CONCEPT OF EDUCATION
IN THE WRITINGS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

Fr. Czar Emmanuel Alvarez, OSA

Introduction

Education has gone a long way from the classical times up to the present. Various theories and philosophies of education have been presented. The very concept of education itself has evolved. New disciplines have emerged and developed throughout the centuries and the methods of teaching them to students have changed as well.

In our short paper we will discuss education as elaborated by one of the famous thinkers the Western world has ever produced – Augustine of Hippo (354-430). He was a product of his own time; his ideas were conditioned by the historical context he lived in; his world vision was shaped by the type of cultural formation he had received.

To begin with, let us raise some guide questions. First, what concept of education emerges from the writings of Augustine of Hippo in general? Second, what factors influenced such a concept? And, third, what pedagogical insights can we derive from it? Let it be said beforehand that Augustine’s theory of education has certain limitations and restricted application. He apparently did not intend to propose a syllabus for the emerging Christian schools of his times, in the first place, as Henry Chadwick affirms.¹ This does not mean, however, that Augustine has nothing to teach to modern-day educators. We just have to be careful in applying it to our present system of education, recognizing what is truly Augustine’s original insight and how his ideas were later developed by other thinkers who came after him.

Influence of the Classical Graeco-Roman Paidaeia on Augustine

Augustine’s concept of education was strongly influenced by the type of cultural formation he himself had received. We are dealing with the classical Graeco-Roman paidaeia. It was the only type of education available to men of learning of antiquity. No “Christian schools” (in the strict sense of the term) existed yet.² They were only starting to develop at that time. Thus, men – both believers or Christians and non-Christians – who wanted to learn had no other choice but to go to one and the same school and receive one and the same type of education. Augustine, in his

² Cf. S. PRICOCO, “Scuola” in Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane (DPAC), vol. 2, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, Genova: Casa Editrice Marietti 1994, pp. 3126ff. explains how the need to organize schools where both Christian faith and classical culture could be reconciled was already felt as early as the second and third centuries. Thus we have the cases of the first catechetical schools under the supervision of local bishops (e.g. the Didaskaleion of Alexandria in Egypt). For a long period of time classical schools and the emerging Christian schools coexisted (with the latter not introducing any radical change in the curriculum or any novel teaching method). We would have to wait until the fifth or sixth century before we could speak of a “Christian school” in the technical sense of the term.
Confessions, speaks of his early contacts at school with Christians while he himself was still unbaptized.3

Graeco-Roman education was very humanistic in character. Content-wise, it concentrated on teaching and training students in the seven classical liberal arts4 – namely, grammar, dialectic (logic), rhetoric (— these forming the so-called trivium or artes sermocinales or triviales), on the one hand, and arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy (forming the so-called quadrivium or artes reales or physicae or quadriviales), on the other hand. The number of such arts was already fixed as early as the first century B.C. as testified by authors like Cicero (106-43 B.C.) and confirmed by Quintilian (ca. 35-100 A.D.).5 Augustine dedicates ample space to these liberal arts in his work De ordine (On Order),6 trying to demonstrate how through them one is equipped with instruments that could help him discern the existence of divine order in the universe. In the Confessions we also find a list of, at least, six of such liberal arts.7 Finally, his first biographer, Possidius, attests to how Augustine was initially instructed in “profane letters – that is in all those disciplines called ‘liberal’.”8

Of the seven liberal arts, Augustine excelled in that of rhetoric or public speaking. In fact, he informs us that he was the best student in the school of rhetoric in Carthage at that time.9 Note that basic education in the early centuries practically trained young boys to master the “liberal arts”, particularly the art of oratory. Austin Evans – a renowned scholar on ancient Roman civilization – says that the principal aim of the classical (Graeco-Roman) education since the third and second centuries B.C. seems to be precisely the training in oratory.10 After his university studies and after having taught for a while in Thagaste (his home town), we find Augustine dedicating himself to the teaching of rhetoric in Carthage until he decided to seek greener pasture in Rome (probably around the year 383).11

