

# Cultivating a child's love for parents as a spiritual practice: pedagogical aspect

Luydmyla Moskalyova<sup>1,\*</sup>, Sergiy Gurov<sup>1,\*\*</sup>, and Svitlana Podplota<sup>1,\*\*\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bogdan Khmelnytsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University, 20 Hetmanska Str., Melitopol, 72300, Ukraine

**Abstract.** Spiritual education of a child is one of the most difficult and important areas of educational research. The way of family life has always been reflected in the moral character of a person. The emotional and moral atmosphere reigning in the family, the desire to share responsibility, the level of mutual understanding and mutual respect, parental love and reciprocal feelings of a child, family traditions – all these lay the foundation for spirituality. Teachers who work with younger students often observe their interactions with their parents. Each child and each parent is individual, and relationships between them develop differently. In this article, the authors reflect on teachers' role in cultivating love, where the theoretical concept of "from child to parent" is the basis for study. The article identifies the types of a child's love for parents, reveals the markers of manifestation of a child's love for parents, which is positively associated with the cultural and social environment. In addition, the basic pedagogical characteristics for cultivating a child's love for their parents in the context of the school are proposed.

## 1 Introduction

There are a lot of questions that relate to various spiritual practices in pedagogical science. Cultivating a child's love for parents is one of these practices. Cicero was right when he said that "love for parents is the basis of all virtues". A child who is able to love its parents, which means, to support them at any moment, to find a warm, sincere word for them, to thank for what they have done for it, cannot be angry and cruel. There are many answers to the question of "How to love a child?" in pedagogy. However, these answers cannot be mechanically transferred to the question "How to love parents?" The difference is that each spiritual practice on the part of a child is unique. So, a child is an object of parental love, expresses its love without reliance on solid knowledge about the expression of care. It moves along an intuitive trajectory, based on interest, naivety, imagination, openness, a sense of pleasure.

## 2 Materials and methods

There is quite a bit of relevant research about the development of mutual attachment between children and their parents and caregivers/teachers. Researchers such as A. N. Schore [1], D. J. Siegel [2], R. Feldman [3], and C. Trevarthen [4] have done extensive research into attachment relationships between child and adult. Originality of the article is that it identifies the types of a child's love for parents, reveals the markers of manifestation of a child's love for parents, which is positively associated with the

cultural and social environment. The basic pedagogical characteristics for cultivating a child's love for their parents in the context of school are proposed. The purpose of the study is to examine the teachers' role in cultivating love, where the theoretical concept of "from child to parent" is the basis for study. The methodological basis of the study are: system approach, activity approach (L. S. Vygotzky [5], A. N. Leontiev [6]), the principle of determinism (S. L. Rubinshtein [7]). Considering the problem of love for parents, as a theoretical basis for the study, we use the concept of personalization (A. Petrovsky [8]), theoretical principles and provisions of the theory of relations (V. N. Myasishchev [9]). Research methods: review-analytical theoretical research of pedagogical and psychological literature on the studied problem in order to clarify its development and determine further ways of research.

## 3 Results and discussion

### 3.1 Cultivating a child's love for parents: history and contemporaneity

Raising a child means laying the foundations of a spiritual character in it and bringing it to the ability to love its parents and other people [10]. Parents who accepted and creatively solved this task fulfilled their spiritual vocation, justified their mutual love, strengthened and enriched the life of people on earth. Only the spiritual flame of a healthy family hearth can give the human heart an incandescent coal of spirituality, which will both warm it and shine for it throughout its future life. So, the family has avocation to give the child the most important and essential in life – the ability to love.

\*e-mail: moskalevalul@gmail.com

\*\*e-mail: serggurov@ukr.net

\*\*\*e-mail: spodpleta@gmail.com

According to Tertullian, “human soul is a Christian by nature” [11]. These words are especially true when applied to family. In a marriage and in a family, a person learns to love, to suffer from love, to endure and to sacrifice, to forget about himself and to serve those who are closest and dearest to him. Therefore, the family turns out to be a natural school of love, a school of creative self-sacrifice, social feelings and an altruistic way of thinking. In a healthy family life, the soul of a person from early childhood is restrained, softened, and learns to treat its neighbours with respectful and loving attention.

