Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on Love and Care

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ABSTRACT

**Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on Love and Care**
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The concept of love in early childhood education is complex and challenging to define. However, understanding early childhood educators' views on love is essential for supporting educators and children in childcare settings. This phenomenological study examines early childhood educators' beliefs and expressions of love and how they differentiate between love and care in their interactions with children. Their perspectives include, amongst others, influences from parents, coworkers and children. Eight early childhood educators from Montreal, Canada, who work with children under five years of age were recruited for this study. They participated in in-depth individual and focus group interviews. During the interviews, the participants were asked questions about their perspectives on love and care in their childcare settings as well as inspirations and challenges to showing love. They each gave concrete examples of how they showed love, including physical affection, curriculum actions and emotional support. The focus group discussions allowed participants to share their thoughts on personal and traditional definitions of love, deepening the dialogue around these complex concepts. The data was analyzed using In Vivo and Emotion coding and four themes were identified: (1) How Educators Believe They Show Love, (2) Factors That Educators Believe Shape the Way They Show Love, (3) Factors Educators Believe Act as Barriers and Challenges to Showing Love, and (4) How Educators Understand Love and Care in Their Work. These themes provide valuable insights into the educators' experiences and interactions within early childhood settings, highlighting the emotional intricacies of their roles, specifically as they alter

their expressions of love and care for the children. This research has important implications for early childhood education training and support, helping pre-service teachers better understand their work's emotional dimensions and navigate the challenges of forming and maintaining meaningful relationships in childcare environments.

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**Chapter 1. Introduction**

Parents are not the only ones asking, "What about love?" Educators, researchers, and policymakers have struggled to balance academics, professionalism, and emotional connection within early childhood educational settings (Ailwood, 2008; 2017). Page (2011) states that the concept of love in the classroom may currently be misunderstood, though it has not always been contested. Both Froebel and Montessori highlighted the importance of love in educational settings (Aslanian, 2015). The entire "kindergarten movement" was founded on the notion that education should be offered within a loving environment (Aslanian, 2015), with several theories stating that children learn best when they are in a loving and caring relationship with their educator (Rouse & Hadley, 2018). Early childhood education proponents have also emphasized that the environment of a childcare setting should be a loving atmosphere rather than an institutional one (Rouse & Hadley, 2018). However, educators have stated that they are unsure about how to create such an environment of love and care and are concerned about creating personal relationships with the children (Page, 2011; 2014). Educators have stated that they are also confused about regulatory expectations, which focus on educational activities or custodial acts of care, such as feeding and hygiene tasks, more than the relational aspects of the educators' profession, such as building loving relationships with the children in their care (Rouse & Hadley, 2018).

The need for early childhood education has grown since the 1980s, with more mothers in the workforce. In 2019, 60% of Canadian children under the age of six were in childcare (StatsCan, 2021, Uppal, & Savage, 2021, June 25th). This has required parents to decide what types of care they want and what forms of relationships they are comfortable with between their child(ren) and non-related adults. How comfortable are they with their young children developing bonds and relationships with others?

When asked about their motivation for entering the field of early childhood education, many students say that they love children (Fenech et al., 2009; Grant et al., 2019; Jalongo, 2002). I, too, was once a prospective early childhood educator, interviewing for acceptance into the college of my choice. I expressed my love for children but also stated that I wanted to work in early childhood because I wanted to teach children. These two concepts, the love for children and the desire to teach them, have been at odds with me ever since. I have struggled with reconciling the concepts of love and education in the same setting and determining which 'side of me' should win, the teacher or the caregiver. Of course, I am not alone in this struggle.

It is important that notions of love within the early childhood context be discussed openly at all levels (parents, educators, curriculum) as they influence the actions and decisions of interested collaborators (Page, 2011). In other words, parents need to openly discuss their children's potential loving relationships with the educators, educators need to be self-reflective and understand their own ideas of love within the ECE context (Page, 2018), and student teachers need to be taught about the importance of love within the classroom including the potential pitfalls they may encounter (O'Connor et al., 2019). This dissertation project contributes meaningfully to this critical conversation by exploring how educators perceive and express love in early childhood settings. By examining these beliefs and practices, it addresses a gap in the literature surrounding the practical application of love in ECE contexts and its impact on relationships and pedagogy. Furthermore, this work highlights the need for embedding discussions of love into teacher education programs, professional development, and curriculum design. By doing so, it enriches the broader discourse on relational dynamics in ECE and offers actionable insights to foster nurturing, reflective, and inclusive environments for children, families, and educators alike.

In this project, I draw from my personal journey of grappling with the concept of love and many of the same concerns that have plagued others. Since my early childhood education training, where we were taught that children were not to be hugged or touched more than necessary, I have wrestled with how I, as an educator, could show love to the children in my care while still being professional and above reproach. I, like others, feel that the loving nature of the early childhood educator contributes to making us professional. However, it is more common for this quality to be seen as unprofessional (Osgood, 2012).

A struggle raged in me throughout my early years as an educator, trying to balance professionalism and emotion. I felt that if I showed too much affection for the children in my care, parents would be suspicious and make accusations of favouritism, impropriety or even abuse. However, I knew that I did indeed love the children and needed to share that with them, which led me to seek out how to express it comfortably. At the time, I worked in a large group daycare center, which afforded me the luxury of watching other educators express their love to the children. I also had many friends in the field and a mentor, so I could converse about love and what it could look like within a childcare setting. Through these experiences, I have discovered that love appears to be very individual. Each educator varied in how they showed it, following their personality, experience, and beliefs. Unlike some of my colleagues, I am not a physically affectionate person by nature, in the sense that I was not quick to hug children in my care. I am, however, talkative and outgoing, so I did my best to find a way to demonstrate my feelings while staying true to my personality. I realized then that I also needed to respect the policies of the centres and customs of the society I was working in, which included respecting the families I was working with. Still, I often compared myself to others, thinking I was a worse educator than some due to the minimal amount of physical affection I showed or that I was a

better educator than others because I was less emotional and appeared more professional. At the time, I did not think about the implications of this personalized expression of love on the general field of ECE, with each educator needing to find their own expressions, often without support, guidelines, or even awareness.

My employment at a community college (CEGEP) early childhood education program reignited my interest in the definitions of love for early childhood educators. As I got to know student teachers and heard about their passions and motivations for becoming early childhood educators, a recurring statement emerged that they "love children." This statement and its similar forms ("I love working with children," "I love being with children") were part of what has inspired this research.

This dissertation project addresses love and care in early childhood education, including classical definitions, love in a professional context, similarities and differences between love and care, the struggle for professionalism, and educators' perspectives on love and care.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

**Accounts of Love Within the Research Literature**

What is love within the context of education, specifically early childhood education? This is a challenging topic, as Page (2011) wrote, "love is not easily defined or discussed, but not talking about love implies that the topic is somehow taboo" (p. 312). This chapter reviews the various definitions of love, the distinctions between love and care, professionalism, and educators' perspectives on love. This literature review sets the foundation and context for the dissertation project.

**Classical Definitions of Love**

Numerous studies look to the Greek terms *eros*, *agape* and *philia* for clear categories of love (Aslanian, 2018; O'Connor et al., 2019; White & Gradovski, 2018). *Agape*, a term used most often to refer to the Christian ideal of "loving thy neighbour," is one educators and researchers are most comfortable with when working with young children (White & Gradovski, 2018, p. 202). *Agape* is an unconditional love that is devoid of the sensual or erotic that is noted in *eros* but deeper than what is found in *philia*, which is akin to friendship (O'Connor et al., 2019; White & Gradovski, 2018). Given that romantic or erotic love has no place in early childhood education and that friendship is uncommon because of the power dynamic between teacher and student, it is *agape* that is most readily embraced by educators (O'Connor et al., 2019). It is not only the Christian faith that has such concepts; Judaism has *chesed*, or the idea of "loving kindness," which is filled with a communal sense of "gratitude and devotion to God" (Taggart, 2022, p. 3). This devotion to God motivates the caregiver to focus on the 'other,' ensuring that the person's needs are met through compassion and respect. Loving kindness is akin to a Buddhist term, *metta,* which speaks of an attitude of compassion that can be grown

within a person (Taggart, 2022). Taggart (2022) insists that these faith-based terms could be the "counter-cultural love (…) to challenge the individualistic stance of neoliberalism" (p. 4).

Although these faith-based terms are inspired by religion, a similar form of love can be described through the terms altruism or compassion: "behaviour that serves the group, or others, more than or even to the detriment of one's self" (Aslanian, 2018, p. 179). It is, however, unclear what motivates acts of altruism. There is an aspect of perseverance for the survival of the human race that can motivate altruism for the sake of children, at least in the basic sense of providing for a child's physical needs. Altruism does not, however, explain why an educator would value a loving relationship with children (Aslanian, 2018). Others take a more pedagogical stance on love as Uusiautti and Maatta (2013), who stated, "Love in early education serves as a means to create a learning environment where children can use and develop their own resources, and eventually reach the fullest expression of their abilities" (p. 110). This broadens the previously stated definitions considerably, to the extent that an educator could claim that everything they do within the classroom, including the arrangement of the environment, program planning and curriculum writing, can be seen as acts of love (Uusiautti & Maatta, 2013).

Love has been suggested by Cousins (2016) as a personal experiential emotion that looks different for each person and situation. This suggests that in some situations, love is natural, immediate, and easy, while at other times, love takes time to develop, growing as the educator gets to know the child. For example, an educator and a child may get along quickly while other children take more time to build relationships. hooks (2003) stated that love within the classroom is what pushes educators to be their best, serving as their motivator. She gave examples of students to whom she has shown love, noting that the students felt cared for and had a level of trust for her, developing into relationships that extended outside of the time and space of the

classroom. She described love as "a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust" (p. 131).

**Love in the Context of Professional Early Childhood Education and Care**

It is not surprising to hear educators state that they "love" children; in fact, it is a key motivating factor for entering the field of education (Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; Fenech et al., 2009; Grant et al., 2019; Jalongo, 2002). Many educators express that their love for the children in their classes is the basis of the 'real work' they do (Osgood, 2010). They believe that basic care work, such as feeding, hygiene tasks and meeting government regulations, distracts them from the actions of love that they want to express in the classroom. Working in an environment where the regulations are often confusing, with inspectors of those regulations seemingly not familiar with the emotional aspect of the work done in an early childhood classroom, can be stressful for educators (Osgood, 2010). Osgood (2010) interviewed twenty-four nursery educators in the UK who stated they did not have time to give the love they wanted because they were busy ensuring that they fulfilled the government regulations. They expressed that they were expected to perform specific duties, including cleaning the room and meeting the physical needs of the children, leaving less time for building quality loving relationships (Osgood, 2010). The highly restrictive nature of the regulations made educators feel bogged down, unable to focus on the aspects of their profession that they deemed most important, specifically actions of love (Osgood, 2010; Page, 2018a).

Looking at love as a foundational aspect of the early childhood classroom, Page (2018b) researched what she called "Professional Love," highlighting the critical role of attachment in fostering meaningful relationships within the classroom. She explored the implications of attachment theory, emphasizing its importance in explaining why some children and teachers

bond more easily than others. Attachment theory underscores that a strong attachment to a primary caregiver at home equips children to establish secure attachments with caregivers in daycare settings, a foundational element for emotional and social development. In this context, the teacher serves as a secure base, allowing children to confidently explore their environment in the absence of their parents (Recchia et al., 2018; Robson et al., 2019). Furthermore, Page (2018b) emphasizes the importance of fostering attachment with parents as well as children, creating a "Triangle of Love" between the parent, child, and educator (p. 129). This triadic bond reinforces the notion that a child's sense of security and belonging thrives when teachers and parents work collaboratively rather than at odds. Attachment within this triangle becomes the cornerstone of a supportive and nurturing early childhood environment. White and Gradovski (2018) suggest that love must be understood outside of acts of care such as feeding, cleaning, and cuddling. Instead, it should be regarded as an emotional act within pedagogy. They suggest that love requires "emotional identification" with the other, in this case, the children in childcare, and if there is no emotional identification, then it is not love. When there is no emotional connection to the other, the authors refer to it as "fellow-feeling" (White & Gradovski, 2018, p.206), which is a general sense of obligatory caregiving for the other. White and Gradovski emphasize that emotional connection is essential to turn acts of care away from obligation into love. This implies that care and love should not be seen as the same. This is similar to Noddings' (2003) emotional 'engrossment,' in which the caregiver is fully invested in the child's needs. It seems, then, that it would indeed be possible for educators to give a standard of care without having an emotional connection with the children in their classrooms, which makes it even more critical to explore educators' personal views on love.

Educators and policymakers often feel uneasy about the term "emotional," associating it with a lack of professionalism, as noted by Ailwood in 2008. Similarly, the use of the term "love" in this context also seems to evoke discomfort among professionals in these fields. Rouse and Hadley (2018) argued that in order to legitimize the early childhood profession, educators and policymakers have focused more on traditional pedagogical elements, such as academics and social behaviour, moving away from elements of love and care. However, they found that parents believed that "love, care and friendship" were the most important elements within their children's early childhood experiences (p. 165). In contrast, teachers were more focused on the traditional academic elements. Moreover, the authors argued that education should be done in "a context of care rather than care be done in a context of learning" (p. 160). This seems important as it reflects the educators' beliefs on care's vital role in their classrooms, encouraging them to push down strong academic teaching in daycare for more emotional education. Rouse and Hadley (2018) also explored the language used by parents and educators and found that the term 'love' was rarely used by educators but often used by parents. The authors did not believe that the educators were 'unloving,' or that the parents were unconcerned about education but that neoliberalist discourse was influencing the educators to prioritize top-down requirements, which they were led to believe were the most important (Rouse & Hadley, 2018). hooks (2003) emphasized the importance of emotional connection within a classroom setting, including love. She pushed back against the idea that teachers should be objective above all else, leaving emotions out of the classroom. She emphasized that love helps equip teachers to meet the individual needs of their students better, creating a positive learning environment. It is not without its challenges but worth every moment, as the bonds of love created between teacher and student last beyond the classroom (hooks, 2003; Recchia et al., 2018). Emotions play a role in

educators' pedagogical practices. Research has shown that student-focused pedagogy increases positive emotions such as love and joy (Chen, 2019), and this increase in positive emotions leads to increased work engagement (Bruic & Macuka, 2017).

Some authors have intentionally chosen the term 'care,' which is most commonly used in society. However, they claim that a more robust understanding of care in ECE(C) is needed (Ailwood, 2017). By defining the term 'care' as "the filling of the needs of others," educators are giving care to children in their daily work lives. Ailwood (2017) stated that there is an art to "giving the right care at the right moment" (p. 307). This art of care requires a responsiveness that speaks to the professionalism of the educators performing the work (Ailwood, 2017).

Noddings (2003) wrote extensively on the ethic of care, detailing how physical acts of care (such as feeding and cleaning) alone are insufficient to classify 'care' as a loving relationship. She wrote about how one's actions must be emotionally motivated to truly care for someone, to indeed have an ethic of care. In the same way, one could complete acts of care without having an emotional connection with the person; for example, a nurse in an emergency room will complete acts of care for her patients but will not often create an emotional connection with them. She referred to the state of mind of both the caregiver and the care receiver, as well as the emotion that needs to be present when the caregiver engages in acts of care. The caregiver needs to be fully emotionally present with the person receiving the care; they need to be 'engrossed' in the person. The caregiver must adopt an 'other-directed' motivation for the care; it is not enough to complete acts of care. They must want the best for the other person. In the same way, the person being cared for must be willing to receive both the acts of care and the emotional connection offered by the caregiver for a genuine caring relationship to form (Noddings, 2003).

However, Noddings' concepts of engrossment and other-directiveness seem to overlook the educator's needs, revealing a significant imbalance in the caregiving relationship (White & Gradovski, 2018). From a feminist perspective, this critique underscores the historically gendered expectations placed on educators—predominantly women—to selflessly prioritize the needs of others at the expense of their well-being. White and Gradovski (2018) argue that such a framework risk perpetuating a patriarchal notion of caregiving that values the labor of care without adequately supporting the caregiver. This neglect not only limits the educator's emotional engagement—an essential component of building meaningful relationships with children and families—but also reinforces systemic inequalities by devaluing the caregiver's emotional and professional needs.

When educators are expected to act predominantly in an other-directed manner, feelings of frustration and exhaustion can arise, mirroring the broader societal pattern of undervaluing the emotional labor traditionally associated with women (Buric & Macuka, 2018; Grant et al., 2019). These pressures may lead to diminished classroom engagement, reducing the capacity to foster caring, secure relationships with children (Ailwood, 2008; Chen, 2019). A feminist lens highlights the need to balance the care provided to others with support for educators themselves, advocating for systemic changes that value their well-being as critical to creating equitable and nurturing classroom environments.

### *Similarities and Differences Between Love and Care*

The challenge of defining 'love' and 'care' in research and policy is that the terms are often used interchangeably. However, by equating the terms, White and Gradovski (2018) believed neither term is given the attention it deserves, and they focus on how love may be expressed outside the physical acts of care. Care is often used in written curriculum and policy,

while love is rarely used (O'Connor et al., 2019; Recchia et al., 2018; White & Gradovski, 2018). Perhaps interested collaborators use the term care more often than the term love because of the suspicion that comes with the potential of child abuse (Aslanian, 2018; Bishop et al., 2002). Aslanian (2018) claimed that "love and touch in ECEC are thus conceived both as essential to child development and well-being and a threat to children's safety" (p.173). Seeing that the word care is used more often, some have opted to add qualifying labels in front of the term love to help soften any fear or stigma that may be attached, such as 'teacherly,' 'professional,' or 'pedagogical' (Aslanian, 2018; O'Connor et al., 2019; Page, 2018b). This is done partly to help educators hold to what they believe is the most important aspect of their job: loving relationships. Participants in a study conducted by O'Connor and colleagues (2019) believed that there are apparent differences between the terms; they state, "To care is to do, but to love is to do in a better way" (p. 4), implying that love is superior to care, motivating them in their professional life. This 'do' mentioned above most likely refers to physical acts of care, such as feeding, but could be more exhaustive than that, including nearly anything as long as it is done with intentionality. Physical acts of care were not enough for these educators, and they chose to use the term 'pedagogical love' to emphasize the true nature of their work (O'Connor et al., 2019, p. 9). This term gave them the freedom to embrace emotion while recognizing that in this context, love is more than an emotion; it is a "commitment to the vocation," to children and to seeing the children develop holistically (O'Connor et al., 2019, p. 9).

Looking more closely at curriculum documents used locally in Quebec, the term love is never used in the Quebec Education Program (2017). In preschool education, the term 'care' is used exclusively. In the Family Ministry document, *Meeting early childhood needs: Québec's educational program for childcare services* (Belleau, 2019), the relationship that an educator has

with the child is referred to in terms of "warm and responsive caregiving" (p. 3), "enduring emotional bonds" (p. 16) and even "meaningful emotional relationships" (p.17). The term "loving relationship" is only used in reference to parent-child relationships (p. 17) (in original French only). This implies that some relationships are appropriate for the term 'love' (parent/child), and some are not (educator/child). In the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (2009) statement on developmentally appropriate practice, the word 'love' is never mentioned. They solely use the word 'care' while describing what they define as quality childcare. When the professional literature focuses on one term, it has the potential to imply that one term ('care') is more suitable for an educator than another ('love'). When this does not align with what the educators believe their job entails, it can be detrimental to how they feel about their profession. More often, the word 'care' is used in government regulations and when discussing professionalism and relationships within an early childhood classroom (O'Connor et al., 2019), while 'love' tends to be the term used by some educators and parents (Recchia et al., 2018). While I am not attempting to take a clear stance between the terms 'love' and 'care,' I am interested in how educators distinguish between the terms.

### *The Struggle for Professionalism*

Perhaps another reason, as stated by Osgood (2010), that educators moved towards terminology such as 'care' and not 'love' is the need to quantify and report on their daily routines and tasks. By turning towards more tangible and less emotional aspects of care, educators could lean into the political, neoliberalist notions of professionalism in childcare settings, and policymakers could have a more consistent and measurable standard of 'quality' (Osgood, 2010; 2012). Nevertheless, when educators were asked what made them professional, "rationalism [and] accountability" were not mentioned (Osgood, 2010, p. 125). The educators

struggled with feelings of having to "perform professionalism" and being overburdened with report writing, government policies and government inspections (Osgood, 2010, p. 123). They felt that they needed to show their professionalism in ways that undervalued what they saw as their authentic professional selves: the love they showed to the children. When educators accepted the neoliberal definition of professionalism, focusing solely on pedagogy, they believed they were gaining respect; they were, however, losing elements of emotional connection, affecting their own well-being (Ailwood, 2017). It seems that more emotional (loving) educators are viewed as less regulatable than those focused on physical acts of care, making caregiving easier to regulate than lovingness.

This terminology of 'love' and 'care' is not the only aspect of ECE that has changed throughout the quest for professionalism; the title of the childcare worker has also changed (Osgood, 2012). Over the years, the titles have varied greatly, with some being seen as more professional than others in a neoliberal society (Osgood, 2012). An example of this is that 'daycare worker' is viewed as less professional, whereas 'educator' and 'teacher' are more so. Osgood (2010; 2012) discussed the confusion that seems to take place within the public about what early childhood education entails, which, in turn, causes some confusion about roles, titles, and the professionalization of the field. The changing and numerous qualifications of early childhood educators, from little to no formal education to graduate degrees, have added to the confusion (Rouse & Hadley, 2018). In Quebec, there are two types of early childhood educators: qualified and unqualified, and regulations govern how many of each type a centre may employ (Ministere de la Family, 2024). A childcare centre needs to keep a ratio of 2/3 qualified educators to unqualified. This means that 1/3 of the centre's educators do not need childcare-specific training (except first aid). There are several ways to become qualified as an educator,

including a 4-year BA program in university, a 3-year college level diploma program, a 1-year attestation program and several work experience programs. Even with these options, there is still a demand for unqualified educators as the workforce for educators seems to be lacking (Crawley, 2023, March 23; Government of Canada, 2023, November 29). According to the Government of Canada (2023, November 29), there is expected to be an increase in job opportunities nationwide (108,800 jobs) but not enough job seekers to fill them (91,500).

