



School Vision Rationale

Learn to love and then...

love to learn

This is an article by a consultant clinical psychologist which provides the foundational rationale behind our core belief and Vision Statement.

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The prime needs of both children and adults are to love and be loved. Parents and teachers must see that love is a two-sided coin and respond to both aspects of love in their receiving and teaching of children. However, when a mother sees herself as the "carer" she will have no difficulty in showing love to her children, but will have difficulty in receiving it.

The consequence of this is that the child learns that it is only safe to receive love, but not to give it. Any attempt to give it may result in withdrawal or criticism on the part of the "carer". Sadly, too, when a parent is tied to one side of the coin of love, her giving is conditional on children needing her and children cleverly learn to be helpless and needy rather than powerful and independent.

Similarly, when a parent is only good at receiving love, but not in showing it, children learn to give but not look for love. They also perceive that the parent who is the "taker" must not be disobeyed or contradicted, and this makes these parents' receiving of their love conditional. It is only when parents and teachers are comfortable in both the giving and receiving of love is unconditional love possible.

In the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's guidelines for parents of primary school children there is no emphasis on the love relationship that needs to exist in the home and classroom if children are to maintain their love and eagerness to learn. The essential foundation for children's learning is that loving must always come before learning, and that learning must neither jeopardise children's sense of self nor the relationship between parents and children. There are few of us who do not lose control with children when they fail or are slow to

respond. However, what is needed immediately is a healing of the blow to the child's self-worth and the disruption of the parent-child relationship. A good index of a mature family is where parents apologise when they lose control or get it wrong. It is important that subsequent actions reinforce the verbal apology; otherwise children will learn not to trust the words of adults. When a parent says, for example: "I'm sorry I shouted at you; that was no way to correct that behaviour. I still need you to do what I asked, but I apologise for the way I did it." When parents and teachers are comfortable in admitting loss of control and mistakes it makes it more likely children will imitate such mature behaviour; the contrary is also true.

Every child needs to shout from the rooftops: "I am not my behaviour; I am not my behaviour". To love children for what they do and not for their person effectively dooms children to a life of dependence, insecurity and a hiding of their real presence. The distinction between person and behaviour is not a benign one, because the confusion of children with their actions closes the door to their expression of their wonder and to an expansive life.

Not only does the enmeshment affect the prime need to love and be loved, it also affects the innate drive to know and understand the world. In other words, when learning threatens the need for unconditional loving, children will find ingenious ways to offset the rejection that can occur when parents or teachers are teaching them. The most common strategy is to avoid those knowledge areas where criticism or humiliation may result and to be attracted to those knowledge areas where no such threats occur. Other children employ aggression, hostility and uncooperative responses when threatened and there are those who attempt to offset rejection by pressuring themselves to be the best in those knowledge areas that please their parents and teachers.

The other essential area that is overlooked in the recommendations to parents as partners in education is to make sure not to label children because of certain behaviours. Labelling confuses behaviour with the person of the child. It is okay to correct or encourage a certain behaviour, but be sure your comments are specific to the behaviour. Certainly correct the behaviour - "I will not accept you hitting your brother"- but to say "you're a bad boy" is unlikely to gain a responsible response from a child. Similarly, the guidelines to parents would have done well to advise parents to praise behaviour, particularly learning efforts, but not children. When you tell a child "you're brilliant for coming top of the class" the child will associate your love with his brilliant behaviour and as a result may become success addicted or develop a fear of success. Praise, encouragement and reward are for behaviours, particularly for efforts to learn and the attainments that accompany each learning effort. Affirmation is for person - children always deserve respect and love and acceptance of their uniqueness, difference and individuality and an acknowledgement of their unique giftedness and vast potential.'

Dr Tony Humphreys is a consultant clinical psychologist and author of *Self-Esteem: The Key to Your Child's Education*