

“A Brave Writer’s Life in Brief”

Love + Collaboration in Learning

Podcast S6E2: Julie Bogart

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All you need is love. The Beatles sang it and we believe it.

Love—that thing we all say is essential to homeschooling, to parenting, to happiness. When I think of love for myself, I want tenderness, understanding, a mental telepathy to know my needs now and for that other person to say, “Hey, I can take care of you and meet that need because that’s how well I know and love you.” It’s like when you have an itch on your back and your partner is scratching your back and there’s a part of you that really honestly believes they should know where the itch is without you having to say it. It’s that irrational desire to be merged, to be known, to have your needs met by this person.

In fact, just last weekend I experienced my desire for psychic need-meeting. I got busy hosting guests, making decisions about my house and business with consultants, and managing a slew of tasks that were “due” right now! All of the sudden, I crashed emotionally—flat out spent. In that moment, did I admit my need and share it vulnerably with my person (my main squeeze of the last 8 years)? Um, I did not. I did what you have probably done too: I expected him to KNOW—to guess my distress and to offer me the perfect antidote or rescue. To be fair: he was already doing all the things—being helpful and available and kind and fun! But I wanted just that titch more—that thing that would tell me “He loves me because he saw my need without my saying what it was and took care of me in just that way.”



This is the love we see in movies or read about in books or fantasize could be ours if we swapped partners or lost ten pounds.

It's a feeling of being known. KNOWN and accepted and gloriously helped—nay, relished and rescued. Dividing in half the burden of being me—love is help with my messy imperfections without judgment.

But that kind of love is a lot of pressure to put on someone at all times—so in our most intimate relationships, we settle into the comfortable side of love where we trust that we are there for each other often enough, sensitive enough, caring enough. When we face that moment where the expression of “I know you better than you know yourself love” runs short—then what?

That's when someone invariably suggests “self-love.” You know yourself best! Take better care of the you, you know and love.

When people talk about self-love, what they're really saying is that no one else CAN KNOW you the way you know yourself. You can provide for yourself what you need. You can show yourself kindness, understanding, acceptance, and internal mental telepathy that leads to a need being met. Self-love is not about empty affirmations in a bathroom mirror. It's “Whoa! I got over my skis there. I had better pause, discover what I need, and then be brave enough to admit it and do something about it.” That's self-love.

When people bash self-love, sometimes they picture ego-stroking (I'm so great!). Other times I think they may be saying: “Isn't it selfish to focus on your own needs? Serve others and you'll be happier. Choose to act loving even if you don't feel it and you will have achieved love.”

But ugh how I don't agree!



When we are starved for love—for affection, romance, care-taking and understanding—that hunger doesn't go away by spending more energy on others.

I remember the teaching that love is an action, it's a verb not a feeling. If the only kind of love offered you is oriented toward your well being, would you feel loved? That's the question.

What if the "loving action" someone does for you is merely good for you? When someone says, "Even though it hurt when I yanked your arm and pulled you from the street to save you from being run over, I did it because I love you", that simply feels like responsible care. It may be a form of love, but it certainly isn't the kind that fills our well of need for intimacy.

Just because your spouse finally washes the dinner dishes without being asked (and we would all agree that is a loving act), is that the same love-feel as when that same spouse kisses you passionately under the boardwalk or brightens like marquis lights when you walk into the room or brings home your favorite chocolate bar? All matter, but is dish-washing love enough?

I'm asking: is responsible care what we mean when we use the word "love"? Is that what we mean when we "fall in love"? Are we saying we fell in love with the expression of responsible care from some other person? I adore my children means I love ensuring they don't drown and they love me because I make sure they don't drown?

I don't think so.

Here's what happens when we talk about love mostly as an action—we start imagining that we know what is best for the other person. We take charge of them and call it love. Then we execute those plans that are even sometimes painful to the other person and tell them: This is what love looks and feels like. We skew the meaning of the word and try to get



everyone to agree that the hunger you have to feel loved is unnecessary for a meaningful life.

If you've been the object of "good for you" love, you know what I mean. You learn to associate pain and pressure and responsibility and sacrifice with the word "love."

Then one day, some other person comes along and provides the one thing that ALWAYS feels like love—utter fascination with you the way you are right now—and BAM! All the songs make sense, all the rom-coms are true, all the sonnets are about you, Taylor Swift's album *Lover* is your favorite.

Belonging, delight in who you are, a hunger to be around you, admiration for how you live your life, inside jokes, surprise messages and treats, affection—these are the experiences—the actions of love. Responsible care is something else. It's loving. It's not felt as love.

Another amazing thing about this felt-love is this: We fall in love not just with another person, we fall in love with the feeling of being with the other person. Imagine that! There's a sense of shared joy that animates conversations, outings, and sleeping together.

This is just as true for romantic love as it is for mother-baby bonding or father-child camaraderie.

So let's circle back to the word love again.

