

Personalised education as a school community of friendship

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Abstract

Many teachers believe that becoming friends with their pupils compromises their status as teachers because they regard friendship as a role that is incompatible with that status. However, to consider friendship as a typical relationship or social interaction does not reflect the classical idea of friendship. In a classical approach to friendship, a distinction is made between friendship as an intimate *concordant duality* and its manifestation or operative exercise, which is by necessity social and is regulated by what is right and fair in the exchange of goods typical of every community.

Therefore, a school community may become a community of friendship to the extent that its educational purposes are fostered and strengthened by friendship, and what is right and fair in relationships and exchange of goods is respected.

Personalised education can flourish in a school community of friendship because the reciprocity inherent to friendship emphasises the personal character of pupils and teachers, and promotes the capacity for coexistence of the students, which is a pre-eminent aim of personalised education.

Key words: educational relationship, fairness, personalised education, community of friends, social type.

1. Introduction

As García Garrido notes in relation to *personalised education*, “the prevalent view of what these two words mean when they are put together is vague and shallow” (2014, p. 23), possibly because in many cases the attempt to personalise the school setting is not based on a pedagogical attitude but rather a strategy of *customisation* of services that is typical of our time (Hartley, 2007, pp. 632-633; Peters, 2009, pp. 620-621). If, however, following the Spanish educationalist, García Hoz, we understand personalised education as an “educational process that depends on the person” (1993, p. 31) and as “education referring to the person” (1993, p. 32), the proposal goes beyond changing how a service is provided and it reacts to the need to insist on the personal character of the protagonist of the education and to be consistent with this in practice. It therefore includes a *vindication* of the personal character of the student that results, in the educational endeavour, in a dialogic and cooperative pedagogical model (McLaughlin, Talbert, Kahne, & Powell, 1990, p. 234). Personalised education considered in this sense is a pedagogical attitude that places its emphasis “on the student as a person, on the educator as a person, and on the continuous interaction between them” (Vélez Escobar, 2003, p. 2). But what does “placing the emphasis on the person” mean?

As Saint Thomas Aquinas notes, the word “person” is a name that represents dignity (1888, pp. 331–332 [*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 29, a. 3, ad 2]). This means that knowing a person as such is not equivalent to having a description of a reality that can be identified through a series of traits but rather to giving due recognition

to that person (Spaemann, 2006, pp. 16–17). This recognition is not generic and does not respond to a logical need. Instead, it is freely granted by *synderesis* (Sellés, 2008, p. 155; 158; 163). But the other's personal being is only affirmed when its correspondence is expected, that is to say, when it is invested with the same dignity as the person who accepts it. If the person is not recognised as an *equal* the personal character is not asserted, or, at least, this assertion remains very vulnerable or precarious since the other is left exposed to unilateral initiatives from outside. For this very reason, personalised education should not be viewed as an indiscriminate service in which that correspondence or duality of initiatives is not respected.

This correspondence or duality of reciprocal initiatives is, however, inherent to friendship. The key to understanding friendship, both in classical authors such as Aristotle or Cicero and in contemporary ones such as Leonardo Polo, is correspondence, because a friend is always a friend of *its* friend (Pérez Guerrero, 2020, pp. 302-303). Friends are replicas of each other, that is to say, otherness of initiatives that mutually accept and react to one another, and in doing so, are situated on the same plane (Polo, 2015a, p. 63). The heart of the classical notion of *philia* is, therefore, the mutual recognition of the intimacy of the other (Rodríguez Valls, 1991, p. 164).

Without loving correspondence of friendship in its classical sense, personalised education takes the risk of losing its anthropological roots, and that emphasis on the personal character of the students and teachers weakens. If this is the case, personalised education is reduced to any of its methodological strategies, as is the case of *personalised learning* or *personalised teaching* consequently losing that personal encounter between teachers and students that gives personal significance to education. When there is no friendship, the personal character of the students and teachers hides behind their social types.

For this reason, in order to avoid misunderstandings, it would perhaps be advisable to use the term “personal education” to refer to this pedagogical concept. However, keeping the expression “personalised education” is justified by the fact that it is to some extent a reaction to a previous process of depersonalisation that occurred in the school setting (García Hoz, 1993, p. 22).

