

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

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A Thesis in the Field of Education  
for the Degree of Master of Science in Education

**What's Love Got To Do With It?**

**The Importance of Love and Compassion in Education**

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**Abstract**

Everyone has that one teacher that they remember forever. That impacted them in a way no other teacher ever has. That encouraged, motivated, cared and influenced them in the classroom to be the best learner they can be and achieve anything they set their mind to.

Love is shown in different ways in the classroom. The way an elementary school teacher shows love is very different from the way a high school or college professor shows love to their students. Every teacher has their own unique way of showing love to their students. Instead of trying to tell teachers how to show love in their classrooms, this research notes the importance and impact that love and compassion in the classroom have on student learning and motivation.

A little love can go a long way and can stick with a child forever.

*Key words:* Love, compassion, impact, education, children

### **Acknowledgments/Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to Mrs. Payson. Whose kind heart, compassionate personality, and genuine love for her students, inspired me to become a teacher. Thank you for teaching me in first grade, allowing me to join your classroom again as a senior in high school for my senior options project, and for encouraging me to follow my heart and become a teacher. I think about you everyday and hold you dear in my heart everytime I step foot in a classroom.

I also dedicate this thesis to my future shining stars.

I would like to thank all of the teachers who have supported me and guided me along this journey, from both Skidmore College and Sarah Lawrence College, I wouldn't be where I am today without each and every one of you.

## Annotated Outline

### **Main Idea/Thesis:**

I believe that educators need to define love as building trust and empathy with students, we need to demonstrate love and respect for students, and we need to show dedication to students through an interactive and engaging presentation of the curriculum with a warm and welcoming classroom setting. Love and compassion are extremely important in education and we need more in the classroom.

### **I. Introduction**

- A. Stephan Ball Quote - "to keep systems volatile, slippery and opaque"
  - 1. Schools have become houses of accountability and regulation and they are not leaving room for love and humanity. Schools will do whatever it is necessary to excel and survive, even if it means taking the love and compassion out of education.
- B. We as educators, need to understand and learn how to incorporate these various forms of love into an educational setting to improve teaching and learning

### **II. Quote - "Give education a heart" - John P. Miller**

### **III. Special Teachers**

- A. Everyone has that one teacher they remember and loved so much
- B. Personal Story
  - 1. Mrs. Payson

### **IV. Mrs. Payson**

- A. Died age 45 kidney cancer
- B. Memorial at the school for students to remember her
- C. Many of her former students became teachers because of her
- D. She is the reason I want to be a teacher

### **V. Nel Noddings**

- A. Nel Noddings is an American educator, and philosopher best known for her work in philosophy of education, educational theory, and ethics of care.
- B. Does not use the word "love" to describe how teachers feel about their students
  - 1. Uses the term "caring," and claims that the capacity for caring in both themselves as well as those around them, must be increased by teachers
- C. Teachers will be able to provide the needed care for their students, if the students are receptive to their teachers as "caregivers" or the "ones-caring."
- D. When teachers are honest and open, students are more likely to trust them and willing to listen to them

### **VI. Importance of Compassion in Education**

- A. Compassion allows us to see our students as individuals who are struggling and sometimes suffering.
- B. Compassion allows us to see ourselves in the student, even the student who we find is hard to relate to
- C. Mahatma Gandhi Quote
  - 1. "Where There is Love, There is Life"

### **VII. Why Do We Need Love In Education**

- A. A main aim of education should be a moral one - "that of nurturing the growth of competent, caring, loving persons"

- B. Place the human dimension back into the educational system that has become dehumanized
- C. Each child has unique talents, abilities, and interests in need of engagement and development by caring teachers

**VIII. What Does Love Look Like In The Classroom**

- A. Love is communication
- B. Love is collaborating with students on classroom culture
  - 1. Be honest
  - 2. Ask for honesty
  - 3. Incorporate student feedback
- C. Pictures
  - 1. Mrs. Barden's classroom door - visual feeling of love
  - 2. "And if those children are unresponsive, maybe you can't teach them yet, but you can love them. And if you love them today, maybe you can teach them tomorrow" - Jeffery R. Holland

**IX. Creating A Classroom Community**

- A. Classroom environments are essential to a child's development of a sense of place
- B. When teachers understand how the geography of the classroom and the arrangement of the classroom furniture helps to either support or hinder their instructional objectives, they are acting as what Schneekloth and Shibley call classroom "placemakers"
- C. Schneekloth and Shibley discuss how a teachers' purposeful use of environmental design helps children understand the space and the place they share with peers and adults (Schneekloth & Shibley 1995).
- D. The teacher is setting the pace or the tone of the classroom
- E. Robbin Hawkin's Classroom - ECC