When Osgood (2010; 2012) discussed professionalism with a group of educators, she discovered that the Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, in the United Kingdom) inspections (of licensed early childhood centres) continued to be raised in both a positive and negative light. The inspections were viewed by educators as a necessary evil, one that brought attention to ECE and, to a certain level, professionalism. However, educators were also suspicious of the inspections. They believed that the inspections were often limited, ill-informed and focused on what they felt were the wrong aspects of early childhood education and the educators' roles. They also stated that the inspectors often seemed misinformed about the everyday goings-on of a childcare centre. The educators in this study felt that the essential element of their profession, their love for the children, was not captured in the short government inspections. We know that educators' identities are tied up, at least in part, with their caring and the striving towards professionalism within the field (Davis & Degotardi, 2015), yet they felt like their professional energies were required elsewhere, in tasks such as report writing (Osgood, 2012).

**Educators' Perspectives on Love**

Current research suggests that educators in different stages of their careers, training and experience have different views on what love looks like in the early childhood program. This

suggests that the experiential nature of love will lend itself well to phenomenological research. Educators may also have much to discuss regarding how their ideas and expressions have changed over time. This section first reviews pre-service teachers' ideas of love and secondly, practicing teachers' perspectives.

*The Pre-service Teacher*

As previously mentioned, many students who enter the field of early childhood educators state that their motivation for entering the field is their love for children. However, researchers suggest that love for children develops over time (O'Connor et al., 2019; Recchia et al., 2018), and it is through developing a relationship with children that one moves from loving the idea of working with children to loving children (O'Connor et al., 2019; Recchia et al., 2018). This seems to imply that it is not love for specific children motivating the student teachers but enjoyment of being around children, as this description of love for children takes time to develop. Chang-Kredl and Kingsley (2014) explored pre-service teachers' memories of and motivations for entering the field, where students mentioned three types of experiences: "school, family and work experience," and they shared both positive and negative experiences (p. 31). From their research, the authors categorized pre-service teachers' motivation as one or more of the following: the influence of a past teacher/school experience (positive or negative), a belief that they were "personally suited" for teaching or they would be better at it than other professions and lastly that they longed to be an influence for future students (Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014, p. 32). I believe love can be seen in all three motivational factors, be it love from or for a past teacher or love they will have for their future students. The motivational elements are emotional and based on the felt needs of the pre-service teacher.

Recchia and colleagues (2108) examined pre-service teachers' understanding of love and how relationships develop during an early childhood classroom practicum. The participants spent 12 hours a week in an infant and toddler class, working alongside the classroom teacher and building relationships with the infants, their families, and the teachers/staff. They were also required to focus extra attention on a "key" child assigned to them by the daycare teacher, allowing each student-teacher to gather extra knowledge and take time to create a special bond with one child and family, including participating in an in-home visit. During this practicum, the participants admitted that building loving relationships was challenging. However, they reported that they grew to love that child and felt many complex feelings for their key child, such as pride. One student-teacher even teared up when discussing her key child's developmental milestone achievement. The hard work of relationship building did not deter the participants but seemed to strengthen their resolve to build loving relationships with the children. By the end of their term in the childcare centres, the student-teachers expressed that love comes through an investment in time and attention given to the children. They realized that what they felt for the children by the end of the practicum would not disappear the instant that the semester was over but would continue past the end date and diminish over time. This realization led them to reflect on their own childhood experiences and how the love of children existed for them in both the past, present, and future, fueling their motivation for entering the field (Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; O'Connor et al., 2019; Recchia et al., 2018). Many of the pre-service teachers in the study stated that their opinion of the profession changed throughout their practicum, from performing acts of care to engaging in a caring relationship (Recchia et al., 2018).

Similarly, O'Connor et al. (2019) found that pre-service teachers were committed to expressing love to children despite fears about being 'too loving.' For instance, the pre-service

teachers questioned how much touch was appropriate in early childcare settings and whether touch played any role in their understanding of pedagogical love. Through reflection, experience, and conversation with their professors, they realized that appropriate touch plays a positive role in working with children. The participating pre-service teachers believed that each situation and each child required an individual response. Some children were more affectionate and willing to instigate physical touch, and the educator was able to return this unprompted affection. Other times, simply getting down to the child's level or placing a gentle hand on the shoulder is enough affection. For these pre-service teachers, pedagogical love promoted emotional, reciprocal, and responsive interactions, which they believed helped children to grow holistically (O'Connor et al., 2019).

Vincent and Braun (2013) discussed emotional labour and the pressure teachers feel to regulate their emotions and those of the children. Teachers and pre-service teachers are under pressure to restrict their range of emotions within the context of the classroom to those emotions that would be considered more professional (Reye et al., 2018). They are expected to stay "patient and calm" regardless of the situation and remain objective, not showing favouritism (hooks, 2003; Reye et al., 2018; Vincent & Braun, 2013, p. 746) and to keep other emotions out of the classroom, such as affection, pride, frustration, and sadness. The pre-service teachers involved in Vincent and Braun's study (2013) were taught the difference between formal (less emotional, less affectionate) and informal care (more affectionate), with the former instilled in them as the more professional stance. Colley (2006) also reported the demand for self-regulation of emotions experienced by the pre-service teachers in her study. The pre-service teachers expressed their frustration at constantly having to guard their emotions. The tutors hired to support the pre-service teachers involved in the study disclosed the pressure of the "unwritten

curriculum" of developing agreeable characteristics in their students (Colley, 2006, p. 20). There was an underlying notion of what character traits an early childhood educator should have, and the participants were expected to deny any emotion that was contrary to the expectation (Colley, 2006; Langford, 2008). Students who did not fit the societal construction of a proper educator either left the program or changed their character, at least in their public life (Colley, 2006; Vincent & Braun, 2013).

### *The Practicing Educator*

Moving from preservice to in-service teachers, research indicates that some practicing teachers have attempted to embrace the language of professionalism more than the more emotional language of love and care (Rouse & Hadley, 2018; Osgood, 2010; 2012). Rouse and Hadley (2018) stated that educators focus on language rooted in pedagogy and learning and not that of emotion or affection, yet Osgood (2010) stated that the most used attributes listed by educators are "associated with the affective domain," including caring and loving (p. 126). Research findings are divided on what educators believe are the most critical aspects of their work: education or love. This could be partly due to the need to follow government regulations, which focus more on physical acts of care, safety and education, or their understanding of professionalism for early childhood educators, which implies that professional educators are highly academic in their work (Rouse & Hadley, 2018; Osgood, 2010; 2012). Complicating matters, some educators "take pride and pleasure in their work and identity as teacher/mother…[while] others have attempted to refuse this discourse" (Ailwood, 2008, p. 162), bringing a layer of confusion when discussing love within the work life of an early childhood educator.

Looking specifically at emotions and work engagement, Bruic and Macuka (2017) found that teachers who "experienced more joy, pride and love towards their students" were more engaged in their work (p. 1928). The reverse was also true in this project; those more engaged in their work at the first assessment experienced more positive emotions toward their students at the second. Workplace emotional experiences influence work engagement. This leads to the idea that teacher's emotional engagement in educational settings is important for productive teachers, making them more 'professional,' not less, and giving them the passion and desire to be educators (Bruic & Macuka, 2017).

Not all educators are motivated to stay within the field of education after some time in the classroom. Due to the marginalization of the profession, the low pay and the general lack of recognition, educators do not always remain in the field. The internal motivation discussed previously is insufficient to hold an educator in an emotionally demanding job with little societal benefit (Colley, 2006; Fenech et al., 2009). Grant et al. (2019) explored educators' perceived working conditions and emotional well-being in relation to their retention in the field or their specific centre. They found that educators who suppressed their emotions could downplay the negative experiences and stay in their current position. Those who were reflective about negative situations were more likely to vocalize employment issues, leading them to find a new centre or profession. It is worth noting that the educators who suppressed their emotions were more likely to stay in their positions but less likely to be emotionally present or fulfilled (Hughs, 2001, as cited in Grant et al., 2019). This leads to the natural conclusion that educators being closed off to their emotional well-being is detrimental to the atmosphere of the class and themselves, and the children in their settings.

The fears of educators are at least partially valid, according to White and Gradovski (2018), who have stated that the word love itself can conjure up insecurities and fears of abuse as well as ideas of mothering and feminine work, which historically has brought a label of non-professionalism to the early childhood field (Aslanian, 2018; White & Gradovski, 2018). When the work is viewed as care work and filled primarily by women, the work is often regarded as 'easy' to do because women are deemed to be natural caregivers (Vincent & Braun, 2013), reinforcing the notion that ECE does not require professionalism (Ailwood, 2008; 2017).

**Including Parents in ECE Love**

As stated briefly, educators may feel concern when building loving relationships with children as they may feel that the parents of the children may be uncomfortable with the relationship. Grumet (1988) addressed the importance of the inclusion of parents into the lives of students and teachers, stating that when we get to know the parents, the children are no longer 'other people's children,' they become 'our children' (p. 179). Darder (2002) has also stated that there is great importance in welcoming parents into the classroom and into the relationship that develops between teacher and students. This is valuable in all grade levels, but perhaps no more so than in early childhood settings. With the caring nature of the environment and the emotional nature of the work, it is of utmost importance to work towards developing relationships with the parents.

*Meeting early childhood needs: Québec's educational program for childcare services* (Belleau, 2019) also speaks to the importance of building relationships with parents, acknowledging that the parents are considered the experts on their children. Educators can better understand the children and their behaviour through partnering with the parents and getting to know the families. Keeping the mindset that parents are not a necessary by-product of working

with children but, indeed, a resource for the betterment of one's job performance as an educator can impact how one engages with the parent.

Page (2018a) has explored the jealousies that can arise when relationships with children are formed with non-familial adults. When parents are unaware of or unwilling to accept the relationship their children are forming with the educator, there can be mistrust, jealousy or even fear. Parents may fear the loss of their role as primary caregivers as the educators spend extended periods with their children (Page, 2011). They worry that their children may no longer want them and that the child will prefer the educator's way of doing things. This concern can extend to a fear that the educator will unintentionally take their place and overstep the familial boundaries (Page, 2011). Page (2018b) stated that accepting a mutual relationship between parent, child and educator is not guaranteed, as feelings of jealousy can develop between the parent and the educator, negatively affecting the child (Bishop et al., 2002). Ideally, all parties (parents, children, and educators) accept the loving relationship offered and work towards it, which means that the parents need to be "acknowledging, accepting and permitting" of Professional Love (the ideal form of love created through reflective relationships with parents, children and educators) shown by the educators to the children (Bishop et al., 2002, p. 134). Page goes as far as to say that a true Triangle of Love is a "utopian abstraction" as it is rarely achieved or maintained (2018b, p. 129). However, she holds to her stance that attachment theory justifies her concept, regardless of the elusive nature of the reciprocal relationship.

In contrast, other research suggests that not all agree with Page and that parents are very willing to accept the love of educators for their children and wish for it in a childcare environment (Rouse & Hadley, 2018). It has been found that some parents were more concerned about love and care as it related to their young child's early childhood classroom experiences

than academic activities, so it seems natural that they would be amicable to the idea of loving relationships forming between children and educators (Rouse & Hadley, 2018). Recchia and colleagues (2018) emphasized that connecting with parents and seeing them as partners in care is essential for supporting the child. Haslip and colleagues (2019) also found that educators are given the opportunity to self-report acts of love that they have witnessed in early childhood settings (by themselves, the children, or their colleagues), acts of love and kindness are extended to the parents by the staff, implying that they viewed the parents as part of a partnership, or in the very least, worthy of such acts.

When there is no intentional relationship with the parents, fear can take hold in the minds of all involved. Just the thought of adults who admit that they love being with children can conjure up images of sexual abuse and mistreatment of children, particularly when male teachers are involved (Ailwood, 2008; Aslanian, 2015; Colley, 2008; Jalongo, 2002). Even when fear of sexual abuse is overcome through careful screening, hiring, and training of educators, there are other issues that parents and teachers fear when it comes to building loving relationships with children. From an educator's perspective, they may believe that parents are uncomfortable with the loving relationships that they have created with their children (Robson et al., 2019).

**My Opinion of Professional Love**

Although many aspects of the research on love resonate with me, from my experiences both as an educator and an educator of teachers, I find that, like Aslanian (2018), it is hard to clearly state a personal definition of love. It is as she described, a mystery that is not meant to be solved, but embraced on a personal level. I believe that there are situations that call for different levels of care, requiring different levels of emotional investment. There seem to be times when love will ebb and flow within relationships. However, I struggle with the idea that some children

do not inspire the emotion of love (Aslanian, 2018) but would agree with Noddings (2003) and Page (2018b) that it is through the acts of caring, with the proper, selfless motivation that the feeling of love can develop. Even for those children who may not bond quickly, love can grow through dedicated acts of care done by a loving educator. I understand more clearly why *agape* love is often used to describe the teacher student relationship, the unconditional nature of love, like a teacher loving all children through acts of care (O'Connor, et al., 2019). Through dedication and effort, a teacher can move from *caring about* the children in her class to *caring for* them (emphasis mine).

Page's (2018b) idea of a Triangle of Love is one that rings with truth, both in the importance of it, as well as the elusive nature of it. There have been times that sincere trust has formed between myself or my educators and the parents, and then times when either party were suspicious, jealous or condescending. It is hard to express love to all within the early childhood workplace (Haslip, et al., 2019) yet it is what educators say is important (Osgood, 2010; Osgood, 2012) and parents say they want (Osgood, 2010; Rouse & Hadley, 2018). Each educator must find for themselves how they "implement Professional Love" and I believe as fellow educators, teacher educators, parents and policy makers, we can and must support each other in that discovering that process (Page, 2018a p. 124).

**Present Study**

As described in this literature review, there are many definitions of love, which makes it challenging to understand how educators view it within early childhood settings. It is in the childcare environment that educators, parents, and children build relationships, which is why there needs to be a clear understanding of how love and care are expressed and defined by early

childhood educators. This dissertation aims to gain a better understanding of how educators

define and express love within their profession by examining the following research questions:

1. How do educators describe their beliefs of love in their programs?

2. How do they distinguish between love and care?

3. What are the implications for early childhood teacher education and professional

development?

In the writing of these questions, it was expected that other topics would arise, possibly

including, but not limited to, the struggle for professionalism, the fear of crossing boundaries,

and whether educators' expressions of love changed over time.

**Chapter 3. Methodology**

Due to the imprecise nature of love and the limited research on educators' perspectives about love within early childhood educational settings, phenomenology was chosen as the method for this project. Phenomenology sets out to better understand the lived experiences of participants around a phenomenon, in this case, expressing love in an ECE setting (Mayan, 2023). When looking at the phenomenon, it is essential for your participant to reflect on the lived moment, as opposed to reciting "pre-reflected" answers. This approach helps to understand why an experience is felt a certain way and how the experience impacts the participant (Hays & Singh, 2012; Mayan, 2023). Phenomenology was chosen for this topic of love in ECE because of the diverse lived experiences within childcare settings and educators' professional lives. I sought out an authentic description of the ways in which participants show love, which came to them automatically (Mayan, 2023). My goal was not only to capture their stated experiences but also the emotion and personal meanings behind their expressions. I did not aim to define love for educators. Instead, I embraced its complexity and vagueness by listening to educators' personal definitions and experiences. Through listening and exploring the topics that arose within the greater theme of love, I explored educators' beliefs and definitions that can add to the limited bank of research and help frame their perspectives.

**Research Aims**

The key aim of this research was to better understand the concept of love from the perspectives of early childhood educators. With how varied and personal the beliefs about love seem to be and the more common use of the word 'care,' it is essential to understand more clearly what educators mean when they say they love children. As noted, it was not my aim to create one definition that all educators embrace but to look for themes within the personal

definitions of the participants. Using a phenomenological approach to this research, I strove to better understand educators' perspectives on love and care and how their perspectives may impact early childhood training and professional development.

**Participants**

Participants for this study were educators who work with children (five years and younger) in early childhood settings in the Montreal, Quebec area. Eight participants were recruited through contacting local daycares, universities, and colleges with early childhood education programs. This contact was done in several ways, including by email, sending the recruitment flyer to daycare and program directors, calling the centres, and reaching out via social media accounts (directly to the centres' Facebook pages) (see Appendix A). I am actively engaged in the early childhood education field in the local Montreal area, which aided recruitment through word of mouth and connections that have been formed over the years. Individual educators who I knew were also contacted and sent the same informational PDF as the centres. The recruitment of eight participants fit the phenomenological approach, providing a diverse representation of long-term daycare staff and more recent graduates (a comprehensive range of perspectives and experiences) and allowing for in-depth data gathering.

The criteria for participant recruitment required that the early childhood educators were currently active in the field of early childhood education, working directly with children and had a minimum of six months of work experience in the field. In Quebec, a person may work in an early childhood environment with a variety of education. Recruitment did not require the participants to have a specific level of education (attestation, diploma, or degree). However, educational levels were noted in case this impacted an educator's perspectives of love. The participants were asked to complete a demographic survey (see Appendix B) to obtain relevant

information about their age range, gender, ethnicity, years of experience in the ECE field and level of education (see Table 1). All participant names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographic Information*

| Participant (pseudonym) | Age range | Gender | diversity | Years of experience | Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rachel | 50+ | F | POC (person of colour) | 20-25 | ECE Attestation – Currently in child studies BA program |
| Amy | 30-40 | F | POC | 2 | ECE Attestation |
| Lacey | 50+ | F | French speaking White | 30+ | ECE diploma |
| Mark | 40-50 | M | White | 20+ | MA Education |
| Jamie | 30-40 | F | POC | 3-5 | ECE Attestation Nursing (Philippines) |
| Karen | 30-40 | F | POC | 3-5 | ECE Attestation |
| Amanda | 30-40 | F | POC | 1 | ECE Attestation MA – Education (India) |
| Tammy | 30-40 | F | POC | 1 | ECE Attestation |

As stated, eight participants were recruited: seven women and one man, with a variety of years of experience in the field. There were three participants who had more than 20 years of experience, the rest having anywhere between one and 10 years. The levels of education also varied between the participants, with the most being a master's degree, while the majority had either a diploma or certification in ECE. The participants worked in different forms of childcare centres: six worked in the public sector (Centre de la Petite Enfance or government subsidized centres), one was the director and educator in a forest preschool program, and one was employed in the private sector. Six of the participants were people of colour (Rachel, Karen, Jamie, Amanda, Tammy and Amy), and five were recent immigrants to Canada (Jamie, Karen, Amanda,

Tammy and Amy) (within the last ten years). Each participant spoke English, although for six participants, it was not their first language. The demographic spread of the participants does not reflect the national statistics which state that 33% of all childcare workers are non permanent or immigrant status and that 28% of all childcare workers in Canada are visual minorities (Uppal, & Savage, 2021, June 25th). This could perhaps be due the fact that the greater Montreal area has a higher visual minority population (38.8%) (Demographics of Montreal, 2024, para 4) than the country's average of 26% (Visible Minority, 2024, para 4).

**Data Collection**

Three data collection methods were used: in-depth interviews, focus groups, and a 'strength spotting' journaling exercise, each described below.

*In-depth Individual Interviews*

The data collection began with individual interviews, which allowed educators to participate in one-on-one conversations with the researcher and discuss perspectives and expressions of love in early childhood settings. As some of the participants were known to me before the interviews, some time was spent catching up, and with those I had never met, time was spent getting to know them. I also shared briefly about myself in order to develop rapport. Set interview questions included:

1. Do you have a personal definition of love? If yes, what would it be?

2. How do you express love in your program?

3. Tell me about your work, especially as it relates to showing love.

4. What challenges do you have to show love in your classroom?

5. Do you have any reservations about showing love to the children in your class?

6. Is there anything that you would like to tell me?

The interviews ranged from 30 to 75 minutes, with the average length being 40 minutes, and they were audio recorded. Six interviews were conducted in person, meeting at a location chosen by the participant, usually a coffee shop, and the other two were conducted over TEAMS at the participants' request.

### *Focus Groups*

The second data collection method was focus groups, where the educators explored and responded to the theoretical foundations and definitions of love found in the research literature. After an introduction, three discussion prompts were offered through a simple PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix C). I shared with the participants research-based definitions of love, such as philosophical, religious or dictionary. I included generalized ideas from the participants interviews, while keeping the prompts anonymous. Page's (2011) concept of Professional Love was shared and discussed. The participants were also instructed on how to conduct the strength spotting exercise, a written self-reporting technique. After each prompt, the participants shared and discussed their responses to the topics. Two focus groups were held, allowing for smaller groups and more open discussion. The first group had four participants and the researcher, while the second group had two participants and the researcher, although one more participant had registered but did not show up and the last participant declined to participate in the focus group due to personal commitments. Each focus group was approximately one and a half hours long. One focus group was held in person, while one was done online (over TEAMS) to accommodate several members who could not attend in person due to childcare needs.

