

Fall 2024

What's Agape Love Got To Do With It?: Teaching With Courage, Passion, and Compassion in a Rural Elementary School in North Georgia

Jhanna Bryson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bryson, Jhanna, "What's Agape Love Got To Do With It?: Teaching With Courage, Passion, and Compassion in a Rural Elementary School in North Georgia" (2024). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 2838.

<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/2838>

This dissertation (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies at Georgia Southern Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Georgia Southern Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

WHAT'S AGAPE LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?: TEACHING WITH COURAGE, PASSION,
AND COMPASSION IN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN NORTH GEORGIA

by

JHANNA ELIZABETH BRYSON

(Under the direction of Robert Lake)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the crucial role of love in teaching, specifically focusing on a rural elementary school in North Georgia. Drawing on personal experiences of the author, as well as other teachers at the school, study examines how love, manifested through courage, passion, and compassion, can significantly impact teaching practices. Theoretically my dissertation draws upon three bodies of literature such as critical pedagogy, (e.g. Darder, 2007, 2009, 2015, 2016, 2018; Freire, 1987, 1998, 2000, 2019; Giroux, 2010, 2018; hooks, 1994, 2001), radical love, (e.g., Ayers, 2004, 2016; Darder, 2007, 2009, 2015, 2016, 2018; Freire, 1987, 1998, 2000, 2019; Nieto, 2003, 2005; King, Jr., 1957,1963; Schubert, 2010), and self-determination theory (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001, 2002). Specifically, this dissertation highlights the unique challenges faced by educators in rural elementary schools. Through a reflective and ethnographic inquiry approach, the author explores the ways in which love-driven teaching practices can create a nurturing relationship between teachers and students. The following four findings have resulted from my dissertation inquiry: (1) Teachers should observe veteran teachers to learn more about teaching with passion, compassion, agape/radical love, relatedness, spirituality, and courage. (2) There is a need for courage to teach away from the curriculum in today's restrictive public school environment. (3) Teaching with agape/radical love is crucial for both the teacher and the student. (4) It only takes one teacher in a child's life to plant the seed of agape love and make a

difference. This dissertation is an ethnography involving four participants who were observed and interviewed— a principal, counselor, and two veteran-level teachers. The participants are Tammy, Penny, Debbie, and Hannah. The six themes that were relevant throughout the participant interviews were: (1) If you don't have a genuine love for children, you're in the wrong profession. (2) Teaching is a spiritual calling. (3) Teachers have to show love to all kids. (4) You have to make a connection with students (relatedness) about something they are interested in. (5) Teachers find the courage to return to teach. (6) You have to have courage to teach apart from the required curriculum.

INDEX WORDS: Radical love theory, Self-determination theory, Passion, Compassion, Courage, Relatedness, Motivation, Early childhood education, Agape love, Elementary school, Public school, Curriculum and instruction, Qualitative research, Critical pedagogy, Curriculum studies, Ethnography, Qualitative research, Spirituality

WHAT'S AGAPE LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?: TEACHING WITH COURAGE, PASSION,
AND COMPASSION IN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN NORTH GEORGIA

by

JHANNA ELIZABETH BRYSON

B.S., Dalton State College, 2012

M. Ed., Kennesaw State University, 2015

Ed. S., Georgia Southern University, 2016

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

© 2024

JHANNA ELIZABETH BRYSON

All Rights Reserved

WHAT'S AGAPE LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?: TEACHING WITH COURAGE, PASSION,
AND COMPASSION IN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN NORTH GEORGIA

by

JHANNA ELIZABETH BRYSON

Major Professor: Robert Lake
Committee: Ming Fang He
Abraham Flanigan
Laura Rychly

Electronic Version Approved:
December 2024

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family who have supported me in everything I have ever set my mind to accomplish. Thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to be my best. A special thank you to my Granddad, Clayton Timms, for always taking the time to talk with me and never missing a chance to tell me how proud you were of me. I miss you dearly and know you would be so very proud of me for embarking on this grand endeavor and finishing it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PROLOGUE	6
CHAPTER	
1 BACKGROUND: SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS	12
Introduction: Autobiographical Roots of Love.....	13
Stories of Love: Family Matters	13
Love and Church.....	16
School and A Dream.....	16
A Love for Teaching and Teaching With Love	19
Research Questions and Purpose	20
Theoretical Frameworks	23
Organization of the Dissertation	53
The Braided Strand of Positive Relationships	54
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	55
The Braided Strand of Freedom: Gaining Freedom in Today's Schooling Practices Through Positive Relationships	55
Tying the Braid Together: What Makes Education Whole?.....	80
Personal Beliefs and Interests	85
Compassion & Passion for Teaching and Learning.....	86
Education Begins in the Home	89
3 METHODOLOGY	94
An Ethnographic Study Through A Critical, Loving, and Determined Lens: Ethnographic Inquiry	94
Ethnographic Classroom Studies	96
Research Questions.....	102
Participants.....	103
Data Management	104
Data Collection	105
Data Analysis	107
Researcher Positionality.....	108

- 4 DATA REPRESENTATION: CONCURRENT THEMES 118
 - Context of Research 119
 - Participant Profiles 121
 - Research Activities 123
 - The Interviews 124
 - Reflections on Interviews 129
 - Coding Reflection 132
 - Emergent Themes 134
- 5 REFLECTIONS ON INQUIRY: A CURRICULUM OF AGAPE LOVE 150
 - Findings 150
 - Future Research 164
 - Challenges 166
 - Conclusion 170
- EPILOGUE 172
- REFERENCES 175
- APPENDIX A 191

Prologue

Try to imagine a scenario with me where agape love is not present. What comes to my mind is a classroom of students being neglected, going to school each day and not getting what they need and also deserve. These students in this particular classroom are not being hugged, given attention, no expectations are set for the students to be better people, and the teacher doesn't listen intently to them. In turn, the students are unhappy, have feelings of isolation, and fear for their safety. The room is a chaotic scene and the students know that the teacher does not care about them or their well-being. There are no words of encouragement, only scolding and ignoring fill the students' days. Each day, the students feel like they having nothing to look forward to and dread coming to school. Most of the students are withdrawn, and others are brazen and loud just so they can get attention, even if it's negative attention. They don't care what kind of attention they get because they don't receive any attention at home either. These students have learned that acting out of turn will at least get the teacher to talk to or look at them. The class is starving for attention, love, and safety. Yet, those basic needs are being neglected day after day.

The students get passed on to the next grade, and the teacher could care less if they met their learning or social behavior milestones to be appropriately ready for the next grade. The students struggle in the next grade because their teacher didn't take the time to love them or help them succeed. Their behavior is also challenging for the next teacher because it wasn't tended to in the grade prior. Hopefully, the next grade is filled with loving teachers. Who will love these children and show them what a positive school experiences is like? Will they be passed along like a hot potato? Or will someone stop and truly listen to them, provide empathy, and show them attention as well as radical, agape love in order to make a true and lasting difference in

their life? It is essential for teachers of children to understand that every child deserves to receive and feel love and compassion. When a child's basic need of love is met, he or she can grow up feeling secure and confident.

Through my experience of teaching for 12 years, I have learned that love goes a long way in a student's life. It took me a while to figure out what I meant by 'love' as related to teaching and education, and how I wanted to convey the way I feel about my students, past and present, through words in a dissertation. Through researching others' works related to the joy, passion, and courage of teaching, as well as what it is that keeps teachers coming back to the classroom, I have found that the word 'love' is used more prominently than I predicted it would be. The greatest example of love that has been displayed in my life is through my relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible is filled with his teachings about loving your neighbor and doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. The world would be a much better place if we all loved our neighbors (Outka, 1972). The part of His teaching that resonates with me the most is when he speaks to His disciples about agape love.

Jorge Aquino (2002) speaks about agape love and explains Christianity well: In a nutshell, the Christian uses a biblical-theological hermeneutic (the Word) as a benchmark for critical reflection on her/his life, works, and place in history, as well as in a salvation history (p. 29). Agape love is the deepest type of love in the Greek language. Agape is difficult for sole-speakers of the English language or Western culture to fully grasp and understand because we only have one word for love, and that is simply 'love'. Agape deals with a compassionate, sacrificial, unselfish, and unconditional love; it does not just refer to simply using kind words with someone or romantic love, it is a much deeper love (Hahn, 2014). This is the type of love I will be aiming to convey within the text of my dissertation – a love that is rare and

unconditional. I believe that it is truly this type of love that brings teachers back each day and year of their teaching career, and some teachers, even more than the amount of time that is expected of them and beyond what their contract requires.

Within the words of this dissertation, I observe and interview fellow teachers at the rural elementary school where I have been teaching for the past 10 years. I am writing this present preface after hours here at school, just as I have written most of this dissertation's contents. This school is where I feel at home and like a family with the other teachers who are privileged to work here. I feel that I am called to work at this school, with these teachers and students who make up the school. It is a privilege to work here because our school community is truly like a family. Most teachers here are friendly, passionate, and enjoy coming to work each day. When I type the word 'work', it always feels strange to me because I do not go to work. I usually call it school when referring to the place that I report to on Monday through Friday, 160 days out of the year, because I believe it is my duty to teach children, yet it is also my duty to be willing enough to learn something from each of my students who pass through my classroom each year. One person said, "When you love what you do, you will not work a day in your life." That statement resonates with me and I try my best to live it out each and every day. Speaking with conviction, I wholeheartedly believe that teaching is a calling. I feel that I have been called by my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who put this calling in me before I was born, and I truly hope to answer that call each day to the best of my ability. The Oxford English Dictionary (2024) defines a calling as "a strong urge toward a particular way of life or career; a vocation". I realize that other teachers may not view teaching as a calling and I would be willing and open to have a conversation with them to understand where they are coming from and would appreciate their viewpoints and thoughts about teaching not being a calling. Through my lens of how I see the

world, I can't imagine separating teaching away from a calling or teaching away from love; they are one in the same to me.

I hope by speaking with other teachers who I believe feel a lot like me about our school and teaching in general, I learn new concepts from them and feel even more inspired about the world of teaching than I presently do. I also hope the words they speak will encourage and inspire other educators and future educators who read this dissertation. Although, at times, writing at school was not easy, neither was writing at my house. I have obligations as a teacher, wife, mother, and daughter. It was challenging to carve out time and quiet my mind to research, read, and write with all of the demands of my purposeful and blessed, yet busy life. Writing a dissertation is not easy, but it is worth it in the end. I am proud of my dedication, commitment, and perseverance in the midst of life's distractions.

Through the research and work of this dissertation, I have learned a lot about myself. I have learned that I don't possess all of the radical love, passion, and compassion that I could have just yet. I am still a work in progress and trying to learn to better love myself and those around me with a true, radical love. I have found that I have judged others and how well they love me or don't love me, instead of looking inward and reflecting upon how much more I need to show love to others. I have worried way too much about what others think or perceive of me. I have learned that it is not about me, it is about others. Yes, we have to look inward to find love to give, but we also cannot forget to notice the sacred lives around us. It is in acts of service to others that I find love, joy, and purpose in my life. As far as radical love goes, I am not yet where I need to be, but I do not plan on giving up. I desire to live a life with no regrets.

I recently learned of the story of William Borden and tend to think about him when the temptation of giving up comes to mind. William Borden was a wealthy young man who got the

opportunity to travel the world after graduating high school in 1904. From his travels, he witnessed many hurting people and decided that he wanted to become a missionary. Even though he had wealth, his heart was dedicated to using his wealth and giving himself away to help others. Helping others is what brought him joy. Upon travelling to Egypt to learn Arabic, Borden got spinal meningitis and died at age 25. When Borden's Bible was discovered, it was found that he wrote, "No reserves. No retreats. No regrets." (Culbertson, 2023). I have great admiration for Borden's story and desire to figure out how to live such a fulfilling life of helping others, without ever giving up and with no regrets. Without love I have nothing at all.

Now I would like to include a special section of thanks to all who have made this difficult, yet rewarding adventure possible. First, I would not be where I am today without Jesus Christ. His teachings, unconditional love, and sacrifice inspire me to be the best version of myself as a wife, mother, and teacher. As my Creator, He is the author of agape love. Second, to my husband, Matthew. If it were not for him and his constant encouragement, love, and emboldening, I would not be sitting here writing this today. Thank you, Matthew, for always believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself, and lovingly looking after our daughter in the moments I could not be there. Third, to my family and close friends. Without your constant encouragement and prayers, I would have given up a long time ago. A special thanks to my mother-in-law, without your tender, loving care, agape love, and entertaining spirit for my little one, I absolutely wouldn't have been able to devote as much dedicated time to this endeavor, knowing that she was being cherished while Mommy was away. Lastly, but not 'leastly', to my professors at Georgia Southern University, and especially to those on my committee, Dr. He, Dr. Flanigan, and Dr. Rychly: Thank you for your encouragement, direction, care, and wise words that helped guide me along this journey. A very special "thank you" to Dr. Lake, for believing in

me to write this dissertation. His encouragement and ideas pushed me through so that I could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel! Thank you for your loving and caring mentorship, Dr. Lake. I learned so much from you, not just about writing and theories, but about life itself.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND: SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

The school where I teach is a Title One elementary school in north Georgia. The population who attends our school is mostly from a lower socioeconomic background. 25.3% are dominantly speakers of another language; most are from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. 13.2% of students have disabilities. 77% of students come from economically disadvantaged homes. The racial distribution of students in our school is as follows: 38.3% Hispanic, 1.6% Multi-racial, 59.1% White/Caucasian, 0.7% Black, and 0.3% American Indian/Alaskan. We have 46 certified teachers, all of whom are White/Caucasian race. All of these demographics are available to view online at USNews.com.

The principal of our school has been in the education system for 22 years and was principal at a local middle school before she transferred to the school where I currently am employed; last year was her first year as our principal. Our former principal of 11 years, now works as a long-term substitute for a kindergarten class in our school. The grades in my school are kindergarten through sixth grade. Our school has a positive relationship with the community. We are involved with donating funds, toys, and food for Christmas time for families who may be in disadvantaged situations. We partner with *Helping Hands Ending Hunger*, an organization that helps the school community donate food to families of the school who are in need. We also partner with a couple of churches in our area to help students and families in need at any time of the year with food, school supplies, coats, etc. A local family with close ties to our community has a foundation that donates for our school; with their generous funds, enough money was collected for a new playground at our school. Also, through the historical society in our county, the Ruritan Club frequently donates for and assists our school. Lastly, we collect monetary donations through fundraisers to help out an organization called “Heroes Against Child Abuse” organized through a local family support council.

Introduction: Autobiographical Roots of Love

The burden of teaching and mandated curriculums seems to be robbing some of the joy of teaching. This continuous occurrence is leading to a dampening of true love because it takes away from a creative atmosphere of teaching and learning; there is not as much time to make learning as fun as it could be, for both students and teachers. How do love and positive relationships play key roles in helping students learn and stay motivated in school? This is the main question I would like to be answered through the qualitative research I am conducting for my dissertation. Through the lens of critical theory, as well as other theoretical frameworks, I desire to focus on how teachers are continually being suppressed by the required use of scripted curriculum and standardized testing, and how this repeated suppression affects how children are learning or not learning. Secondly, I would like to explore teaching practices that combine passion, compassion, and love in an age where those character traits and morals seem to be fading away (Ayers, 2004, 2016). There are policies against teaching certain subjects, for example, critical race theory and certain aspects of social/emotional learning, yet at the same time, other content still remains standardized and required. This type of belief system needs to be corrected. Teachers should be allowed to creatively teach what they feel is right, instead of *what* and *how* they are told to teach; I believe in a mix of both. For example, with flexible guidelines, teachers should be able to decide what standards are appropriate for their students and how they would like to teach them. I also believe student input should be considered.

Stories of Love: Family Matters

The roots of love are relevant all throughout my life. Unconditional love shown toward and for me has shaped me and made me the person I am today. From as far back as I can remember, I have been continuously surrounded by love. I have lived a blessed life, not perfect

by any means, but simply blessed with love all around. Some may call it sheltered, but I call it love. Unconditional love involves discipline and I received my right share of discipline when I needed it, which is what I try to pass down to my students and my daughter. I don't discipline because I enjoy it but because it's what a child needs to learn from their mistakes and grow from them. I teach my students and my daughter that mistakes are okay as long as we learn from them. As I state throughout this dissertation, I am not speaking of flowery, puppy love, or the love that one may hear about in popular love songs. I am speaking of deep, thoughtful, unselfish, yet disciplined love. My family taught me what love is from the first day I came to exist here on earth. They have always given me more than they had themselves. My mother and father always did the best they could to raise my brother and I in a loving home, giving of themselves from morning to night each day. I never had to wonder if I was loved or if I ever wouldn't be loved. An example of unconditional love that stands out to me in my early years is my mother teaching me how to read before I started kindergarten. She worked late nights and my father took care of my brother and I most nights, but she still pressed on to teach me. I always thought they never made any mistakes. It actually wasn't until a couple of years ago that they told me their stories of struggles in their own lives before they were married and before they had me. I was unaware of all of they went through that made them into the people they are today.

I almost didn't have a biological father. He was in a fishing boat wreck a few months before I was born. He and some friends were fishing near the dam at their own risk. To their dismay, the dam turbines suddenly turned on. From being too close to the currents, the boats were swept underwater. When my father tells this story he says that he saw his life flash before his eyes and knew that he most likely would never meet his first born child, his baby girl—me.

When he tells this story he says that it was like an indescribable force pulled him up to the surface and he was able to eventually get out of the water into an onlooker's boat, even though it felt like he was too tired to keep fighting. Tragically, some of his friends in the other boat didn't make it. Was the force an angel? Was the onlooker fisherman an angel? Our family may never know, but this terrible experience in my father's life taught him to never take his life for granted and helped him be the husband, father, and friend he is today. It taught him unconditional love.

Another story involves my paternal grandfather, who is no longer here with us earth side. He was a very influential person in my life. I named my daughter after him because of the ways he always showed unconditional, warm love in my life and in everyone's life he came in contact with. When I was barely one year old, he had back surgery that resulted in a staph infection which put him into a coma. When he awoke after several days of the doctor's wondering if he could pull through, he always said that I was the first person he saw, sitting at the foot of his hospital bed. From that incident and others involving health scares in his life, he said that they taught him how to love others and never take life for granted.

To this day, I am still loved and accepted by my parents just the way I am, and I know without a doubt that will never change. My family is very important to me because I have so much I can give back to them for all they have done for me, even though they don't expect anything in return. I am very close to my family—my grandparents, aunts, and uncles. I've also become quite close to my husband's family, even though they aren't related to me by blood, I feel unconditional love from them as well. I feel like family can help me get through anything. For example, every morning my mother in law drives thirty minutes to mine and my husband's house to take care of our daughter who is not yet old enough to attend public school. She cares for our daughter like she is her own and never complains or says she is tired.

Love and Church

I was raised in a Baptist church since I was in the womb and I continue to attend a Baptist church today. Family and church have always been a constant in my life. Other than my family, this is where I learned truly what unconditional love means. I learned that God loved the world and the people of the world so much that he gave his Son to come and die for the sins of the world, so that one day those who love Him will live with Him after this life comes to an end. And, therefore, since God loves me so much I am supposed to show that same unconditional love to others. God also disciplines those He loves to help them grow in their love for God and others. I have continuously attended church with kind-hearted, giving, and devoted people who have shown that love to me since I was a little girl in Sunday School and youth group. I've always had my faith and family to fall back on when challenging events happen in my life. When I go to church, I experience freedom and am able to release the stresses of life as I am encouraged and recharged to keep going and keep loving. Throughout this dissertation, I am speaking from a nonjudgmental voice. The churches I have grown up in and attended were filled with love for others. The Word says that if I judge, I will be judged. I am not wishing to come from a voice raging with 'hell and brimstone', but of love and light—seeing the world through love and not through a criticizing, condemning eyes. Who am I to judge? I believe all of mankind is created equal and all people deserve to be loved.

School and A Dream

When I was a little girl, it was like I always knew that I would eventually be a teacher. I would pretend to be the teacher to anyone who was around, even my stuffed animals and dolls. My brother and our friends would play school from time to time and I was always the teacher. I continually knew I wanted to help others in whatever profession I would choose and I think that

is from all of the love that was shown to me throughout my life. From my time in kindergarten to high school and beyond, I have been shown unconditional love from several of my teachers. My teacher in second grade seemed to constantly have a calm demeanor and loving way of teaching and caring for her students. She never once raised her voice. This way of teaching made a strong impact on me; it resonated with something within me and is still the way I try to teach my students today. Being no coincidence, I was able to have that same teacher as my mentor teacher when I was in my student teaching block in undergraduate school.

In middle school, I had several teachers who were encouraging forces in my schooling. Especially in eighth grade, I felt like they were always there if I ever needed an encouraging word or just someone to talk to. I was mostly shy, but I still knew they were there if I ever might need them for anything. They challenged me in my studies and work, but also showed constant care at the same time. Moving on to high school, I had one particular teacher who I was close to because of a married-in family member. She always pushed me to do my best in all of my classes, not just hers. She had high expectations for me and was the first teacher I witnessed actually getting her doctorate degree in education. I still remember her talking about how challenging it was for her. I viewed her as an intelligent woman and remember thinking that I could never get my doctorate degree because I would never be as diligent and determined as her. However, she didn't know how I saw myself and she challenged me to one day earn my doctorate degree. I still never thought I would, but believed it to be a nice gesture. She planted the seed of pursuing this degree and I didn't realize it at the time.

In undergraduate school, I had almost completed my teaching degree, but I made a grade that pulled my average down in this particular class. I felt the grade was unfair, but nevertheless, it was the way it was. I had another professor who was distantly related to me, and she, along

with another of my professors, was able to discuss my grade during their meetings. The professor who gave me the 'unfair' grade eventually allowed me to earn more points in other assignments to pull my grade up. This grade was the only grade out of all of my classes preventing me from graduating on time. I tell this because what was meant for bad turned out good for me, thanks to caring and loving professors that had my best interests at heart.

I also had another professor who taught literature who was influential in my life. She was overly helpful and encouraging to me while I was a student her class, but what made her special to me was how she reached out to check on me through email and in person, even when I was not a student in her class, but while I was continuing to earn my degree in undergraduate school. That meant a lot to me because I remember her kindness and generosity still today. She was very empathetic to me as an undergraduate student because she told me that she remembered what it was like going through college and always made sure to tell me if I needed anything to let her know and that she would do whatever she could to help me.

Fast forward to one my first classes as a doctoral student in curriculum studies, I thought I would absolutely quit. This particular professor said some things I never thought I would hear a person in that high of regard say. I walked away from that class feeling very disappointed, disheartened, and bound and determined to quit right then and there. My husband was waiting for me after class in our car as I sat down in my seat and cried. He continued to lovingly push me and encourage me, telling me that everything would work out and not to worry about it, as he always does. He was right because even though that professor did not agree with my lens of the world, they were still respectful of my views and I made an A on my final paper and grade for the class. I'm not sure what I would have done without his unwavering support and love for me in that moment, and many others. I would not be where I am today without all of the supportive

people through the 34 years that make up my life. With love comes forgiveness, even though I felt that I had been wronged and hurt. The professor doesn't know they hurt me because it wasn't intentional and wasn't said to me alone personally. However, I still had to choose to forgive that professor and move onward and upward through prayer while leaning on my family and faith. If one truly loves, then one has the power to forgive.

A Love for Teaching and Teaching With Love

When I became a teacher, I continued to learn to love teaching more from those around me who showed me love. In my earlier years as a teacher, a particular veteran teacher who was nearing retirement spent a great deal with me, just talking about what teaching meant to her, giving advice, and telling me her stories from her time as a teacher and life in general. Because of her and others, I want to be the fellow teacher who is always there for other teachers to be a force of love in their life. I had my first student teacher this year and I have been challenged to stay true to what I've always been taught. I have had to learn to be more patient this year than I have during my years of being a teacher. Teaching with grace and grit is a difficult balance sometimes. Selfishness is always there, ready to sneak up and ruin a day or a moment for me and those around me. It is my faith in unconditional love that keeps me from giving in to selfishness and straying from the light of love within me.

I have had some challenging years in my 12 years of teaching. Most of those challenges have been from the students I have taught. I can count on one hand some very difficult students who I have had in my class that I had to learn to deal with. I had to learn what they liked, disliked, and what made them feel remorse from their actions so they could learn to do better and make wiser choices. From these students with challenging behaviors, I have learned the most about myself and how much love I truly have to give when I feel like there's no more that I could

possibly give. I believe that the highest rewards in life come from working with and through difficulty. Nothing worth having is ever given for free, it must be worked for. Even though it seems like the reward will never come, there's always something positive to find. If the reward doesn't come in the form of the student changing his or her ways to become more loving, the reward will come in another way. Who knows, the reward may come when those particular students become adults and find me to thank me for never giving up on them and always showing them unconditional love.

Research Questions and Purpose

The key research question is: How do teachers keep their passion, compassion, and radical love in the teaching profession despite all forms of oppression?

Specific Research Questions are:

- How do teachers build up their courage to teach in spite of all the challenges and dilemmas?
- How do aspects of spirituality and faith help keep teachers in the teaching profession?
- How do teachers engage with students to meet their students' needs and empower them to thrive in education and life?
- How do teachers work with students and stakeholders to ensure that knowledge and success is valued for all involved in educational processes?
- What are rural teachers doing to help meet the need for relatedness in the classroom?

These questions are important and vital to the area of curriculum students because there is much more to the whole teaching and learning process than safely abiding by the requirements of curricula and tests. When only academia is the focus of education, the whole child is not being educated and nurtured properly. The student's spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being are

left out far too often in today's educational world (Zhao & Li, 2021). Positive relationships, love, passion, and compassion are needed in order to educate the whole child – body, mind, and soul. The world of education is a non-stop, fast-paced race every day. Due to all of the continuous hustle and bustle, there is not much time for dedicated relationships and teacher-student bonding. There is not much importance placed on morals and values in today's society, and school is no different (Silverman, 2019). Times are very uncertain. Heightened pressure is placed upon teachers to teach to a required curriculum and aim for a certain percentage of students to be on grade level on standardized tests. The result from all of the requirements and restrictions is love being extinguished from the soul of schooling; the heart and soul of public education is being stripped away (Shapiro, 2006). Children are not being taught to the full extent of their being. Education should be about teaching and fostering the emotions and soul of the individual, as well as what the individual can offer to others (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Education should center around dialogue and understanding between human beings, i.e. sharing ideas, teaching students to carry respectful discourse, and celebrating differences and similarities.

Today in the state of Georgia, there is a lack of teachers. The practice of importing teachers from other countries is now in existence in the United States. Why are teachers being burned out and quitting the field of teaching? There are many reasons. First, teachers are becoming burned out and do not have a desire to teach. But, why are they being burned out? The lack of pay for the amount of work could be one of the reasons, but I believe the main reason that teachers are walking away is due to the stress – the stress of being graded on how well students perform on tests and how well they can read a scripted curriculum verbatim. “So much of teaching at the public school level is scripted and has little to do with the inner lives of

children” (Morris, 2016b, p. 63). Teachers are not allowed a full voice in their classroom with their students; it is a suppressed voice, a voice that lacks creativity and the promotion of curiosity with their students. Instead of true creativity, teachers are trying to figure out how to be innovative with what they are handed, which is a curriculum that cannot be altered, as well as rigid, standardized assessments as the only means of evidence of student learning, which results in students spiritual foundations being neglected; there is not enough time spent exploring nature, enjoying fresh air, experiencing meaningful conversations, creating art, etc. all without the interruptions of technology and boring, scripted curriculums.

Sonia Nieto (2005) writes:

These are hard times for public education, which increasingly is characterized by a mean-spirited and hostile discourse, one with little respect for teachers and the young people they teach. Currently, the most common buzzwords in education are borrowed shamelessly from the business world: The school is a “market,” students and families are “consumers,” and teachers are the “producers.” In this discourse, “accountability is proposed as the arbiter of excellence, teacher tests are the answer to “quality control,” and high-stakes tests are the final judge of student learning. (p. 4)

With so much pressure placed upon teachers to perform at a high-level through scripted curriculums and testing measures, what is it that keeps them in schools? What force keeps them from leaving? Even a number of retired teachers, through all of the stressors and confusion, return to teaching when they thought they were finished. I believe that it is the power of love, specifically agape love, that keeps teachers returning to be present in schools. It is the power and force of compassion, positive relationships, and a strong passion for teaching that keeps teachers coming back to school year after year. By agape, I am referring to unconditional love – a deep

love that knows no boundaries. Joseph Khabbaz (2022) defines agape love as “love that does something that no other love can do; it causes us to love others without seeking anything in return” (p.1). This strong sense of love is what I firmly believe is the driving force behind why teachers stay to teach.

But, why do teachers enter this strenuous field in the first place? According to Nieto (2005), teaching is “hard and stressful work” with “little autonomy and support.” “Teachers work countless hours in the classroom and out (the average teacher spends 50 hours a week on all teaching duties, more than those in many other professions) and they get an average of 32 minutes for lunch; they spend nearly \$500 a year of their own money for classroom supplies” (pp. 3-4). Teachers also must deal with disinterested parents, along with countless other hassles that were not mentioned, of which place teachers into the unappreciated and underrated job category. So, again, I ask, why do we/they do it? Some reasons could be that teaching is a calling and some people are driven by acts of service and good deeds. Teachers appreciate love more than money. The rewards of teaching outweigh the turmoil and strife, not monetary rewards of course, but rewards of smiling faces whose minds and souls finally understand and connections become formed, both mentally and spiritually. Finally, could it be that the genuinely ‘called’ teachers do not expect anything in return? They just do it because it’s the right and moral thing to do. It is unconditional, agape love.

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Pedagogy of Education

The three theories of my dissertation is like one braided strand that runs throughout the entirety of this dissertation. They are: critical pedagogy of education, radical love theory, and self-determination theory. Theory is important because it allows one “to build meaning and

develop criticality, to explore ideas, to understand systems, to understand the role of civil society in developing a more humane world, and more importantly, to understand the concept of resistance” (Ollis, 2010, p. 11). In that quote the word resistance brings me to the first theory I am incorporating into this dissertation. The first theory that I discuss is critical pedagogy of education. What is it about critical pedagogy that speaks to me? “The attention of critical pedagogues tends to fall on these ‘commanding forces’ that are often difficult to identify in one’s everyday life but that nonetheless affect one’s thought, behavior, and the possibilities for the full unfolding of one’s individuality” (Holohan, 2019). What is it that aggravates me the most about my daily life and interrupts my purpose?

Through self-reflection and research for deciding upon my dissertation topic, I kept coming back to the suppression of teachers in today’s public education practices. In the end, I chose to work alongside this theoretical framework lens because, being a teacher myself, I truly feel that teachers are being suppressed and repressed in today’s public education classrooms. When I teach, I believe in challenging the status quo. Suppression and challenging the status quo are tenets that fall under the category of critical pedagogy (Darder, 2015). I am retaining the main focus on the suppression of teachers and challenging the status quo since I plan to incorporate an ethnographic study and literature review concerning what it is like to be a teacher in today’s early childhood classroom in a public school setting (in the school where I teach). Through this study, I am contributing to the field of curriculum studies by providing interviews of public school teachers and how they are experiencing suppression, as well as the ways in which teachers see it affecting students through modernized ways of teaching. I also include how the same teachers portray radical love to their students and how love influences everything they each day at school.

There is no such thing as a ‘one size fits all’ curriculum (Paraskeva, 2017). All children learn differently and all teachers teach differently, because no two people are alike. For too many years, since curriculum was first discussed in the United States, educators who have been part of those discussions believe their curriculum choice to be the best. There has always been a power struggle, even in the area of education, since education reform was first founded. The following are questions from Mary Frances Agnello and William M. Reynolds (2016) that theorists from the school of critical pedagogy desire to be answered:

What knowledge is of the most worth? Whose knowledge should be taught? What role does power play in the educational processes? How are new media shaping as well as perpetuating what happens in education? How is knowledge produced in a corporatized politics of knowledge? What socio-political role do schools play in the twenty-first century? What is an educated person? What is intelligence? How important are socio-cultural contextual factors in shaping what goes on in education? (p. iv)

These are not research questions for this dissertation, they are questions that I have continued to come back to time and time again during my time as a doctoral student and simultaneously in my teaching experience in the classroom. Teachers and students are oppressed because schooling has become only about educating students to prepare them for a job. The act of schooling and those who have designed it have purposefully left behind and neglected what it means to educate the whole child (Giroux, 2010). Through my research in this dissertation, I am able to identify who is being suppressed, as well as how and why. I aim to explore all angles of the suppression, as well as offer suggestions in order to prevent and overcome teacher suppression, as suppression is not only about critique, but about moving toward social change (Heertum, 2008). I also add aspects related to the positive side of teaching, which is through radical love and self-

determination. My goal is to interview teachers who enjoy the art of teaching and, that find through all of the stressors and repeated suppression, there is still life—a life that continues to beckon one to teach. To teach is to love and to love is to teach. If a teacher really and truly loves what they do as a called teacher, they don't actually go to work each day. They look forward to what each new day will bring and enjoy life as an educator. They have reached the realization that they are someone who can make a difference in the lives of children and dedicate their life to bettering the present and future of society. As Donald Hall (2003) says, "I've never worked a day in my life" (p. 3). I desire to analyze the words of teachers who love what they do because of the positive relationships they form with their students – teachers who love what they do, despite the many public school hardships.

Through this dissertation, I hope to offer hope to educators of young children, as well to parents and the children themselves. I also want to shed light on the importance of learning both with the student and from the student (Freire, 1998). As a mother of one child and a teacher of many children, I value the well-being of children and consciously view the needs and spiritual desires of each individual student as the most important piece within the jigsaw puzzle called education. "Parenting is an experience of being with children" (Schubert, 2010, p. 56). I agree wholeheartedly with this statement that teaching can be considered parenting. After all, the children are with their teachers more hours in the day than with their own parents and caretakers. The students indeed become as if they are the teacher's adopted children when the teacher is truly called to teach and uses her gift with love, care, compassion, and passion.

All too often, children are left out of educational decision-making, while they are supposed to be valued above all and at the heart of education (Nouri & Sajjadi, 2008). Students are in charge of their own learning and this should be realized in the classroom. People truly

experience emancipation when they have love and they give it through gratitude for and toward others, as well as through acts of generosity (Kincaid, 2023). Many people think that paying off loans, having large amounts of money, etc. makes them free, but it is in fact an illusion. True liberation comes from giving of oneself to others, which represents the love I am speaking of in this dissertation. Critical pedagogical discussions can be had in the classroom where students learn their value and how they can change their lives in and out of school (Bussey, 2008). What will students' futures look like if they remain a critical thinker after graduation? What will happen if they don't remain a critical thinker? How will love be balanced with critical pedagogical thinking?

“A truly critical education must call into question not merely modes of instruction or approaches to curriculum, but also the most basic senses of *who* the teacher is” (Lissovoy, 2010, p. 418). Finding out who one is as a teacher is quite the journey. I have figured out a lot of who I am as a teacher and what my values, critiques, and expectations are as a teacher, but I know that I still have a way to go. I believe in learning something new every day from people and things around me. I also believe in learning to think more critically each day. My students help me learn more and more about myself; they don't just learn from me. It's a shared experience in my classroom, and I desire to always keep it that way no matter how many years I end up teaching. Once a teacher finds out the basis of who they are in the classroom, they will be liberated. Liberation brings about confidence and pride in who one is as a teacher. However, this sense of pride is not to be confused with thinking that one is better than others, but it is the sense of pride that the teacher knows her expectations for students, and that they are high expectations for all. I teach with a certain teacher who has not been teaching for many years and she admits that she is still unsure and nervous about how she teaches each day. I reassure her

that her confidence will be realized through more and more experience in the classroom. I do not believe that teachers who have not been truly called into the outreach of education become confident. Confidence comes by knowing deep down that one is doing what they are supposed to be doing. They are at the right place at the right time, and know in their heart of hearts that they are making a difference.

Teachers should desire what is best for their students to become the best versions of themselves. Students should be almost like biological children for the teacher because the teacher should want to protect them and fight for their well-being. This is an example of agape love, a love for all mankind (McFadden, 2013). A teacher should stand up for their students. If a teacher hears about another child putting down a child in their class, it should make the teacher want to get to the bottom of the situation and make sure that her student is being treated fairly and is respected. If there is any member of the class who is being prevented from moving onward and upward in any way, an emotion should arise in the teacher. Whenever I hear about one of my students, past or present, being neglected or suppressed in any way, I do my best to figure out what can be done for the student. They are not just a student to me, they are a child, a delicate, growing flower, a soul, a spirit, and someone's baby. Paulo Freire (1998) calls this type of emotion 'armed love'. He even goes as far as to say that he doesn't believe educators can survive without it. Armed love is a fighting type of love, and realizing that one has the right and duty to fight for their students (Kahn, 2010). It is a love that hurts, but for the best of reasons. It is a protective love, and emotionally speaking, similar to the way a mother lion cares for her cubs.

If teachers do not realize they are blinded through totalitarian practices, they will never be able to truly make a difference and change the current state of education. It is not only the

totalitarian practices that have ruined education, it is also the teachers, administrators, superintendents, and community members who have allowed it to happen (who were either too blind or too afraid to speak out) (Basic, Delić, & Sofradzija, 2019). This dissertation is my way of speaking out, however, I know I have to do more for the sake of education and children. How will teachers become empowered? When will they realize and come to the conclusion that enough is enough? Do the teachers who consistently output high scores from quarterly and yearly standardized tests realize the suppression? Or, do they just focus on how well they appear to the school and district as someone who can produce ‘good scores’? Sometimes it seems that way. As if it’s not about the rights of students at all, but how worthy of a teacher they are at producing high scores. Do they think about the empowerment of themselves and their students? Do they want better for themselves and their students? Are they satisfied with the status quo and blindly believe the current state of education is how it was meant to be? Do they have a false, skewed view of what education should be? Critical pedagogy is firmly based upon past, present, and future tense (Glithero & Ibrahim, 2012): How did it get like this? What is it like now? How can we change it for the better? Also, whose voices have been silenced? In this dissertation, I discuss how the teacher’s creative voice has indeed been silenced and replaced by a scripted voice. It is no longer the teacher’s knowledge that matters, it is the establishment of the internalized curriculum (Paraskeva, 2016). The present curriculum is one that suppresses parts of the creative spirit that is alive in all teachers and children. Every day, the spirit of all humans is yearning to be allowed to escape in the form of true, free, and unhindered expression.

