

Book Review: Jack Miller's *Love and Compassion: Exploring Their Role in Education*

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Received Jan. 2022

Accepted for publication Feb 2022

Published May 2022

Abstract

This book review is grounded in the philosophical assumptions associated with holistic education and will follow a spiritual paradigm. Khan begins this review by briefly introducing the book (why it was chosen, summary, etc.), followed by an explanation of the philosophical assumptions associated with holistic education and the spiritual paradigm the author uses. A critical reflection of the book follows; the conclusion entails implications and how this book might inform future research as well as the questions it raises.

Keywords: review, love and compassion, education, spiritual paradigm

Thomas Merton writes, "Love is our true destiny" (as cited in Miller, 2018, p.3). Given the current global fiasco (including climate change, poverty, animal extinction, inequitable education, gender disparity, racial profiling, bigotry), one can't help but raise an eyebrow on Merton's statement. Yes, comparative education is important, yes adult education is important, community development, educational leadership, policy, etc. are all significant envelopes which need to be pushed forward, but love in education, a neglected topic, can not only liberate us from our own demons (depression, anxiety, eating disorders, mental health struggles, suicide, etc.) but also solve global epidemics plaguing our world today. I'll try to justify this rather bold statement in this book review. I chose Miller's book, *Love and Compassion*, to find answers as well as raise questions, which will anchor and drive my future research endeavors.

Why did Miller write this book? What was his inspiration and rationale? Bell hooks writes:

When I talked of love with my generation, I found it made everyone nervous or scared, especially when I talked about not feeling loved enough... But most folks were just frightened of what might be revealed in any exploration of the meaning of love in our lives" (as cited in Miller, 2018, p.4).

Why get yourself entangled in a topic such as love, which can quickly feel like, well, quicksand? No matter how much you try to understand it, love keeps growing new and mysterious branches from all dimensions. A topic of this nature is also bound to draw in critics and skeptics. So then why did Miller feel the need to undertake such a contentious journey? Why not step away from the controversial realm of Holistic Education and fiddle with safer topics such as comparative education or global citizenship which seem to appease academia worldwide?

Miller wanted to explore the multi-faceted conceptualizations of love in educational settings, a topic he feels is rarely explored (p. 4). Questions which gave birth to this book include (i) How to nurture love in an era where accountability and standardized testing are exalted? (ii) What conducive environments are necessary to support love in classrooms? and (iii) What is the relationship between love, soul, and beauty? Miller also wanted to explore the reason behind Diane Ackerman's statement, as a "society we are embarrassed by love" (as cited in Miller, 2018, p.4) and attest to Cornel West's claim about love being a "steadfast commitment to the well-being of others" (as cited in Miller, 2018, p.4). Miller builds on past research by Barbara Fredrickson (2013), who views love as a supreme emotion (lets human beings feel wholly and fully alive) that rises and passes away depending on the conditions, as well as

introduces love as a universal energy, *Eros*, which exists beyond any form.

Love and Compassion is divided into ten chapters, each dedicated to discussing a unique form of love in vivid detail and includes critique from various scholars, literati and contemplative practitioners, followed by its connection to education. The main beneficiaries of this book are not only educators who wish to nurture various forms of love in their classrooms but also anyone and everyone who wants to restore his/her relationship with this bittersweet universal verisimilitude. Therefore, this book is not only a contribution to the theory of love but also to the holistic practice of love both inside and outside classrooms.

Why I chose this Book: My Journey

The relationship to Self is at the heart of holistic education, so I will start from here. Why did I feel inclined towards this book? I've had a tumultuous relationship with Love. Being a tenacious hopeless romantic, I, nonetheless, decided to give this book a chance in order to allow Love to redeem itself.

Miller's book has opened a Pandora's box for me in a rather positive sense. Yes, the discussion around the erratic nature of love is a complex one but also a necessary one. I believe that the fear around the word *love* needs to be de-constructed. We need to unlearn and relearn some lessons around love. We need more discussions around these various forms of love and their place in educational settings, broaching the following questions: What is appropriate and what is not? Why is it not appropriate? Who are we to decide that it is not appropriate? Have we asked/considered the animals? Have we talked to/included the Cosmos? Who will be privileged by these discussions? Will the disenfranchised/minorities be included? Will everyone be heard? Whose perspectives will be voiced and whose will be silenced? Whose stories are being told and how? What messages about love are we subconsciously imparting to the students? Are we valorizing suppression of emotions (contradictory to self-love) by asking students to act in an unnatural way (calm and collected) when they feel low? Why are we so afraid to let our emotions surface? What implications can this unhealthy emotion regulation have on our relationships (with self, others, animals, cosmos, earth, nature, etc.)? How is love currently being practiced in classrooms? What is the relationship between love and other classroom practices such as empathy/compassion? What is the relationship between love in classrooms and

teacher development? Is the subject of love being taught in teacher development/education programs? How so? Is it just being touched upon on the periphery or is it being delved into deeper? Do we need to delve deeper into the subject? Do we have enough eastern perspectives on love alongside the western ones? What can we learn about love from the primordial beings/Indigenous elders/spirit world/animals? These are some of the questions Miller's book ignited in me and will be the driving force behind my future research. Miller's book *Love and Compassion* urges us, as educators, to question the current educational discourse and rehabilitate the topic of love in education if we are to fulfill Merton's prophecy, "Love is our true destiny" (as cited in Miller, 2018, p.3).

References

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Acknowledgement

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