### *Strength Spotting*

The final data collection method was a strength spotting exercise, in which educators were asked to write short anecdotal descriptions of moments throughout their day when they

gave love to a child. These expressions could be any action or comment that they deemed loving. There was no specific definition of love given to the educators for this exercise so that they could freely report on whatever situation may arise that they thought appropriate. These anecdotal observations were submitted to me through a private and secure email address. The participants were asked to maintain the confidentiality of their students by using pseudonyms. The participants were also encouraged to complete the strength spotting exercise during a workday following the focus group.

**Data Analysis**

The recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and these transcripts were read and reread. Some repeated words (e.g. like, um, huh) were removed for ease of reading. Repeatedly-used words and key words were highlighted during the readings. All submitted strength spotting reports and my memoing were compiled. Each of the participants were offered the chance to review their interview and focus group transcripts to determine if they felt like they were accurately represented. First cycle coding was done using In Vivo and emotion coding. During second cycle coding, codes were organized and altered to create categories. Third cycle coding was completed by reviewing and reflecting on the categories and creating themes.

**Researcher's Reflexivity**

Before commencing this project, I looked at my current assumptions of early childhood educators' constructions of love. As someone with many years of experience working in various early childhood settings, I have developed my own definitions of love within early childhood classrooms. I am familiar with early childhood settings and the relationships that typically grow within them. As stated, I have personal experience developing loving relationships with children

and parents in early childhood settings. I have had many informal conversations with educators and parents over the years as an educator. I have also experienced relationships with children and families that have not always been what I would define as loving but a relationship of quality care. I believe there is a difference between care and love; however, the exact difference eludes me. My religious beliefs lean towards a view of *agape* or neighbourly love, and I am personally interested in whether an educator's culture, religion or upbringing impacts their loving actions in their classroom. I acknowledged this personal construction and experience through reflection and was aware of this throughout the analysis process (Birks & Mills, 2012; Charmaz, 2014).

### *Theoretical Stance of Researcher*

In qualitative research, it is essential to consider the researcher's personal perspective on the issue, as it is impossible to stay completely detached from the research topic. I lean towards a constructivist stance on life, that is, one in which our social interactions, cultures, and experiences heavily influence us. We construct our knowledge of the world based on our own experiences (Cousins, 2016). Keeping with a constructivist stance, I realize the importance of individual experiences, social engagement, and the participants' language. One aspect of constructivism I paid particular attention to is how knowledge and understanding can change with new experiences (Cousins, 2016). I aimed to focus on each of the educators' viewpoints and experiences, asking them to reflect on what they currently do to express love, how they would define it and any changes in their actions or definitions they feel have taken place over the years of work experience. I used probing statements to encourage the participants to focus on the meaning behind word choices, experiences, and past social interactions.

**Expectations and Apprehensions.** With my current knowledge and experience in early childhood education environments and many friends and colleagues who have worked in or are

currently working in the field of ECE, I had some general expectations of what may be discovered through data collection and analysis. However, I stayed open to all topics raised by my participants and approached the data with an open mind, willing to explore any topics that arose from the conversations.

One apprehension I had about conducting this research was the potential for a participant to feel unheard or nervous to share. The participants were regarded as experts, and I intended to receive all the information they were willing to share to understand their perspectives better. The idea of love could be private, and I did not want anyone to feel uncomfortable. I strove to create an environment for collecting data where all participants were respected through active listening, accurate note taking, and memoing, which I made available to the participants so that they could verify that the data accurately represented what they intended.

**Ethical Considerations and Covid-19**

Ethics was received through the university, and all participants were informed about the project before they agreed to participate (see Appendix D). The participants were invited to participate in all three data collection methods; however, there was flexibility with the participants to meet their needs and time constraints. They were informed that they could withdraw at any time during the process and that they could request that their information be removed up to two months after participation in the focus group. Each participant received a small token of appreciation (20$ Amazon gift card) for their participation, regardless of whether they completed each step of the data collection process. All data was kept confidential, seen only by the researcher, and stored on a secure computer.

**Conclusion**

The methodology aimed to provide valuable insights into educators' perspectives on expressing love in early childhood educational settings. By employing phenomenology, the study sought to uncover educators' nuanced experiences and perceptions, ultimately contributing to the existing literature on the role of love in early childhood education.

**Chapter 4. Coding and Analysis**

The data collected from interviews with the early childhood educators revealed exciting insights into the personalized definitions of love for each of them. Data collection started with individual interviews of eight participants, which produced 360 minutes of recorded interviews, creating over 140 pages of transcript (see Appendix E). Once the interviews were completed, focus groups were held with the participants, one with four participants and another with two participants, to further discuss and explore their definitions of love in the early childhood education setting. The focus groups provided over two and a half hours of discussion. The focus groups were also transcribed, creating over 70 pages of data (see Appendix F). During the focus groups, the educators were guided in a journaling technique known as strength spotting, as referenced by Haslip and colleagues (2019), and asked to complete the exercise in their centres. However, only two participants completed the journaling exercise (perhaps the educators were too busy to be self-reflective at the end of a workday). The two strength spotting documents were used as additional data to help confirm the verbal expressions of how the educators showed love. A sample of the strength spotting documents can be found in Appendix G.

Before presenting the data coding and analysis, it is worth looking at the direct answer to the question posed to each participant: "What is your definition of love as it relates to your profession, early childhood education?" This question was asked early in each interview, after the participants shared a little about the context of their work and, at times, their history of how they started in early childhood. Their answers to the question are presented verbatim in Table 2 to highlight their voices and respect the differences in the responses. As expected, some participants' responses were longer and more detailed than others. Each participant expanded on

their initial definitions throughout the interview process, which were used throughout the rest of

the data analysis.

**Table 2**

*Participants' Definition of Love*

| Participant | Personal definitions of love – direct quotes |
| --- | --- |
| Rachel | Love, love is providing children with, the children I care for, a place that is safe, where they want to be. Where they feel like they are valued. Where they're respected, even to the point where I'm going to tell them no. Because I love you enough to tell you no, not just do something but 'no' because you can be hurt. Maybe we can find a different way for you to do whatever they actually want. Let's find a different way. It's about being open and not just keeping them alive. It's not just keeping them alive. |
| Mark | I look at it (love) in the kind of like the agape expression in a lot of ways and then just wishing the best for whoever it is, in general…love flows so we need to center ourselves. Or if I get to a roadblock with a student, parent or colleague that often just sort of gets me to take a step back. And then somehow, grace comes through and provides me with something |
| Amy | Being passionate with a job. Giving attention to the children and serving their needs and taking care of them. And there's a lot, it's endless. It's just like unconditional, it's loving them despite of who they are despite the normal, special needs [sic] |
| Lacey | Making links with the children (relationship building) |
| Jamie | Love in the work setting, so for me meaning as it's a short term because every year we change. However, it (love) makes you human. Like meaning you empathize with people, you give them care, which is love and care is interconnected, which is they are not interchangeable [sic] |
| Karen | For me love is, you know, to help them grown up to be like to be polite to other people … I feel like I'm a parent who I need to discipline my own children…I |

| | |
|---|---|
| | want them to be good. To be to grow up to be a good person. That's my main thing [sic] |
| Amanda | Building that trust for the children. If they don't trust me they won't listen, they won't follow me. |
| Tammy | Care for the children, filling their needs |

Looking at each of the educators' definitions, there are similarities in highlighting the importance of relationships with the children in their care. The vocabulary used differs between participants, but each implies levels of relationship-building with the children as their expressions of love. Even though the participants were asked to define love for themselves, many used the terminology of care.

**First Cycle Coding**

First cycle coding was done through In Vivo and emotion codes and began with multiple readings of the interview and focus group transcripts, highlighting repeated words, phrases and concepts within each interview. It is important to note that the keywords and phrases are taken as direct quotes so that the voices of the educators are clearly heard, which is a core value in In Vivo coding (Mayan, 2023; Saldana, 2015). There were 501 codes drawn out of the interviews and an additional 157 codes from the focus groups (see Appendix H for a sample). During the coding process, I took notes of any early patterning or categorization that appeared in the data. Emotion coding was conducted simultaneously with In Vivo coding. I focused on any emotions that the participant expressed in their words or through their body language and tone of voice (captured in the audio recording and memoing (see Appendix I) done during the interview).

**Second Cycle Coding**

Second cycle coding was done as the 658 codes were reflected on, confirmed, changed and categorized. Eleven categories were built by combining similar codes, considering both the

In Vivo and Emotion codes. Within the creation of these categories, I considered how well the existing codes fit into each category and how each category differed, focusing on internal and external homogeneity (Mayan, 2023; Saldana, 2015) (see Appendix J for sample). A summary of the categories, with examples of the codes, is shown in Table 3 (listed in no particular order). The In Vivo codes are represented in quotation marks while the emotion coding is without them.

**Table 3**

*Coding Categories*

1. Love as action
2. Love as attitude
3. Love as emotion
4. Individual preferences
5. Educator's knowledge of children and families
6. Educator's knowledge of pedagogy
7. Physical Needs
8. Professionalism
9. Challenges
10. Parents
11. Time

In the next section, I provide illustrations for each of the 11 coded categories listed in Table 3. For each category, a table with excerpts and sample codes is presented, followed by a brief description of the overall category.

***Love as Action***

**Table 4**

*Excerpts and Codes for Love as Action*

| Category: Love as Action | |
|---|---|
| Excerpts | In Vivo and Emotion codes |

| | |
|---|---|
| "Just care is boring for children, it makes you a babysitter. Love is finding time to interact with them. Show them right from wrong. But show them right and wrong with a guiding hand, not a shove 'you're going to learn now.'" | "Time to interact" "Show them" "Guiding hand" |
| "I will fight for certain rights. Love is that you feel that you are okay with someone telling you to get out" | Fight |
| "If a child wants to hug me, we set that up, but if not, I don't." | "Wants to hug me" |
| "Authentic play from supporting, listening, giving space, I think is actually one of the most, the most powerful, loving things that I think I can do" | "Authentic play" "Listening" "Giving space" |
| "They need love and attention and affection and are and time to play" | "Attention" Affection Care |
| "Sometimes I would sit on the floor and play with the kids" | "Sit on the floor" "Play with" |
| "I defend the children with language difficulty. And instead of screaming at her like my colleague, I ask her to get up gently" | "Instead of screaming" "Ask her gently" |
| "How to take care of them, and all the things I do for them, I call it love, you know, everything." | "All the things I do" "Everything" |
| "One of my strengths is having good relationships with children" | "Good relationships" |
| "So I took my time to understand each and every kid" | "Understand each kid" |
| "Empowering them by taking their ideas seriously" | "Empowering" |
| "Shoulder touches and maybe a side hug" | "Shoulder touches" "Side hug" |

In this category, I included codes that reflect the participants' definitions and beliefs of love within their profession, specifically as they relate to actions they complete in the classroom. These include physical actions, pedagogical interventions, and words of encouragement. When participants spoke of how the children showed love to the educators through any of these tangible ways, those excerpts were incorporated into this category.

*Love as Attitude*

**Table 5**

*Excerpts and Codes for Love as Attitude*

| Category: Love as Attitude | |
|---|---|
| Excerpts | In Vivo and Emotion Codes |
| "I'm very passionate about what I believe. When I believe in something I am gonna fight for it" | Passionate |
| "Everybody says I'm silly. I think that's the only way to be if you're gong to work in daycare" | "I'm silly" |
| "I have to figure out how to give love within a circumstance and it's hard" | "Figure out how to give love" |
| "It's just like unconditional, it's loving them despite of who they are, despite the normal, special or whatever" | Unconditional |
| "I don't want the child to stay in number two and have rashes like that, so I think that's care. What's love is with those children with special needs, sometimes it's really difficult but despite, it's okay" | Difficult |
| "They are always in the back of my thoughts" | "Always" "In my thoughts" |
| "And children are not in the 'likeable' they are in the 'love'" | "Not in the 'likeable'" "They are in the 'love'" |
| "But basic needs, everybody wants to be loved and everyone wants to love, so it is a need." | "It is a need" |
| "I've seen people that you can tell they don't like kids and they work with them. For me it makes no sense." | "You can tell they don't like kids" |
| "It's the nature, it's who I am. I always say that my mom was not a mom, she was an educator" | "It's who I am" |
| "It's (love) really a commitment but care is the act, we nurture or we play? But love, it's their love. It is like love is under the care" | Commitment |
| "It's a circle. Like being a human you need to love in order to care to be kind, to be gentle." | "Being a human you need to love" |

Codes representing loving attitudes towards children, families, or the profession were put

in this category. This included the participants' hopes for the children and their goals within their

classes. Comments about the participants' perceived ideas of their coworkers' attitudes were also

listed here. Additionally, topics including respect, empathy, and well-being were placed in this

category.

*Love as Emotion*

**Table 6**

*Excerpts and Codes for Love as Emotion*

| Category: Love as Emotion | |
|---|---|
| Excerpts | In Vivo Code and Emotion codes |
| "I trust the kids enough. That is love. You trust them enough to let them touch your stuff" | "Trust the kids" |
| "Inspiring" | Inspiring |
| "Joyful" | Joyful |
| "It's wonderful" | Wonderful |
| "Authentic joyful playing …divine flow" | Authentic joyful playing |
| "One time the mom was so jealous" | Jealous |
| "But it didn't always come with warm fuzzy feelings." | Warm fuzzy |
| "If you don't love kids and you don't like to work with them, it is gonna be hard for you. You need to be happy at work" | "If you don't like kids" "You don't like to work with them" Be Happy |

This category contains the codes that speak of loving feelings and emotions. These

include emotional statements that refer to the children, their job, the parents, or their co-workers.

Both negative and positive emotions were included.

***Individual Preferences***

**Table 7**

*Excerpts and Code for Individual Preferences*

| Category: Individual Preferences | |
|---|---|
| Excerpts | In Vivo code and Emotion codes |
| "I'm not super physically affectionate with, outside of family" | "Not super physically affectionate" |
| "There are different loves in life and your heart expands" | "Different loves" <br> Heart expands – love grows |
| "Children of different personalities" | "Different personalities" |
| "It is not for everyone. Some kids don't like to be touched" | "Not for everyone" |
| "This is my personality that I would show love not only for the children but for everyone" | "My personality" |
| "I tried to give them a hug and all of those things but now I don't try. I let them do whatever they want" | "But now I don't try" |
| "I would say there is different caring and love for each and every case" | "Different caring" <br> Love for each <br> "Every case" |
| "You are jealous, that is not my fault. If you want to be loved like I am, then do something. Change something. I am not saying be like me, but be something different because it's not working" | Jealous <br> Loved like me <br> Be something different |
| "I can change my actions depends on the kids" | "Change my actions" |
| "I show love to my kids different than the daycare kids" | "Different" |
| "With my kids there is hugging, kissing, and flipping and rolling on them I don't feel doing those things with the daycare kids" | Doesn't feel like it |
| "I want to keep that limit as barriers for me" | "Keep that limit" |
| "I am not comfortable giving kisses" | Not comfortable |

In this category codes that were included reflect the educators' own preferences for expressions of love, as well as codes that spoke to the children's preferences for receiving love. Although those were the most common codes in this category, some also represent other

people's preferences, rules, or regulations, such as the director's instructions, government

regulations, and parents' considerations.

***Educator's Knowledge of Children and Families***

**Table 8**

*Excerpts and Codes for Educators' Knowledge of Children and Families*

| Category: Educators' Knowledge of Children and Families | |
|---|---|
| Excerpts | In Vivo code and Emotion codes |
| "I wish I would have known… | "Have known" |
| "…know my child before touching them" | "Know my child" |
| "The daycare is a diverse culture. We have to know them, where they come from, like other cultures, there is like hesitant to be touched." | "Have to know them" |
| "You need to know your limits. If you are tired be honest and take time off" | "Know your limits" |
| "Like I can see their face and all the hugs and kisses like, oh, how they know this child like how much they know." | "They know this child" |
| "Vanier taught me how to show love to children and my family showed me how to love" | "Taught me how to show love" "Showed me how to love" |
| "Yes, something is always in-built…but also our families or some other close ones, they taught me" | "Taught me" |
| "I feel like I know a little bit about everyone so that I can change my actions depending on the kids" | "Know a little bit" |
| "I learned everything in school and I wanted to follow them but I couldn't because of the situation" | "Learned everything in school" |
| "Know the family" | "Know the family " |
| (Relationships with parents) "which is part of loving support" | Loving support |

The participants spoke of the need to know many people within the childcare community

and how that knowledge impacts how they show love. Codes for this include statements that

referred to getting to know the children in their programs, as well as their co-workers (to respect

their preferences), the parents, and families. Participants discussed knowing the family, including being informed about siblings, divorces, trips and how these may impact the educators' engagement with the children in the classroom.

***Educators' Knowledge of Pedagogy***

**Tables 9**

*Excerpts and Codes for Educators' Knowledge of Pedagogy*

| Category: Educator's Knowledge of Pedagogy | |
| --- | --- |
| Excerpt | In Vivo Codes and Emotion codes |
| "I think love is bigger than care and it has more definitions to it" | "Bigger than care" |
| "How I structure my curriculum" (like the constructivists) | "Curriculum" |
| "So it's very idealistic for me that I got into education because I want to help make the world a better place" | "Idealistic for me" |
| "I think love is bigger than care. And it has more definitions to it. Yeah, care could be. Yeah, just for, like, as I mentioned before, like, I read some nel Noddings, when I was doing before doing my studies, teacher prep and my master. And yeah, just so I know that, that aspect of care is pretty broad as well" | "I read some Nel Noddings" "That aspect of care is pretty broad" |
| "To try to help make society better through individuals but education has its limits | "Education has its limits" |
| "And just so everybody gets to know each other, which is a big reason why I like to do the story transcribing. Like Vivian Paley, like writing down, like familiar." | "Gets to know each other" "Story transcribing" |
| "But like I said, government, they don't even know I wish sometimes they could come and spend an whole in a classroom and see what we do" | "See what we do" |
| "A profession that is really the care all the physical, psycho psychological, all the development holistically." | "Psychological, development holistically" |

The knowledge of child development and pedagogical theories were included in this theme. Participants spoke of needing to understand and identify the developmental levels of children and children's needs at different stages. It was expressed that younger children, infants and toddlers needed more physical affection than older preschool children. Other codes in this category include participants' references to theorists that address love, such as Noddings and Paley.

***Physical Needs***

**Table 10**

*Excerpts and Codes for Physical Needs*

| Category: Physical Needs | |
| --- | --- |
| Excerpt | In Vivo Codes and Emotion codes |
| "I don't want the child to stay in a number 2" | "Number 2" (bowel movement) |
| "And have rashes like that so I think that's care." | "Rashes" |
| "Literal expressions of love, like more about feeding and changing" | "Feeding and changing" |
| "Feeding" | "Feeding" |
| "Diaper changing" | "Diaper changing" |
| "Fulfill their needs" | "Needs" |
| "You and I can't even call it caring. You fed them, they're alive." | "Fed them" "They're alive" |
| "We also need to think about our own needs." | "Own needs" |
| "There's a part that is physical because you're on your feet all day long" | "Educator's physical needs" |
| "And always, for example, for the safety also, you know, when they keep on running in the classroom, I want them to walk in the classroom, you know, because one time there's a child who just run he got stitches on the forehead." | "The safety" |

All codes that related to physical acts of care, such as changing diapers, feeding, and dressing, are found in this category. This includes any emotions, attitudes, or actions directly stated as part of care. Context was taken into account, in terms of whether the participants

directly mentioned care in their statements, such as when they were asked to describe the

difference between love and care.

***Professionalism***

**Table 11**

*Excerpts and Codes for Professionalism*

| Category: Professionalism | |
| --- | --- |
| Excerpts | In Vivo Code and Emotion codes |
| "We are not their friends …" | "Not their Friends" |
| "That does not show love" | "That does not show love" |
| "It always comes down to money. You don't feel respected by like, I don't feel respected by the government" | I don't feel respected |
| "We are high, even my own sister, high priced babysitters" | "Babysitters" |
| "I think if we had more men, maybe we might be considered (more professional) because we're women. Women care, women love, we are born, we're natural caregivers. But no, like maybe we might be natural caregivers, but we deserve that the pay and the money and societies respect that we have the skills to take care of the future." | "Natural caregivers" "But we deserve" "Societies respect" |
| "I'm cautious with the whole expression, being a man." | Cautious |
| "I don't have kids sitting on my lap, just a boundary and professional boundary that I think is important" | "Professional boundary" |
| "You have to have your boundaries about where you are or how much you care in some ways" | "Boundaries" |
| "A boundary, are very good boundaries to have. It's like the children need our care, we do not need them. In a sense I need it for my pay cheque…but if I'm sad it's not their job to console me" | "Boundaries" |
| "As an educator I profess my love to them as a professional because I am not a parent. I am just an educator for them." | "Not a parent" "Just an educator" |

| | |
|---|---|
| "That's what we call professional love we can distinguish to care. The limits the boundaries. I'll do my best however unlike the parents, it's not my child." | "Professional love"<br>"Boundaries"<br>"Do my best" |

The topic of professionalism within the field of early childhood education came up multiple times, specifically when topics such physical affection, emotions, and boundaries were discussed. These codes represent how the participants viewed their chosen career as well as how they felt others viewed their work.