When someone’s voice has been altered, relocated, or removed, dehumanization has occurred (Darder, 2018). One’s reality has been changed through their voice being changed or cancelled. The colonization of scripted curriculums has rendered silent the voices of teachers.

The teacher's voice has become invisible, absorbed by the voice of the scripted curriculum. Once the voice has been reformed and suppressed, the act of forgetting has taken place. The matrix of power has won, the other, original voice has been destroyed and forgotten. Are teachers forgetting they have a voice? Do they care about their unique voice and how it can positively impact their students if used with appropriate care and practice? Have they been so entranced, brainwashed, and preoccupied to what has occurred right before their eyes that their original voice is almost inexistent?

Critical pedagogy is not just about critical thinking skills, it is about critically thinking about how to change the status quo politically (Johnson & Morris, 2010). Critical pedagogy is acting upon the thought of upending totalitarian ways of society, seeking ways to find emancipation, not just for themselves but for a group of people who are under suppression. It is having compassion for the suffering of others. Education should be about feelings, emotions, and morals. The establishment knows exactly what they are doing to society through the suppressive use of scripted curriculums—they are controlling the masses. A survivor of a concentration camp whose name is unknown wrote, "My eyes saw... Gas chambers built by learned engineers... Children poisoned by educated physicians... My request is: help your students become more human" (Pring, 2004, p. 24). How can teachers help their students be more human? I believe that the ways I can help my students become more human is through critical pedagogy practices, as well as radical love and self-determination.

Through researching about teaching with love and positive relationships, I continue to desire to learn more about ways to further inspire my students to be critical thinkers, as well as learn from veteran teachers – educators with more experience than me, yet who also strive to teach their students to be critical thinkers as well with love and care at the core of their

teaching. Although the majority of my dissertation is constructed around relationships, passion, courage, and teaching with spirituality, I also touch on psychological, and educational theories that support my research that I have learned about through doctoral courses related to human development, problem-solving, motivation, etc.

Radical Love Theory

Along with critical pedagogy, I am implementing the framework of radical love theory. Agape love can be equated with the term radical love. I believe that radical love has been present since the beginning of time itself, and even though it is displayed all around, it can only be truly found by searching for it. One has to accept it to find it. Love is given freely, but only to those who have an open heart. Radical love is unconditional love and regard for everyone, faults and all; it is not a flowery, cliché, or fairy tale love (Aronson, 2018). It is not a love found in love songs or in movies about romantic or friendship love. Agape love is the deepest type of love (Melina & Anderson, 2006). Paulo Freire's version of radical love is "never about absolute consensus, or unconditional acceptance, or unnecessary words of sweetness... instead it is unconstructed, rooted in a committed willingness to struggle persistently with purpose in our life... to be lively, purposeful, and inspiring, while challenging and insistent, and intimately connected to what it means to 'be human'" (Darder, 2015, p. 34). Radical love is not violent, yet it is also not silent. It revolves around action and peace. It is not fearful, but is courageous and committed to others. In *Teachers As Cultural Workers* (1998), Freire lists seven qualities that teachers who teach with radical love should aspire to have. They are: a commitment to humility, dialectical ability, courage, tolerance, decisiveness, the ability to recognize the tension between patience and impatience, and the joy of living. These types of love are not innate nor gifted, they are acquired through experience, determination, and

consistent practice. Choosing to possess radical love requires a new way of thinking, challenging the status quo, and taking risks (Ratcliffe, 2014). Radical love also involves mutual respect and equity for all; it's about more than just building a community of kindness. It is about figuring out how to bring about justice. It calls for one to reflect upon their own biases and maintain critical reflective practice (by both teachers and students). This does not simply mean thinking about how to do something differently next time, it's about remaining in the present moment and constantly reflecting upon how to embody radical love. What needs to be unlearned in order to become a better, more loving teacher (Amoo-Adare, 2017)? This type of thinking requires mental toughness, therefore one who embodies radical love must find ways to care for themselves.

Going back to Freire's (1998) types of love, I will now discuss each one in detail. These types of love are not taught in teacher preparation courses, and really could not fully be taught if attempted. Instead, they can only wholly be learned through experience—experience as a genuine, certified teacher with a class of students of whom the teacher is solely responsible. First, commitment to humility is agreeing with oneself to practice inner peace. Peace should be more important to a teacher than winning an argument with a student or fellow teacher. Teachers are responsible for being role models for their students, meaning they are to set an example as professionals for students and their students' families. This one is difficult for me at times with students who seem to want to see how much they can irritate me or sound like one who knows it all to the other students, even if they have to lie to try to prove a point out of pride in always being right. Teachers who practice humility aren't afraid to say they are sorry or admit when they made a mistake, and also practice self-control.

Life itself is found when one is truly at peace—peace with themselves and their spirituality, as well as peace with everyone and everything around them. Faith is trusting in that peace to be who they are made to be and making decisions with love at the forefront. When a teacher models peace and humility in their classroom, students are likely to take suit and choose peace as a part of the classroom community. Students will act kinder toward one another in their words and actions, leaning toward forgiveness instead of holding grudges. I teach gifted students and most of them want to be leaders of the classroom. Imagine the classroom environment when all of the gifted students try to rule the classroom with demeaning attitudes. Now, imagine the same classroom with the same gifted students who lead instead of rule the classroom. And, instead of leading with demeaning attitudes, they lead with humble attitudes who desire to help others who may not understand as quickly as they do, sharing in their ideas and leadership. The teacher sets the standard of the entire year during the first few weeks of school (Wong, 2009). The standard of humble leadership should be recognized and modeled in the classroom each day, but especially at the beginning of the year.

There are many ways that shared decision-making can take place in the classroom between teacher and students, as well as student to student. Shared decision-making helps build classroom community (McKenna & Darder, 2011). One way is at the beginning of the year when routines, procedures, and expectation are being set for the year, teachers can allow their students to help create those routines and expectations. For example, the teacher will name a task that must be done daily in the classroom, the teacher would then ask the class for suggestions, and write the suggestions on an anchor chart where the whole class could view it. At the end of the discussion about all of the daily routines and expectations, each child would come up and sign the bottom of the list. In this way, students are signing that they are agreeing

to follow these shared and decided upon routines, procedures, and expectations. They are also going to realize that they are responsible for not only respecting the teacher's expectations, but also respecting each other, as well as holding one another accountable, teacher included.

The second aspect of love is dialectical ability. Dialectical ability is being able to openly learn with and from students from year to year. Veteran teachers usually teach the same material each year in the same formats, although there are tweaks here and there with reevaluation and reflection between lessons throughout the years. Dialectical ability is the practice wherein teachers learn from their students with each brand new year, and relearn again and again with each new group of students. Yet, the learning will differ in some ways between years because each student is unique and brings special skill sets to the group. It may consist of discussing the same or different topics with each unique group of students depending on what ideas and standpoints each distinctive student brings with them to the classroom. I enjoy getting to relearn the same material taught the year before with each new set of students I receive. All of their ideas differ in some way, and it is exciting to see how each new group responds and mixes with one another.

“The notion of students as embodied and integral human beings has received limited attention in discussions of classroom praxis in the United States” (Darder, 2009, p. 218). The life of the classroom is not openly discussed within curriculums, and it seems that it is not viewed as having importance or relevance. Many teachers and those who view schooling from the outside, see schooling as only cognitive. Therefore, students are only viewed with their mental capacity in mind, while their physical nature is left out of the daily curriculum. It seems like the only time the physical is taken into account is when something seen as inappropriate happens. Maybe

if the physical was celebrated and was given proper attention in the first place, less inappropriate acts would occur.

Learning should be a shared experience through mind, body, and soul. It is not enough to rely on cognitive practices only; the body and soul are alienated in these types of practices. Likewise, students become estranged from each other. Amanda Sinclair (2005) speaks about the body and education:

Turning to teachers, the impact of teachers' bodies in the classroom can be profound. Emotions are aroused, comfort or discomfort levels are established and evaluations are made well in advance of verbal communication. Without saying a word, teachers reveal themselves and students accurately judge them, as optimistic, confident, active, dominant, likeable and enthusiastic—or the reverse. (p. 97)

Therefore, teachers and students are to work together, using mind, body, and soul interchangeably. Transformation can place when teachers and students change the world around them, leaving it better than they found it. Then, each student emerges from this experience as a changed person ready to change the next world around them along their future endeavors, inspiring others to do the same.

The next aspect of love is courage. Teachers should have the courage to love, as well as courage to never give up on students. It is impossible to teach without a capacity to love. This capacity is not easily understood or acquired; to attain it, one must conquer their fears before they can fully love and fully teach. Courage is not found outside, but within. Nevertheless, courage can be found through outer experiences. What is gathered on the outside, becomes a part of the inside, and what is found inside eventually becomes a part of the outside. I have to resist the urge to give up on students with behavior issues and continue figuring out ways to

make learning enjoyable for them whilst continuing to discipline their behavior consistently until they begin making better choices more often. I believe that courage is what happens when critical pedagogy, radical love, and self-determination touch one another, philosophically speaking. Teachers must keep their courage in order to have good teaching. It is not about technique, it is about having integrity in one's identity as a teacher (Palmer, 2007). A teacher should ask themselves this question: "Are you being true to yourself and your beliefs in the decisions that you make as a teacher, or are you cowering or succumbing to the beliefs that surround you?"

Teaching is not easy and is not for everyone, therefore if a teacher finds herself worried more than she is brave, teaching may not be for her. In today's world, "there is little interaction or dialogue and tremendous almost constant virtual/technical obsessiveness" (Reynolds, 2016, p. 34). This 'virtual obsessiveness' is especially true after March 2020, when people felt forced to stay inside which increased the time online and decreased the ability to actively listen to one another. I definitely witness listening and promptly following verbal directions as more of a challenge with students now versus pre-2020. I am very thankful that I am a first grade teacher, a teacher of children at the time in their lives before they have become extremely obsessed with cell phones and social media. I am empathetic for the secondary teachers who have to face those challenges with their students on a daily basis.

Teaching requires courage, even with societal changes, such as the obsessiveness with phones and social media. They have to find ways to cut through the noise and teach students how to be active listeners, listeners of themselves, to their teacher, and to their peers around them. Students must be taught to have a teachable heart, not just a teachable mind. Having a teachable heart is learning how to have radical love for themselves and others. This is found by

teachers modeling what radical love looks like in front of students, through dialogue with coworkers, administrators, as well as their students.

Fourthly, there is tolerance. Tolerance requires a lot from the teacher; it demands respect, discipline, and a code of ethics. A teacher cannot have any type of prejudice and tolerance simultaneously; the prejudice must be removed. Tolerance to Freire (1998) is not coexisting, yet tolerance is understanding that everyone is different and being able to learn from them, even if the teacher does not agree with the student's choices or actions. Tolerance is grace.

Grace is when one honors someone else whether they deserve it or not. It cannot be earned; on the contrary it is given freely. Compassion comes from a heart of grace. Giving in to grace yields freedom for the educator because they are not bound by their misbehaving students' actions, yet they find things to appreciate and are bound and determined to not give up and do what's best for the student. They put the student and his or her needs before themselves. Spirituality is freeing for the body, mind, and soul. "What is proposed here is a pedagogical understanding of spirituality that cannot be separated, objectified, or dehumanized, in that it exists as an integral force of humanity, enacted upon the world through communal engagement" (Darder, 2016, p. 4). Thoughtful reflection helps one to find grace. Once one finds the grace through experience and plenty of reflection, they inwardly contain a force of tolerance able to withstand and respond gracefully in any spontaneous situation in the classroom.

Taking the time to reflect is vital for healthy and fulfilling teaching. I know within myself that I do not take the time to reflect nearly enough. I usually think about my thoughts and actions at the time of an incident, but do not take the time to reflect in the evening of the day after all of the students have gone home and I am in the solitude of my empty classroom. Daily

solitary reflection is an area where I need improvement to make more room for tolerance and love. I firmly believe that metacognition is what makes good teachers great.

While a teacher must have tolerance for students, she or he must also have tolerance for themselves. It is okay to have inner frustrations, but it is not okay for those frustrations to overcome the teacher. The teacher must find a way to control their frustrations and exhibit grace. The grace may be with grit at times, but it's still grace all the same. "If we do not have the inner resolve to handle these regular setbacks, and even see value in good failure, then we may succumb to frustration and disillusionment and quickly experience burn out" (Kaufman, 2017, p. 12). By practicing contemplation, a teacher is better prepared to deal with whatever may come.

The fifth area of love is decisiveness. Decisiveness is the ability to make effective decisions. From a teacher's standpoint, sometimes the decisions are slow and methodical, other times decisions have to be made promptly, without much forethought. Students know when a teacher doesn't have decisiveness and the students perceive a lack of it as weakness in morals and values, as well as incompetence as a professional. This is usually evident when a teacher does not have much classroom management. It is very evident as a teacher who does possess decisiveness to walk into a classroom and where a sense of decisiveness is not present.

There must be a balance of making decisions for the best of the students, as well as the teacher's sanity. Not disciplining a student is not fully loving the student. A student must be taught right from wrong, or they will never figure out who they are as a person. Their personal growth and maturity will be stunted. However, sometimes a teacher must pick his or her battles. Sometimes a student needs constant discipline, other times a teacher must protect his or sanity by allowing the student to find out the consequence on their own. A student realizes if a teacher

truly cares for and loves them if they have consistent discipline, which sometimes involves punishment. Punishment is not a bad thing if it is done appropriately and with the best intentions for the student in mind to help correct the unwanted behavior. Discipline can also involve positive and negative reinforcement strategies.

Decisiveness cannot be taken lightly. Decisions made today impact decisions that are made days, weeks, months, and years from the first decision. When a teacher is responsible for a classroom of students, they are responsible for making decisions for their students at times. Will the decisions help or hinder the student? Is the teacher too often making decisions for the student, or is she allowing the student to make decisions for themselves? The following passage is from an Antonia Darder workshop piece (n.d.) where she mentions Paulo Freire's 'armed love' can be viewed from the standpoint of freedom for students and students in control of their own learning versus the exploitation of too much assistance from the teacher:

Freire spoke repeatedly about the manner in which conditions of economic exploitation and domination dehumanize us—stunting the development of social agency and the political understanding necessary to challenge and transform the social and material conditions that betray our freedom. (p. 9)

Making too many decisions for students instead of with students hinders the students' independence and maturity. Sometimes, a love that I call tough love is what is needed for some students to realize their full potential and freedom as a learner. Some teachers do not have high expectations for all students, and tend to those who seem to struggle instead of deciding to push the student to work harder and more independently. These acts are hurting the student more than they are helping the student. Decisiveness is all about moderation and balance.

Sixthly, there is patience. Teaching requires a lot of patience, however, when Freire (1998) uses this word, he is not speaking of what patience usually means to most. He is not calling for patience or impatience, he is calling for impatient patience. Teachers who are living with impatient patience rarely lose self-control in their words or actions and will not usually speak without carefully thinking first. Their tone is energetic, but their message is considerate yet certain. They are quick to listen and slow to speak.

Just like patience is required from teacher to their students, patience is also required by the teacher for themselves. A teacher must be patient in their learning of themselves and their students, especially new teachers. They cannot put so much pressure on themselves to realize what it takes to be an effective teacher in their first or second year of teaching, and beyond that for some teachers in unique situations. It is also important that superintendents and administrators do not put immense pressure on new teachers while they are in the process of trying to figure everything out within themselves. Administrators should be willing to meet with teachers to help them figure out who they are as a teacher. All teachers need ample time to answer for themselves the following questions mentioned by Maria Nikolakaki (2012):

Why am I teaching? What is my scope or aim? How is knowledge selected? What are the consequences of my actions? Who benefits from this type of education? Who gets left out? Am I really helping my students become adults who will be responsible and agents in society? Will society improve if my students grow up to be the citizens the system wants them to be? (p. 24)

These questions could and should be asked daily by teachers to themselves. The use of suppressive scripted curriculum makes these some of these questions invalid. Maybe scripted curriculums are 'good' for new teachers so that they feel like they know exactly what to do and

don't ask any questions to the establishment. However, they are definitely suppressing for veteran teachers who feel like their once creative lessons have been stripped out from under them. I also see this 'stripping away' with preservice teachers who design their own lessons to be observed while in the student-teaching phase of undergraduate school. Then, when they get certified and have their own classrooms, they realize that the creativity is no longer present and begin following the suppressive scripted curriculums like the rest of the district. And, it seems they dare not ask any questions about it if they wish to keep their jobs.

Finally, there is the joy of living. Surrendering oneself to a life of living versus a life of dying makes all the difference. What can be done today in my classroom to make a difference in my students' lives for the better? What discussions can my class and I be a part of to improve morale and classroom community, as well as the souls of each student? Thus, improving my own life by helping others improve their lives.

When I think of the joy of living, I cannot help but think of striving to live by the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in the Bible. Galatians 5:22-23 NIV states: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law." How can I show these fruits in my workplace? How can I help each of my students to improve their lives and reach their purpose? How can I help lead my fellow teachers to a life of joy? How can I plant a seed of critical thinking and freedom in my students' souls?

I believe finding the joy of living is a daily practice. Joy must be meditated on and searched for. I must put in joy if I want to reproduce it outwardly. Does what I am listening to or watching contain a sense of joy? How can I show others joy if I don't pursue joy myself? If I put negative aspects of living into my body, mind, soul, and spirit, how can I be a positive

person? I believe what goes in will come out in my daily living. I also believe that what one sows, one will reap, meaning what one puts out into the world, they will get back. If I put joy out into the world, the world will repay me with joy. The same idea works with a negative attitude as well. In thinking about *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), would the people of Brazil have desired to be taught by Paulo Freire if he possessed a negative attitude? I believe they were drawn to Paulo Freire because of his joyful disposition to help others succeed and reach freedom.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a lot to say about love and how people should treat each other. In bell hooks's text (2006) *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*, she mentions that the emphasis that Martin Luther King, Jr. placed upon love:

The civil rights movement transformed society in the United States because it was fundamentally rooted in a love ethic. No leader has emphasized this ethic more than Martin Luther King, Jr. He had the prophetic insight to recognize that a revolution built on any other foundation would fail. Again and again, King testified that he had “decided to love” because he believed deeply that if we are “seeking the highest good” we “find it through love” because this is “the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality.” (p. 244)

bell hooks goes on to say that we as humans struggle with finding our identity and worth, realizing that we are more than our gender, race, or class. People strive for justice, yet they unfortunately do not reach a “transcendent reality” because they aren't rooted in love (hooks, 2006, p. 244). With radical love, one learns to rise above whatever is causing them to struggle. One reaches a deeper way of thinking and understanding, as well as a newer, better way in which to view the world and its inhabitants. When love is at the forefront of one's

thinking, there's a great power that becomes ignited and rooted within that causes one to not fret too much about their struggles, and what they view as failures in their life. I do not write about radical love because I am an expert who has 'arrived' in the 'love for all' department, but because I, myself, am striving to attain radical love for all. Attaining radical love is definitely not an easy task, it takes years and years to almost master. I'm not sure if it ever is totally mastered within a human being according to the following quote by Clelia Rodriguez (2008): Radical love is "forgiving without forgetting" and "breathing in community with the spirit of resistance" among many other poetic examples (p. 8-10). While one may desire to reach the level of instilling and displaying radical love perfectly at all times, it just simply isn't possible. Selfishness, which is innate human nature, can always creep up when someone is least expecting it. The goal is to have this mindset at the forefront most of the time, and realize that mistakes will happen. However, one must also realize to learn from the mistakes so that one will get closer and closer to an almost perfect display of radical love with each new day and season of life.

Radical love is even more important and needed now in the 21st century and its increasing uses of technology in the classroom (Kahn & Kellner, 2007). Students at my school are on the computer much more now than just 5 years ago. With that said, there comes the absence of the teacher more and more. Teachers are missing more time for interaction with their students due to computers stealing a lot of time. If teachers are not making up for the time lost by using radical love along with engaging lessons, students will begin to desire time with computer more than time with the teacher. If a teacher is burnt out, they will also more likely have students get out their computers instead of finding time to connect with their students personally. Computers should be used for creative expression and for meaningful learning experiences, and should not

take up the majority of the students' daily learning time. Even in the 1970s, Freire was writing about technology and how it was becoming an obsession. It is hard to fathom how much more true that statement is today. Freire (2000) writes about technology:

The rationality basic to science and technology disappears under the extraordinary effects of technology itself, and its place is taken by myth-making irrationalism. Technology thus ceases to be perceived by men as one of the greatest expressions of their creative power and becomes instead a species of new divinity to which they create a cult of worship. (pp. 62-63)

People still worship technology today, even people who happen to be children; it continues to become more and more of a problem in the classroom. I believe that 2020 made this problem more worse of an issue in today's society. Due to the society being within the home more, social media and other uses of technology became more used than ever. Children did not get the attention they needed from their parents and still do not in certain homes. To try to make children behave, students were placed in front of screens to bide their time. Due to this dark, confusing time, teachers have to compete with computers to keep the attention and engagement of students in classrooms today. I have witnessed many veteran teachers, including myself, say that we teachers are having issues with keeping students engaged due to screens taking more and more of children's lives these days. It appears technology is here to stay, so it won't do any good to discuss this and complain about it. Teachers will have to learn how to take action against the obsessiveness of screens and still maintain engagement in their classrooms. It is a struggle for teachers to figure out how to hold their students' attention, but it must be done for teachers to make a radical difference in their students' lives. I believe this is through passionate teaching with radical love (Spooner, 2018). If a teacher gives of themselves consistently on a

daily basis, children will figure out that unconditional love is more important and fulfilling than anything that technology can provide for them.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is the study of human motivation and personality. Teachers who love their students desire what is best for each student. In order for students to perform for themselves and their teachers, they must be motivated. Some students naturally possess an innate motivated personality to perform well for themselves and others who are asking for a positive performance. Other students must be provided motivation by the teacher and other outside sources. SDT can be related to academic or behavioral purposes. For example, a student may need more encouragement than others to stay focused on academic learning, such as a test in class. Meanwhile, another student may need motivation to follow the classroom rules so as not to lose recess or visit the principal's office.

All students in a classroom have varying degrees of motivation and different, unique personalities. It is the teacher's responsibility to learn what motivates each of her students and which personality traits each student possesses. However, motivation, just like learning, starts at home. Parents, who choose to do so, motivate their children to enjoy learning. They motivate their children to have a desire to go to school from the point when children become verbal and display motivation to learn. Students who are motivated to want to learn more by their parents usually are that much more motivated in the classroom. On the other hand, students who are not motivated to enjoy learning and being at school will have difficulty at paying attention in school. Thus, unmotivated students usually become students who exhibit problems with positive behavior.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the school where I teach is a rural school. Many of the teachers at my school were born and raised in the county where my school resides. Most of our students have not visited big cities and usually only travel between neighboring counties. Generational poverty is prevalent in our rural county and it doesn't seem to be going away anytime soon. Therefore, education is very important in order for students in our area to have a chance at overcoming the vicious cycle of poverty. In our small town, it seems like everybody knows everybody. Our district of schools faces unique challenges, such as economic distresses. In particular, the school where I teach, has the highest amount of students who come from economic distresses out of all of the schools in our district. From my time in as a teacher, it seems like there is a pattern with students who come from lower income homes needing more motivation to enjoy going to school and learning. They seem to have more worries on their mind than other students who may be closer to what is considered lower middle class. On the other hand, I realize I am an outsider to what goes on in students' homes. I only see how the student acts when they are with me at school and can only go on what their parents tell me about the child's home life. Students who have a rough time at home can be totally different at school because school is their safe place where they know they won't be abused, hungry, etc.

According to Antonia Darder (2007), who came to elementary school from an abusive home, "school represented a sort of respite from the pain and confusion at home. School was a place where I didn't have to worry about being beaten or sexually molested" (p. 186). Sometimes, students are living two lives and no one at the school is even aware of it until the child decides to share with a trusted adult. Like Darder, some students are learning another language than the one spoken at home. These students most likely feel lost, unwelcome, and unable to be

understood (literally and figuratively). How can students from troublesome homes or homes where the first language is not English be motivated?

Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is motivation that is activated through the student relaying a message to themselves without relying upon extrinsic sources or rewards. Extrinsic motivation refers to the opposite of intrinsic; i.e. it is motivation that is acquired through messages that the student did not produce themselves. For example, a student may need to be motivated by a piece of candy as a reward in order to effectively complete a desired task. In order to be intrinsically motivated, a person must have three needs met: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For this dissertation, I am mainly focusing on the relatedness aspect of SDT since relatedness and radical love connect with one another, however if students acquire relatedness, competence and autonomy will then be fostered. When teachers allow their students to experience relatedness by showing them radical love through compassion and care, relatedness and competence will follow. Simultaneously, students will gain internal motivation because all three of these needs have been met.

Relatedness is when one has a sense of belonging and connection. Competence is experiencing mastery and effectiveness in an activity, task, or skill. Autonomy is knowing that one has a choice and realizing they are in charge of their own behavior. These three needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence being met are essential for human motivation and well-being, as well as social development. For someone to desire to complete a task, they must either inherently value the task and what it takes to achieve it or they must be motivated and coerced externally. Ryan and Deci (2000) goes on to say that humans who are intrinsically motivated have more energy and confidence than one who is extrinsically motivated.

Scientists have discovered that when children are born, they are intrinsically motivated because they are curious and active; they do not usually require external motivation at this time of life. Most babies are vivacious. Studies have shown that in order to maintain this type of motivation throughout life, enhancements must be made. Therefore, there are various degrees of intrinsic motivation to be looked at. This theory relates to positive psychology, which has been recently researched with hope and inspiration (Minh, 2019). Positive psychology centers around finding a type of well-being that is only simply experiencing happiness, but is a higher-level well-being that is thriving with resilience (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Thriving with resiliency stems from gratitude, generosity, contentment, imagination, etc. When students and teachers experience positive psychology, they are experiencing “Love— the elephant in the room of education” (Barcelos & Coelho, 2016, p. 131). When teaching and learning is enjoyable, it helps the teachers and students become resilient to challenges. Negative emotions bring about the opposite emotions, which depletes resiliency and well-being. Teachers have to work even harder for students who come from troublesome homes or homes where another language comes first to find what motivates them. It could be as simple as taking the time to talk to students, trying to find something that makes them happy and to feel welcome.

A sub theory of SDT is called Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET). This theory explains the variations of intrinsic motivation, focusing upon competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Studies have shown that positive feedback enhances and improves intrinsic motivation, while negative feedback decreases intrinsic motivation levels (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For competence to occur, autonomy must be maintained; both are necessary for intrinsic motivation. Further studies “have shown that teachers who are autonomy supportive (in contrast to controlling) catalyze in their students’ greater intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and desire for

challenge” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70-71). When teachers allow students to have choices and acknowledge students’ feelings, students’ intrinsic motivation is increased due to increased autonomy levels. Students who are taught by teachers who are more controlling and uncaring lose motivation and do not learn as effectively as students who have a healthy sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. As far as behavior is concerned with the area of relatedness, studies show that students who feel connected to, cared for, and understood by their parents and teachers are more likely to follow directions in school and perform positively (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Choice is another way that motivation can occur in the classroom and helps to produce self-determination (Brooks & Young, 2011). I believe that students should be given choices about many areas of schooling. I also believe students should be pushed and encouraged to do their best. There has to be a balance of encouragement, pushing, and choice. Sometimes a student just simply doesn’t want to do something, and most of the time, that is okay. Eventually, if given appropriate choices and when the student can be allowed to feel empowered, they will complete the task in front of them. In this case, the task may be in their own way instead of in the way the teacher had planned or envisioned. Other times, students need more time and need to be heard in order to complete a task. They may be having a bad day and need to talk to the teacher or counselor before moving forward and putting forth effort to complete the task. I have seen the power of choice work well in my classroom over the years. It has paid off the most with gifted students and students with behavior problems. Students have a more positive and loving relationship with the work they do at school when they are allowed to things they enjoy (Amidon, 2013). When given a choice of how an assignment or activity is completed, boredom is less likely to occur when the assignment can be completed in a creative way that the student

chooses for themselves. Other times, with a student who often displays a need for behavior regulation, giving them a choice lets them know they can be in charge of their own learning and releases any power struggle the student may have with the teacher.

Recently, I have been using a behavior chart with a certain student in my class who needs behavior regulation. He is able to use the chart to record his behavior, and he and I rate his behavior from 0 to 2 each day for different segments of the day. 0 being not showing evidence of positive behavior and 3 being fully showing evidence of desired positive behavior. If he receives higher numbers by the end of the school day, he is rewarded with prizes of his choosing. This chart seems to work well because the student is given a choice and is in charge of rating himself. It is also a chance for the student and I to interact more, which I find helps tremendously. Consistent attention and listening to the student helps meet their need of competence and relatedness that is lacking in their life because the student feels like they are attached to the teacher and have a sense of belonging. I have observed throughout my years of teaching that students who act out in a negative manner in the classroom seem to be starving for attention and love, and they will seek to get the attention from the teacher, either in a positive way or negative way. Turns out, it's almost always in negative ways. With this particular student, in recent weeks, I have seen him become more intrinsically motivated than externally motivated, even though he definitely enjoys his ice cream rewards! I feel like my hard work day in and day out with him is finally paying off – it *only* took around 120 days of consistent discipline with him! I have to laugh to keep from crying sometimes! Jokes aside, it is definitely rewarding to see the transformation of students. It is my passion and what drives me to go in to school each day, and why I continue to teach. Seeing students motivated to learn through self-

determination and desiring to do better as a person fuels my fire for teaching and my desire to be a lifelong learner.

In the years of 2020-2022, with at-home learning, students' motivation levels have indeed tapered. It has taken quite a while to build the motivation back up. Personally, I still don't feel that the motivation is where it needs to be compared to pre-2020. From what I've witnessed, students are currently having a difficult time with actively listening and following directions, more so than pre-2020. In the past four years, I have had students who have been used to minimal expectations for learning and I blame it on the pandemic era. Even when schools were considered safe by most, some parents still did not send their students to daycare and preschool. Daycare and preschool would have been the ages in the years of 2020-2022 of the students I now teach this year. Some of these children were not given adequate expectations because they were at home for their most critical stages of development instead of learning about expectations, motivation, and self-determination in school. "The first five years of child development are crucial to their health, well-being, and the overall trajectory of their lives in various ways" (Ramos, 2023). It seems they were also used to not having to listen and follow directions because they were in informal environments, such as at home, with little formal learning, for their very early years. Perhaps their caretakers did most things for them instead of allowing them to gain independence for reasons that may have been due to the pandemic. Thus, children are not accustomed to listening and following directions like students who are accustomed to schooling.

The class environment is the foundation for motivation in the classroom. A classroom should be warm, inviting, age-appropriate, not too visually stimulating, clean and above all, safe. The teacher is part of the classroom environment and should check all of the boxes in the prior

sentence about themselves and their demeanor. A teacher's attitude and levels of passion and enthusiasm has a lot to do with student participation, engagement, and motivation (Ford, 2019). If teachers aren't excited about teaching, students are going to be excited to learn and will be naturally motivated. On the other hand, if the teacher comes across mundane and lazy, the students will reciprocate the behavior that they see. Some schools are older than others, therefore classrooms in older schools may not be as appealing as classrooms in newer schools. However, I believe there are creative ways that teachers can make their classroom look inviting no matter the circumstances, using whatever they have to work with. Also, the teacher can make up for an old classroom with exciting classroom management and ways of teaching. Administrators should take responsibility for the atmosphere and culture in the school, while also encouraging their teachers to take initiative of their classroom environment. It is also the administrators job to hire passionate teachers, but in today's teaching economy, there are not many teachers to choose from. Not as many people are wanting to teach and teachers who are already certified are increasingly changing careers.

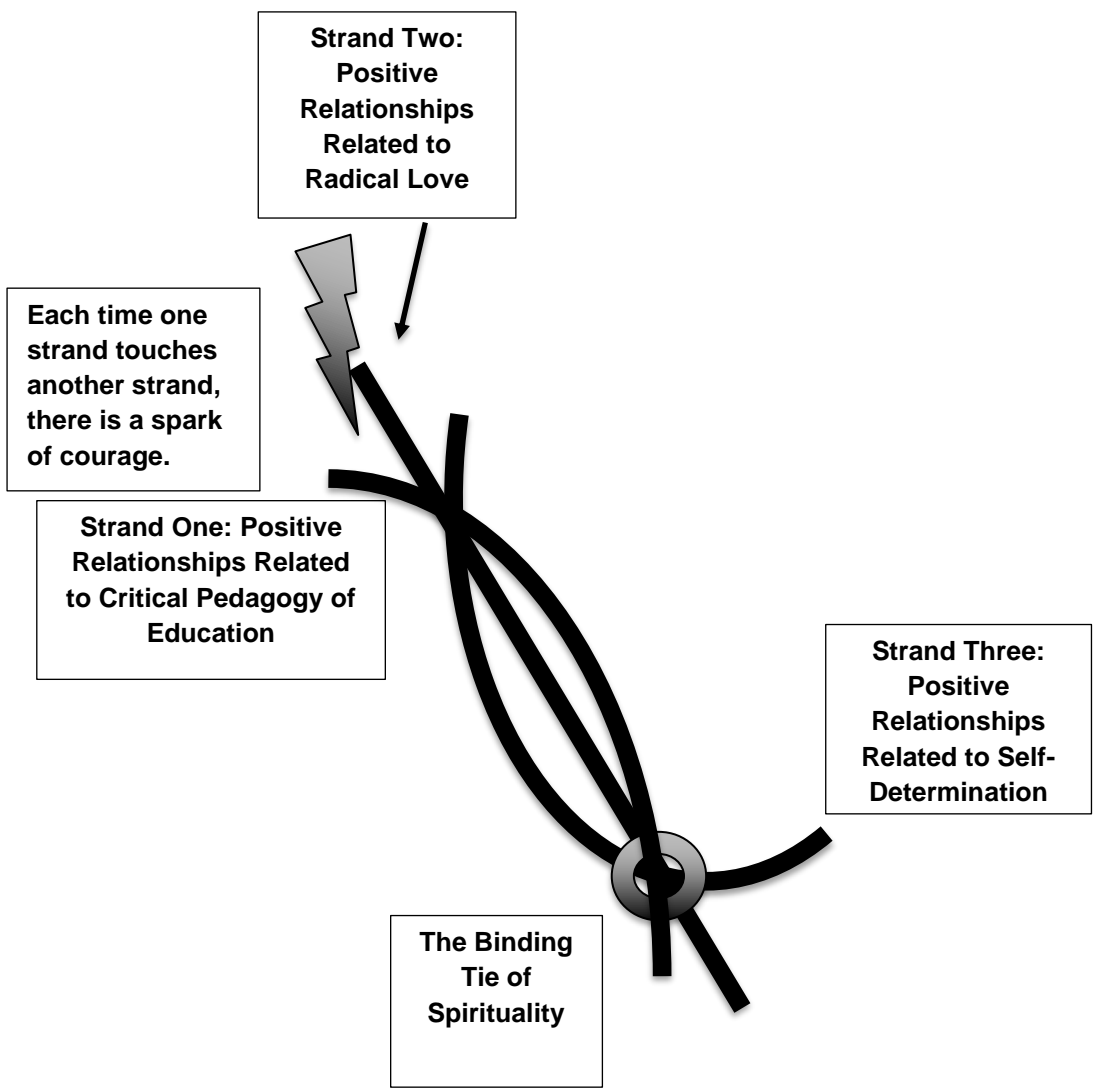
Even though this is the more scientific section of this dissertation, it is also psychologic. I believe that spirituality and psychology can intertwine at times, i.e. body, mind, soul, and spirit make up a human being, a person. The spirit is intangible and interrelated to all things that make up the universe. "To comprehend a phenomenon or condition fully, we also have to understand what it is not and what external forces or contexts define its identity" (Villaverde, 2008, p. 2). Teachers must first realize who they are and what they bring into the world before they can truly and deeply learn and make meaning of the world. Teachers have to value themselves before they can value others. For teachers to truly reach students and come to a place where true learning takes place, the authentic self must be found first (Jones,

2005). Students can tell when teachers are not authentic or take their job of teaching and caring for children seriously. When interaction in the classroom is not authentic or the teacher is not attempting to relate to their students, true learning is not taking place; it becomes a simple act of going through the motions. “The inner self is always in relation to others and to the world. We are not alone, even if we live solitary lives. We are fluid in our relationships with others as we must speak with others, help others, and work with others” (Morris, 2016b, p. 65). Through the child’s adventures and experiences in life, their spirit will be altered in some way. When this happens, the child will be able to discern for themselves what can alter their spirit in positive ways. It is the teacher’s responsibility to motivate students to think in this way. I discuss spirituality and the learner later on in this dissertation.

Organization of the Dissertation

My dissertation consists of a prologue, a background and introduction, five chapters, an epilogue, and an appendix. In the prologue, I present a metaphor of a classroom where radical love is absent. Chapter 1 concerns the background and introduction of my topic of interest, as well as the purpose of the topic, including autobiographical stories and my research questions. Chapter 2 contains the theoretical frameworks that I have chosen to support my topic (critical pedagogy of education, radical love theory, and self-determination theory), and ends with the literature review. Chapter 3 includes the methodology section, which is an ethnographic study. Chapter 4 highlights the data collection, data analysis, and research positionality. In Chapter 5, I put everything together as an expression of a curriculum of agape love. In the Epilogue, I present a metaphorical classroom filled with radical love.

THE BRAIDED STRAND OF POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE BRAIDED STRAND OF FREEDOM

Introduction: Gaining Freedom in Today's Schooling Practices Through Positive Relationships

As stated in the first part of this dissertation, I am interested in researching the impact of positive relationships between teacher and student, as well as the power of love, passion, courage, and compassion in an early childhood classroom. Shapiro (2006) writes:

School offers only the hollow shell of meaningful experience to our children. In its zeal about academic achievement, test scores, grades, point averages, college acceptance, and the rest, it has turned our eyes away from what is most important in the process of human development and maturation. In focusing our attention on winning, getting ahead, being a success, we have offered kids little that speaks to what it means to live a good and purposeful life in the context of social relationships and communal responsibility (p. 17).

