



Love Pedagogy: Teachers Reflect On Love As An Educational Approach

Dr. Diana Daaboul^{1*}

^{1*}The David Yellin Academic College of Education, Jerusalem, Israel; e-mail: dianad@dyellin.ac.il

Citation: Dr. Diana Daaboul (2024) Love Pedagogy: Teachers Reflect On Love As An Educational Approach, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(10), 51 -57
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i10.7894

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Love pedagogy integrates emotional and relational aspects into education, fostering compassionate relationships between educators and students, and promoting a more humane approach to teaching. Rooted in its leading principle that education should nurture both the intellectual and emotional growth of students, this study explored the role of love pedagogy in contemporary education by examining the opinions, knowledge, and experiences of 61 educators. Through a qualitative questionnaire with open-ended questions, the research investigated how teachers perceive and implement love-based approaches in their classrooms. The findings indicate a strong belief among educators that love is a foundational element to effective teaching, promoting emotional well-being, enhancing student engagement, and fostering a positive learning environment. Many teachers perceived love as an essential component of education, considering it an integral part of their professional responsibilities. The study highlights the benefits of love pedagogy in reducing behavioral issues, increasing participation, and supporting holistic student development. However, challenges such as personal stress and difficult student behavior can hinder consistent application of this approach. Notably, 83.61% of teachers had no formal training in love pedagogy, pointing to a gap in teacher education programs. Based on these results, the study concludes that formalizing the role of love in education, teachers can better nurture both the academic and emotional growth of their students, resulting in improved educational outcomes. Therefore, it proposes to incorporate love pedagogy into formal teacher training, provide institutional support for teachers, and promote a more holistic educational framework.

Keywords: Love pedagogy, Teacher education, Emotional well-being, Student engagement, Classroom management.

1. Introduction:

The role of love and care in education has gained increasing recognition as scholars and educators alike emphasize the need for a more humane and compassionate approach to pedagogy. Love pedagogy highlights the importance of building genuine, supportive relationships between educators and students. It integrates the non-academic aspects of emotional and relational dimensions into the teaching process. Grounded in the belief that education should nurture both the intellectual and emotional growth of students, love pedagogy challenges the teacher-centered traditional authoritarian models of teaching and promotes a collaborative, care-oriented approach.

Theoretical Framework: Love Pedagogy in Educational Contexts

The concept of love in education centers on the idea that teaching should not only be about the transmission of knowledge, as educators seek to create environments where emotional and relational engagement contribute to holistic development. Love pedagogy, grounded in the work of educational theorists such as Paulo Freire, Gloria Jean Watkins (better known by the pen name bell hooks), and Nel Noddings, explores the vital role the emotional dimension of teaching plays in fostering student engagement, academic performance, and social-emotional well-being. Expanding on the foundational ideas of love pedagogy, this framework also integrates contemporary studies that examine love in various educational settings, including early childhood education, second language acquisition (SLA), and teacher-student relationships.

2. Literature review:

Love as a Foundational Element in Teaching

The notion that love is central to education is deeply rooted in the philosophy of education. A notable example is Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he framed education as an act of love. Freire argued that education cannot be separated from the emotional and relational aspects of teaching, asserting that teaching is a dialogical process grounded in mutual respect, care, and love. Without love, education becomes the mechanical transfer of knowledge rather than a process of transformation that empowers both the teacher and the student.

Freire's ideas resonate with later works, including bell hooks' (2003) book *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, where she emphasized that love is foundational to classroom interactions as it fosters hope and critical thinking through deep relational bonds. In addition, Noddings' (2005) work on the ethics of care further supports the notion that caring relationships are central to moral education. In her view, love in education is about attending to the needs and emotions of students, understanding their individual differences, and engaging in caring acts that nurture personal growth. This notion of care extends beyond mere emotional support, positioning the teacher as a moral agent who facilitates both academic and emotional development.

Contemporary Perspectives on Love Pedagogy

The resurgence of interest in love pedagogy has led scholars to explore its practical application across different educational contexts. Loreman's (2011) framework identified key emotional components that together form the core of love pedagogy as they cultivate strong relationships, improve teaching effectiveness, and establish an encouraging learning atmosphere: passion, kindness, empathy, intimacy, bonding, sacrifice, forgiveness, acceptance, and community. These emotional constructs highlight that love in education is not a passive feeling but an active, relational process that involves mutual respect and engagement.

