathe it, and we recognize it whenever we encounter it. As human beings living in a human world, we have been plunged into moments of suffering and difficulty in our lives, and yet somehow, we find ourselves pulled by the attraction of love even in those moments. Love has the capacity to enable us to grow in every moment of our lives, even in those moments of suffering and uncertainty.

Over the years, the radically privileged academics, in their quibbles and rhetoric about love, especially regarding its place in education, seem to negate and separate love from the core of our existence. Steeped in their academic hubris, they treat love as though it were something extraneous to our being (see Aldridge & Lewin, 2019).¹ This dualist way of understanding love would appear to overlook our shared human experience which reveals that we are forever plunged into the very aura of love in our daily encounter with people and situations in life, and that love is essentially and existentially integral to the human life. This essay challenges this dualistic, arid and reductionist approach to love and proposes, as a solution, the nondual, encompassing, dynamically rhythmic dimension of love that evokes our wisdom, emotion, compassion, intelligence and the core value of what it means to be a human being, living in a human world with human problems and challenges. This position aligns with the heart-centred approach to pedagogy propagated by some academics and institutions of learning (see Carrington, 2019; Chadwick, 2021; Tsey, 2018).² The

¹ See the 2019 special issue on love and desire in education in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* for some of the arguments *for* and *against* love in education. Aldridge and Lewin (2019) acknowledge in the introductory pages of the issue that many authors acknowledge the invocation of love and desire in education as a risky adventure and proposes an emphasis on the erotic in education as a counter to an over-emphasis on love.

² For instance, academics like Jody Carrington (2019) maintains that building positive relationship optimizes the learning experience of both the teacher and the student. And Joy Chadwick (2021) encourages teachers to embrace the complexities of their day-to-day encounter with students because it will provide the opportunity to build their pedagogical relationship with them. In institutions of learning like James Cook University (JCU), Australia, a heart-centred approach to relationships and learning is at the core of

essay further argues that love will always help us move outside of ourselves for the good of the *other* even when things go wrong. It intends to offer an intersubjective reflection on an experience of a poor pedagogy in a teaching adventure that evoked a philosophy of love. So too, the essay argues that through encountering with an open heart the kind of love that is borne out of suffering, one could move beyond the narrow, static, either-or mentality of love in education, to an expansive view of love that extends us outwardly; a movement that will always be a threat to the ego, “because it means giving up... superiority, separation and control” (Rohr, 2019, p. 70). In the face of obstacles where people will tend to close their heart to love, love will always find a way to overcome the obstacles. Like water, love flows downwards around any obstacle, constantly seeking for ways to make things better (Rohr, 2019). It is on this view of creating future possibilities that I now turn to the experience that taught me about embracing a philosophy of love as a way of life and as a pedagogy in my educational endeavours.

The Genesis...

After my studies in Queensland Australia, I found myself teaching in a remote village in Southeast Nigeria back in 2015. As someone who had spent several years studying and working in Australia, going back to Nigeria and teaching young people who were from very poor families, was quite an eye-opening experience. I was faced with the difficult task of helping to transform the lives of young high school students, whose very basic need was not *to flourish* but *to survive*.

On my first day of school, I was excited to meet my students. I had spent the last couple of days preparing for my first class and was delighted to be offered the opportunity to influence the lives of these young people entrusted to me. As a teacher, your aim will always be to have a positive influence on your students, but this goal is not always guaranteed. As I watched the students arrive at school, especially some who had walked quite a few kilometres to get there, I saw sweat dripping down their faces, their school uniforms soaked in sweat as it created marks on the armpit corners of their shirts. Their feet were covered with dust, and their socks and sandals looking rather decolourized. I heard a teacher shouting at them to run to the school gate, and those who were unable to make it to the gate early enough were given lashes of the cane for coming late to school. To my amazement, the students involved, got up, dusted themselves, shook off the pain of the lashes and went into their respective classrooms. This was a normal

Footnote 2 (continued)

the qualities of the Family Wellbeing program (Tsey, 2018) which has been operational in the university. This program centres on building relationship founded on love, respect and willing the good of the other for the *other*. Exploring the feasibility of this program in the JCU curriculum has been the focus of my PhD study. Also, in the University of Calgary (2022), Canada, a Master’s program entitled “Leading with Heart” is being offered to students. This program prepares students for future school leadership to connect with a person’s heart in order to make a lasting change. All these instances align with the notion of pedagogical love as an essential part of the learning experience of both the teacher and the student.

routine, to which the students were accustomed. As I watched, I was filled with discomfort as to how the students were yelled at by some of the teachers, with words filled with implications of stupidity and irresponsibility. It felt like the screaming and caning had no effect on the students; they were desensitised to it.