Today, it seems that the focus of public education encompasses two areas: scripted curriculums and testing. In the district where I teach, benchmark testing in elementary school occurs three times a year for kindergarten through sixth-grade students. In third through sixth grade, students take the Georgia Milestones state-standardized test at the end of each school year. For the entire school year, teachers in all grade levels are required to stay diligent in preparing students for the tests that teachers are required to administer and that students are required to complete. With the heavy burden of testing and teaching to the test, the power of love, compassion, passion, and courage is being extinguished from today's classrooms. True love and care for the soul of the student is a thing of the past (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In the United States, both students and teachers were not used to being held to such high standards in the schooling of the

past. Teaching and learning was more about the experience versus scores on standardized tests. Yes, there were still summative assessments that were administered, but the abundant pressure was not present in schools. It wasn't until the 1980s when standardized testing became a part of the schooling experience of today. "Significant reform efforts— the standards-based education movement, the passage of No Child Left Behind, the Common Core— have come with plenty of good intentions, chief among them to focus the entire system on the success of *all* students. And yet our current path of reform has had numerous unintended consequences" (Goodwin, 2015, p. 1). The rise of stress due to the burden of testing has caused principals and teachers to flee the profession. Students drop out when they can't figure out how standardized learning and testing is beneficial to them, or they learn to memorize for a test and do 'just enough to get by' instead of acquiring a love of learning for life. Fostering curiosity and discovery are becoming ideals of old in today's classrooms. So, while students do not deeply care about the outcome of a standardized test, teachers are being held accountable.

The public school system is working harder instead of smarter, and can be likened to a hamster on a wheel— working hard but not really going anywhere. It remains unclear whether standardized learning has actually created consistent, effective instruction. Schools in other countries, who are leading the way, have gradually gotten away from the restrictions of standardized testing and rely upon experiences of deep individual learning choices (Goodwin, 2015). While the United States education system has been attempting to run schools like a business, one important element has been left to the side: the students, and the students' opinions about standardized learning. Successful businesses like Southwest Airlines, Apple, and Google do not even run their businesses like the businesses of old; instead they motivate their employees

by providing a sense of autonomy and working alongside their employees to help them grow as individuals (Goodwin, 2015).

While the use of curriculum is most likely here to stay for a while, teachers can learn how to teach freedom through the curriculum, meaning, figure out ways of teaching that still allow for teachers to abide by the curriculum, yet simultaneously help create a sense of creativity and discovery in the classroom, while also tending to the soul and spirit of the child. I am convicted that including the soul and spirit of the child in what is taught and learned is the wholistic education of the child, which I discuss in more detail below. However, this type of education is difficult to attain in a classroom where teachers are told to not deviate at all away from the curriculum. I won't go into "holistic" education in too much detail in this dissertation, but I would like to point out that educational spirituality might be what makes the term *holistic education* 'whole' and it is a topic I will continue to study now and in the future. In this dissertation, I am changing holistic to *wholistic*, as in education that is spiritually whole. Teachers in this type of environment are told that if they deviate away from the curriculum at all or if they are not teaching a certain part of the curriculum at the allotted time shown on their schedule, they will be deducted points on the teacher rating scale. In public schools in Georgia, this scale is called the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES). Teachers in early childhood education have become afraid of reading their favorite books to students, experimenting with crafts and creative activities, working on cutting and pasting skills, etc., which are all important skills to discover in an early childhood student's life. In the below stranded sections, I speak about each section, studies related to the theories, as well as what those studies mean to me personally as an educator who seeks to wholistically educate each one of my students.

Strand One: Positive Relationships Related to Critical Pedagogy of Education

Positive student relationships are vital to student success (Kaufman, 2023). When students feel cared for and heard, they're more likely to retain learning engagement and academic success. A study in 2011 pertaining to the teacher-student relationship shows that students are more likely to succeed academically if they have a positive relationship with their teacher (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Ort, 2011). The effects of negative relationships were shown to affect younger students more than secondary students, yet the effects of positive relationships were shown to affect secondary school students more than primary students. I am reminded of my own experience in teaching students. I strive to put the positive relationships first and the academics second. If my students know they can trust me to care for and love them, then they will be willing to learn and try their best (hooks, 2001). If my students don't seem to be trying their best, then I need to look at my relationship with them and see if there are any empty holes that need to be filled. Am I giving them enough positive attention and encouragement? Is there anything that may be going on at home that has their thoughts elsewhere?

Veteran Teachers: Thinking Critically About Instructional Methods

Another study about veteran teachers shows that veteran teachers are more satisfied teachers when they have positive relationships with their students (Veldman, Tartwijk, Brekelmans, & Wubbels, 2013). Students are also observed and interviewed in this case study. The combined results show that even if students do not believe they have a positive relationship with their teacher, the teacher can still be satisfied with her job. However, the study also shows that veteran teachers are even more satisfied with their teaching jobs when there is a positive teacher-student relationship present. These two studies fall under the umbrella of critical pedagogy in education because the effects of positive relationships in the classroom is an understudied subject within education and it presents critical love as a grassroots social

transformation. I am reminded of my relationship with one of the veteran teachers I interviewed for my ethnography in this dissertation. One reason she continues to return year after year, even though she is retired, is because of the relationships she forms with each student she is in contact with. She has found her purpose and fulfillment in being an educator because of positive relationships fueling her passion for education. Work is being conducted in the area of positive relationships between teacher and student now more than ever before, which I believe is due largely to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Positive relationships in the classroom are very important and challenging, especially during uncertain times.

I also think that teachers should have total freedom to allow children to have the opportunities to critically discover how they are connected to the world, their relationships with others, and the unionization between human beings and nature. Today's curricula should include education for the environment, specifically, education aimed at teaching children to respect their environment and to be responsible for caring for the environmental resources (Fien, 1991). A classroom should become a classroom community as students become connected with themselves, others, and the teacher. Students should also become connected to the building as a place, as well as the nature surrounding the building. In order to feel connected, the teacher must guide students in learning to respect themselves and others. Children, early on, should also learn to respect their place. By place, I am referring to the environment where one resides at for most of the day, which for children is the school. By becoming familiar with the building and the outdoors, students can become connected at a more deeper level, which will in turn cause them to respect their place. "We are souls and so too is the earth – the earth has a soul because we are the earth and we have souls. This is one way, then, to think of fluidity between ourselves and the world" (Morris, 2016b, p. 65). Teachers could lead students on nature walks and teach students

about respect for self and nature through scavenger hunts. Teaching students to value themselves, and the place in which they dwell (literally and figuratively), will help students to feel content and at ease wherever they are in life. Chances are, if students learn to respect their school, they will respect other environments that become places for them in their life. Curriculum should be adapted to the place where the students and teacher reside (Grunewald, 2003). Many educators take the curriculum as the ‘one all be all’, instead of dissecting it for themselves and their students, and figuring out how it can actually apply to the real lives of the students they are teaching. How can the curriculum be taught in a way that students are able to wholly connect with it? How does the curriculum need to be altered to fit the place and culture of the students being taught?

When a child feels wholistically connected to their peers, teacher, and their school, they will be more apt to open up and allow positive, trusting relationships to form. They will not be timid to get to know others and will feel safe to share whatever is on their mind. This will allow the teacher to get to know their students. When teachers truly know their students at a deep level, they can figure out the best ways to teach and assist students. The teacher will know how the student prefers to learn and what the student’s likes and dislikes are. When students trust their teacher, the possibilities are endless. This trust must first be formed before a deep, spiritual connection can take place. In order for trust to occur, the teacher must make room in their classroom for all types of relationships. This means that the teacher must work diligently to get to know all of their students, even students who may have a ‘harder shell to crack’ than others; these are most likely students who have experienced some sort of trauma outside of school. All students can be reached in a way that result in connections, some just may take more time than others to feel the connection. The stronger a wholistic connection (Miller, 2006) that includes

spiritual, mental, and emotional classroom connection, the more all students will want to become part of the team. I speak more about that in the spirituality strand below.

Another pedagogical study in the classroom found that teachers are reluctant to allow their students to be in charge in the classroom (Katz, 2014). Some teachers are also leaning toward the unwillingness of a transformation of status quo learning to a more wholistic society of learners. Teachers say that they encourage their students to have a desire to improve the world society, and they think that the best way for that to happen is by only teaching critical thinking skills and discussing social issues. I believe there should be a mix of critical thinking, social issues (without a dominating force of one particular lens), and wholistic education involving nature, spirit, and soul. Most of the teachers in the study discuss that they do not think about how the classroom learners produce the future society all through learning a specific set of beliefs. Some of these teachers may have never learned about critical pedagogy before so they wouldn't know that the U.S. schooling system is only preparing students to be workers in the society, not imaginative, loving yet critical thinkers (Willis, 1981). As I've been teaching and become more and more aware of politics and government, and how they influence society, I believe that Willis's (1981) text is accurate – public schooling was indeed designed so to ensure that working class students get working class jobs. However, that topic will have to be further explored through a writing assignment for another time. The study also found that a certain level of comfort decreases the chance that one will seek social change and challenge the status quo, for teachers and students (Katz, 2014). Indeed, a critical pedagogy in education needs to be a continual practice among those being suppressed as well as the suppressors if there is any hope of an increase in compassion and justness in society.

Is There Enough Time for Play in Public Schools?

Another aspect of this is about the pedagogy of play in the classroom. Play is very important for early childhood education. Almost daily, I run across several Instagram posts from teachers and administrators who want their followers to realize how important play is for a young child. One of them in particular, by Dr. Brad Johnson (Johnson, 2024), states that recess is just as important, if not more important, than being in the classroom. Dr. Brad Johnson is a motivational speaker in the field of education and I follow him on one of my social media accounts because I agree with most if not all of his online posts. Recess is stimulating, freeing, and it is where children learn social skills, like how to lead a group or sort out disagreements and conflicts. I try to incorporate as much brain breaks into my teaching as possible. There are a couple of times in my schedule that are everyday routine brain breaks when I know they've been sitting at their desks for a while. Other times, I can just sense that they need a break because they are becoming chatty or disengaged. A brain break is where students can get up out of their seats, stretch, dance, or exercise. There are many YouTube channels devoted to brain breaks catered to young children, such as accounts ran by Coach Corey Martin and Matthew Wood. My students always enjoy brain breaks from these content creators. I also participate with them most of the time, dancing or exercising, and the students really enjoy it. I see this as another area where I can develop positive relationships with them, appreciating the same things they do. Rangel's (2017) paper argues in favor of early childhood play and also that play is just as important in post-childhood education, which the author calls "transformative play" because "human development is a life-long process" (p. 67). Play is proven to be an ideology, not only an activity. The author also discusses the pedagogy of play as being an extended part of critical and wholistic education and that it teaches students respect for others, connects mind, body, and

spirit, and gives way to personal and social transformation. I discuss the spiritual aspect of education in another strand of this chapter.

Another article that talks about education through play is from EdSurge.com in 2023. The interviewee is science journalist, Annie Murphy Paul. Paul states that our education system is subjected to learning only through the brain, which is then evaluated through assessments. She adds that there is an extended mind, philosophically speaking, which doesn't stop at the skull level. The mind extends beyond the skull, into the rest of the human body. The mind is in surroundings, relationships, device use, and other technologies. Paul concludes by saying that humans can improve their minds by improving their use of resources that are outside the brain and believes that learning through play should extend even into college. I agree with what is stated in this article because learning should not just be bound inside the brain, but learning should be done through exploration by the whole body. Learning through the whole body examples might be physical activity, recess, exploring, and uninterrupted, unstructured play. All of these activities teach students how to get rid of energy, reduce their stress levels, gain and improve upon relationships, and sort out conflicts. Learning through play also gradually helps children learn emotional regulation. I believe that it's also just as important to learn to calm down after play. After physical activity and recess, I have my students lay their heads down on their desks for what I call "5 minutes of quiet time". This allows them to calm down and reach emotional regulation.

Connections & Gaps Summary

Through strand one, there are connections and gaps in the literature. In the first study by Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Ort (2011), it is stated that students are more likely to succeed academically if they have a positive relationship with their teacher. This study connects to the

second study by Veldman, Tartwijk, Brekelmans, & Wubbels (2013), which is about veteran teachers being more satisfied in their teaching when they have established positive relationships with their students. These two studies have a connection because when a student succeeds academically, that is affirmation to the veteran teacher that they have a positive relationship with that particular student. Thus, one can conclude when students don't have a positive relationship with their teacher, they are more likely to be unsuccessful academically. These two studies connect with the final studies involving Johnson (2024) and the article from EdSurge.com relating to play at school. When a teacher allows her students to play and also is involved in the play with the students, that means the teacher and students have a positive relationship. A veteran teacher who truly knows her students knows that they enjoy playing, especially at the early childhood level. A veteran teacher will also know that students enjoy seeing their teachers interact simultaneously through play with them. The one gap that I found in this group of literature is that if veteran teachers have a positive relationship with their students, then they should allow their students to be in charge more often. I know this is an area where I struggle in my own classroom. I see that my relationships with my students could be stronger if I relinquish some of the control and allow them to be more in charge more often. This equates to having more trust for my students and realizing that I need to further push them to be more independent and more in charge of their own learning.

Strand Two: Positive Relationships Related to Radical Love Theory

In a study conducted through collected narratives, a professor discovered that radical love is necessary in teaching and working with pre-service teachers (Lake, 2016). The professor shares that listening to and respecting students' unique perspectives leads to rewards for both the teacher and student. He also mentions that true listening should occur in a classroom no matter

how different the student is than the teacher. Racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious differences should not be a hindrance on how much a teacher listens and truly cares for a student. Radical love celebrates the differences between individuals and how everyone deserves to be treated with respect and value. This study brings to my mind what I have been striving to help my student teacher learn this year. She is gradually figuring out that positive relationships and care with love are more important than academics, or at least I hope she is. I have tried my best to relay this to her throughout her time in my classroom. She also naturally learns about love for the student through her own interactions with them. There are plenty of teachable moments each day in the classroom. However, I know the total and full realization of this notion will only come through the personal experiences she has with her future students in her own classroom.

Collaboration and Care

A second study presents dialogue between two strangers who come together to become truly collaborative with one another. They speak together about their beliefs and outlooks on life, with radical love and spirituality being the main two speaking points. Their conversations present to the reader ways to become truly collaborative and empathetic to someone, even to someone who one has never met before. By the end of the study and conversation, one of the strangers states what radical love means to them: “service to all, listening intently, curiosity about others, the world, and what connects, empathy for others, and social justice in everything” (Colonna & Stevenson, 2013, p. 17). These studies speak to me about how I should be conducting myself not only in my classroom and school, but also in life in general. I have to remind myself constantly while on the job to slow down and really listen. Listen to my students with intent, listen to my coworkers without thinking about how I am going to reply or what my response will be. I also have to teach my students how to listen by modeling being an active and

intent listener myself. I believe that greeting my students every morning with “Good morning”, along with that student’s name, shows the child that I value them because I am genuinely happy to see them, and I am also at the same time teaching them how to greet others. They are expected to say “good morning” back to me; I have taught them this practice over time. They learn my expectations but they also learn how to be a good listener and how to acknowledge others with respect through a greeting. How can I be more of service to my students, my fellow teachers, my administration team? How can I be more positive and have a more joyful outlook? Not only on the outside, but really feeling it on the inside? The main answer to these questions is gratitude--basking in thankfulness for all God has blessed me with and what I get to do each day with the children who are in my classroom for a reason. We are all existing to learn and grow from one another each day at school. What makes us different is one aspect I love about my job.

Overcoming Prejudice with Love

“Seldom are the humble self-assertive, or the self-assertive humble” (King, Jr., 1963, p. 1). This quote from Martin Luther King, Jr., from his book *Strength to Love*, resonates with me as a teacher. It’s a rare find to find someone who is both humble and self-assertive, they are indeed few and far between. Showing love through humbleness means sacrificing oneself to others and acting as a servant (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017). True servant leaders put serving others before themselves; they do not seek power and control. However, life is lived best when these two opposites work together in one’s life. In order to make it out in the world, one must combine toughness and softness. They must have “a tough mind and tender heart” (King, Jr., 1963, p. 2). A tough mind is a mind that is realistic and insightful. A tough mind has courage and is bold. A tough mind doesn’t mean a harsh or mean mind, there is a difference. It’s being able to make wise choices regardless of one’s surroundings. These decisions

sometimes take a while to make; that's what makes the mind tough—withstanding through the trials and tribulations, not giving up or seeking the easy way out. Our minds are constantly tugged this way and that, and it's hard to see right and wrong. This is especially valid in a world filled with false propaganda and pressure to remain in the status quo, versus having the boldness and courage to make change in love. When one firmly decides to base their choices upon love, that will always be the right choice one could make. Love is pure and true, based on a controlled mind, body, and spirit. One can never go wrong when doing things in love. Teachers must not be afraid to be bold and courageous to make changes for the better, for themselves, their students, their school, and for education in general.

A Teacher's Love for Her Students Can Change the World

I want to celebrate the differences and uniqueness of each of my students, and show them that it is acceptable to make mistakes, as long as we learn from those mistakes. Above all, I want to teach my students to possess radical love for their fellow man and woman, the world, nature, and to be a positive world-changer by obtaining an understood and foundationally-sound, controlled notion of connection with themselves, others and the world. I am also a firm believer in the teacher being open to learning from their students and acting as the facilitator, where the classroom represents an atmosphere where students feel safe, encouraged, spiritually connected, heard, and supported. In his text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, when writing concerning the art of dialogue, Paulo Freire (2000) states:

If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be

transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. (pp. 88-89)

Students are to be taught how to speak and converse with one another. They do not need to be taught to argue or be hostile with another; they will learn enough of that technique on their own. To sort out issues, students must be first taught how to address an issue within themselves, speak about the issue, and reach a sensible conclusion (Freire, 2000). This type of dialogical and critical thinking can successfully begin within the spirits of students who are in early childhood education, but they cannot do it without first being taught and delicately guided, yet led with a disciplined approach through what I call 'tough love'. The aforementioned suggestions are ways that I believe public schools can be improved. Recurring questions by curriculum theorists involve, "What knowledge is of most worth? What should the schools teach" (Green 2010, p. 451)? These are important questions that should be taken seriously by school leaders and political leaders; however, it should not always be totally centered around academia. What is most important are the hearts and souls of the children.

In another article, a teacher reflects on her experience when she was a first-year teacher (Cridland-Hughes, 2015). She heard stories from her students that were overwhelming. Care was thrown by the wayside in the personal lives of her students. Many of the students were responsible for taking care of their younger siblings, as their parents worked different or multiple shifts, as well as navigating unstable family situations. I can relate to these types of stories and the sense of overwhelming grief it places upon the teacher. Desiring to help, but wondering how it is possible. The article goes on to speak about care. First, she speaks about the dehumanization today's schooling practices are causing in our classrooms. Children have been

reduced to numbers and teachers are now seen as evaluators. However, “teaching has always offered the potential of being a transaction of love between and among community members” (Cridland-Hughes, 2015, p. 130). The absence of care limits the ability of teachers to achieve the cultivation of critical thinking and intellectual growth.

What is A Whole Education?

Education that is whole focuses upon the heart and the heart is where radical love flows from. “Indeed, the view that the heart is a key center of cognition, emotion, volition, discernment, wisdom, and spirit may be the strongest common thread uniting diverse cultures throughout human history as well as most of the world’s major religions and spiritual traditions” (Arguelles et al, 2003). Many of the world’s ancient civilizations held the notion that the mind and heart are connected in education, but as time passed, the mind has taken more precedence over the heart. Western culture has put total emphasis on the brain and now most curriculums are cognitive-based. The heart used to be valued just as much as the brain, if not more because the heart is also a source of wisdom, as well as the emotions of love, care, and compassion. A human’s heart rhythm changes due to their current emotion (Arguelles et al., 2003). For example, if a person is experiencing a negative emotion such as frustration, the rhythm is more erratic, but if a person is feeling appreciation, the rhythm is more balanced and even. This example reminds me of how appreciative I am, along with the other teachers at my school, that we are being taught how to self-regulate during stressful experiences. We are also being taught how to teach our students how to reach self-regulation when they are experience stress. We have received several sessions of how to model to our students what it looks like to feel frustrated and how to reach self-regulation.

Students are learning that teachers are human beings just like the students, and teachers are allowed to feel frustrated too. Through this teaching, the students are learning empathy for others, as well as how to manage their emotions appropriately. It gives me hope that the educational system is moving toward more of a balance of a heart and mind curriculum. Some teachers complain about having to learn about self-regulation, saying they don't feel qualified and don't want to be qualified because they didn't go to school to be a psychologist, they went to school to become a teacher. While I can understand this statement, I can't wholeheartedly agree with it. A teacher is more than a giver of knowledge and academia. Teachers who fully care for the needs of their students realize that students need a wholistic education, and that includes connecting with their spiritual side.

Connections & Gaps Summary

All of the literature mentioned in this strand connect with one another because radical love is necessary while teaching students and working in a school. Collaboration and care between teacher and student is necessary for the teacher to feel validated in the radical love she provides and freely offers to her students. Yet, teachers must be bold, tough, courageous, yet tender with the love they give and decisions they make. Teachers and students should have conversations about how each can give radical love and spirituality in the classroom in order to thrive together. These conversations may be in a whole group, small groups, or private one-on-one conversations between the teacher and student. If no one cares, what will be found? A lifeless classroom that no one wants to be a part of. The teacher doesn't want to come to "work" and the students don't want to come to school. The gap I found in this group of literature would be if a first year teacher found the absence of care at her school or in her classroom, what has she done since her first year as a teacher to become more of a caring, loving teacher?

Strand Three: Positive Relationships Related to Self-Determination Theory

Relating Social Identity Theory to Self-Determination Theory

Before I list the studies in detail surrounding self-determination theory, I want to preface this section by beginning with social identity theory. I believe teachers should research and study social identity theory in order to understand self-determination theory, and to better fully understand the students they work with on a daily basis. Social identity theory focuses on the human's awareness that they belong to a specific social category or group (Oni-Eseleh, 2021). Each person sees themselves as part of a group and the groups that they are not a part of, they view as the out-group, which is also called othering. An individual bases their self-esteem on how their group is viewed. In undergraduate school, I learned about Erik Erikson's stages of psychological development, and was reminded of it again in courses I took in doctoral school. I think it is important that the reader is reminded and understands these stages before diving into self-determination theory. "Erikson emphasized the value of identity by asserting that identity provides a sense of well-being and direction regarding one's life, and showing that an individual's identity is formed and shaped through the context of interaction with others" (Oni-Eseleh, 2021, p. 2). In this theory, a child's identity is developing before adolescence because the child understands they are a separate being from their parents. The child then chooses to pick what they like about each parent and mirror those characteristics. After that, the child begins to form their own identity as they gain more and more independence and decision-making skills. After adolescence, the child may question how they are perceived, as well as how they perceive themselves. For a child who does not have strong support systems, this stage can be more of a challenge.

Children and young adults from marginalized groups experience more social rejection than people from groups who are not marginalized. Social rejection is when a person or group of people is denied the chance to interact with others (Oni-Eseleh, 2021). Labeling, stereotyping, and discrimination lead to social rejection. When one group feels entitled and sees another group as undesirable, social rejection has taken place. Including and welcoming others regardless of their social status begins at home by parents teaching their children to love and appreciate everyone. This love for others should be echoed and reinforced at school where children are around all types of other children, especially in public schools. Teachers have the grand opportunity of teaching their students to care for each other and modeling how to create a loving and caring classroom community. When students who either have family parents who have experienced social rejection, or even the student has experienced it at such a young age, self-determination and motivation may be lower. This is why it is so vital that teachers love and care for all of their students' needs to meet the student right where they are, with all of the baggage they bring to school with them. The student should not feel 'less than' or inadequate when comparing themselves with the other children in the classroom. Students will feel much more motivated when they trust that the teacher truly cares for and loves them no matter how they have been treated in the past. Students should learn not to judge others and to not believe themselves to be better than anyone. This type of thinking should be modeled by the teacher for younger students to understand. In the classroom, everyone is the same in that everyone has unique needs that have to be met for self-determination to fully occur. When the seed is planted that everyone is important and everyone is on a unique journey, students will one day truly understand that everyone they meet is going through something they don't understand unless they have been through it themselves. Teachers should teach their students that understanding

this is how they can possess radical love for their fellow man and woman. It is not about self, it is about others and how self can show love for others. Everyone is going through something. When I reflect on social identity theory, I can't help but think of the song "Walk A Mile in My Shoes", written by Joe South and sung by Elvis Presley:

If I could be you, if you could be me
For just one hour
If we could find a way
To get inside each other's mind,
If you could see me through my eyes
Instead of your ego
I believe you'd be
Surprised to see
That you've been blind.
Walk a mile in my shoes
Just walk a mile in my shoes
And before you abuse, criticize, and accuse
Just walk a mile in my shoes.

(Elvis Presley, 1970/1995, disc 5 track 3)

I have researched a lot about Elvis because I have family members who told me about him and his music, and what it was like to grow up listening to him, as well as what his songs were about. I am intrigued and inspired by Elvis, the human being, because of the unconditional love he showed for others, even though he experienced all the world had to offer and reached worldwide fame and fortune. When one researches about Elvis Presley—the person, and not the entertainer,

they will find that there are many stories by people who experienced him giving them money or a brand new car or house, aside from all he frequently donated to charities to help people in need.

Moving from Identity to Determination

The following study pertaining to self-determination theory found that students held higher perceptions of both self-determination and competence when their teachers listened to them more, encouraged conversations with one another in the classroom, made time for independent work, and allowed students to work in groups with manipulatives and other learning materials more than the teacher directly teaching students (Ryan & Deci, 2002). When the teacher was more of a facilitator in the classroom and not as controlling, students felt more competent, showed more intrinsic motivation, and seemed to value what they were learning. When teachers exhibited certain behaviors such as active listening and giving students time for independent work, relatedness in the classroom was nurtured; yet, when the teacher controlled the learning environment for most of the day and gave answers to students instead of providing hints, relatedness in the classroom was aggravated. This is another area that I have to remind myself that I don't always have to be in charge or in control of my students' learning. Even at six and seven years old, they are capable of teaching themselves, teaching their peers, and being in charge of their own learning. I constantly have to ask myself and reflect: Did I do too much of the talking today? Did I allow my students to talk enough and have discourse with one another? In the hustle and bustle of the school day, when so much information must be taught, I still have to find time for discourse with my students, yet also observing their discourse with one another. This is another way that teachers can learn about their students, by listening to what they talk about with each other.

An article about lifelong learning involves contemplative pedagogy and compassionate engagement (Blinne, 2014). Contemplative pedagogy and compassionate engagement is centered around having metacognition and metacommunication. The author speaks about the importance of daily mindful breathing and contemplation. She argues that mindful breathing helps one to develop relational awareness through “self-inquiry” which brings about “compassionate engagement with oneself and the world” (Blinne, 2014, p. 2). The focus of the paper is for higher education, but she contends that contemplative pedagogy can be equally valued in K-12 education. Contemplative pedagogy brings students together and helps create classroom community because students learn to listen, deal with stress, and create a deeper sense of belonging through care and compassion for others. As I mentioned earlier, I incorporate brain breaks throughout the day to aid in stimulation and play. I also incorporate times for meditating and breathing. Again, through YouTube, as well as through a brain break-designed website called GoNoodle, there are many activities designed to help students through mindful breathing exercises and activities. These activities focus on meditation, self-reflection, focusing on caring for self and others, and how to relax and calm down from being upset, worried, excited, etc. These breaks teach students metacognition and how to have self-awareness as well as empathy.

Another study echoed the previously mentioned study in that it revealed that when a classroom follows the flipped-classroom model (FCM), students are more intrinsically motivated to perform successfully and value learning (Sergis, Sampson, & Pelliccione, 2018). FCM represents collaborative learning, scaffolding provided by the teacher, and not much lecture time from the teacher. When students are allowed to control their own learning and given unique learning opportunities and experiences, they are more likely to be well-behaved and develop a

matured sense of relatedness. They have a sense of belonging because they realize their way of thinking is just as important as anyone else in the classroom.

Another study involving self-determination theory is about tracking the engagement of nine early primary students. These students were labeled by their teachers as student who were often “disengaged” (Fried & Konza, 2013). Teacher perceptions of the students being disengaged centered around behavioral and emotional issues, with not much focus on the students’ cognitive skills. Researchers used an observation tool to observe students in their classrooms and they recorded the students’ behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, while simultaneously rating their completion ability and effort on their classwork. The students’ sense of relatedness was also monitored. The study concluded that students who were not as independent as others in their level of relatedness responded to activities or classwork that addressed those needs.

When I reflect on my time as a teacher, I can see how this study concludes the way it does. Cognitively speaking, when an activity makes a student feel like a failure, they are more likely not going to be willing to attempt it. The same could be said about an activity that is too simple, they don’t want to waste their time doing something they already know how to do fluently and consistently. In the area of relatedness, students will more likely complete a class activity if it makes them feel accepted and gives them a sense of belonging.

Connecting Radical Love with Self-Determination in Rural Settings

I am reminded of a short story that a fellow educator told me about a young relative of hers who has special needs. The child was very resistant to learning and lacked in finding any motivation to appreciate learning. However, when this educator was working with him and figured out he liked horses, she began to incorporate horses into her teaching when she was with

him. The teaching learning process suddenly changed like the difference in night and day! The child began to enjoy learning, even though he didn't realize it. He just thought he was getting to interact with anything and everything to do with horses. She used real horses as the reward for his improvement for gaining the desire to learn. He got to visit a horse farm and ride the horses. He now welcomes learning because someone in his life took the time to find out what he really likes and built their teaching off his personal love for horses. The educator studied horses and anything that has to do with horses and figured out how to teach him in a way that is personally motivating to the student. She told me this story after she asked me what my dissertation was about, and added, "The story I just told you defines love between teacher and child." This is just one example of how self-determination and radical love align.

Students, especially those from early primary grades, desire attention and a sense of relatedness from their teacher and classmates. Students who not feel they relate to the teacher or classmates will seek to get the attention however they can, either positively or negatively. Therefore, the student will not only have to be told, but shown that they matter, their presence is valued, and that they are loved. This will have to be done over and over and over, consistently, until the student realizes he or she is in a safe place and belongs. I have one student in particular this year who I have had to pour so much love into to make him realize this. It is definitely not easy, but when it's done with fidelity and consistency, the hard work will almost always pay off. Like I stated earlier when speaking about Martin Luther King, Jr.: Anything done in love is always the right choice.

Having empathy for a child shows relatedness and radical love. Empathy is not sympathy because sympathy is not a part of radical, agape love (Iorio & Campellow, 2013). Sympathy is appropriate when helping students be their best, but only to a certain extent. High

expectations must be set in order to truly demonstrate radical love for the student to achieve at their highest level possible. When a student perceives themselves as different, yet they know their teacher has cultural empathy, there isn't anything that student won't do for their teacher to show their appreciation. Students deeply appreciate when their teachers see them for who they are, not for how their differences may make them feel. The teacher helps them talk about how their differences make them special and unique. Differences belong in a classroom. Empathy belongs in a classroom. Students deserve relatedness. How will they thrive and be taught wholly without relatedness and radical love given and modeled by the teacher? Wholistic learning doesn't exist without relatedness and radical love for self and each other.

In a study about the effects of relatedness and motivation, specifically in rural versus urban settings with adolescent students, a researcher found that "rural students had lower motivational profiles because their perceived student-student and student-to-teacher relatedness was less than urban schools" (Stringam, 2022, pp. 22-23). The researcher goes on to say that the takeaway is that "rural teachers cannot be passive but must find ways to create meaningful student-to-teacher connections and student-to-student belonging in their classroom" (Stringam, 2022, p. 23). I agree with the passivity the researcher is speaking about here. I see it all of the time at the school where I work. There can be some negativity present and I truly believe it is because some students have not been validly called to be a teacher, or not called to be an elementary teacher. Intentionality is the core of passionate and compassionate teaching. One is simply not a wholistic teacher if they are not intentional in the way they make decisions based upon what's best for the student.

Another study, relating to behavior, relatedness, and appreciating school, comes from an elementary, rural setting. In this study, the researcher found that when students had the

perception of support from teachers, students held the notion of liking school. Student-teacher relationship played an important role in linking “student behavior, social relatedness, and liking school” (Gest, Welsh, & Domitrovich, 2005, p. 296). The studies mentioned here bring up an important point that I have thought about many times over the years and it is the question: Do my students want to come to school? Do they enjoy walking into my classroom each morning? If so, why? How can I make sure to recreate their love for learning and school each day? How can I help foster their relationships with me and their peers? Am I being a positive role model that helps my students understand why school is important? Do they view me as someone who enjoys going to school? Am I making sure they feel like they have a sense of relatedness/belonging? How am I motivating them to desire to come to school and learn?

Connections & Gaps Summary

The first study by Ryan & Deci (2002) mentions that the teacher listens, encourages conversations in the classroom, makes time for students to work independently to show what they’ve learned, and allows students to work in groups. This study connects with the third study by Sergis, Sampson, & Pelliccione (2018) about a flipped classroom. When a teacher uses the FCM in the classroom, students are more likely to enjoy school, that’s because they get a mixture of learning throughout the day, not just lectures by the teacher from morning to afternoon. The second study by Blinne (2014) is about mindful breathing and contemplation. In the midst of the business of FCM, students and teachers need an opportunity to slow down, meditate, and reflect, so this study can connect with the other two. Finally, the last study by Fried & Konza (2013) is about students responding to what they’re given day to day in their classroom. If an assignment is too difficult, most students do not want to try and many will give up. On the other hand, if an assignment is too easy for some students, those students will not want to complete it because it is

boring and unchallenging to them, so they too may not complete the assignment. This study connects to all the other studies because if a teacher is incorporating FCM with their students, they will know what each student is capable of and how to appropriately challenge each student with what works best for each particular student, while also being mindful that everyone needs and deserves a break throughout the day in order to prevent disengagement and promote motivation. As far as the last two specific studies relating to early adolescent and elementary students, the connection is that teachers cannot be passive and must figure out how to motivate students by having positive relationships with their students so students can acquire relatedness. If students don't like their teacher, they will not like school and will practice negative behaviors. The gap I see in this literature is when and how to allow students to be in charge of their learning depending on what grade level a teacher is dealing with, and also when is the best time to incorporate the mindful breathing and contemplation?

Tying the Braid Together Through Spirituality: A Whole Education

This braided strand of freedom in the classroom will be nonexistent without all three parts working together simultaneously. Implementing a braid of critical pedagogy of education, radical love, and self-determination will create a beautiful class of engaged, creative, and loving learners (teacher included), not just for their time in the classroom, but for their time here on earth. The following section regarding spirituality ties together and wraps up all that I have discussed in this chapter.

The braided strand of freedom in education is not fully complete without spirituality. The braid must be supported and secured with the binding tie of spirituality. "The educator fosters collaboration, deep inquiry, mind/body/spirit health, and joy in learning and growing" (Sosa-Provencio et. al, 2018, p. 10). I consider myself a spiritual person, and didn't

fully realize that spirituality is at the center of teaching until I embarked on this journey of dissertation. As an educator, I am called to provide optimism and hope for my students. I am in charge of their spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being while they are with me at school. Teaching students how to cope and heal from traumatic experiences in their life has also become part of the teacher's job where I teach. When I go into school each day, most outsiders would see me as going to teach children about reading, writing, and math, and maybe even as a babysitter. Oh, if they only knew what truly embodies 'teaching' and all that goes into it! Teaching, if one genuinely cares for and loves their students, is about so much more than teaching academics. I go to school because I feel like I am needed to make a difference and help make my school a better place and teach my students to do the same. Teaching is such a tiring profession, but it is all worth it to those who want to stay and persevere through all of it, come what may.

Many people, including educators, probably do not think of or connect spirituality with education. When I am speaking of the word spiritual or spirituality, I am not speaking of religion. I am speaking of the spirit and soul inside the human being that is capable of transcending away from what one believes to be their stagnant and unchangeable reality. The spirit is the innermost part of one's being. Teachers are incorporating spirituality each day in their classrooms; it's just that some simply do not realize they are. Human beings are born with a natural space for spirituality. Without the space for spirituality filled, a person is not fully developed. Marla Morris (2016b) writes, "If we can imagine soul as something that moves beyond our own interiority it helps us to better understand how interconnected we are, not just with other humans but also with nonhuman animals and objects" (p. 58). Spirituality provides the foundation for a child's development in the most important areas, i.e. social, emotional,

moral, and even physical. Children who are spiritually nurtured turn out to be more happy and healthy than children whose spirituality is not nurtured. Children whose spirituality is not nurtured have a higher chance of experiencing anxiety, depression, lack of self-worth etc.

Spirituality and moral development can be explained and nurtured in all schools, regardless of the type of institution, i.e. private, public, religious, etc. When I was in school, I believe that I learned more about my spirit than today's students learn about their spirits. I wasn't able to tell someone that then, but now as an educator plus being a more spiritual person than I was as a child, I know that it was opportunities to ignite and grow my spirit that made learning fun, enjoyable, and motivating for me. I enjoyed arts and crafts very much, as well as learning how to properly stretch and exercise, opportunities with singing and music, and going outside for nature walks or scavenger hunts, to name a few. I believe that I even gained and continued to grow in my spirituality from listening to my teacher read aloud a fictional and stimulating chapter book as I set in the almost dark, peaceful classroom, using my imagination to picture the story and learning how to become an author myself in the many stories I was able to create in class. Thankfully, we have the funds in our district for art and music electives that all students attend once a week, but I believe once a week is not enough, especially for younger students, and should be included in the regular classroom curriculum as well. Students are not able to discover their talents unless they are exposed to specialized areas that are inspiring to them.

Just as there are doctors who specialize in holistic care, that is, not just putting a band aid on the problem by prescribing endless prescriptions, but actually go to the root or source of the problem that's causing a patient's ailment(s). I believe that a teacher is not only responsible for academics, but teaching with a whole curriculum, including the student's wholistic wellbeing.