Derakhshan et al. (2022) expanded on this by positioning love pedagogy as a critical element in SLA, where positive emotional connections enhance student motivation, engagement, and success. In SLA, teachers are encouraged to foster emotional connections that allow students to feel secure and motivated, leading to better academic performance. The research suggested that a love-based approach in SLA is particularly effective in enhancing students' autonomy, social competence, and critical thinking skills (Derakhshan et al., 2022). These findings underscore that love in education is not limited to early childhood settings but can be effectively applied in various domains, including language learning and higher education.

Another practical aspect of love pedagogy can be found in the implementation of the affective pedagogy approach in teacher education programs, as discussed by Falcón-Linares (2023). She emphasizes the role of explicit emotional learning by integrating emotional reflection with vicarious learning, allowing teachers to develop a deeper understanding of their emotional engagement in teaching. This is critical as teachers must be aware of how their emotions influence their students, on the one hand, and how emotional connections can enhance learning outcomes, on the other hand.

Love Pedagogy in Early Childhood and SLA

In early childhood education, love-based approaches are particularly effective in building strong emotional foundations that support long-term learning. As noted by Grimmer (2021), early childhood educators who adopt a love pedagogy create environments where children feel safe, respected, and valued. This does not only promote emotional well-being but also fosters cognitive development and social competence.

Similarly, in the study field of SLA, putting into practice love pedagogy enhances student motivation and engagement, leading to improved language learning outcomes. Research by Barcelos (2020) and Vincent (2016) found that love in education is associated with higher levels of autonomy, identity formation, and student success. Teachers who use love-based approaches in language learning create classrooms where students are more willing to take risks, participate actively, and collaborate with their peers.

The Pedagogy of Love in Christian Education

In Christian education, the pedagogy of love is a central element, drawing heavily from the teachings of Jesus Christ. Ohirko (2019) states that Christian pedagogy is based on the commandments to love God and others, fostering spiritual and moral development.

This pedagogy encourages educators to prioritize love as a moral obligation, promoting virtues such as faith, hope, and unconditional love. Similarly, Sales (2020) expanded on this by positioning Christian pedagogy as a transformative framework, emphasizing love as a spiritual act that transcends societal, racial, and cultural boundaries. Sales highlights the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26) as an example of Jesus' unconditional love, which dismantles social norms and affirms individual dignity. Both perspectives assert that the pedagogy of love is not merely emotional but rather a deliberate and spiritual practice.

The Role of Emotions in Teacher-Student Interactions

Schutz (2014) argued that teaching is deeply tied to emotional experiences, which influence not only the teacher-student relationship but also the overall classroom dynamics. Emotions such as love play a significant role in shaping the learning environment, and teaching is inherently emotional. Research on emotional engagement highlights that positive emotions such as love, compassion, and empathy can create a supportive learning environment that promotes student well-being and academic achievement.

Vincent (2016) identified love as a crucial element in teacher-student relationships, where relational engagement fosters trust, belonging, and motivation. Furthermore, the results of this study supported the idea that empathy and compassion are essential in managing classroom dynamics. Teachers who build emotional connections with their students create a sense of safety and inclusivity, leading to reduced behavioral issues and increased student participation.

Challenges in Implementing Love Pedagogy

While the benefits of love pedagogy are clear, several challenges hinder its widespread implementation. Cultural resistance and ethical concerns often make teachers hesitant to adopt a love-based approach in their classrooms. In some cultural contexts, love is viewed as a personal or romantic emotion that should remain outside professional domains. As Zhao and Li (2021) point out, in many English as a Foreign/Second Language classrooms (where English is taught to non-native speakers in a non-English speaking country or where English is the dominant language, respectively), the notion of love is regarded with suspicion, leading teachers to avoid explicit emotional engagement out of concern for maintaining professional boundaries. Moreover, even if teachers determine to adopt love pedagogy in their educational approach, external pressures such as curriculum demands, administrative responsibilities, and personal stress can make it difficult for them to consistently apply it.

Pedagogical Approaches and Practical Applications

Effective implementation of love pedagogy requires both an emotional commitment from teachers and the integration of love-based strategies into the curriculum. Wang et al. (2021) suggested a model for professional love, which includes the development of emotional resilience, a shift from self-centered to student-centered thinking, and the building of reciprocal relationships between teachers and students.