Part of the materials students during the time of Augustine had to study were the works of classical Greek and Roman authors (like Homer, Virgil, Terence, Horace, Ovidius, Cicero and Sallust), as well as those of ancient philosophers. Thus,

3 AUGUSTINE, Confessions (henceforth, Conf.) 1.9.14: “We did meet at school some people who prayed to you, Lord, and we learned from them, imagining you as best as we could in the guise of some great personage who, while not evident to our senses, was yet able to hear and help us. So it came that even in boyhood I began to pray to you, my aid and refuge. By calling upon you I untied the knots of my tongue and begged you, in my little boy way but with no little earnestness, not to let me be beaten at school.” All the works that will be cited in our study are of Augustine (unless otherwise indicated).

4 Conf. 4.1.1: doctrinas, quas liberales vocant.
6 Cf. De ordine (henceforth, De ord.) 12.35-15.42.
7 Cf. Conf. 4.16.30; also see 4.1.1 and 16.30 where Augustine speaks of quidquid de arte loquendi et disserendi, quidquid de dimensionibus figurarum, et de musicis et de numeris.
8 POSSIDIUS, Vita Augustini (henceforth, Vita Aug.) 1.1.
9 Cf. Conf. 3.6
10 A. P. EVANS (ed.), Roman Civilization, vol. 1 (The Republic), New York: Columbia University Press 1951, p. 494: “In the third and second centuries BC, under the impact of Hellenism, Roman education was gradually institutionalized and merged with Greek intellectualism ... Literature, both Greek and Latin, philosophy, rhetoric, and other aspects of the liberal arts became part of the formal curriculum. But the principal aim of the new Greco-Roman education was training in oratory – the key skill in the conduct of affairs.”
11 Cf. POSSIDIUS, Vita Aug. 1.2.
Augustine tells us that he read, for example, the *Categories* of Aristotle when he was about twenty years old.\textsuperscript{12} When he decided to resign from his teaching profession and retire to Cassiciacum, he had only one thing in mind – that of dedicating himself to *otium liberale* – that is, a life of leisure or “studious devotion to philosophy, literature, or the arts.”\textsuperscript{13} Given his training in both the liberal arts and philosophy, it is not surprising to see in Augustine’s writings references to the ideas of the Stoics, the Neoplatonists, and other ancient thinkers once in a while. What interests us, of course, is the influence such a cultural background had on Augustine.

**Anthropological Presuppositions of Education**

After having presented a general background on the type of cultural formation Augustine received during his student days, we are now in a better position to understand what he has to say about education.

For Augustine, education serves to supply nourishment for the soul just as food does for the body. This was his mother Monica’s contribution to a group discussion that took place at Cassiciacum recorded in one of Augustine’s early dialogues.\textsuperscript{14} He fully accepted this view and from that time on he concentrated on the human soul,\textsuperscript{15} elaborating the idea that education was fundamentally a mental or intellectual activity, geared towards training, disciplining and providing our minds with knowledge and skills. By so doing, it is hoped that we would be able to live a good life, which is the road to happiness.\textsuperscript{16}

Clearly, Augustine sees education not as an end in itself. It is rather a means to an end, which is happiness. All men desire to be happy, he asserts.\textsuperscript{17} And no man can be truly happy unless he possesses what is lasting or permanent.\textsuperscript{18} He speaks of the *summum bonum* in this case\textsuperscript{19} or sometimes of Truth or of God.\textsuperscript{20} George Howie, in his study on Augustine’s educational theory, rightly notes that the ultimate end of

---

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. *Conf.* 4.16.28.

\textsuperscript{13} M. BOULDING, *The Confessions*, New York: New City Press 1997, p. 155, note 76. In the *Contra Academicos* (henceforth, *Contra Acad.*) 2.2.4 we find the expression “*otium philosophandi*” instead, while in the *Retractationes* 1.1 Augustine speaks of “*otium christianae vitae*.”

\textsuperscript{14} *De beata vita* 8: “Ideas and thoughts are the nourishment of the mind since it is through these that the mind gets to know things.”