Teaching the student as a whole, not just parts. After all, what is a true education and curriculum? What makes someone intelligent or educated? Is it knowing all of the math equations to ever exist or knowing all of the scientific facts of the universe? Is it someone who knows of all the skills to make a good living for themselves? No, there is much more needed to acquire a fulfilling and whole education. Miller (2006) asks, “Or could we consider educated the person who is free of paranoia and narcissism, who has sufficient tranquility of heart to be compassionate and can make a real contribution to the community” (p. vii)? A student’s curriculum is not whole without reaching the entirety of the child’s, which includes their intellect and soul. Education cannot be seen as forcing in, but also should be viewed as what can be pushed out by guidance and caring leadership, that is treating the soul like the delicate, fragile thing that it is. It is finding the talent that the child was born with and leading them in that direction until they are able to take the reins for themselves and let their talents shine and go forth. “The three letters *duc* in education are from the same root word as the word duke, a leader. Educators are leaders because, like a pied piper, they entice all of the latent stuff out into the world, where it enriches us all” (Miller, 2006, p. vii). But, how can I reach the soul of a child? It’s what this dissertation is all about; it’s done with love.

bell hooks (2001) states that we should treat love as a verb, not just talk about it as a noun. If I truly love someone, I am supposed to show them that I love them through actions, not just with words and feelings. If I truly love someone, I don’t love them through possessive love, I love them through humanistic love, loving them for who they are. Some students come from abusive homes and believe that abusive actions are love because their parents tell them they love them while simultaneously abusing them or someone else in the home. Therefore, those students grow up looking for love in all of the wrong places because true love had always been missing

from their life. It is not until the student experiences what true love is that they learn to accept it, truly love themselves, and give forth that same true love to others. Love is found through showing generosity to others, proving to others that they are loved. This may be through gifts for some, but true agape love that was mentioned earlier is about wanting the best for someone and being accountable to them by treating them with the love they deserve. Love is not found by putting others down to lift up oneself. In her chapter concerning spirituality, bell hooks (2006) quotes a verse from the Bible, 1 John 3:14, “Anyone who does not know love is still in death”. This means that anyone who does not know love or how to give love is spiritually dead, meaning they have no spiritual purpose. This reminds me of a verse in the Bible that encompasses what it means to give and receive spiritual love. 1 Corinthians 13: 1, 4-8 New International Version states:

If I speak of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

I believe that love is the strongest force that has ever existed or ever will exist. However, not everyone is going to appreciate generosity or be open to actions of love, but students must be taught that doesn't matter. Showing love is not about what one thinks they will get in return; love that is radical— agape love— repays evil with good (Oord, 2005). As long as they know they are truly showing love, then what happens next is not to be worried about or dwelt on. I tell my young students all the time, “If you make good choices, good things are bound to happen.

But, if you make bad choices, bad things are likely to come your way. What you put out into the world somehow finds its way back to you.”

Personal Beliefs & Interests

As a mother and teacher of young children, I am very interested in researching critical notions of parenting and teaching that challenge the status quo. I desire to ensure that I am doing what is best for my own child, as well as the children who I am responsible for on a daily basis in my classroom. “Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness of injustice within a particular lived domain. By ‘ethical responsibility’, I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings” (Madison, 2011, p. 5). Through the research that I am conducting I desire to understand how teachers are treated unfairly through today’s educational trends. How are their emotions related to their motivation to continue teaching? What part do teachers have to play to ensure that students are taught wholly, as well as wholesomely? How are teachers guaranteeing that the whole child is being nurtured? How can schooling be changed one activity at a time, one classroom at a time, for the betterment and benefit of all teachers and children? “Critical ethnography becomes the ‘doing’ of the ‘performance’ of critical theory. It is critical theory in action” (Madison, 2011, p. 15). Focusing on teachers and what keeps them teaching will help to further justify my theoretical framework; social action can take place from what I learn, as well as what others learn who become involved in my research. I will be able to connect the theory of teacher suppression and justify the theory through critical ethnographic research data. My research centers around teachers and what makes them stay in public school education practices.

I also desire to see radical change in education. I would love to find characteristics of radical love as the ‘new curriculum’ of public education, as well as less capitalistic practices (DeLeon & Rice, 2010). Public schooling is far from where it needs to be; schools are more and more controlled without teachers, administrators, students, and stakeholders having any say in what is taught and what is of most importance. Having genuine radical love for one’s neighbor(s) is revolutionary (Chabot, 2008). Radical love is one of the foundations that our nation needs, let alone radical love needing to be present in public education, which is the purpose of this dissertation. If one person had radical love for all they come in contact with, the world would be a much better place and there would truly be peace (York, 2019). New ideas, policies, and practices come and go, but they will never stay unless they are built upon radical love. Radical love is a transformative force that beckons to be found, yet to too many it is unrecognizable. All people have a need for radical love, but many do not realize it is missing from their soul. Even those who believe they possess radical love can be found in insensitive moments of not recognizing the love they could have given someone else if they had been sensitive to that person’s needs. This love that I am speaking of is not demeaning and haughty, but humble yet assertive.

Compassion and Passion For Teaching and Learning

When an educator teaches and guides students to connect their spirits, they are imparting compassion in their teaching. Jones (2005) writes that the teacher’s goal should be to teach students to ask the following questions to and about themselves: “What am I? Why am I? How should I act? Why should I be moral? What is my experience? What is my effect? What are the interrelationships between myself and others? Are these being attended to” (p. 4)? Teachers should teach students how to teach themselves and how to appreciate all types of

learning. When students appreciate seeing the world through their own eyes, as well as through others' eyes, they will learn how to respect the world, nature, and relationships with others. This type of teaching can start in early childhood education. It is vital that it start at an early age so that students will have the spiritual foundation when they begin insistently questioning themselves during their somewhat confusing years of adolescence. If teachers do not show compassion on their students, students will learn that they are being ignored and will suppress their feelings, which will cause students to become "toxic and explosive" (Jones, 2005, p. 4). This is especially true with students who may already experience being ignored at home. For all students, but especially students with behavior issues that may be related to homelife trauma, teachers should focus on teaching them to positively channel their energy. Usually these children use their energy to bring about negative outcomes; however, if they can learn that the same energy can be channeled elsewhere to bring about positive outcomes, a sense of balance can be achieved. When students feel balanced, they are more likely to be more receptive and open to reaching positive, effective connections with themselves and others.

"Children should be reading and studying meaningful things, not memorizing junk for a multiple-choice test" (Morris, 2016b, p. 63). With all of the focus on standardized testing, teachers can feel like they do not have enough time in the day to reach and connect with students. There is no longer time in the school day for reading literature for soulful enjoyment and productive, meaningful discourse; the same is true for writing. This is such a travesty to students as individuals and what education is supposed to be in general. Dehler et al. (2001) suggest:

The complexity of managerial thinking and action needs to be reduced with sufficient clarity that students can comprehend its essence, while simultaneously raising their own

level of complicatedness in order to grasp that extant complexity. That is, in the teaching of management we face the challenge of creating a learning context whereby students create meaning and personal interpretation with respect to managing while also enhancing their won complicated understanding. (p. 494)

When teachers are in charge of teaching students who will one day become leaders of society, teaching them to value and respect their spirit, as well as the spirit of others, should be at the top of the list. What kind of citizens are being produced if the only focus is on testing and grades? Students are only being prepared for the work force to make more money for the selfishness of society and the powerful elite, instead of being given the gift of spiritual knowledge and respect for themselves and others, which cannot be either bought or replicated in a tangible, materialistic sense; and, once acquired and cultivated, cannot ever be stolen from the soul.

Teaching with power and action brings freedom to the educator. When a teacher does not have fear at their workplace, anything can be accomplished. DeLeon & Ross (2010) sum it up in the following way:

How do educators get the power to teach toward the truth, rather than toward capital's cruel desires? Clearly, one answer is dedication to the kids, parents and community; teaching well every day. The unions must be overcome, in part by transcending the boundaries of unionism and, beyond that, by violating the norms that keep the union bosses in power. Storm the podiums and seize the union offices. Another is in solidarity across lines of class, race, gender, nation; building close personal ties—tight friendships. And another is direct action on the job, the real

battle for control of the work place linked to corresponding freedom schools in the midst of strikes or civil strife. (pg. 52)

When a teacher harnesses the passion to teach well every day without fear, freedom and independence encapsulates the soul. Being dedicated to each student and their family brings about true and lasting emancipation. Being self-governed in one's decision-making versus being controlled by what the union says is the 'right' thing to do is freeing and liberating.

Education Begins in the Home

When studying the culture of a school, it is vital to keep the parents and families of the children who attend the school in mind. Parents should be considered an important and integral part of the operations of a school. It is my belief that parents should be involved in several decisions that are made by a school and should be involved in constant communication with and by the school, as well as their child's teacher. Children are a product of what they learn at home. Whatever they learn at home, they bring into the school, along with the innate part of their being. Some of the behaviors brought into the school are negative and some are positive. A teacher can tell if a student is taught to work hard and possesses a sense of morals and values. Likewise, a teacher can tell if working hard and possessing morals and values are not at the top of a list of characteristics that are taught in a student's home. A student is much easier to work with and teach if they have a foundation of innate motivation and morals. It is a challenge and a struggle when working with students who are not taught to believe these areas are important in life. Teachers should already expect that they are going to have a mixture of children in their classroom at the beginning of the year and should research ways to be more intentional with parents about things the children need to work on at home before coming to school. Being more intentional may look like a mailed checklist of things students need to know before starting

school sent to parents or other family members from the teacher who will have their child in their classroom for the upcoming school year. Along with academic skills the children can be working on, teachers can also include positive character traits to be working on. This helps the students and parents realize that the teacher has high expectations for these areas. This is not something I currently do for my students' parents and families, but I desire to begin this practice next school year. Throughout this dissertation, I want the reader to realize how I believe positive relationships are more important than academia involving scripted math and reading curriculums.

How else can a teacher help to ensure that they can have a positive rapport and relationship with the parents? Starting out the year on a positive note helps to ensure trust from the parents and helps to decrease the chance of a parent becoming defensive about something that may occur at school involving their child. Maybe that child is having a hard time getting their work done on time because they are too busy talking instead of working. If a teacher has had a positive relationship with this child's parents/guardians, the family member will be more likely to react calmly, rationally, and positively versus how they might act from a teacher they have not heard from all year up to the point of the incident. With so many demands with schooling in today's times, parent communication from teachers can sometimes fall by the wayside. It may not be intentional, it may be that teachers have a difficult time finding the time to communicate with parents as much as they should. One way that I try to close the gap in this area is providing a daily chart of my students' behaviors. This chart is in the form of a calendar, provided for each month and it is in the students' communication folders. The communication folders are sent home and returned to school each day. If a student has an incident one day, there will be note included for that day to explain to the parents what happened. I may also choose to text or call the parent to inform them in a more detailed manner. Teachers can also accidentally

fail to communicate with all parents when they have a student who displays negative behaviors. The teacher can get so caught up in communicating mainly with this student's family, and neglect to provide positive communication to parents of students who always follow the rules and work hard each day (Huddleston, 2019). It is important that teachers remember to communicate with all families. Most families want to know more about what their child is doing at school and they enjoy receiving positive notes from the teacher periodically. With all of the demands placed on teachers from day to day, this practice can be very difficult for teachers to remember to do and also to have time to do.

Since the demands of teaching are so high, it is important to set up a routine that works for the teacher's busy schedule, to make sure that all students get recognized for their positive traits. All students should be recognized on a regular basis. Too much emphasis is placed on contacting home when the student performs poorly. Things have become too focused on the negative in the classroom. Teachers are more apt to rediscover they why behind their teaching, as well as their passion. Contacting home when students perform well is just as important, if not more important. Contacting for positive reasons helps keep things in perspective for the teacher. I am more of a positive teacher when I focus on the good versus the bad. The bad should be displaced from the teacher's mind as often as possible so to not get caught up in a negative state of being and reflecting. Keeping a communication chart can help teachers keep track of when they contacted a parent, reason for contact, and how many more they need to contact within a given amount of time during the school year. This should be planned out at the beginning of each year. Teachers can send home praise about a student excelling at an assessment, being an encouraging leader in the classroom, showing empathy, habitually working hard each day, completing work, and exhibiting a positive attitude. To keep track of positive and negative

contacts, the teacher should color-code the chart. That way, the teacher can know who has only received negative contacts. To not dwell on the negative behavior of a student and to reassure the parents that the student is trying to do better in class, the teacher should find anything positive that the student with behavior issues is doing. Then, the teacher is able to send a positive note home around two to three weeks after the negative report was sent home.

In the hustle and bustle of the everyday grind that is a teacher's life, it is important to not forget what teaching is all about – the students. No student should be invisible in the classroom (Huddleston, 2019). Relationships with parents should be fostered intentionally. A positive and functional chain is built between the school and home when teachers have relationships with their students' families. All students are someone's little boy or girl and parents desire to see their child recognized, even for something that might seem as little as being a good friend or completing their classwork. Setting the goal of contacting every student's family not only deepens relationships between school and home, it helps boost the morale of teachers who may be feeling stressed and suppressed in today's educational environment.

When I think back to when I was a child in elementary school, I remember my parents showing that they were proud of me when I received excellent grades and positive notes home. My mom still has most of them saved in my school-days files. I remember thinking as a little girl, "If I become a teacher, it's going to be so much fun to write notes home on the special note paper that most of my teachers use." I still think about those special notes when I write notes home to the families of my students today. I also picture the families and students' faces light up when they get the note out of their child's folder and read it to them, and tell them how proud they are of them. I know that the best teachers take time to make each of their students feel special and loved. It makes me feel good when I take the time to do something special for my

students and their families. I don't expect anything in return, I do it because I know it's the right thing to do and what I would want as a parent and student. Now, most things are done through the use of technology like sending texts or emails to parents, but in my opinion, there is still nothing as good as taking the time to write or receive an old-fashioned letter or a phone call home.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY THROUGH A CRITICAL, LOVING, AND DETERMINED LENS

Ethnographic Inquiry

This dissertation implements ethnographic research through the form of observation and interviews between myself and veteran and/or retired public school teachers from the rural elementary school where I currently teach, and have been teaching for the last ten years. This qualitative study explores various instructional strategies that can be used to build positive student-teacher relationships through compassion, passion, love, and relatedness. This chapter provides an overview of the rationale behind choosing ethnographic inquiry, research questions, data collection, and analysis of the data. Ethnography is a type of qualitative research; its intention is to provide a thorough and comprehensive analysis of an individual's or group's daily activities and rituals, such as their community, values, cultures, language, etc. Ethnography originated in ancient Greece during 3 B.C. when Herodotus, an ancient historian, traveled between cultures to record traditions, society, and politics in various regions of the world. In the United States and Britain in the 1960s and '70s, ethnography became popular in the field of education (Anderson, 1989). M.D. Myers (1997) writes, "The goal of ethnographic research is to improve our understanding of human thought and action through interpretation of human actions in context" (p. 277). It is to observe humans in action to deepen their understanding of what makes humans the way they are. "This design emerged from the field of anthropology, primarily from the contributions of Bronislaw Malinowski, Robert Park, and Franz Boas" (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). For reference here, John W. Creswell (2009) is a critic and studier of ethnography, not an original ethnographer. His critiques are insightful to me and I wanted to

allow them to belong within this section relating to ethnography. Ethnography can be viewed as an empathetic approach to studying and researching; it is an attempt to immerse oneself into ‘someone else’s shoes’. “The goals of critical ethnography researchers are to analyze and criticize features of oppression in order to go about creating social change by investigating “social interactions and shared meanings” (Myers, 1997). Ethnographers deeply engage themselves in their traditions and practices when conducting research and gathering data. They may so deeply engage themselves in their research that they begin to feel like they are a part of the culture they are researching. All parts of the study make up the whole (Clifford, 1998). The participant conversations along the topic being researched, including political, critiques, and local and/or global analyzations all make up an ethnographical study.

On the other hand, the ethnographer may choose an outside-in approach, where they study the culture while abstaining from self-immersion. Critical ethnographers question power structures and inequities of society (Canagarajah, 1993). The types of ethnography that I use for the methodology section of my dissertation are a combination of two types. The first type involves analyzing a particular subject or group, as well as the social milieu, and the second type includes a focus upon the larger structure of society while focusing on determining how the relationships in society influence and impact the subject or group, i.e. the teacher’s classroom is the first type and the school as a whole is the second type for this particular study.

Ethnographers employ the use of interviews and multiple data coding techniques, simultaneously relying upon the lens of their theoretical framework. They read, sort, categorize, find patterns, and reflect upon their data in order to interpret it from several different angles. This type of analysis is completed in order to create a comprehensive critical justification. Effective ethnographers desire to leave no doubts in their justification and

validation. Even after the ethnographer believed themselves to have reached a confident conclusion, they may still return to their data and make even more final justifications. Different types of data are collected in various ways by conducting interviews and observations. Multiple readings and analyses are conducted before the research is shared, reported, and finally published. This process involves viewing the data from different perspectives, using multiple themes and ideas.

George E. Marcus (1998), a founding father of what we know as ethnography today, states: “How to move from the personal or from the exploration of affinity to the proposal which speaks to other scholars and scholarly communities, as well as perhaps to a nonacademic public, is an important aspect of the evolution of any contemporary ethnographic research project” (p. 16). This is what I hope to do through my research. The research is for me, but it is not just for me. It is for other scholars who may be in the same shoes as me, or communities of teachers who desire to see change. I hope the research I conduct speaks to someone to help them realize there are others who feel the same as them; they are not alone in their thoughts. Change can come when others realize there are others who feel the same way they do. Through this research, I set out to learn from the participants in this study to make me a better person, scholar, and teacher.

Ethnographic Classroom Studies

In an ethnographic study concerning love being present in a classroom, an ethnographer observed twenty classes over an eight-week period in a school for gifted children (Cloninger, 1993, as cited in Stern, 2008). Two teachers were also interviewed as part of the study to assist in gathering insight into the influence of love and care in the classroom. Through observations and interviews, the researcher was able to designate love and its effects as having a powerful

impact in a classroom. This study reminds me of how positive relationships, in particular those with love, are important in the classroom. Love overcomes suppression because it is creative and leads to freedom. Students are going to desire to please the teacher by diligently working and showing engagement if they trust the teacher, and trust comes from forming that positive relationship with the student. One way to gain students' trust is to talk to them; it's really as simple as that. Initiate conversations and always show that the students' needs are important by modeling active listening and intently caring for the student and their unique needs. All students are different so the type of care the teacher gives is going to look a little different from one student to the next, but all care should be done in love with a passion for teaching and helping. With teaching comes behavior challenges. All teachers can resonate with me when I say that there is usually at least one student with challenging behavior each year, and that particular challenging behavior is usually an issue that lasts the entire school year. What's a teacher to do with a student who keeps 'pushing her buttons'? The answer is hope. Denzin (2009) speaks about hope:

Hope is ethical. Hope is moral. Hope is peaceful and nonviolent. Hope seeks truth of life's sufferings. Hope gives meaning to the struggles to change the world. Hope is grounded in concrete performative practices, in struggles and interventions that espouse sacred values of love, care, community, trust, and well-being. (p. 385)

When all else fails, one still has hope. Hope for betterment in the future, regardless of the current situation. Hope leads one out of suppression and into freedom. Hope is freedom of the mind. Critical pedagogy seeks to transform education and what happens in the classroom to reach a level of democracy (Carr, 2012). One way to improve things is to remain hopeful and

loving, which is definitely easier said than done when dealing with a challenging behavior that repeats itself day after day.

In a second study involving ethnography, the researcher studied four first-grade teachers (Robinson, 2005). The ethnographer discovered that “good teachers empower their children and are empowered by them” (Robinson, 2005, p. 3). He discovered that open-ended interactions between teacher and students, as well as teachers and students learning with and from one another, led to the empowerment of the teacher and students. He related this discovery to what Paulo Freire (2000) called the ‘liberation of the banking concept of education’. Teaching students to care for one another is key to having a positive community of learners. A positive community of learners is when students are respectful to one another and responsible for what they say and how they act toward others. However, there are times when some students have outbursts, purposely hurt another student emotionally or physically, or display other challenging behaviors. Teachers who have a student who displays actions such as these should have in place protective measures for themselves and the rest of the students. It is vital to remain calm and respond correctly when a student challenges the teacher or another student.

Before teachers show that they are choosing to remain calm in a heated situation, they should use preventative strategies to decrease the chances of challenging situations from occurring (Dahlgren, 2022). Nevertheless, even the most well managed classrooms will have problems every now and then. In some classrooms, behavior problems will be a regular occurrence that results from the “growing culture of disrespect that has progressively infiltrated our schools” (Dahlgren, 2022, p. 2). For other classrooms, discipline issues may be rare or may be only an issue with one particular student. When this unwanted behavior does occur, teachers should be prepared to handle it in a professional, respectful way that still holds the student

accountable while simultaneously limiting disruptions to learning for the other students who are not practicing offensive behavior. The teacher is to maintain composed, calm, and cognitive. After the disruption has ended, the teacher can move on and discuss the altercation with the student later after the student has had plenty of time to calm down. When students and teachers feel positively empowered, suppression doesn't have much of a place to exist.

In another ethnographic study (2007), Parker J. Palmer writes about a teacher whose teaching was like watching a craftsman. However, the teacher was “self-divided”, which means that he was not a true and selfless teacher. He was concerned more about himself and his worth than that of his students (Palmer, 2007, p. 16). The researcher believed the teacher was self-divided due to his past experiences related to alienation and self-defense. The researcher also believed that the teacher was not called to academia. “The self is not infinitely elastic – it has potentials and it has limits. If the work we do lacks integrity for us, then we, the work, and the people we do it with, will suffer” (Palmer, 2007, p. 16). From this quote, I gather that if teachers are not truly called to teach –like a falling domino– they, their teaching, their students, and other teachers will suffer from it. If a teacher feels stretched too thin, they may have not been called to be in the field of education. Education and academia are not for everyone; a called teacher enjoys his or her work (if they can even call it ‘work’), and they do not dread it or their students. Their focus is on creating and molding successful citizens, even though some students are indeed tough to love. I also realize this subject is easier to talk about than to actually live it. When a teacher is truly called to be a teacher, he or she is less likely to feel suppressed because in that calling there resides love, passion, and freedom. Freedom to be who God intended them to be, one who loves to teach and teaches to love. I know that not every teacher will equate their teaching experience to a calling, and that is okay. A love for students and/or teaching is not a

prerequisite or requirement to teach. I am only concluding that a love for students and a spiritual calling are significant elements in the professional motivations and passions of my personal experiences as a teacher.

Being a proactive teacher will help with a particular student who is tough to love. The more that a teacher is able to help a student who demonstrates unwanted behaviors, the more the teacher will be successful in helping the student learn and maintain life skills (Shaw, 2021). When this student acts out, how the adult in the classroom responds makes all the difference. If a teacher is not self-regulated, the student will not be self-regulated. On the other hand, if the teacher remains calm and self-regulated, the student will not be as prone to making more negative choices and disrupting class further. Students are influenced by how their teachers respond. Those responses either escalate or de-escalate the students' behavior. I believe all teachers should receive regular training on how to respond well to students and how to create a calm classroom to stay up to date on best practices involving behavior. It seems like most of the trainings conducted are about academics—*what* to teach—and *how* to teach students gets left behind and unaddressed. I believe this is one of the main foundational reasons why teachers are leaving the profession. They do not know how to work with students with behavior issues because they have never been taught inclusive strategies that work.

Another study that I would like to include was written by Susan Florio-Ruane (2001). This study is not quite ethnographic, but is similar. Florio-Ruane (2001) tells the story of a girl named Nell, who didn't know anything about her culture or anyone else's culture, so she made up a lie about being from another country for a class project:

Once upon a time, a little girl named Nell was assigned to prepare an oral report about her cultural background. Nell realized that she did not know very much about

hers. What could she say that would give her report the flavor and color of “culture”? Nell felt a wave of panic as she thought about what to show and tell. “I’m not anything,” she thought, “I’m just an American.” Seeking to impress her teacher and classmates with at least some colorful details of her family’s food, dress, and holidays, Nell asked her mother for help. But Nell was disappointed when, barely looking up from the vegetables she was preparing for dinner, her mother merely shrugged at the question, “What are we?” She replied, “I don’t know. Some mix of Irish and English, I guess. It was a long time ago.” So, she [Nell] confesses, to make her cultural background interesting, “I faked being from Poland.” (p. xxiii)

This story resonated with me because I am responsible for teaching several students who speak Spanish as their first language. Each year, I thoroughly enjoy teaching students who come from a different background than me because I can learn so much from their culture. They teach me how to be a better teacher because I have learned empathy from seeing what it is that I need to do to increase their chances of successful learning. Those needs are things like providing pictures beside things they may not know, using more in-depth vocabulary strategies, allowing them to hear a lesson on the computer in their first language, increasing my spoken Spanish skills to better communicate, translate notes home in the language that is spoken at home, being extra patient, etc.

It is crucial that teachers allow all of their students to feel welcome, comfortable, and accepted in their classrooms, no matter what background they originate from or what cultures they are a part of. Uniqueness and differences should be celebrated, not mocked. Students should be encouraged to feel proud of their heritage, not only at home, but at school as well. A vital part of having unconditional love for students is to accept them as they are, no matter how

different they are from the teacher. The teacher should also teach the other class members to appreciate the different cultures that make up the classroom community of learners. I think the story could be flipped around as well. Students could feel ashamed of where they come from because they don't feel included and accepted by their teachers and classmates. So, if asked to prepare an oral report about their heritage, a student may lie about where they originated from out of embarrassment.

It is important that our nation's schools do not continue down a capitalistic path. Even though it seems things have improved in this area in recent years, it still is not enough. "Capitalism promotes hegemony, not social justice" (Hinton, 2015, p. 307). The goals of the national, state, and local governments seem to ignore community empowerment and seek suppression of teachers. Schools are run like factories. The more families are in a community, and the more they are recognized, the more capitalism will get snuffed out. Family is the core of a community. But, all family is important, not just those from the mainstream culture of the community. Schools should always translate anything sent home, hire translators to be present each day to aid in communication, encourage cultural celebrations of minority families, and have special assistance for families who need more clarification. Consistent inclusion is key to all cultures working joyfully together in a school.

Research Questions

The key research question is: How do teachers keep their passion, compassion, and radical love in the teaching profession despite all forms of oppression?

Specific Research Questions are:

- How do teachers build up their courage to teach in spite of all the challenges and dilemmas?

- How do aspects of spirituality and faith help keep teachers in the teaching profession?
- How do teachers engage with students to meet their students' needs and empower them to thrive in education and life?
- How do teachers work with students and stakeholders to ensure that knowledge and success is valued for all involved in educational processes?
- What are rural teachers doing to help meet the need for relatedness in the classroom?

Participants

For this study I focus on two white female veteran teachers, as well as a newly retired principal and counselor for this study, also both white females. I am interviewing and collecting stories from veteran teachers at the school where I teach. One veteran teacher works in the kindergarten department and is in her sixties. She has taught at our school for most of her career; she exudes kindness, care, and love for all of her students, and her reputation for these characteristics precedes her. She adds an upbeat, positive morale to our school, and is respected by parents. She has witnessed changes in education over the many years that she has been teaching and believes that students are not at the center of educational practices as they once were. This teacher has actually already retired, yet still returns to our school to long-term substitute each year. There is something to be said for a retired teacher who continues to return. She says that she chooses to return because she has a passion and compassion for helping students, witnessing them succeed, and making a difference in the life of each student she works with. She also has a desire to witness our school continuing in a positive direction.

The other veteran teacher who is included in my study is one of our ESOL teachers. She is in her thirties. This teacher has also taught second and third grade at our school. She works diligently to ensure that all students she serves receive a fair and equal education. She strives to

exude kindness, love, and care for all of the students attending our school, not just the ones she serves. She is proud to work at our school and has a positive reputation in our school and community, both with other teachers and parents.

The retired principal and counselor are both middle age. They are now both newly retired. Both had great rapport with the students, teachers, and parents of our school. All of these veteran teachers and administrators were selected by sending a recruitment letter through email. The letter highlighted my role as the primary researcher, what I am studying, and the interviews and observations involved in the study. Then, they were asked to sign consent forms. The teachers were able to ask more detailed questions about the research and what exactly I needed of them. I answered their questions to the best of my knowledge and they agreed to be observed and interviewed. The incentives given for this study were monetary gift cards to a restaurant, one for each participant.

Data Management

I collected my acquired data through the use of observations and interviews. The interview sessions were set up as a story-telling experience and were audio-recorded. I desired for the interviewee to be as comfortable, upfront, and honest as possible in order to gather all angles of the storytelling process. I also made observations in the veteran teachers' classrooms and took field notes of everything I observed. While I was observing, I was looking for teacher-student interactions. I interviewed each teacher separately, in a face-to-face manner, after regular school hours. I interviewed the teachers after each of their observations. I observed each teacher for thirty minutes on one day. After the observation, at the end of the school day, I interviewed each teacher in my classroom for approximately 45 minutes. I interviewed the principal and counselor separately through virtual meetings during after school hours. Before all

interviews, participants were informed of the purpose of the interviews, expected length, the plans for the data collected from the observations and interviews, the recording and notetaking procedures, and member checking procedures. Several careful steps were taken to protect the privacy of each participant. All research was kept confidential by me, with digital data stored on my smartphone that only I have access to. Written observational notes and transcriptions were kept in a secured folder in my desk drawer in my home. Recorded interviews were kept on a recording app on my password-protected smartphone device. All audio recordings were forever deleted once the recordings were transcribed. All data pertaining to this dissertational study will be destroyed three years after the research expiration date.

Data Collection

I used semi-structured interview formats with all participants. I wanted to keep some structure to keep the interview on topic, yet I also wanted to ask open-ended questions to allow teachers to share their opinions without holding them back. The veteran teachers were interviewed once, and the principal and counselor were interviewed two times. The veteran teachers' interviews took place in my classroom after school hours, and the interviews with the counselor and principal took place virtually on work computers. All interviews began with the question: "Why did you become a teacher?" I followed up that question with questions pertaining to classroom management, positive relationships between teacher and student, love, and being a lifelong learner. For the principal and counselor, interview two focused more on behavior issues in the classroom and how to love through it.

When I interviewed the retired principal and counselor, I asked them similar questions that I asked the two veteran teachers, i.e. positive relationships in the classroom regarding love, encouragement, and care from teacher to student. The principal and counselor are both in their

late fifties and are both white females. Also, both of these veteran teachers were selected by sending a recruitment letter through email. The letter highlighted my role as the primary researcher, what I am studying, and the interviews and observations involved in the study. Then, they were asked to sign consent forms as well. Also, they were able to ask more detailed questions about the research and what exactly I needed of them. I answered their questions to the best of my knowledge and they agreed to be observed and interviewed. The incentives given for this study were monetary gift cards to a restaurant, one for each participant.

Classroom Observations

I observed the two veteran teacher participants on one day, separately, as they each have different roles in their own classrooms. Handwritten notes were taken during an instructional segment of the day, when the teacher was teaching in front of the classroom. I chose the math instructional time with the kindergarten teacher, as it was the time that worked best for their schedule, as well as mine. I was in the classroom for around 30-45 minutes. I took notes on what I saw in the classroom, what the teacher was doing, what the students were doing, engagement level, instructional tools, morale of the classroom, etc. I did not interact with the teacher or students; the students acted as if I wasn't even there. After the lesson, I thanked them for their time and exited the classroom. Upon being back in my own classroom, I reviewed the notes and made sure everything was correct, concise, and clear from what I had just observed.

For the veteran ESOL teacher, I observed her when she was working with first graders. She only sees students to focus on reading and writing skills. Her job description does not include working on math concepts with students, as students who speak another language at home struggle more with reading, language, and writing versus math. I did not purposefully choose to observe her while she was working with first graders, it just ended up that way to work

well with both of our schedules. Again, I was in this classroom for about 30-45 minutes. The teacher had her classroom set up in stations. One station was journal writing, one was at the teacher table with her, and the last one was computer station, where students worked on Lexia. Lexia is a best-practices online reading subscription program that our district uses for ELLs. Just like the other classroom, I took notes on what I saw in the classroom, how the teacher interacted with the students, how they interacted with her, engagement levels, instructional tools, overall morale of the classroom learning environment, etc. Again, I did not interact with the students or teacher, and the students acted like I was not there.

Data Analysis

Each of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. I used a transcription program to assist me in transcribing the interviews. I also used the member-checking process if I had a question or concern about a particular spot in transcription. After the transcription process, I implemented manual coding techniques with the data. I used process coding for the first round of the coding process, followed by values coding for the second round of coding. I was manually searching for patterns and themes within the data. I used process coding because I researched daily life in a school. “Process coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that search for the routines and rituals of human life” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 111). Since I researched passion, compassion, and radical love, I felt that values coding was also very meaningful for this research. “Values coding is the application of codes to qualitative data that reflects a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview. Though each construct has a different meaning, Values Coding, as a term, subsumes all three” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131). All of these conversations were extremely meaningful and emotional to me. It was a treasured experience where I thoroughly gained

meaningful knowledge and information, not only to be used for this dissertation, but also for my day to day teaching experiences, and also for working with others in daily life. I compared the interview transcripts and codings with the observation field notes and its codings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the combination of observations and interviews, I compiled the stories together to reach conclusive themes. “Noting patterns, themes; seeing plausibility; and clustering helps the analyst to see ‘what goes with what’; making metaphors (Miles et al., 2019, p. 274). I coded with my chosen theoretical frameworks in mind, as well as my topic of agape love to find patterns and themes in the entirety of the collected data. The themes that stuck out to me with process coding were the routines of the participants at school and in their classrooms; the routines and procedures of the ways in which they prefer to run their classrooms and how they operate at school. I was able to find around 10-15 codes and sorted them into the two themes of routines/procedures and preferences. For values coding, the themes that stuck out there were their values, beliefs, and attitudes about how they personally view schooling and teaching with love and compassion; I was able to get a snapshot of their worldview. I found around 30-45 codes for each interview and sorted them into 5 themes: values, beliefs, attitudes, love, and compassion.

Researcher Positionality

When I first read and researched for a doctoral project about how Paulo Freire used love in his teaching, I knew from that point on that I wanted to center my research around radical love in the classroom; I know specifically now that the love I was attempting to harness for this project is known as radical (agape) love. I have always known that I wanted to be a teacher, although I believe it was more subconscious than conscious as a young girl. Outward forces, as well as an inward force, helped me make the conscious decision. My husband, who is also a

fellow educator, was the one to encourage me to be a teacher. He helped bring the dream to consciousness and fruition, as well as divine, spiritual intervention by my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, I was being called to be a teacher. Now, after I have been in the field of education for a decade, I have seen that calling be confirmed over and over again through experiences that cannot be attested to just coincidence.

At times, I thought I wouldn't be able to complete college and earn my teaching degree, but through prayer and my husband's dedicated encouragement, I walked across the graduation stage. He saw more in me than I saw in myself. During the early years of my teaching career, I soon realized that I was indeed called by God to be a teacher to children; I feel it is my spiritual gift. I firmly believe that teaching is my destiny and helps make my life complete and meaningful; it is one of the reasons I am living on this earth and makes up my identity. I have felt radical (agape) love and have given the same type of love since my first day of student teaching, as well as on my first day as a certified teacher in my own classroom. This type of love has always been there to lead and sustain me along the way. When I feel out of focus as an educator, I always go back to love and it keeps me grounded in knowing this is where I belong, it is my sense of purpose.

There have been times, specifically since after the 'covid years' of education, that I seriously pondered whether I wanted to continue in education because of the increased demands, demands that I feel decrease my physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health if the right perspective is not accounted for. The increased demands can very easily cause a teacher to lose their focus and make them want to quit. Constantly focusing on the negatives of the education world can cause chronic stress, and I personally know of teachers who are on stress reducing medications because of the high demands of the teaching profession and what is expected of us.

Teaching is not easy as some people assume it is since we get summers off. We make thousands of decisions a day consciously and subconsciously, and that's just for what we do during our hours at the school building. This doesn't include all of the responsibilities that continue when we get home. It is hard to leave what we go through on a daily basis at the exit door and not bring some of it home. What happens at school continues to reside within our psyche and emotions even if we aren't physically present in the building. Thoughts like, what students are going through, what we have to plan for next, how we disagree with how things were handled with our administration team, feeling unsupported and unappreciated, not understanding why certain students continue to misbehave, what I could have done better in a specific situation, and the list continues—the lingering thoughts seem to be unending on some days.

I did not truly realize and understand the depth, weight, and brevity of it all until I began this journey of creating a dissertation based on unconditional, radical (agape) love in the classroom. I am thankful and so blessed to be able to go along this tedious, long, yet rewarding journey. Even after this completed dissertation, I know that I will still yearn to find out more about agape and teaching toward freedom for the betterment of myself, as well as for the betterment of each child I will encounter and have the pleasure and privilege of teaching and learning from. I will also use what I learn as encouragement for fellow teachers struggling with oppression who may seek my advice.

When I think about what exactly it was that made me desire to become a teacher, I know in my heart and soul that it was from those early years of childhood that a seed was planted and a fire was ignited. It was the seed and fire of a love that sought to help others succeed. My mother was my first teacher; she taught me to recognize letters, numbers, and shapes, as well as to read before I began kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher would actually have to ask my mother

for things that I could do at school while the other children were learning to read since I learned so early. Therefore, my mother was the first person who planted the seed of a love for learning and ignited the fire for helping others. Then, from kindergarten and beyond, all of the teachers who were present in my school life made a difference and continued nourishing the plant that was planted in my heart, as well as kindled the fire in my soul. All of the teachers I had in elementary school were loving and caring teachers, who I believe had my best interest at heart. Whenever I was in a classroom, I felt empowered, even though I was born with a shy personality. Through their constant love, nurturing, encouragement, and passion for teaching, my confidence in myself began to grow and flourish. I felt like I could do anything I put my mind to.

I was blessed to be able to student-teach in undergraduate school with my second-grade teacher. At the time I student-taught, she had changed schools and had become a kindergarten teacher. She is probably the teacher who made the most difference in my life; she taught with a passion and radical love that I have never forgotten and I don't think I ever will. I carry her spirit with me in my day-to-day teaching. It is she who I design my ways of teaching after. I often ask myself in certain situations, "Would my second-grade teacher do this?" She taught me the importance of self-reflection and metacognition, and how those skills make a good teacher great— always striving to do better time and time again, growing and learning from one experience to the next, improving upon one year to the next.

I have witnessed past students of mine who go through school and don't seem to be the same student who was in my class just a few years ago. I first found myself wondering, "Is that child receiving love at school? Is their current teacher making a positive impact in their life? Does their teacher truly love and care for them?" This feeling, mixed with what I have learned

from Freire and other teachers, helped me to determine the need for this project about radical (agape) love in a critical ethnography setting, in the field of curriculum studies. Love is indeed missing from today's public school curricula.