In addition, Page's (2018) model of love in education, which emphasizes the importance of establishing emotional intimacy and trust between teachers and students, remarks that implementing a pedagogy of love requires teachers to be emotionally aware, capable of empathy, and willing to engage in dialogue with students. This process is more complex and consuming as it involves not only caring for students' academic needs but also attending to their emotional well-being.

3. Research issue:

The integration of love pedagogy into educational practices is essential for creating emotionally supportive and academically successful learning environments. The theoretical underpinnings from Freire, bell hooks, and Noddings, alongside contemporary research on affective pedagogy and loving pedagogy in SLA and student-teacher interaction, highlight the transformative power of love in education. By incorporating love-based approaches, educators can enhance student engagement, improve academic outcomes, and foster a sense of community within the classroom. However, challenges such as cultural barriers, ethical concerns, and professional boundaries must be addressed to ensure the effective implementation of love pedagogy across diverse educational contexts.

The present study explores the significance of love and care in educational settings by drawing on input from over 60 teachers who provided insights into their knowledge, experiences, and practices of love pedagogy. Using a qualitative questionnaire with open-ended questions, the study gathered data on how educators perceive and apply love in their classrooms. The survey addressed various topics, including teachers' understanding of love pedagogy, its role in education, and the challenges they face in its implementation. By analyzing these insights through patterns, percentages, and illustrative quotes, this study aims to identify the extent of educators' knowledge and familiarity with this educational approach, its perceived importance, its role in contemporary education and possible ways of increasing exposure to it.

4. Research Methodology:

The present study employed a qualitative research design using an open-ended questionnaire to gather insights from teachers on their understanding, experience, and application of love pedagogy in educational settings. The qualitative approach is appropriate for this research given it allows for in-depth exploration of the participants' thoughts, opinions, and experiences regarding love pedagogy, an emotionally complex and highly personal subject. Open-ended questions enable participants to express their views freely, providing rich, nuanced data that cannot be captured by quantitative methods. The written responses were qualitatively analyzed and the major themes extracted from each of the answers to the open-ended questions. The research

focused on understanding the role of love in the classroom, the benefits and challenges of implementing love-based approaches, and teachers' perspectives on the training required to effectively apply love pedagogy.

Procedure of data collection

A series of several open-ended questions covered topics such as:

1. Teachers' definitions of love pedagogy.
2. Experiences with love-based teaching approaches.
3. The perceived impact of love pedagogy on student behavior, engagement, and academic performance.
4. Challenges teachers face in implementing love pedagogy in the classroom.
5. Whether teachers receive any formal training in love pedagogy.

Responses were collected through a Google Form, allowing for easy distribution and the collection of data from a diverse group of participants. Participants received a clear definition of love pedagogy at the end of the questionnaire. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and categorize recurring themes in the participants' responses.

Participants

The research participants consisted of 61 Arab teachers that teach in Arab schools in Israel, the majority of which (56) were female (92%), who had varied levels of teaching experience and a range of student age groups:

- *Years of teaching experience:* 36 teachers had over five years of teaching experience, 20 had between two and five years, and 5 had one year of experience. The majority of respondents had over five years of teaching experience, reflecting a more seasoned group of educators. This may provide a deeper perspective on the use of love pedagogy across a variety of educational environments
- *Age group of students:* Participants taught students in different age groups, with a majority of 32 teaching elementary school, 16 teaching preparatory or secondary students, and 12 working in mixed-age special education classes.

5. Results:

Responses are presented according to the sequence of questions in the form. Each question is displayed along with a summary of its answers. Statements and quotes from the study participants are integrated into the presentation of the results to illustrate themes and provide examples.

Have you heard or learned about the "Love-Based Teaching Approach"?

- No: 51 participants (83.61%)
- Yes: 10 participants (16.39%)

Of the 61 participants, the vast majority had no formal training in "Love-Based Teaching Approach", highlighting a significant gap in teacher education programs related to love pedagogy. While it is clear that the concept of love in education is not mainstream in teacher training programs, responses still indicated strong opinions on love in education, suggesting that many teachers may apply elements of this approach intuitively.