Personalised education eschews unilateralism, treating the student as an *equal* but an equal who must be advanced. Advancing students educationally is not so much a case of transmitting something to them as of increasing their ability to correspond. In other words, “it is not a case of meeting the needs of others as of ensuring that the other ceases to be in a precarious position and can turn towards others” (Polo, 2015b, p. 63). Personalised education seeks to advance students so that they emerge from their childhood isolation and become more present in the world, increasing their capacity to coexist (Polo, 2016, p. 486).

Consequently, friendship appears to us not only as a desirable breeding ground for personalised education, but also as an educational aim, since helping to increase students' capacity for coexistence and free contribution is equivalent to increasing their capacity to exercise friendship in the most perfect way. We devote the second section of this study to friendship as a fertile breeding ground and a pre-eminent aim for personalised education.

In that regard, the key concept that can provide a philosophical basis for a theory of personalised education is friendship. An education that aims to recover its personal character must, therefore, achieve a correct link between the equality, based on mutual *philia*, that marks the friendly encounter between the teacher and the student, and the asymmetrical and functional educational relationships that typify the school community. The main purpose of this article is therefore to help clarify this duality, which appears as a keystone for a theory of personal education looked at in this way. Friendship is not primarily or principally a type of social

relationship or a typical way of relating. When seen in this way, friendship becomes incompatible with the educational relationship, as Jover shows (1991, pp. 194 and passim; Martínez, Esteban, Jover & Payà, 2016, pp. 38-41). Without its operational and social manifestations, which only occur in a community, friendship would, as Aristotle says, merely be goodwill: an inactive friendship or one that is not exercised (1894, [1167a10–12])¹. Friendship requires signs of friendship (*philika*), that is to say, concrete actions with a social meaning that substantiate and enrich it, but friendship should not be reduced to its manifestation, among other reasons, because false evidence of friendship can be given. Friendships for pleasure or utility, which are only friendships by similarity (*kath' homoioteta*), can be mistaken for true friendship (*alethes philia*).

Until this point is clarified, it is difficult to consider personalised education as that in which friendship takes the form of educational relationships (Ruehl, 2008), or that in which educational relationships become operative manifestations of friendship.

Therefore, our first step is to provide an explanation of why friendship between teachers and pupils is essential in personalised education and thus why the school community should become a community of friendship if we opt for a personalised education. After that, we must set out the Aristotelian doctrine according to which friendship is not a typical relationship but the ultimate *raison d'être* of human communities. Finally, we briefly analyse several critical aspects of this community that can determine especially what is right and fair within this community.

2. The value of friendship in personalised education: Learning through friendship

We must now show why friendship between teachers and students must be present in personalised education, so that it can be regarded as a school community of friendship.

It is not simply a matter of providing evidence for the many educational benefits of a possible friendship between teacher and student in the context of personalised education, but rather of calling into question whether, without this friendship, a true personalised education is achievable in the sense we have described from the beginning.

The Introduction to this article pointed out the first and foremost reason behind this question, noting that without the correspondence inherent to friendship, without the mutual recognition of the intimacy of the other, the personal affirmation of students and teachers is, to say the least, vulnerable or precarious. Now we must try to explain this idea better.

Furthermore, friendship between teacher and student is also needed to achieve the educational aspiration that characterises personalised education, namely, to increase the capacity for personal coexistence of the students, which is equivalent to improving their capacity for friendship.