Throughout my doctoral journey I have been involved in courses related to human development, motivation, and problem-solving. In the human development course, I learned that children are influenced by their environments. Their environments – home, school, and play – all influence the person they become, which embodies the social determination theory; nature is continuously interacting with nurture (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2013). I have also learned about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which states that love is the third foundational step for all future learning and thriving. If love is not present following physiological needs and safety, self-esteem, and self-actualization cannot occur (Maslow, 1943). All of these thoughts and theories are what have influenced my realization to pursue the study of love and passion in the classroom. All that I have learned and continue to learn each day through my teaching experience journey, is aiding me in designing my methodology and data analysis.

Radical (agape) love is the most important part of my daily experiences, self-reflection, methodology, and data analysis. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1957) defined (agape) love well when he said in one of his many speeches that (agape) love is such a powerful love that causes us to serve others in such a way that does not seek anything in return; this is the kind of love that I strive to show my students and anyone I come into contact with, in or out of the school building, in life in general. I must keep moving forward and toward the goal of total understanding of unconditional, radical (agape) love for all. This type of thinking and believing can be achieved through constant metacognition and consistent reflection. It is something that I make an effort to improve upon daily.

When I reflect upon the data collection from my observations and interviews with the veteran teachers at my school, I am moved by how much social justification is found within the data I have collected. It reveals that if teachers are willing to truly interact, care for, and love their students, and the students realize it, then in return, students will care for, love, and interact with their teacher. It works both ways. Teachers must have time to learn these things and not be bombarded with the burdens of grueling curriculum, standardized tests, and little to no support from administrators and stakeholders.

In a world focused on mental illness and health, spirituality is often left out (Miller, 2021). Lisa Miller (2021), in *The Awakened Brain*, writes about a study centered around a connection between spirituality and depression. The study revealed that patients who were depressed had a low spirituality and patients who had healthier brains stated that they had high spirituality present in their lives. Therefore, people are more likely to be depressed or have other mental illnesses if a source of spirituality is not present in their lives. This is why in any occupation, but I believe especially in the field of education, educators will experience burnout, chronic stress, depression, etc., if they have a void or low sense of spirituality. So, spirituality can be an abundant source of strength for teachers to keep them going. Spirituality can be as easy as listening to calming music at certain times of the day. The type of calming music differs from person to person—it is a preference. Calming music helps the teacher slow down, reach self-regulation, and feel love, and it also helps the students in the same way. Both can experience spirituality together at the same time every day, at a specific time or multiple times during the school day.

However, spirituality may not be the answer for teachers who are not where they belong. When I say where they belong, I am speaking of teachers who are not fit to be teaching

the students they have been given. Teachers who work with students who come from lower economic backgrounds or students who speak another language at home may not be a good fit for teachers who have not been exposed, experienced, or trained to work with the students they are given (Nieto, 2005). It is important for teachers to be “spiritually sensitive” to where they belong, meaning which school or classroom fits their teaching experiences and expertise. It is not fair to students to be taught by a teacher who is not aware of the student’s way of life who is in his or her classroom; they are not being wholly taught if this is the case. It is vital that all teachers realize where they are called, as well as if they are even called to the field of education at all.

How can one know if they are called to teach or not? If a work does not make one glad, he or she should consider calling it quits and making a career change (Palmer, 2007). To me, having the courage to teach means that a teacher shows up to work each day ready to take on the day. They don’t frequently dread coming to work; they have enthusiasm about their job and strive to make those around them happy and welcomed— this includes both teachers, students, administrators, and parents. All too often, teachers are “thrust into molds, they suffer objectification like other members of society. They play roles in many ways defined by others, although their interpretations of these roles must, in some manner, be grounded in an understanding of themselves” (Greene, 1978, p. 39). The understanding of oneself comes through experience (which cannot be taught) and having time for self-reflection. Having courage in teaching also means doing the right things each day, doing what is asked of the teacher by those in authority, and being willing to go the extra mile for a child or co-worker at times. Yet, courage also means standing up for oneself and having a bold yet kind attitude. Sometimes, issues arise and the teacher feels the need to stand her ground. I believe that teachers should

have the freedom to be bold. If a teacher doesn't agree with something that another teacher or administrator is doing, they should ask questions through a mature, professional discussion. One will not overcome oppression from being timid and afraid.

I also believe that courage means having a little bit of fun in the classroom to help foster those long-lasting, positive relationships. Students will not want to come to school each day if the classroom is stagnant, repetitive, and script-like. Students desire fun lessons and a teacher who isn't afraid to laugh at themselves and change things up every now and then; maybe that means playing a game that involves the whole class for just 5 minutes a day or going outside to learn. There are many ways that a teacher can accomplish the same task with her students, but do it in a more enjoyable way for herself and the students. Students need to see that teachers are human, too, and like to have fun and laugh just like students do.

The curriculum must be able to be altered in a sense in order for exciting, out-of-ordinary learning to occur (Nieto, 2003). The curriculum designers and those who enforce the curriculum have a tight grip on teachers even though most of the aforementioned leaders have never been a teacher before. Yet, those are the ones calling the shots for school boards, schools, administrators, teachers, and students (Giroux, 2011). School is not as fun as it maybe once was because teachers and principals are feeling the harsh grip and are not able to loosen up to have fun. They stay stressed out about curriculums and standardized testing. They are not encouraged and don't feel supported by their principals (Carvalho & Mulla, 2020). Could it be because the principals are just as stressed as the teachers, if not more by those in power at the local and state levels? In Georgia, we are now having to submit what we use to the state department of education to ask for permission which program materials we can and cannot use in the classroom. The freedom to simply teach with what works is disappearing. The tools to teach

are being removed from the teacher's hand and replaced with what must be taught through a script that the government deems appropriate. It's all about what they choose, not what we as teachers feel works for our students. It is power overriding principle.

The online standardized test that we use where I teach is called a 'diagnostic'. What does that word remind one of? Most would probably say a diagnostic for a car or something relating to technology or machinery used by a technician. This terminology is offensive because it is not designed for a child; it is designed for those in power. A child is not a car, a type of machine, or a piece of metal. Children, especially younger children like the ones I teach, are made for movement while learning, through discovery, exploration, and learning while outdoors, etc. They are not made to sit in a school building for 8 hours with little movement and repetitive, ineffective habits sometimes referred to as 'rigorous learning'.

Bettina Love says it best when she said, "Education can't save us. We must save education" (Love, 2019, p. 88). In her book about surviving in education, she calls bold, revolutionary teaching "abolitionist teaching" (p. 89). Love (2019) states that abolitionist teaching is not a simple approach to teaching; it is a way of life, a lens to view the world. Being a teacher shouldn't be merely surviving. It should be a way of life, and that way of life, that lens that is used to see the world, requires passion, compassion, and love, which should then be passed down as a vision to each child who enters a classroom. I would like to end this dissertation with a quote from a treasured book of mine, a type of 'love guidebook for teaching' book that was gifted to me, a book that has given me surmountable heartwarming encouragement during all my years of teaching. This quote sums up the entirety of this paper and I could not have written Buck's (2013) words any better:

Only the brave should teach. Only those who love the young should teach. Teaching is a vocation. It is as sacred as the priesthood; as innate as a desire, as inescapable as the genius which compels a great artist. If one has not the concern for humanity, the love of living creatures, the vision of the priest and the artist, one must not teach. (p. 90)

Data Representation

In my next chapter about my data representation, I summarize my research data and include the interview transcriptions from all four participants.

CHAPTER 4

DATA REPRESENTATION: CONCURRENT THEMES

The ethnographic research inquiry I used in my research centered around exploring positive relationships in the classroom between teachers and students, specifically focusing on how teachers keep their passion, compassion, and radical love in the teaching profession despite all forms of oppression. Theoretically speaking, this dissertation was influenced by a wide array of critical pedagogists, such as: Paulo Freire (1987, 1998, 2000, 2019), Henry Giroux (2010, 2018), Antonia Darder (2007, 2009, 2015, 2016, 2018), and bell hooks (1994, 2001). When speaking of radical love, this dissertation was influenced by a wide array of radical love theorists, such as: William Ayers (2004, 2016), Martin Luther King, Jr. (1957,1963), Sonia Nieto (2003, 2005), and William Schubert (2010), as well as the aforementioned and respected critical pedagogists, Paulo Freire and bell hooks. For the area of self-determination theory, this dissertation was influenced by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000, 2001, 2002). My work pursued find out how teachers build up their courage to teach in spite of all the challenges and dilemmas. I also sought to discover how aspects of spirituality and faith help keep teachers in the teaching profession. Another aspect I desired to explore was how teachers engage with students to meet their needs and empower them to thrive to in education and life. Specifically, I also wanted to explore how teachers work with students and stakeholders to ensure that knowledge and success is valued for all involved in educational processes. Lastly, I sought to find out how rural teachers help meet the need for relatedness in their classrooms.

I used ethnographic inquiry with two teachers, a principal, and counselor in my own Title I school, located in a rural town in northeast Georgia. The data collected was from observations and individual interviews. The observations and interviews were carefully collected and

analyzed to determine how teachers use passion, compassion, love, courage, spirituality, faith, and relatedness to overcome oppression and continue to teach in today's uncertain times. During the interviews, I did not want to insert my opinions, so I hardly commented on each answer the interviewees provided me. I only wanted to get their pure, original, unadulterated thoughts. In this chapter, I provide the reader with participant profiles, critical examinations of my research, and preliminary analyses of the themes that transpired from the data I collected.

Context of Research

My ethnographic research takes place at Spring Place Elementary School, where I have been teaching for 10 years (at the time I am writing this). As I stated before, I teach first grade at this Title One elementary school in the town where I was born and raised and still reside today. Spring Place is a Title One elementary school located in a small, rural town in northwest Georgia. Our elementary school was first established in 1924. A new building was built in 1969 and stood until 2017. In 2018, a new building was built in front of where the old building once stood. Veteran teachers at our school miss the old building but are also thankful for all that comes with the fresh start of a new school building. Since I began teaching at this school in 2014, I was hired and worked under the same principal. As of the 2021-2022 school year, Spring Place has a new principal, as the former principal is now retired. However, the former principal still visits and is a substitute teacher at our school. The population of the school includes around 400 students – in kindergarten through sixth grade – of which a high percentage come from disadvantaged homes. Our school qualifies to provide free breakfast and lunch for all students. A large portion of our school contains students who receive English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes.

We also have students who are served through an Early Intervention Plan (EIP), which is a remedial service to students in a smaller class size setting. This plan is designed to fill in the gaps of math and/or reading deficiencies. Students are also served through intervention processes in the regular classroom once or twice daily. We also have a gifted program called EXCEL that serves gifted students at least twice a week in a small classroom setting. There is also an Exceptional Student Service (ESS), which also includes speech services for students who qualify. Students who qualify for ESS benefit from full-day, or partial-day services, consisting of small group or one-on-one assistance, either in a regular education classroom through inclusion services or in a pull-out, self-contained setting. For students who have experienced types of trauma, there is a program called *Georgia Hope*, where certified counselors work with the school to visit and counsel students, helping children deal with their trauma and find healing through the process. The counselors must have parental consent before working with a particular student. We also have a full-time counselor who works with any students who may need to talk about issues that have occurred or are occurring in or out of school. For positive behavior reinforcement, we recognize and celebrate students once a month who have exhibited positive behavior characteristics. Our school is also involved with local churches. The local churches help to provide food and school supplies to families in need. Local businesses also work with our school to fundraise in order for our school to have separate funds for positive behavior rewards, field days, celebrations, dances, etc.

Our school closed for at-home learning during the COVID-19 pandemic from mid-March 2020 to May 2020. In the 2020-2021 school year, we experienced hybrid learning, then returned back to full face-to-face learning in the 2021-2022 school year. That summer, students who were in need of passing their specific grade had to attend summer school to catch up and receive

passing grades. The pandemic put most children behind in their learning at our school, and we are still seeing the effects of at-home learning versus students attending school face-to-face. In the 2021-2022 school year, all learning was face-to-face unless there were parents who preferred virtual. This year, 2022-2023, virtual learning was no longer an option.

Participant Profiles

Tammy (White female) was the principal of our school at the time I interviewed her. She has now been retired for two years, but comes to visit our school often and also substitutes. Tammy is in her late fifties and attended school in the county just west of the one where our school resides. I worked under this principal for 8 years until she retired. She was a great principal in my opinion. I could tell she loved the students at our school, yet believed in giving them firm talks out of tough love if needed. She was always wanting to help out students who came from lower socioeconomic homes. For me personally, I felt like I could always go to her for anything and she was always there to lend an ear or caring heart, and offer sound advice. I never told her, but she was like a second mother to me, that's how much I felt that she cared about and supported me as a teacher and as a friend. She was a dependable mentor to me for sure. She never thought she would be a principal, but always said that everything happens for a reason and that God had other plans.

Before Tammy became a principal, she was a teacher. She was a teacher for 11 years and only taught in our district. She taught third grade and physical education. She was an assistant principal for 9 years in 3 different schools in our district. Tammy was a principal for 14 years in 2 different schools in our district.

Penny (White female) was the counselor of our school at the time I interviewed her. She has now been retired for a year. Before Penny became our counselor, she taught first and third

grade at our school for 5 years. She worked at 4 different schools in our district as a counselor. She was a counselor for a total of 24 years. Penny is in her mid-fifties and attended school in the county just west of the county where I teach. She was my counselor at the school where I work for 9 years until she retired. Penny was and still is close friends with Tammy, the retired principal. Penny was a wonderful counselor who truly cared about the needs of others. She would make home visits and phone calls to check on students and their families. She worked with the principal each year to delicately place students into their next grade class roster with the teacher they felt would be the best fit for each other. She also told me that she and the principal prayed over each child and classroom before the beginning of each new school year.

I always had a good relationship with this counselor, I felt like I could talk with her about unique needs of my students and she would always have advice for me. I also always knew that once I told her about a student who I thought was being neglected at home, she would always talk with the student and make sure everything was okay.

Debbie (White female) is a retired educator from our school, who never really left. Debbie is in her early to mid-sixties. Right after retirement, she returned the next year as a long-term substitute, and would only substitute at our school. She actually was rehired last year in a kindergarten parapro position. Debbie taught for 30 years before she retired. She taught all 30 years at the same school where I teach now and where she keeps returning to teach. She has taught first grade, second grade, fourth grade, and now kindergarten.

I always noticed Debbie when she was a teacher before she retired and after as a substitute and parapro. Her line of students in the hallways was always so quiet and respectful. I have always known there was something special about Debbie, and it wasn't until I began this doctoral journey that I found out that it was indeed agape love. Her students respected her

because she loved them and her students respected others because she taught them all about love by caring for them in her passionate and compassionate teaching. She has also maintained her courage to teach her students in ways they understand and need, and desires to make a lasting impact each day in her students' lives.

Hannah (White female) is a veteran teacher at our school. Hannah is in her mid-thirties. She has been teaching for 16 years, all at our school. She has taught second grade, third grade, and now ESOL. Hannah is a wonderful person who cares not just about the students she teaches each day, but about every student in our building. She stands at the door to greet the students each morning, whether they arrive by car or bus. She always has an encouraging word for students and deals well with other teachers and parents. She is looked up to by her peers as a model teacher, and just an overall good person who exudes positivity and kindness.

When I began figuring out what type of research methodology I would be implementing for my dissertation, Hannah immediately came to mind—I knew I wanted to interview her. Since I have been working with her at our school, I've come to realize that she indeed loves all of the students at our school, and shows it radically. She has said that she sometimes feels like she cares more for our students than her own children. She is seemingly always making an impact on someone's life for the better and I always hear her speaking diligently, respectfully, patiently, and softly with students. I look up to Hannah very much and strive to be like her in how she genuinely exudes passion, compassion, and love each day toward others. She works selflessly.

Research Activities

Before I began my research, I had preconceived notions about what teachers would say. Some it ended up being said by the participants, but there was much more information that I

learned and did not preconceive them saying. Before I began asking the interview questions, I mentioned that the questions would be centered around positive relationships, as well as the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (mentioned earlier in this dissertation). We discussed that basic needs must be met first, followed by safety and love/belonging. When those three needs are met, a student can then reach self-esteem and attain the top tier, which is self-actualization.

The Interviews

The interviews took place from March 2021 to May 2023. Two interviews were conducted with the principal and counselor in March 2021, and one interview was conducted with each of the veteran teachers in May 2023. Member checking was conducted after the last interview took place to check for errors in my transcriptions. I was unable to fully conduct the member checking process due to time constraints, therefore, this puts limitations on my data analysis. Similar limitations are noted more in-depth in the ‘Challenges’ section of this dissertation. Because we all have so much going on during the school day, all of the interviews were held during after school hours. Each interview lasted between 20-30 minutes.

Before I began each interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study, explained expected length of the interview, gained permission to record, described how the data would be stored and eventually destroyed, explained the member checking process, and reminded them of the incentives. I also relayed to them if there was any question that they did not feel comfortable to answer, they did not have to answer it. Everyone seemed like they understood. I only sensed nervousness from one of the veteran teachers, and I think it was because she had never been interviewed before.

The interviews were used to gain an understanding of how teachers use compassion, passion, and love in their classrooms. I was able to get much more information from the

interviews than the observations, but the observations still served a purpose. Through the observations I was able to see teachers' compassion and love, as well as their courage and relatedness, in real time. In the interviews, I was only able to imagine what it might look like in their classroom by how they responded to the questions. Below are snapshots of the two types of interviews I conducted in March 2021 and May 2023. Complete interviews are located in Appendix A.

Tammy

Bryson: So, the first question is, have you ever been interviewed for project purposes before?

Tammy: Yes.

Bryson: Can you go into detail a little bit about that without giving any secrets?

Tammy: Same kind of situation research projects. I've done a lot of, people going into leadership and just asking questions about that.

Bryson: What is your philosophy on education and being an educator?

Tammy: Wow. I guess just in general and in as short of terms as possible, I've always believed it's a calling, that you are to be successful at it. It's not just a job, it's something you feel like you're supposed to do. And I can, I can see that in people it's very easy to read. Who's here for a paycheck and who's here because that's what they fill out they're supposed to do? So, then, I guess overall, that. That would be it in a nutshell.

Bryson: What led you to become a teacher before you were a principal?

Tammy: Well, I started out, I was going to be an obstetrician. So, I'm going, you know, once I saw I would be like 35 before I even actually, you know, all the years you have to go to school and all the residences you have to do and everything I thought, well, I'll try something else. But, I always liked being around kids and working with kids. So, I guess that just, just that I enjoy

being with kids and wanting to continue to do that.

Bryson: What led you to become a principal?

Tammy: It was kind of just the next step. If you had asked me, you know, 25 years ago, I would have said, you're crazy. I would never do that. 'Cause I never made years thought I would enjoy this side of it. But then after you've been in it for a while, you kind of see it in a different light and I wanted to experience this part of it. And I enjoy working with a lot of people, not just, you know, you're kind of when you're in the classroom, it's you and your 20 kids or whatever, and you have a little collaboration with other teachers, but it's totally different from this aspect. And, I get to work with teachers, kids, parents, which is not always, you know, fun, but, I enjoy it and I enjoy solving problems. Like, you know, there's a conflict then you got to figure out how to make it doable for everybody.

Bryson: What advice do you have for teachers in order for the teacher to develop effective relationships with their students?

Tammy: I think you have to be very positive and very, there's a fine line between discipline and humiliation. And I think I'm real big on discipline with dignity. You can be very stern. You can be very, you can have high expectations, but you have to do it in a way where you're, you know, our job is to teach kids the difference between right and wrong. So, there's a fine line between, yes, there are consequences for the choice you made, but here's why you need to why this is a better choice. And, you know, hopefully if you make this other choice in the future, things will be better. I had a conversation with it, a kid yesterday kind of like that, just, you know, here and you've heard me do that with kids. Here's the thing, you know, you got two choices and, and you can either choose trouble or you can choose to do what you need to do and avoid the trouble. So I think that would for teachers, it's the same kind of thing in the classroom and just the

communication with parents. If you have a good relationship with your parents, it's easier to have a good relationship with the kids. And I have to know that, you know, you're their cheerleader and they're the person that's going to take care of them. I mean, I can add another hour, but I, you know, that would be it in a nutshell.

Debbie

Bryson: Why did you choose to be a teacher?

Debbie: I always wanted to be a teacher growing up. I knew I was good at reading. I knew that school came easy for me. And, but growing up I always, always knew in my heart that I wanted to be a teacher. If we ask, God leads our path. When I got into high school, I could type like everything. I mean, I could, you know, just make it zing. And I, I love typing. So when I went to college, I was really torn, Did I want to be, a teacher or did I want to type and be in an office, do office skills? And, I got put in education classes. And, by mistake. I did not sign up for 'em. And I was too bashful and shy to ask 'em if I was in the wrong classes. So I stayed in them. And I know that was God directing my path and telling me. And I had, and I'll tell you later on in there about my fifth-grade teacher who inspired me so much, so much. And showed me love, and she would tell me all the time, what a great teacher I would be one day and all this. And that's stuck with me.

Bryson: How do you approach classroom management?

Debbie: I get them involved, have interaction with them. I think that's the key is if you show them, you know, that what they say to you is important enough for you to interact with them, then they're going to participate. And, to me that's, I mean, that's it in a nutshell. If you can have that relationship with 'em, then they're going to catch on and they're going to, you know, interact with you and discuss things with you. And, to me, management is showing those kids, each child

in that room, that they are the most important thing in that classroom. And, you got to do it to each child. Like that child is the most important person in that classroom. And, I just have tried my best to do that when they start talking or something. I try my best to give them full attention and they know that I'm going to.

Bryson: Define what it means in your own words for the teacher and student to have a positive relationship.

Debbie: That's what I was saying. Just, you know, show 'em praise, you know, even if they, if they mess up or, you know, get in trouble for something, you know, tell 'em something positive they've done. You know, "Hey, I like the way, you know, you handled this," or, "I like the way that you stood in line quietly." "I like the way you raised your hand." You know, and they catch on. They know that you're going to notice them. These kids at this school are hungry to be noticed. And I can just see it on their little face that they want to be noticed so bad. And most kids do. But there's just something about this school. These little kids, if you just praise them a little bit and notice them and notice their clothes, notice, you know, say something positive, whether their clothes are dirty, whether their shoes are dirty, no matter what.

Their hair is dirty. Their face is dirty. Find something, find something and tell 'em every day, every day. Always listen to their voice every day. I would always make sure I heard every child's voice in my classroom every single day. Some of them are shy or quiet at the beginning or something, but I would, even if it meant me kneeling down beside them with a one-on-one conversation, I made sure. That was one thing I would always do, is make sure I had a conversation with every child one-on-one every single day. And, no matter what they want. They want to give you something all the time. I don't care if it's a rock, I don't care if it's an eraser. I don't care what it is. You take that. You don't say anything negative about it, you know,

or say, “I don't need that. I don't want that.” Or whatever. You take it and you act like that's the most precious gift they could have given you. And I, I mean, I, I've gotten some funny things in the past, but, you know, you don't forget those things. And they don't forget it. They don't forget giving you little gifts and they've picked that rock special for you, you know, up off the ground or those little flowers, those little weeds they come and give you, you know, you take it. You, you can throw it away later, but it don't matter what it is. You, you never, never, you know, not take it or you never, if they want to give you a hug, you never turn away and not give them babies a hug ever. That may be the only one they get that day.

Reflections on Interviews

After conducting the observations and interviews, I now reflect on them. When I observed the veteran teachers, I gathered ways and ideas of courageous teaching and creating relatedness with students that I took back to my classroom. I also noticed the great amount of passion and love present within each classroom, which I, too, try my best to pursue with my students every single moment of every single day. Teaching really is moment to moment that makes up a day. Every moment truly matters. After the interviews, I felt like what I feel every day and never really deeply discussed with other teachers was resonated. It can be taxing and negative working in a public school from all of the demands, but it was so refreshing and confirming to sit down with likeminded educators and discuss topics and scenarios related to love, passion, compassion, courage, and relatedness. It was a breath of fresh air that I brought back to my classroom with me the very next day. What was discussed in the interviews brought more life within me, more passion for my students, and overall was very encouraging and uplifting to my soul and spirit.

When I interviewed the principal and counselor, the first question I asked is, “What made you want to be a teacher/principal/counselor?”. After that, we discussed what it’s like being a teacher then becoming a principal/counselor. I asked them if/how their beliefs had changed and what their passions are and were within each job title. They discussed examples of concepts they have learned as a principal and counselor, and wished that they had known those things when they were teachers because it would have impacted their relationships with their students. Both participants believed that teaching is a calling connected to emotions and spirituality. The following are quotes from our interview regarding ‘the calling’: “It is easy to spot educators who have not been called, [i.e.] the ones who see it as just another job and a paycheck.” “A true love for teaching cannot be generated – you either have it or you don’t.” “Teachers who have struggles and hardships in life will have a difficult time showing love to their students – hurt people, hurt people.” Both participants believe that love directly influences behavior, effort, learning, etc. They agreed that “love affects everything”. One participant added, “A teacher can have all the skills and knowledge, but without love, students' learning, and appreciation for school, it is minimized greatly.” Both the principal and counselor have witnessed specific students’ behavior changing over the course of their schooling, the behavior being visibly dependent upon who the students’ teacher was/is. One of my favorite phrases from one of the participants when dealing with students with behavior problems is “discipline with dignity”, meaning that discipline should occur if it is necessary, but should be done with respect for the student. To conclude, the best statement at the end of our interview was: “Above all, students have to feel safe and cared for before they can learn.”

When I interviewed the two veteran teachers, the first question I asked was, “Why did you choose to be a teacher?” They each spoke about what profession they thought they would get into, one thought they wanted to be an office worker and the other thought they would get into the nursing profession. Yet, they both became a teacher and felt like it was because it was meant to be. One teacher said that getting into teaching was because of “God directing my path.” Next, I asked them how they approach classroom management. They both spoke about how they are more positive than negative toward their students. If a teacher is positive and praises students, students are going to respect that teacher more because the teacher talks about what they like about a student or what positive things a student is doing that deserve to be pointed out. One teacher said, “Praise automatically corrects the bad behavior.” Then, I asked the veteran teachers to speak about what it means to have a positive relationship between the teacher and student. Both of the teachers spoke about how students just want to be noticed and complimented on something they do well. One teacher said that she always makes sure to have at least one conversation per child each day. The other said that she constantly reminds herself to “fix her face”, which means to smile around students and always greet them and praise them. We went on to discuss love. One teacher stated that love is “absolutely” involved with teaching—“I don’t think you can be an effective teacher if you do not you’re your kids.” The other teacher said, “They know it. They know if you don’t love them. If you don’t love them, you are in the wrong profession.” One teacher said, “If you don’t love your job, it shows on your face. And, you don’t just love them here at school. You take that love home with you and worry about them at night.” This was an emotional, raw part of the interview; it continues in Appendix A at the end of this dissertation. The interview ended with speaking about negative behaviors,

which both teachers agreed separately that the negative behaviors were most likely due to the pandemic era.

Coding Reflection

In this section I would like to reflect on the coding process that took place after the interviews were transcribed. The two types of coding processes that I used were process coding and value coding. After conducting process coding, I would like to reflect on the procedures and themes behind my coding. Again, I chose process coding because I felt there was a large amount of emotion contained within my interviewees' responses to the interview questions. "The conventions of story-line are used in analytic memo writing when reviewing data for process – eg., the first step, the turning point, the second step, the third step" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 79). There was a lot of storytelling in this interview process, as well as a good amount of reasoning and thinking out loud approaches involved. There are a plethora of examples I could provide within the data that was collected, but I chose one as evidence that reveals the type of storytelling that I am referring to. The first question that I asked each interviewee was, "Why did you choose to be a teacher?" All of the interviewees began a storytelling sequence of events to answer this question. "I always wanted to be a teacher growing up. I knew I was good at reading. I knew that school came easy for me. But growing up I always, always knew in my heart that I wanted to be a teacher. And to show you how, if we ask, God leads our path. When I got into high school I could type like everything. I love typing. So when I went to college I was really torn on did I want to be a teacher or did I want to type in an office." Another interviewee replied to this question: "I went into college wanting to do nursing, but I wanted to be some sort of pediatric nurse or anything with kids 'cause I

loved kids and I wanted to help. And I thought that would make me more money because I wanted to be able to support myself because my mom never could.”

I applied process coding as the first round of coding to sort out the storytelling and emotions. I did this by highlighting the printed transcription text. I used Johnny Saldaña’s (2009) book as a reference guide to go through my data. I looked at the examples he used for process coding and tried to find instances within my data that were of similar format. I searched through the data for each time the interviewees told a story, had flashback moments, used great emotion, vivid details and descriptions, etc. Luckily, there were a lot of instances where this type of evidence occurred within the collected data. This is one of my favorite emotional parts of the interview. When asked about defining positive relationships between teacher and student in the classroom, the interviewee replied, “Show them praise. Even if they mess up or get in trouble for something, tell them something positive they have done. You know, hey, I like the way you lined up quietly. I like the way you raised your hand. They catch on. They know you’re going to notice them. These kids at this school are hungry to be noticed. And I can just see it on their little faces that they want to be noticed so badly. And most kids do. But there’s just something about this school.” The other interviewee replied, “I’ve been doing a lot of research with all the new studies that have come out after Covid, and I try really hard to do the five-to-one. It’s like, for every negative thing, you find five positive things. Another thing is I just try to fix my face. As we wake up tired, maybe we don’t want to be here. You’re the first person that they see. So I’m always trying to smile or hug them or greet them, just listen to them. Tell them ‘good morning’. Lots of praise. Lots of praise.”

For the second round of coding, I incorporated values coding. I used values coding as an attempt to sort out the interviewees’ beliefs and worldviews. Again, I highlighted the printed

transcribed text, but this time I used a different color of highlighter than I used with process coding so I would be able to differentiate between the two and keep the two parts of sorted data separated. And, once again, I used Johnny Saldaña's (2009) book as a guide for values coding. For the values coding process, I am looking for anything that sticks out to me related to how the interviewee views schooling relationships and frankly, life in general. One instance that spoke to me was the following, when asked about approaching classroom management: "Getting them involved and having interaction with them is key. If you show them that what they say is important enough for you to interact with them, then they're going to participate. If you can have that relationship with them, they're going to interact with you and discuss things with you. And to me, management is showing those kids, each child in that room, that they are the most important person in that classroom. I try to do my best, when they're talking or something, I try my best to give them my full attention and they know that I'm going to." The other interviewee replied, "I feel like classroom management comes really easy for me because I just use a lot of praise, praising the good behavior. It automatically corrects the bad behavior. I feel like as soon as they realize that you really love them, they'll do anything for you."

Emergent Themes

The following concurrent themes have resulted from my review of the data. These six pieces of data kept reappearing throughout all of the interviews: (1) If you don't have a genuine love for children and understand that you can make a difference in their lives, you're in the wrong profession. (2) Teaching is a spiritual calling. (3) Teachers have to show love to all kids, but especially those who don't know what love is. (4) You have to make a connection with students (relatedness) about something they are interested in to gain their respect and establish positive relationships. (5) Teachers find the courage to return to teach. (6) You have to have

courage to teach apart from the required curriculum. These concurrent themes emerged as I was reviewing the interview transcripts and observation notes. In the upcoming sections, a description is provided for each theme, as well as supporting evidence from the data.

If You Don't Have Love, You're in the Wrong Profession

This is one theme that appeared throughout the interviews with each educator. Before this research occurred, I knew it took something special to be a teacher. It wasn't until I began researching about radical love in the classroom and the affirming data from the interviews, that I found what that something special was exactly. It is indeed love. If love is not present in a classroom between teacher and student (all students), that teacher is in the wrong profession. I knew that I had that love, but I don't know if I knew exactly that it was okay to call it love. Now, I know for sure that's what it is and it is freeing to me, and I hope through this research, that fellow teachers will recognize the love they have for their students and that their thoughts will be affirmed, too. I hope they can celebrate about the love they have for their students alongside me. This was an emergent theme all throughout the interviews.

Tammy

For Tammy, she thinks "it comes down to that word". She believes that love and relationships with kids "can directly impact behavior, effort, grades, everything". "When the kids know that you care about them and they matter to you, some kids you can get just about to do anything, if they know you care about them and want the best for them." She also added, "You can have all the skills and all the knowledge to teach, but if you don't have that part (love), success level is minimized greatly. You either have it or you don't."

Tammy went on to talk about love. "It impacts everything. From the time the kids get here till they leave." She also talks about when love is absent from a student's life at school,

when it used to be present. “It’s weird from this perspective because you see a child who’s never been in trouble for two or three years, and they get into a teacher’s class, and there’s obviously not that relationship, and you start seeing all of these issues.” Tammy believes that teachers who display love in their classroom have a gift, and can see “a change in behavior through various classrooms”.

From a principal’s standpoint, Debbie sees that parents know when their child isn’t getting the love they received in another classroom. “That’s the difficult thing being in this position because I want to support my teachers, but then I’ll get phone calls. And I know the ones (teachers) who struggle with that aspect of it and the ones who don’t. And they’ll (the parents) say that year that teacher love my kid, and did all this, and now my kid doesn’t want to come to school. And it’s because of that (love). I think it directly affects everything, and kids know, even the people who can hide it best, kids know if you like them or don’t like them, or you care about them or don’t care about them.” She believes that not all teachers are capable of loving their students because “hurt people, hurt people”. She added, “It (love) changes everything and it changes your perspective, and when kids are loved, if they do come from a home where they don’t get that (love), the right kind of love, or the amount, or the attention, or whatever they need, that’s why teachers can have such an influence because they see that. And for some, it does change their life. I go back to, if you don’t love the kids and you don’t have that desire, or you can’t find that, you’re in the wrong profession. And I unfortunately have had to have career counseling with some teachers and I said in a nicer way, I basically said, it might be a good time to consider a new pathway. And a lot of times it was because they did not have empathy or they just didn’t have the love and the concern for kids that you would want people in your building to have.”

Penny

Penny believes that love “is a huge part of learning”. She thinks that “the children have to feel loved. And with that, I think they’re going to feel encouraged. They’re going to feel safe. They’re going to feel comfortable. And, as a counselor, I think that (love) is crucial for them to be able to perform at their best in your classroom”. She adds that children are “going to be more willing to open up to you about all kinds of things”. When speaking of the fact that love is a basic need: “I feel it’s very important that their basic needs are met. And, so a child that feels loved by you is much more likely to tell you that they didn’t eat dinner last night.” Speaking further, Penny says, “I feel like love from the teacher is very impactful just for their overall health, mental, physical, wellbeing. And I believe all of that ties in to them being able to learn basic facts.”

Speaking as an outsider who visits with a lot of students, Penny says that she can tell which students are shown love and which ones are not. She related the word *love* to *safe*. “You can tell a lot of times, not all the time, when children feel safe. The word love can mean a lot of things. And I feel like a big component of love is them feeling safe. And, to me, they have to be able to feel safe to fail. They have to feel safe to try. They have to feel safe to share of themselves; it can even mean trying to sound out letters. It can mean sharing their dad got put in jail last night. It can mean sharing that they’ve had an accident. It can just give them the opportunity to be more open with you. And I think love is the cornerstone of that.”

When speaking about self-discipline and self-worth, Penny says, “Some of our students have to re-learn behaviors. We have to help them unlearn misbehaviors that they’ve learned at home and help them relearn appropriate behaviors to be able to have a sense of self-discipline, but that will tie into self-worth and responsibility, dependability, and I think that starts with

showing them we care about them.” She then chose to speak about a boy who was in my class that year: “I can speak specifically to a little boy that’s in your classroom that I have seen a difference in because he feels loved. You can see it in the way he stands, the way he carries himself. You can see it in the way he communicates more openly with other people. I have no idea if he knows what two plus two is, but I know he’s more open with me. I know he is more friendly. I know he has a sense of self-confidence that he did not have last year, and I think it has to do with that. He feels loved. He feels he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that when he’s in your classroom, he is going to face consequences but that are going to be the same consequences every day. It’s not going to matter what your mood is. He knows your consequences are going to be the same and that stability has given him a sense of security, and I think it shows just in his face. And all of that is love.”

Debbie

When Debbie spoke about love in the classroom she said, “I don’t think you can be an effective teacher if you do not love your kids. And if you don’t love your job, it shows on your face. It just does. You’re in the wrong profession.” Then, she spoke about the love being continuous, not just while she is at school. “And you don’t just love them here at school. You take that love home with you and you worry about them at night. You worry. Do they have supper? Well, I wonder, you know, where are they sleeping tonight? Are they warm? Are they going to have clean clothes to wear tomorrow? Or, do they have a winter coat? And you know, when they’re not here, you don’t forget about them. They go home with you mentally and you just think about them all the time. You can’t teach and not love. I mean, it goes together hand in hand because you’ve got to love these babies.”

Debbie then told a story about her fifth grade teacher and how she showed her love even though she was “probably the poorest one in the classroom”. She talks about her loving the teacher because she knew the teacher loved her. “I would look for things so I could go to her desk.” “My fifth grade teacher inspired me so much. And she showed me love, and she would tell me all the time what a great teacher I would be one day and all this. And that’s stuck with me.”

Hannah

When speaking about classroom management, Hannah spoke about love. “Loving them. I feel like as soon as they realize that you really love them, they’ll do anything for you.” Speaking about love between student and teacher, Hannah said, “They know it. They know if you don’t love them. They know if you don’t like them. They’re just not going to perform as well. They’re not going to want to come to school. I mean, to me, that’s just the craziest thing ever. If you don’t love them, you’re just in the wrong profession.” Reflecting on how she loves her students that she gets to teach, Hannah says, “I love on them, I do. I baby them and people say that all the time that I baby them to death, but at least they know for that 45 minutes that I really do care about them.” When speaking about discipline being a part of love she says, “And love and discipline goes hand in hand. That’s so learning can take place.”

Teaching Is a Spiritual Calling

Another occurring theme was that teaching is a spiritual calling. This theme kept emerging with all four educator interviews, some more than others. Debbie said that she “always wanted to be a teacher growing up. I knew I was good at reading. I knew that school came easy for me. But, growing up I always knew in my heart that I wanted to be a teacher”. She added that God was the reason she became a teacher: “If we ask, God leads our path.” Then, Debbie

mentions that she got put into education classes by mistake because she didn't know if she might want to be a type of office worker because she enjoyed typing. She says that "she was too bashful and shy to ask them if I was in the wrong classes, so I stayed in them. And, I know that was God directing my path and telling me." She again mentions her fifth grade teacher as the inspiration behind her wanting to someday be a teacher. She feels like all of it was a calling.