A few days later, thanks to the daily and seemingly casual conversation among teachers in the staff room, I began to make sense of what would eventually lead to my epiphany. It became clear to me that a handful of students in the entire school were treated differently because they were considered smart and responsible. The rest of the students were seen as lacking the capacity to grow and denied the prospect of growing. Therefore, they were not worthy of receiving love from the teachers. One teacher noted with dismay that some of the students were so dumb that it was impossible to teach them anything, implying that trying to educate them would be a total waste of time. Another teacher remarked that the students only understood the language of punishment, hence the constant use of cane to teach them. I once asked the teachers why my students do not listen to me when I try to engage them in a discussion without waving a big stick and speaking in a loud voice. They all laughed at me, and then responded that it was a waste of time to speak to the kids without a cane in hand. It felt frustrating that no pedagogical solution was offered by the teachers, and that the only solution was to join the bandwagon in the unruly display of authoritarianism. I was able to notice as Kalisha (2015) would say, the hidden frustration in the system that blinds us to the fact that children are unique and different, thereby hindering any intersubjective reflection on how to make a difference in the lives of the students as unique individuals.

The school that I taught in was a very poor school located in a poor community with limited resources. Most of the students struggled to pay their school fees, and there were no external funds, either from the government or any other external body. Ninety-nine percent of the school's main source of income was the students' school fees. And since many of the students were struggling to do so, it meant that the school could not afford good teachers. Obviously, this was the main reason for the poor infrastructures within the school; exemplified in poor classrooms condition, with no constant electric power supply. Students studied in inadequate conditions; and this affected the general classroom orientation. The pedagogical orientation of the school was the traditionally didactic method of teaching in which the teacher is the knower and the expert who 'pours' knowledge upon the students, and they in turn passively receive and accept whatever the teacher says as truth. This method of teaching is centred around the teacher while the students sit and listen; in doing so, they memorise the important points the teacher makes without offering their own personal interpretation and analysis of what they are taught. With this kind of orientation, the teachers have unquestioned authority, which they exercise, sometimes unsupervised, while teaching. For them, education is what the teacher gives the student and what the student must have to accept.

It is worthy to note that this orientation of teaching was an offshoot of the colonial system of education imposed in most African countries. According to Garba (2012), the advent of Christian missionaries and the British colonial masters saw the introduction of 'essentialism' in Nigerian educational system. This meant that

education was seen as ‘transmitting’ essential knowledge to all those who came to school (Garba, 2012). She argues:

With this type of education, Nigerian teacher was expected to be strict and well behaved to the extent that he was a model of emulation. In imparting knowledge to the learner, he could use lecture, play way or Socratic teaching strategy, while the learner was expected to learn what the teacher taught him by memorization and reproduction of the same on the examination day (Garba, 2012, p. 53).

In effect, students’ quietness and compliance to a teacher’s ‘strictness’ became a sign of being a good student. A quiet classroom is a sign of good behaviour; and not solely because one is accentuated on the learning process, but probably because one is afraid of ‘disrupting’ the status-quo that has been set in place. Waving a big stick became a sign of having control and authority that teachers sometimes display. Even though this didactic mode of teaching is outdated in Nigeria, sadly, it is still operative in some of the schools in remote parts of Nigeria. One could say, this is the impact of colonisation as something that still lingers even in the educational system of Nigeria till date (Garba, 2012). Maybe if I had not had the opportunity to study overseas and experience other cultures, my pedagogical orientation would have been the same heavy-handedness of didactic teaching. As I reflect on the privilege I had, I return now to how it triggered a change in my pedagogical approach.

One day as I was teaching, filled with the frustration that had built up over the weeks, I noticed that my students always said ‘yes’ to my ‘is that clear?’ when in fact, they did not understand what I was saying. This became apparent to me when one of my students asked me the exact question I had been explaining in my lesson. In an utter blip of frustration, I retorted to the students’ question as thus: *how can you ask me that question when it is all I have been explaining for the past 45 min? Are you so absent minded that you forgot that you are in a classroom? You might as well go home instead of wasting your parents’ school fees.* In sheer shamefulness, the student folded like a cheap tent. He regretted asking a question in the classroom. I could see and hear other students quietly laughing and muttering words that suggested he should have kept quiet like others and simply say ‘yes’ to everything I said in the classroom. At that moment, I realised that I had humiliated the student, and the resulting taunts from other students will haunt him even outside the classroom.

Perhaps, the student was just trying to be courageous to ask a question that will make his teacher see him as smart and therefore deserving of support and love as the system had conditioned? Perhaps, the student could not ask the question at the right time because he was afraid of speaking up, and now he looked unintelligent having asked the question late? Perhaps, he was afraid that the very thing that resulted in him asking a question in a classroom eventually happened, and he felt so small, so unintelligent and hence in the ‘black books’ of *no-do-gooders*? Perhaps, all these things have contributed to the conditioning of the ‘so-called’ problematic and unintelligent population of students that they had grown numb to the yelling, caning and subjugation that the teachers and those in positions of authority have contributed? And here I am, with my prospects of making a difference, inadvertently subjecting my students to the same matrix of domination

that had objectified them for so long and that had failed to see their unique gifts and talents as people deserving of every love and support to grow and flourish in society.