- a) Friendship as a breeding ground for personalised education: The experience of friendship as intuition of the person

¹ We will quote from this edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, using the initials “NE” followed by the Bekker numbering. The *Eudemian Ethics* will be cited with the initials “EE” followed by this numbering. We have used these translations: (2019). *Nicomachean Ethics* (translated by T. Irwin). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett; (1981). *Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 20* (translated by H. Rackham). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

In order to provide an education that takes place in the realm of a personal encounter, teachers and students must learn *from* friendship, since “from friendship we move on to knowledge of the *self* and of the *other self*” (Sellés, 2008, p. 163). Friendship is of methodological or, as Kristjánsson states, epistemological value for self-knowledge (2020), but not just because friends and frank dialogue give us a privileged view of ourselves, so that we can speak of a *critical friendship* (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Schuck & Russell, 2005; Bognar & Krumes, 2017), or because we see ourselves in our friends somewhat like looking in a mirror, owing to our rapport with them, but because the personal character, both of the friend and of ourselves, can be sensed in the free and loving correspondence typical of the *concordant duality* that is friendship. Friendship reveals that we are not isolated, closed beings but that we continue being with our friends and *through* them (Smith Pangle, 2003, p. 153). The person is a reality that is incompatible with isolation due to its *coexistential* character, and this character that the experience of friendship reveals to us is very difficult to note in the absence of friendship. Accordingly, as Rodríguez Sánchez states, “Friendship is a value that calls for the acknowledgement of the other value: that of the person” (2000, p. 226).

The Socratic and Aristotelian notion of friendship seems to contain a paradox in that virtuous and wise people, who are best suited for friendship need it the least because they are the most self-sufficient (Hitz, 2011, pp. 2–3). Indeed, friendship is a good that we enjoy precisely thanks to the friend and, in this sense, it is not an individual achievement but rather a good that depends on the other. However, this is not to the detriment of the self-sufficiency typical of the virtuous person, given that this self-sufficiency is not based on being independent from the *other self* but rather on respect for medial goods. Accordingly, friendship does not reveal the *need* for others, because others are not medial goods. Instead, it shows that all of us are radically made for coexisting with others. Therefore, the moral experience of friendship becomes an *affective notice* of the person (Polo, 2016, pp. 508–509). Rejecting intimate friendship, as the Epicureans seemed to do because they regarded it as a source of worries, not only destroys the possibility of pursuing virtue in common (Smith Pangle, 2003, p. 110), but it also directly works against the *coexistential* character of the person.

Without the experience of friendship, personal recognition would be extremely precarious. Without this experience, it would be hard to recognise others habitually in their irreducible, irreplaceable character, because our objective comprehension, which always contains a common moment, tends to regard them as cases, examples or representatives of a class or type (Jaspers, 1958, p. 453). This happens in schools when a student is treated as *another student*, as another example of the “student” type. But a person *as such* is distinct from all other.

The experience of friendship emphasises the irreplaceable character of the person for the same reason that it emphasises its *coexistential* character. Each person as such is a distinct person because each one joins others opening new spaces of coexistence without filling a previous void that could be occupied by others. For this reason: “The irreducibility of the person is incompatible with its isolation or separation” (Polo, 2016a, p. 110).

Without anyone who can accept us and respond to us as equals, without friends that break this intimate isolation, it would be difficult to recognise our own personal being and the personal being of others.

b) Friendship as an educational aim of personalised education

From the point of view of personalised education, the school period can be regarded as a time when young people should be initiated into social types as necessary vehicles for personal encounter as thanks to these types students can organize their coexistence with others. The school community therefore becomes a *sui*

generis type of community in which friendship plays a very special role, given that it not only acts as a link between its members, but also as a good that it attempts to promote.

In an article from his youth, Popper advises teachers to treat students not as social types but as what at that time he calls *individualities*, meaning with this “each individual being, seen in its singularity” (2019, p. 1). The *fundamental position* educators must adopt in front of learners is to regard them not as social types but as individuals, since they must help them “acquire a full understanding of their relationship to society”, to “find themselves in their position as one type facing another”, and to be clear that the teacher is also subject to this social need for types (pp. 4–5).

Teachers must help their students to adopt social types consciously and committedly, keeping suitable distance from them. For this very reason, they should not treat their students as consolidated social types, given that students are only starting out in society and its types. Young people’s educational initiation into the human world risks failure if they do not experience it as a personal task, but as the role of a social type.

Taking the person into account beyond the social type can be difficult because of the *unstinting* nature of this social manifestation of the person. Society is vital for personal manifestation (Polo 2016a, p. 554), because having *one’s own voice* requires taking a position in relation to others in a cultural space of speakers. Without this location, the self would remain mute and unseen to others; we could not speak of it and it could not be included in a project or a conversation. But defining oneself by one’s social situation means condemning oneself to live in the *demonstrative pronoun* without authentic self and becoming identified with a public image or a hollow social frame.

