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Love in education: West Australian early childhood pre-service teachers' perspectives on children's right to be loved and its actualisation within their future practice

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Love in education: West Australian early childhood pre-service teachers' perspectives on children's right to be loved and its actualisation within their future practice.

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Abstract

Children's right to love is a recognised fundamental human need set down within the 1992 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. This recognition stems from an acknowledgement that the Early Years of Development are emotionally driven (Degotardi, & Sweller, 2012). Young children responds best to those with whom they experience love and acceptance (Carter, & Fewster, 2013). As such, love in the classroom is important as an empowering agent of children's well-being and achievement. Children's need and right to be surrounded by love poses a challenge for many early childhood teachers as they strive to meet the emotional needs of children within a professional care-based relationship (Goldstein, 1999; Walsh & Brandon, 2012). This research presents pre-service teachers' perspectives on love in early childhood education; their definitions, their understanding of its role within development, and their visions of how it can be actualised within their practice.

Keywords: early childhood, pre-service teachers, pedagogical love, love in education, care in education, relational pedagogy.

Introduction

This research project grew out of conversations with pre-service teachers. As educators of educators, we observed that there was a frequency of conversations arising within tutorial sessions that centred on a confusion about how pre-service early childhood teachers should best respond to tensions around physical touch and affection within educational settings. These conversations were generally punctuated by expressions of

concern by students that children's right to be loved and to feel loved was an important and integral part of early childhood education. As the educators of these future educators, we decided that some action research was required in order to ascertain more comprehensively, the perspectives of our students on children's right to be loved and how students envisaged this right would be actualised within their future practice. The findings of this research will support us to better meet pre-service teachers' needs on this evolving learning journey. This paper deals with the presentation of the pre-service teachers' perspectives. A future paper will present our response as their educators.

The rights and needs of young children are ethical issues. The difficulties and complications surrounding love as a concept coupled with both how society's responses to evolving boundaries around love and affection, and young children's developmental requirements, have created a challenging space for early childhood educators. It has also, potentially, created a space within children's lives where their need for love and their right to be loved is being compromised by the fear of educators who are unsure of how to respond appropriately within a changing landscape. This is the narrative shared with us by our pre-service teachers. As their educators, our response was to record their perspectives in order to better understand and thereby meet their needs. Time and time again, it became clear that our students need guidance on how best to meet the needs of the children they will work with while also meeting the professional expectations surrounding their responses. As such, this research is underpinned by ethical motivations. The researchers are aware of children's need for love, are aware that young children today are often spending long days within educational facilities, and are also aware that the pre-service teachers are concerned and unsure of how to manage this tension between children's needs and professional boundaries surrounding love.

Social life has been changed by the realisations that have followed disclosures of

abuses within many social institutions, including education. One effect of this within education is a degree of uncertainty, or sometimes an inappropriate certainty, surrounding expressions of affection, especially ones which incorporate touch. An example of the type of inappropriate certainty that exists includes schools that have developed policies prohibiting all touch. These policies are inappropriate because a child within an Australian kindergarten school-based program may be three years of age and appropriate touch is an integral element of a developmentally aligned pedagogical responsiveness (Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). Children in pre-kindergarten and childcare programmes are even younger. The majority of schools in the Perth metropolitan area operate pre-kindy programmes, where the children can be as young as two years of age. Most Western Australian childcare facilities welcome babies as young as six weeks old. The current uncertainty and inappropriate certainty result in the need to create a space where educators are clearer and have access to more developmentally appropriate information about how best to meet children's need for love in a professional educational setting. As such, this research is action focused and seeks to extend the conversation in a way that supports pre-service teachers' evolving applied and professional ethics.

This action research is important to us as educators of educators. There is a strong link between children's developmental need for love and their ongoing mental health and wellbeing, which is heightened in an educational context (Hatt, 2005). The process of attachment and the relational experiences of young children in school-based, centre-based and home-based environments is a key indicator of their life-long wellbeing (Doyle & Cicchetti, 2017).

As such, the ability of the early-childhood educator to manage the appropriate boundaries of professional interaction while meeting young children's need to be loved

is an ability which has implications for the mental health of our population of young children. This responsibility is not new. The need to meet children's needs in a professionally appropriate manner is not new either. However, what is new, is the complicated landscape which teachers find themselves within in relation to evolving understandings and definitions of appropriate boundaries of professional interaction within this context.