### Challenges

**Table 12**

*Excerpts and Codes for Challenges*

| Category: Challenges | |
|---|---|
| Excerpts | In Vivo and Emotion codes |
| "I think that others make it hard to love" | Hard to love |
| "Outside of the classroom, issues with my own family…hard to leave ourselves outside." | "Leave ourselves outside" |
| "My colleague is close to my boss, so I'm zipping my mouth" | "zipping my mouth" |
| "But like I said, government, they don't even know I wish sometimes they could come and spend an whole day in a classroom and see what we do and say it took a pandemic for us to be recognized" | "they don't even know"<br>"Took a pandemic"<br>"recognized" |
| "What is hard for me is sometimes when children are not clean all the time" | "Not clean" |
| "But is mostly when a child is going into very sexual about it" | "Very sexual" |
| "One time the mom was so jealous" | Jealousy |
| "I struggle with kids who have the special needs" | Struggle |
| "Sometimes I get angry so I apologize…I'm so sorry for like raising my voice to you" | "I apologize" |
| "Sometimes they use inappropriate words" | "Inappropriate words" |

| "I love you but I don't like what you say right now" | "Don't like what you say" |
| "When kids have possessiveness" | "possessiveness" |
| "When they need more help and more attention" | "Need more" |

This category of codes represents participants' statements about challenges, either tangible or felt, to expressing love within their programs. These codes include, but are not limited to, co-workers, government regulations, individual personalities, and fear.

*Parents*

**Table 13**

*Excerpts and Codes for Parents*

| Category: Parents | |
| --- | --- |
| Excerpts | In Vivo and Emotion codes |
| "We are not replacing parents. We are giving to them. That's one part of life (caring for their children during the day) they don't have to worry about" | "Giving to them" |
| "I talk to parents" | "Talk" |
| "I apologize to parents" | "Apologize" |
| "(from parents) You know he really loves you" | "Loves you" |
| "I've had bad parents, don't like to say that but some parents are just nasty" | "Bad parents" |
| "With parents…structured listening, interviews…living stories" | |
| "So When parents say oh my god, my child talks about you all the time, and I feel bad, right? I'm like, Oh, I'm so sorry" | "Talks about you all the time" I feel bad I'm so sorry |
| "Yeah, it's curiosity. Yeah, but beyond that, when it's like, all all the times like, then it makes me doubt what's going on in your house" | Doubt |

Any mention, positive or negative, of parents were placed in this category. The

participants expressed that parents play an important role in their expressions and ideas of love

within their programs, so these mentions were also added to this category.

***Time***

**Table 14**

*Excerpts and Codes for Time*

| Category: Time | |
| --- | --- |
| Excerpts | In vivo and Emotion Codes |
| "They may they might have had love | "Had love" |
| The love traveled from my kids last year, because now they are upstairs and they can say my name" | "Love traveled" |
| "You have to start slow, can you can give all the love you want. But none of the kids are going to receive the love. You have to figure it out. And I respect them enough to find out what when is the right time for this kissing stuff?" | "Right time for kissing" |
| "I knew she needed time with me. And it was fine. But she didn't want to share me. That was like, oh, "no, no, we share Lacey" | "Time with me" |
| "So I took my time to understand each and every kid" | "Took my time" |
| "If it goes for a long term it will become my love" | "Will become my love" |
| "And they hug and kiss Someone is growing with you for a long time, it might make me to kiss" | "Growing with you" |
| "That reason would be something else. Then I realized like, okay, because they are seeing them from like six months, and now they are two years old. So it's a big, big amount of time a big big amount of time" | "Big big amount of time" |
| "You have to start slow, can you can give all the love you want." | "Start slow" |

This category contains codes that speak to how building relationships takes time and how time can impact love and care. Any mention of length of time in the field, time with the children, or the children's time in the centre was collected in this category.

**Third Cycle Coding**

Third cycle coding consisted of reviewing the categories, reflecting on the codes and categories to determine the 'big picture' ideas within (Mayan, 2023; Saldana, 2015) (see Appendix K). I identified four main themes that best represent the data and the essence of the conversations with the educators. These themes are briefly introduced here and form the foundation of the main findings of this project, presented in the next chapter.

**Table 15**

*Breakdown of Categories in the Themes*

| Theme 1 How they believe they show love | Theme 2 Factors educators believe shape the way they show love | Theme 3 Factors Educators believe act as barriers and challenges to showing love | Theme 4 How educators understand love and care in their work |
|---|---|---|---|
| Love as action | Individual Preference | Challenges | Professionalism |
| Love as attitude | Knowledge of children and families | Parents | Knowledge of Pedagogy |
| Love as emotion | | | Time |
| Physical needs | | | |

Theme 1 is focused on various actions that educators say they do to show their love to the children in their care. The second theme acknowledges factors that shape the educators' expressions of love, and explores how educators decide what to do when showing love and how

they adapt their expressions to each child. Theme 3 discusses factors educators believe act as barriers and challenges to showing love in the centre, including parents, coworkers and government bodies. The final theme reflects the educators' thoughts on the terminology of love and care and the impact of these terms on their ideas of professionalism.

# Chapter 5. Findings

In this chapter, I will discuss the four themes generated from the data.

- Theme 1: How educators believe they show love

- Theme 2: Factors that educators believe shape the way they show love

- Theme 3: Factors educators believe act as barriers and challenges to showing love

- Theme 4: How educators understand love and care in their work

To offer a more in-depth exploration of the four major themes, I analyzed and interpreted the coded categories, presenting them below as thematic sub-sections. These sub-sections were derived by breaking down the broader themes into more specific components, guided by the categories and codes that make up each theme. Through this process, I carefully examined key elements and made distinctions to ensure that these sub-sections highlight each theme's most important and relevant aspects. By doing so, the sub-sections offer a clearer, more nuanced understanding of the central ideas and their defining characteristics.

## Theme 1: How Educators Believe They Show Love

**Table 16**

*Theme 1 and Sub-sections*

| Theme 1: How Educators Believe They Show Love |
| --- |
| **Sub-sections** |
| Physical action |
| Curriculum action |
| Emotional action |

The first theme focuses on the actions that educators mentioned as loving and includes the coded categories of love as action, love as attitude, love as emotion, and physical needs.

Through further analysis of these categories, the theme, *How Educators Believe They Show Love*, was organized around three sub-sections: physical actions, curriculum actions, and emotional actions.

### *Physical Actions*

The sub-section of physical actions included various acts, such as appropriate touching, kissing, hugging, and spending time with the children. Each participant gave examples of times when they responded to a child's physical needs, listing various physical forms of affection, including smiling, getting down to their eye level and mirroring the child's actions. Participants also mentioned that while they may not be comfortable with expressing love physically outside of their immediate families, they often see other educators engage in these expressions. Two did make an exception, saying that, with time, and as they get to know the child, they may start being more physically affectionate with them.

Regarding physical affection, the participants spoke of allowing the children to initiate the interaction and giving them what they requested in return. If a child needed a hug or to have their 'boo boo kissed' the educator would oblige only if the children came to them first requesting this style of affection. Of course, these requests look different each time, depending on the situation and the child. Participants spoke of children coming to them and lifting their faces for a kiss on the top of the head, raising their arms for a hug or using words to request the desired action. It is worth noting that many of the participants worked with toddler-aged children (under two years of age), and some refer to that age as needing more physical touch than the older children (those over three years of age), especially if the infant or toddler is not walking well on their own yet. The idea of 'forcing' a child to engage in physical touch was also mentioned, with participants saying that they would never make a child engage in physical

affection if they do not want to, including when a parent might be encouraging it. Examples were given where parents would make statements to their child, such as "give Miss Rachel a hug goodbye." If the child was not interested in doing so, the educator would try to adapt the request so that the child was still compliant with their parent's request while not forcing them into an uncomfortable physical situation. This could be through the adaptation of the physical affection request, "That's okay, how about a high five?" or "No problem, a smile is good enough." It seemed important that the educators made it clear to the parents that children should be able to choose when they give physical affection and when they do not.

Mark expressed that he is less comfortable with the levels of 'typical' physical affection in childcare, especially for the two-year-old children, stating that this is most likely due to his gender. He felt that 'male energy' is different from 'female energy' and that his energy was great when playing with the children and building good relationships. In contrast, he felt as though the energy of his female co-workers was better when comforting upset children; this is not an unusual belief. However, he did mention that if a child initiates physical contact, coming for a hug as an example, he will respond in kind, giving the child what they need even though he is not as comfortable with that physical action.

Physical safety were also deemed forms of love. This came up repeatedly in both the interviews and the focus group. One participant stated that she went as far as to leave a job because she was uncomfortable with the setting's level of safety standards, especially when it came to allowing the children to walk down stairs without, in her opinion, proper hand holding. All participants had thoughts about physical safety. Some were very matter of fact, almost as if it was assumed that if you loved the children in your care, you would keep them safe: "And of course there is safety." Others added safety and guidance into their statements of love: "I love

them, so I tell them no, I don't want them to get hurt." Still, others used phrases like "I would die for your child," to highlight that they would do everything in their power to keep them safe.

### Curriculum Actions

Participants described showing love non-physically through curriculum planning. This sub-section focuses on the more traditional academic activities in an educational setting, including childcare centres. This included activities or actions such as getting to know the interests of the children, planning for those interests (emergent curriculum), knowing their developmental levels, preparing appropriately, and scaffolding the children's growth. These more 'behind the scenes' actions took a lot of time from the educators, requiring observations of the children, gathering materials or resources, and learning about specific topics the children were interested in.

Each participant reflected on how they could show love to the children in their care by getting to know what they enjoyed and either playing with them in that activity or helping them learn about a specific topic. Others mentioned the importance of knowing the children's developmental levels and how to improve or strengthen areas that needed support. Through this developmental support, they believed they were giving their children the best opportunity to be successful and in turn giving them love. Love in this perspective came through providing the children with the best opportunities and environment possible. Some examples can be seen in the following quotes:

"I guess it's through listening, showing interest, showing interest in their interests, caring about their ideas." (Mark)

"In trying to do everything that's done to scaffold their developments." (Mark)

"Yeah, it helps them too, even planning activities." (Karen)

"Sometimes I would sit on the floor and play with the kids." (Amy)

In the same way, some saw the creation of a specific curriculum as an essential aspect of showing love. It was also important for some to allow the children to explore the materials and environments and give them the freedom to create as they saw fit. One participant stressed that they support the children's artistic expressions and do not change a child's artwork; if a child paints a flower stem purple, that is okay, as each flower is unique, and each child is as well (Karen). Focusing on the identity and individuality of the children when it comes to planning the curriculum and the activities was a topic that came up often. For specific children in their care, examples of activity creation were given, especially if the children were 'more challenging.' Rachel is quoted as saying, "Yeah, you can do a lot more (than just showing affection), like activities and play more and talk more with them." Children with special needs, as well as those who did not easily follow the rules and guidance of the classroom, were brought up when discussing non-physical forms of love, as these children, according to their educators, benefited from individualized curriculum and activities even more so than other children in their group. Karen talked about working with children with special needs and how planning activities for them has helped her learn what they need. She also said that she can show them love by giving the children what they need:

"Yeah, it changed, like, the activities I plan; I've learned a lot from there (the daycare), how to deal with the children with special needs. You know, from the beginning of the job. And since I'm working for almost five years now, working in the daycare, I think it (experience) helped me for everything [sic]. Since when I was a student." (Karen)

The participants were sensitive to the fact that some children do not like to be touched and may struggle with sensory processing issues by altering their physical expressions to curriculum

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expressions. This implies that physical affection would not only be less welcome by the child but perhaps even detrimental to their current emotional state.

In relation to the concept of allowing children to explore and be creative, five of the participants emphasized helping the children to listen and follow the rules, become good friends and classmates, and grow into good humans, all as acts of love. They repeatedly mentioned that guiding children to know what is right and wrong and how to behave in the classroom are straightforward ways of showing love to them. According to the participants, this was done through verbal encouragement, modelling, and scaffolding. Karen shared that she tells the children, "I care for you. When I care for you, I discipline you, and it means I love you". Karen mentioned that she feels like the children in her care are "her children," and she would want them to "be good," so she disciplines them. It seems that these educators value children's obedience and consider the children's training an act of love. In addition to disciplining negative behaviours, disciplining children to keep them physically safe was also connected to acts of love. To continue Karen's quote from above:

> And always, for example, for the safety also, you know, when they keep on running in the classroom, I want them to walk in the classroom so I, you know, because one time there's a child who just runs, he got stitches on the forehead. That also like for their safety, their safety, and we're always you know? [sic]

### *Emotional Actions*

Emotional care and support for the children is the third and final sub-section under the theme of *Educators' Beliefs on How They Show Love.* Emotional acts include helping the child build autonomy and self-esteem, providing guidance and direction on how to engage in class, and spending time with them. Rachel not only spoke about spending time with the children, but

also making sure that the time spent is meaningful. She mentioned that efficiency should not be the aim of an educator when it comes to care routines (such as diapering) and that quality one-on-one time should take precedence. She described how this routine included spending a few extra moments with the child, being more talkative, and helping the child build autonomy in that routine. She went on to complain that the government did not give educators enough time in the day to appropriately interact with each child, implying that it is hard to be genuinely loving towards the children because educators feel they must strive for efficiency. When questioned about this, she stated that the ratios are too high, making it hard for educators to move away from simply caring for the children efficiently and towards truly building those loving relationships. Lacey also spoke of the busyness of the classroom's daily routine and the high ratios in Quebec and how that impacts their ability to love the children properly. Many participants stated that they make time amid their busyness to show love, even for brief moments throughout the day.

Along with helping the children develop emotionally, these educators stated that they work towards providing emotional safety and support. They discussed empowering children to grow up to be good humans and helping them do so through positive guidance techniques. Some expressed concern that we cannot ignore children's poor behaviour or unkind words as it is not loving of us to do so; that educators are there to help children grow into kind people who care for each other and the environment. Jamie stated that showing love is what makes us human; it is part of our humanity, and by providing emotional guidance, we help children embrace their humanity. It was the participants' perspective that whether it is protecting children from negative self-talk, peer teasing, or a fellow educator's indifference, a loving educator must ensure that the children in their care are protected. They explained that this can be done in several ways, including verbal praise and encouragement, spending time with the children, getting to know

them and encouraging them to use positive self-talk. Lacey stated, "sometimes it's just a pat on the head passing by them [sic] just saying, [sic] just encouraging what they're doing. 'Oh my God, look at you. You're such a big kid. I really like what you're doing right now. Thank you for helping me.'"

Each participant mentioned that they respect the child(ren) and must show this respect by not forcing themselves (or their expressions of love) on the child. Participants gave examples of how some children do not like to be hugged or kissed, so they refrain from this physical form of affection, opting for a more reserved form, such as playing with the child or talking with them. Tammy no longer 'uses' her animated personality at work as it was off-putting for one child. She believed the child was uncomfortable with a louder, bubblier personality, so she muted her natural inclination and acted in a more subdued manner when around this child. They also discussed how physical affection is not the only way to show love and gave examples of what non-physical affection may look like, including curriculum design and play, which were discussed in the first theme.

Similarly to Lacey, Rachel expressed her passion for helping children understand that love does not just come from others but that they must love themselves as well.

"It's not just me loving them. I want them to love themselves and like themselves and not have to be 52 years old, even though I'm 54. I only figured that out at 52 that self-love is so important. And so, I don't want them to have to struggle all their life to find that you gotta [sic] love you. You are lovable. You are likeable."

Modelling positive emotional experiences was another way these educators stated that they supported and loved children, explaining that they wanted to be good examples for them, whether in how they interacted with the children, the parents or co-workers. Karen mentioned

how she would apologize to the children if she expressed frustration or lost her temper. For her, this was a way to show love to the children and make sure that they knew that even though she was upset, she still loved them. She provided this illustration of what she would say: "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry for like raising my voice to you or I get angry with you. But you know what? It's for your safety. I don't want you to get hurt."

Others also mentioned how important it was for educators to know their own feelings and to be able to compartmentalize their emotions so as not to lay an emotional burden on the children in their care. The participants frowned upon the idea of the children being there to fill a personal emotional need, stating that they disliked it when fellow educators hugged and cuddled the children to make themselves feel better if they were having a hard day. Lacey stated:

But I'm saying, if I'm sad, it's (the child) not there to console me. If I'm under the weather I shouldn't be hugging a kid so long because I feel like I need it and there's one (co-worker) that doesn't matter [sic]. You could tell when she had a bad day.

**Theme 2: Factors That Educators Believe Shape the Ways They Show Love**

**Table 17**

*Theme 2 and Sub-sections*

| **Theme 2** **Factors That Educators Believe Shape the Way They Show Love** |
|---|
| **Sub-sections** |
| Work setting & co-workers |
| Family experience |
| Unconditional love |
| Education |

In this theme, I explore the factors that the educators believe impact the ways they show love. Some of the code categories included in this theme are individual preferences and knowledge of children and families. The educators indicated that several factors, including work settings, coworkers, family experiences and the concept of unconditional love, had both direct and indirect impacts. The theme has four thematic sub-sections (see Table 17).

### *Work Setting and Co-workers*

Three of the participants (Karen, Tammy, and Amy) discussed how they not only changed how they expressed love for each child but also adapted to the philosophy of the centre and the direction of their co-workers or director. This change of expression, based on co-workers and directors, was sometimes done out of respect. However, Amy and Karen, mentioned the change being made was under mild duress; Amy was complying to make her work situation more pleasant as she no longer wanted to fight with her co-worker, while Karen had been given an order from her director to be less affectionate with the children. It is worth noting that the more experienced educators stated that they were less likely to change their ways of showing love for the sake of a co-worker.

Amy and Karen seemed very concerned about their teaching partners' opinions of them, wanting to be seen as professional and respectful, so they conformed to their partner's ways of thinking. Amy struggled in her position, as she was new to the profession and the centre, whereas her partner had been in the field for many years. She stated that she felt stifled when it came to being able to express herself in her own way as an educator, but would follow her own instincts, (e.g. play the children's choice of music, do their suggested activities or rub their backs at naptime) when her co-educator left the room. She felt that because she was newer in the field,

she needed to alter who she wanted to be in the classroom for who her teaching partner wanted her to be.

Rachel and Lacey, the two participants who had been in the field the longest, spoke about not caring about the opinions of co-workers. Rachel claimed to have a better understanding of the work it takes to be an early childhood educator than her co-workers, and she claimed she would 'fight' to defend the children's rights to be loved the way that best fits the child's needs. She stated that she was not ashamed of how she loved the children and did not feel she needed to justify herself to her co-workers or, at times, the parents, even if it meant risking her job. She spoke about how she was just as 'deserving' of recognition and respect as her co-workers, who, in her view, did not love the children as much as she did, as they were more 'hands-off' with them.

Rachel stressed that her unconditional love for children and the field of early childhood education led her to give up having a class of her own and become the 'floating' teacher for two different rooms in the centre. This involved a significant pay cut to be able to stay at the centre she was working in. This new position came with what she described as ridicule from her co-workers, specifically those who looked down on her for not being the lead teacher in a classroom. However, when the children she worked with started to say her name (as young toddlers) and build relationships with her, Rachel said it was worth every sacrifice she made.

Rachel openly discussed how her identity was tied up in her work; she is a teacher and unwilling to change that. In this instance, her name, specifically as the toddlers were learning to pronounce it, was meaningful for her. She stated that she felt so much joy and pride as the young children learned to say her name, ask for her attention, and give her affection. She stated, "I am RACHEL," emphasizing her ability to build relationships even with the youngest children.

Karen and Tammy discussed that they not only changed their actions but also changed their expressed personalities while at work to better fill the needs of the centre. One gave the example of her more naturally bubbly greeting of "Hey everyone! Karen is here," which would typically get the children excited to see her. She stopped doing that to avoid increasing the excitement level in the classroom and, in turn, annoy her co-worker.

### *Family Experience*

It is worth noting that more than half of the participants had family members who were also teachers, with two specifically being early childhood educators. Those who had these teaching family members spoke of how they inspired them to become teachers. They understood that the experiences they saw their family members go through were foundational in their own ideas and motivations for entering the field of education. Three were even given "their start" by these family members inviting them to participate in the classroom settings as volunteers or staff. These family members and experiences influenced how the participants learned to show love. Mark and Lacey both stated that they witnessed the love their mothers gave as early childhood educators and Amy said that her family members showed her what it means to love in the classroom.

The topic of children's family experiences was discussed regarding the expressions of love in the early childhood programs. There were moments in the interviews where participants acknowledged that they needed to change how they reacted to the children in their care based on what was currently happening within each family. One participant gave the example of playing with a toddler when the child's mother came in. The educator playfully stopped the toddler from going to their mother, requesting a high five first. This participant was upset with herself when the child got sad and refused to give the educator a high five. The mother then explained to the

educator that she had been out of town for a few days and had not seen the child yet. The participant stated that she would not have kept the child from the mother, even for those few seconds, if she had known that the mother had been away. These comments imply that family situations like divorce, illness or a new baby can impact the children's needs, causing the educator to change the expressions of affection once again to fill the child's current and ever-changing needs.

In both the interviews and focus groups, there were discussions about the rare times parents have been jealous of an educator's relationships with a child. When this happened, the participants who addressed it (Karen, Tammy, Mark, Jamie, Rachel) emphasized the importance of trying not to make the parents feel uncomfortable. Mark stated, "Parents can get apprehensive or nervous or even jealous of the relationship that their child has with the educator because it gets to be personal." Jamie also mentioned, "Parents get jealous and don't want to talk. Tired [sic] of hearing their child talk about you at home." Additionally, they stressed the importance of cultivating relationships with parents to foster transparency regarding daycare activities, discouraging any secrecy. Mark continues, "And when there's a break between the relationship with the parents and the educator, neither are supporting the child best within the daycare setting." Most of the participants spoke of building healthy relationships with parents by communicating about their child's needs and by keeping professional boundaries (i.e. not becoming 'friends' with parents and not connecting on social media). Jamie took the concept of professional boundaries one step further by not talking to parents outside of the daycare centre. She stated that once she steps out of the centre at the end of her shift, she is no longer working and does not need to discuss work situations after hours.