A child’s love for parents deserves special attention. The positive experiences of cultivating such love by teachers have been one of the largest investments in pedagogical science in the development of the spirituality of society. A child’s love has been often considered in the relationship of the theoretical concept of “parent–child”, which made a child more vulnerable, an object for the manifestation of love and care, but not its active subject. The positive effect of teacher’s work, who cultivates a child’s love, has great prospects – from improving the quality of family lives to creating new families in future. The teacher, using this approach, in addition to improving social development, softening the psychological climate in the family, led adult members of society to the development of spiritual consciousness, promoted self-actualization and self-development of the individual.

Janusz Korczak in his book “How to Love a Child” wrote that he didn’t know and he couldn’t know how parents, unknown to him, in conditions unknown to him, could raise a child unfamiliar to him; he emphasized that they could, but they didn’t want and they hadn’t [12]. Such love – “love as an opportunity” is in its essence the definition of the spiritual practice of parents. The child is the possibility of love for the parent, but the love of the parent is not always love for a child. As Rollo May testifies, culture of the relationship of a child with significant others in its environment plays an important role in the history of human culture [13]. The concept of Karen Horney reveals the belief that as a result of a violation of the relationship of parents with children, basic anxiety manifests itself, which is inextricably linked with basic hatred of parents. If a person finds himself in unfavorable conditions, where cruelty, humiliation, ridicule, neglect, blatant hypocrisy reign, as Karen Horney points out, there is a bitterness for survival. This situation in relationship is accompanied by a child’s attempts to gain sympathy, affection, interest, but a child ultimately refuses the need for tenderness and gradually decides that sincere love is not only unattainable, but does not exist at all. So such child no longer desires her and is rather afraid. However, this step has dire consequences, because the need for affection, human warmth and intimacy is a powerful incentive for the development of qualities for which other people value us. The feeling that you are loved, and even more that you can be loved, is probably one of the greatest values in life [14].

Each new pedagogical system, which developed as a result of dependence on new socio-political decisions, claims that it is thanks to the introduction of this system that many issues that were previously impossible were re-

solved. Thus, if a child’s love for parents, in particular, its cultivation by the teacher at different periods of personality growth, has many solutions in pedagogical science, then in the teacher’s practice there are even more options that turned out to be suitable for real children. For example, these are studies of expressing spirituality in elementary school [15], spiritual well-being of a child [16, 17], caring relationships between a child and an adult for better development [18], attachment relationships between a child and an adult [1–4].

These decisions, presented by pedagogical science, still need to be investigated. It will probably be discovered that the issue of spiritual practice on the part of a child is forced to turn to the realities of the modern world, the socio-political and economic environment, which is dictated by both parents and teachers, their arguments for the manifestation of “love as an opportunity”.

In these cases, to answer the question “how to love parents?” a child begins to feel annoyance, since the manifestation of its love is caused by the very spiritual nature of man, which is often not comparable with the existing practices of adults. That is why the pedagogical study of a child’s love for parents is viewed through their daily spiritual experience. A study of this spiritual experience can explain the understanding of the issue of a child’s love as a spiritual practice, as well as its incompatibility with “love as an opportunity”. If the question “what is love?” is asked, then we will find a semantic solution to the question. In the case when the question “how does it manifest itself?” is asked, then usually we are talking about the sensitive, emotional sphere, as well as the sphere of actions and human activities. Of course, such a question on the part of a child more often expresses its emotional state and that is why the question of the manipulator is: “Whom do you love more – dad or mom?” is painful and, in the case of a healthy family atmosphere, will remain unanswered.

A child does not always understand why it feels love for his parents and the question of whether he loves dad and mom equally or differently relates to spiritual practices, which, on the one hand, lie on the surface, but have not yet been studied by pedagogical science fully. Thus, Esther O. Ohito, as a researcher of critical pedagogical love, points out the insufficient literature on the study of love in general. The author confirms: “the concept of love is fairly frequently (ab)used, yet under-theorized” [19].