Methodology

This is an action research project. Action research is suited to investigations within social contexts and so is often carried out in the field of education (Somekh, 2005), to improve the methods and approach of those who are seeking to educate. As both the researchers and the participants in this study are educators, this is a highly suitable methodology. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods were chosen as their blend was most appropriate to achieve the aim of this research which centres on gaining insight into pre-service teachers' perspectives on children's right to be loved and its actualisation within their future teaching practice.

Surveys were distributed to all first year students of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and Care Programme at The University of Notre Dame, Australia's Fremantle campus. This programme is a four-year full-time initial teacher education qualification programme. The data were collected during the mid-point of students' first year in the programme. The participants of the research were pre-service early childhood teachers who have completed a semester of theoretical courses including a course titled 'Child Development'. Child Development is a course which covered content of children's holistic needs inclusive of their emotional needs. The pre-service teachers had not yet undertaken an educational practicum.

All participants were asked to fill in a separate consent form with an additional option to volunteer to be a group interview participant. All of those who volunteered for an interview were invited to participate in a group interview. Fifty of the pre-service teachers returned the survey and two group interview sessions took place. The group interview sessions each lasted forty-five minutes and were attended by twelve participants each.

This paper presents the qualitative data from these focus group sessions. The quantitative data is being held in reserve for the second stage of the project. The second stage of the project will repeat the survey and hold follow-up focus group interviews to discuss these concepts with the pre-service teachers after their completion of a teaching practicum in an early childhood educational setting. The qualitative data will allow us to extrapolate whether professional experience changes the perspectives of the pre-service teachers on children's right to be loved within education and what that might look like within their future practice.

It is intended that data gathered in this study will allow for a comparative discussion on pre and post perspectives and expectations of the school sector in meeting the emotional needs of children. This comparative discussion will incorporate any potential fears around emotional boundaries as they relate to a changing landscape in the interpretation of both children's needs and their protection. If appropriate, data from phase two may also provide more specific information regarding the way in which engagement with practice and school policies changes the participants' perspectives, if at all, and the reasons any change. This study will make a necessary contribution to the current research context where research on perspectives of pre-service teachers within young children's complex emotional needs is limited. It will also allow us to reflect on how the early childhood education degree is preparing pre-service early-childhood

teachers for this challenging landscape and make changes to the degree if deemed appropriate in light of the findings. The journey for us, however, starts here, in this paper; where we present and discuss our early childhood pre-service teachers' perspectives.

Findings and Discussion

Discussing the premise; pre-service teachers' perspectives on whether children should be loved by their educators; and whether educators should love the children they teach.

The pre-service teachers who took part in the qualitative research unanimously agreed that children's right to be loved extended into their education and care environments. They expressed a view that loving the children they work with makes a teacher a more effective educator. They communicated that they saw a difference between pedagogical love and pedagogical care. They also believed that the children would be able to tell if they were loved by their educator and that this pedagogical love would be valued by the children. The pre-service teachers found it tricky to articulate what it was that they believed the children would experience differently within pedagogical love as opposed to pedagogical care. Literature and empirical work frequently refers to educators' responsibility to 'care' for their students and to teach their students how to care for others and the world (Cloninger, 2008). However, the word 'love' is rarely used. Cloninger (2008) addresses this absence, suggesting it is due to the depth and intensity of the word 'love'; 'love' implies a much deeper relationship. Loreman (2011) calls on the exploration of love as pedagogy, to go beyond the word 'care' that has become vague and impassive.

This concept was grappled with by the pre-service teachers to some resolution.

Love is genuine, it is seeing the best in the child. You can care for the child and not necessarily love them...but the child can tell the difference...it's being genuine versus doing what you need to do as a carer.

Love exists within the feeling, not just within the action. But the feeling shapes the action and it's different even if it is the same action and a child can tell if the difference is there.