\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, in his *Soliloquia* 1.2.7, Augustine confesses to be interested only in two things – God and the soul; nothing else. In fact, his early Dialogues were all focused on the human soul – its search for happiness (*De beata vita*), its ability to attain knowledge and wisdom (*Contra Academicos*), its immortality (*De immortalitate animae*), its greatness (*De animae quantitate*), its freedom (*De libero arbitrio*), and so forth.

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. *De beata vita* 1.8.23.

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. *De Trinitate* (henceforth, *De Trin.*) 13.15; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (henceforth, *En. in Ps.*) 32.3.15-16; *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* (henceforth, *De mor. eccl. cath.*) 3-8.

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. *De beata vita* 11; *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (henceforth, *De div. quaest.*) 35.1.

\textsuperscript{19} *De mor. eccl. cath.* 4: “No one can be happy who does not enjoy what is man’s chief good … Happiness consists in the enjoyment of a good higher than which there is nothing better, which we call the chief good.”

\textsuperscript{20} *Conf.* 10.23.33: “Indeed, the happy life is joy arising from truth, for this is the joy coming from You, who are the Truth, o God … This happy life all men desire; this life which alone is happy, all men desire; the joy arising from truth all men desire.”
education, for Augustine, is “knowledge of the spiritual and the divine … The aim is to know God, and the process is intellectual enquiry.”

Platonic influence is easy to discern in Augustine’s speculation about education. It is a gradual process of purification of the mind – a mental ascent toward the contemplation of eternal realities. In this context we understand why Augustine distinguishes between wisdom (sapientia) and knowledge or science (scientia) when he speaks of education. He defines “knowledge” or “science” as “the rational learning of temporal things” (temporalium rerum cognitio rationalis) and “wisdom” as “the intellectual learning of eternal things” (aeternarum rerum cognitio intellectualis). Knowledge, whose object is that which is tangible, changeable and temporal, concerns practical action in relation to the needs of man’s physical existence, while wisdom, whose object is that which is unchangeable and eternal, refers to understanding of absolute truth and contemplation. The two are distinct as to their proper object and also in terms of method. Knowledge or science uses investigation, research, analysis and synthesis, while wisdom relies on insight, intuition, or direct vision. Education, then, although it includes knowledge or science as a preliminary stage, aims at the acquisition of wisdom. Fr. Francisco Galende Fincias, a famous Augustinologist in Latin America, distinguishes, in this case, between the objective of the “lower reason” (ratio inferior) and that of the “superior reason” (ratio superior – also called intellectus). According to the former goal – i.e. acquisition of “science”, academic teaching aims at “immediate objectives governed by the principle of usefulness and efficiency. It seeks to shape a clever and capable man, who successfully triumphs in the competitive world in which we live.” As to the latter goal, he speaks of the search for truth, the attainment of wisdom and the happy life, and the exercise of virtues. George Howie further explains: “Wisdom is the enjoyment to the greatest possible extent of what is in the mind of God … The content of the divine mind is truth; therefore wisdom is the contemplation of truth … (Wisdom is) the highest reach of the human understanding and the ultimate aim of education.”

Aside from the idea of education as a gradual purification of the mind, Platonic influence on Augustine can also be discerned in the way he looks at man in general. Augustine had a hylemorphic vision of man. He is composed of both matter