Biesta (2020) notes that the school is a place for fuelling the desire to live in a grown-up way; and one must consider how to heighten the consciousness of students to grow-up as *subjects* who can exist *in* and *with* the world. The task of education therefore is to provide *a range of existential possibilities* for students to exist in and with the world (Biesta, 2021). Yet, it seemed that I had failed to fuel this desire for my students; I had failed to help ‘open up’ *existential possibilities* for these students to exist in the classroom. I had resorted to doing what I saw other teachers do when I first arrived, and it seemed abhorrent to me. Was this my *shadow self* or was I protecting a *persona* that the system had conditioned me to promote in the school? I had to be humbled in my capacity to see that I too can hurt others or treat them in a way that was hitherto repugnant to me. I was beset with the kind of questions that confronted Kalisha (2015) in his own experience:

What kind of world was I creating for these particular students? I planned for lessons, adapted materials for use, developed courses, taught and evaluated students in an unreflective and naïve manner. Did I have the time to think and reflect on my actions? Did I understand why I was teaching what I was teaching? I thought I did until slowly, and hesitantly I started coming to moments of seeing – catching glimpses of how the child should be seen. I began to wonder – had I begun attaching myself to my students in search of a way that I wanted to know them, to understand them, in order to make the situation better (p. 56)?

In a rather unsurprising way, these questions brought me face to face with my shadow self, to a point of critical reflection of what it means to be a teacher. An intersubjective reflection that led to an epiphany of what that moment summons me to: love. It was the kind of love that was ushered in by great suffering. I was undergoing suffering at that moment, the kind of suffering that opened my eyes to the suffering of my student. I was able to see that he was experiencing a sense of diminished self-worth. As was later revealed to me by the student, he was deeply hurt because I treated him like the other teachers who had not honoured his learning potentials. Upon reflection with my teacher mentor, it seemed that I had subjected the students to the same fate as others did. This became the starting point of what informed a critical pedagogy anchored on a philosophy of love; one that was triggered by a ‘poor pedagogy’.

Masschelein (2010) underscores that academics experience real transformation in their academic adventure when they encounter what he calls a ‘poor pedagogy’. This refers to practices that “allows us to expose ourselves, practices which bring us onto the street, displaces us” (p. 44). A poor pedagogy leaves the position of the teacher and the student rather empty with no comfort. It helps one to be attentive to an exercise of ethos and attitudes, not subjecting one to methods or codes or rules of an institution or profession (Masschelein, 2010). For Masschelein (2010), a poor pedagogy.

...invites one to go outside into the world, to expose oneself, i.e. to put oneself in an uncomfortable, weak position, and it offers the means and the support to do so. ...[I]t offers means for experience (instead of explanations, interpretations, justifications, representations, stories, criteria, etc.), means to become attentive. These are poor means, means, which are insufficient, defective, which lack signification, do not refer to a goal or an end. They are pure means, tracks leading nowhere and which therefore can lead everywhere (p. 49).

In essence, a poor pedagogy is when you are face-to-face with the realness of an experience. When all the tools, preparation and theorizing have failed you. You find yourself face-to-face, exposed, vulnerable and naked with the rawness of an experience that makes you fall flat on your face with no trump card to play. Instead of running or avoiding the experience, you submit yourself to the rawness of the experience and what it has to teach you. When you submit yourself to the experience, *you are walking the track that is leading nowhere, which has the potential to lead everywhere*. Openness to this walk is what leads to transformation. Liston (2008) highlights this when he said: "...it is only when radical academics experience the pain and despair of frustrated and seemingly doomed educational struggles that critical theory can guide pedagogy. Only when struggled heartache delivers seasoned wisdom, will critical theory inform meaningful practice" (pp. 387–388). For me, embracing the rawness of my experience was what started a journey of transformation in me, one that led to a place that was not initially intended, but a place that was altogether rewarding. It spurred in me a pedagogical reflection on what it means to be with and to teach children.

How can I see my students differently as *subjects* who are worthy of being seen from the perspective of love? How can I teach them to recognise their inherent goodness even when it is hard to do so? How can I encourage them to courageously be their unique self without being swayed by the authoritarian positions of teachers, who sometimes relegate them to the background of non-existence in the classroom? How can I model to them a different philosophy of life, one that does not make them *see* less of themselves, but one that encourages them to believe that they are inherently good, deserving of love and support? I now turn to these questions and, in doing so, propose what could be seen as a philosophy of love regarding education.

Love..., the Not-So-Subtle Word

In the educational world, love has received incredible mileage to the point that to talk about love seems like opening a can of worms, like Pandora's box that causes all sorts of problems than it solves. Aldridge and Lewin (2019) observe that the discussion on love have heightened the tension in the educational world; and this makes love in educational practice almost unthinkable and unspeakable. They reflected on the possibility of re-establishing meaningful discussions on love in the general educational discourse. The concern lies deeply on the need to confine love in an *either-or* box of definition and yet love is like a gem that keeps giving us new perspective whenever we turn it around.