The pre-service teachers who were the participants of this study felt clear that love is an appropriate emotion within education. Cloninger's (2008) scholarship regarding love supports this view in that it defines three forms of love, one of which applies well to pedagogical contexts: *eros* is the first type of love defined within the literature. It is a romantic love driven by desire and passion; *philia* is named secondly and described broadly as the love which underpins friendship. The third type of love is *agape*. It is referred to as the deepest form of love due to its unconditional nature. *Agape* is love displayed through a sense of giving or caring for another (Fehr, Harasymchuk & Sprecher, 2014). *Agape* expects nothing in return and there are no provisos to this form of love (Cloninger, 2008). *Agape* is described as a profound form of love, both altruistic and liberating in nature. It is *agape* which can be present within early childhood education; in essence "it is *Agape* that is at the heart of affective pedagogy" (Patience, 2008, p. 57). Pedagogical love is *agape* in that caring for students with the unconditional love of *agape* is to give of oneself without the expectation, or need, to receive in return. The participants of this study however, were at pains to

differentiate between love and care within early childhood pedagogy. Love, they felt, was at the heart of the motivation for care but was not the same thing as care:

Love is beyond care, it is something more. To care is to do but to love is to do in a better way because what is driving you is deeper and more committed. I think children can tell if someone loves them and for sure they are going to learn more from that person and be more responsive to that person.

There was also a strong sense among participants that openness to pedagogical love is connected to the essence of what underpins a vocation within early childhood education:

It comes from who you are as a person. To love your students is a personal commitment that mirrors a commitment to all human kind really. I believe in people and love people and I want to make a difference and the biggest difference you can make is with small children so here I am and I am sure everyone in my classroom will be loved. That's why I want to be an early childhood teacher.

Several discussions on the motivations for pedagogical love centred on this connection to vocation and developed into an expression of something that mirrored the therapeutic mission of unconditional positive regard. One participant shared that for her, pedagogical love started before she even met her class. 'Pedagogical love is a commitment', she explained; going on to elucidate:

It is there no matter how kind or troubled each child is, no matter how happy or sad, no matter how challenging or frustrating or rewarding or funny each child is, I will love them. To me that is part of my professional commitment to every child I'll teach. I love them already and I haven't even met them.

This commitment to love what doesn't yet exist exposes that the pre-service teacher perceives that loving the children is an integral part of her future work as an educator. She went on to explain that what she meant was

I will start each year with a commitment to love every child. If that commitment is challenged by the reality, I won't let it be shaken, I will reflect on the challenge but I will hold true to the commitment. I will use that commitment to help me to overcome the challenge and untimely, to meet the child's needs.

Pre-service teachers' perspectives on what defines a pedagogy based on love.

There was strong support among participants for the concept of pedagogical love within early childhood education and an esoteric understanding of it as vocationally motivated and service-driven. When the question of what defines pedagogical love within practice was posed, the participants paused before contemplating that it centred on connection to the children, knowing them, understanding them, wanting deeply what is best for them, working hard to support them to achieve it, and offering plentiful opportunities for them to experience positive emotional journeys as well as social and cognitive ones.

The importance of knowing the child

“It is your facial expression and it’s in your tone of voice” began one participant.

Another took up that thread and extended it to the following:

...but it is also in what you say and what you choose, you know about their life and you ask the right questions and you say the right things so they know that you know and that you truly care.

One participant called it ‘mindfulness’, another called it ‘attentiveness’. A third said that it was ‘being in-tune’ with each child. Others agreed with this line of thought.

Several participants elaborated with practice examples such as:

It’s knowing what’s going in within each child’s life and their friendships and their relationships and home life touching base with the right support when you see something is going on.

It’s knowing like what’s their favourite colour and favourite food and what do they like to do on the weekend, who are their siblings, what annoys them and what they love to do and why, its knowing them on a personal level so they feel seen and heard and understood and appreciated and well...loved.

I think small things can make a big difference like simply showing them that you care, standing at the door and greeting each one individually, conversing with them throughout the day, asking them

what they did on the weekend...showing you have an interest in their life.

Loreman (2011) echoes many of these sentiments, discussing the importance of the emotional engagement between teacher and child. Loreman describes this emotional engagement as being centred within a teacher's empathy for the child and defines empathy in the classroom as both a cognitive and an affective construct. Teaching from a position of empathetic love requires the ability to "understand the psychology of others" (p. 16) as well as being able to feel as another does. Such descriptions of professional empathy also echo what counsellors and therapists call 'unconditional positive regard' and are built upon a professional commitment that is deeply rooted in human connection.

Kindness is also fundamental within a pedagogical approach founded on love for the children. Kindness is best described as helping others, being generous and warm-hearted. Kindness and empathy in pedagogy are much more than the adoption of a variety of teaching strategies on these two concepts. Loreman (2011) articulates the need for kindness and empathy to permeate all that occurs in the teaching and learning environment, so that a loving atmosphere that engenders actions of kindness and empathy develops.