"Yes, even parents sometimes when you're out(side), and you're leaving too, alongside them [sic]. It's like they want to talk. (I say) "Oh, I'm so sorry." We can be tough (with boundaries) because once they cross it, they will do that every day. And sometimes, still, they are like "Do you have Facebook?" No, I'm so sorry. I'm not on social media. And if any problem [sic], just anything if you want to contact me [sic], the director is there for me. When I stepped outside [sic] when I stepped out from work (I'm) done"

She expressed this was done both as a way to maintain professional boundaries and to keep the time she deems necessary to safeguard her own emotional health. This emotional health and positive relationships with parents were viewed by the participants as having a direct impact on their capacity to show love to the children. These educators often change their natural ways of showing love to suit the needs of those around them, including parents.

### Unconditional Love

Unlike the factors of co-workers and parents, the idea of "unconditional love" suggests a love that is "not subject to any conditions" (Oxford Learning Dictionary, n.d.). Three participants (Rachel, Lacey, Amanda) uses the words 'unconditional love' when talking about their professional relationships with the children. In contrast, others talked about actions that seemed to be expressing unconditional love without using specific vocabulary. Usually, the explanation of unconditional love came with examples of what the educator would do to help the child. This included actions such as protecting them from danger (such as falling or meeting strangers) and protecting them emotionally and socially, such as from bullies (adult or child). The educators stated that they were so concerned about safety that they would risk injury to themselves if it meant keeping the children safe. There was much discussion about safety and keeping the children in an environment that will help them grow and develop without putting them at risk.

Amanda talked about quitting her job because she felt the centre was not diligent enough in its safety practices. She felt that she loved the children unconditionally and showed it by sacrificing her employment.

Participants talked about their relationship with parents when it came to loving the children unconditionally. It was their perspective that they do not need to like the parents to love the children. For example, Lacey talked about needing to call the police on a father who was being aggressive with the centre staff, and she stated that this parent's behaviour did not impact how she interacted with the child. As mentioned earlier, Lacey said she would 'die for the child,' which would be the ultimate example of unconditional love.

Some participants mentioned co-workers and other educators being a risk to the child's well-being, not physically, but in their attitudes towards the children and the perceived lack of love shown to them. For them, protecting the children and loving them unconditionally included standing up to colleagues for the rights of the children. Others discussed leaving better-paying jobs for their early childhood positions. They moved to and from different countries, took additional education and changed financial expectations to pursue early childhood education.

The term "unconditional love" is often associated with the Greek concept of "agape love," which encompasses selfless, unconditional love and compassion for others. While only Mark referenced the term *agape*, two participants spoke of their experience with spirituality and how it impacts their concepts of love. Mark mentioned that he relies on the grace of God and that God's love needs to flow through him in difficult situations. He also mentioned several other religious concepts outside of Christianity that have impacted the way that he views relationships and working with others. Amy also mentioned how her spirituality motivates her to engage with all of the children in her programs. She used the phrase "by the grace of God" when referring to

working with children. When situations arise that are challenging, she relies on her faith to help give her the strength to continue through and speaks openly about sharing that faith with co-workers.

### *Education*

To close this theme of *Factors that Educators Believe Shape the Way They Show Love*, several of the participants spoke of how their work experience and education impacted their perspectives on love. Rachel and Lacey, who have been in the field the longest, spoke of how they have grown in their knowledge and confidence in their profession, while others who were new to the field expressed uncertainty about how to be. Amy and Tammy, both recent graduates from early childhood training programs, expressed that they learned a lot from the training program. However, when they entered the daycare classroom, they struggled to implement the theories and approaches they learned in college. Tammy, in particular, expressed that she needed to 'follow her heart' when expressing love. She also found that her daycare centre had a different philosophy than what she was taught, which made it challenging to rely on her training. Karen described how she had learned much from her work experience, almost as much as from her college education, building her confidence as an educator and encouraging her to alter her actions as time passed. Mark spoke of a combination of education and work experience as primary influences on how he understands love in his classroom. He spoke of the relationships he created with children and families in places of employment as well as pedagogical theorists such as Vivian Paley and Nel Noddings.

## Theme 3: Factors that Educators Believe Act as Barriers and Challenges to Showing Love

### Table 18

*Theme 3 and Sub-sections*

| Theme 3 |
| --- |
| **Factors Educators Believe Act as Barriers and Challenges to Showing Love** |
| **Sub-sections** |

Children's physical characteristics

Children's challenging attitudes

Children's negative words

Addressing barriers

Unconditional love was contrasted with the belief that love can sometimes be conditional. Each participant was asked if they perceived any barriers to expressing love toward the children in their care. To my surprise, nearly everyone mentioned actions or characteristics of children that they find challenging to work with. These challenging attributes identified are categorized into four sub-sections: children's physical characteristics, children's challenging attitudes, children's negative words, and addressing barriers.

### *Children's Physical Characteristics*

In the sub-section of children's physical characteristics, educators mentioned that when children's hygiene was unkempt, such as when they were dirty or smelled badly, the educator found it challenging to treat the child the same way as others. They stated they did not want to cuddle or hold them, causing the educator to physically distance themselves from the child. The fact that an infant or toddler's hygiene is out of the child's control did not seem to impact the educators' perspective on withholding affection. This excluded times when a child needed their diaper changed, as many participants mentioned that this was just a part of the job, but it was about body order and uncleanliness.

Another physical facet that participants deemed barriers to showing love was when the child or toddler engaged in any form of 'sexual' or self-pleasuring behaviour. This included

actions like rubbing their diapered genitals on the educator or touching the educator's breasts. It was acknowledged that young children, especially those who are still breastfeeding, will often touch breasts while they are being held or cuddled, especially near a regular feeding time. Although it was acknowledged that this was natural and not sexual, it was still upsetting for some of the educators. They would redirect the child's attention to something they deemed more appropriate and told child that the educator's body was her own and not to be touched that way. Some addressed these actions with the parents, with one parent responding, "He's a boob guy." Educators expressed a need for adequate support when they felt uncomfortable with a child's actions to help deal with it. If the educator deemed there to be a lack of support, they were often unable to change their mindset and continued to struggle.

The last challenging physical attribute was one of developmental differences. An educator shyly expressed that she sometimes struggles to love children with special needs and children who do not physically act the way that is expected of them, including when children have 'temper tantrums.' She seemed to feel ill-prepared to work with special needs children, causing her to struggle to show love to specific children. Others also expressed that when children are unable or unwilling to follow instructions, it is more challenging to care for them and, in turn, more challenging to show love to them. They stated that they struggled with keeping their patience and knowing how to respond when the children were not 'behaving.' It is important to note that not all participants felt this way, as two were passionate about working with children with developmental differences and often would go out of their way to be extra attentive to the needs of these children.

### Children's Challenging Attitudes

The second sub-section in barriers to expressing love is one of children's challenging attitudes, including describing certain children as "narcissistic" and "self-centred." Tammy described how a certain child was overly possessive of her and it was hard to care for them. This child would cry if Tammy got near anyone else, wanting to be the only child to engage with the educator. What Tammy described as "selfish" behaviour and the 'neediness' of the child decreased her desire to engage with and show love to them. It was also expressed that when a child pulls away from them, is slow to warm up, or unwilling to accept the forms of affection the educator is willing to give, the educators find it more challenging to make meaningful connections with the children.

Other challenging attitudes that caused the educators to struggle were when children were perceived to be "mean" to the educator or their peers. This included children being physically aggressive. The educators said they would redirect the children's behaviours and stand up for themselves and others, using language like "this is my body" or "you cannot act this way." Some expressed that when children ignored the requests of the educator or seemed to disrespect them, it was hard to engage with them and show them love. Although no participant used the word disrespect, it was implied by the context of their statements, such as Lacey's examples of being called a negative name by a child ("poo"). These educators added that they felt they overcame their lack of motivation to show love to children exhibiting these challenging attitudes and still believed they treated each child equally.

### Children's Negative Words

The third sub-section of challenging behaviours is children's negative words. Participants found it hard to show love when children insulted others or used inappropriate words toward their teachers or peers. Examples were given of when children lashed out and called each other

names, saying things like "I don't like you," or using bathroom language such as 'caca' or 'peepee.' This category can easily be seen as an extension of the aforementioned challenging attitudes, as many difficult attitudes can cause children to use foul language or to be insulting. However, negative talk drew out difficult responses from participants. One educator said she would address a child using foul language, such as swear words or insulting talk, with "I love you, but I don't love what you are saying right now," trying to bring the child's actions to light while holding to that element of unconditional love. However, another participant would say, "If you stop saying that I will love you again," which goes against the notion of unconditional love. Another participant would say, "There is no love from me for a few minutes." Such deliberate and verbalized withdrawals of love as a form of consequence was shared by multiple participants.

**Addressing Barriers**

It is important to note that following these three sub-sections of barriers to showing love, six of the eight participants stated that they made sure that the children would never know that they felt differently about them than the other children. It seemed as if they prided themselves on ensuring this and gave several examples. For one, they would only focus on the physical care aspects of their job when it came to a challenging child. The child would not receive subpar care from them, and they would 'force' themselves to show the same affectionate care to the child but would not go 'above and beyond' for that child. One participant said, "I have to love this kid or show that he's loved even though I don't feel it as much but because we are caring [sic]. He will not feel it [a lack of love] because he'll get all he needs." They were confident that they were in control of their actions and that they would not 'slip up' or show negative emotions to the child.

Participants also said that they would show care to the child regardless of the emotions involved, hoping they would eventually grow to love the more challenging children the same way they love the others. The idea of 'growing into love' was discussed by the educators. A participant expressed that they would try to find one good thing about the child whom they were struggling to love, and they would focus on that positive attribute in hopes that they would notice more and more positive behaviours of the child, building that one positive into a thriving relationship. Rachel stated that she would also continue to focus on the little positive things and her love for this child would grow.

Not all the participants felt that certain children were more challenging to love. Jamie and Mark argued that love does not have to be an emotion but a choice. They expressed that they would act the same way with each child regardless of how they felt about the child or how they generally felt that day.

**Theme 4: How Educators Understand Love and Care in Their Work**

**Table 19**

*Theme 4 and Sub-sections*

| Theme 4 |
| --- |
| **How Educators Understand Love and Care in Their Work** |
| **Sub-sections** |
| Distinguishing care and love |
| Care growing into love |
| Impact on professionalism |

Understanding how educators' perspectives on love and care in early childhood settings can help distinguish between the terms, consider how care may change over time, and illustrate

how the terms impact professionalism. The theme of how *Educators Understand Love and Care in Their Work* includes these three sub-sections (see Table 19).

### *Distinguishing Between Love and Care*

During each interview, the participants were asked directly what the difference between love and care was for them or if, in their opinion, there was no difference. It was clear from their responses, as well as the way they used the terms interchangeably throughout the interviews and focus groups, that the participants did not see a great difference between love and care, even if they sometimes stated that they did. One participant said, "I don't think there is a difference between love and care," while another said, "It's not that different; if you love someone, you will care for them." Some took it a step further by saying, "If you care, you know, if you care for someone, it means that you love them," or similarly, "they go together because if you love something [sic] you are going to care about them." These matter-of-fact statements that love and care have similar definitions imply that the educators see the care aspects of their job, such as changing, cleaning and feeding, as loving acts. This is interesting because when they stated examples of how they show love in their classrooms, no one included feeding, cleaning or diaper changing. Rachel, however, did discuss the difference between love and care, through turning a simple diaper change from a "caring act" into a "loving interaction" by spending a few extra moments to engage with the child intentionally.

Jamie and Amy shared an interesting perspective, stating that "caring for them is attending to their basic needs. But basic needs [sic], everybody wants to be loved and everyone wants to love, so it is a basic need." This idea was so plainly stated that it implies that definitions of caring and loving could be connected through fulfillment of them both as basic needs. However, Jamie complicated this idea by arguing that true love is reserved for family, which has

a level of commitment to it, that is, a permanency that does not come into early childhood education as children move in and out of classrooms and centres each year. To Jamie, "care is for everyone, it's empathy for someone, even strangers." She mentioned during the interview that love links us to our humanity and that we must care for everyone, seemingly equating love and care as distinguishing features of our personhood. For Jamie, care is universal, being given to everyone. When asked a follow-up question about caring for strangers, she mentioned that in her past career as a nurse, she had to care for everyone even when she did not know them and that she is no different now that she is no longer in that field. She still cares for everyone. Still, even in these statements, Jamie used the terms love and care interchangeably.

### Care Growing into Love

Another idea presented in our discussion was of care coming first and being seen as the "bare minimum" of what an educator could do for the child. Rachel believed that "just care is boring for the children …it makes you a babysitter. Love is finding time to interact with them, be with them, show them right from wrong." Karen and Tammy stated that there is a difference between love and care, but it is dependent on each relationship within the daycare classroom. While vague, this highlights the chameleon nature of the early childhood educator being able and willing to change their actions and emotions to suit the needs of the children in their care. This idea that care is the bare minimum, but that love follows when care is "done better" implies that time is a necessary element of love. This was reflected in a few of the participants' statements, including Lacey who said, "and eventually they'll (the children) just transfer that (love), 'oh that person loves me like mommy.'" This suggests that when the acts of care are consistent and positive, the child will recognize the actions of the educator as forms of love similar to a mother's love.

Tammy spoke of building a long-term relationship with a family in which she felt more comfortable giving kisses to the child once they had been in her classroom and the centre for several years. She expressed that there was an element of time when watching a child grow up, which builds a stronger relationship. She stated that this process of "growing into a relationship that offers physical affection" was one that has been modelled to her by her colleagues who have been at the centre longer. As they got to know the families and the children over the years, they grew to love the children as if they were their own, taking pride in their development and showing off the child to newer colleagues.

### *Impact on Professionalism*

The idea of professionalism was brought up several times when talking about the differences between love and care. The notion that the government ministry in charge of childcare did not recognize the importance of building relationships was discussed often, especially when addressing the time it takes to build personal relationships. The educators lamented that the child-to-educator ratios in Quebec did not leave them enough time in the day to spend in one-on-one moments with each child. They also believed that it took a global pandemic for the government to notice the importance of local early childhood educators.

The term care was also described as more 'professional,' whereas the term love prompted ideas of motherhood and natural caregivers. Some questioned if you could be a natural caregiver or if women were better at this profession than men. A long conversation was had during a focus group about how it was a shame that only a few men joined this field and how it may become a more 'legitimate' career if more men joined. Participants mentioned how the men who have worked with them have often used this profession as a stepping stone, as an experience to see if they wanted to become an elementary school teacher or a career considered more 'professional.'

However, they expressed that using the term care was one that most people were comfortable with, as the idea of pedophilia and abuse was brought to mind when adults talked too passionately about loving children. This topic of child abuse was not further discussed.

Self-care was addressed as an act of love for the children, especially when considering the children's emotional care and support. Several of the participants (Jamie, Mark, and Tammy) spoke about being self-reflective and ensuring that they were taking care of their own emotional needs each day. Times of self-reflection were mentioned, as were times of rest throughout the day. Jamie emphasized the importance of caring for oneself, asking for help, and expressing the need for time off and rest. She stated that she sets these boundaries with the children, her co-workers, and the parents. She noted that she makes sure she takes her whole break period daily, allowing others to fill the needs of the children during that time, and reflects on the day during her commute home. These self-care concepts were discussed as ways to show love and bring professionalism to your work as an educator. Mark stated that his biggest challenge when it came to loving the children was when personal problems (i.e. family life) distracted him or made him feel down. In these conversations about self-care, the educators reflected on the need to be aware of their own biases and experiences before entering the classroom. This would ensure that they were not subconsciously treating children differently than others (in a more negative way).

**Conclusion**

In summary, four themes were interpreted from the data, revealing the participants' key ideas about love in the early childhood setting. In the following chapter, I will consider how these themes connect with the project's research questions and highlight how these educators' perspectives fall in line with other existing research and shed new light on the terms love and care.

**Chapter 6. Discussion**

This chapter addresses the study's research questions in light of the findings that emerged from the participant data and current literature and considers the implications of the findings for early childhood education and teacher training. The research questions are:

1. How do educators describe their beliefs of love in their programs?

2. How do they distinguish between love and care?

3. What are the implications for early childhood teacher education and professional development?

In wording these research questions, I hoped to explore the personal nature of love for each educator and wanted to see if these educators would have beliefs similar to the literature about love in the early childhood setting (Osgood, 2010; Page, 2018b; Recchia et al., 2018). This chapter explores these research questions and the data and literature surrounding them.

As a brief overview of the themes discussed in the last chapter, Theme 1 focused on educators' various actions to show love to the children in their care. Theme 2 discussed the factors that influence educators' expressions of love, exploring how they decide to show love and how they adapt their approach to each child. Theme 3 described educators' barriers and challenges in showing love in the centers, as reported by the participants – challenges including parents, coworkers, and the government. Theme 4 reflected on the educators' understandings of the concepts of love and care and how these concepts impacted their ideas of professionalism.

**Research Question 1: How Do Educators Describe Their Beliefs of Love in Their Programs?**

*Relationships with Children*

The first research question asks how educators describe their beliefs of love in their early childhood programs. Focusing on the participants' key beliefs on love, each participant talked at length about how relationships are the most important aspect of what they do, especially their relationships with the children. They gave examples of how they spend their days working towards winning the trust and affection of the children and how they intentionally engage in ways they know will be most appreciated by the child. They emphasized that an essential aspect of their beliefs on love was knowing the needs of the children and ensuring they were met. In other words, they were committed to understanding and addressing the needs of the children. Noddings (2003) stated that the ethic of care requires caregivers, in this case, educators, to be engrossed in the individual needs of the care-receivers, the children. Without the knowledge of the individual being cared for, it is hard for the caregiver to be truly engrossed in giving the love and care. The participants seemed to think that their "real work" was building relationships and showing love to the children (Osgood, 2010). They spoke of the 'distraction' of government regulations, emphasizing the problematic government ratios in Quebec. Rachel and Lacey, who have both been in the field for over 20 years, spoke about the struggles of being able to spend the time required to build strong relationships with the children when the ratios of children to adults are high. They wanted to spend more personal time with the children but did not have the available time once they finished accomplishing the pedagogical and custodial expectations. Corroborating Ailwood's (2017) and Osgood's (2010) findings, the participants spoke of wanting to focus more on relationship-building but felt they needed to pay attention to what the regulatory body deemed more professional.

Participants in this study who were newer to the field also expressed how they believed that love was supposed to be the focus of their work. However, a few of them stated that they were still learning how to perform daily tasks and felt like they were not yet able to express their love for the children fully. They spoke of their own education and the theoretical knowledge that they gained in the college classroom about relationships and guidance but found that they needed to put this aside because, in their opinion, it was less relevant in 'real world' daycares. Tammy shared that she was unsure of how much affection was appropriate in each situation, which was similar to the concerns that the student teachers had in O'Connor and colleagues' (2019) study. O'Connor and colleagues' (2019) participants found themselves uncertain about the role of physical affection within the profession and whether it was even appropriate. In contrast, the participants in my study were questioning not only whether affection was appropriate but also how to find the time to build the relationships needed to be able to show affection. They had to adapt to each situation, each group of children, and each child, which they found challenging, particularly if they were newer to the field. One participant spoke about feeling unprepared upon arriving at her first daycare job. This reflects the study's second theme, *Factors that Shape Educators' Expressions of Love*, where the educators felt that they needed to adapt themselves to the needs of the centre and children, sometimes foregoing their training and personal beliefs on love (Ailwood, 2017).

### *Work Contexts*

Another belief that the participants had about love is that it can be impacted by coworkers and teaching partners. Amanda stated that, in her experience, her co-workers would not allow her to show love to the children in ways that she was most comfortable. They would tell her to leave the children alone and not to play with them, and they even requested that she not put music on

for the children. This lack of control within her own classroom seemed to cause Amanda stress, impacting her daily experiences of showing love (Schaak et al., 2020; Wagner & French, 2010). Amanda explained that this was hard for her, as she tends to be more affectionate and eager to help the children and support their development. However, she believed that she could not do this to her fullest potential because of the disapproval of her co-worker. She expressed that she wanted to show respect for her colleagues, so she did what she was instructed to do. However, she longed for the day that she would be able to have more independence in the classroom and show the type of care and love that she deemed appropriate. Research supports this idea of an independent and autonomous classroom as valued and sought after by educators; it may even be a deciding factor about whether they intend to stay at their place of employment (Schaak et al., 2020; Wagner & French, 2010). Amanda questioned why her colleagues were in the field as they did not, in her opinion, love the children and perhaps did not even love the job of working with them.

Other participants expressed frustration and concern about various experiences with coworkers within their work history. They felt judged, silenced and dismissed because of their personal expressions of love and care shown to the children and the families. Rachel spoke at length about how she pushes back daily against the sideways glances, comments, and perceived lack of respect by her colleagues, and she shows the children love anyway. She believes that her co-workers disapproved of the amount of affection and play that she gave to the children and the strong relationships she developed with the parents. She gave examples of how they would ignore her, talk about her behind her back and even hide her Christmas gifts from the parents as they believed she was not a 'real' educator. She was not a lead educator in the classroom, and felt she was viewed as less qualified even though she had the same education and experience.