We observe various spiritual practices, but their characterization remains an open question: “who has empirical data in this area?” The situation is completely different in pedagogical practice. For the teacher, the understanding of the question “Does a child love its parents?” is mostly associated with the meaning of educational activity in general, the manifestation of a child’s confidence in its childhood environment and the manifestation of self-love or self-hatred. Of course, the question “what is the child’s love for parents?” like any question relating to the spiritual sphere, can be an expression of interest in this phenomenon. So, for example, a child, observing other children who accidentally appear in his field of vision, remembers their behaviour and asks about what could serve, for example, their joy or hostility. If the answer on the

part of the parent is clear, then there is no doubt that the child asks about its manifestation of feelings, tries to find an answer about the need / uselessness of the manifestation of its love for parents. That is why such questions are important on the part of a child. Obviously, it is necessary to conduct a study of different types of love of a child for parents, their differences. Their existence can be traced in religious, philosophical, psychological literature, in art, including the folk epos. It is easy to answer the question “what is the love of a child in the understanding of world religions?”, “What is the love of a child in the philosophy of childhood?”, “Why do children compete for love for their parents?” Of course, these are not simple questions, but their semantic charge is fixed in various worldviews. Meanwhile, to understand the answer to the question “what is a child’s love for parents?” it is necessary to distract from these worldviews and focus on specific spiritual practices that may be incompatible even within the same family, where children are brought up by their biological parents, and not by foster parents or stepmothers / stepfathers.

### **3.2 The meaning of love in a child’s life: necessity need or right?**

In order to appreciate the importance of a child’s love for parents, a multidimensional approach to the study of this concept is needed. We present several categories.

Love is often interpreted as a feeling that is experienced and understood as attraction, affection, passion. This is a free manifestation of a human being, an existential attitude to a person, an object, knowledge, activity, nature, and fatherland. The recognition of love as a life-giving force that can spiritualize a person, help to make an unselfish act, stimulate the manifestation of creative qualities is an important fact. We understand that such a concept of love is limited and does not reveal it in whole, as one of the virtues. David W. Robinson-Morris adheres to a similar point of view: “Love is the metaphysical fiber, which binds us to one another. It may be the very force that makes the planets orbits, the sunrise in the East and set in West. Love may very well be the force that holds the stars in the firmament, the Energy of energies, a force that can neither be created nor destroyed” [20].

Teachers have actual data on the manifestations of such power on the part of children, and therefore the question “what is a child’s love for parents?” does not seem difficult for them. The pedagogy of love is manifested through loving kindness, compassion, and equanimity [21]. However, this question always sounds differently for parents. They do not study philosophy and pedagogy, so it is not clear for them why their “love as an opportunity” comes into conflict with “love for parents”.

Some parents who listen to teachers’ advice are annoyed that their ideas about their child’s love are questionable. They believe that the teacher is deceiving them, and meanwhile they do not even understand the reasons for the manifestation of such states of a child as anxiety, fear, feeling of loneliness. Few people come up with the idea that it is necessary to identify indicators of a child’s love for

parents. As the ideal of a child’s love for parents, the following set of qualities is often presented, including: obedience, respect, patience, caring, etc. But, as pedagogical practice shows, not always an obedient child really loves its parents, as well as a child who shows patience with the vices of parents or their social disadvantage in society. Resentment, helplessness, or the accumulation of imaginary scenes of revenge may be hidden behind the external manifestations of a child’s supposedly positive character traits. Of course, this does not mean that we deny the upbringing of positive qualities of a child, but we direct our attention to overcoming delusions on the part of both a child and its parents, which is necessary for personal development, the formation of new spiritual practices.

Meanwhile, teachers who are supporters of various pedagogical systems usually agree with the statement that most often a child still loves its parents, although few of them would bother to examine in detail the manifestations of such love. A child’s love for parents and an adult’s love for a child are fundamentally different.