As the participants of this study were pre-service teachers in the first year of their degree, the practice examples were not yet necessarily derived from practical experience and as such were naturally more theoretical. In order to apply existing

knowledge to a hypothetical practice situation, some participants drew on examples from their memories of being children who had ‘in-tune’ educators:

I remember getting a birthday card from my Year One teacher ...and that’s just really nice and I remember my parents talking about her as being really lovely and I remember how important it was for them and for me.

I remember a Year One teacher that everyone wanted to get. She was kind and knowledgeable about all the children. All the parents used to say ‘she just really loves children’, everyone knew that was a good thing for a teacher to be...a good teacher was someone who loves children.

‘Everyone knew this’ says a participant, ‘they have known it for a long time but do they still know it?’. In 1910, Cygnaeus wrote: “every teacher has to blaze with the spirit of sacred love. Sacred love that does not seek its own. That kind of love towards pupils has to smoulder in a teacher’s heart. That kind of teacher’s love affects the whole school in a protecting way” (p. 197).

Both Cygnaeus and the participants of this study are referring to a deep bond, which is pivotal to childhood education. The participants draw regularly on bonds they experienced with an educator; bonds, which they recall as inherently positive and influential. Loreman (2011) describes pedagogical love as an intimate bond between educator and child. Intimacy can be described in a variety of ways. In the context of education, Loreman writes that intimacy is best articulated as an intimate interaction (experiential and behavioural), as opposed to an intimate relationship (romantic partners)

(Fehr, Harasymchuk & Sprecher, 2014). Intimacy and bonding concern the development of a psychological security. In the relationship between educator and student, this intimacy and bonding is a foundation for mutual sharing, deep understanding and emotional support, and leads to a sense of loyalty (Loreman, 2011). Intimacy and bonding are connected to the theory of attachment. Bonding provides security, children learn when they feel safe (Bowlby, 1988). Bonding and intimacy develop when educators involve children in decision-making and ask for their feedback (Loreman 2011). Bonding occurs when children feel that the teacher has their interests at heart—their successes are celebrated and their concerns listened to.

Several participants also connected pedagogical love to the children's learning, making the link between love as knowing and understanding to planning, providing and facilitating progression. This concept has echoes of Cho's (2005) work which describes love as having a positive impact on learning, with the ability to unite teacher and student. Cho emphasises that there is a place for love in pedagogy and that its presence enriches learning. The pre-service teachers made this connection between love in pedagogy and learning in their responses:

I think love means knowing what your children need next on their learning journey and making sure they get it.

It's understanding their learning needs and working hard to come up with ways of meeting those needs.

It's planning learning experiences based on the children's interests
so they're really meaningful so they feel that they're valued.

Cornelius-White (2007) found that positive teacher-student relationships were shown to be associated with optimal holistic learning in 119 studies between the years 1948 to 2004. Conversely, any negativity within this pivotal relationship has been shown to be an obstacle to the child's learning journey (O'Connor, 2016). Connecting pedagogical love with richer learning outcomes is a connection that was by Slavin (2016), who wrote that:

Education is empty without love. Evidence helps teachers and principals give every child the best possible chance to achieve success in school and in life. An educator who loves children wants the best for them. The purpose of educational research, development, and evaluation is to provide educators with pragmatic means of showing their love for children. But the two together are the most powerful force in education. (para 3.)

The role of physical touch

What is it about love in education that makes us nervous? This question was posed by a participant of the study when the topic of expressing love through physical touch was deliberated. A similar question was posed by Cloninger (2008): Does it transgress the boundaries of teacher-student relationship? To love is to take a risk, in this case the risk is required if educators are to view the child as a holistic being. The risk of taking a purely impersonal position is far riskier (Cloninger, 2008).

Caution is used in discourse connecting the words ‘love’ or ‘relationship’ to education. This caution is a result of instances of exploitation and predatory behaviours, whereby individual educators have used their position of authority to move away from love and into perverse and harmful behaviours (Loreman, 2011; Patience, 2008). As a result, ‘love’ has been omitted from discussions on education for fear it may be interpreted as the intimate love of *eros* and subsequently call into question the integrity of the profession. The tension, as Loreman (2011) describes it, is between the need to have policy in place that protects the child whilst also providing caring, nurturing, natural and trusting relationships that are essential for learning to occur.