Guess the definition of the Love-Based Teaching Approach

This question asked teachers to define the love-based approach based on either their prior knowledge or their best guess. Many respondents described love pedagogy as an approach that emphasizes compassion and understanding in the classroom. A central theme was the concept of showing students that they are "valued" and "cared for":

"To give to our students with love and show them love through our teaching and to be compassionate and understanding of their needs and that they are valued."

Another main theme was that of emotional connection, teachers often highlighted the importance of an emotional bond between students and teachers, focusing on love as a tool for creating a positive learning environment, and noting that love-based classroom management fosters mutual respect and cooperation among students:

"Using emotions in the educational process and building a loving relationship between the student, the teacher, and the curriculum."

Some respondents believed this approach uses love as a tool for learning. They indicated that love helps students succeed, build their self-esteem and encourages participation in the classroom:

"Teaching with pure love and using direct methods to reflect this feeling in the classroom."

"I have not heard of it as a science that is being taught, but I believe that one of the important educational tools in our current time is love. The teacher should express their love either through words or through their attitude and actions towards the students."

From the responses to this question, we can assert two kinds of definitions:

- Compassionate definitions: 40% of respondents described the love-based approach in terms of emotional connection and compassion.
- Emotion-based definitions: 35% of respondents emphasized using emotions to improve educational outcomes.

Reasons for supporting or opposing the Love-based Teaching Approach in the classroom

This question explored teachers' reasons for their views on love-based approaches in education.

Many teachers viewed love as a part of education. They argued that love is integral to education, emphasizing that without love learning becomes mechanical:

"...because a caring personality with values of love, respect, and inclusion is part of the teacher's job."

Several respondents viewed love as essential for holistic teaching, contributing to students' personal and emotional development.

"...the teacher has a clear role in creating the student's personality and building their self-confidence."

Additional responses in support of love pedagogy in teaching showcase success and improvement:

"I use love and acceptance to encourage students to succeed academically and emotionally."

"Love brings students closer, makes them more engaged, and improves their focus in class."

In contrast, some teachers acknowledged challenges in consistently applying love pedagogy, stating obstacles such as personal issues or difficult student behavior. Participants in the current study acknowledged that while they believe in the value of love, external constraints such as large class sizes, standardized testing, and limited resources often prevent them from prioritizing emotional care.

"Sometimes I may not be able to work with love due to personal or other circumstances."

The Role of the Teacher and Love

This question asked teachers for their views on whether love is part of the teacher's duty. Most respondents (85%) strongly disagreed with the statement that love is not part of a teacher's duty, arguing that love is central to effective teaching:

"I strongly object to this statement because the teacher is an educator and the most important characteristic of education is love."

Several teachers stressed that love helps build students' self-confidence and plays a role in developing their personality:

"This is not true because the teacher has a clear role in shaping the students' personalities and building their self-confidence."

"It is unacceptable to me, because you cannot separate education from upbringing."

Some respondents highlighted education as more than a duty, detailing teaching as an act of giving, and love as naturally flowing from this mindset:

"If we consider education a duty, then it may be that love is not included, but love is an act of giving, which is related to a person's perspective towards education."

"Love is the secret to success in teaching. If a teacher does not show love, they lose an important tool for reaching their students."

6. Summary of Major findings:

Overall, the data reflects a strong belief among educators that love is an integral part of teaching. The majority of respondents emphasized that love helps build trust, improves student engagement, and foster a positive learning environment. Teachers with more personal experiences of love-based approaches in their non-professional lives found it easier to implement it in their classrooms. However, challenges such as personal circumstances and difficult student behavior were acknowledged as obstacles.

7. Conclusions:

This research underscores the significance of love pedagogy in education, revealing that while the term may not be widely recognized or formally taught, many educators view it as essential to effective teaching. The overwhelming consensus among teachers is that love fosters a positive classroom environment, enhances student engagement, and contributes to both emotional and academic development. These findings resonate with existing literature, which advocates for integrating emotional and moral values into teaching practices,

emphasizing that love can create nurturing spaces where students thrive (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2003; Ohirko, 2019). The diverse teaching environments from which participating teachers came suggest that love pedagogy is applicable across various educational stages.

Teachers acknowledged that love-based approaches not only reduce behavioral issues but also promote inclusivity and trust. This aligns with previous studies that demonstrate how love in pedagogy strengthens teacher-student relationships, leading to increased motivation and participation (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Vincent, 2016). However, many educators face challenges in consistently applying love pedagogy due to personal stress and external pressures, such as standardized testing and large class sizes. This highlights a significant gap in formal training, as a majority of participants reported not having received education on love-based teaching methods, indicating the need for professional development focused on these approaches (Page, 2018; Loreman, 2011).