To initiate young people through education successfully in the social types and the meaningfulness of their structure entails getting them to understand social types as garments that make people recognisable, identifiable, and allowing them a personal exchange of benefits. Therefore, it is equivalent to initiating them in friendship. When seen as necessary channels for participation and communication, social structures are seen not as being rigid, but rather porous and flexible (Albrecht-Crane, 2005, p. 494). The social type allows the person to *flourish* in a common space where a certain *social grammar* must be respected, but this type does not stop being a vehicle for interpersonal coexistence. The reason for the existence of types is interpersonal communication: “if there are no types, coexistence cannot be organised, but the aim of society is not simply coordination of types” (Polo, 2015a, 154). The distinction between types leads to an interplay of mutual benefits because they all have something to give and something to accept in a way that is right and fair. That is to say, they allow everyone to work in favour of others (2015a, p. 243). There is, however, an art to this interplay of benefits that must be learnt, as we will see in the next section.

Students must take ownership of the social type. They must integrate it into their own being, so that shared moment that every type involves can become a means of interpersonal communication, rather than an anonymous superposition that conceals the irreducible character of person and isolates people (Polo, 2015, p. 66). Integrating the social type into one’s own being means accepting it as a channel for free contribution, and so the initiation into types takes the form of learning *about* friendship: learning to exercise friendship, to give and accept *through* the type and its systemic complexity of roles, in other words, learning about what is right and fair, as we will see in the next section, because “to seek the proper way of associating with a friend is to seek for a particular kind of justice. In fact, the whole of justice in general is in relation to a friend, for what is just is just for certain persons; and persons who are partners, and a friend is a partner, either in one’s family or in one’s life” (EE 1242a19–23).

However, as in the case of ethical virtues, the acquisition or learning of friendship is inseparable from its practice. Simulated or hypothetical situations that might act as training or instruction are ineffective in this case as they do not intimately involve the subject. Only through friendship, through its exercise, can one learn to be a friend and be a better friend, in the same way that one can only become a fair person by practising fairness. In this sense, friendship is also a virtue, as Aristotle or Saint Thomas Aquinas say, however, its exercise is only possible with friends. Therefore, it would not make much sense to try to help students acquire this virtue without offering oneself as *that friend* without which is not possible to exercise that virtue.

3. Community as a structure that governs the exchange of benefits in Aristotle

The next step is to justify why social relationships can be considered as different socially instituted modes for channelling the exchange of benefits and thus make friendship operational. This idea may seem excessively optimistic, but it is Aristotle's point of view. By distinguishing between friendship and its exercise or operational expression, Aristotle offers us the key to articulating friendship and social relationships, including educational relationships.

Aristotle states that communities (*koinonai*) are distinctively human in comparison with other forms of animal groupings, because true otherness only exists among humans and this otherness means a division within the good (EE 1241b12–24). Humans must coordinate amongst themselves because they do not form part of a whole as animals that are like parts of a species; instead they are *equals*. The idea of justice arises precisely as that which connects this equality to the break within the good. Accordingly, in every community there is some sort of justice and friendship (NE 1159b 25–26), and what is right and fair in how goods are exchanged and shared is what determines the different types of community.

Nonetheless, sharing goods is good in itself. If goods, however many one had, could not be shared with others, as Aristotle says, they would be of little use in living a full life (NE 1155a5–11). When one no longer needs anything, one continues trying to do good for others (EE 1244b17–19), so, from this perspective, the *raison d'être* of the community, more than satisfying needs, is the desire to share goods with *one's equal*. In this way, nobody would want to live without friends because the favours or benefits (*euergesiai*) are done above all (*malista*) and most commendably (*epainetotate*) by friends. One can do good for a baby or an animal, for example, but it does not make sense to say that this does them a favour, because the favour must be able to be requested, refused, accepted and even returned, and this requires an otherness of initiatives *in duality* that is characteristic of a genuinely human community.