The role of physical touch was discussed in detail by the participants. The pre-service teachers felt that it was touch that underpinned this tension. Many shared stories of being told of no-touch policies in schools and wondered aloud if that applied to circumstances such as a child crying, or asking to be lifted, or climbing onto the educator’s knee during story time. ‘Are we supposed to lift them off?’ asked one participant of another, ‘It just seems wrong’. Calling the participants to consider the role, if any, of physical touch within pedagogical love elicited this response:

Pedagogical love has a physicality, it is a gentle hand on a shoulder at the right time, and it can also be sitting on a teacher’s lap or getting cuddles if you need them.

There was collective agreement that being open or closed to physical touch as an educator was expressed through body language:

You communicate your love through your openness and being physically open is part of this. It is like having an openness towards the children instead of being disassociated and cut off, so it might be someone putting a hand on a shoulder or inviting children to come to you or go to them and getting down on their level I think that's a sign of love.

There was also a general discussion that the physical element of pedagogical love may change not just in response to different children's expression of their needs but also in response to their age:

I think the amount of love is always the same but you're just presenting it in a different way with different age groups. You're showing the same amount of love but you're not showing it in the same way.

I guess it would have to change as they grow because when they are babies they'd want more cuddles and there would be more holding but when they get older they tell you their needs and so this physicality changes as children get older.

Some participants spoke about responsive educators who facilitated the sense of connection by allowing child-led physical responsiveness. There was strong support for how natural and positive it felt for them as children when their educator supported their needs in this way:

I remember my first day at kindy. I was fine when I arrived and then when my mum left I burst into tears and I remember I sat on my teachers lap for like the whole day...I didn't leave her side, I remember feeling so comforted and safe like I was in a place where I could relax and be comfortable.

The discussion evolved to a general consensus that children's needs should come first within an early childhood educator's professional responsibilities and that the role of the educator who is practising pedagogical love is to remain 'in-tune' and responsive to those needs:

So if a baby cries, you pick them up and comfort them. The older child will come looking for physical connection if they need it, I think it's important to always hug a child back if they come for a hug but maybe we don't need to be the one to initiate the hug and that is where the line lies as they grow older. It's different if they are crying though because that's a language of its own that says I need human comfort now.

Pedagogical love as a relational, human, personal expression

The discussion took a direction into relational pedagogy and its link with pedagogical love. The participants spoke about the importance of being truly yourself with the children so authenticity is felt. The participants felt that this authenticity on the part of

the educator would, in turn, empower the children to feel free also to be truly themselves. One participant explained it as underpinning “an unconditionality within the exchange, an almost familial acceptance that whomever you are is welcome”. The unconditional nature of pedagogical love was written about in 1948, when Haavio wrote “a teacher’s pedagogical love will not become dependent on how a pupil responds to a teacher’s love” (p. 71). This concept links well with Cloninger (2008) who wrote:

Thus, to cultivate a culture of love in a classroom, one must create a safe place, a safe environment, where students feel that they are both listened to and listening to others. In this environment, all students feel that they can speak freely and that what they will say will be accepted. (p. 203)

Others agreed:

Just knowing your students on a deeper level than just ‘they got this mark in their test and they played with this person at lunch’, just really knowing them as an individual and knowing their family and what things might be affecting them in the classroom or in their life.

I think showing them also who you are, showing your expression of emotions, showing them it’s okay to be who you are is really important and it helps them to know they can be themselves too.

The importance of children having opportunities to express their love and care

The participants spoke about the centrality of love within the human experience. The important role it plays within child development and how much they value the

experiences of both loving and being loved. The pre-service teachers linked the centrality of love within the human experience to pedagogical love by expressing that children needed not only to experience being loved, but also needed to experience loving. An enthusiastic discussion of this point ensued and concluded with the participants agreeing that pedagogical love included offering the children opportunities to engage with others in loving ways:

Pedagogical love is promoted when children have opportunities to care for those around them. They are supported to care for those in their class, care for pets or living things in the garden, learn about friendship, learn mutual respect, practice collaborative skills and build their empathy through loving interactions.

I guess that pedagogical love is also about wanting to care and help, wanting to look after someone, helping them to grow and develop and reach their potential. I think the children also need to have these experiences. Having an empathetic classroom where we listen to each other, respect each other's differences, even things like growing plants and caring for them and having a class pet are important.