---

22 Ibid., p. 47: “It was from Platonism that Augustine understood both the aim and the method of education: the aim is a knowledge of the ultimate, transcendent cause of all existence … The method is the Socratic method of question and answer, which must begin with self-examination.”
25 Cf. De ord. 2.11.30; 2.18.48; De immortalitate animae 10.17.
26 Cf. I. DIEZ DEL RIO, ibid., p. 60.
27 Cf. De ord. 2.11.30; 2.18.14; De Trin. 12.2.2; In Iohannis evangelium tractatus 15.19.
28 F. G. FINCIAS, “The Augustinian Education Model,” in *Basic Elements of Augustinian Pedagogy*, pp. 35-36. Cf. De Trin. 14.7.10; De beata vita 4.28; Contra Acad. 1.5.13 and 1.8.23; and De ord. 2.20.52.
and form – that is, body and soul. However, he sometimes further divides the soul into two “parts” – a “higher soul” and a “lower soul”. He uses many terms to refer to the former (like mens, ratio, intellectus, animus, and so forth), whereas he calls the latter simply as anima. It is in the “higher soul” where the human faculty of reasoning and understanding is found and it is precisely the human mind (mens) that we are supposed to nourish and cultivate through education. This vision of man easily calls to mind Plotinian psychology, which also speaks of a “higher soul” where the nous – man’s contact with the intelligible world – resides and a “lower soul,” which animates the body. Sometimes Augustine would identify man with the “higher soul” (animus), which is the “rational soul.”

Going back to our discourse on attaining happiness through education, Augustine holds that living a good life is tantamount to living wisely, and this is the only way to beatitude. Needless to say, “scientific knowledge has its own importance and relevance to temporal life of man. But unless it is supplemented by wisdom, man’s education is necessarily incomplete and defective. For the idealist thinker the goal of education is an activity which is purely intellectual.” It should lead us to God, our ultimate end, and our salvation. Fr. Isais Diez del Rio terms this as the “sapiential principle” and considers this as the very heart of Augustine’s anthropology.

**Content of Augustinian Education**

After having clarified what the nature and the goal of education are, according to Augustine, the next question would be: What method does he propose to enable man to acquire both knowledge or science and wisdom?

As to be expected, Augustine recommends the same humanistic formation in the liberal arts which he had received during his student days. They serve to liberate the mind by opening the learner’s eyes to the reality of immaterial truth. Contrary to his contemporaries, however, he considers training in the liberal arts not an end in itself, neither should they be used only in view of mundane interests. He does not deny the fact that knowledge of such arts is necessary in order for Christians to enter into a dialogue with the educated men in the Roman world at that time. But the orientation is totally different. We acquire knowledge in view of eternal happiness through the attainment of truth. It is important to recall at his point the distinction

---

30 Cf. _De beata vita_ 2.7; _De Trin._ 15.11.
31 In his _Enneads_ 4.8.4, Plotinus presents the human soul as wandering on three levels of knowledge – (a) that of the sensitive-rational, (b) that of the intellectual, and (c) that of unity and union with the One. These three levels actually correspond with three operations attributed to the three compositions of man: (a) perception (attributed to the body), (b) discursive reason (attributed to the soul), and (c) intuition (attributed to the spirit). Cf. M. T. CLARK, _Augustine_, Chapter 10 (“Augustine and Neoplatonism”), London: Geoffrey Chapman 1994, p. 109.
32 Cf. _Conf._ 10.9.6.
33 G. HOWIE, _ibid._, p. 109. It may be true that “Augustine’s programme is concerned with religious instruction, not with education in general,” as H. CHADWICK, _ibid._, p. 86 notes. However, it is debatable to assert that “scientific knowledge is marginal to the scheme” (ibid.) for, as we have said, _scientia_ and _sapientia_ are both an important part of Augustine’s concept of education.
34 I. DÍEZ DEL RIO, _ibid._, p. 49.
which Augustine makes between *uti* and *frui* or between things that are to be used in view of something else and things to be enjoyed for their own sake.\(^{36}\) Knowledge of the liberal arts clearly belongs to the former category: they are “to be used as instrumental to the end that truth may be enjoyed.”\(^{37}\)

Augustine, of course, does not limit the content of education only to the liberal arts. Other sciences or disciplines can also be incorporated, provided that they contribute positively to the acquisition of wisdom, which – he holds – is best manifested in the divine revelation contained in the Scriptures. This explains why the study of the Bible occupies a central role in his vision of education. “The study of the Scriptures is not merely one among a number of subjects of study; it is the central subject, which draws from the peripheral subjects the resources they can provide to guide the Christian along the pathway of self-education toward an understanding of spiritual reality.”\(^{38}\) In other words, anything that contributes to the study of God’s word (like history, natural sciences, languages, sociology, semiotics, etc.) can be included in the content of education or in the academic curriculum.\(^{39}\)