Love proves to be greater than its parts, and therefore exposes the inadequacy of words to really capture it (Clough, 2006).

Cho (2005) highlights three main positions about love and pedagogy: those who hold to the erotic dimension of love and encourages it even when it slips into sexual domain; those who hold to the caring dimension of love and supports it so far as it does not lead to sexual desires; and those who ultimately deny the role of love as inappropriate in the domain of education. In all these, there seems to be claims that justify the positions of each group in that *either-or* approach to love and education. What if love is part of what it means to be human? What if love includes all and enlarges our hearts to move externally to include others "...even, and especially, when things go wrong[?]" (Rohr, 2019, p. 71) What if love is the physical energy that binds us and defines all of us, and attracts all things to all things? What if love is the very language that we all can speak because it is steeped into the fabric of our being and the universe? Rohr (2019) believes that love is the undergirding energy in all things, and a universal language that everyone speaks. If we speak this universal language, then it is safe to say that "we know a positive flow when we see it, and we... know... coldness [of heart] when we [encounter] it" (Rohr, 2019, p. 70). So, when we meet people who challenge us to be better from a place of love, something within us understands that positive flow, something in us begins to expand, to grow, to speak that language of love. Concomitantly, we constrict and fold when such energy is coming from a coldness of heart. When we go deeper to examine how we act and move in the world, something within us knows when we are acting from a place of love and when we are being indifferent or cold. This innate knowledge is something we cannot deny especially when our action is inspired by the intention to do good for the other. In this regard, we can see that in all the arguments *for* and *against* love, there is a common thread that underlines all of them, and that is, *for the good of the other*.

All the arguments employing the importance of love and care in pedagogy stands on the premise that it is done *for the good of the other*, normally, for the students' benefit to learn and grow. Equally, all those who subscribe to the position that love does not have any place in education because education is about knowledge and hard work and love could lead to bias (Cho, 2005, highlights these arguments), do so on the basis that it is *for the good of the other*, normally for the student. The good of the other becomes the prime basis for including or excluding love in pedagogy. In this regard, Chalwell (2016) observes: "While many researchers may not use the word 'love' to describe teaching, they allude to love as they discuss the importance of teachers' positive caring relationships with their students" (p. 121). This therefore raises the question: what *is* love for the good of the other? This is where I would like to employ an understanding of love that has changed my perspective about love and its place in pedagogy.

Love..., for the Good of the Other

Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* speaks of love as *willing* the good of the other for the other (see Thomas Aquinas, STh I-II, 26 4). To *will* the good of the other for the other is to simply *will* the other's good for their benefit and *not for*

yourself. There is a tendency to speak of love as willing the good of the other while at the same time it is willing the good of the other for *yourself*. Once we start willing the good of the other for our own benefit and not for the *other*, it becomes manipulation. Many evils have been done in the name of love. People who do so believe that they were acting out of love while in actual sense, they were simply manipulating others into their subjugation in the name of love. This is where many people have become sceptical about love, especially concerning its place in education. It seems that this sceptic orientation has become the pitting hole that drowns any conversation about love and pedagogy into a reductionist quagmire, thereby resulting in not having any conversation at all. Even in that situation, love enables our hearts to be open and expansive. A heart open to love always expands, enlarges and goes through obstacles like water flowing downwards (Rohr, 2019). Being open to love is when we start willing the good of the other *for the other* which has its own reward as *love*. We do this because we are pursuing something greater – the highest good. Being drawn to the highest good is influenced by an innate attraction within us. Love therefore becomes that attraction to the highest good.

Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* (see 206), say that Socrates believes that the human person is pregnant with the yearning to pursue the highest good. This pursuit is to preserve the human immortality (see *Symposium* 207). It is the search for the absolute beauty which begins with the beauties of the earth as one is being drawn by love. Thus: "The true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upward, for the sake of ...other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going to two, ...to all forms, ...until [one] arrives at the notion of absolute beauty" (*Symposium* 211, quoted in Caranfa, 2010, p. 561). Caranfa (2010) underscores this in his synthesis of love as the centre of instruction in the *Symposium*: "Th[e] spiritual wisdom that contemplates the harmonious unity of all things is nothing but the love of beauty. To love beautiful things is essentially a desire for happiness that comes from the possession of true beauty...which is the good" (p. 566). Simone Weil, quoted by Liston (2016), argues: "At the center of the human heart, is the longing for an absolute good, a longing which is always there and never appeased by an object in this world" (p. 226). Liston (2016) comments that this yearning "for something greater than ourselves" is what Weil discovers as "the exploration of love" (p. 226), because love always urges us to engage in something beyond our ourselves. This love is understood as that which propels Socrates in pursuit of the good. He constantly pursued knowledge while simultaneously acknowledging the fact that he does not know. By the acknowledgement of his ignorance even when his contemporaries would call him a wise man, Socrates was 'being open' to know, 'being open' to the callings of wisdom. He bemoans those who claim that they know, without knowing that they know *not*. He believes that for one to live a good life, one must pursue the highest good. In pursuing the highest good, one is responding to the call of wisdom. This means one has to *love* wisdom by constantly 'being open' to know, to be wise. Thus, the person who is in love with *beauty* is known as a lover since such a person is taking part in love