Pedagogical love is also about modelling. It is doing things to show what love means.

Love as pedagogy appears in literature within the terms *affective practice* and *affective pedagogy*. Affective pedagogy is centred on relational aspects of the teacher-

student interaction. Affective pedagogy requires a giving of the self, on behalf of the educator, in order to invest in a relationship with the student. Emotional modelling in this context is central to this concept. This involves the educator giving of themselves in a very authentic way. Patience (2008) explains that for the teacher, it entails accepting emotional vulnerability as well as engaging in the conveying of knowledge. It also requires the highest ethical integrity. To act with love is to care; to care with the integrity of love is a deep professional commitment within early childhood education.

Pre-service teachers' perspectives on why they are committed to practising a pedagogy based on love

When asked why they are committed to practising a pedagogy based on love, the pre-service teachers identified two main motivations both of which centre on the benefits for the child's overall development. These motivations are rooted in a dual belief that love, inclusive of pedagogical love, leads to the child developing a greater sense of agency, and a greater degree of integrated and holistic development thereby supporting their overall development.

A pedagogy of love leads to a sense of agency

The focus groups strongly agreed that a pedagogy of love leads to a sense of agency within the children:

If you feel loved by your teacher, you are going to think I am worthwhile, I am good, I am special. All of which will help you to grow in confidence and confidence is going to help you to feel happier and be a better learner and a more effective communicator.

The origin of this view among participants was again strongly linked to their sense of vocation; with pedagogical love being intertwined with a shared perspective on what defined an early childhood educator.

I think it is an important part of being a good early childhood educator, it is important for me anyway. I want to be that type of teacher, a loving, caring, nurturing one. They are the teachers that make the biggest difference in children's lives.

Again, the participants drew from their own educational experiences as children and spoke about loving educators who made a difference to them. They used these experiences to integrate what pedagogical love gave them as children and what they hope to actualise as future educators:

A loving teacher makes you feel important and gives you a sense of I'm a good person or a belief in yourself to drive you further, ...like my Year One teacher...she still shows an interest in all our lives...she's still someone to talk to...she's always there...when she taught me, I knew she was there for me and that made me feel really good.

I have been lucky enough to have teachers who made me feel love. It is a very good feeling as a child. I felt that I had all of these people that loved me and I believe that it has made me a better person I think

it is really important for educators to show children how much you care. It helps with their assertiveness and confidence and that can make a big difference to a child.

Children who are loved by their educator grow holistically

Loreman (2011) wrote that passion infuses all that educators do—or it should! The passionate educator who knows his/her students, who plans for their needs, who brings together the classroom community, is embracing a pedagogy of love. If educators truly believe that children learn from the context they are in and the adults in their world, then “growing up in a loving environment may well engender a greater capacity for empathy, kindness, affection...” (p. 107).

The view that children learn best when they have developed a secure attachment to the teacher is commonplace within literature, particularly in the field of early childhood. Bowlby’s (1988) attachment theory clearly describes the need for children to develop a secure base. The secure base, expands as does the child’s distance from the secure base as the child develops his/her sense of confidence and autonomy. Attachment theory becomes connected to self-regulation as the child internalises the feelings of security and begins to develop strategies to cope with their own emotions (Drake, Belsky & Fearon, 2014). Self-regulation and these secure attachments in early childhood are linked to ‘love’. Emotionally-based relationships are the bridges between people (Maatta & Uusiautti, 2011) and these bridges become the solid foundations on which greater depths of knowledge and skill acquisition occur.

Love significantly influences the development of the brain. Gerhardt (2014) describes the influence that the emotional connection of love has on the developing

brain, commencing in utero. When babies are loved, the level of stress hormones such as cortisol are reduced when compared to babies of mothers who are depressed, removed or resentful. Increased levels of stress hormones pre or post-natal, have debilitating and long term negative consequences for the child's future development.

There was a strong sense among participants of this study that children who are loved by their educator grow holistically. They defined positive holistic growth as developing more positive attachments, holding a more positive world view, engaging in more positive relationships and having overall better outcomes in social and emotional domains as well as cognitive domains. Several participants explained in different ways that they believe children need healthy attachments at school and at home; that a healthy attachment reaped rewards within the child's sense of personhood and as such supported their holistic development. This discussion was lengthy, animated and passionate. The participants made linkages between experiences of pedagogical love and personal development:

Attachment is important at home and in education, children need a sense of love to feel they belong and that in turn helps their development of who they are as a person, how they see themselves and then how they act and how they learn.