**X. Pictures/Quotes**

- A. "Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love" - Bruce Perry
- B. "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship" - James Comer

**XI. Paulo Friere**

- A. "Teacher's political, ethical, and professional responsibility puts them under an obligation to prepare and enable themselves before engaging in their teaching practice" (Freire, 2005, 32)
- B. Taking the needed steps to become familiar with their student's background, where their students are from, what languages they speak, and their family life at home, are qualities of a good teacher
- C. Educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom they work
- D. They need to know the hopes, fears, dreams, and the language with which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it (Freire, 2005)

**XII. Everyone has their own definition of love**

- A. Paulo Friere quote
  - 1. "The final virtue, if possible, is the ability to love students, in spite of everything. I don't mean a kind of soft or sweet love, but on the contrary a

very affirmative love, a love which accepts, a love for students which pushes us to go beyond, which makes us more and more responsible for our task.”

- B. “Love is multidimensional and manifests in many different ways” - John P. Miller
- C. “Love is connection” - Barbara Fredrickson

### **XIII. Love According to Students**

#### A. Student quotes

1. “Love is hugs and kisses”
2. “Love is when someone gives you something to make you feel good”
3. “Love is being nice to each other”
4. “Love is when someone hears you”

#### B. Picture

1. Student work
2. Student Teaching at Tanglewood Elementary - group project

### **XIV. Teacher definitions of love in the classroom**

#### A. Deanna Santoro - 5th grade teacher

1. “Love in the classroom is the little moments...when the shy 8 year old feels safe enough to raise their hand for the first time, when the struggling student gets the confidence to believe they can do it, when the child whose parents are getting a divorce wants to eat lunch with you because they are having a hard time, when your former fifth grader writes you a letter after graduating college, thanking you for being a special influence in their life. Those little moments, that is love in the classroom.”

#### B. Lorayne Carbon - ECC Sarah Lawrence College

1. “I think love in the classroom is visibility - both the seeing and the coming to know each child. Providing space and time for children to be seen - and I think love in the classroom allows for messiness - And most of all it recognizes that school is only one part of the child’s world and love makes space for the other pieces and intersections.”

### **XV. My Definition of Love in the Classroom**

- #### A. Love in education to me is when your student comes into the classroom in the morning and gives you a hug. When you come back from lunch and there is a homemade card on your desk saying “Ms. Goldberg, I love you. You are the best teacher I ever had.” When one of your students has been struggling with fractions for weeks and they complete a problem entirely on their own and they come running over because they want to show you. Love in the classroom to me is the connection between the teacher and the students and the bond that is created through learning and teaching.

### **XVI. Effective Classroom Teachers**

- #### A. In his book, *Qualities of an Effective Teacher*, James Stronge (2007), discusses the personal attributes that contribute to teachers’ efficacy in the classroom:
1. Important characteristics are subject knowledge, a caring attitude, good communication, classroom management skills, and an appreciation of the value of process and mastery
  2. Teachers’ attitudes toward their jobs in general and the classroom experience in particular help to determine how their students perceive

them and how they experience their school day (Stronge, 2007).

**XVII. Quotes**

A. Ralph Waldo Emerson

1. "The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil"

B. Aristotle

1. "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all"

**XVIII. A Progression of Love In The Classroom K-12**

A. Timeline from Elementary School - Middle School - High School

**XIX. Influence of Love in the Classroom**

A. Barbara Fredrickson

1. What happens in the classroom when love occurs are the interpersonal transactions that can arise in a group setting built upon trust and empathy

B. Susan Engel - "The Hungry Mind"

1. Importance of fostering children's curiosity
  - a) Love of learning means keeping the child's natural curiosity alive

C. Einstein

1. Quote

- a) "It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry"

2. Present day emphasis on standardized testing

3. Einstein would change his view about most schooling today

**XX. Covid/ Pandemic Impact On Love In The Classroom**

A. Loss of

1. Personal connection
2. Engagement
3. Motivation
4. Accountability
5. Social Interactions
6. Compassion and feeling of love
7. Trust and empathy

**XXI. Enthusiasm in Education**

A. One way of showing/ expressing love in the classroom

B. Teachers who express enthusiasm are more likely to keep their students motivated

C. Good teachers understand that each of their students are inspired differently and know how to motivate them individually

D. Enthusiastic teachers not only increase the enthusiasm of their students but increase their level of achievement as well