However, as Seneca affirms, “one should not cast them at random, and it is not right to waste anything, much less benefits; for unless they be given with judgement, they cease to be benefits, and, may be called by any other name you please” (1935, pp. 9–10). In other words, some gifts are inappropriate or out of place according to judgement. Not all types of good should be shared, and they should not just be shared any which way, and this relates to what is just, fair and suitable in each community, according to Aristotle. From this point of view, *shareability* becomes a key notion within his ethics (Brewer, 2005, pp. 722–723).

Accordingly, given that correspondence, that is a characteristic of friendship, requires that the goodwill of friends should be noted or apparent (NE 1155b34–1156a5), friendship requires certain established channels of goodwill and so can acquire different forms in different types of community.

Friendship should not be regarded as one type of community among others because the good sought in the case of friendship is the friends themselves, “for when a good person becomes a friend he becomes a good

for his friend” (NE 1157b32-33); but friends are not goods that can be disposed of or shared but rather are those *for whom* medial goods are shared. Character friends are so because of or in virtue of themselves (*di'autous*), not because they are useful or provide pleasure (NE 1157b1-3). Friendships for utility or pleasure are accidental friendships (*kata symbebekos*), as in them we do not love the friend “in accordance with what is in his self, but according to what happens to him, that is to say, according to what is useful or pleasurable” (Saint Thomas Aquinas, 1969, p. 450 [VIII, 3, 73-75]). Speaking of these three types of friendship in Aristotle (i.e., friendship based on utility, pleasure and goodness) while ignoring this radical distinction can lead to misinterpretation of his doctrine. For Aristotle, friendship based on virtue or goodness is the only friendship *per se*, while friendship by interest or for pleasure is only friendship by similarity (EE 1244b16; NE 1157a30-31).

A friend wants his or her friend to exist and live through love for the friend itself. Aristotle says that the friend is like *another self* because one relates to a friend as to oneself. He defines this relationship as follows: just as one finds pleasure in sensing one's own existence, one also finds pleasure in sensing the existence of a friend (NE 1170b7-8; 1171b35-36). Furthermore, this pleasurable sensation (*aisthesis airete*) of the existence of the friend is refreshed when living alongside (*sytsen*) the friend (NE 1171b-36-37). It is necessary to exchange (*koinonein*) words and thoughts, which is what above all defines human coexistence, to be able to have this pleasurable sensation of the existence of the friend.

Old people or people of a morose nature who do not find pleasure in shared company (*homilia*) and interactions with others (*syntheia*) are, therefore, less given to friendship (NE 1157b36-1158a2). They are often benevolent (*eunoi*) but not friends, because while they might desire good for others, they avoid living with them. In contrast, young people (*neoi*) are drawn to friendship because they enjoy coexistence. What is distinctive about friendship, compared to inactive goodwill, is that friends enjoy sharing initiatives so that friendship promotes coexistence and shared interaction as a pleasurable good in itself, and friends try to spend their lives together (*diaguein*) (NE 1172a2-3). So, when the basic reason of a community is friendship, interaction are *signs* that manifest this friendship insofar as they refresh and intensify this rapport between friends according to which they truly relate with one another as with themselves.

Aristotle sometimes adopts the position that friendship is a type of community, for example when he says that what is just in a relationship between two friends is different from what is fair and just in the relationship between a man and a woman or between strangers, etc. (NE 1162a29). However, a transversal vision of friendship, so to speak, predominates in Aristotle because, as we have seen, justice and friendship are found in every community. Friendship can encourage different types of community, and so it appears that Aristotle does not regard friendship fundamentally as a “voluntary relationship, lacking a formal legal or contractual framework that specifically identifies particular ‘duties’ or ‘requirements’” (Healy, 2017a, p. 165). Friendship is better seen as the ultimate reason for the community when this community lacks specific requirements and obligations, but it can encourage different types of community by transforming their specific duties and requirements into channels of benevolence.