Similarly, Tammy and Hannah both spoke about enjoying being around kids and that is what led them to go down the journey to become a teacher. Hannah says, "I wanted to be some sort of pediatric nurse or anything with kids because I love kids and wanted to help. And, I went into college and one year I hated biology. And, then I went and talked to a counselor, and they were like, why don't you try teaching? And, I did and I just loved it." When elaborating on her opinion of teachers who display love in their classrooms, Tammy says, "You can't generate that. You either have it or you don't." She is speaking about the gift or calling that teachers have or do not have. She goes on to say, "There are only so many things you can teach somebody. The other stuff is innate." Some of this was said in the last section, but it goes along well with this section as well so some of it was repeated.

Going back to the true calling, Tammy speaks more about radical love, "When someone is around it and sees that, it does influence them. So, yes, I think they can see it in other teachers and that does help people, but I can't say that a hundred percent. I do feel like there are some that it's not within them to do that because for whatever reason they are people who have had difficulties and struggles and all of that. And you know the saying, hurt people hurt people. You just either got to care about them (the students) or you don't, and you need to find a new profession." Speaking more about the spiritual calling and love, Tammy then adds, "Once you understand that significance, it does, it changes everything and it changes your perspective."

For Penny, she talks about being called to the field of education because “a lot of people in my family are teachers, and then I loved school when I was in elementary school. And, so, I think it just kind of seemed like a natural fit because I didn’t really even think about anything else. I just kind of thought that’s where I need to be”. Then, she talks about being called to transition from a teacher to a counselor, “I just found myself led more and more to wanting to talk to the children more about why they were feeling a certain way as opposed to what two plus two was, and so I think it was just a natural progression for me.”

Showing Love to Those Who Don’t Know What True Love Is

A discussion about showing love to students who don’t know what true love is was also an occurring theme. It occurred with all four educators’ interviews , but especially with Penny. Speaking of students who may come from less fortunate homes when it comes to love, Tammy says, “If they do come from a home where they don’t get that, the right kind of love or that amount or that attention or whatever they need, that’s why I think teachers can be, can have such an influence because they see that. And, for some of them, it does change their life.” Speaking about feeling true love in the classroom, Penny says, “If they feel that (love) from you, some of our kids have never felt that, they don’t know what being safe is. They don’t know what being loved in the manner that I’m correlating it to safe. They don’t know what that means. Their love may be skewed. They’re getting hit at home. They’re getting beaten at home. They’re getting degraded at home, and to them that’s love. And so for us to show them what true love is, I think enables them to be able to open up to us and I feel like that’s just a cornerstone in them being able to be successful in your classroom.” She then went on to tell a story about a girl opening up to her and another counselor about being raped and that she had been working with this student for two years. “I feel like it took a year and a half to be able to instill in her the fact that we do

care about her and that she can trust us and that we will both believe her. And, in my mind, all of that is love. She had to believe that we would love her. For this year, she had been putting test after test to us, for I feel like, to see if she could trust us.”

Debbie likened showing love to classroom management. “To me, management is showing those kids, each child in that room, that they are the most important thing in that classroom. And, you got to do it with each child. Like that child is the most important person in the classroom. And, I just have tried my best to do that when they start talking or something. I try my best to give them full attention and they know that I’m going to.” She then compares praise to showing love. “Just show them praise. You know, even if they mess up or get in trouble for something, tell them something positive they’ve done. They know that you’re going to notice them.”

After this discussion, Debbie begins talking specifically about the students at our rural school. “These kids at this school are hungry to be noticed. And I can just see it on their little face that they want to be noticed so bad. And most kids do, but there’s something about this school. These little kids, if you just praise them a little bit and notice them and notice their clothes. You say something positive, whether their clothes are dirty, whether their shoes are dirty, no matter what. Their hair is dirty. Find something. Find something and tell them every day. Always listen to their voice every day.” Debbie was speaking about children at our school who may not get true love and attention at home due to their home life and various less fortunate situations. Hannah equates showing true, radical love to students as praise. “I’m always trying to smile or hug them or greet them. Just listen to them. Tell them good morning, lots of praise.”

Making A Connection with Students

Another theme that frequently reoccurred was making connections and using relatedness with students, making sure every student knows they belong and are a special part of the group. Tammy started out by saying that an automatic connection that teachers can make with their students is having a good relationship with that student's parents. "If you have a good relationship with your parents, it's easier to have a good relationship with the kids. You have to know that you're their cheerleader and they're the person that's going to take care of them." She added to this concerning positive relationships: "I think you can directly impact behavior, effort, grades, everything, when the kids know that you care about them and they matter to you. I mean, some kids you can get just about to do anything, if they know that you care about them and want the best for them. You can have all the skills and all the knowledge to teach, but if you don't have that part (positive relationship), the success level is minimized greatly." She added a principal's perspective from being an outsider and still knowing which teachers have positive relationships with their students. "It's weird from this perspective because you see it—a child who's never been in trouble for two or three years, and then they get into a teacher's class. And, there's obviously not that relationship, and you start seeing all of these issues."

Tammy then tells a story about a teacher she used to work with who made a difference in a child's life because of positive relationship and connection. "They had been in the office every day from kindergarten through second grade, and they got in this teacher's third grade classroom and never made another trip to the office. So, I do think some people just have that gift and they just let the kids know through everything they do, that they care about them and the kid's success is their success." After this story, she tells another that she personally was involved in on the day of the interview, earlier in the day. "I spent my first hour and a half today from 7 to 8:30, dealing with a new child that we have. And we met with the dad for an hour and a half yesterday

afternoon, and he's having issues in class. This morning he and I kind of developed a relationship. I feel like now he's making an effort because he knows I care about him. It's going to take that effort from all of us and that kid's cooperation, too, for him to be successful."

Speaking about connections, Tammy said, "I think teachers can establish that in their classrooms, and that's what makes kids want to come to school. They feel a part of something." Penny spoke about connecting with all of your students, even though some are harder to connect with than others. "And so sometimes, if we're all being very honest, it's harder to connect with certain children and you might have to search for just something that you can connect with them on, be it a cartoon or a sport or a favorite color, or just something to let them know that you do have this little connection with them and that they are special to you. And I think just searching for that thing. I mean, we're all just being a human naturally drawn to certain personalities. And, those kids are the easy ones. You know, you connect with them, they connect with you, and then, let's go. But some of them, you have to really search for that because, you know, if I don't have that connection with you, I just, I don't think they're going to do as well as they could." Penny also spoke quite a bit in the interviews about playing with students outside on the playground or taking students outside to learn, and doing other fun, exciting things with them to further develop those relationships.

Debbie continues again telling the story of her and her fifth grade teacher, and the efforts that teacher made to develop a relationship with Debbie and make her feel special—efforts that Debbie now makes today to make her students feel seen and special. "We see that here with our kids. They search for a reason to get out of their seat to come ask you something, to show you something. I would do the same thing. I grew up in a really strict religious home where I had to wear dresses all the time. And, I would untie my belt just so I could go stand by her because I

knew she loved me and she was going to tie my belt and that she was going to give me a hug while I was up there, that kind of thing. One time I pretended I had something in my eye just so she would touch my face. Hmm. I remember that. And, she did. She was looking all in and she couldn't find anything, of course.” Hannah sees her ESOL teaching position as extra special because: “There’s lots of pros about it, but two, I thought I can touch 32 kids, right, as opposed to 24. I know I only see them for a little bit, but I can be a positive influence to them or a positive role model. Like what I do in those 45 minutes can matter for them.” She values seeing more students so that she can develop more relationships than what a regular classroom teacher can.

Finding the Courage to Return to Teach

There were several opportunities where we discussed these teachers having the courage to return to teach and what makes them keep coming back. It appeared more often for Debbie and Hannah. Hannah says, “I like to keep coming back and doing this job. I feel like we’re always changing. This year, especially, I’ve dealt with some really difficult behavior problems in kindergarten, and I believe it’s because of the pandemic. The behavior that I’ve seen this year I’ve not seen in the whole seven years that I’ve done this ESOL drop-in with kindergarten. But, I’m learning from it. You know, we can only get better and every kid is just different. And, what works for one kid, it just might not work for the other kid. I feel like I’m always learning. I love this job because I get to watch all of them (other teachers). I’ll learn something from one teacher when I’m in there, but then I learn a lot of things from another teacher, which we’re very different.” The challenges from the pandemic keep Hannah coming back to the challenges that lie before her because she wants to figure out how to help kids in the way they learn best and

cater to their unique needs. Another reason she keeps coming back is because she loves learning from other teachers.

Debbie said what keeps her coming back after 38 years is “the love I feel for these kids, and I still feel like I have something to offer them and they have something to offer me. A hug around the neck, a smile, you know, and I know what it’s like personally to grow up in the same situations as some of these kids. Matter of fact, we were probably even more poor because we didn’t have a bathroom in our house till I was 12 years old, or running water”. Debbie then talks about her future. “This is my 38th year teaching and my only regret, I can look at you right now and say, that my only regret is that I wish I had 38 more. I love it. They’ll tell me one day I’m too old, I know. They’ll probably tell me I’m too old school or something, I know that. But, I absolutely can’t imagine me being anywhere else. It’s a lot of fun. And, you know, that’s something else, you got to have fun in there too.”

Tammy speaks about being a principal and why she kept returning each day, even after being in education for more than 30 years. “I never in a million years thought I would enjoy this side of it. But, then after you've been in it for a while, you kind of see it in a different light and I wanted to experience this part of it. And I enjoy working with a lot of people, not just, you know, when you're in the classroom, it's you and your 20 kids or whatever, and you have a little collaboration with other teachers, but it's totally different from this aspect. And, I get to work with teachers, kids, parents, which is not always, you know, fun, but, I enjoy it and I enjoy solving problems. Like, you know, there's a conflict then you got to figure out how to make it doable for everybody.” Penny has courage to keep returning because she enjoys helping children with their feelings through play, humor, connections, as well as serious conversations that arise from being a counselor. “I myself use humor to create a sense of community. I think when we

do silly things like dressing in your favorite color, or wearing a hat or something, and you can talk about it. Oh, I like that football team, or that's my favorite color, just little things like that. The other day I was talking to a little girl in first grade and she's the baby in her family. And, so I just said, oh I'm the baby. And, I said the principal is the baby in her family and the receptionist is the baby in her family. I said, we're like a little club. Well, two days after that I saw her in PE and she said, I sure am glad we have that club. So, just, you know, little things of just including them in whatever helps them feel comfortable here and feel safe and feel included. You never know how simple that's going to be. That's so big in their mind, you know?" Penny also added, "To look at these children and realize you have absolutely no idea what they went through last night or this morning, and that for eight to nine hours that we have them here, it's our responsibility to put whatever in the world we're going through in our own lives on the back burner, and make it the best day for that kid that's possible."

Teaching Apart from the Required Curriculum

The last set of data that reappeared was the subject of teaching apart from the required curriculum. Tammy reflects on her past ways of teaching before all the hustle and bustle of required curriculums took over the teaching world. She believes this way of teaching should still exist today. "This was back when school wasn't like it is now. And, you had a lot more freedom and time to address other things. We would have what was called circle time. There was a few minutes, maybe 10 minutes a day, all the kids just sit around and like to talk about anything they wanted to talk about, that they were comfortable talking about. And, you know, they just kind of learned how to support each other and talk to each other. Now, unfortunately, I wouldn't have an issue if we still did that, but I know time is a factor and we're all about academics, which I support that as well, but I think we're wasting our time trying to get the academics if we don't

have that, first establishing that. That's how it establishes the community, and the kids felt a part of something."

When asked more about love and teaching about life, Tammy replied, "I do feel like we've lost that, that we've put so much pressure on teachers about test scores and those kinds of things. And, so, that's kind of been lost. I mean, we used to talk about saying please, and thank you, and how you reacted to certain things, and what's the appropriate way to do this. And, the other issue you have with that too, is there's no moral absolutes anymore. It's not, this is the right way to do something, and this is the wrong way. But yeah, that should be part of your everyday teaching. And, you can incorporate it into other things that you do, but it takes planning. It takes skill, it takes a little extra effort to do, but it certainly can be done, very successfully."

Debbie speaks about using teaching methods other than what is required by the curriculum. "You've got to meet each individual child at their level, where they're at. You've got to be involved. You've got to be right on them, involved with everything they are doing and I mean, kids know that. Change is not always the best thing. Sometimes we got to go back to old school and we got to get out those flash cards or we got to get those sentence strips or spelling words, and whatever. Write the spelling words, write the multiplication facts. This works sometimes with kids and some kids need that. I think until we do, we are going to see a gap in our students, until we get back to some of that old school handwriting, the way we learned. I'm not saying it's the teacher's fault; I'm saying the curriculum that they're required to teach now does not include some of that basic stuff that the children need. It's just like they're skipping all these steps trying to accomplish the same things, but they aren't getting it

accomplished because they skipped all these things that they didn't find necessary or something."

For Hannah, she saw how the curriculum needs to be set aside sometimes because of the effects the pandemic. "I feel like the pandemic really showed us that we can't just use those stinking computers. We just can't. We need to go back, it's not the best thing sometimes. Which is crazy, because before the pandemic we thought technology was the end all be all. We all used it; we were forced to use it, but really, like a pendulum, right? We've kind of swung back around to paper/pencil and read alouds and up teaching, which I really like it. That's the way I want to learn. I'd much rather see a pencil in their hand than a screen in their face."

Penny spoke more about taking students outside to learn more than being inside most of the day with the curriculum. "Every day I loved my kids and we had a ball together. Now, I taught a long, long time ago, so we made ice cream, and we made slime. And, like I said, we would play, kick ball all the time with the kids. We had a lot of fun together."

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS ON INQUIRY: A CURRICULUM OF AGAPE LOVE

In my ethnographic inquiry, I studied the passion, compassion, radical love, spirituality, and relatedness that educators possess at the school where I teach in rural northwest Georgia. Theoretically my dissertation draws upon three bodies of literature such as critical pedagogy, (e.g. Darder, 2007, 2009, 2015, 2016, 2018; Freire, 1987, 1998, 2000, 2019; Giroux, 2010, 2018; hooks, 1994, 2001), radical love, (e.g., Ayers, 2004, 2016; Darder, 2007, 2009, 2015, 2016, 2018; Freire, 1987, 1998, 2000, 2019; Nieto, 2003, 2005; King, Jr., 1957,1963; Schubert, 2010), and self-determination theory (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2001, 2002).

The literature assisted me in gaining understanding of the emotions and stress teachers experience while still returning to teach with passion, compassion, courage, and love. Furthermore, the literature provided understanding for thinking critically in the classroom and developing motivation, specifically focusing on relatedness. Methodologically, I used ethnographic inquiry (Marcus, 1998) to gather observations and interviews of teachers' experiences in the classroom, as well as their beliefs and values. I used observations and interviews to defend my critical views of what teaching with compassion, passion, radical love, spirituality, and relatedness looks like in a classroom. Through careful selection, I chose educators from the school where I teach who possess the aforementioned qualities. During the interview process, teachers shared passionate evidence of how they operate in their classrooms to produce positive relationships with their students. It was also evident in the observations that I performed where I had the opportunity to see their positive characteristics on display. These

interviews show that teaching without these qualities, most important being radical love, is inexistent. I used Process and Values coding (Saldaña, 2009, 2016) after transcribing the interviews. My literature review matches up with the content of the interviews because they both highlight the importance of a healthy teacher-student relationship for successful learning to occur.

This last chapter of my dissertation presents my findings with reviewing my literature review and tie in the interview data to the literature, creating a connection between practice and theory.

Findings

The following four findings have resulted from my dissertation inquiry: (1) Teachers, especially new teachers, should observe veteran teachers to learn more about teaching with passion, compassion, agape/radical love, relatedness, spirituality, and courage. (2) There is a need for courage to teach away from the curriculum in today's restrictive public school environment. (3) Teaching with agape/radical love is crucial for both the teacher and the student. (4) It only takes one teacher in a child's life to plant the seed of agape love and make a difference.

Finding 1

Choosing veteran teachers for this study enabled me to learn from my peers who have more experience than me—in all areas. Because of this knowledge that I have gained, I believe that teachers, especially new teachers, should observe veteran teachers to learn about ways of teaching that cannot be taught, such as passion, compassion, agape/radical love, relatedness, spirituality, and courage. However, the experience cannot just be with *any* veteran teacher; it must be with a positive veteran teacher who displays passion, compassion, love, and courage for

their school and students. I agree thoroughly with what Hannah said about learning from other teachers. “I love this job because I get to see all of them (teachers). I get to watch all of them teach and like, I’ll learn something from one teacher when I’m in there, but then, I learn a lot of things from another teacher, which we’re very different. But, I feel like I’ve picked up on so many things she does. That’s one of my favorite things about this position is I can go in and watch all of those teachers and watch all of them teach, and think, oh that was good! I want to do that! Then, I’m always changing because they’re always changing.” Hannah also mentions that “a long time ago” we got to observe other teachers, and adds, “I get to everyday!”

I believe that teachers should be given the time and opportunity from their administration to observe other teachers. This year, we have gotten to observe other teachers. We had to choose a grade level teacher different from the one we teach and observed two teachers, two different times for around 15-20 minutes. I believe this practice is vital for showing other teachers what teaching with compassion, passion, and radical/agape love looks like. If a principal knows that a teacher in her building is struggling in an area related to compassion, passion, and radical love, that teacher should be given the opportunity to visit a veteran teacher’s classroom to see this type of teaching in action. Principals know who in their building teaches in this manner. This is evidenced in the interviews with Tammy, an elementary school principal. Far too long are teachers going to college to become teachers and are only harnessing the knowledge and academic side of it, and any veteran teacher could tell someone, it takes much more than just knowledge or skill. This is why I believe that teaching is a calling and a gift. Like Tammy said, “I don’t think you can generate that. You either have it or you don’t. It comes down to, there are only so many things you can teach somebody. The other stuff is innate.” However, as stated before, some teachers may not feel like teaching is a calling, or

maybe don't relate it to a spiritual experience, and I respect that belief. Some teachers may teach because they simply enjoy it. My findings here are rooted in the emerging themes that I found from the interviews, from the personal experiences and motivations of the participants, and what they view as being of importance.

I don't believe that co-planning is enough. Teachers need to be in other teachers' classrooms learning from each other as much as possible, observing real-life situations and learning experiences. This will take ample planning from the administration, but I believe it would be crucial and worth it for the betterment of the school faculty and building morale. Teachers don't get many opportunities to develop relationships with one another and this would be a great way to bond. Bonding helps form positive relationships of agape love (Loreman, 2011). Tammy speaks about how teachers can tell radical/agape love from other teachers. The question was posed if she thought that all teachers are capable of displaying agape love for students. "I think they can see it in other teachers and that does help people. But, I can't say that a hundred percent. It helps to see and watch other people who have a very good example of that. You just either got to care about them or you don't, and you need to find a new profession."

This research adds to the literature review. Freire & Macedo (1987) speak about learning to read the word and the world. Just knowing facts, knowledge, and skill is not enough. One must learn acquire innate knowhow about the world, and life in general. This type of expertise is gained through experience and day-to-day teaching from one year to the next. The ones who keep going are called, the ones who give up never had the gift or lost the gift along the way. Like I stated earlier in this dissertation, education should entail teaching and fostering the emotions and soul of the individual, as well as what the individual can offer to others (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Effective education should center around dialogue and understanding between

each other, i.e. sharing ideas, teaching students to carry respectful discourse, and celebrating differences and similarities. Teachers should be able to learn from one another. First, they should be open to learn from one another, and second, they should be rewarded the opportunities and time to learn from one another.

This also connects with Goodwin's (2015) work about changing schools from the inside out. As stated earlier, successful businesses like Southwest Airlines, Apple, and Google do not even run their businesses like the businesses of old; instead they motivate their employees by providing a sense of autonomy and working alongside their employees to help them grow as individuals (Goodwin, 2015). Teachers will gain autonomy when they feel like they are needed and can experience growth. I am not speaking of growth in knowledge and how to teach academics, I am speaking of personal growth that deals with passion, compassion, love, relatedness, spirituality, and courage. Teachers should be mentors to each other (Beck, Lunsman, & Garza, 2020). Retention is best when teachers have autonomy with each other and have success learning from one another. This helps to create a positive school culture and environment.

Especially during these post-pandemic, uncertain times, teachers need to lean on each other and learn from one another. Teachers need to find out what internal and external values bring them joy and share with others, because it may help them sustain and continue returning, too (Carrillo & Flores, 2017). To someone, a word of advice may sound simple, but to another, it could be the catalyst that gets them through the day, week, month, or year(s). A simple word of encouragement might be what sustains them and keeps them returning. After all, agape love is unconditional love that seeks to serve others. I try to ask myself daily, "How can I be of

service to someone today? How can I lift them up and make their day better?” It is very challenging to find time to do that during the school day, but the time must be found.

Finding 2

There is a need for courage to teach away from the curriculum in today’s restrictive public school environment. Teachers spoke about how the curriculum has gotten us far away from what really matters and what should be taught. People who have never been in the classroom are designing our school curriculum (Green, 2010). All four teachers spoke about how things used to be and how they still should be because of the gaps that are left by the required curriculum. Tammy spoke about “circle time”. “There was a few minutes, maybe 10 minutes a day, all the kids, just sit around and talk about anything they wanted to talk about, that they were comfortable talking about. And, you know, they just kind of learned how to support each other and talk to each other. Now, unfortunately, I wouldn’t have an issue if we still did that, but I know time is a factor and we’re all about academics, which I support that as well, but I think we’re wasting our time trying to get the academics if we don’t have that, first establishing that. That’s how it establishes the community, and the kids felt a part of something.” When asked more about love and teaching about life in general, Tammy added, “I do feel like we’ve lost that, that we’ve put so much pressure on teachers about test scores and those kinds of things. And, so, that’s kind of been lost.”

Educators are realizing that what is being required to be taught is not all that should be taught (Shapiro, 2006). Penny and Debbie believe there should be more time to play while learning, indoors and out. Relationships can easily be formed through play—that is, play between the teacher and student. Penny and Debbie both say in their interviews that teachers should have the courage to play with their students. There should be more opportunities for

students to learn outside and have more fun inside than the oppressive curriculum allows. This connects with Fien's (1991) work about environmental education. In my literature review, I stated that today's curriculum should include education for the environment, specifically, education aimed at teaching children to respect their environment and to be responsible for caring for the environment and its resources. Also, through learning with and through the environment, children are able to awaken their spiritual and emotional side and take in all that nature has to offer while learning at the same time, which connects with Miller's (2006) work about education and the soul. Curriculums should not only include academics, but spirituality and nature as well. Children are not made to sit indoors all of the time. They were made to roam, explore, discover, and be curious (Bonnett, 2007). Children deserve to learn through exploration and connecting with nature as well as play and whole body movement. As mentioned in the literature review, Rangel (2017) says that there should be a balance that involves a pedagogy of play.

In another light, the curriculum does not seem to take into account the students who are struggling and have fallen behind because it does not teach the basics (Wexler, 2020). There seem to be fundamental holes in the curriculum and students are falling through the cracks. Debbie and Hannah spoke about how technology in the classroom is hindering student learning for those who need intensive teaching, teaching that involves more paper and pencil, as well as other tools and learning manipulatives than a screen. Debbie put it best when she said, "Change is not always the best thing. We've got to get back to that (more paper and pencil learning versus what the curriculum says to do). I think until we do, we are going to see a gap in our students. We have students leaving our classroom right now that still don't know their last name, much less how to write or spell it. I'm not saying it's the teacher's fault. I'm saying the

curriculum that they're required to teach now does not include some of that basic stuff that children need. It's just like they're skipping all these steps, trying to accomplish the same things, but they aren't getting it accomplished because they skipped all these things that they didn't find necessary." I can see this in my own classroom. Students may know how to count to 100, but can't tie their shoes. Students might can read, but can't put on a jacket the correct way. Students may know what the capital of each state is, but can't accurately form letters and numbers. Those are just a very few examples of what is witnessed in today's classroom, at my school anyway, due to mandated curriculums. If teachers are not involved in the curriculum development, more and more gaps will be there (Alsubaie, 2016).

Furthermore, teachers must plan when technology time is appropriate during the school day, when it is not, and recognize when there is too much of it. If it does not serve a purpose of helping an at-risk student get to where they need to be academically, then it is a waste of time and is harming the student (Hannafin & Savenye, 1993). Likewise, students are becoming more reliant on the computer than their teacher, which can cause anxiety and depression (Deweese, 2014). It seems that technology use in the classroom has become more rampant since the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, the district in which I teach was allotted one-to-one Google Chromebooks for each student in the district for at home learning. Due to all of that learning at home through a screen, students have become more reliant and obsessed with screens. Their cognitive ability to learn through other means has lowered from this crisis and students were more isolated in their learning (Sage, Jackson, Fox, & Mauer, 2021). Now, teachers are having to fill in the gaps. However, technology is not the answer to filling in those gaps. It takes a teacher with dedication, passion, compassion, courage, and love to meet the student where they are and take them where they need to be by relating to the student and finding a connection.

If a teacher possesses unconditional love for their students, they won't let them struggle. They will do whatever it takes to get that student where he or she needs to be, even if that means straying from what the curriculum tells them to do. Veteran teachers know what the best practices are for students, and will use the skills they have acquired from experience to allow all of their students to be successful, caught up, and ready to enter the next grade level. Teachers must have courage to teach at the individual student's level, and not worry about what the curriculum says to do, but worrying about what is best for that individual child. This goes back to the first piece of inquiry and is another reason why veteran teachers need to be observed, so that new teachers can realize that they too can have the courage to veer off and do what is right and just for the student, to not be afraid of what policymakers enforce, to follow their intuition, passion, and love for the student. Teaching should not be about scores and standards, but more about growth and learning (Schlein, 2015). Growth should be celebrated, and truly called teachers realize this. Seeing a student finally understand something is what teaching is all about. It's how teachers increase the love, gratification, and satisfaction they have for their students. It's what satisfies their soul and keeps them coming back for more.

The reader should know that just because a teacher's soul is satisfied at times and that they continue coming back to teach does not mean that this job is easy. Teaching is not easy, as evidenced from the words of this dissertation, specifically in the Epilogue section of this dissertation. When teachers realize their disposition of courage, they feel like they can conquer any day; any day that is a struggle can be worked through because of a deep, developed sense of courage that comes from experience and support from other teachers. Teachers confront not only the challenges of imparting knowledge, but also the complexities of the diverse needs of their students, societal pressures, and institutional constraints. This disposition of courage is

evident in teachers' willingness to advocate for their students, stand up against injustices, and foster inclusive classroom communities where every voice is heard. Furthermore, teachers often take emotional risks by sharing their own vulnerabilities, which in turn cultivates a safe space for students to authentically express themselves. In this uncertain era where educational challenges are ever-evolving, it is the courage of the teachers that inspires resilience, promotes critical thinking, and empowers future generations to navigate an increasingly complex world.

Finding 3

Teaching with agape love is crucial for both the teacher and the student. This piece of inquiry connects with Colonna & Stevenson's (2013) literature in that if a teacher has radical love inside of them, then they are able to love all and serve all. If teachers love all and serve all, they are going to be more likely to have the courage to return to teach. They will strive to see the good in all and share the good within them with their coworkers and students. Likewise, if a student is given agape love by their teacher, and taught how to love, they will love their teachers and peers, as well as enjoy going to school each day (Gest, Welsh, & Domitrovich, 2005). Being a teacher who uses radical love in daily life at school is someone who is humble, yet assertive. This concept connects with Martin Luther King Jr.'s (1963) work where he speaks about having the strength to love. Having unconditional love is not easy sometimes, maybe most times in some situations. However, by having the strength to love, one pursues and choose to show humility and empathy, even when they believe someone may not deserve it, they choose it anyway.

If one is being honest with themselves and others, they will admit that some people are harder to love than others. In my interview research, Tammy tells a story about a student drawing all over the wall in the office hallway one day. "He was supposed to be working and I

was on the phone. I went back out there and he had just scribbled all over the wall in crayon. So, I said, what are you doing? I said, do you draw on your walls at home? And he said, yeah.” This is an example of students who are harder for teachers to love, but there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Speaking from personal experience, if the teacher will just find something to connect with the student on and develop that positive relationship, the teacher will find they have renewed patience, understanding, and empathy, which to me is radical, agape love—loving others despite their flaws or differences. If teachers will stick with it and not give up on students, they will see that they will have an impact on students, and students will achieve and succeed (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort As Tammy added, “You might not see it as soon as you want to, but it will.”

Having agape love in the classroom is crucial for relationships to flourish (Dennis, 2012). Penny speaks about a teacher’s mood, lack of sleep, etc. as not interfering with her love for her students, as well as struggling to love students who have behavior issues: “Sometimes, if we’re all being honest, it’s harder to connect with certain children. We’re all just being a human, naturally drawn to certain personalities.” “He (a boy in my class who exhibits issues with behavior) is going to face consequences, but they are going to be the same consequences every day. It’s not going to matter what your mood is. It’s not going to matter if you didn’t get sleep last night. He knows your consequences are going to be the same and that stability has given him a sense of security.” Going on to how all teachers show love differently because we all are drawing from our own experiences and how we see the world: “I think every person is capable of displaying love, but I think we all show it differently. I think we all draw from our own experiences. Like I was saying, some of our kids don’t know the word, they don’t understand what love really is. Those kids grow up into adults and some children become adults that have

been mistreated, become teachers. I think teachers that are successful are able to show love.” She goes on to speak about different personalities, “You’re quiet and reserved, and I am very loud and sarcastic. We show things differently based on our personalities... but that doesn’t mean that I am loving a student in a more or less way.” I agree with Penny on further down in her interview when she says that she believes that effective administrators place students with teachers that they know will mesh well together. Similar personalities usually get along better with one another. One teacher may be able to love a student more because their personalities are alike, versus a teacher and student with two different personalities on the opposite end of the spectrum.

When a teacher exhibits agape love for her students, which can be viewed as relating to them, making them feel welcome, seen, heard, and understood, the students will respect the teacher and student engagement will increase more and more. Students will do almost anything for a teacher if they know the teacher truly cares about and loves them (hooks, 2001). This is evident in my interviews with all four educators. They each told about how students will be motivated and perform for the teacher if they feel loved, liked, and praised, as well as have a sense of belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This piece of inquiry connects with Fried & Konza’s (2013) study about using self-determination theory to produce student engagement. The aspects of motivation and relatedness go hand in hand (Stringam, 2022). If a teacher connects and relates with her students, the motivation has been provided. That’s not counting the innate motivation that the student already possessed. Then, at that point, the sky is the limit for how much the relationship will flourish and how successful the student will be, as well as how fulfilled the teacher will be. It works both ways. Love begets love. Positive student-teacher relationships benefit the teacher’s job satisfaction (Veldman, Tartwijk, Brekelmans, & Wubbels,

2013). It works the other way too, however. If a teacher does not respect, relate to, and love her students, motivation will dwindle, and in some students will be almost nonexistent.

Finding 4

Throughout this research journey, I have learned that it only takes one teacher to make a true and lasting difference in a child's life. This one teacher and the agape love that she provides, along with having the passion, compassion, and courage to teach, can be compared to a seed. It only takes one seed to grow a tree. It is something remarkable to ponder upon that thought. Something so large, grand, and majestic came from only one seed. It is the same type of impact with a teacher in a child's life—it only takes one teacher to connect with a child and plant the seed of love. Children can grow up to be successful young adults from the impact made from one teacher, one teacher who believes in a child and works diligently to connect with the child and give them all the support and love they need to grow and prosper (Kaufman, 2017). Imagine if all of the teacher's in one student's life were truly loving and supportive, how strong and resilient that child could possibly be, just like a mature oak tree.

It only takes one teacher to notice a child and something they are good at, something that the teacher can find to compliment a child on. It could even be something so simple, but it ends up being so big in the child's mind. I once heard a story about a teacher that noticed that a boy always tapped his fingers on his desk in class. Instead of being annoyed by the boy, the teacher told the boy to meet him after class. The boy, realizing he may have been tapping too much, thought he was going to be in trouble with the teacher. Turns out, the teacher told the boy that his tapping was his gift and that one day he could use his gift for a big, important purpose. That same boy never forgot that his teacher told him that and grew up to be a successful drummer as his profession. This story proves that if students feel valued by just one teacher, what an

outcome they can have in their life. This type of value is also evidenced in Debbie's story about her fifth grade teacher. She is a teacher today because she never forgot how her teacher made her feel and how she inspired her. I know that I can look back on my own schooling and feel a sense of pride, not just for my achievements, but because I had loving, caring teachers who believed in me and took the time to make me feel special.

Agape love is both a "subtle and pervasive" influence in the classroom (Stern, 2008, p. 199). It can be felt upon entering a classroom and noticing how pleasant and welcoming it is, yet it can also be observed in the way which a teacher speaks to their students, or their body language toward a student. Both ways influence those who observe the classroom, yet the students are influenced in both ways the most out of anyone in the school. The more a teacher connects and praises her students, the more the seed will root and catch on to the student's heart, soul, and spirit. Especially in early childhood education, if the teacher expresses love for their students, the students will in turn express love to their peers (Shih, 2021). Yet, the love will also embed itself into the student's mind in an everlasting way because the student will never forget how a teacher made them feel, especially if those feelings are positive and loving.

Taking the seed concept a bit further, one can consider the parable in the Bible about the sower and the seed found in Matthew 13 (Ham, 2011). It was only when the seed fell on good ground that it could take root and bring forth good fruit. At first, it may seem to a teacher like they are trying to sow a seed on hard or stony ground with a student who needs time to trust the teacher, or has things they need to unlearn or relearn. The teacher has to help the student produce fertile ground by connecting and building a relationship with them. The teacher must prepare the ground and construct the right foundation before what she says and does will take root with students. When a teacher loves a student, the student begins to trust the teacher, that's

when the right, fertile ground has been reached. The teacher has to plow the ground to make it fertile. Plowing is not easy, it takes time and patience to get through to a student and get them to trust, but the growth and harvest is worth it all.

Future Research

My dissertation has several possibilities for future research. First, the positive and affirming results of my research prove to other researchers and educators that change through oppression and restrictions is not only possible but highly valuable and successful in student achievement. The research is evident to readers of this dissertation that any classroom teacher is capable of the agape love that my work speaks of, agape love for each student, as well as coworkers. The evidence shows that a public school classroom teacher can experience success and fulfillment that comes from being courageous. Courage, based in agape love, that leads the teacher to be bold and make changes and decisions that they truly believe in, despite the required curriculum and standardized testing in an uncertain time (Ciamarra, 2011). Teachers need the support of their administrators and community stakeholders for this change to truly take place, but teachers can start the change today and now in their own classrooms.

The results were positive between a principal, counselor, and two veteran teachers. They all seemed to have similar teaching and learning philosophies. In other ethnographical inquiries that were researched in my dissertation, they too had positive results. Another layer of research would need to be done on how to further connect with students of other ethnicities and cultures. The main ethnicity of our school is students from a white, rural north Georgian background. It would be interesting to conduct interviews on what passion, compassion, and love entail with students strictly from other cultures who may speak another language, or with teachers from varying cultures and backgrounds. My dissertation has proved that a more “wholistic”

curriculum benefits not only all students, but the teachers as well. Plus, the fact that this study is solely about a rural north Georgia elementary school adds several other layers.

This research allows other teachers to see the possibilities that can occur within their own classrooms from common, ordinary veteran classroom teachers and educators. This research proves that not only are these veteran educators successful in their classrooms and schools, but through the interviews, the individual teacher data is revealed. The revealed data allows myself and the reader to see the types of success that teachers and students experience through passion, compassion, courage, radical love, relatedness, and spirituality. I enjoyed how enthusiastic and detailed the participants were to my study. It further encouraged me to find my why again and continue to return to teach, that is, to teach in the way that I know is best for each of my students through love. Furthermore, this dissertation proves to stakeholders the validity and worth of these aforementioned pedagogical practices, and how change is not always best for students and teachers. Curriculum cannot be a one size fits all approach. Each child learns differently and all have differing needs that have to be met. The teacher must meet each of her students at the child's own unique level.

As a veteran classroom teacher of first grade, I can definitely attest that the research I conducted and studied would have been much more doable for me had these types of critical pedagogies and theories been a part of my undergraduate teaching program. Teachers learn how to teach, but they don't learn how to love. Like Tammy said, "You can't teach that. It is innate. You either got it or you don't." However, I do believe that teachers in pre-service programs should be involved in learning about how to best care and love their students through courses that should be offered about critical pedagogy, radical love, and self-determination. It takes a lot out of a teacher to provide the amount of love that they do each day for each student; agape love

has a cost for the giver (Enright, Wang, Rapp, Evans, & Song, 2022). The amount of decision making that is backed by love is exhausting and never ending. Radical love is sacrificial and unselfish, it is not self-seeking (Matthias, 2016). Teachers must take care of themselves in order to refuel and recharge. Teachers must have self-love, in that they love themselves so much that they don't want to be selfish and stagnant, even though it is difficult sometimes to only focus on looking out for yourself (Brugaletta, 1990). Teaching is unlike any other profession, and only those who are in the trenches of it truly understand. We are far too often unsupported by our administrations and district leaders, but love can conquer the feeling of unsupportiveness. Radical love sustains and can transform the educational experience.

The work I have conducted asks teachers to look within themselves and challenge the status quo, expectations, regulations, mandates, policies, any other oppressive teaching situations, and even the lens they use to view the world (Greenway, 2016). Patience, understanding, and perseverance with themselves, their students, other teachers, and anyone they love, will pay off greatly. Any type of relationship that involves agape love, is a dance. There is a lot of give and take, and choosing your battles wisely (Jones, 2000). With endurance, the teacher will begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel that they didn't expect to ever see within themselves. As far as veteran teachers are concerned, keep challenging yourself to become better and not be afraid of change, if that change is keeping you more focused on keeping your why, your love, your freedom, and your courage to keep coming back to teach.

Challenges

My work within this dissertation contains many challenges. For true social justice and change to occur, our approaches in the way we go about educating our students must change. This is a challenge because of all of the pressures of curriculums and testing. Teachers have to

have immense courage to take a leap of faith in doing what's best for students (Agnello, 2016). They have to hope that their courage will lead them in the right direction that won't result in the scrutinization of the teacher. The extremist ideas of the decision makers and those in power remain protected while our teachers remain voiceless and criticized. The blame often gets placed upon the teacher instead of where it rightfully belongs. All the while our children get an incomplete educational experience. Teachers must figure out ways to work around the oppressive curriculum and standardization to get students what they need and get them where they need to be to be successful by filling in the gaps that the curriculum overlooks.