**Augustinian Pedagogical Method**

The liberation and the purification of the human mind constitute a particular stage in a student’s learning experience. The goal is that of attaining the Truth or God himself, for this alone can make man really happy. Concerning this, many scholars pay attention to the pedagogical principles expressed in two particular works of Augustine – the *De magistro* (389) and the *De doctrina christiana* (started in 396). The earliest dialogues he wrote also caught their attention (like the *De beata vita* and the *De ordine*, both composed in 386-387 during Augustine’s sojourn at Cassiciacum). Let us briefly present some of his pedagogical principles.

Beginning with the conviction that no one has monopoly of the truth, Augustine holds that in education, both teacher and pupil disembark on the same quest for truth. In one of his famous commentaries on the Psalms, he writes: “The truth is neither mine nor yours, but the patrimony of all.”\(^{40}\) The truth dwells in all men because of the presence of the “interior teacher” in us and he teaches us from within: *qui enim te docet intus est.*\(^{41}\) Augustine’s educational theory, indeed, “is hostile to the assumption that the teacher has exclusive and absolute possession of truth … The teacher must always be adding to his existing knowledge, which can never be complete, and he is helped to do this by the insights he receives from his pupils’

\(^{36}\) Cf. *De doctrina christiana* (henceforth, *De doctr. chr.*) 1.22.20.

\(^{37}\) G. HOWIE, *ibid.*, p. 231.


\(^{39}\) Cf. H. CHADWICK, *ibid.*, pp. 82-84. It has been rightly pointed out that the Bible had a central role not only in the education of monks and priests in Africa during the time of Augustine, but also in the medieval period. On this, see T. MARTIN, “The Educational Tradition in the Order,” in *Basic Elements of Augustinian Pedagogy*, pp. 212ff.

\(^{40}\) *En. in Ps.* 75.17; 103.2.11. In the *De libero arbitrio* 2.12.33 we read: “There is an immutable truth, containing all things that are immutably true, which you cannot say is yours or mine or any one man’s, but that in some wonderful way a mysterious and universal light, as it were, is present and proffers itself to all in common.”

\(^{41}\) *En. in Ps.* 139.15. Cf. *De vera religione* 39.72: *noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi; in interiori homine habitat veritas.*
reactions to his teaching.\textsuperscript{42} The teacher is not the source of truth. His task consists only in helping his pupils find their way to the discovery of truth, and he can do this by offering suggestions for consideration of the questioner rather than imposing his ideas, and encouraging his pupils to make their own personal assessment of them. In this way the teacher enables the learner to feel his own way forward to understanding.\textsuperscript{43} In their search for truth, both teacher and student become co-travelers.\textsuperscript{44} In other words, both of them are simultaneously learning and contributing to the systematic exploration of traditionally accepted assumptions.\textsuperscript{45} At a certain point in the teaching and learning process, the distinction between a teacher and a pupil disappears since both are engaged in one and the same quest for wisdom and happiness. “The distinction between teacher and taught is largely obliterated; each is both teaching and learning from the other, since they are linked by a common purpose and in love with the same objectives.”\textsuperscript{46} Augustine rightly asserts: “I am a good teacher insofar as I continue being a student.”\textsuperscript{47}

Teachers are expected not only to guide and offer suggestions to their students in their common search for truth. They must also find ways of encouraging, motivating and inspiring them so as to arouse their enthusiasm and interest in what is being taught to them. Augustine believes that educators have a very strong influence on pupils. Hence, he underscores the possible influence of a teacher’s behaviour and attitude on his pupils. One way of stimulating pupils would be by showing them that one is really interested in what he is teaching. Attitudes quickly communicate themselves to students. “Enthusiasm is infectious.”\textsuperscript{48} Augustine speaks of the role of love in teaching and in learning.\textsuperscript{49} Pupils should be stimulated to love what is being taught to them, while teachers should manifest personal interest in and love for the subject matter they teach. Augustine thinks that pupils perceive if their teacher really loves what he teaches when the teacher puts into practice what he teaches. In other words, there must be coherence between what one teaches and his personal lifestyle. A higher value, indeed, is set on the teacher’s integrity of character than on his mastery of the techniques of instruction.\textsuperscript{50} Fr. Francisco Galende Fincias, again, rightly comments: “Effective education is affective education.”\textsuperscript{51}