She believed they were jealous of her relationships with the children and parents. While these are clearly subjective opinions, Schaack and colleagues (2020) argue that negative relationships impact work engagement. In Rachel's case, however, these negative relationships reinforced her beliefs rather than pushing her to leave her position or the field. Karen also spoke about how she had 'gotten in trouble' with her director and colleagues in the past for being too energetic and affectionate with the children. She explained that she would be told that she spoke too loudly, laughed too much or was too lenient with the children and that it was frustrating for the other educators. Because of this, she felt that she not only needed to adapt what she was doing to fit the centre staff, but that she needed to change aspects of her personality as well. She believed she had to suppress her more bubbly personality to be calmer and more reserved, which impacted her daily expressions of love within the classroom. Lacking the support of the director, co-workers and parents when it comes to their personal expressions of love can have an impact on job motivation and satisfaction. It may cause educators to feel as if they are not well suited for the career; conversely, it may impact their motivation to make changes and become 'better' educators (Wagner & French, 2010).

Interactions with co-workers were not the only challenges that the participants discussed. They also mentioned parents, the actions of children, and physical characteristics that are often out of the children's control as deterrents to showing love. These challenges were discussed in the third theme: *Factors that Educators Believe Act as Barriers and Challenges to Showing Love*. However, I believe they warrant being mentioned under the first research question (how educators describe their beliefs of love in their programs), as all of the participants admitted to finding it hard to love the children in their care at certain times. They believed it was normal to struggle with loving all children all the time; however, many still expressed guilt for that

realization. Schaak and colleagues (2020) explored the impact of children who were more challenging on educators and determined that these challenging relationships did indeed impact educators' overall job satisfaction.

Even the participants who proclaimed that they had never met a child they did not love admitted that there were challenges to loving children, for example, due to unhygienic practices, sexual behaviours and special needs. They emphasized that these children received the same care as others and that the child would not know that the educator had different emotions towards them. Some participants, especially those who had been in the field for a more extended period, prided themselves on the fairness of their behaviour, regardless of their feelings for the children. It seems that, for these educators, love is not purely an emotion but a combination of emotion and action. They stated that they do not allow their feelings to determine how they act towards children, as they show all children the same level of love, care and respect; however, they also admitted it was easier to do so when there was a positive emotional connection with the children, or at least fewer barriers to building that connection.

The participants concurred that that their personal preferences, needs and habits did not matter as much as the child's needs in receiving love. Nodding's (2003) ideas of engrossment support these participants' beliefs, where they strive to be in tune with the needs of the children, through knowledge and empathy (Taggart, 2022). White and Gradovski (2018), however, argued against Noddings' ideas, stating that caregivers should not constantly ignore their own needs over those of others. Indeed, some educators in the current study mentioned that self-reflection and self-care were essential aspects of love. If they cannot take care of themselves and their own needs, through breaks and rest, for instance, they cannot fully give love to the children.

*Expressions of Love and Care*

Participants provided many examples of physical aspects of showing love, such as hugging, giving high fives, patting heads, and kissing the tops of heads. Not all participants were comfortable with the physical forms of expressing their care for the children, as it was not part of their personality or their natural inclination. They found alternative ways to show their love, including more educational expressions, verbal statements and guidance methods.

One expression of love used by these participants was pedagogical planning and environment preparation. They gave examples of curriculum planning, intentional playing, lesson preparation, and activity implementation. Mark explained that his choice of a constructivist educational philosophy was one way that he showed love to the children. This is similar to Haslip and colleagues' (2017) study, in which participants expressed that there are many ways to show love to the children in their care, including through pedagogical planning. Indeed, Mark added that he was being idealistic, hoping to change the world through education and love, which can be reflected in compassion and care (Taggart, 2022).

Another educational expression of love the participants described was verbal encouragement or words of affirmation. The educators talked about the importance of using words like 'I love you,' using the children's names often (in songs and activities), and phrases such as "Way to go" and "I am so proud of you." Concurring with Haslip and colleagues' (2017) findings, endearments and encouragement like these can express care to children uncomfortable with physical affection or perhaps those who are averse to being touched. Three participants mentioned that children with special needs may need to receive love in different ways than the rest of the class to make it meaningful for them. Finally, the ways the educators disciplined the children were seen as acts of love. It was mentioned that a critical way they showed their love

was by keeping the children safe, both through supervision and guidance, by telling a child 'no', and using reflective messaging, such as 'I do not like it when you do that.' These were ways for them to help the children grow up to be responsible adults.

***Parents***

Page (2018a) discussed the parents' perspective of physical affection and attachment in early childhood relationships. She states that it is of utmost importance that parents and educators are open with each other on matters involving a child. This includes having honest conversations about the physical affection that is taking place and the relationships that are being built. Each of the current study's participants talked about the importance of making sure that the parents were aware of and comfortable with whatever expressions of love they were using with the children in their care. Almost every participant mentioned the possibility of the parents getting jealous of the relationships being created. They had stories of how different parents were concerned or would express jealousy about their child's relationship with adults at the daycare. As educators, they believed they had the responsibility to mediate this by building relationships with the parents themselves. Aslanian (2018) too found that educators fear crossing family boundaries while building relationships with children in their care.

Grumet (1988) wrote that when teachers and parents work together, children become 'our children' rather than 'their children' implying a sense of community responsibility to the children and families alike. Grumet (1988) suggested limiting the information given to parents so as not to cause jealousy, whereas Page (2018b) stated that secrecy causes jealousy and a lack of trust. The participants in the current study were aware of the problems that secrecy could create, and all stated that they would avoid keeping secrets and even, at times, would avoid building affectionate relationships with specific children if that relationship was upsetting to the parent.

**Research Question 2: How Do Educators Distinguish Between Love and Care?**

The question of terminology is essential, primarily when so many parents and educators use the word love, while textbooks, government documents and policymakers favour the term care (O'Connor et al., 2019; Recchia et al., 2018; White & Gradovski, 2018). I wanted to examine what educators believed to be the similarities and differences between these two words. This was explored in detail in the fourth theme, *How Educators Understand Love and Care in Their Work*. As stated, there were conflicting practices and opinions when discussing differences and similarities between the terminology of love and care. Some educators used the words interchangeably, even when defining the term love, while others spoke of the differences but, in the following sentence, would use the terms synonymously. This continued use of both terms in similar contexts highlights the confusion or blurred meanings of the terms. It is important to note that several of the participants openly stated that they did not believe that there was a difference between the terms, as 'if you love someone, you will also care for them.'

***Love and Care are About Relationships***

One takeaway from the educator's responses about the terms love and care is that both terms are related to relationships. Some participants suggested that a caring relationship is a 'lesser' form of relationship than a loving one; however, both are essential in a childcare environment. This is nearly a direct reflection of O'Connor and colleagues' (2019) study where the authors stated, "To care is to do, but to love is to do in a better way" (p. 4). The participants argued that feeling the "genuine" emotion of love for a child in your care is not what is important. It is what the child perceives that is the critical aspect. They stated that the child must never know the educator's true feelings if those feelings are less than positive and that the educator must show that child all the same attention, care and affection as they do all the other

children. This sentiment was discussed by many of the educators, some with pride, expressing that they are so good at their jobs that they could 'fake' a relationship with a child to make them feel loved, and some with guilt, upset that they had come across children whom they struggled to love. Emotional engagement, including pride and guilt, impact an educator's job satisfaction (Bruic & Macuka, 2017; Chen, 2018). Indeed, Bruic and Macuka (2017) found that educators with more positive emotions at work (such as joy, pride and happiness) were more likely to be highly engaged, and conversely, those who were highly engaged also seemed to have more positive emotions about work. Many participants in this study expressed that with time and deliberate effort, they could grow their relationships with any challenging child and that it was their responsibility to do so. At that point, they no longer needed to 'fake' the relationships. This aspect of time and effort causing care to grow into love is is supported in the literature, as educators express that they need time to build relationships (Ailwood, 2017; Cousins, 2016; hooks, 2003).

Participants spoke about partnering with parents when it came to loving children. During the focus group, a conversation started between the participants about whether their ideas of love in ECE were affected by their experiences of being parents themselves. Mark stated that he always looked for loving environments for his children when they were young and that he was comfortable with the educators acting lovingly toward his children. Tammy also expressed that she was okay with her child being loved by and loving the educators in the classroom. However, both admitted that it could be challenging for a parent to have children and educators build meaningful relationships because insecurities and jealousy can arise. Mark stated that he has worried that the educator may grow to know his children better than he does, and Tammy stated that there have been times when her child asked for an educator at home.

Other participants mentioned similar experiences from the educator's side, such as having parents talk to them about how much their children ask or talk about them in the home. Jamie, Lacey and Karen mentioned parents being upset and expressing their frustration to the educator about how their child compares them to a specific educator. Karen even apologized to a parent for her relationship with the child, specifically with the expression that the child was copying from the educator: "OOPSIE." However, other parents have told her how happy they are that she cares so much for their children, and they have invited her to their homes and family activities.

### Hierarchy Between Love and Care

Some participants expressed a hierarchy of emotions, with care being the lower or most basic emotion and love being the ultimate goal. This hierarchy leads to judgments, both on others and themselves. For example, some stated they have only loved children and never found one they disliked, while others expressed that they struggled at times with loving children. Still, others focused their conversation on how their colleagues did not show love but rather only care for the children, which indicated that they themselves were better educators than those who simply cared for the children.

Is caring for the physical, social, emotional, and academic needs of the children enough or does one have to show love to the children? Can you be a 'good' educator without having a love for the children that you teach? Is there a difference between an educator who loves the children and one who creates an emotional attachment with each child in their class? Looking at the qualifications of early childhood educators in Quebec, there is no mention of educators creating loving relationships with the children in their care. The Quebec government has created a list of 17 competencies for early childhood educators, none of which speak to their personality or desire to express love in their childcare environments. The first topic addressed in the Quebec

education document for early childhood education, as issued by the Ministry of Family, is that the early childhood education plan has a humanistic approach (Belleau, 2019). Educators must see children separate from their actions, that children are not 'good or bad' but that each one deserves respect and care. The document states that each child should be treated individually, considering their personal development in the classroom. Furthermore, it speaks to building relationships with parents and children and working as a team. Jamie spoke of being a nurse, where she loved her patients but was not emotionally connected to them in the same way as others were describing their connections to the children in their care. To her these professions, through their required actions were care professions and she expressed that one can still be in tune with the needs of others (Noddings, 2003), including the need for love, without becoming overly emotional within the relationship. She was clear on boundaries and what her relationships looked like in a care setting. Jamie spoke about not being like a parent but "just an educator," and for her, love is a choice, not an emotion. She could love the children and care for their physical and emotional needs without needing to become emotionally attached and she seemed to embody the Quebec Family Ministry (Belleau, 2019) ideal when it came to relationships with children. Is there a need to include 'love' in a document such as the Quebec education document and how would this benefit ECE programs?

In addition to ensuring that each child is cared for, respected, and treated with dignity, my concern is that having to worry about one's own personal opinion of the child could increase the stress associated with the job (Bruic & Macuka, 2017). It is important to consider that in an already busy profession, an additional mental, emotional and pedagogical load may risk further impacting the burnout rate of the profession (The Burnout Crisis, 2022; Chen, 2018; Colley, 2006; Fenech et al., 2009).

This idea that care is the lesser form of love is an interesting one. Just the thought that educators would look down upon their own job, which is undoubtedly care work, is important to explore. Many educators believe that the base form of their profession is not 'enough,' and this perspective may stem from society's perspective on care work (Chang-Kredl, Pauls, & Foster, 2021; Chang-Kredl, 2018). Throughout the interviews and the focus groups, expressions of love were discussed, with some educators perceived as giving more or less love and some educators' forms of love not being recognized or understood. Some participants talked about how they believed that their colleagues did not love their job or the children in their care, giving examples of their teaching partners being on their phones during work hours and spending all day talking with other employees rather than engaging with the children. It is no surprise that the participants felt the need to differentiate themselves from these other educators. They are better *and* they 'love' the children.

The distinctions between love and care were muddled. The participants used the terms interchangeably throughout the conversations. Even when asking them to give their personal definitions of love, some used the term care within it, showing again that the terms are closely linked for the educators. It was common for them to use the terms within the same sentences when discussing care or love. However, when discussing negative examples of love by other educators, they were quick to say that care is not enough, that is it about love. There was a level of pride for some when they discussed how their actions were superior to the societal belief that they were 'only babysitters' who did basic care work. One participant said, "I think that within the word love, there is care. If you love your child, if you love your profession, you love the kids, it is absolute that you are going to give care."

### *Professional as Leaving out Love and Care*

Another concern when it comes to terminology is how concepts of love and care impact the professionalism of the field (Davis & Degotardi, 2015; Osgood, 2010, 2012; Rouse & Hadley, 2016). Much research has been done on professionalism in ECE (Osgood, 2012), some of which addresses terminology and educators' perspectives on their profession. The participants in the current study talked about professionalism regarding elements of care and love, including maintaining boundaries, safety and building relationships. Little was openly discussed when it came to using the term 'care' to indicate a lack of professionalism in the field. They used other terms like 'babysitter' when they discussed a lack of professionalism, such as when family members, friends or strangers made comments: 'aren't you just a babysitter?' 'It must be fun to play all day' or 'I don't know how you can take care of other people's children.' No one directly stated that people looked down on them for loving children or for caring for them. Similar to Davis and Degotartdi's (2015) findings, the shame associated with the profession, in the participants' perspectives, seemed to come from a lack of understanding about what takes place in the classroom and the number of responsibilities and amount of work that the field entails. No one expressed concern about being called a childcare provider, childcare worker or daycare worker, as they all recognized that they are care providers.

What, then, is the takeaway from the use of 'love' and 'care' terminology for these participants? Perhaps the key point is that they do not, for all intents and purposes, believe that there are any significant differences between love and care. They feel they can use them interchangeably and that, together, they provide a full perspective of what relationships look like in a professional early childhood education setting. However, even though the terminology was used interchangeably, there were some participants who also insisted that there is a hierarchy

between love and care and that love was harder to reach. One participant suggested that a better comparison of terminology would be 'love' versus 'like' and that there was a more significant difference between those two words than between love and care.

**Research Question 3: What are the Implications for Educator Training and Professional Development?**

*Implication #1: Educator Training About Relationship Building*

The less experienced educators seem to struggle to build affective relationships within the classroom and maintain personal and professional boundaries. This was seen in both the interviews and the focus groups, where the participants would make statements such as "You would know more than me," "My colleagues do it this way," and "I am told that I am not allowed to do it my way." They questioned their own beliefs and actions as well as the training they received. Some mentioned that they "tried" to follow all that they were taught in their college training, but once they arrived in the field, they realized that it was challenging to implement. There were two main reasons for this: one was that their fellow employees did not hold the same views as they did when it came to expressing love to the children in their care, and in some cases, this included the centre's director. These educators struggled with finding their own "love" identity within their classrooms and were easily influenced by their co-workers, for better or worse. Tammy mentioned how she was inspired by her more experienced co-workers, finding comfort in the ways they interacted with the children in their care (and believing that once she has been at the same centre as long as they have, she may build similar relationships with the families). She stated that although she is not physically affectionate with the children, perhaps she will be one day, after years of getting to know the families. Amanda had an opposite experience, finding that her co-workers hindered her ability to show love at all, including

physical affection, verbal encouragement or intentional curricular activities. They refused to let her plan or implement any activities, and physical touch was off limits. She expressed that she was unhappy with her work environment but did not know what to do as she could not leave her job at that time. These responses by the participants seem to correspond to Schaak and colleagues' 2020 study on job fulfillment, in which they found that relationships with co-workers, either negative or positive, played a large role in the satisfaction that educators experience in their employment. In the current study, Tammy shared a view of love and care with her co-workers, but Amanda did not, which impacted their overall job satisfaction.

This lack of certainty and control by others reflects not only a lack of experience in the field of early childhood education (ECE) but also deeper systemic issues that hinder the ability to build positive working relationships (Osgood, 2010, 2012; Rouse & Hadley, 2018). While training programs may focus on technical skills and child development, they often neglect to address the broader structural challenges that educators face, such as low wages, lack of job security, and inadequate professional support. These systemic deficiencies increase interpersonal challenges, making it difficult for educators to navigate complex relationships with children, parents, and colleagues.

Research highlights that early childhood educators are leaving the field at alarming rates, citing not only poor pay but also the stress of strained relationships with colleagues and parents as significant reasons for their departure (The Burnout Crisis, 2022; Schaak et al., 2020). These findings point to an undervaluation of the ECE profession, where systemic issues—such as insufficient resources, lack of professional development opportunities, and minimal recognition of educators' expertise—create environments ripe for burnout and dissatisfaction. Participants in this study similarly expressed that their stress was not limited to children's behaviors or low

compensation but was deeply influenced by conflicting perspectives and relationship challenges within the workplace. Addressing these issues requires more than just improving individual training programs; it calls for systemic reform. Future educators need robust preparation that includes not only technical and relational skills but also advocacy and resilience training to navigate an underfunded and undervalued profession.

**Table 20**

*Competencies in the Quebec Training Program (*Early Childhood Education Attestation of

| 0194: To establish an affective relationship with children. |
| --- |
| Elements of the competency |
| 1. To evaluate the children's affective needs |
| 2. To create affective ties with the children, both individually and as a group. |
| 3. To maintain the affective relationship that has been established with the children. |
| 019H: To establish a partnership relationship with parents and resource people. |
| Elements of the Competency |
| 1. To welcome parents to the childcare establishment. |
| 2. To cooperate with parents with respect to the development of their child. |
| 3. To cooperate with resource people. |
| 4. To give an oral and written report of the child's personal experience. |

College Studies, 2015)

     In Quebec, there are two main ways to obtain early childhood educator qualifications: a three-year college diploma program or a one-year attestation certificate (Qualifications Quebec, 2024). Currently, 17 competencies are taught within the attestation certificate, two of which specifically address relationship building and professional partnerships. These competencies are

then covered throughout the provincial training programs (Early Childhood Education Attestation of College Studies, 2015), with some courses dedicated to the topics. While partnering with parents is addressed in the professional partnership competency, conflict and coworker relationships is not (see Table 16). If the instructor does not intentionally include training on workplace conflicts, a student could go into the field completely unprepared for the potential of a hostile or unsupportive workplace.

Similarly, the affective relationship competency addresses all aspects of building and maintaining relationships with children but does so theoretically, as these participants and others have expressed that their experiences in the field were very different from classroom teaching (Recchia et al., 2018). Based on the responses from the participating educators in this study, I suggest that placing a greater emphasis on real life situations as well as exploring the challenging sides of working in a childcare facility will benefit future students and perhaps decrease the attrition rate of early childhood educators. Providing students with more supervised time in the field, having them interview current educators and using negative case studies where relationships are not quickly built may help the students understand the field more fully, leading to fewer surprises and disappointments when they are employed. Three participants (Karen, Tammy, and Amy) said they tried to apply what they were taught in school, e.g. building relationships and using reflective statements. However, when they came across situations where these classroom techniques did not work as they were taught, they followed their 'gut' instead of their training. Although they believed their training gave them foundational knowledge, a lack of in-centre experience put them at a disadvantage when it came to building relationships and expressing love to each child.

**Implications #2: Increased Emphasis on Emotional Awareness in Training and Professional Development**

It is not unusual for educators to say that they love children and that they love children unconditionally (Aslanian, 2016; Taggart, 2022); however, when participants in this study were asked about barriers to love and loving action, there are caveats put on love. Suddenly, there are challenging actions and attitudes, and the educator's quick-to-love persona shifts to one of relationship building. This should not be a surprise, as educators routinely deal with children they do not connect with as much as others. Naturally, some personality types are more compatible than others, and when a child and an adult have conflicting personalities, they can struggle to 'like each other.' The participants asked for a better definition of the word 'like,' as they stated that they might love all the children and the job itself, but there are times that they do not 'like' much of it. (Ailwood, 2017; O'Connor, et al., 2019)

These responses have led me to believe that there needs to be a more open mindset regarding educators and their personal feelings within the classroom. Many of the participants, especially less experienced educators or student educators, felt guilty when they found themselves in situations where they did not like each of the children equally (Colley, 2006; Reye et al., 2019). They questioned their job qualifications because loving relationships do not come as quickly for them (Colley, 2006). These emotional responses are expected. We would never expect an adult to have the same loving attitude towards everyone in their workplace, so why do we expect educators to feel the exact same emotions towards all children? By placing the pressure on educators to leave all negativity at the door of their classroom, society is telling them that they are expected to be less than human, they are expected to switch off all negative emotions as if they were robots, and if they cannot, then they are not suited for the field (Colley,

2006; Reye et al., 2019). There is no consideration for the example of 'fully human' educators who show a variety of emotions within their classroom in appropriate ways (Reye et al., 2019).

While it is natural for educators to have different feelings toward each child, they should strive to maintain a positive relationship with all. This doesn't mean providing equal attention to every child, but rather offering each what they individually need (Aslanian, 2018; Taggart, 2022). How does an educator do this if they are not prepared for having children in their care with whom they struggle to build meaningful relationships? This is why teacher training is so essential, as there are currently topics within the ECE training that cover areas such as building affective relationships, guidance intervention strategies, and working with children with special needs. Here, educators can learn that building relationships with children does not come naturally or quickly to everyone (Cousins, 2016; hooks, 2003). There are strategies and methods that one can use to build positive relationships. When the course content is realistic, there will be conversations about what to do when you do not connect emotionally to a child in your class (O'Connor et al., 2019; Recchia et al., 2018). If these conversations are not had, student educators can feel shame and guilt for not relating to every child in their care during their fieldwork placements. When a teacher education course provides students with an open and honest look at relationships within a daycare classroom, students can question, without fear of ridicule, what to do if they are struggling to connect with a child or, more commonly, what to do when they do not feel any 'warm fuzzy feelings' towards specific children. Instructors and mentors can then give the students support, answer their questions and guide them to create personalized goals for effective relationships while helping them reflect on their own emotions and motivations (Recchia et al., 2018).