Regardless of any inequalities that might exist, for example between teachers and students or between parents and their children, friendship always entails an equalisation because the virtue of friends consists of loving (*philein*) one another, as “this above all is how unequals, as well as equals, can be friends, since this is how they can be equalized” (NE 1159a34-1159b2). Friends match one another in love (“*pares in amore*”, Cicero says of them) (1989, § 32). The principal equality of friendship is found in mutual *philia*.

The transversal character of friendship makes it possible to speak of friendship between relatives and friendship between strangers (NE 1162a8–9). Even among foreigners “in our travels we can see how every human being is akin (*oikeios*) and beloved (*philos*) to a human being” (NE 1155a21–22). Aristotle draws attention to the fact that, in the family community, children do not return parents’ love until they reach a certain age, and so the mutual and manifest goodwill, typical of friendship, cannot appear until this moment. However, it would be absurd to think that the family community is replaced by another when parents and children match each another in love. Rather, it means that this community’s specific requirements can now be seen as favours. A favour is something that is not done by obligation, *even if it is an obligation*, but for love of the beneficiary and without annulling its initiative.

Friendship is a reciprocal goodwill that becomes operative and manifest through intimacy: “goodwill is inactive friendship”, which when it lasts and reaches the point of intimacy (*synetheia*), may become proper friendship (NE 1167a10–12). Goodwill can be something sudden and superficial, as happens in contests when the spectator “acquires goodwill for [the competitors], and wants what they want, but would not co-operate with them in any action” (NE 1166b34–1167a2). If we wish to move from goodwill to friendship, it is necessary to reach intimacy, and this intimacy is always socially structured.

For this reason, educational relationships can be considered as operative, socially structured manifestations of friendship within the educational community made up of teachers and students.

4. The fair exchange of benefits in the school community of friendship

After having shown that personalised education must be encouraged by friendship between students and teachers, and revealed, according to Aristotle, that human community can be understood as a structure that governs the exchange of benefits or samples of friendship, we will now briefly consider what is right and fair within a school community internally animated by this friendship.

Personalised education can flourish in the community of friendship made up of students and teachers which has its own physiognomy, its particular structure that governs the exchange of benefits. And the meaning of fair within that peculiar community is determined by the correct articulation between friendship as an intimate rapport that equalizes friends and asymmetrical educational relationships. In this section we identify some critical aspects of this articulation that can determine especially what is fair and appropriate within a school community of friendship.

It is therefore not a matter, as we have said, of analysing the benefits or goods of friendship for personalised education, but rather reviewing these critical points on which that peculiar community depends.

a) Educational aims in the personalised school community: helping the freedom of newcomers

As we have seen, the typical link between student and teacher in personalised education is very distinctive given its character of initiation to social types as a channel through which students can organize their coexistence and free contribution to others, thereby making their liberty more effective in their lives (García Hoz, 1967, p. 4). Personalised education is “a free exercise that serves freedom” (1993, p 106).

This educational aim is what fundamentally determines what is right, fair and just in an educational community built on friendship, which assumes that the social and cultural initiation must always be at the service of the liberty of the students and of their ability to coexist and join in with others. Personalised education attempts to ensure that students acquire resources that perfect their own being, what Aristotle calls habits (*hexis*):

technical skill (*techne*), practical wisdom (*phronesis*), scientific knowledge (*episteme*), contemplation (*theoria*), etc. These educational aims are compatible with friendship because all those habits are intimate resources at the service of free coexistence. Accordingly, the functional educational relationship and friendship are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the former is actually strengthened by the latter, and the latter is exercised in a privileged way thanks to the former.

b) Due respect for social standards: Equality in friendship and inequality in virtues and requirements

The teacher–student friendship is an example of the friendships Aristotle described as “based on superiority” (*kath’ hyperochen*). As we have seen, friends match or align with one another fundamentally because of their manifest mutual *philia*, and it is not right that, in interaction, similar benefits are demanded when they are related or coordinated between them by social types whose virtues and operations are very different (NE 1158b 17–18). The typical asymmetry of the relationship between teacher and student must be respected in the school community in order not to fall into an unfair interaction that dissolves or impedes friendship while also stifling hinders the achievement of educational aims. Friendship cannot move forward with an undifferentiated interaction which does not respect the coordination of roles and functions.