Love in our families is the context and goal, yet we forget to pay attention to what gets experienced as love. We spend so much time offering "responsible care" as love that we are shocked when passion dissipates in our primary romantic relationship or when our kids slowly over time become resentful or drag their feet or throw tantrums. We set priorities



that are about well-being rather than about their experience of being known, of feeling loved.

When we show admiration or delight in our kids, we are stunned to see them react to us with hugs and kisses, with big smiles, with forgiveness, with offers to help US with our tasks. In those moments when they feel loved, the kinks get smoothed and suddenly everyone is in the rom-com together.

I was reading recently about an educational reformer named Paulo Freire. As I read a commentary on his work, the writer exclaimed that what made Freire revolutionary is that he was not afraid to put at the center of his pedagogy the importance of love. Love, as the key to effective teaching. Love, as the center of the educational experience.

What Freire means when he uses the word love is a profound appreciation for the value of the student by the teacher. The teacher doesn't come to make deposits of information into the empty minds of children. The identities—teacher and student—become interchangeable, because in a love relationship we learn together, based on the questions we ask and the answers we find together, becoming fascinated and delighted by each other.

Freire says:

“Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into 'containers,' into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.”

This is the “responsible care” model of love. It starts with the idea that the teacher knows best and has an obligation to fill the minds of the recipients for their benefit, regardless of what their current need or hunger to know is. It forgets about the legitimate curiosity and



hunger of the student. Then we wonder why a “love of learning” is not the result of this kind of teaching...

As home educators we brought our kids home precisely because we love them and want to love learning together: we love them so much—their pudgy hands, their messy art tables, their glorious singing voices belted so loud they wake the baby, their attempts to read or explain an algebraic equation.

But what happens to that felt love? Responsible care takes over at some point and the first thing you feel when someone sees you as a responsibility is a loss of love. It’s axiomatic. It can’t be helped. It’s no one’s fault. Responsible care takes away your own inner sense of hunger and knowing. It focuses on what’s best for you, which is sourced outside of you.

If we put the felt-experience of love at the center of learning, how does that change how we educate? Freire would say that it gives us a chance to put inquiry, questions, what he calls “problem-posing education” at the center. We start from a shared curiosity—what I call collaboration in learning.

As parents and educators, we have to do more than lecture our kids about what they need to learn because we know best. We don’t want them to pretend to feel loved when we do what’s best for them. Instead, can we inject into their daily experience messages and actions that let our children and teens have the feeling of being loved?

A great question to ask yourself before you do anything is: How will my child receive this? What will he or she feel?

Love in education means intimacy with learning, not correctness of approach. It means teacher and student become less important designations and instead we build a family of learners together, attentive to the voices and needs of all members (parents and children alike). It means that the outcome is not predetermined, that there is a journey of



unknowing guiding the education. It means getting comfortable with discomfort—like you felt when you were dating and you just never knew what might happen next, but you were also excited by the not knowing yet, the anticipation that good feelings were ahead.

Both giving love to the one you love AND loving yourself, together we create the foundation for a wonderful learning environment.

Let's make this practical. You know your child needs to learn to handwrite. Your child balks. You set the table with candles and special pens. Your child balks again, feeling manipulated. You feel hurt. Even though you added enchantment, you were loving through responsible care to get the child to do what is on your agenda. Your child knew it.

Let's try it now the other way. You admit to yourself: "I want my child to learn to handwrite." You think to yourself, "What feels like love to my child?" This kid needs to be able to voice his reasons for why handwriting is stupid and he needs to be heard completely. I'm going to find out why he hates the idea of handwriting and really listen. I might even take notes to value his thoughts that completely. From there, I'll pose the problem: what should we do about handwriting? And then I can show genuine curiosity.

The truth is: I don't know yet. But I'm going to be patient and open to new answers and opportunities. Perhaps I will start using handwriting in playful, loving ways myself. Perhaps I need to rediscover why writing is important before I expect him to think it's important. Maybe I have forgotten how challenging it is.

Perhaps we do something else for a while until he matures. For now, I'm going to value what he brings to the table—his recklessness about his education (he doesn't see the long term picture), his resistance (he doesn't yet have the patience to work on something difficult), his impatience (I will transcribe a little longer to help capture his voice until he can handwrite better), his joy in learning other things (because since I love him, I know him and I know what he loves!).



Something like that.

Jeanne, in the [Homeschool Alliance](#), likes to say that we are in process the whole time—and it takes time. This kind of homeschooling is not something to be done to children, it is a WAY of life. It is THE way. We like to say: “The way in is the way on.” It is the practice (like yoga or prayer or exercise)—that grows all of you, not just your kids.

Love is patient, love is kind. Love isn’t about getting through or done. And if there’s been a LOT of responsible care love in your family, it may take time to rekindle the “in love” feelings. A little detox from too much love as a responsible action until you rediscover just how adorable and wonderful and interesting and capable and smart your kids are. That’s okay too. Start with you. Be kind to you first—YOU are capable and smart and amazing. Let that love grow in you through acceptance and forgiveness and gradual faith. See where that takes you. See where your family goes when the pedagogy is love.

Link: <https://bravewriter.com/homeschool-alliance>

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