E. Students will show interest if their teachers are energetic and keep activities flowing at a good pace

F. Students become motivated when teachers vary their teaching methods according to their kids' needs and encourage their students throughout the day to participate actively in their learning

**XXII. Video**

A. Mackenzie Adams - Kindergarten virtual teacher became famous and well known for posting a Tik Tok video of her teaching virtually to her students

B. Video shows examples of enthusiastic teacher showing

1. Empathy
2. Energy
3. Personality
4. Genuine caring for students
5. Positive environment
6. Smiles
7. Games
8. Compassion
9. Understanding

**XXIII. Showing Love Through Technology**

A. Tik Tok Trend - students showing love to their teacher

**XXIV. Love in Education is Mutual**

A. Student Teacher Experience at Tanglewood

B. Personal Pictures from student teaching

**XXV. Showing Love Through Progressive Education**

A. Descriptive Review Process

1. Seeing the child in a holistic way
2. Observing their actions and helping them be creators of their own learning and learn in a way that is best suited for them and their learning journey

B. Observation and Documentation

C. Sarah Lawrence College - ECC

**XXVI. My Future Classroom**

A. Space of comfort and security

B. Welcoming and colorful environment

C. Creative and unique setting

D. Space for exploration

E. Areas for individual and group work

F. Easy access between students and teacher

G. Family-like atmosphere

**XXVII. Conclusion**

A. My beliefs

1. Define love as building trust and empathy with students
2. Demonstrate love and respect for students
3. Show dedication to students through an interactive and engaging presentation of the curriculum with a warm and welcoming classroom setting

B. We need more love, trust, empathy, and compassion in education, especially now...

**C. A little love can go a long way**

### Quotations

“Give education a heart” (Miller, 2018, ix)

“Students have the freedom to love and explore, relate, and experiment” (Miller, 2018, ix)

“Bring soul to the classroom” (Miller, 2018, x)

“Let me be a friend to others as I would have them be a friend to me” (Hunt, 2010, 21)

“Perhaps counterintuitively, love is far more ubiquitous than you ever thought possible for the simple fact that *love is connection*” (Papova, 2015).

“Learning feels good when the material satisfies curiosity, and such learning tends to last” (Engel, 2015, 178).

“It is my firm belief that it is love that sustains the earth. There only is life where there is love” (Gandhi, 1980, 65).

“A caring and compassionate teacher naturally builds a classroom that is a loving community that students want to attend. Each student is honoured and respected for who he or she is” (Miller, 2018, 125).

“Love is the momentary upwelling of three tightly interwoven events: first, a sharing of one or more positive emotions between you and another; second, a synchrony between your and the other person’s biochemistry and behaviors; and third, a reflected motive to invest in each other’s well-being that brings mutual care” (Fredrickson, 2014, 17)

“Love unfolds and reverberates between and among people” (Frederickson, 2014, 19)

“Metta - the sense of love that is not bound to desire, that does not have to pretend that brings are other than the way they are - overcomes the illusion of separateness, of not being part of a whole. Thereby metta overcomes all of the states that accompany this fundamental error of separateness - fear, alienation, loneliness, and despair - all of the feelings of fragmentation. In place of these, the genuine realization of connectedness brings unification, confidence, and safety (Salzberg, 1995, 25)

“Compassion is not an option. It is the key to our survival” - Karen Armstrong

“- systems of accountability, that there is an undeclared policy ‘to keep systems volatile, slippery and opaque’. Not infrequently, the requirements of such systems bring into being unhelpful or indeed damaging practices, which nonetheless satisfy performance requirements. Organisations will do whatever is necessary to excel or to survive. In other words, these policy technologies have the ‘capacity to re-shape in their own image the organisations they monitor’ (Shore and Wright, 1999, 570).

“Connection is why we're here. We are hardwired to connect with others, it's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it there is suffering.”- Brene Brown

“Teacher’s political, ethical, and professional responsibility puts them under an obligation to prepare and enable themselves before engaging in their teaching practice” (Freire, 2005, 32)

“It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curious of inquiry”- Albert Einstein

**Picture Quotations (from oral presentation) Citations:**

“And if those children are unresponsive, maybe you can't teach them yet, but you can love them.