(*Phaedrus* 249).³ In beholding the beauty of love, one is participating in the goal of love known as generation in beauty (see *Symposium* 206). This is the reason a philosopher is believed to be a lover of wisdom; one who beholds the beauty of love.

Dissecting the word philosophy – *philosophia*, from its Greek root – *philos* – love, and *sophia* – wisdom, philosophy therefore means love of wisdom (Mautner, 2000). To understand this means that there is an innate attraction of embracing wisdom in one's life if one is open to it. Wisdom is a way of ordering one's life according to the values of pursuing the highest good – the beautiful. This is the reason Socrates would consider himself a *gadfly* who uses wisdom to sting his contemporaries in order to bring about good conduct in the society, and this became the crux of his definition of what it means to be *noble* and *good* which leads to a *good life* (Kolakowski, 2008). The human person who is living a good life is one who is in love with wisdom by being *open* to the attraction of the highest good with oneself and with one another. This is what is known as the Socratic way. It means being drawn to the highest good as you strive to live a good life with the help of the people you encounter in your life. It goes both ways. As you are striving to help others in their pursuit of the highest good, they are inadvertently doing the same for you.

Love..., What the Ancient Greeks Mean

Alain de Botton, in his 2016 talk on love at the Sydney Opera House (2020), argued that ancient Greeks developed an understanding of love that is based on the "... admiration of the perfect sides of another human being" which includes the virtues, the accomplishments, the character and the qualities of a person (34:13). He states that for the ancient Greeks,

...the word love is reserved for admiration of what is virtuous and accomplished in another person. And for the ancient Greeks, the whole notion of love is that love should be a process of mutual education in which two people under the auspices of love undertake to educate one another to become better versions of themselves. And they do this not to be cruel, not as a way of bringing each other down, but because they have the sincerest best interests of the other at their heart. And therefore, love is a process whereby a teacher and a pupil are constantly rotating roles. Everyone is the teacher, and everyone is the pupil at certain points and has lots of things to take on board. This is not a sign that love has been abandoned, it is the proof that love is in action (Sydney Opera House, 2020, 34:32).

Kenkly (2019) captured this well when he described the relationship between Socrates and his student Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium*. He maintains that the relationship was not based on the attraction of Alcibiades to the wisdom of Socrates for he did not consider himself to be wise; nor the looks of Socrates, he

³ See Plato (1892). *The Dialogues of Plato*, volume 1, translated by B. Jowett. London: Oxford University Press, for references of *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*.

was considered odd and strange. Rather, the relationship was based on the *incomparableness* of Socrates (*atopos*), of not being able to be identified by Alcibiades with all the known categories common among teachers of his time. It was the *Otherness* of the *Other* that caused the relationship (Kenklies, 2019). So, there was this state of being in *ec-stasis* – being in a higher degree of awareness whenever Alcibiades was in the presence of Socrates his teacher (Kenklies, 2019). In this state, something was happening, both the teacher and the student were being drawn to the highest good as they encounter one another in their pursuit of good life. In the words of Kenklies (2019):

The teacher is attracted to the emptiness of the student and the infinite potentiality of the future; the student is attracted to the completeness of the teacher and the infinite actuality of the past; and it is the moment that is the present in which past and future meet and the new future begins to unfold on the foundations of the past – a process of meeting and unfolding that is called *education*... (pp. 554-555).

Therefore, the goal of education in Plato's *Symposium* is “the comprehension of the idea of the good, that is the idea of ideas – something that not even the teacher has actually achieved when entering the relationship” (Kenklies, 2019 p. 555). This goal is not always understood by both the teacher and the student at the beginning, and yet the attraction draws them to the idea of the good. Kenklies (2019) explains:

[The] teacher and [the] student are attracted to each other as *atopoi* for each other, and together they are drawn to the great *atopos* of the idea of the good, connected in their desire to relate to the seemingly incomprehensible, to something that can only be vaguely prefigured at the beginning of the pedagogical adventure. Or, in yet other words, what constitutes the pedagogical triangle in the first place is the state of being an *atopos* for each other – the teacher for the student, the student for the teacher, and the idea of the good for both, the student and teacher; and it is a pedagogical relationship because the person recognised and acting as teacher (Socrates) engages with the student's (Alcibiades') relation to the *atopos* (Idea of the Good) in order to support changing it for the better, i.e. improving it (p. 555).