### **3.3 Differences in a child’s manifestations of love must be recognizable**

Differences in love, which are created both by the conditions of upbringing, and by the social environment, and the cultural life of society, can be recognized and accepted for correcting pedagogical practice. Let us emphasize the difference between the types of love, which, as a rule, does not always attract attention in educational science. If a child’s love was transformed into its surrogate in an adult, then what is the achievement of pedagogical science? Apparently, it is necessary to conclude that our pedagogical science does not develop love as a spiritual practice, but, on the contrary, makes a child’s love for parents very abstract, throwing off the flaws of their pedagogical technologies on the “cruelty of the world around” and the pedagogical immaturity of parents under the slogan “it is their own fault that such a child was brought up”. That is why a child’s love for parents becomes abstract in the school environment, which unites many manifestations of types of love into a diverse system of beliefs: for one child, love for parents is a source of pleasure, it draws from there positive emotions, a desire for development, while for another it is a source of fear, which fetters its feelings, dulls the saturation of the perception of the world around it and the knowledge of itself as a person. For the third child, love for parents is a source of duty and piety, which most often becomes an external, but not an internal factor. That is why it is possible to formulate an abstract concept of a child’s love for parents: love is a conviction that builds the entire system of cognition of the external and internal world of a person, which allows you to feel, comprehend, analyze, act, relying on the experience received from parents. A child’s love for parents based on intra-family relationships allows exploring and building further interpersonal relationships, to learn, evaluate the behaviour of other people to whom a child is interested. In many ways, this concept is based on the understanding of child’s love in those cultures in which a child itself develops. For example, Guop-

ing Zhao points to the importance of a child's love for parents in Chinese culture as a special feeling that is freed from the concepts of "duty". He emphasizes natural attachment in relationships where the maturing personality thrives: "In the private space reserved for nourishing natural human affections, the child's individuality flourished" [22]. Perhaps, some scientists will disagree with such a definition of a child's love for parents. So, Kevin James Swick believes that child's love should be manifested in its understanding, decency, peacefulness, caring for its parents, who should be manifested every day: "Democracy requires decent and caring people. The trust and love that bind people into partnerships for living in peaceful ways require us to learn, share, care, and support each other in these efforts. We must be sensitive to the dynamics of helping each other become peaceful and caring" [23]. Only in this case, according to the author, a caring relationship can be considered love. Not all scientists may also agree that child's love for parents is a cognitive system. Howard S. Schwartz believes that a child should win love "The hope is that, having learned to survive and succeed, we will be able to gain a place of love and importance, modeled on our early experience with mother, as father seems to have done", than implies the presence of basic patterns of behaviour inherited in the family and the study of worlds of love and worlds of indifference [24].

Despite these views, let us nevertheless assume that the concept of a child's love for parents is a "conviction" as a deep communication process and a fundamental concept. However, often, in everyday life, persuasion is examined through techniques that are studied in order to subordinate the thoughts, feelings, will of another person to solve their personal issues, and not of another person. The desire to influence the train of thought, to rule a child on the part of an adult is not always based on spiritual and moral values, and is often authoritarian in nature. The arguments of parents are less likely to be ethical, moral, value, and often based only on information that is beneficial for a quick solution to the situation. Parents (especially in critical situations) are increasingly using rude language of influence (anger, annoyance, disappointment, etc.), which, without relying on mental values, plunge a child's consciousness into chaos, fear, anxiety. Parents often deceive a child, hiding behind good intentions. False myths have always existed in different cultures for coercion and intimidation of a child ("don't go there, boogeyman is there", "the gray wolf will bite if you don't obey," "I'll put you in a corner, let bogeywoman take you", etc.). Such deception limits the freedom of the child's spirit, compels it to make a false decision that the will of the parents is omnipotent and only adults know how to behave.