On the other hand, the demands inherent to the educational aims of the school community are not relaxed with friendship. On the contrary, they are reinforced because exigence and correctness, not blame, are characteristic of true friendship (NE 1159b 6–7). Cicero, for example, states that we should not be indulgent or complacent with friends (1989 §89). True loyalty between friends promotes virtue and justice, even at the risk of provoking a rupture, because, at least in the Aristotelian universe, it does not make sense to claim that “even ‘bad’ people can have (and be) good friends to some” (Healy, 2017b, p. 192), or that true friendship “can be expressed even through crime, cruelty and immorality” (Nehamas, 2010, pp. 276–277).

However, friendship requires mutual goodwill, not equality with regards to virtue. Kristjánsson speaks very accurately of a “zone of proximal development of character friendships” (2020) that legitimises the ability to speak of character friendship between people who are at different levels regarding moral development, while also allowing true ethical education understood as education in virtue. The idea that a character that grows in virtue is less friendly than one that is *already* virtuous forgets that the Aristotelian concept of virtue must be considered *in crescendo*, not as something that has been achieved (Pérez Guerrero, 2019, p. 389), since the notion of virtue is intrinsically one of development (Annas, 2011, p. 38). On the other hand, some empirical studies have shown that, even at very young ages, students value ethical virtue (obviously in the process of development) as a strong argument to justify the choice of *good friends* among classmates (Walker, Curren, & Jones, 2016).

c) Community of friendship and impartiality of the teacher

Teachers should not show a predilection some students over others. This impartiality, which is obliged not only with regards to teachers’ technical tasks, but also possible expressions of affinity or aversion towards their students, has led authors such as White (1990, pp. 88–89) to consider that teachers must avoid friendship with their pupils, even though the pupils mainly appear to see this friendship as opportune and desirable (Shuffelton, 2012, p. 211).

In fact, the precautions teachers should take to safeguard their impartiality do not affect a well understood friendship, because “true friendship (although it is unique) is never exclusionary or closed to others, and, in addition, a condition of friendship derives from it, which is to be detached” (Romero-Iribas & Martínez-Priego,

2011, p. 2250). Therefore, these precautions include avoiding exclusive friendships but not an open and inclusive community of friendship with students. In fact, authentic friendship is the best defence against inclinations and preferences, given that it transcends the level of morally irrelevant qualities and minimises or smoothens the attachments and aversions these might awaken.

Furthermore, if students expect partial and preferential treatment from their teachers, on the basis of their friendship with them, this shows that such a friendship only exists on the basis of utility or interest. Among character friends, “there will be no conflict between duties to friends and other moral duties because our character friends will not tempt or expect us to do what is immoral” (Jeske, 1997, p. 70). It is unsurprising, therefore, that, if the moral basis of friendship is disregarded to better suit an imperfect human reality, friendship appears to us as something dangerous for morality (Cocking & Kennett, 2000, p. 279 and *passim*).

Teachers should not be friends with some students and not others, but rather should be open to friendship with all, without exception. Friendship is not a zero sum game (Kristjánsson, 2020), that is to say, it is not something that must be distributed or doled out, because it does not get used up as it is given. Friendship is a good that is not possessed before it is shared; instead it is constituted when it is reciprocally granted.

If a student does not want to be friends with the teacher, then his or her liberty must clearly be respected. A forced friendship is a wooden iron. However, the teacher must always continue to offer signs of kindness, trust and appreciation, and patiently await reciprocity from the student. A good teacher must be a *polifilos*.

d) Affective proximity in the school community: Confidence without *intimacies*

According to Laín Entralgo (2012), the confidence without which the intimacy needed for true friendship cannot occur (NE 1158a 14–15), comprises trusting the friend with something regarded as important or valuable in one’s life. This is how to go into greater depth in the rapport that friendship pursues. Therefore, good teachers should not offer pre-packaged knowledge from textbooks but rather scientific interests, a passion for disciplines, valuable hobbies, experiences that enriched them, and they must naturally be open to fair reciprocity. Moreover, coexistence with young people usually gives teachers something of the openness of mind, of the optimistic outlook and of the audacity, that are often largely lost with the passing years.