I ask teachers to look within and around their classroom to remove any self-induced stressors. What can a teacher do to relieve herself of some of the stress? Who can a teacher talk to and receive advice from? I would tell them to find a veteran teacher who exhibits compassion, passion, love, and courage and figure out ways to gain freedom in the classroom. Freedom and agape love beckons one to keep returning. Things are always changing in education, and teachers need to be flexible, but that doesn't mean to give up on yourself or to quit doing what you know works just because you feel like a curriculum tells you to. I challenge teachers to always come back to their why, and their why should be their students. The power of love can raise up the human being that is our students and brings about educational justice (Shalaby, 2013). These children need teachers who are not fearful of doing what's right for the sake of the child and their successes. Children are hungry for love and I have learned through experience that they are very receptive to it and listen when love is explicitly talked or read about in the classroom (Howsare, 2006). Many of the students, at the school in which I teach, cry when it is time to go home for summer break. Teachers and administrators in my school attribute the students' sadness to having to part ways from safety and security for three months. At our school, most of the

children know that they will receive endless amounts of love, as well as knowing they won't go hungry when they are at school.

The largest challenge that arose from doing this work was being away from my family and having to work late at night, and for extended amounts of time. This work took quite a bit of literal blood, sweat, and tears. It panged me to have to sacrifice myself to not be able to spend more time with my daughter, who is now four, and my husband. My daughter was only a babe in my womb when I began this intense, yet rewarding journey. This has been a stressful and burdensome workload, but the hard work has finally paid off. I did this for myself, my family, my students, and other teachers. I also did this for a pay raise, which is very deserved with how much overtime I've accumulated in 12 years as a public school teacher. I also did this for my retirement with my family, and that one day, the ultimate reaping, gifts, and blessings that come from this, will go to my daughter and her family. I want my daughter and my family to be proud of me, and I hope my daughter has learned and will continue to learn that she can do hard things. While this work will be rewarding, there is not enough discussion about the draining and exhausting physical, mental, emotional, and monetary challenges that come along with this work. I also experienced great anxiety at times, and sometimes there were moments of depression. When I approached the thought of obtaining my doctoral degree, I only had an inkling of what it would entail and require of me. No one talks about how difficult this process truly is. It takes a lot of sacrificing, working for hours upon hours straight—only taking breaks to eat and use the bathroom, lots of pain medication from sitting at a desk, resulting in a sore back and shoulders, thinking about it constantly, including waking up during all hours of the night with it on your mind, and doing your best to use your time wisely, even when you just want to rest. It takes a very large amount of perseverance, commitment, dedication, and endurance to achieve. The

journey is long and strenuous, with hardships and disappointments along the way. There are also feelings of success on the way, but they seem few and far between until it is finally and totally completed. It takes a long time to finally find the light at the end of the tunnel. Through all of this, I keep coming back to the saying, 'Anything worth doing is not easy.'

Another large challenge was the challenge of finding time; I wish I could have had more time to conduct a more in-depth ethnography. At the same time, I feel like I know our school and coworkers pretty well from working there for 10 years (at the time I am writing this). However, I would have still liked to have been in the classrooms of the veteran teachers more than I was able to in order to gather a bigger snapshot of the happenings inside those classrooms. I realize that the time I spent observing does not reveal the full scope of a complete and total ethnography; I have a very limited amount of data from the observations. The time I had to conduct observations is just a small snippet of time compared to how much more could have been experienced and discovered. The circumstance of my limited time in the classrooms was due to the pressure and expectation of the classroom teacher being in the classroom as much as possible. My principal has set very high expectations for her teachers to be in their classrooms as much as possible, working with students, especially with students who are struggling to learn the content. It would have been discourteous and unempathetic of me to ask my principal to stay out of my classroom for an hour each day for a month or longer. It would cost the district money to have a substitute cover for me that much, and if it wasn't a sub covering for me, the principal would pull a parapro from another classroom to cover for me and that wouldn't be fair to that teacher or her class. Likewise, I would feel guilty for being away from my students, missing out on the time I could be learning with and teaching them.

Continuing with the subject of time limitation, I did not feel comfortable asking the participants to interview more than what I had already asked of them. We are all very busy teachers all day long, especially after school. Unfortunately, because things are so hectic and busy, our planning times are often taken from us during the school day, so it only leaves after school to truly have time to plan. During the day, we are all extremely busy, working from moment to moment to get students on-grade level and prepared to do well on tests and for the upcoming grade level. We are expected to be up out of our teacher desks at all times, working with students diligently and consistently. I would feel terrible to ask the other teachers to meet with me more than what we did due to this issue of time. I would be taking away their time to plan for their students, and that goes against the very heart and soul of the contents of this dissertation.

Conclusion

With knowing that one needs to be passionate, compassionate, loving, relating, and courageous in the classroom, it can seem overwhelming to remember because all that is asked of teachers—not only from the schoolwide level, but the local, state, and national levels as well. With all of the mandates, requirement, and other oppressive aspects of this job, the why behind teaching can become blurred. Sometimes, it gets so blurred that teachers forget their why, give up, and leave the profession. This is happening all too often today. Teachers are having so much stress laid on them that they cannot go another day, yet others keep returning. They keep returning because no matter how bad the day, week, month, or year, they still remember their why.

Agape love helps to compensate for the lack of supports (Carvalho & Mulla, 2021). The students are ultimately what keep them returning because that is who education is all about.

Agape love is the only love that can truly satisfy the hunger for love (West, 2007). Taking things day by day is what seems to work best for me, reflecting at the end of each day on what I can improve upon and what I did well that day. I can't let myself get too caught up in the stress that can come from it all. Life is too short to worry, so I must let things go and do better the next time. The love I have is revolutionary and allows me to have freedom from my thoughts and worries (Jones, 2020). For me, my love and faith to keep me grounded, sustained, and free. I know that love conquers all, so I trust in love and give into it all that I can. There is no replacement for agape love (Grant, 1996). I don't always get it right, but I know that I'm learning and changing every day into a teacher and person who loves more and more unconditionally. I can never give up, I must continue to return. My students need me and I choose them (Gregory, 2002). My love for them is what keeps me going. This is agape love.

Epilogue

In stark contrast to the prologue at the beginning of this dissertation, I now imagine a classroom full of agape love. This classroom is warm, welcoming, and inviting, as well as orderly. Everyone in the classroom knows what is expected of them, and respect is present. There is respect from the students for each other, as well as for their teacher. Likewise, there is respect from the teacher to the students. The teacher self-sacrifices and gives of herself unselfishly. Discipline occurs regularly in the classroom because the teacher cares too much about her students to let them stay the way they are. She wants to constantly challenge them to do and be better human beings, just as she disciplines herself. The discipline is done with dignity, not degradingly or harshly. The classroom runs like a small community, with every person being a valuable member and doing their part to make the day run smoothly and efficiently. The teacher doesn't have to use corrective discipline much because the students are very much aware of the love their teacher has for them, so they strive each day to make her happy and well-pleased. Each person who comes into this classroom can feel the love as soon as they step into the door; there is something special about it that sets it apart from other classrooms in the building. Each day, all students are welcomed, intently listened to, given hugs or pats on the back, encouraged, and spoken to with kindness and love. Students are excited to come to school every day. The students who struggle with academic or behavior issues are treated the same as students who excel.

This scenario reminds me that things that are the most impactful and lasting are usually not displayed in plain sight. Things that positively influence people's lives with an everlasting

impact are usually done behind the scenes when no one is watching. The love that teachers give their students is usually done behind the closed door of a classroom, in the precious moments filled with lots of hugs, pats on the back, a kind word, an encouraging discussion, a listening ear, and the list could go on and on.

Teaching is one of the most difficult careers, as far as how taxing it is on the mental and emotional state of the human being. Most days after I leave my classroom, I desire to sit in the silence of my car before starting it up to head home, thinking about nothing. Before I go in to my house, I have to take time to mentally leave what happened at school that day in order to be mentally present for my family. Teaching is what I love to do because it is fulfilling, yet it is also draining. Through some trainings I have received as a teacher, I have learned that teachers make hundreds of decisions in just one day's time, without even processing most of them. All of those quick decisions leave the teacher's mind stressed and depleted by the end of the school day. At the school where I teach, students from kindergarten come to first grade either below grade level, approaching grade level, on grade level, and above grade level. It is my responsibility to get them where they need to be by the end of first grade, ready for second grade. On average, I have 20 students in my classroom each year. I have to work so diligently every moment of every day to get each child what they need, all the while making sure they have wiped their face from breakfast and lunch, mend their skinned knee from recess, fasten their overalls, hug them when they are sad, call their parents to talk about their behavior, turn in their money for school events, etc. Simultaneously, I have to adhere to curriculums, standards, district mandates, and other accountability measures. Teachers are not appreciated as much as they should be and are underrated. It is clear that teachers not only play a crucial role in shaping

future generations, but also face immense pressures each day that make what we do uniquely demanding, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Teaching was already challenging and complicated before 2020, but teaching has greatly evolved since then, due to the pandemic. Educators now navigate a type of foreign landscape that has been transformed by remote learning, mental health concerns, and even more diverse student needs than before. Now, more than ever, this disruption has highlighted the importance of building strong relationships between students and teachers. These connections foster a supportive learning environment for addressing the emotional and academic challenges students face. In this era of uncertain times, isolation and uncertainty have become prevalent, but prioritizing relationships leads to improved student engagement and motivation. Teachers who take the time to understand their students' emotions can create a classroom environment that not only enhances learning for each student but also nurtures their well-being. As educators continue to adapt to the ongoing changes in public education, recognizing and cultivating relationships with students is essential for overcoming the recently emerging challenges. Furthermore, recognizing and supporting the courage of teachers is essential for fostering a robust educational system that not only prioritizes academic achievement, but also nurtures the holistic development of all students. For the teacher and students to enjoy and appreciate school, the teacher has to ensure that all students can thrive. This can be achieved through teaching with passion, compassion, courage, and radical, agape love.

REFERENCES

- Agnello, M.F. (2016). Enactivating radical love: Joe L. Kincheloe's 10 precepts of teachers as researchers. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 7(3), 67-78.
- Agnello, M.F. & Reynolds, W.M. (Eds.). (2016). *Practicing critical pedagogy: The influences of Joe L. Kincheloe*. Springer.
- Alsubaie, M.A. (2016). Curriculum development: Teacher involvement in curriculum development. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(9), 106-107.
- Amidon, J. (2013). Teaching mathematics as agape: Responding to oppression with unconditional love. *Journal of Urban Mathematics Education*, 6(1), 19-27.
- Amoo-Adare, E. (2017). (Un)Thinking, Decolonial loving & becoming: Critical literacies for 'postnormal times'. *Academia*. Retrieved February 15, 2024, from https://www.academia.edu/35053548/_Un_Thinking_Decolonial_Loving_and_Becoming_Critical_Literacies_for_Postnormal_Times?email_work_card=title
- Anderson, G.L. (1989). Critical ethnography in education: Origins, current status, and new directions. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(3), 249-270.
- Aquino, J. (2002). Revolutionary ambivalence: A dialogue between U.S. third world feminism and liberation theology on the limits of 'love' as an axis of radical social change. *Critical Sense*, 11(1), 11-46.
- Arguelles, L., McCraty, R., & Rees, R.A. (2003). The heart in holistic education. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, 16(3), 13-21.

- Aronson, B., Reyes, G., & Radina, R. (2018). Teaching against the grain as an act of love: Disrupting white Eurocentric masculinist frameworks within teacher education. *The Urban Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0474-9>
- Ayers, W. (2004). *Teaching toward freedom: Moral commitment and ethical action in the classroom*. Beacon Press.
- Ayers, W. (2016). *Teaching with conscience in an imperfect world: An invitation*. Teachers College Press.
- Barcelos, A.M.F., & Coelho, H.S.H. (2016). Language learning and teaching: What's love got to do with it? In P.D. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *Positive Psychology in SLA* (pp. 130-144).
- Basic, G., Delić, Z., & Sofradzija, H. (2019). Ideology of neo-facism, education, and culture of peace: The empirical case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Critical Education*, 10(6), 1-22.
- Beck, J.S., Lunsman, C., & Garza, T. (2020). "We need to be in the classroom more": Veteran teachers' views on teacher preparation and retention. *Professional Educator*, 43(1), 91-99.
- Blinne, K.C. (2014). Awakening to lifelong learning: Contemplative pedagogy as compassionate engagement. *Radical Pedagogy*. 11(2), 1-30.
- Bonnett, M. (2007). Environmental education and the issue of nature. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 39(6), 707-721.
- Brooks, C.F. & Young, S.L. (2011). Are choice-making opportunities needed in the classroom? Using self-determination theory to consider student motivation and learner empowerment. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23(1), 48-59.

- Brugaletta, J. (1990). Agape and self-love. *The Lamp-Post of the Southern California C.S. Lewis Society*, 14(1/2), 3-12.
- Buck, P.S. (2013). *Words to warm a teacher's heart* (Jenny Bethke & Jeff Jansen Eds.). D. S. Summerside Press.
- Bussey, M. (2008). *Where next for pedagogy? Critical agency in educational futures* [Doctoral dissertation, University of the Sunshine Coast]. Academia.
- Canagarajah, A.S. (1993). Critical ethnography of a Sri Lankan classroom: Ambiguities in student opposition to reproduction through ESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(4), 601-626.
- Carr, P.R. (2012). Transforming educational leadership without social justice? Looking at critical pedagogy as more than a critique, and a way toward “democracy”. In Shields, C. (Ed.), *Transformative leadership: A reader* (pp. 37-52). Peter Lang.
- Carrillo, C. & Flores, M.A. (2017). Veteran teachers' identity: What does the research literature tell us? *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 48(5), 639-656.
- Carvalho, F.K. & Mulla, Z.R. (2020). Power of love (Agape) in leadership: A theoretical model and research agenda. *South Asian Journal of Management*, 27(4), 96-120.
- Carvalho, F.K. & Mulla, Z.R. (2021). All you need is love: The relationship between agape and work outcomes. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 31(4), 1061-1080.
- Chabot, S. (2008). Love and revolution. *Critical Sociology*, 34(6), 803–828.
- Ciamarra, D.J. (2011). *Speaking up: Using a pedagogy of love to debunk technical learning and learning practices*. (Doctoral dissertation). Miami University.
- Cloninger, K. (2008). Giving beyond care: An exploration of love in the classroom. In B.S. Stern (Ed.), *Curriculum and teaching dialogue* (Vol. 10). Information Age Publishing.

- Clifford, J. (1988). *The predicament of culture: Twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art*. Harvard University Press.
- Coetzer, M.F., Bussin, M., & Geldenhuys, M. (2017). The functions of a servant leader. *Administrative Sciences*, 7(5), 1-32.
- Colonna, S.E. & Stevenson, D.N. (2013). Radical love: Love all, serve all. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 5(1), 5-10.
- Creswell, J.W. (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N. (2018). Data analysis and representation. In *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed., pp. 181-223). Sage.
- Cridland-Hughes, S. (2015). Speaking truth to power. *English Journal*, 105(2), 129-132.
- Culbertson, H. (2023, January 27). *William Borden—No reserves. No retreats. No regrets*. Resources: Christian Missions and World Evangelism. <https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/index.htm>
- Dahlgren, R. (2022). Remain calm & respond right when a student challenges. *CPI*. Retrieved March 5, 2024, from <https://www.bemidjistate.edu/services/public-safety/wp-content/uploads/sites/92/2022/02/Classroom-Security-1.pdf>
- Darder, A. (n.d.). Revolutionary leadership for community empowerment: A Freirean approach. [Workshop paper]. Reading for Freire & Education Workshop, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA, United States.
- Darder, A. (2007). From madness to consciousness: Redemption through politics, art, and love. *Counterpoints: Public intellectuals, radical Democracy and social movements: A book of interviews*, 276(1), 181-206.

- Darder, A. (2009). Decolonizing the flesh: The body, pedagogy, and inequality. *Counterpoints: Postcolonial Challenges in Education*, 369(1), 217-232.
- Darder, A. (2015). Decolonizing interpretive research: A critical bicultural methodology for social change. *The International Education Journal*, 14(2), 63-77.
- Darder, A. (2015). *Freire and education*. Routledge.
- Darder, A. (2016). Political grace and revolutionary critical pedagogy. *Rizoma freireano*, 21(1), 1-9.
- Darder, A. (2018). Decolonizing interpretive research: Subaltern sensibilities and the politics of voice. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 18(2), 94-104.
- Dehler, G.E., Welsh, M.A., & Lewis, M.W. (2001). Critical pedagogy in the 'new paradigm'. *Management Learning*, 32(4), 493-511.
- DeLeon, A., & Ross, E. W. (2010). *Critical theories, radical pedagogies, and social education: New perspectives for social studies education*. Sense Publishers.
- Dennis, M. (2012). A study of how teachers show love in the classroom. (Doctoral dissertation). George Fox University.
- Denzin, N.K. (2009). Critical pedagogy and democratic life or a radical democratic pedagogy. *Cultural Studies—Critical Methodologies*, 9(3), 379-397.
- DeWeese, K.L. (2014). Screen time, how much is too much? The social and emotional costs of technology on the adolescent brain (Master thesis). Dominican University of California.
- Enright, R. D., Wang Xu, J., Rapp, H., Evans, M., & Song, J. Y. (2022). The philosophy and social science of *agape* love. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 42(4), 220–237.
- Fien, J. (1991). Towards school-level curriculum inquiry in environmental education.

- Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 7(1), 17-29.
- Ford, A. (2019). Examining and improving classroom environments through the lens of self-determination theory. *Critical questions in Education*, 10(1), 65-77.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach*. Westview.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of the heart*. Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2019). *Pedagogy of hope*. Bloomsbury.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word & the world*. Bergin & Garvey.
- Fried, L.J. & Konza, D.M. (2013). Using self-determination theory to investigate student engagement in the classroom. *The International Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum*, 19(2), 27-40.
- Gest, S.D., Welsh, J.A., & Domitrovich, C.E. (2005). Behavioral predictors of changes in social relatedness and liking school in elementary school. *Journal of School Psychology*, 43(4), 281-301.
- Giroux, H.A. (2010). Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(6), 715-721.
- Giroux, H.A. (2018). Teachers as transformative intellectuals. In E.B. Hilty (Eds.), *Thinking about schools: A foundations of education reader* (pp. 183-189). Westview Press.
- Glithero, L. & Ibrahim, A. (2012). Pedagogy of the moment: A journey on becoming wide-awake. *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry*, 9(2), 1-15.
- GoNoodle. (2024, March 4). *GoNoodle: The good energy company*. GoNoodle.
<https://www.gonoodle.com/company/p/who-we-are>

- Goodwin, B. (2015). The road less traveled: Changing schools from the inside out. *McREL International, 1(1), 1-13*.
- Grant, C. (1996). For the love of God: Agape. *The Journal of Religious Ethics, 24(1), 3-21*.
- Green, B. (2010) Rethinking the representation problem in curriculum inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 32(4), 3-12*.
- Greene, M. (1978). *Landscapes of learning*. Teachers College Press.
- Greenway, W. (2016). *Agape ethics: Moral realism and love for all life*. Cascade Books.
- Gregory, M. (2002). Pedagogy and the Christian Law of Love. *Journal of Education and Christian Belief, 6(1), 9-25*.
- Gruenewald, D.A. (2003). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place.
- Hahn, M. (2014). Teaching the truth in love. *Journal of Christian Education & Information Technology, 25(1), 7-26*.
- Hall, D. (2003). *Life work*. Beacon Press.
- Ham, K. (2011). *The foundations curriculum: Participants guide*. Answers in Genesis.
- Hannfin, R.D. & Savenye, W.C. (1993). Technology in the classroom: The teacher's new role and resistance to it. *Educational Technology, 33(6), 26-31*.
- Heertum, R. V. (2008). Moving from critique to hope: Critical interventions from Marcuse to Freire. In D. Kellner (Ed.), *Marcuse's Challenge to Education*.
- Hinton, K.A. (2015). Should we use a capital framework to understand culture? Applying cultural capital to communities of color. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 48(2), 299-319*.

- Holohan, K. (2019). Breath by breath: Reconsidering the project of critical pedagogy through the lens of zen buddhist thought and practice. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 17(4), 353–370.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Outlaw culture: Resisting representations*. Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2001). *All about love: New visions*. William Morrow.
- Howsare, R. (2006). Why begin with love? Eros, agape, and the problem of secularism. *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 33(3), 423-448.
- Huddleston, L. (2019, October 11). The power of positive communication. *Edutopia*.
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/power-positive-communication/>
- Iorio, G. & Campello, F. (2013). Love, society, and agape: An interview with Axel Honneth. *European Journal of Social Theory*, (16)2, 246-258.
- Jones, W. (2000). Love and the individual (in education). *Studies in Culture*, 16(1), 103-127.
- Johnson, B. [@DrBradJohnson]. (2024, February 19). *Physical activity, recess, and unstructured play are all beneficial for developing self-regulation of emotions. These activities allow students to release* [Photograph]. Instagram.
- Johnson, L., & Morris, P. (2010). Towards a framework for critical citizenship education. *The Curriculum Journal*, 21(1), 77–96.
- Jones, J. (2020). Love, art, and revolution (Master thesis). Purchase College State University of New York.
- Jones, L. (2005). What does spirituality in education mean? *Journal of College and Character*, 6(7), 1-7.
- Kahn, R. (2010). Love hurts: Ecopedagogy between avatars and elegies. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 37(4), 55-70.

- Kahn, R. & Kellner, D. (2007). Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich: Technology, politics and the reconstruction of education. *Policy Futures in Education*, 5(4), 431-448.
- Kail, R.V., & Cavanaugh, J.C. (2013). *Human development: A life-span view*. (6th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Katz, L. (2014). Teachers' reflections on critical pedagogy in the classroom. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 10(2), 1-20.
- Kaufman, P. (2017). Critical contemplative pedagogy. *Radical Pedagogy*, 14(1), 1-20.
- Kaufman, T. (2023). Building positive relationships with students: What brain science says. Understood. Retrieved September 22, 2023, from <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/brain-science-says-4-reasons-to-build-positive-relationships-with-students>
- Khabbaz, J. (2022). Knowledge exchange. *The main thing devotional: Agape love*, 83(1). Southern Adventist University.
- Kincaid, L. (2023). Path to utopia: Shifting consciousness from derangement to entanglement in the anthropocene -How capitalism is a world destroyer and love can save us. *Journal of Conscious Evolution*.
- King, M.L., Jr. (1957, June 4). *The power of non-violence*. <https://www.barnstableacademy.com/app/uploads/2021/02/MKLjr-Power-of-Non-Violence.pdf>
- King, M.L., Jr. (1963). *Strength to love*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
- Lake, R.L. (2016). Radical love in teacher education praxis: Imagining the real through listening to diverse student voices. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 7(3), 79-98.

- Lissovoy, N.D. (2010). Staging the crisis: Teaching, capital, and the politics of the subject. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 40(3), 418-435.
- Love, B.L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.
- Loreman, T. (2011). *Love as pedagogy*. Sense Publishers.
- Oord, T.J. (2005). The love racket: Defining love and agape for the love-and-science research program. *Journal of Religion and Science*, 40(4), 919-938.
- Madison, D.S. (2011). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Sage.
- Marcus, G.E. (1998). *Ethnography through thick and thin*. Princeton University Press.
- Martin, C. [@CoachCoreyMartin]. (2024, March 4). Leprechaun hunt [Video]. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/myUeYW7MA6E?si=01bff--GLbnfBeXu>
- Maslow, A.H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(1), 370-396.
- Matthias, L. R. (2016). Altruism and the flourishing teacher: Exploring a Christian theology of love. *International Journal of Christianity & Education*, 20(2), 106-118.
- McKenna, B. & Darder, A. (2011). The art of public pedagogy: Should the ‘truth’ dazzle gradually or thunder mightily? *Policy Futures in Education*, 9(6), 670-685.
- McFadden, K.A. (2013). Agape: Love and art in community. *Analytic Teaching and Philosophical Praxis*, 34(2), 74-85.
- Melina, L. & Anderson, C.A. (2006). *The way of love: Reflections on Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical deus caritas est*. Ignatius Press.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., & Saldaña, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Sage.

- Miller, J.P. (2006). *Education and the soul: Toward a spiritual curriculum*. State University of New York Press.
- Miller, L. (2021). *The awakened brain: The new science of spirituality and our quest for an inspired life*. Random House.
- Minh, Hien N. (2019). (Re)considering the role of emotion in language teaching and learning. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103(2), 515-544
- Morris, M. (2016b). *Curriculum Studies Guidebooks: Concepts and Theoretical Frameworks* (Vol. 2). Peter Lang.
- Myers, M.D. (1997). Critical ethnography in information systems. In A.S. Lee, J. Liebenau, J.I. DeGross (Eds.), *Information Systems and Qualitative Research* (pp. 276-300). IFIP.
- New International Version Bible*. (2011). Bible Gateway. <https://biblegateway.com>
- Nieto, S. (2003). *What keeps teachers going?* Teachers College Press.
- Nieto, S. (2005). *Why we teach*. Teachers College Press.
- Nikolakaki, M. (2012). Critical pedagogy in the new dark ages: Challenges and Possibilities: An introduction. *Counterpoints*, 422(1), 3-31.
- Nouri, A. & Sajjadi, M. (2014). Emancipatory Pedagogy in Practice: Aims, principles, and curriculum orientation. *International Journey of Critical Pedagogy*, 5(2), 76-87
- Ollis, T. (2010). Accidental and lifelong activists: Embodied knowledge, identity, and learning (Doctoral dissertation). Victoria University.
- Oni-Eseleh, O. (2021). Othering and marginalization of minorities: A synopsis of identity and social rejection. *Academia Letters*, 2356(1), 1-6.
- Outka, G.H. (1972). *Agape: An ethical analysis*. Yale University Press.

- Oxford University Press (2024). Calling. In *Oxford English dictionary*. Retrieved September 26, 2024.
- Palmer, P. (2007). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Paraskeva, J.M. (Ed.). (2016). *The curriculum: Whose internalization?* Peter Lang.
- Paraskeva, J. M. & Janson, E. (Eds.). (2017). *Voicing the silences of social and cognitive justice*. Brill.
- Presley, E. (1995). Walk a mile in my shoes [Song]. On *Walk a mile in my shoes: The essential 70s masters* [Album]. RCA Records.
- Pring, R. (2004). *Philosophy of education: Aims, theory, common sense and research*. Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Ramos, J.A. (2023, April 25). Why the first 5 years of child development are so important. *Children's Bureau*. <https://www.all4kids.org/news/blog/why-the-first-5-years-of-child-development-are-so-important/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20most%20critical,their%20lives%20in%20various%20ways>.
- Rangel, N. (2017). Pedagogy of play: A holistic project of personal and social liberation. *Radical Pedagogy*, 14(2), 67-88.
- Ratcliffe, R. (2014). *Functional and critical literacy in yo si puedo: An examination of Cuba's literacy program through a Freirean lens* (Master thesis). The University of Newcastle's Digital Repository.
- Reynolds, W.M. (2016). Imagine radical love abides in cruel unforgiving times. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 7(3), 33-48.

- Rodriguez, C. (2020). On radical love. *Overland Journal*, 238(1).
- Roorda, D. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., Spilt, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The influence of affective teacher–student relationships on students’ school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(4), 493–529.
- Ruane-Florio, S. (2001). *Teacher education and the cultural imagination: Autobiography, conversation, and narrative*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 141-166.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2002). Overview of self-determination theory: An organismic-dialectical perspective. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 3–33)
- Sage, K., Jackson, S., Fox, E., & Mauer, L. (2021). The virtual COVID-19 classroom: Surveying outcomes, individual differences, and technology use in college students. *Smart Learning Environments*, 8(27), 1-20.
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Schlein, C., & Schwarz, G. (2015). Teacher as curriculum. In M. Fang He, B. D. Schultz, & W. H. Schubert, *The SAGE guide to curriculum in education*. Sage Publications.
- Schubert, W.H. (2010). *Love, justice, and education: John Dewey and the Utopians*. Information Age Publishing.

- Sergis, S., Sampson, D.G., & Pelliccione, L. (2018). Investigating the impact of flipped classroom on students' learning experiences: A self-determination theory approach. *Computers in Human Behavior, 78*(1), 368-378.
- Shalaby, C. (2013). “You must accept them and accept them with love” – The privileged elite and the struggle for educational justice. *Special Issue: Justice Work In and Outside of Schools, 29*(2), 123-142.
- Shapiro, H.S. (2006). *Losing heart: The moral and spiritual miseducation of America's children*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sinclair, A. (2005). Body and management pedagogy. *Gender, Work, and Organization, 12*(1), 89-104.
- Silverman, E.J. (2019). *The supremacy of love: An agape-centered vision of Aristotelian virtue ethics*. Roman & Littlefield Publishing Group.
- Shaw, E. (2021). Prevention and de-escalation of intense behavior responses: What adults can do. Inclusive Strategies to Address Behavioral Needs for Students with IEPs. Retrieved March 6, 2024, from <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sped/pdf/pbis-prevention-de-escalation-4c.pdf>
- Shih, Y.H. (2021). Love-based relationships between teachers and students in early childhood education. *Policy Futures in Education, 20*(7), 748-761.
- Solís, S.P. (2009). *Cosecha voices: Toward a transcultural pedagogy* (Publication No. 1472700) [Master's thesis, University of Texas, Pan American] UMI Dissertation Publishing.
- Sosa-Provencio, M.A., Sheahan, A., Desai, S., Secatero, S. (2018). Tenets of body-soul rooted pedagogy: Teaching for critical consciousness, nourished resistance, and healing. *Critical Studies in Education, 1*(1), 1-18.

- Spooner, H.S. (2018). *Agape: Love as the foundation of pedagogy and curriculum* (Master thesis). Kent State University.
- Stern, B.S. (2008). *Curriculum and teaching dialogue*. Information Age Publishing.
- Stringam, C.D. (2022). The effects of relatedness support on motivational profiles in rural vs. urban physical education students [Master's thesis, Brigham Young University] ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Travis, R. (2002). Three wooden crosses [Song]. On *Rise and Shine* [Album]. Word Records.
- U.S. News & World Report. (2023, April 23). *Spring place elementary school*.
<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/georgia/spring-place-elementary-school-209461#:~:text=Overview%20of%20Spring%20Place%20Elementary%20School&text=The%20school's%20minority%20student%20enrollment,students%20and%2050%25%20male%20students.>
- Veldman, L., Tartwijk, J., Brekelmans, M., & Wubbels, T. (2013). Job satisfaction and teacher-student relationships across the teaching career: Four case studies. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies*, 32(1), 55-65.
- Villaverde, L.E. (2008). *Feminist Theories and Education Primer*. Peter Lang.
- West, C. (2007). *The love that satisfies: Reflections on eros & agape*. Christopher West.
- Wexler, N. (2020). Building knowledge: What an elementary school curriculum should do. *American Educator*, 44(2), 18-21.
- Willis, P. (1981). *Learning to labor: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Morningside.
- Wong, H.K. & Wong, R.T. (2009). *The first days of school: How to be an effective teacher* (4th edition). Harry K. Wong Publications.

Wood, M. (2024, March 4). *Toy Story leprechaun run* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://youtu.be/zBKGofl9lQQ?si=yT9ELt2B35p3wsyK>

York, M. (2019). *Imagining new worlds: Revolutionary love and radical social transformation in the twenty-first century*. Radical Philosophy Review.

Young, J. R. (2023, September 26). *Helping students think with their whole bodies*. EdSurge.

<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2023-09-26-helping-students-think-with-their-whole-bodies#:~:text=A%20growing%20area%20of%20research,%2C%20surroundings%2C%20and%20other%20people.>

Zhao, S. & Li, M. (2021). Reflection on loving pedagogy and students' engagement in EFL/ESL classrooms. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(1), 1-4.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Interview #1

Interviewee: Tammy

Interviewer: Bryson

Date: March 5, 2021

Place: Google Meet

Time: 3:00 p.m.

- Review
 - Briefly review study's purpose
 - Review the structure of the interviews and the expected length of each interview
 - Explain that they do not have to answer a question if they do not feel comfortable or simply do not want to answer
 - Explain how results will be used
 - Questions?
- Permission to audio record and take notes
 - Obtain permission to turn on recorder from interviewee
 - Test recorder

Bryson: So, the first question is, have you ever been interviewed for project purposes before?

Tammy: Yes.

Bryson: Can you go into detail a little bit about that without giving any secrets?

Tammy: Same kind of situation research projects. I've done a lot of, people going into leadership and just asking questions about that.

Bryson: What is your philosophy on education and being an educator?

Tammy: Wow. That's um, I guess just in general and in as short of terms as possible, um, I've always believed it's a calling that you to be successful at it. It's not just a job, it's something you feel like you're supposed to do. Um, and I can, I can see that in people it's very easy to read. Who's here for a paycheck and who's here because that's what they fill out they're supposed to do? So, then, I guess overall, that. That would be it in a nutshell.

Bryson: What led you to become a teacher before you were a principal?

Tammy: Well, I started out, I was going to be an obstetrician. So, I'm going, you know, once I saw I would be like 35 before I even actually, you know, all the years you have to go to school and all the residences you have to do and everything I thought, well, I'll try something else. But, I always liked being around kids and working with kids. So, um, I guess that just, just that I enjoy being with kids and wanting to continue to do that.

Bryson: What led you to become a principal?

Tammy: Um, it was kind of just the next step. If you had asked me, you know, 25 years ago, I would have said, you're crazy. I would never do that. Um, cause I never in a million years thought I would enjoy this side of it. But then after you've been in it for a while, you kind of see it in a different light and I wanted to experience this part of it. And I enjoy working with, a lot of people, not just, you know, you're kind of when you're in the classroom, it's you and your 20 kids or whatever, and you have a little collaboration with other teachers, but it's totally different from this aspect. And, I get to work with teachers, kids, parents, which is not always, you know, fun, but, I enjoy it and I enjoy solving problems. Like, you know, there's a conflict then you got to figure out how to make it doable for everybody.

Bryson: What advice do you have for teachers in order for the teacher to develop effective relationships with their students?

Tammy: I think you have to be very positive and very, there's a fine line between discipline and humiliation. And I think I'm real big on discipline with dignity. You can be very stern. You can be very, you can have high expectations, but you have to do it in a way where you're, you know, our job is to teach kids the difference between right and wrong. So, there's a fine line between, yes, there are consequences for the choice you made, but here's why you need to why this is a better choice. And, you know, hopefully if you make this other choice in the future, things will be better. I had a conversation with it, a kid yesterday kind of like that, just, you know, here and you've heard me do that with kids. Here's the thing, you know, you got two choices and, and you can either choose trouble or you can choose to do what you need to do and avoid the trouble. So I think that would for teachers, it's the same kind of thing in the classroom and just the communication with parents. If you have a good relationship with your parents, it's easier to have a good relationship with the kids. And I have to know that, you know, you're their cheerleader and they're the person that's going to take care of them. I mean, I can add another hour, but I, you know, that would be it in a nutshell. But I can't get on my soap box and, you know, drag it out. But it's, it's weird too. Cause I have a whole different perspective now that I'm, you know, three months away from walking out the door.

Bryson: True. I bet that adds a whole other layer.

Tammy: It does. And, I'm excited about it, but at the same time, I'm like, ugh, you know, I was waving a couple of days ago, I was waving to the buses, you know, when they all leave, I wave at them and walked down and I thought, Ooh, that three months, I'm going to do that for the last time. You know? And that's, that's just that doesn't even seem possible because I've done it for so

long. I'm like, what am I going to do when I don't do that? You know? So it's a weird place to be, but it's still a good place.

END OF INTERVIEW ONE

Interview #2

Interviewee: Tammy

Interviewer: Bryson

Date: March 11, 2021

Place: Google Meet

Time: 3:00 p.m.

- Review
 - Briefly review study's purpose
 - Review the structure of the interviews and the expected length of each interview
 - Explain that they do not have to answer a question if they do not feel comfortable or simply do not want to answer
 - Explain how results will be used
 - Questions?
- Permission to audio record and take notes
 - Obtain permission to turn on recorder from interviewee
 - Test recorder

Bryson: Do you believe that teachers who exhibit love for their students can actually benefit students behavior and learning?

Tammy: 120%.

Bryson: And can you explain how you think that goes into it?

Tammy: I think it comes down to that word. You've heard, you know, that's been our motto for several years and especially when the last superintendent from a few years ago was here about

relationships with kids, and I think you can directly impact behavior, effort, grades, everything, when the kids know that you care about them and they, they matter to you. I mean, some kids you can get just about to do anything. If they know that you, you care about them and want the best for them. So definitely, I think that's probably one of the most impactful things, you know, you can have all the, all the skills and all the, all the knowledge to teach, but if you don't have that part, the success level is, is minimalized greatly.

Bryson: What all do you believe results from a teacher exhibiting love for her students?

Tammy: I think it affects everything and I, I think you're a good example of that. And it's hard, it's hard to find that happy medium where you're strict, but, and it's the same thing as discipline. It would be like, you know, it's, it's, I'm doing this because I love you. And here's why, and, I think it impacts everything from, you know, from the moment the kids get here till the time they leave. And I've talked to some teachers about that because, you know, they'll bring kids up who it's, it's weird from this perspective because you see it a child who's never been in trouble for two or three years, and then they get into a teacher's class. And, there's obviously not that relationship. And, you start seeing all of these issues, and vice versa. I used to work with a teacher. I won't mention names, I guess, because I'm probably not supposed to, but, who was, like I don't, I don't even know how she did it, but she never raised her voice above a whisper. She reminds me a lot of you. She really does. She never raised her voice, never, I never saw her even really getting on to a kid, but they would take some of the worst behavior problems in the building. They had been in office every day from kindergarten through second grade, and they got in her third grade classroom and never made another trip to the office. So, I do think some people just have that gift and, and they just, you know, they let the kids know through everything they do, that they care about them and, and, you know, the kid's success is their success. A

change in behavior through various classrooms.

Bryson: All right. Next question. I believe teachers have the power to influence students' lives by exhibiting a love for learning, providing high expectations, encouraging success, teaching students to think for themselves and teaching self-discipline all through the manner of love. Like you said, discipline with dignity. I like that. Can you elaborate on your opinion of teachers who display love in their classrooms? Maybe a little bit more of that.