However, we emphasize that the child's love for parents is, first of all, of a value character, based on the recognition of parents. If a child is dissuaded from its parents, sees or feels their obvious deception, the value of the parents is gradually refuted, which creates the basis for future conflicts. For example, a child asks "How are you feeling? How are you?" and parents reply: "I'm waiting for you to do something for me ...". This is a recognizable manipulation, deception on the part of parents. Such and

similar phrases internally push a child to accept the feeling of guilt for the unfulfilled wish of the parent, which is destructive and devastates a child mentally. Manipulation, pressure, and even such tactics as parental refusal of love is detailed in the work of Karen D. Annear and Gregory C. R. Yates. The authors believe that excessive strictness and control of authoritarian parents can further cause irreparable damage to their child. This position does not take into account, in their opinion, the manifestation of a child's love as a need of life itself: "Psychological control methods are geared to a child's compliance with parental decisions, where a child's input is minimal and possibly irrelevant to the agenda. Psychological control implies the expectation of obedience with minimal recognition of the needs of the developing young person" [25].

There is no doubt that the ideal of such parents is gradually erased in a child's picture of the world. So, in making future decisions, a child will be guided by the advice of any person who seems close to it, understands and accepts it without manipulation, pressure and psychological control. The situation can be aggravated by the fact that the understanding of the traditional role of parents has been changed significantly in the modern economized world. And love, as a spiritual practice, begins to be oppressed, its spectrum narrows, and manifestations become rare [26]. For example, a mother who works outside the home is perceived differently by a child than the one who is constantly nearby. The child is faced with an unusual feeling for it: "why do my parents abandon me?", "What needs to be done so that the parents are always at home?" Anxiety, lack of well-being, feelings of anxiety affect the very manifestation of love, and the mental and physical pain inflicted by the parents force to divide the world into at least two worlds that are not alike: "with parents" and "without parents". At the same time, as emphasized by Debra Lindsey Prince and Esther M. Howard, love appears from the first days of life: "From the first moment of life, human beings continually seek the reassurances of belonging and love. Children who receive sensitive and reliable responses from their parents or caregivers during the early years of their life are able to develop successful, secure relationships" [27]. In this case, it is important not to miss those moments that have a positive effect on the spiritual world of a child sensitive, timid, beautiful, full of hopes for the future.

There are studies that confirm the importance of the value of the childhood world. Hiroyuki Numata analyses the types of manifestations of love in different cultures (including Japanese) and points to dichotomous relationships in European culture: "the concept of "love" presupposes that there is a person who loves and the other who is loved" [28]. At the same time, the author states the fact that modern children are protesting all over the world, which gives rise to such antisocial phenomena as crime, cruelty, violence in children's environments.

Reflecting on such phenomena, some questions arise: "How can love be cultivated in such environments? What generation should we educate and how can a real teacher influence the spiritual world of a child? And is it just the time for teachers to pay attention to the torn worlds of chil-

dren?" We take into account that there are different types of a child's love for their parents. However, the typification must also receive its own understanding. For example, it can be characterized by the degree of emotional manifestation, the presence or absence of actions, the manifestation of self-awareness, and the expression of special behaviour. Therefore the existence of different types of a child's love requires a distinction.

The first type the physical is based on the fact that a child feels pleasant feelings only when the needs of its body are satisfied. A child who is close to this type loves parents for their hugs, kisses and gentle treatment.

The second type – social based on the desire to talk and listen, to interact. It may not be important for such a child how it is dressed, how and when he ate; listening to parents, understanding them, perceiving their speech, speaking with are the most important things for such children.

The third type spiritual based on the contemplation of the spiritual nature of the parent. Such a child may not care what tone the parents talk to him, in what conditions they live. The desire to observe the manifestation of the spirit of the parents, their life story, and formation as a spiritual person are the main things. A child gets pleasure from the very thought of the parents, their manifestations of the strength of the spirit, the ability to withstand life's difficulties. The parents of such a child may be lucky, or they may be unhappy, but for this type of child's love, this does not matter. Their spiritual image is the main thing, which can be manifested in the child's consciousness through various symbols, sounds, smells, and not just as through the expression of their physicality. Note that this distinction is fundamental, although in its pure form, each of the listed types of love is rare.