The value of the goods shared by friendship, of its true benefits, is relative to the will with which it is done rather to any purported material or *objective* value. Consequently, it is not possible to evaluate objectively who comes out on top in this exchange in a school community of friendship:

The benefit is not the material good granted, but rather the will which accompanies it. It is to this will that we respond when we return the favour. Things are instruments to express this friendly will. In commercial exchanges, on the contrary, our return corresponds to the value of the thing as such, irrespective of the intention or will that accompanies its granting (Seneca as cited in Schwartz, 2007, p. 18).

In any case, what lies outside this honest exchange of goods is the confession of *intimacies* that do not pursue the virtue of the person who hears them but the respite or relief of people who share them (Lain Entralgo, 2012). Accordingly, we must take into account the moral risks and threats involved in the affective proximity between teachers and students when “teachers are expected to have a personal concern for learners that goes beyond their progress in the subject being taught” (Williams, 2019, p. 560), as happens in personalised education. This proximity can inspire desires that are incompatible with the educational relationship. Consequently, as Williams notes (2019, p. 572), a certain detachment in educational relationships, as in other relationships that require a commitment by professionals that go beyond the functional or technical, is

advisable. However, this detachment does not mean absence of *philia* but rather of *eros*, and, as we noted in the previous section, true friendship that promotes virtue and goodness of character can become an effective defence against these attachments that are not useful in an educational community.

e) The trust of friendship and the risk taken in the school community

Friendship achieves character education that is not based on modelling, that is to say, on the unconscious imitation of roles, but on coordination between friends:

The overemphasis on role models is misguided and misleading, and a good antidote draws on the Aristotelian concept of character friendship. Character friendship (a) constitutes a unique form of experience in which we share a substantial way of seeing with a close other; (b) facilitates a unique form of knowledge, the knowledge of a particular person (my-self and the other's self); (c) develops other emotions important for virtue cultivation besides admiration, such as love, shame, trust, and hope; and (d) is a praxis in which cooperative interactions and discussions function as a bridge between habituation of virtue at home and the public life (Hoyos-Valdés 2018, p. 66).

This change in paradigm requires us to renounce unilateral control of the educational mission or task. Pursuing friendship in education “does not imply making things easier and cozier. On the contrary, education becomes more challenging and risky” (Ruehl, 2018). A pedagogy of friendship is a pedagogy that accepts risks that are worth taking, owing to the educational benefits this provides (Shuffelton, 2011, p. 2012).

Along with plannable classroom rules, routines, and strategies, in a school community of friendship there must be room for the unexpected and the educational opportunities that accompany it (Rickert, 2001, pp. 313–314). Entrusting everything to impersonal structures, to procedures and protocols, offers a certain security in everyday life, but at the cost of eliminating the reciprocity and intimacy characteristic of trusting interpersonal relationships, without which prudence or practical wisdom do not develop.

Where there is friendship there is risk precisely because friendship is based on mutual trust. It does not seem sensible that, to avert this risk, we must give up mutual trust as the basis of the school community, because “when nobody trusts anyone, everyone loses; it is not even a zero sum game” (Polo, 2016b, p. 124).

On the other hand, as Polo notes, risk “is what unites, as if one person contributes all of the resources needed, this person does not rely on others and does not ask for help” (2015a, p. 72); accordingly, the school community of friendship is the best defence against the *pedagogical imposture* that Bárcena mentions (2012, p. 30) which presents education as a predefined set of procedures that can be put into practice following a technical model while ignoring their nature as an occurrence and a personal experience. In a school community of friendship, the processes involve “*appeals and answers* (...) The scheme that underspins the encounter is not ‘linear’ (action-passion) but ‘reversible’” (López Quintás, 1997, p. 112).

Thus, personalised education relies on virtue, and virtue is never guaranteed by any predefined process or technique, but friendship is a spur for virtue since “the virtuous life is a sort of dialogue or conversation between friends” (Schwartz, 2007, p. 4). Personalised education happens through this dialogue or conversation between friends within the school community.

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