And if you love them today, maybe you can teach them tomorrow.” - **Jeffrey R. Holland**

“Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love.” - **Bruce**

**Perry**

“No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.” - **Dr. James Comer**

“The secret of education lies in the respecting the pupil” - **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all” - **Aristotle**

### **Process Paper**

The importance of love and compassion in education has been a value of mine since the beginning of my teaching journey. I have always been passionate about the importance of love and the influence it has on children's learning. When a child feels as though they are cared about and loved, they are more likely to want to perform well and learn more, not only for themselves, but for their teacher as well. If the child feels like their teacher does not care, and does not want to be there, then they are more likely to resist and push back when asked to do something in the classroom. I witnessed this first hand throughout my education journey. In elementary school, the teachers that came to school and were cold and just went through the motions, had students that did not perform as well and were unmotivated and did not enjoy going to school. Whereas, the teachers that truly loved their job and their students and created a loving, exciting, and family-like environment, had students that were eager to learn and genuinely enjoyed going to school.

I chose to write my thesis on the importance of love and compassion in education because I feel that they are the two most important things to have in your classroom as a teacher. If you show your students that you truly love them and want them to do well, they will want to do well not only for you, but for themselves as well. They will want to do well because you believed in them, you supported them, you encouraged them. You told them that the sky's the limit and they can do anything they set their minds to.

The process of working on my thesis was truly special. I chose a topic really dear to my heart and that I am really passionate about, so the journey was extremely fulfilling. My various student teaching experiences, at both Skidmore College and Sarah Lawrence College led me to the topic of love and education. All the teachers I have worked with showed love and

compassion to their students and had warm and welcoming classrooms that made me fall in love with teaching and children.

As I embarked on my thesis journey, I wanted to learn more about love and how everyone expresses love differently. I kept coming back to the idea that the way my first grade teacher showed me love was very different from the way my high school teachers showed me love. However, they all loved me equally as much, cared about me tremendously both in and out the classroom, and wanted me to succeed academically. I also wanted to explore more about why children need love in the classroom and why it encourages them to want to succeed and perform better. The emotional connection a student has with a teacher can go a long way. I have enjoyed learning and understanding the emotional side of education and the impact it has on student learning.

The book, *Love and Compassion, Exploring Their Role In Education* by John P. Miller, was the basis of my entire presentation. Miller's exploration of the different forms of love and how they can be nurtured in an educational setting to improve teaching and learning, warmed my heart and reminded me of why I chose this profession in the first place. He encouraged me to reflect on my own teaching practices, as well as on my student's experiences and how I will create a loving and empathetic environment in my future classroom.

*The Challenge to Care in Schools. An Alternative Approach to Education*, by Nel Noddings, assisted me in making sense of my own experiences in school and brought to light a school system that is built upon the idea that different people have different strengths and that these strengths should be cultivated in an environment of caring, not of competition. Noddings does not use the word "love" to describe how teachers feel about their students, rather she uses the term "caring" and claims that the capacity for caring in both themselves as well as those

around them, must be increased by teachers. She believes that teachers should be able to provide the needed care for their students, if the students are receptive to their teachers as “caregivers” or the “ones-caring.” One specific notion that I grasped onto from Nel Noddings’ work, that I have made a part of my teaching philosophy and practice, is the idea that when teachers are honest and open, students are more likely to trust them and willing to listen to them. Love in education is communication. It is important for everyone in the classroom to trust one another and build a community based on trust and communication to allow everyone to be their own unique self.

I knew from the beginning of this process that I wanted to include personal examples into my presentation because of the personal connection I have to love in education. As a student, I myself thrive when I know I have someone rooting for me, someone encouraging me, someone who genuinely cares about me and wants me to succeed. I wanted everyone who was watching my presentation to think about who that teacher was for them and how that teacher impacted their education journey. In light of the current world we are living in, I wanted to empathize the importance of love in education and how students, of all ages, are lacking that personal connection and feeling of love and compassion in the classroom due to virtual learning. Teachers are having to explore different mediums and practices to demonstrate that feeling to their students, and some are doing a phenomenal job and others are struggling. It is not easy, and as educators, it is our job and responsibility to ensure that our students feel safe, feel supported, feel cared about, and most importantly, feel loved. My goal of my presentation is to have everyone feel the impact of love on our students and how vital and influential it is in the classroom.

Throughout this journey, I feel that I learned that I am even more passionate about this topic than I thought I was. I knew I cared a lot about love and compassion in education but after the extensive research I did and the knowledge I have gained, I feel even more inclined to make

a change and take a stance in the education world. I want every student that I teach to feel the way Mrs. Payson made me feel. I want them to know that from the moment they step foot into my classroom on the first day of school and forward, that they have a special place in my heart. I want them to feel excited about school, to feel motivated to do well, and most importantly, to feel as though they can do anything because Ms. Goldberg believes they can. I want to put the heart back into education, like John P. Miller says.

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