Of course, the question "How can the concept of a child's love for parents be defined?" may arise. So, we understand it broadly, as the child's system of views on parents as a whole, the acceptance of the parent's ideal. Also, a child's love can be a system of views on a particular parent and his/her attitude directly to a child itself. This concept should include a child's understanding of the parent's place in its life and a value judgment about it. Thus, we see that the love of a child is made up of conscious acts that are gradually formed into beliefs. Love, therefore, is not only a feeling, as is often stated. Naturally, in various circumstances, living conditions (prosperous or dysfunctional developmental environments), these beliefs can be erroneous, imaginary, and therefore, in some cases, there may be a variety of sensual manifestations from hatred to exaltation. The manifestation of such feelings is quite wide and diverse. This is important to emphasize, since the manifestation of the beginnings of love is not only the satisfaction of basic needs at an age when a child cannot provide itself with the necessary for survival.

We associate the very love of a child with manifestations of courtesy in behaviour, with pleasure in joint communication, with benevolence, reverence, joy and mercy. Diligence is one of the markers of a child's manifestation of love for his parents. A child makes efforts to make the parent happy from his actions: it studies hard, helps about

the house. It is important that these efforts are not forced. They are pleasant for a child and are done with pleasure. And even if parents for some reason do not appreciate the efforts of a child, a child is not angry or offended. It observes with respect why the parents are upset. Thus, the set of manifestations of a child's love is very wide. It is also important to distinguish manifestations contradicting love flattery covered by imaginary care, the root of which we see, first of all, in deception and in seduction. A child, not knowing how to correctly express love for its parents, tries to dissemble; its deception subsequently manifests itself in actions, which later reveals insecurity and secrecy in relation to loved ones. Emphasizing the importance of a child's manifestation of love for parents in ordinary actions and words, one cannot ignore the existing attempts to erase their meaning. Both a child's deed and an involuntary offensive word are not really thoughtless, as parents themselves might not notice. With this behaviour, parents can refer to a crisis of age, a reassessment of values; however, the dominant type of love of a child does not change, but only acquires new features. In this case, pedagogical work on the development of moral courage is indispensable. Such work consists of 11 components: education of kindness; education of virtue; education of truthfulness; education of compassion; education of responsiveness; education of moral stamina; education of moral culture; fostering empathy; the development of moral habits; education of politeness and friendliness; education of a sense of human duty. If a child's love for parents and adult family members is not directed towards doing good deeds, then it will be selfish. For example, if a child loves its mother only because she is the source of his good mood. We must cultivate in children courage, the desire to take care of others, worry about them.

## 4 Conclusions

Taking into account all the above, at least five basic pedagogical characteristics in cultivating a child's love for parents can be distinguished:

- 1) teachers should be aware of the main types of manifestations of child's love for parents and understand the difference between them;
- 2) teachers should inform children that the spiritual type of love is laid down from the first days of birth, and all subsequent types of love can be manifested depending on relationships within the family;
- 3) teachers need to disclose to children that they have many markers of manifestations of love that are manifested in their actions. These markers are only an external manifestation, and, as a rule, are desirable, but not absolute, since each child has its own character and environment that affects it;
- 4) teachers need to prove to children the importance of working to foster moral courage, and in this case, both teachers and parents themselves serve as the ideal for expressing this type of courage;

- 5) teachers should strive to reveal to the pupils the meaning of manifesting their love for their parents, regardless of the environment (prosperous or disadvantaged) they live in.

The expression of a child's love for parents is one of the given properties of a person. This belief can be developed. This should be of great importance for pedagogy as an applied philosophy and for everyday practice in school. Freedom of expression of the spirit, mercy on the part of the child is largely determined by the parents themselves, by their behaviour. To a large extent, the manifestation of pedagogical love is important, which finds expression in direct communication with both children and their parents. Thus, the initial question of a child's love in our time becomes a question of its future fate and an acute social problem that worries many peoples. The solution to this issue a measure of the teacher's influence on a child's self-understanding, management of its feelings, acceptance of values will help build up the spirituality of the whole society.

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