One interesting insight of Augustine concerning the learning process is the idea that learning is a “self-activity of thought.” When a teacher succeeds in arousing his pupils’ interest, they commit themselves to what is being taught and the process of “self-learning” begins. In such a process, a person poses questions to himself and tries to find his way through them. The teacher may indeed guide him in his search for

\textsuperscript{42} G. HOWIE, \textit{ibid.}, p. 221.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{44} Cf. Sermo 292.1; \textit{De catechizandis rudibus} (henceforth, \textit{De cat. rud.}) 10.14 and 12.17.
\textsuperscript{45} G. HOWIE, \textit{ibid.}, p. 164.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{47} Sermo 244, 2.
\textsuperscript{48} G. HOWIE, \textit{ibid.}, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{50} G. HOWIE, \textit{ibid.}, p. 232; cf. \textit{De doctr. chr.} 4, 60.
\textsuperscript{51} F. GALENDE FINCIAS, \textit{ibid.}, p. 38.
answers, but it is the learner himself who should understand, on his own, the solution to the problems. This method of teaching was clearly observed and applied by Augustine in the group discussions at Cassiciacum. In his early dialogues, we see examples of exploratory investigations rather than systematic expositions of a problem. The participants start with no fixed and final aim in view, but move on whithersoever the argument and the general will of the members of the group direct them. Firm solutions are not even necessarily reached. The tone is less sophisticated and the flow of conversation is lively and informal. Augustine gives his companions and students the opportunity to test and sharpen their powers of thought and self-expression. The group members practically take command of the discussion. Only in the second moment does Augustine formally intervene and give an uninterrupted exposition.

The act of committing oneself to what is being taught presupposes free choice. No one can be forced to learn. In fact, we cannot learn anything unless we open ourselves up to truth. No one learns unless he wants to. In Augustine’s educational theory, volition or the human will occupies a prominent place. George Howie explains: “Pupils cannot be compelled to learn; they can only be influenced to learn by the teacher’s own example, enthusiasm and love.”52 Modern Psychology pays attention to the many factors that hinder a person’s learning process, which may lead to a student’s conscious or unconscious refusal to learn. And where such an attitude exists, teachers should try to understand the motivation and consequently find ways or methods to stimulate the interest of their pupils. For Augustine, one fundamental role of a teacher is that of providing stimulus to students. Hence, in addition to instructing and giving information, a teacher must “invite, arouse, stimulate, provoke, awaken, guide and help a student” in his search for truth.53 Teachers, for example, must find ways of making the material they are teaching appear interesting, desirable, useful and significant. “The activity of learning arises entirely of the learner’s own volition in response to the presentation of some desired objective … Nothing which the teacher can do can produce learning, unless the learner voluntarily engages himself.”54

In the students’ process of self-teaching the teacher occupies a peripheral position. “It is the learner himself who is central; he teaches himself in a direct encounter with the thing to be known … the teacher as not being the cause of learning but as merely supplying the stimulus and perhaps the source materials”.55 In order to properly guide his pupils’ activity of self-learning, the teacher must pay close attention to their distinct personalities. He must carefully assess their progress and their reactions to the various methods being proposed. He also needs to take into account their level of maturity, their needs, their cultural background, and so forth.56 The teacher must have regard not only to what he himself desires to teach, but also to what his pupils desire to learn.57

52 G. HOWIE, ibid., p. 143.
53 I. DÍEZ DEL RIO, ibid., p. 53.
54 G. HOWIE, ibid., p. 159.
55 Ibid., p. 158.
56 Cf. De cat. rud. 12 and 23.
57 G. HOWIE, ibid., p. 153.
Conclusion