In the relationship of Socrates and Alcibiades as described by Kenklies (2019), we can see that the *atopos* acts as what could be called a magnetic attraction that engages them to pursue the idea of the good. This magnetic attraction is love. Love was the very force that was attracting them to the idea of the good and as such acting as *atopoi* for each of them. Love is the energy attracting *all things to all things*; it is the physical energy and structure of the Universe (see, Teilhard de Chardin, 1962; Rohr, 2019). Therefore, in Socrates and Alcibiades, their desire to pursue the idea of the good was love attracting them to *will* the good of the other for the *other* without knowing that in *willing* this good for the other, they are being rewarded with a life that is constantly being changed for their own benefit. In other words, love was its

reward, because it implies living in this state where love constantly pushes you as *atopos* to keep improving while pursuing the idea of the good.

When I came to understand this Socratic way, it changed my pedagogical approach and my philosophy of life. It became the springboard for embracing a philosophy of love in my teaching approach. As Harðarson (2019) concurs, teachers have the opportunity to develop practical wisdom through their work if they work towards the flourishing of their students. I now know that I must engage passionately in my pedagogy with the idea of the good. This involves recognising the inherent goodness in every student. It opened my eyes to the mutual process of engaging with my students in a way that they too are teaching me something that I need to learn. Assiter (2013) puts it well while commenting on Kierkegaard's approach to teaching. She says, "Kierkegaard...encouraged teachers ... to be passionate about the subject matter and about the process of learning, but also, ...to recognize that they are learners as well. Teaching, ... ought to be 'a genuinely Socratic approach' where the teacher is learning as well" (p. 262). The role of a teacher through this lens of "Socratic fashion" guarantees "a mutual process of development" (Assiter, 2013, p. 263). The understanding of a mutual process of development opened my eyes to the immense potentialities that are at the heart of this Socratic approach. It improved my pedagogy on how I could teach my students whose worldviews were totally different from the worldview of teaching that I was trained in, and it helped to enhance my relationship with them.

Coming Full Circle...

In the days that followed my outburst with my student, I began to reflect on how to engage better with him and the rest of my students. *Can there be a recourse to a philosophy of love in the face of a poor pedagogy even after the feeling of hurt by the student and possibly others in my class?* At first, it was a feeling of shame on my part and on the part of the student that engulfed the classroom. Shame that I had failed my student, and the shame of intellectual weakness that my student experienced. This shame caused a great suffering for both of us and for the rest of the students. It was hard teaching the students in the conditions that caused my frustration at the beginning, but it felt more difficult having to teach them when none of them were courageous to ask or answer any questions in the classroom for fear they might get it wrong.

In one of our lessons, I had to stop the lesson to speak to their hearts. Recognising now that I was in a time and space of 'poor pedagogy', I had to submit myself to the experience. "A poor pedagogy does not promise profits. There is nothing to win (no return), no lessons to be learned. However, such a pedagogy is generous: it gives time and space, the time and space of experience and of thought" (Masschelein, 2010, p. 49). The generous nature of the space and time of a poor pedagogy meant that I saw an opportunity to connect to the soul level of my students. I had to get out of my head and let the soul (self) be commanded by the experience, an experience that a poor pedagogy offers (Masschelein, 2010). It gave me the grace to be humble because a poor pedagogy offers the means to take the vulnerable position, to be

uncomfortable and to being exposed (Masschelian, 2010). In that vein, I apologised for the way I talked to the student and the hurt I may have caused him and the rest of the students. It was a simple and humbling gesture, but I never realised how much it meant for the student and the rest of his classmates. Given the distinguished power and authority that teachers possess in the school, it was uncommon to see a teacher, acknowledge that he had done something wrong.

It was a novel experience for the students, but one that opened the door for a whole new level of engagement and commitment to be better students. For me, it was initially a period of suffering that later opened the door to a philosophy of love. As though ignited, my students sparked to life as they began to communicate during lessons and engage in a passionate discussion about their own growth and development. It was a reverberating energy that assured them that they were good, and that their journey of education was going somewhere *good* and *thrilling*. Now, as I reflect on my time in the school, I realise that love was taking us to someplace new and thrilling in our pursuit of the beautiful, the highest good; and as their teacher, I was acting as *atopoi* for them, while they were doing the same for me as my students. When my time at the school came to an end, it was emotional to say goodbye, but the reassurance was the knowledge that we have transformed each other, and that the legacy created would have impacted their life in a deeper and meaningful way as it did mine.

Who could have thought that the very thing that caused great pain was the necessary suffering that opened the door to renewed love for my students? Who could have thought that a humbling experience was the very *Socratic way* that helped me to learn how to be a better teacher? Who could have imagined that the atmosphere that caused some resistance gave the right amount of friction that moved my students to open their hearts to the inherent goodness in them, and thus, helped them to begin to enjoy the journey of their pursuit of the highest good? Who could have sensed that a poor pedagogy would give the opportunity to be *in* the experience that would offer growth and transformation for my students and for myself?