Between personal development and resilience:

The child who has had an educator who has loved them (sic) will have a stronger sense of being who they are and a better sense of belonging

when they are at that point in their life. Greater belonging and a stronger sense of yourself gives you resilience. They'll have stronger resilience because they've been taught that's okay, you can go on to the next thing.

Between pedagogical love and spirituality and morality:

It's about spirituality too, being loved is a spiritually connecting experience. If you are surrounded by love, you feel connected to everything and you can better understand the importance of goodness. And you can better feel that you could also be loved by God.

Yes and you can be good in the world too because those that love you have been good to you. So it helps a child morally because morality and love are connected and love shows us what is right and what is wrong.

On this point regarding the relationship between spirituality and pedagogical love, the participants have touched on an aspect of pedagogical love, which Cloninger (2008) identified. To love the children in your educational care attends to their spiritual capacity (Cloninger, 2008), an aspect so frequently overlooked in the educational agenda. Love nurtures children's spiritual capacity through the unconditional response of the educator (Cloninger, 2008). *Agape* love is "love in action" stated Martin Luther King Jr. (1991, pp. 19–20) "and this agape love calls us to recognise the connectedness of humanity." (pp. 19-20)

The discussion concluded with an enthusiastic exchange of summary statements where the participants spontaneously sought to bring their views together into encapsulating descriptions of their overall views on the value of pedagogical love:

If love is the basis for attachment and attachment is the basis for wellbeing and wellbeing impacts all learning...then children will have much more beneficial outcomes in education if they are loved by their educators because they have this firmer foundation...this foundation helps them develop more positive mental mind-maps like 'I am a good person', 'The world is good', 'I can accomplish good things'. Versus the child who doesn't feel loved or connected in day-care or school who grows up stressed and starts to develop negative self-perceptions which impact formal learning and relationships, resilience and mental health.

Well...when you put it like that...

Conclusion

Love has been left out of discourse on education for too long (Page, 2013) implying the subject is somehow taboo (Page, 2011). Research explicates that working mothers selecting childcare arrangements for their children do so with the hope that their children will develop loving relationships with their educators/carers. Love cannot be bought or sold as a commodity; there can be no requirement for love (Lynch, 2007). However, a loving attachment is what mothers hope for when making childcare choices (Page, 2013).

The relationship a child has with his or her teacher has a profound influence on the child. A positive connection can lead to greater engagement with learning (Libbey 2004; Roorda et al 2011; Runco 2012, 2013). It is also one of the most important factors in the generation of positive academic and social outcomes in education (Keddie & Churchill, 2005). Assiter (2013) affirms that it is the role of the educator, as a role-model for students, to demonstrate their own love for the world and to subsequently impart this to students. Furthermore, the role of the educator is described as one that moves between teacher and learner, recognising the mutuality inherent in the teaching and learning process.

When a relationship of 'love' exists between teacher and student, the learning that takes place becomes so much more, it necessitates a "sociocognitive context" (Cloninger, 2008). The learning transcends the boundaries of knowledge and skill attainment to become learning about the self, about humanity and about connectedness with others (Cloninger, 2008). Assiter (2013) makes the claim that contemporary education has changed and now follows a more entrepreneurial approach; one that focuses more on knowledge and skill acquisition. Assiter (2013) argues that a sole focus on knowledge and skills is to the detriment of other necessary components of the teaching and learning process in particular, the love of learning.

The findings of this research project clearly show that for this group of future early childhood educators, there is no narrowing of their pedagogical aspirations. They evidently understand the depth of their influence. The commitment to the children they will teach that these participants demonstrated was heartening; as were their insights into how they will work to meet children's complex needs within a complex professional landscape.

One surprising feature of the findings was that fear and fearfulness was much less present than consideration and commitment. The participants' sense of vocation and vision of practice as rooted within vocation was stronger than any message which jarred with their clarity of thought around what it means to be an early childhood educator. There was a general air of lucidity of purpose that gave strength to a commitment to overcome these challenges and be truly present within their practice. This clarity that a pedagogy of love was not simply about actions but also about presence is a true embodiment of affective pedagogy as defined by *a giving of the self*.

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