Tammy: You know, we kind of touched on that a little bit last week that I think it's a calling. I don't think you can generate that. You either have it, or you don't. I mean, you certainly can, like I said, you can learn the skills and you can learn a little bit of that. But ultimately that is the gift that you, you just love kids and you love being in that situation to impact their lives. And I really don't think most teachers, especially nowadays have any idea about how much impact they can have. And if you can get people to see that, and sometimes I've been successful at that and sometimes I haven't. And again, it comes down to, there are only so many things you can teach somebody. The other stuff is innate. So, I think it, even when we're talking about how it impacts it, I think even your relationship with the parents, parents know what teachers, and I know that's the difficult thing being in this position because I want to support my teachers. But, then I'll get phone calls. And I, I know the ones who struggle with that aspect of it and the ones who don't, and I'll get phone calls from parents about teachers. And they'll say, you know, that year that teacher loved my kid and blah, blah, blah, and did all this. And now my kid doesn't want to come to school. And, and it's, it's because of that. I think it directly affects everything and kids know, even when you, even the people who can hide it the best, kids know if you like them or don't like them, or if you care about them or don't care about them.

Bryson: Okay. And you kind of went into this, but we'll see if you have any other examples. Do

you have a specific example or examples from either your years as a teacher or yours as an administrator? The teacher you speak of can even be you if you'd like to discuss your experiences as a teacher?

Tammy: I guess I have my most recent is what I see in other teachers, but I do, I do feel like I, I was the teacher that I was a disciplinarian, but it was with respect and dignity like that. So I had a lot of which I hate requests, I despise requests. And it's because when was a teacher I paid that price because I had 13 behavior problems that year. I think those are the kids who people struggle to love. I loved, I mean, I, I loved having those kids. I loved working with them and well, I actually, I'm going to give you an example of today. I spent my first hour and a half today from 7 to 8:30, dealing with a new child that we have. And we met with the dad for an hour and a half yesterday afternoon, and he's, he's having some issues in class. And, I was real impressed with the grade level. They all met, talked about, you know, how they wanted him to be successful. And, this morning he and I kind of developed a relationship. Now, granted, part of his issue was he did not have his morning medication. He spit it out in the trash can at home. But, after that, his medication and after we could talk, I feel like now he's making an effort because he knows I care about him. And, he knows his, his teachers cared about him. They were able to, and he was able to hear that yesterday afternoon and his dad was able to hear that and his issues are so great. It's going to take that effort from all of us and that kid's cooperation too, for him to be successful. But, I do think we made an impact because they did not get in trouble today after he had his medication. And granted, bless his heart. But, it's hard. He's like Jekyll and Mr. Hyde without his medication. It was, I mean, it was, it was sad. And so I could've, you know, gotten in my head and said, you're going to do this, and you're going to do that. But I don't, it wouldn't have made a difference. You could, he's not capable of it. Now after he had his

medicine, then we had that conversation. But, I think he realized we do, we did want him to be successful and we did want to do whatever he needs us to do to help him, but he's going to have to do his part as well. We were able to have that conversation. So, I don't know if that's a really good example of what we're talking about, but, I say that about you, you got to look at some of the kids you have, and, maybe I shouldn't say names, but one and the other one that you have that I see a lot of, I mean, it would not be the same if they were in another class. And I know she pushes things as far as she possibly can, but even with that, you're very patient with her and, and understanding. Now, I know you don't always want to be and I don't either. But, that will have an impact on her. You might not see it as soon as you want to, but it will.

Bryson: The next question. Do you think all teachers are capable of displaying this type of love for students? I think you may have already hit on that when you said it was a calling.

Tammy: It, it, yeah, it is. I did feel like it's a calling. When somebody is around it and sees that, you know, it does influence them. So yes, I think they can see it in other teachers and, and that does help people. But I mean, I can't say that a hundred percent. I do feel like there are some that it's not, it's not within them to do that because, you know, for whatever reason they will, people have had difficulties and struggles and hurts and all that. And I, you know, that saying hurt people, hurt people. Particularly adults that struggle with that, it it's, it's hard for them to do that. Or we have, I have run across one or two of those, you know, in, in 33 years.

But I, I do think they can. It helps to see and watch other people who have a very good example of that. It does help people. And I've, I've said that with people, even with mad parents, like they come in and I finally get to a point, I, I can't, you know, can't reach them. I can't, you just have nothing you say. And I finally found that sometimes I just say, what are you so mad about?

What, you know, what has gotten you to this point that you're screaming and yelling? Cause I, I,

you know, I'll be happy to try to help you with it, but at this point there's nothing I can do to, you know, and just, just sometimes that. I've said that to people and they start crying and you know, it completely changes the whole dynamic. So I think that transfers to kids too, at some point you just have to, you know, you just either got to care about them or, or you don't and you need to find another profession.

Bryson: Do you believe that love makes a difference in students' lives in order for them to be successful?

Tammy: A hundred percent. I mean, I guess I'm kind sappy like that, but I think that that changes everything. Once you understand that significance. It does, it changes everything and it changes your perspective. And when, when kids are loved and the way, you know, if they do come from a home where they don't get that, the right kind of love or that amount or the attention or whatever they need, that's why I think teachers can be, can have such an influence because they see that. And, for some of them, it does change their life. I mean, I just, again, I go back to, if you don't love the kids and you don't have that desire, or you can't find that, then you're in the wrong profession. And I unfortunately had that career counseling discussion with some teachers and, and I said it in a nicer way, but I basically said, you know, it might be a good time to consider a new pathway.

And a lot of times it was because they did not have empathy or they just didn't have the love and the concern for kids that you would want people in your building to have.

Bryson: How is a teacher most powerful in her classroom in creating effective teacher, student relationships and establishing a sense of classroom community?

Tammy: Well I'm real big into, you know, every day is a new day and the kids coming in, especially at the beginning of the year, welcoming, welcoming them and setting those,

consistencies as far as they come in every morning, this is what you do. So you're, there's not any time where you're having to fuss at them about stuff and starting their day off like that. But, also just we used to have, and this was back, this is back when school wasn't like it is now. And you had a lot more freedom and time to address other things. We would have wait, it was called several things. And there was a lot of research on this, but you know, some, a lot of times it was called circle time. And you just, there was a few minutes, maybe 10 minutes a day, all the kids, just sit around and, and, you know, like to talk about anything they wanted to talk about, they were comfortable talking about. And, you know, they just kind of learned how to support each other and talk to each other. Now, unfortunately, I wouldn't have an issue today if we still did that, but I know time is a factor and we're all about academics, which I, you know, I support that as well, but I think we're wasting our time trying to get the academics if we don't have that first establishing that. And that, that's how it establishes the community. And, the kids felt a part of something, you know, that's a lot of the, all the research and stuff out there about kids joining gangs and that kind of stuff is they don't feel connected to, to anything or anybody. And that is a connection. Now it's a horrible one, but, but nevertheless, they think I feel a part of something. And, I think teachers can establish, establish that in their classrooms. And that's what makes kids want to come to school. They feel a part of something and they feel like, you know, I'm going to say that the one student in your class thinks you hung the moon. And they, his dad or grandpa told me he gets up in the morning and he can't wait to go see Mrs. Bryson. And that is, you know, that's, that in itself has had an impact on him. And if, if, just think, if you do, if every teacher did that with, can't always do it with your whole class. But if every teacher did it with 10 kids, I mean, that's, that's huge. But yeah, I mean, I just, that's a big one.

Bryson: I think teachers sometimes don't realize that you can teach and teach them about life

simultaneously. It's like, you know, I could easily say I don't have time to teach about positive behavior. I'm teaching all this stuff when they don't give us time to do that. So, but I think, I think you have to, you have to figure out how to teach that, teach with love, I guess is the only way I know how to title it. I couldn't think of anything else to title this.

Tammy: I think that's a good way to describe it. And I do feel like we've lost that, that we've put so much pressure on teachers about test scores and those kinds of things. And so that's kind of been lost. I mean, we used to talk about saying please, and thank you and how you reacted to certain things and what's the appropriate way to do this. And the other issue you have with that too, is there's no moral absolutes anymore. It's not, this is the right way to do something, and this is wrong way. There's across all kinds of, you know, being politically correct lines and all that kind of stuff. So that does make it a little more difficult. But, but yeah, that, that should be a part of your everyday teaching. And you can incorporate that into other things that you do, but it takes, it takes planning. It takes skill, it takes a little extra effort to do, but it certainly can be done, very successfully.

Bryson: And I think, in the past many years ago, I guess, I think that manners, teaching manners and positive behavior traits at home has gone out the window. I mean, schools are having to take the place of teaching that now when we're teaching them about, you know, academics mainly, and not having to worry about that. Now you can reinforce it, but now it's going from not just reinforcing it, it's going from just teaching the whole thing because they come to school, not everybody, but some come to school, you know, not knowing a thing about how to treat other people, how to respect their elders, all those things.

Tammy: Yep. They see a different example at home. And that, that's one thing I guess there's, there's good and bad to being old, but that is one thing that I can look back and say, it's, it's

changed so much. And, and I even made the mistake. We just assume kids know sometimes. And I, I had a kid, it was right before we left our old building, who I had up in the office and he'd been in trouble every day. And he, he was one of those kids that obviously had not been taught how you act at home. But he was drawing all over the wall in the hallway, in the classroom. I mean, just, he was supposed to be working and I was on the phone. I went back out there and had just scribbled all over the wall in crayon, you know, and granted the building was falling down, but still, that's not acceptable. So as I said, what, what, what are you doing? I said, do you draw on your walls at home? And he said, yeah. And I was like, okay, well, here's a good lesson. We don't draw on the walls at school. You know, that's, I mean, you know, and he cleaned it off, but to even, you know, I can't even imagine. And he was, he was, I think he lived in utter chaos. And so I think, you know, he probably did get to draw on the walls. So it's, you wouldn't think you'd have to teach that, but, you know, and that's just a very minute example. I mean, there, you know, the big ones, how to treat other people and respect and, you know, but even, even adults don't do that anymore, I mean, you know? Yeah. It just, it's, it's completely amazing to me when I see things and, you know, just the way people treat police officers and, I mean, I realize there's bad police officers just like there are, you know, bad everything, but it's the position that holds the respect. It's the same thing with the principal. I mean, even with new teachers now you'd be shocked at some of the stuff they come in here and say, and I'm like, I could never have imagined walking in, you know, my principal's office and saying that, but they don't think, I mean, it's not, it's, they've never been taught. That's not how you do things. And I've had that conversation with, with one, you know, about, you need to learn the number one chain of command and how to address someone in a position above you. And that actually went better than I thought it would. But, but you know, you don't expect to have to have that conversation

with a 25 year old, you know, but I don't know. It's just different. It's a little scary.

Bryson: Okay. All right. And the last question for today is what do you wish you would have known as a teacher that you know now as an administrator that would have helped you be a more effective teacher relating to the subject we've been discussing today?

Tammy: I wish I had known the impact I could have had. I knew I had somewhat of an impact, but I had no idea. Just how, how big it can be and how just doing some little things can change a kid's life. I see that more and more now, and I wish I had had had a better perspective of that, you know, 25 years ago when I was in the classroom.

Bryson: I'm going to add this question on, do you think that you would have realized that being a teacher for 30 years and looking back, or do you think you would realize that even more being an administrator for so many years and looking back on your time as a teacher?

Tammy: I don't think I would have realized it to the extent as a teacher. I think having the perspective from a, from an administrator and, and seeing the different levels of teaching and the different personalities and the different kids that I've talked to, I don't think I would have gotten that same perspective from being in the classroom that long.

Bryson: So it's like you were able to take a step back and look at it from the bigger angle than just in your classroom.

Tammy: That's a great question. And that that's, that's one of the things I think that's the biggest, I had no idea when I became an administrator, how different it would be, you know, and just the whole, it's on the whole other side of the fence, it's vastly different. It's a whole different world. And that's why I think people who, I think it'd be very hard to be an administrator and not have been a teacher because you don't understand, you know, the, the difficulties and the trials that happen and what teachers go through. And, that's the same perspective, I think, you know,

nothing, not taking anything away from our current situation, but, but, you know, our superintendent has never been a principal or an assistant principal or whatever, really never even been in the school. And he takes a lot of information from people who have, so he can kind of, you know, but he doesn't, he doesn't know because he hasn't been there. And then there's, there's other people, you know, in central office positions, not all of them have been an administrator. And I think it's very hard to, you need to have had every one of those, you know. I'm very grateful. I was a teacher. I'm very grateful. I was an AP. 'Cause I think that makes me a better principal. Not saying you can't do it. And I think our superintendent does an exceptional job, having been a, you know, a finance director going into a superintendent's role, but it does. It, it just, it's not the same if you haven't had that experience yourself.

END OF INTERVIEW TWO

Interview #1**Interviewee: Penny****Interviewer: Bryson****Date: March 8, 2021****Place: Google Meet****Time: 3:00 p.m.**

- Review
 - Briefly review study's purpose
 - Review the structure of the interviews and the expected length of each interview
 - Explain that they do not have to answer a question if they do not feel comfortable or simply do not want to answer
 - Explain how results will be used
 - Questions?
- Permission to audio record and take notes
 - Obtain permission to turn on recorder from interviewee
 - Test recorder

Bryson: Have you ever been interviewed for project purposes before by anyone?

Penny: I think so.

Bryson: Do you care, do you care to elaborate on that?

Penny: I think, I got, oh you know, I've had to be interviewed a couple of times by some perspective counselors. So I don't know if it was truly project based or just something to do with their counseling program.

Bryson: Okay. All right. So my first question is, and this is kind of a loaded question. What is your philosophy on education and being an educator? What comes to mind first, when you think about that?

Penny: I think, well, I think my answer's going to be a little different since I'm a counselor, but, I think it's very important should create a safe and loving environment for the kids, to make sure that their basic needs are met so that they can come in and be successful in the classroom. I of course want to prepare them for their future, whatever that may be. You know, hopefully graduating high school and then going on to a trade school or getting a job or college. But especially in the elementary school, just trying to instill a love for learning and just create, like I said, creating a safe place so that they feel free to learn and be themselves and, do the best that they can.

Bryson: My next question, you were a teacher before you were a counselor, correct?

Penny: Yes.

Bryson: What first led you to become a teacher?

Penny: I think just enjoying being around kids, that's, you know, you don't really know much when you're going to college to know what to be. A lot of people in my family, extended family, are teachers and then I loved school when I was in elementary school. And so, I think it just kind of seemed like a natural fit because I didn't really even think about anything else. I just kind of thought that's where I need to be.

Bryson: What led you to change after those five years to become a counselor?

Penny: Well, when I went and got my degree, I stayed just an extra year in college and got my master's in counseling. And years and years ago, when I was a teacher, before I became a counselor, you had to teach for at least three years before you became a counselor. And so I

taught first grade a couple of years, and then I moved to third grade for a few more years and I just found myself led more and more to wanting to talk to the children more about why they were feeling a certain way as opposed to what two plus two was. And so I think it was just a natural progression for me.

Bryson: My next question is what advice do you have for teachers in order for the teacher to develop effective relationships with their students? And this can, this can come from whatever background you want it to come from, either as a teacher or as a counselor's perspective or whatever you would like to throw in there on that.

Penny: I think that kids need to know that you care about them. If they don't think that you care about them, they're not going to perform to the best of their ability. And so sometimes, if we're all being very honest, it's harder to connect with certain children and you might have to search for just something that you can connect with them on, be it a cartoon or a sport or a favorite color, or just something to let them know that you do have this little connection with them and that they are special to you. And I think just searching for that thing. I mean, we're all just being a human naturally drawn to certain personalities. And those kids are the easy ones. You know, you connect with them, they connect with you and then let's go. But some of them, you have to really search for that because, you know, if I don't have that connection with you, I just, I don't think they're going to do as well as they could.

END OF INTERVIEW ONE

Interview #2**Interviewee: Penny****Interviewer: Bryson****Date: March 16, 2021****Place: Google Meet****Time: 3:00 p.m.**

- Review
 - Briefly review study's purpose
 - Review the structure of the interviews and the expected length of each interview
 - Explain that they do not have to answer a question if they do not feel comfortable or simply do not want to answer
 - Explain how results will be used
 - Questions?
- Permission to audio record and take notes
 - Obtain permission to turn on recorder from interviewee
 - Test recorder

Bryson: Do you believe that teachers who exhibit love for their students can actually benefit students' behavior and learning? If so, explain how?

Penny: Yes. I definitely think that that is a huge part of learning. I think the children have to feel loved. And with that, I think they're going to feel encouraged. They're going to feel safe. They're going to feel comfortable. And as a counselor, I of course think that is crucial for them to be able to perform at their best in your classroom.

Bryson: What all do you believe results from a teacher exhibiting love for her students? What do you think comes from that?

Penny: I guess I kind of answered that. I think they feel safe. I think, hat just them being safe, feeling safe and feeling loved. They're going to be more willing to open up to you about all kinds of things. And like we talked about some last time being the counselor, I feel it's very important that their basic needs are met. And so a child that feels loved by you is much more likely to tell you that they didn't eat dinner last night. And then that way, if we can get them a full belly, then I believe that's tied to them being able to, you know, learn to read and learn two plus two. So I feel like love from the teacher is very impactful just for their overall health, mental, physical wellbeing. And I believe all of that ties into them being able to learn basic facts that you know, you as a first grade teacher are going to be teaching them.

Bryson: Number three is: I believe teachers have the power to influence students' lives by exhibiting a love for learning, providing high expectations, encouraging success, teaching students to think for themselves and teaching self-discipline all through the manner of love. I couldn't think of a better word to call it. I don't, I've called it love. I don't know what else to call it. I think sometimes we might take that word for granted. So I think it's very powerful, but can you elaborate on your opinion of teachers who display love in their classroom?

Penny: I get to see kids from all of the classrooms and kids, a lot of times take on the personality and mannerisms, especially in the younger grades of their teacher, which, I think is just precious. But you can tell lot of times, not all of the time, but you can tell a lot of the times when children feel safe. And I think like you said, the word love can mean a lot of things. And I feel like a big component of love is them feeling safe. And to me, they have to be able to feel safe to fail. They have to feel safe to try. They have to feel safe to share. Sharing of themselves can mean trying to

sound out letters. It can mean sharing that their dad got put in jail last night. It can mean sharing that they've had an accident. It can just give them the opportunity to be more open with you. And I think love is the cornerstone of that. If they feel that from you, some of our kids have never felt that, they don't know what being safe is. They don't know what being loved in the manner that I'm correlating it to safe. They don't know what that means. Their love may be skewed and that, you know, they're getting hit at home. They're getting beaten at home. They're getting degraded at home, and to them that's love. And so for us to show them what true love is, I think enables them to them be able to open up to us and I feel like that's just a cornerstone in them being able to be successful in your classroom.

Bryson: Number five is, do you believe that love makes a difference in students' lives in order for them to be successful?

Penny: I think something you said I agree with, and I don't think I said that is it enables them if they feel, then that, they will be more willing to take risks and that helps them to learn, like you were saying about self-discipline because they have to learn, some of our students have to relearn behaviors. We have to help them unlearn misbehaviors that they've learned at home and help them relearn appropriate behaviors and healthy to be able to then, like you were saying, have a sense of self-discipline, but that will tie into self-worth, and just responsibility, dependability, all of, as things that. I think like we were saying that starts with showing them we care about them.

Bryson: Do you have a specific example or examples from either your years as a teacher or years as a counselor that comes to mind?

Penny: Just about, an, a specific example of a child feeling loved? Yes, I have plenty.

Bryson: Maybe one specific that sticks out like more than the others.

Penny: Well, I will tell you just not 20 minutes ago, I, myself and the Georgia Hope counselors

have been working with a child for two years, they cried in my office for the first time. And, told me about her being raped as a five-year-old. And I feel like it took a year and a half to be able to instill in her the fact that we do care about her and that she can trust us and that we will both believe her. And in my mind, all of that is love. She had to believe that we would love her. And she, through this year, especially has been putting out test after test to us for, I feel like to see if she could trust us. And then finally today, I don't know what was special about today, but, you know, she could share a little bit of that. But like I said, with some kids, it may take five minutes and, some kids, it's taken, you know, five years, and some, it can take a lot longer. I can speak specifically to a little boy that's in your classroom that I have seen a difference in because he feels loved. You can see it in the way he stands, the way he carries himself, you can see it and the way he communicates more openly with other people. I have very little knowledge. Maybe I should have more about how some of our children are doing in the classroom as far as, I mean, I have no idea if he knows what two plus two is, but, I know that he's more open with me. I know he is more friendly. I know he has a sense of self-confidence that he did not have last year. And I think it all has to do with that. He feels loved. He feels, he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that what, when he's in your classroom, he is going to face consequences, but they are going to be the same consequences every day. It's not going to matter what your mood is. It's not going to matter, you know, if you didn't get sleep last night, he knows that your consequences are going to be the same and that stability has given him a sense of security. And I think it shows just, just in his face. I think you can say it just looking at him, and all of that to me is love.

Bryson: Thank you. Number four is, do you think all teachers are capable of displaying this type of love for their student? If so, explain how, if you do believe that.

Penny: Ooh, that's kind of a loaded question. Well I think every person is capable of displaying

love, but I think we all show it differently. I think we draw from our own experiences. Like I was saying, some of our kids have, I don't know the word, that they don't understand what love really is. And you know, those kids grow up into adults and, some adults become some children that have been mistreated, become teachers. And so I think they, teachers that are successful, are able to show love. Now I do think it's important. Some, you know, you're very quiet and reserved. I am very loud and sarcastic. And I think, we show things different differently based on our personalities. And I think different kids react to that. I think a good principal or assistant principal, whoever in charge of putting kids in classes, I think it's important to look at personalities because just because you have an exceptional teacher that can show love, her personality may not gel as well as somebody else's personality with this specific child. And I think that's very important when you're putting children in classrooms for the next year, you probably can't include this in your study, but the principal and I pray before we put kids in classes. We do that because I think that's vital. Do we always get it right? No, but you have to just look at the kids' personalities because one kid might need your personality to coax them into being able to open up. Another child might need somebody that's a little more boisterous or will laugh with them. Not that you don't laugh with your kids, but I just think teachers have different personalities, just like everybody else in the world has different personalities. And just because I am loud and boisterous doesn't mean, you know, that I am loving your student in a more or less way. It just sometimes get shown differently.

Bryson: Do you, let's see, number six is how is a teacher most powerful in her classroom in creating effective teacher, student relationships and establishing a sense of classroom community? How do you feel about that?

Penny: I think teachers have to find a common bond with kids, and it can be reading. It can be

writing, you know, it can be the academics, some kids that's, that's their thing. It may be going outside and playing a game of kickball. Well, that's kind of old school. Y'all are not wanting to play kickball anymore. You might be swinging on the swings. It might be talking to them about their favorite cartoon. You have to have some kind of connection with them. With little kids, a lot of times the connection they get is that they love you because you're their teacher. But as they get older, I think it's very important to create some of, you know, just have something that you can sit down and talk to them about. It may be at the lunch table. It may be quietly in the hallway. It may be when you pull them back to the writing table. You know, I would go outside when I taught, I would go outside and play with the kids. And I think that's just, you know, it's everything just to see their teacher running around and doing, you know, stuff that they do. And I think that creates a sense of community. I myself, you know, use humor a lot to create a sense of humor. I mean, sense of community. I think just sometimes in your wording, you know, you can say this is our class, you know, we are going to do this together. Just you know, just actually saying, you know, that we're a family and we're going to take care of each other. And, I think you kind of teach that in a classroom, you know, when Susie drops her crayons, you know, you're going to encourage Johnny to help her pick those crayons up. Little things like that are creating a sense of community. I think, you know, when we do silly things like dressing in your favorite color or wearing a hat or something, and you can talk about, oh, I have, you know, I, I like that football team or, oh, that's my favorite color, or, you know, just little things like that. I, the other day I was talking to a little girl in first grade and, she's the baby in her family. And so I just said, oh, I'm the baby. And I said, the principal is the baby in her family and the receptionist is the baby in her family. I said, we're like a little club. Well, two days after that I saw her in PE and she said, I sure am glad we have that club. And so just, you know, just silly little things of

just including them in whatever helps them just feel comfortable here and feel safe and feel included. Hmm. Yeah. You never know how simple that's going to be. That's so that's big in their mind, you know?

Bryson: The last question is, what do you wish you would have known as a teacher that, you know, now as a counselor that would have helped you be a more effective teacher relating to this subject that we've been discussing today?

Penny: I don't think when I was 22, 23, I did not have a sense of the world that the majority of our kids come from. I led a very sheltered life and I didn't realize, I just took for granted, my mom and my dad loved me. I came from a loving family. I felt safe. I had clothes, I had food. I just had a very sheltered life and I wish I could go back and, just know now, I mean, I wish I knew then that how I grew up is very rare. And when you compare it to the kids that we have, and I had very high expectations of my students, which I think you should have very high expectations, but I had no comprehension of what they were bringing to school with them. Every day I loved my kids and we had a ball together. And, now I taught a long, long time ago. So we got to, you know, we made ice cream and we made slime. And like I said, we would play, kick ball all the time with the kids. And, we had a lot of fun together and I hear from kids now, cause I'm so old, you know, a lot of our parents had, they were my kids. You know, and they have kids at our school now. So I can hear back from them about memories that they had. I will tell you, I have not had one student come back and tell me that they remember a lesson that I taught them, but they do remember me joking around with them. They do remember us coloring outside. They do remember, you know, the times that I think that they felt loved. And so I wish I knew then how important that was. And to look at these children and realize you have absolutely no idea what they went through last night or this morning and that for the eight to nine hours that

we have them here, it's our responsibility to put whatever in the world we're going through in our own lives, on the back burner and make it the best day for that kid that's possible.

END OF INTERVIEW TWO

Interview

Interviewee: Debbie

Interviewer: Bryson

Date: May 23, 2023

Place: Bryson classroom

Time: 3:00 p.m.

- Review
 - Briefly review study's purpose
 - Review the structure of the interviews and the expected length of each interview
 - Explain that they do not have to answer a question if they do not feel comfortable or simply do not want to answer
 - Explain how results will be used
 - Questions?
- Permission to audio record and take notes
 - Obtain permission to turn on recorder from interviewee
 - Test recorder

Bryson: Why did you choose to be a teacher?

Debbie: I always wanted to be a teacher growing up. I knew I was good at reading. I knew that school came easy for me. And, but growing up I always, always knew in my heart that I wanted to be a teacher. If we ask, God leads our path. When I got into high school, I could type like everything. I mean, I could, you know, just make it zing. And I, I love typing. So when I went to college, I was really torn on did I want to be, a teacher or did I want to type and be in office, do

office skills? And, I got put in education classes. And, by mistake. I did not sign up for 'em. And I was too bashful and shy to ask 'em if I was in the wrong classes. So I stayed in them. And I know that was God directing my path and telling me. And I had, and I'll tell you later on in there about my fifth grade teacher who inspired me so much, so much. And showed me love, and she would tell me all the time, what a great teacher I would be one day and all this. And that's stuck with me.

Bryson: How do you approach classroom management?

Debbie: I get them involved, have interaction with them. I think that's the key is if you show them, you know, that what they say to you is important enough for you to interact with them, then they're going to participate. And, to me that's, I mean, that's it in a nutshell. If you can have that relationship with 'em, then they're going to catch on and they're going to, you know, interact with you and discuss things with you. And, to me, management is showing those kids, each child in that room, that they are the most important thing in that classroom. And, you got to do it to each child. Like that child is the most important person in that classroom. And, I just have tried my best to do that when they start talking or something. I try my best to give them full attention and they know that I'm going to.

Bryson: Define what it means in your own words for the teacher and student to have a positive relationship.

Debbie: That's what I was saying. Just, you know, show 'em praise, you know, even if they, if they mess up or, you know, get in trouble for something, you know, tell 'em something positive they've done. You know, "Hey, I like the way, you know, you handled this," or, "I like the way that you stood in line quietly." "I like the way you raised your hand." You know, and they catch on. They know that you're going to notice them. These kids at this school are hungry to be

noticed. And I can just see it on their little face that they want to be noticed so bad. And most kids do. But there's just something about this school. These little kids, if you just praise them a little bit and notice them and notice their clothes, notice, you know, say something positive, whether their clothes are dirty, whether their shoes are dirty, no matter what.

Their hair is dirty. Their face is dirty. Find something, find something and tell 'em every day, every day. Always listen to their voice every day. I would always make sure I heard every child's voice in my classroom every single day. Some of them are shy or quiet at the beginning or something, but I would, even if it meant me kneeling down beside them with a one-on-one conversation, I made sure. And that was one thing I would always do, is make sure I had a conversation with every child one-on-one every single day. And, no matter what they want. They want to give you something all the time. I don't care if it's a rock, I don't care if it's an eraser. I don't care what it is. You take that. You don't say anything negative about it, you know, or say, "I don't need that. I don't want that." Or whatever. You take it and you act like that's the most precious gift they could have given you. And I, I mean, I, I've gotten some funny things in the past, but, you know, you don't forget those things. And they don't forget it. They don't forget giving you little gifts and they've picked that rock special for you, you know, up off the ground or those little flowers, those little weeds they come and give you, you know, you take it. You, you can throw it away later, but it don't matter what it is. You, you never, never, you know, not take it or you never, if they want to give you a hug, you never turn away and not give them babies a hug ever. That may be the only one they get that day.

Bryson: You have said a lot about praise. Do you think that that goes into love? Do you think that love is involved in teaching?

Debbie: Absolutely. I don't think you can be an effective teacher if you do not love your kids. And if you don't love your job, it shows on your face. It just does. You're in the wrong profession. You know, here I'm about in tears 'cause I love these kids so much. And you don't just love 'em here at school. You take that love home with you and you worry about 'em at night. You worry. Do they have supper? Well, I wonder, you know, where are they sleeping tonight? You know, are they warm? You know, are they going to have clean clothes to wear tomorrow? Or do they have a winter coat? And you know, when they're not here, you don't forget about 'em. You, they go home with you mentally and you just think about 'em all the time. You can't teach and not love. I mean, it goes together hand in hand because you've got to love these babies.

Bryson: This is for you Debbie, but really for any teacher. What keeps you coming back every year?

Debbie: The love, the love I feel for these kids and, I feel like I still have something to offer them and they have something to offer me. A hug around the neck, a smile, you know, and I know what it's like personally to grow up in same situations as some of these kids. That's how I grew up. We were as poor, as poor could be. Matter of fact, we were probably even more poor because we didn't even have a bathroom in our house till I was 12 years old or running water. But we were clean, you know. And, Mama would have to draw water out of the well, and she would, warm it on the stove and fill up a tub in the middle of the floor in our kitchen. And we'd take our baths. But of course we had one every night and we wore clean clothes and stuff. But I knew what it was like, and I knew what it was like when my fifth grade teacher showed me love, even though I was probably the poorest one in the classroom. I would look for things that I could go to her desk. And we see that here with our kids. They search for a reason to get out of their seat, to come ask you something, to show you something. I would do the same thing. I had

to wear, I grew up in a really strict religious home where I had to wear dresses all the time. And, I would untie my belt just so I could go stand by her because I knew she loved me and she was going to tie my belt and that she was going to give me a hug while I was up there, that kind of thing. One time I pretended I had something in my eye just so she would touch my face. Hmm. I remember that. And, and she did. She, she, you know, she was looking all in and she couldn't find anything, of course. And, something to put a Band-Aid on. We see these same things every single day in this, in our classrooms, in our school. I lived that. I know what it's like. That Band-Aid was the most important thing that a teacher could have done to me that day is put a Band-Aid on me. And you got to have that balance, you know, and they know, you know, you've got to have that balance of discipline, but you got to have, show 'em love and show 'em attention and all that. And, and it may take, you know, the first few weeks of school or whatever to set those boundaries and that balance. But that's what teaching's all about too, is coming up with that balance. Because each classroom's different each year. And you know, what may work this year may not work next year, but you, you come up with that and, and they respect you and they know the rules and, and you've got to have discipline. I get asked all the time, why, how you're a strict teacher, Ms. Debbie, but how do you, these kids, they love you. They love you, and I know they love me, but I set boundaries for 'em. They have to have, I have a balance, you know, in my classrooms. I, I showed them that. I showed them discipline and sometimes I may have been a little hard on 'em, but they knew I loved them.

Bryson: Last question is, describe the term lifelong learner and what it means to you. You said a little something about that. On the love part, you said that you learn from them.

Debbie: Absolutely, and that's it. And they bring to you things, you know, what they offer you. The same things we offer them. And the pandemic hasn't just changed kindergarten and first

grade, it has changed all of the grades in the whole school. All the way through each grade, the pandemic has. From their behavior and their academics and their attention span, their focus. And, learning, lifelong learner, you know, just learning each year what it takes for each individual child that walks through your door, to meet their needs. Because each child is different, but each child can learn. But you've got to meet each individual child at their level at where they're at. And also that's something that makes me more madder to walk by classrooms and see the teachers sitting at the table or desk. Never did I ever want to be one of those. Never. And the kids just working on the computers now. But used to, it was paperwork and stuff. You've got to be involved. You've got to be right on them, involved with everything they are doing and I mean, kids know that. Change is not always the best thing. Sometimes we got to go back to old school and we go to get out those flash cards or we got to get those sentence strips or spelling words and you know, or whatever. Write the spelling words, write the multiplication facts, you know. This works sometimes with kids and some kids need that. And, I guess that's what I still do. Handwriting, you know? We've got to get back to that. I think until we do we are going to see a gap in our students, until we get back to some of that old-school handwriting and you know, the way we learned. It worked for us. That's my opinion. We have students leaving our classroom right now that still don't know their last name, much less how to write or spell it. I'm not saying it's the teacher's fault, I'm saying the curriculum that they're required to teach now does not include some of that basic stuff that the children need. They need that. It's just like they're skipping all these steps trying to accomplish the same things, but they aren't getting it accomplished because they skipped all these things that they didn't find necessary or something. This is my 38th year teaching and my only regret, I can look at you right now, and say that my only regret is that I wish I had 38 more. I love it. Love it. They'll tell me one day

I'm too old, I know. They'll probably tell me I'm too old school or something, I know that. But I absolutely can't imagine me being anywhere else. It's a lot of fun. And, you know, that's something else, you got to have that fun in there too.

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview

Interviewee: Hannah

Interviewer: Bryson

Date: May 23, 2023

Place: Bryson classroom

Time: 4:00 p.m.

- Review
 - Briefly review study's purpose
 - Review the structure of the interviews and the expected length of each interview
 - Explain that they do not have to answer a question if they do not feel comfortable or simply do not want to answer
 - Explain how results will be used
 - Questions?
- Permission to audio record and take notes
 - Obtain permission to turn on recorder from interviewee
 - Test recorder

Bryson: Why did you choose to be a teacher?

Hannah: Well, I went into college wanting to do nursing, but I wanted to be some sort of pediatric nurse or anything with kids. 'cause I loved kids and I wanted to help. And I thought that that would make a more money 'cause I, I wanted to be able to support myself 'cause my mom never could. And I went into college at West Georgia, and one year I hated biology. I hated

blood and cells and science. And, and I went and talked to a counselor, and they were like, why don't you try teaching? And I did. And I just loved it.

Bryson: How do you approach classroom management?

Hannah: I feel like classroom management comes really easy for me because I just use a lot of praise and showing them and praising them, the good behavior. And it automatically corrects the bad behavior. And loving 'em, like, I feel like as soon as they realize that you really love them, they'll do anything for you.

Bryson: Define what it means in your own words for the teacher and student to have a positive relationship.

Hannah: It's a lot about praise. I've been doing a lot of research with all the new studies that have come out after Covid, and I try really hard to do the five to one. It's like, for every negative thing you say, you say five more positive things. Another thing is I just try to fix my face. Like, you know, some days we wake up more tired, we don't want to be here. You're the first person that they see. So I'm always trying to smile or hug 'em or greet 'em. Just listen to 'em. Tell 'em good morning. Lots of praise. Lots of praise.

Bryson: Do you think that praise goes into love? Do you think that love is involved in teaching?

Hannah: Yes. They know it. Gosh. They know it. They know if you don't love 'em. They know if you don't like 'em. They're just not going to perform as well. They're not going to want to come to school. I mean, I, to me, that's just the craziest thing ever. If you don't love 'em, you're just in the wrong profession.

Bryson: What makes you keep coming back?

Hannah: I know I like to keep coming back and doing this job. And I, two, maybe last year, I went back and forth on did I want to take a third grade spot, third grade math spot, which I

always said was my dream job or stay with the ESOL. And I honestly stayed with the ESOL.

One, because there's lots of pros about it, but two, I thought I can touch 42 kids right, as opposed to 24. Like, and I know I only see 'em for a little bit, but I can be like a positive influence to 'em or a positive role model. Like I, what I do in those 45 minutes can matter for 'em. And I love on 'em, you know, I do. I baby 'em and people say that all the time I baby 'em to death. But, at least, you know, they know for that 45 minutes that I really do care about 'em.. And, love and discipline probably goes hand in hand. That's so learning can take place.

Bryson: The last question is: Describe the term lifelong learner and what it means to you.

Hannah: I feel like we're always changing. You know, this year especially, I've dealt with some really difficult behavior problems in kindergarten. And I believe it's because of the pandemic. The behavior that I've seen this year I've not seen in the whole seven years that I've done this ESOL drop-in with kindergarten. But I'm learning from it. You know, we can only get better and every kid is just different. And what works for one kid, it just might not work for the other kid. I don't know. I feel like I'm always learning. I love this job 'cause I get to see all of them. I get to watch all of them teach and like, I'll learn something from one teacher when I'm in there. But then I, I learn a lot of things from another teacher, which we're very different, but I feel like, you know, I've picked up so many things she does. Kindergarten can be so hard and demanding. But, that's one of my favorite things about this position is I can go in and watch all of those teachers and watch all of them teach and then think oh that was good, I want to do that! Then, I'm always changing 'cause they're always changing. You know, a long time ago we got to go observe other teachers, and I get to every day! One teacher takes my breath away with the way she does certain things. It's so good. This pandemic has been a big change. I know for me, their behavior and emotional problems. It's just changed. I feel like the pandemic really showed

us that we can't just use those stinking computers, we just can't. We need to go back, it's not the best thing sometimes. Which is crazy 'cause before the pandemic we thought technology was the end all be all, we all used it, we were forced to use it, but really, like a pendulum right? We've kind of swung back around to paper/pencil and read alouds and up teaching, which I really like it. That's the way I want to learn. I'd much rather see a pencil in their hand than a screen in their face. Some kindergarteners have never held a pencil or learned to hold it correctly before school or never seen a book.

END OF INTERVIEW