Rohr (2019) highlighted what is at the heart of every human experience when he argued that there are only two normal and primary paths of transformation strong enough to cause a lasting change in us: namely, great suffering and great love. He maintains that love and suffering interplay in creating a deep experience of life by helping us to be in touch with what it means to be human; for “those who love deeply are committing themselves to eventual suffering, [and] those who suffer often become the greatest lovers” (Rohr, 2013, para. 3). Suffering has a way of breaking down our defence mechanism and opening our eyes to the reality that we too can make mistakes and we too can learn from it. Love has a way of expanding our hearts that we too can act from our deepest and innate capacity of willing the good of the other for the *other*. Once we learn this, then we ought not to be afraid of our shadow self, because it is teaching us something that we do not know yet about ourselves since it is hidden in our blind spots. When we have gone through the crucible of suffering and love, then we can in turn offer love to others. In this regard, Rohr (2021) explains:

We can only transform people to the degree that we have been transformed. We can only lead others as far as we ourselves have gone. We have no ability to affirm or to communicate to another person that they are good or special until we know it strongly ourselves. Once we get our own ‘narcissistic fix,’ as I call it, then we can stop worrying about being center stage. We then have plenty of time and energy to promote other people’s empowerment and specialness. Only beloved people can pass on belovedness (para. 5).

This principle buttresses the famous saying that you cannot give what you do not have. As teachers, we ought to see our students in their unique self and capabilities. We must open the eyes within to be able to see them. Liston (2016) argues:

It is not unusual for any of us to overlook the actual and potential ‘good’ that exists within others. And, it is not unusual for teachers to mistakenly perceive the struggles and qualities of their students. As teachers we frequently see the world and students through our own anxieties and fears. When teaching is construed (for us or by us) as controlling and directing others, discerning this good is not a priority or a need. When teaching is defined solely as drilling and skilling kids to achieve higher standardized test scores, we do not honour students. But, when teaching is viewed as a way to help others take part in the challenges and pleasures of understanding our political, cultural, and natural worlds, and become more capable in the transforming these worlds, then we frequently need to affirm and understand (as much as we can) our students’ goodness (p. 226).

By being mindful of our issues and negative projections, we can begin to *see* our students as inherently good. Liston (2008) affirms this as he proposes *attentive love* as a pedagogical ancillary. He asserts:

In the attempt to connect student and the world, attentive love entails the following: the presumption that good exists within each student; the attempt to discern and see our students more clearly and justly; and the understanding that in order to see more clearly we need to reduce the noise of our selves. Attentive love in teaching is frequently a struggle and a sacrifice. It is a struggle and a sacrifice to see beyond our egoistic selves so as to see our students more clearly (p. 389).

This is the step we need to take to reach out to our students and to reinforce our belief to that which is good. It is a desire that will conflict with other desires, but “a yearning that defines, in part, what it means to be human” (Liston, 2016, p. 226). Liston (2008) therefore affirms that,

[c]ritical pedagogy with its intellectual and emotional interrogation of the world, – when pursued with depth, vigor, and pleasure – can engage and refine students’ attentive qualities. And in order to enable this engagement, teachers need to assume, honour, and pursue the good that lies within each student (p. 389-390).

Seeking the good in our students is a struggle and a challenge, it is a burden we carry as teachers, but it could also be a privilege that we get to help our students take part in the challenges and pleasures of transforming our world.

As I reflected on my experience with my students in the school, I realised that what my students needed was not someone who would subject them as objects of an educational outcome. They did not need someone who would prioritize standardized tests and grades over honouring them as human beings, they needed someone who could *see* them as human beings capable of growing, capable of becoming better, and capable of being loved and seen in all their vulnerabilities and weaknesses, and in all their gifts and uniqueness. In truth, there needs to be a 'stepping out' of our self-centredness in order to see the otherness of a child, and thus, help such a child. On this, Saevi and Husevaag (2009) explain:

Without the possibility of stepping outside of social conventions or to permanently overcome our self-centred striving for sameness and synchronization of views and wills, our challenge as adults and pedagogues is to become more attentive to the experience of the child and to acknowledge the child's utter otherness as the basic precondition for pedagogical practice (p. 40).

Moving out of my self-centredness in my inadvertent ways of conforming my students to the matrix of domination in the school was something that confronted my inability to *see* the *otherness* of my students. It helped me to be mindful of how I could be blind to the *otherness* of the child.