Ultimately, the findings affirm that love is integral to the teaching process and plays a vital role in fostering holistic education, and contribute to the growing body of literature advocating for the integration of emotional and moral values into teaching practices. As educators recognize the importance of emotional support alongside academic instruction, future research should explore the practical application of love pedagogy across diverse cultural and social contexts, ensuring that it meets the varied needs of students (Noddings, 2005; Grimmer, 2021).

8. Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to ensure effective implementation of love pedagogy in educational systems. The following key recommendations are proposed to support teachers and schools in integrating love-based approaches into their daily practices.

1. Given the overwhelming support for this approach, teacher education programs should incorporate formal training on love pedagogy. These can include workshops, courses, or enrichment programs focused on how to apply love-based approaches in various classroom settings. Formalizing love pedagogy implementation would benefit educators and students alike.
2. Schools and educational institutions should allocate resources and set in place support systems to help teachers overcome the obstacles they face in applying love pedagogy. For example, offering professional development programs that focus on managing stress, handling difficult classroom behaviors, and maintaining a balance between discipline and emotional support.
3. Educational policies should promote a holistic approach, where the emotional well-being of students is considered as important as academic achievement. Love-based methods can be promoted as part of this holistic framework to improve academic performance concurrently with fostering students' well-being.
4. Schools are encouraged to motivate teachers to reflect on their emotional engagement with students as part of their professional development. Reflective practice helps educators recognize the impact of their actions and attitudes on students, allowing them to better incorporate love-based approaches in their daily practice.

These recommendations are grounded in the strong belief that love pedagogy enhances education. By formally integrating these practices into teacher training and providing continuous support, educators can effectively foster both academic and emotional development in students.

9. Limitations:

Most participants were women, which could influence how nurturing and emotional care is viewed in the classroom. This gender disparity might also impact how love pedagogy is perceived and applied. In addition, all participating teachers were from the Arab community, which may influence the findings and limit the generalizability of the results to other cultural or ethnic groups. Finally, the present study offers data exclusively from Israel; a future cross-cultural study, amplifying the voices of educators from diverse backgrounds, could provide a more comprehensive perspective.

10. References:

1. Barcelos, A. M. F. (2020). Revolutionary love and peace in the construction of an English teacher's professional identity. In R. Oxford, M. Olivero, M. Harrison, & T. Gregersen (Eds.), *Peacebuilding in Language Education* (pp. 96-109). Multilingual Matters.
2. Derakhshan, A., Wang, Y., & Pan, Z. (2022). Positioning an agenda on a loving pedagogy in second language acquisition: Conceptualization, practice, and research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 894190.
3. Falcón-Linares, C. (2023). Affective pedagogy in pre-service teacher education: A twofold approach combining explicit and vicarious learning. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, 15(2), 3-20.
4. Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum International Publishing Group.
5. Grimmer, T. (2021). *Developing a Loving Pedagogy in the Early Years: How Love Fits With Professional Practice*. Routledge.

6. hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. Psychology Press.
7. Loreman, T. (2011). *Love as Pedagogy*. Springer Science & Business Media.
8. Noddings, N. (2005). *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. Teachers College Press.
9. Ohirko, O. V. (2019). Christian pedagogy as a pedagogy of love. *The Bulletin of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. Pedagogy*, (1), 50-54.
10. Page, J. (2018). Characterising the principles of professional love in early childhood care and education. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 26(2), 125-141.
11. Sales, T. B. (2020). Love: A critical pillar in the pedagogy of Jesus. *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry*, 17(2), 233-247.
12. Schutz, P. A. (2014). Emotion in education: Where we've been and where we're going. *Educational Psychologist*, 49(1), 1-12.
13. Vincent, J. (2016). Perspectives on love as a component of professional practice. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 5(1), 6-21.
14. Wang, Y., Derakhshan, A., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Researching and practicing positive psychology in second/foreign language learning and teaching: The past, current status, and future directions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 731721.
15. Zhao, S., & Li, M. (2021). Reflection on loving pedagogy and students' engagement in EFL/ESL classrooms. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 757697.