Currently, there is a lack of emphasis in early childhood educator training on self-reflection about the relationships educators form with children and families. Page (2018b) highlights the role of self-reflection in establishing Professional Love within educators. This intentional self-reflection should be more integrated into ECE teacher training, the designing of courses that lead future educators to gain a better understanding of themselves and the challenges they will face in the field.

**Implication #3: Government Policies**

Each participant expressed the different ways that they show love to the children in their classroom, which all focused on building relationships. These relationships were built through active listening, observing, playing, talking, and being near the children. Each educator altered their actions to best meet individual children's needs, building the necessary relationships in the classroom, highlighting that the most crucial aspect of their job was showing love through the methods the children would best receive in their care. However, with the high ratios, educators struggled to find the time to build these relationships, feeling that they needed to focus on efficiency over affection. This appears consistent with research findings of others, who found that educators most valued relationship building in their work, even though the management and governing bodies emphasized other tasks (such as academic responsibilities and caregiving tasks) (Bruic & Macuka, 2017; Osgood, 2010). Looking at the local governmental regulations for childcare in Quebec, educators have some of the highest ratios in the country, with one educator to five children under 18 months of age, one educator to eight children 18 months to under four years, and one educator to 10 children between four and five years of age. Other provinces within Canada boast lower ratios, with British Columbia being 1:4 for children under three years

of age and Ontario being 1:3 for children under 18 months of age (The Health of Canada's

Children and Youth, 2017) (See Table 17 with all the ratios for Canada).

**Table 21**

*Canadian Childcare ratio*

| Province | Infant ratio | Preschool ratio | School-aged ratio |
|---|---|---|---|
| British Columbia | 1:4 | 1:8 | 1:10 |
| Alberta | 1:4 | 1:8 | 1:10 |
| Saskatchewan | 1:3 | 1:10 | 1:10 |
| Manitoba | 1:4 | 1:8 | 1:10 |
| Ontario | 3:10 | 1:8 | 1:12 |
| Quebec | 1:5 | 1:8/1:10 | 1:20 |
| Nova Scotia | 1:4 | 1:8 | 1:15 |
| Prince Edward Island | 1:3 | 1:10 | 1:12 |
| Newfoundland | 1:3 | 1:5 | 1:12 |
| New Brunswick | 1:3 | 1:8 | 1:12 |
| Yukon | 1:4 | 1:8 | 1:8 |
| Northwest Territories | 1:3 | 1:8 | 1:10 |
| Nunavut | 1:3 | 1:8 | 1:10 |

*Source:* The Health of Canada's Children and Youth (2017)

This leads me to question why Quebec has created such a high child-to-educator ratio for

their childcare system, as it impacts how educators interact with children in their care. Even

though the Quebec childcare plan (Belleau, 2019) focuses on many of the ideas raised by this

study's educators, such as the individuality of children, building affective relationships and

partnerships with parents, they hinder their own goals by increasing the number of children that each educator can supervise (The Burnout Crisis, 2022; Friendly et al., 2009). Logic would dictate that by lowering the number of children allotted to each staff member or hiring additional support staff, the children will be better cared for and loved within the classroom. By adjusting the ratios and giving each educator more time with the children one-on-one, educators can take the appropriate time needed to build relationships with the children and their families.

Another implication of this lack of clarity between the definitions of love and care is that governing bodies should understand that when they use the term care, educators and parents may not interpret it as simply that, as care is not necessarily one-dimensional. It is rich and deep, filled with action, emotion and more intense relationships than the regulations describe. The same can be said for educator training: when care is talked about in the context of children's self-help routines in the classroom (such as toileting and feeding), it should also be seen as acts of relationship building and acts of Professional Love.

# Chapter 7. Conclusion

The educators in this study deemed love and care to be the most important aspects of their profession. They discussed wanting to show love to each child in a variety of ways, through physical actions, emotional support and pedagogical actions. They emphasized that the most important way to show love is however the child wishes to receive it. Customizing their expressions of love to the individual child assured them that they were giving the child what they most needed: safe relationships within the childcare centre. They discussed challenges that they faced when showing love, including parents, colleagues and children's individual attributes that they deemed negative. The participants shared their personal beliefs and experiences, shedding light on the differences between love and care and the impact these may have on professionalism.

One might wonder why this data is important and why we want to know what educators have to say about love. The answer could be as complex as the question itself. First, I believe that it is important to hear the voices of those who are actively working with children, especially when considering implications for educator training. Understanding the struggles, joys and frustrations of those who are invested in the profession can bring light to both the field and those who work in it. This understanding highlights the beliefs and attitudes that those in the field believe are necessary for professionalism. When we can better understand what those in the field deem important, we can review our training and policies to see how they reflect the ideas and attitudes. When we listen to educators about love in their classrooms and their emotional attachment to children, including any challenges that may come with that, we can help them better understand themselves, moving to encourage them to be reflective educators (Page, 2018).

When educators reflect on their relationships, ideas and emotions, they can become more engaged in their work (Bruic & Macuka, 2017).

Secondly, there seems to be a gap in the literature about educators' beliefs on love. As stated, limited research asks early childhood educators to discuss their opinions on love, care and professionalism. Further research on this subject can help highlight both successes and struggles that are taking place in the field (The Burnout Crisis, 2022). This dissertation is a starting point for exploring this topic and much more can be done on educators' beliefs about love and its impact on their professional engagement and willingness to stay in the field.

**Limitations**

This study has several limitations, including the sample size and the homogeneous nature of the participants. While the sample size of eight participants was appropriate for the study's phenomenological approach, this means that the findings are not generalizable.

Similarly, all of the participants in this study are educators in Quebec, which has a particular political and cultural environment. Quebec is unique in Canada, as no other provinces currently have a 'public' or low-cost system. Educators in Quebec can work in both public and private early childhood education daycares, often with a discrepancy in pay and responsibility The participants' education and experience were gained within this system, giving their voices a viewpoint that is specific to Quebec.

Another limitation of this project was the lack of returned strength spotting documents, which were a noted data collection method. Although many attempts were made to collect the documents and encourage the educators to complete it, perhaps there was a different way that could have helped the educators to complete the task.

Lastly, I would like to address that this study collected the educators' beliefs on love and care, rather than observations made by the researcher. If observations had been done in the centres, I may have seen other actions that I perhaps would deemed loving. The focus of this study was solely on the participants' perspectives, which I believe is important, as the educators are the experts of their own love, and I trust that what they have told me matters most to them.

**Future Directions**

I believe this research can be extended by broadening the participant pool in several ways. First, I would interview educators from across Canada, U.S. and outside of North America. This would give an extended expression of love, highlighting how different political and societal landscapes can impact educators' expressions and beliefs. Secondly, I would invite parents to participate in similar interviews to hear about their beliefs on love and care in early childhood environments. Following the concept of Pages' (2018) Professional Love, it is important to have a trusting relationship between parents and educators. One way we can achieve this is through exploring what parents believe is involved in a loving daycare relationship. This can help both parties to better understand and reflect on the childcare environment and the loving relationships developed within. Do parents want educators to love their children and to use the terminology of love with them? How comfortable are parents with educators giving their children physical affection or saying the words 'I love you?'

Thirdly, I would extend this research by interviewing children to have them explore how they see love shown in their childcare classrooms. Having the counterpart to the educators' examples would provide a unique perspective which could help validate the educators' goals of showing love. If the children mention actions similar to those of the educators, then it can reaffirm the educators' intentions. However, the children could mention many other actions that

they see as love, which could be very encouraging to all involved. Of course, interviewing children would carry ethical and language capacity concerns and would need to be thought through carefully.

Lastly, a study that could extend this research would be one on vocabulary, not just an extension of the definitions of love and care, but specifically the term 'like'. Several participants suggested that they would want to explore the differences between love and like, as they thought it was more of a challenge to like certain children than it was to love them or show them care. A conversation about what it means to like a child and how treatment may or may not change according to their emotional connections could help educators become more reflective of their relationships and actions.

**Researcher's Statement**

In this dissertation I wanted to hear personalized definitions of love. I believed that I would hear that love motivated educators to enter the field and that it keeps them in it. I expected I would hear about their physical expressions of love, the emotion attached and the struggle for professionalism. I expected too to hear about what inspired them to show love to the children, thinking that upbringing, religion, or passion would be discussed, and to an extent, I heard those things. I was unprepared to hear how co-workers, parents, and directors directly impact the participants' beliefs and expressions of love with the children in their care. The areas of struggle mentioned caught me unaware as well as I did not expect to hear of so many reasons that children can be hard to love. I was excited when I heard about their identities as teachers and the pride they had in their skills and chosen professions. As an instructor of early childhood education at a college in Montreal, I have a special interest in the well-being of educators and the field of early childhood. I am passionate about seeing educators trained and thriving in the field.

This data gave me insight into how educators view loving relationships and the impact of their views and relationships on their actions and overall well-being. They spoke about professionalism, training and societal views, giving me a renewed appreciation for the role of educators and their perceived struggles. I am excited to be able to lend my voice to their stories, hopefully bringing some awareness to the topic of love within the field.

**Closing Statement**

"Care is good, but love is better." The participants of this study highlighted the importance of love for them within their chosen profession. They took pride in their ability to show love, and it is my privilege to share their pride, challenges, and voices with others.

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**Example of Email to Daycare Centre**

I hope you are doing well.

I am writing to give you information about my Ph.D. research project, which I am now recruiting for. I am researching early childhood educators' definitions of love.

I have attached the recruitment flyer and I would like you to consider participating or sharing the information with other educators you know.

Thanks so much!

Katherine

**Appendix B**

**Demographic questions**

Looking at Love in Early Childhood Education

Demographic information

Please fill in what you are comfortable sharing.

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Language preference:

Years of work experience:

Education:

# Appendix C

## Focus Group – PowerPoint slides

Slide 1

> ### Focus Group: Exploring Love
>
> The objective of this focus group is to explore the many definitions of love; some from research, as well as our own definitions.

Slide 2

> ### Some Definitions
> - Looking at the Greek terms: eros, philia, and agape (Aslanian, 2018; White & Gradovski, 2018)
>   - Eros: erotic/romantic, has no place in ECE
>   - Philia: based on friendship is not one that is typically used when there is a power dynamic of teacher and student
>   - Agape: most commonly associated with the traditional Christian ideal of "love thy neighbour", an unconditional form of love (White & Gradovski, 2018, p. 202).
>     - Is the most agreed upon form of love for within educational settings (O'Connor, et al., 2019)
> - Altruism – A scientific definition of a love akin to agape love (Aslanian, 2018)
> - Merriam-Webster's (n.d) first definition of love is:
>   - **(1):** strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties
>   - **(2):** attraction based on sexual desire
>   - **(3):** affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests

Slide 3

## Some Definitions (cont.)

- Research with educators in early childhood has shown that they have developed their own working definitions of love based off of their experiences in the field.
  - Education should be done in, "a context of care rather than care be done in a context of learning" (Rouse & Hadley, 2018 p. 160).
  - Rouse and Hadley (2018) explored the language used by parents and educators and found that the term 'love' was rarely used by educators but was used often by the parents.
- bell hooks (2003) defines love "as a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust" (p. 131).

Slide 4

## Some Fears

- We would be remiss not to mention some of the fears of being loving within early childhood education. After all "love and touch in ECE[C] are thus conceived as both essential to child development and well-being and a threat to children's safety" (Aslanian, 2018, p. 173)
  - Safety
  - Boundaries – what does this look like?
  - Appearances
- Are there any other fears you can think of that relate to being in relationship with children?

Slide 5

**Difference Between Love and Care**

- Often the terms 'love' and 'care' are used interchangeably in policies and conversations within early childhood education.
  - Example: "An educator must care for a child by feeding them, changing them and comforting them" is easier to observe and quantify than "You must love the children in your care"
- Noddings (2003) wrote that acts of care (such as feeding, hugging or cleaning) are not enough to classify it as a loving relationship. There must be proper motivation and emotion involved in the acts of caring.
- The Quebec Education Program: Preschool education (2017) uses the term 'care' exclusively
- The NAEYC's statement (2009) of developmentally appropriate practice also solely uses the term 'care'

Slide 6

**Difference Between Love and Care (cont.)**

- By exchanging the term 'love' for the term 'care' early childhood educators and policy makers are able to move way from the idea that early childhood education is simply a different form of "maternal love," therefore it is an easy job, especially for women (Ailwood, 2008).
- However, for the sake of this workshop we will try to use the term love while referring to acts of care done within a relationship, one with emotional connection.

Slide 7

## Strength Spotting

- Strength spotting with when a person intentionally looks for moments/actions throughout the day that they would define as encompassing a chosen emotion, in this case, love. These moments could be an action, attitude or word and can be done by anyone within the vicinity. There is no set definition of what can make up a 'loving moment' in an effort to not limit one's personal definition of love (Haslip et al., 2019).
- As an example, Haslip and colleagues (2019) had a group of educators look for loving moment within their daycares, which were done by either themselves, children, co-workers or parents. The educators came back with examples of love such as: high fives, hugs, positive words, smiles and being respectful.
  - One educator even stated that her curriculum planning was an expression of her love for the children!

Slide 8

## Personal Strength Spotting

- During the next few days pay attention to your own actions, and those of the children and co-workers, looking for examples that you would classify as acts of love.
  - This can be anything, that you would describe as acts of 'love'
  - It can be done by anyone within your centre, including yourself, your co-workers, parents or children
- Keep a simple journal (anecdotes) about the loving actions/moments you are noticing
- You can email me your journal (anecdotes) at this email (Katherine.pauls@concordia.ca)

Slide 13

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Slide 14

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**INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM**

**Study Title: Love and Care in an Early Childhood Context**

**Researcher: Katherine Pauls**

**Researcher's Contact Information: katherine.pauls@concordia.ca**

**Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Sandra Chang-Kredl**

**Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: sandra.chang-kredl@concordia.ca**

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

**A. PURPOSE**

There are many definitions of love which makes it challenging to examine how educators view it within early childhood settings. This grounded theory research project will explore early childhood educators' personal perspectives on and definitions of love and care in their daycare settings. I will listen to educators' personal definitions, and ask them to share their experiences of showing love within the classroom and challenges they have faced. Through listening and exploring the topics

that arise within the greater area of love, the research will be able to start developing a theory about educators' beliefs and definitions that can add to the limited bank of research and help frame other perspectives.

## B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview followed by a focus group as well as to complete a journaling exercise.

The interview will take place first and will be scheduled on an evening or weekend at a time and location of your convenience and will last approximately one (1) hour.

The focus group will be scheduled for two (2) hours and will be located on the Concordia campus or in a location convenient for all participants. Scheduling for the focus group will be done using a scheduling application, such as Doodle. The focus group will be audio recorded for ease of transcription.

Directly following the focus group, the participants will be asked to journal their experiences of love in their early childhood classrooms over their next three (3) working days, submitting them either electronically or in hard copy.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately five (5) hours of time during a two-week period.

## C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include: Social anxiety or nervousness in new situations or emotional discomfort that can come with self-reflection

Potential benefits include: to gain a better understanding of your own definitions of love which could enhance your emotional wellbeing. You will also have the opportunity to network with fellow educators.

## D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: Your thoughts and definitions of love as well as personal experiences showing love in your early childhood education classroom. We may also talk about challenges you have faced in your employment.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information will be identified by a code. The researcher will have a list that links the code to your name.

We will protect the information by keeping all documentation in a password protected computer, and hard copies in a locked filing cabinet.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information two years after the end of the study.

By signing this form, you consent to respect each other's confidentiality and to not disclose anyone's identify outside of the focus group. Your identity will be known to other focus group participants and the researcher cannot guarantee that others in the group will respect your confidentiality.

## F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher within one week after the completed focus group. Please note that within the focus group data there may be a limit to what can be removed, as it may relate to other participants' responses, however all data will be anonymized.

As a compensatory indemnity for participating in this research, you will receive a $20 Amazon gift card. If you withdraw before the end of the research, you will still receive the Indigo gift card.

To make sure that research money is being spent properly, auditors from Concordia or outside will have access to a coded list of participants. It will not be possible to identify you from this list.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

## G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)     _____

SIGNATURE          _____

DATE              _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

**Centre Consent form**

Date:_____

I, _____, the director of

_____,

acknowledge the participation of _____ in

the **Love and Care in an Early Childhood Educational Context** research project. I am

aware that the research project will discuss educators' definitions of love and that the

participants will be drawing from their personal experiences including those that take

place in their places of work.

I am aware that all information will be kept confidential and by signing this consent form

I give approval for _____ to participate.

Interview Transcript Samples

**Participant Rachel**

Researcher  41:05

But yeah, so it's a bit of that appreciation. But I would like you to try as succinctly as you can to give me your definition of love. If I was to ask you, which I am right now asking you to define love in regards to your employment, like the children in your care. Yes. What would you tell me?

Rachel  41:25

Love, love is providing children with the children I care for, place that safe, where they want to be, where they feel like they are valued, where they're respected, even to the point where I'm going to tell them no, because I love you enough to tell, you no, not just do something. But no, because you can be hurt, maybe we can find a different way for you to do whatever they actually want. That's fine a different way. It's about being open. And not just keeping them alive. It's not just keeping them alive.

Researcher  42:11

So that's, as we've discussed a little bit, even before the recording started. That that's the difference for you between love and care, care is bare minimum bare.

Rachel  42:21

Minimum. Bare minimum. That's just you did there they were there for seven hours and you fed them you changed your diaper. You might have engaged a bit even when you

change your diaper. He wasn't just put you on the table. Change your diaper. That's what I think carries. Come here. Change your diaper. Go away. Next. Go away next.

**Participant Mark**

Researcher  08:26

So, we know from our previous conversation about what this project is about. It's about exploring early childhood educators' personal definitions of love in their early childhood classrooms and early childhood experiences, as well as their expressions of love. So, if you had to put into words how you would define love, or how you better yet how you would tell me you show love in the classroom? Oh, let's keep those separate actually define love for me as it relates to your early childhood employments.

Mark  09:05

Yeah, sure. Yeah, I guess like, as we talked about before, like, there's the it's [sic], I look at it in the kind of like the agape expression in a lot of ways and then just wishing the best for whoever it is, in general. And I guess with within context of teaching there was in that course that I mentioned before that I really liked Shifting Paradigms where there was a paper that I read, called, Love flows. It was just like a two page article and some it was like a holistic education journal. But it was, I really identify with it because it was a teacher talking about there. expression or their experiences teaching in Asia. And this is before I went to Asia, but anyway, so I've always been interested in Asian culture, philosophies and religions as well, too, like I'm really I really get a lot out of Buddhism and Hinduism as well to in Daoism. So, he was just talking about his, his martial arts master that he was seeing at the same time as well, who always mentioned love flows, love flows as the most important sort of message. And then not, he used that in his

teaching contexts when to serve before entering a room just to sort of center himself in his heart. And so, I've been using have used that sort of phrase in my mind to help me focus on that. When I get into situations where I don't know the way out of it. I guess I'm sort of getting to the how part of it

Yeah, so it's, yeah, so it's a situation where my, I'm not able to think of a solution. Or if I get to like a roadblock with a student, or a parent, or colleague even, that often just sort of gets me to take a step back. And then somehow, grace comes through and provides me with something. Maybe it's, you know, like, just take a step back for a while, maybe it's something to say, maybe it's just, you know, like to touch their shoulder or something like that, like. Yeah, like, because as I'm cautious with the whole expressions, because being a man, and that was something that was very much brought up in our teacher training was to protect ourselves and be careful, never be alone with a student. So that's an I [sic], I think that's really important for the everybody's safety and for the parents to feel safe leaving their children as well to that as a parent, that was something that I look for, with my children. Like, we're very leery of that just because of the reality of what's happened and horrible things that happen to people. So yeah. So that's, yeah. So anyways, do you find that's why I just do like shoulder touches Or maybe like, a side hug and on to somebody like that? Yeah. I mean, if a child wants to hug me, they're really happy that we set that up. But if not. I don't.


**Participant Amanda**

Researcher

So, what would you say your personal definition of love is? How do you define love for early child, (for the children?) like within an early childhood context? Yeah, so how you Yeah, within your job

Amanda Speaker 12:03

Within my job, being passionate (okay) with a job giving attention to the children and serving their needs and taking care of them. And there's a lot it's endless. It's just like, unconditional, it's loving them despite of who they are, despite the normal special or whatever, you know, accepting that for their loss and spending time with them. I think.

Researcher Speaker  12:44

So, that's great. So, with what you were just saying and how you were just talking about your work, do you find that it's a con-? You're having a conflict right now, being able to show love how you defined it. And your co worker? Are you finding that to be in a bit of a challenge?

Amanda Speaker  13:04

It's a challenge, but whenever I get the chance, I find my way. Good. Because there's a shift when you know, the break time for naptime when it's my turn [sic], of course I you know, I caress the children. It is a little bit sneaky

Researcher Speaker  13:51

Okay, so often we hear about, we use words like we use words like love in early childhood, right, like, parents say that they love their children, we say that we love the children in our classrooms. In current research, parents say they want educators to love their children. But directors don't really use the term love very much. Governments don't use the term love they use the term care. Right? (uh hum) It's right in our name, day care,

child care. Do you think that there's a difference between the word love and the word care? Are there differences or is there a different definition for each or do you see them as the same as

Amanda Speaker  14:41

I think that within the word love there is care. (Okay) That's what that's what I understand. So, if you love your child, if you love your profession, if you love the kids, it's absolute that you're going to give the care so I, it seems like they're connected. For me.