Kalisha (2015), in reflecting about his own experience says that students yearn "for an adult who could see them for who they really are – human beings, incomplete, ambiguous and on the road to self-discovery. They needed someone they could talk with and someone who could listen to them. One who cared for them, one they could rely on" (p. 67). He further argues that there is a certain sense of vulnerability that this awakens in both the teacher and the students, a vulnerability that "sees the other as, like oneself, incomplete, ambivalent, ambiguous and in need of help," but it is one that shows "the true meaning of encountering human beings" (p. 67). When the *other* encounters you in your vulnerabilities, your story begins to connect with their story, and in a moment of suffering and vulnerability, great love emerges. The emergence of this love is what brought me to that place of awakening where I came to see that love "engages the one loving. This engagement is created through the love for the other and it means that it is not my willingness to love but rather by my willingness to be engaged by love, which is the forming structure" (Hoveid & Finne, 2014, p. 255). My willingness to be *engaged by love* is what helped me to be vulnerable, to face my fears of letting down my defence mechanism and to be able to walk with love through *willing* the good of my students. Walking with love meant a passionate engagement with my students in what it means to be human. Part of being human is learning how to act with justice and love which is difficult and uncertain, but one that breeds joy because it springs from love (Griffiths & Murray, 2017). As Assiter (2013) observes, "[u]nderlying [a] passionate engagement with the process of learning is a deep commitment to justice and equality and to promoting a philosophy of love" (p. 261). This is the dynamism of love, one that

is liberating. It is a dynamism of love that sets one free to triumph. Merrill (2007, p. 112) summarises this well in her poem:

Who will enter the Heart of Love?
 Who will open their hearts and
 know the Beloved?
 Who dares to face their fears, to
 break down the prison walls,
 to walk with Love?
 O grant us help to answer the call,
 strengthen us with pure resolve!
 With the Beloved we shall triumph;
 With Love we shall be free!

The freedom that love offers is one that is transformative. But this transformative power can only be experienced when one is willing to *will* the good of the other for the *other*. This is the way we are meant to be, this is the dynamic nature of our universe, and hence, this is the way we can create the world we all like to live in.

Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that love is integral to our being because it is the physical energy of the universe. It implies therefore that love is central to our educational experience since we are human beings living in a human world with human problems. Love is at the core of what makes us human, and it expands our heart and enables us to grow, especially in difficult times, because love is like water that flows downwards through obstacles. One way the current debate about love and its place in education has taken is to toe the line of *either-or* approach. This approach sees love from a dualistic lens and as something that is extraneous to our being. Another way is the shallow approach that overlooks love as part of our shared human experience in moments of difficulty and thus, forgets that love will always find a way to create future possibilities in moments of suffering. These approaches have serious implications for education because they create the atmosphere that love is too dangerous to talk about in education. For those who do talk about love in education, it creates the atmosphere that they are being too ‘mushy’ with their approach to love in education. I beg to differ in these approaches. Why? Because love includes all and involves all the parts of what makes us human and therefore cannot be relegated to the background in education. *If education is done for the good of the other, then love is essentially and existentially integral in education because love is for the good of the other.* This is what differentiates love from manipulation which has been the cause of all the harms done in the name of love, hence its contention in education.

In this paper, I have tried to explore what love means in *willing* the good of the other for the *other*, and how this understanding is central to the Socratic way that shaped the ancient Greeks understanding of love. I have done this by suggesting that the dynamically rhythmic nature of love as the physical energy of the universe

pulls one and another in pursuit of the highest good while improving their lives. This pursuit is rewarded with love because it is a state of life that love acts as *atopoi* for those involved. I have demonstrated this through an intersubjective reflection of a personal teaching experience that offered a time and space of a ‘poor pedagogy’ which became central to my teaching endeavour that is transformative. The ideas presented in this paper articulates an understanding that hints at *an openness to love* and its place in our educational endeavours, because love influences our actions and human condition as people who are *in* and *with* the world. Nonetheless, the practical steps in this direction require further work, I have therefore embarked on exploring these further through my PhD research. My task will be to look for better ways to inculcate a philosophy of love in curriculums and to encourage and promote student’s wellbeing and empowerment. I do this by looking at the feasibility of embedding the Family Wellbeing (FWB) soft skills approach in the curriculum of a university access course. The FWB Program has been used to empower and inculcate love, self-awareness, resilience, responsibility and positive mindset among people in the past (Tsey, 2019; Tsey et al., 2018). Its’ core principles focus on a heart-centred approach to relationships and learning, whereby qualities such as speaking from the heart, right use of will and power, unconditional love, wisdom, compassion, understanding, joy, acceptance, goodwill, humility, freedom, humour, focusing on the positive in others and oneself, seeing the deeper meaning and deeper needs involved in conflict, trusting of intuition, desiring to do what is right for all in the pursuit of the highest good, looking at the bigger picture, promoting balance, harmony, creativity, healing and unity, are fostered (see Tsey, 2019; Tsey et al., 2018). This implies that all situations are avenues for learning (Tsey, 2019; Tsey, 2018). My desire would be that these qualities help both teachers and students in navigating their professional and personal lives. I do hope that this serves as a starting point in the conversation about love and education that touches the deeper level of our soul as educators, and what it means to be human.

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Conflict of interest I declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the content of this article.

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