At this point let us summarize what we have said so far. First, we have explained how Augustine’s cultural formation had strongly influenced his theory of education. The type of education he received was essentially humanistic in nature. It was focused on training in the classical liberal arts. Second, when he describes education as one means of providing nourishment for the soul just as food does for the body and as a means to purify, discipline and provide our minds with knowledge and skills so that we could live a good life and, in the long run, attain happiness, we have seen that all of these presuppose a particular vision of man. Indeed, Augustinian pedagogy has clear anthropological presuppositions. And, third, we have presented some fundamental principles of Augustinian pedagogy that are supposed to guide us in the process of learning and teaching.

Now, at the outset of our talk, we stated that Augustinian pedagogy has its limitations and restricted application. We said so, first, because Augustine’s ideas were conditioned by the type of education he himself received; second, the type of education that he received was, in turn, determined by the historical situation of the Roman Empire in the West during the fourth and the fifth centuries; third, the curriculum of the classical school that students, like Augustine, received was humanistic and speculative in character; fourth, no Christian schools, in the strict sense of the term, were existing at that time and Augustine was still struggling with the problem of reconciling pagan culture and Christian faith in his teaching experience; and, fifth, modern-day educational system had gone through significant changes and transformation from the fourth or fifth century up to the present time. Thus, there are many areas of modern-day teaching where Augustine’s educational insights may not prove applicable anymore. Think, for example, of the many branches of positive science that never existed before. Augustine himself also tells us that even in determining which sciences and arts should enter into the curriculum in training Christian pupils, we must be selective and, hence, discard those disciplines which would not contribute to the deepening of our faith or to the acquisition of knowledge of God.

We are not saying, of course, that Augustinian pedagogy is inapplicable in toto to present-day education. We are simply saying that we must be careful in adapting it and avoid forced reading of Augustine’s idea, trying to apply it at all cost to every single area of our current educational system. It is to Augustine’s credit, however, that his pedagogy continues to provide us, at least, with some general orientation and principles that we can take into account in our desire to teach and to learn.

Augustine’s educational theory may seem too humanistic and speculative, but a deeper look into it reveals that it proposes quite a well-balanced approach. It is true that modern education nowadays tends to focus more on scientific formation and less on human formation. Augustine’s concept of education embraces both. Thus, it aims at helping the student to “draw out” into the light of day his human potentialities and help him know how to “encounter” the laws of nature and the hidden sense of

58 Note the word-play here between the Latin verbs educare (“to educate”) and educĕre (“to draw out”). This idea of “drawing out” also evokes the typically Socratic maieutic method of teaching.
things.\textsuperscript{59} Scientific formation, indeed, is necessary, but we should not limit ourselves to this level.

That education must be well focused is another point Augustine teaches us. It must have a clear goal and orientation. In the case of Augustine, his concept of education was intrinsically tied up with his conviction that all men want to be happy. In it, God’s word occupies a prime place since it is in the Bible that we find wisdom and know who God is. Any academic system that excludes religion and the study of the Scriptures from its curriculum goes against Augustine’s idea of education.\textsuperscript{60} The subject matter of his main writing on pedagogy, the \textit{De doctrina christiana}, is “how to teach Christianity, not [to provide] a general handbook to education,” Henry Chadwick remarks.\textsuperscript{61}

One famous line we read in the \textit{Confessions} speaks of “beauty ever so ancient and ever so new.”\textsuperscript{62} It would not be exaggerated to affirm the same thing concerning Augustine’s pedagogical theory. It was formulated more than fifteen centuries ago, in a very particular historico-cultural context, and yet it continues to provide us with interesting insights and suggestions we can apply to ourselves either as teachers or as students. The challenge consists now in figuring out how to adapt them to our present-day context.

\textsuperscript{59} I. DÍEZ DEL RIO, \textit{ibid.}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{61} H. CHADWICK, \textit{ibid.}, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Conf.} 10.27.38.