

Book Review

Love and Compassion

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John P. Miller is a professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. As a renowned author of twenty books focusing on holistic education, spirituality, and curriculum, he conducted a qualitative study in the mid-2010s to explore the effectiveness of a Toronto school that had adopted holistic education. As one of twenty-four educators, Miller was invited to Bhutan in 2009 to be part of the orientation of their educational system, that Bhutan had set as a goal. It was called Gross National Happiness. Among his books are: *Whole Child Education*, *Teaching from the Thinking Heart: The Practice of Holistic Education*, *The Contemplative Practitioner: Meditation in Education and The Workplace and Education and the Soul*. Additionally, Miller is co-author of a book series entitled *Current Perspectives in Holistic education*.

Love and Compassion is a ground-breaking non-fiction book that connects love and learning. The title reflects Miller's stance on their role in education. It is thought-provoking and encapsulates the main theme of the book. The topic would interest people in more than the fields of holistic education and contemplative education. Its message about love is universal and would benefit an audience that cares about children, teachers, and leaders.

The Foreword is written by Thomas Moore who has been familiar with Miller's writings for many years. He states that John Miller's work consists of "giving education a heart." Moore declares his surprise that a lot of educators are uncomfortable with talking

about love in their workplace, choosing not to mix teaching and learning with emotions. His favorite part of the book is when Miller describes his university classroom that is filled with love, respect and freedom. Moore raises an important point of consideration, that it is not what we teach but how we teach it.

The book consists of ten chapters, of which eight give the reader the title of the love that will be discussed in each one. They are self-love, personal love, impartial love, love of learning, love of beauty, love as nonviolence, the gift of presence, and eros. The book jacket is very intriguing. It is a photograph of a woman with two children reading a book in nature, under a big, mature tree. As a reader, I am not certain about the meaning of it. The woman could be a mother, a teacher or another loving person. The two children could be family members or children in the same school, depending how one interprets the title. The title is in a beautiful gold lettering, with the added words "Exploring Their Role in Education." The book jacket is an example of the love of beauty that Miller talks about in the book.

Giving practical ideas on how to implement the different kinds of love in each chapter, Miller also provides a conceptual approach. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the main themes of the book, the diverse kinds of love. For self-love, he emphasizes that many people reinforce self-doubt within their being, and need to develop friendship with themselves, instead of with the inner critic. Self-love is taken up by many authors and Miller gives a new twist to its meaning. It is about feeling connected with nature and the universe. Personal love encompasses romantic love and friendship. "En" exists when people have a strong feeling to accomplish something together, a project, something at work, or some other activity. I can identify with "en," viewing my recent life with projects that just felt needed to be done with collaborators. Impartial love: compassion is present when there is the effort to connect with the essence and goodness of another human being. Compassion is a quality that I and other colleagues are trying to expand within ourselves. The love of learning is in every child growing up. It is linked with curiosity and the motivation to learn new things, that can be nurtured throughout a child's schooling. Having taught young children I was careful to nourish their inquisitiveness with lessons that spoke to their inner being.

Beautiful materials in schools foster a love of beauty that leads to the love of the earth and nature. I learned about beauty in the environment when I was growing up. It enhanced my learning.

Miller presents examples of great people who have used love as nonviolent action, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. This is opposite what our culture now focuses on. Love as presence is a kind of love that another person can feel. It is placing total attention on what the other person is saying and is very important in education. This love can be cultivated by caring adults who are in the lives of children. Finally, eros includes studies with people who had Near Death Experiences (NDE). Consistently, they all spoke about being received with an unconditional love.

Miller writes this book in a motivating and fascinating style that guides the reader to reflect deeply on what he presents. He weaves together different concepts which the reader would not expect to be connected and does it in an artful manner. His appeal to the reader to consider personal and professional change towards the eight kinds of love is felt throughout the book. His examples of his classroom are heartwarming and inspirational. In order for the reader to understand how his graduate university courses in education unfold, and what pedagogy he uses, Miller uses a wonderfully descriptive style. Relying on three approaches, transmission, transaction and transformation, he offers many quotes from his former students who were transformed by his teaching environment. They make his theme for the book very credible.

The chapter on his life's journey is poignant and moving. I could identify with his life story and followed the unfolding of his story with great attentiveness.

I would definitely recommend this book to all adults who love children. It is a book that can change the minds of those who feel squeamish about using the word love to describe their work, their contacts and their interactions. There are eight kinds of love to choose from and the reader will identify with many of them. Others can be put aside for the time being, and perhaps with reflection will be also developed. Miller gives names for love that I did not think about or know before reading this book. I have used it as a reference in many of my writings. His other book that I have referred to in my teaching is *The Contemplative Practitioner*. Miller has a gift of presenting new material in a manner that reassures the reader that it is possible to enter into a relationship with the writings that seemed to be previously impenetrable.

Reading *Love and Compassion* was a transformational experience the first time I read it. I took notes, underlined passages, and highlighted ideas that appeared to be the answers to questions

that I had been carrying around within myself, since completing my graduate work. I approached it in a holistic manner and discovered that the wholes that Miller speaks about was occurring within me. It is a book that will come off the shelf many times after the first reading.

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