**Participant Lacey**

Researcher  03:08

Can you then give me your definition of love, as you see it for your class (for the children) for the children? Yeah.

Lacey  03:19

For me, it's established a link individual with all of them. Because when you start as a group in September, they don't know you, and you don't know that. So, the faster I get to know them and install a link that, of course has confidence in their confidence. Trust, so I was looking for the word, trust, then your [sic] the minute of trust is won, then you create that link of more further [sic] than just like she's just taking care of me. It's like she loves me. I love her. She loves me. They talk about you at home, I think about them all the time. I'm looking at the store I'm like, oh my god, like kids with that. Oh, yeah. So, they're always in my back thoughts somewhere. I'm at home and I'm like, oh, yeah, I could do that activity. They're always there. Like, I'm always I'm off a week or something

on vacation. I'm like, Oh my God. I hope they're okay. So, they're always there. They're always like, for a year the children in my group are my children, not their mom, I know that there's a difference. But for me, I'm there for them for the year and they can count on me. And I will, they will develop and I don't even have to say sometimes you don't even have to say I love you because they know they feel it. Sometimes you do because they do too. So it's like it's okay if one but it's like is it always up? Do I have to always say I love you and no I don't. Sometimes it's just it's just a pat on the head passing by them are nice just saying just encouraging what they're doing. "Oh my God, look at you. You're such a big I really like what you're doing right now. Thank you for helping me". And then like they praise for it because they're like, "oh my god", she's I'm noticing you You're in my class. You're not invisible. So that's fine. It's a It's not sick because there's a fine line because people's oh you can't love those children are not yours. There are different loves in life and your heart expands. There's love for everyone and every style of people that every you know, and that's why I like the word in English. *In English you could say you like someone and you love someone but in French it is just je t'aime (French statement) But in English, I could say I like you, I really do like you, hey, you're not in my love book in my life likeable people*. So, there's a difference. And the children are not in that likable thing. They're in the love. They're in that part. There's a little section for them. That's how I see. Yeah. Great.

**Participant Jamie**

Researcher Speaker  02:08

Great. I love that it doesn't change very much. Can you then tell me your personal definition of love in early childhood?

Jamie Speaker  02:19

Okay, that's quite complex.

Researcher Speaker  02:23

Doesn't need to be okay. Can take you in one sentence or 20 minutes, whatever.

Jamie Speaker  02:30

Early Childhood Educator and educator, he or she, Oh, for sure. love in the, in the work setting. So, for me meaning as it's a short term, because every year we change. However, it makes you human. Like, like meaning you empathize with People, you give them care, which is love and care is interconnected. Which is, they're not interchangeable.

Researcher Speaker  03:09

Okay. I want to hear more about that too!

Jamie Speaker  03:14

Think that's it. I see. As educator, I profess my, my love to them as a professional because I'm not a parent. I'm just an educator for them. Meaning not just is like we are the vital role in their early childhood development. So, I think it's very important. Love to be effective as the profession itself. I think that's, that's, that's my, that's my,
Not just and educator

Researcher Speaker  03:45

That's good. So, you use the term care and love that they're interconnected, but not interchangeable. Can you tell me about that a little bit more? Is there a difference between love and care?

Jamie Speaker  04:01

Yeah, love is like, I love my family, which is, that's the commitment. Whatever happens, I'm always there. Even if they it's like if they dislike me, or what is never change, but care. It's everyone's like the empathy of someone else, even stranger. Like you care for them is like, it's a concern to look after a vulnerable person, not even not [sic] just in your child, but every person inter like, social interaction. Right?

**Participant Karen**

Researcher  05:22

Yeah, I get that. Okay, now that I know a little bit about your classroom, tell me about your personal definition of love. How would you define love specifically for the children in your class?

Karen Speaker  05:41

For me, love is, you know, to help them to grow up to, to be, you know, to have like to be polite to other people. And when they get mistake you know, I'm like, kind of, I feel like I'm a parent who I need to discipline my own child. That's kind of like, when a child who like doesn't respect others I feel so bad. That's why even a child who disrespect their parents, I'm the one talking to them by talking to them with their parents. You know, like, R. It's not nice to tell that to your mom, that she needs to go like go away. Because you don't want her to pick you up. You know, you know what you need, you need to be grateful. You know, that your mom? She comes here to pick you up. You should be grateful. Okay, because that child I think he just graduated last year. He wants his dad to pick him up? No, but he doesn't want his mum. I mean, the mum came instead of dad.

You know, I feel like my heart is breaking. Yeah, you know, so for me, like, I want them to be like, well, you know, like, to be good. To be to grow up to be a good person. That's my main thing. Plus, I like hugging and you know, giving them a hug all the time. Yeah, I'm huggable person. Yeah, I show my like actual (body motion of hugging) for the children.

Researcher  07:30

Yeah. So, you're very you would say that you're a very affectionate person. And right, you like to have a pat on the head, like lots of physical affection?

Karen Speaker  07:39

Yeah, I like that kind of person.

**Participant Amy**

Researcher  09:27

Goods Um, so then let's talk about love. Do you have a definition? What would be your definition of love? Specifically, as it comes to your job? So not how do you love your husband or your family? But love for the children in your class? Do you have a personal definition? Have you thought about that ever?

Amy Speaker  09:54

I never thought about that. But after you asked me, I am thinking that It's like, it's like building that trust for the children. Because I'm new for them, they are new for me. So, if they don't trust me, they, they won't listen to me. They won't follow me. And all those things. So, it's about building trust and giving them respect. So that's it. That is the definition of love for me. And of course, guiding them. If you cannot guide them for me,

I cannot guide them. If I don't build trust, they won't follow me. They want to listen to me. So yeah, this is love, I guess? Yes.

Perfect. Hey, there's absolutely no right or wrong questions? Or answers. So then how do you build trust? How do you do this in your classroom? What are some things you do to build that relationship?

Amy Speaker 10:53

I always what I have learned from all other teachers, I always try to give them positive statements. And I never I never give like wow, it is so beautiful. This kind of because the drawing that they are showing me. So, I always use the behavior reflection what I have learned all those things. So, this, I guess this is building the trust, because they know that, okay, she's not giving me this kind of WoW statement. She is telling me that, what am I doing? So, this is the thing, and also, I am giving them this security that always I'm here if you need some help. So yeah, this is, this is how I build trust.

**Participant Tammy**

Research 01:24

I'm just trying to get some demographic information. Perfect. Can you tell me your own definition of love when it comes to your early childcare work?

Tammy Speaker 01:37

Okay, since I work in the baby class, it's more caring and nurturing, right? Because I noticed that they are like hugs cuddling, like one on one talk and *literal expression* and everything. Like more about like feeding them changing diaper. And you give hugs and

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some kisses. I don't prefer kisses that much. But sometime, you know, like, it's like, uncontrollable. Yeah. They more like hugs and caring. Caring is the most thing for them. Like the biggest cause small babies and they this is the first place for them after this home, so it's more like caring.

Researcher Speaker  02:36

Okay. And by caring you mean? A lot of like self-help care?

Tammy Speaker  02:45

Yes, self-help care Exactly. Like changing diaper. Some of them are able to feed by their self. Some needs little help for the, like applesauce or something like that. Yogurt, we prefer to feed them. And when they want something from the cabinet or like giving them toys and no, to engage. Yes.

Researcher Speaker  03:16

Yeah. Great.

Tammy Speaker  03:20

I was in naptime. They, I noticed they feel secure if the educators sit in the Nap Room. So they wake up and check "Oh, she's there. Okay, she's there" then to go back to sleep. So I feel it's the more secure when they see adult or known people in that room.

Transcript samples Focus groups

Excerpt Focus group 1

Researcher Speaker  24:18

So um, what are some definitions of love? Specifically when it comes to early childhood?
Well, I have some see this is the thing I have a few. If you want to look at like, not
Google. But Merriam Webster. If we look at the dictionary, we have three key
definitions. The first one is a strong affection for another arising out of kinship or
personal ties. Number two is attraction based on sexual desire of course. And then
number three is affection based on admiration, benevolence or common interests. Okay.
So that's Merriam Webster. But I don't think personally for me and you those fit?

Lacey Speaker  25:06

No, well, number two doesn't fit well for number two

I think one into one and number two or three are different things.

Rachel Speaker  25:17

But they can be combined. Yes,

Lacey Speaker  25:19

But third one for me is like more like a mentor and stuff like that, where you're admired
like, you're like looking up to

Rachel Speaker  25:33

That's why but that's why I think it's should be there. I admire the children. I admire them when they teach me Well, no, yeah, it because I have watched through all my years. Why do I do this? Because I know but you heard it too, right?

Lacey Speaker  26:05

You lock the door, we're fine.

Rachel Speaker  26:08

We're here. Yeah. So, like, the worst LA will come but she'll scream. But so but I have watched them do things based on going back to school, sitting back sometimes and watching what they're doing. And I think that's part of love loving them enough. In when it comes to ECE loving them enough to go here. I've given you a little bit of tools. Go No, no, I have to go. I don't really want them to go either. But in the classroom go what are you learning? That's, that's how much I love you. I love you to see you for who you are. I don't know where you're going. I think I see I see the potential. But here. I admire and that's why I think admiration. That's where I see my admiration for them. Because I go home sometimes. That's my husband. "Dude this guy did that." I'm like, wow. And that had nothing to do with me. And then to me, and I love that. I got to see that. I saw that. He showed that to me. Nobody else said to me, you don't like our big boy. Right? He shows that to me. Nobody else. So that I admire him for that because I'm there for him. He knows I love him just the way he is

Lacey Speaker  27:35

Because there's teachers that once a kid is categorized "Yeah, monster". Yeah. So, you'll get fed, you'll get cleaned. But that's it.

Researcher

And that I'll will keep you alive.

Lcaey Speaker  27:49

Unfortunately, but I don't see him like that. And I'll just say you saw me and first of all, I was the first one to go don't listen to these people. I was talking to

L Speaker  27:57

Me and I said, I like to know a little bit so hold on and put a face on the name first of all, so just Oh, don't listen. They she told me he's bad. He's not bad. He's a kid to do. Am I okay, so he's a busy kid. Yeah, I've done that. Yeah, okay. Yeah.

**Excerpt 2**

Reacher Speaker  1:04:44

Number two is move. And this I don't necessarily agree with but "move away from thinking about your own needs and moving towards the needs of others". Yes, yes. So that's important that the kids come first, essentially,

Rachel Speaker  1:04:59

Well, you know, when an educator is not feeling well, and she holds the kid and she rocks the child to consoler themselves? Yeah, that's part of that. That's number two. Yeah. That's her needs for the child's needs.

Researcher Speaker  1:05:10

Yeah. So we're trying to move away. Exactly. So, the child's wiggling to try to get away. And you're like, No, but I'm sad. I'm gonna [sic] hold you.

Rachel Speaker  1:05:23

Words, though, but I see the child struggling. I know what you're talking about. I see the child trying to get away. Okay. There's not a name. We won't talk about but that's not fair. Because now you're trapping the child. And you're

L Speaker  1:05:39

Passing on those emotion that the child doesn't know what to do with because he has no power

Research Speaker  1:05:43

Over them. Yeah. So, we're stepping away from our own emotional needs to focus on the needs of others. And I think the only thing I don't agree about that is, I think there's a limit. We also need to think about our own needs.


**Focus group 2**

Researcher  09:16

Because it didn't always mean I liked them, or I wasn't always excited to see them. But I always was like, ready to care for them. I always was ready to engage with them. I was always ready to support them. And give them whatever they needed, not whatever they wanted, but whatever they needed at any time. But it didn't always come with warm fuzzy feelings. So, it felt like a little bit of a different form of love than Oh, I love pizza

or Oh, I love tacos or Oh, I love that movie. It felt like a very kind of different form maybe a little more authentic because even with our spouses or our partners, our are our own Children, we don't always have warm, fuzzy feelings all the time. So that's my any responses to mind or anything you want to share about your own

M Speaker  10:13

Just what you're saying, just reminded me of, or how it looks different. It's sort of like it's filtered through your lens of being the teacher, the role of being the teacher, the love. So, it's because you're in that role with those expectations and responsibilities. You know, you extend like this field of care, field of love. Because you're in that role. So, it is it does come with the, other parts of being a teacher too. So yeah, that's, I think that's why it looks different from my own experience, too, I think.

M Speaker  10:58

And yeah, I don't really I, I don't think I have a personal definition. I haven't really written that down my own personal definition before, like, I went straight to, again, like an academic sort of overview, like looking thinking about the Western ideas. So like, the Greek one Philla, Eros and Agape. And then, and then, like thinking about Eastern religions as well, too. And just but then, yeah, not so not [sic] personal at all. I was just looking at what I know, academically. So that was interesting. But yeah, then when you said care, comfort and respect that I started, then I thought, like, well, what if I could just choose three words that I thought like, for me, it's safety, which includes like meeting the needs, like Maslow's needs, you can't feel safe unless your basic needs are met, and then just meet going up the pyramid of needs from there, and then joy and respect as well. So,

we had respect in common. But a sense of joy, I think is really part of love for me as well. And then, yeah, I definitely do love my children in the class in. In that sense of that I want to provide them safety, joy and respect. But yeah, again, I think its love is such a word that it hasn't doesn't have enough break down into all the definitions. Like it's too broad. Like you have to give it clarification afterwards, because it's such a overused word in the vernacular.

Researcher 12:52

Yeah, for sure. Which is one of the reasons why I'm doing this study. So yeah, that's really interesting. And we'll touch on. Oh, go ahead.

Tammy Speaker 13:05

Yeah, since like, I'm a new educator in this field. I feel like caring and fulfill their need, and everything becomes love it's like, you do that, then it becomes love. It was in the beginning, I felt like okay, this is my job, I am doing this. No, I'm an educator, I have to do it. Then when I get to know the kids, too, because every kid's have different needs and different kinds of attention from the educators so when they get to know them, and I realized that Okay, in this case, I have to treat like this kid. So, they into individual, individual liberty, oh my God, my words. And then the care I give it to them, like individually, it becomes love because it's not like a mission like okay, you ask something, it gives us same for everyone. No, we are humans like we understand each other, and we give different attention and different care for the different people. So, when you get to know them, well, and you fulfill their need, then it becomes love.

**Strength spotting submission**

<u>Journal for 28th August, 2023</u>

How I showed love in my centre today:

As an educator I show love and affection to the children of my classroom as well as the centre everyday.

Today, while entering the centre, one child ran to me by calling my name and gave me a hug. I sat down and hugged her back. I also asked how is she. I show love by welcoming her and asking her about herself.

After mummy dropped off, another child started crying. I took her hand and sit with her. She sat on me. I told her that "I know that you are missing your mummy, but mummy cannot stay with us, she will come after nap, now calm down, take a deep breath". After few minutes the child stopped crying and went to play. Here I showed love by acknowledging her feeling. Also gave her feeling of security by taking her hand and sat with her. I showed love by helping her to calm down.

At the backyard some children fell down while running and playing. I asked every time everyone "are you okay?"

While washing hands I asked a little child who is new in the class, "do you need help?" I showed love by showing him that if you need help I am always here.

During snacks and lunch, I always respect their choice. I don't force them to eat. In this way I show love while respecting their opinion/choice.

# Appendix H

## First Cycle Coding Sample

for me, it sounds upstairs. And I'm like, no. You're allowed. It's okay, we're good. Oh, roll at the same time. Every three seconds. Okay, no, anyway, so so when you greet you come in the big room and it's like a walk to go into my locker first. So I'm not even and I get "Hello hello hello L" and maybe you'll get one running after you. And then of course, the teacher know you're gonna wait here. So I have to bring them back. I'll see you in a minute. I'm just gonna put my purse away. And then you walk through "LLLLLLLLL" from far away to the staff room, you'll see. So it's like there you get a lot of these. And it's like, they love you. And when kids like when you take them like you said they're strangers, you take them in September you care for them at the beginning because you don't love them yet but it comes easily and fast but you're caring for them because you have to attend to their needs and beginning but you also have creation of needs of of like I said you have to get them individual to make group so if I have a link with you and a link with you and a link with you, eventually we'll have a group a group. So that's what you work with at the beginning September October. That's what it is. But all of a sudden nowhere the end of September, mid October, all of a sudden you'll have a kid get hugging you. "I love you" So you've gained the love of a stranger. I didn't force it on them. I just gave them care what they need. They need to be fed they need to be dressed up they need to be clean. They need to play they need toys and what their needs were and that that what does what does mommy do for them? I want to talk about that because that is included. So what did they do? Mommy takes care of me me feed me food. Mommy plays with me mommy dresses me up mommy kids give me kisses hugs when I was in so what do we do? When they cry? We hug them. Well we may gave them a kiss on the head anyway. Right? But so we are caring for them. And eventually they'll just transfer that oh, that person loves me like why mommy? So it's a safe person like mommy and daddy and grandma or whoever you know? So we become they're part of their family. Yeah, like some kids at home will the parents at night "oh my god last night she couldn't go to sleep until we say good night to you. And I had to say mommy doesn't have L's number. He cannot call it's gonna be sad He wants to say goodnight" (the one participant kept asking other if she heard something, worried that someone was in the centre.

Starts as care until you make the connections (links) then it becomes love, from both sides, the children's and yours.

Comparing us to family
We become like family to the children

*[Handwritten margin notes:]*

starts as care and moves to love.

- attending to their needs individual & group needs

gained the love of a stranger

→ our caring actions (mother - shows them our love

- we become like family

L 8

to, like, treat them well, and get through the day. And then it's often those children with time and, and intention on my part, and, and reflection, that and relationship building that, uh, grows, and I ended up caring for them. And I would say, even loving them in the ends, because I kind of pushed through those original negative feelings towards the child's personality or the child's actions more than the child themselves, right.

Researcher 16:30

Great, so let's thank you for that. Let's kind of keep going. And we'll talk as a whole group, we on't like partner off. But what are some tangible examples of how love are shown? So this is gonna seem very basic, but things like showing affection like high fives and hugs, how else do you feel like we can show a love within our classrooms

M Speaker 17:08

paying attention to their interests, and what they care about. So you can better meet their needs and scaffold their learning to the next what they need to do next. So paying it Yeah, paying attention to where they're at, where they're at with their development, observation. I think those are all very tangible, actionable kinds of ways to provide or to show love and provide love. Very academic focus on showing love

He used the word provide love and show love, I wonder if there is a difference between those two words.

Researcher 17:45

Yeah, for sure.

M Speaker 17:50

Although it's, it's all subtle, because that's kind of behind the scenes. So it's like what you're doing to structure the educational curriculum, but it's not necessarily like a demonstration. They will be there will be noticed as necessarily, although I guess, I do think they, they definitely respond to it when you show that you have noticed. So that, so yeah, I guess it is tangible. It's just not like, as like, it's not physical, like a hug. But it is by giving your presence and your attention that does they, the child feels that and responds to it. So yeah. So it is tangible. Yeah.

Not everything needs to be physical

Researcher 18:33

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**Appendix I**

**Researchers Notes – Memos Sample**

Time is important

Presence is important

      Be there for and with the children

            Playing with them

            Being down at their level

            Talking to them

Filling/servicing their needs

      Physical needs

      Emotional needs

Individuality

      Not only educator, but children as well

            Can't force a child to accept your love,

                  Need to find a why to express it for each child, and follow their lead

**\*\* This tells me that it is again up to the educator be selfless and change their ways of showing love to meet the receivers of this love\*\***

Difference between love and care

      Difference of opinion –

            some say yes there is a difference,

                  Starts with care moves to love with time and building of relationships

            Others says that they are related and just different levels of the same emotion

Challenges

      Co-workers and environment seems to be the biggest hinderance

            Jealousy

      Parents can be a challenge, but usually supportive

**Second Cycle coding Samples**

*knowledge* Change/personal/Individual.

Interview data

*Lv.1 - In vivo*    *Emotion coding*    *Lv.2. another category? answer-*    *Lv.3 theming/categories*

*potential theme.*

| Participant 1/R | Key words or phrases | Feelings | Love is | Notes | Also mentioned by: |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Somebody loves them | | | | |
| | Want them to <u>love</u> themselves | | | | self-care (for kids) |
| | Not enough to just care | | More than caring | | |
| | I feel respected at work … easier to give love | Because she feels respected she can give love | Respect | | |
| | <u>Kiss</u> every child | | | Physical ← | love action professional. |
| | "I'm NAME" | Her job because her personality | | | |
| | I go down to each child's level | | | Physical ← | love action. |
| | Kiss them on their forehead | | | Physical ← | love action |
| | Ready for the kiss | The child needs to accept the love | Reciprocal Needs to be accepted | Noddings | Knowledge of the child accepting signs of acceptance. |
| | Wish I would have known (something about the child) | Knowledge impacts the interaction | Knowledge of the children | | Knowledge. |
| | Love comes from respect | | | | professionalism? |
| | I <u>trust</u> the kids enough. That's love. You trust them enough to let them touch your stuff | trust | | | love - emotion. |
| | I do love what I am doing, I took a <u>pay cut</u> | Pride, dedication | | | professionalism |
| | What I really love to do is take <u>care</u> of people's kids and love. | | | Uses the terms love and care here | Care actions. |
| | Taking <u>care of peoples kids</u>, giving them the chances in life that they may not get later | | | Here she uses care | giving love - emotion. |
| | That self love is that it's okay | | | She seems to be talking | |

Love as action     Love is attitude     challenges     1

Love as Emotion     Professionalism     Parents.

# Appendix K

## Third Cycle Coding Sample