<u>'All you need is love'-or is it? How can I contribute to creating an educational learning environment?</u>

Kate Kemp Masters Unit Understanding Learning and Learners 5th May 2010

<u>Introduction</u>
In my Educational Enquiry 'Can I reconcile the tension I feel between living my values at the same time as exercising professional judgements and, in doing so, improve my practice? (Kemp, 2010) I explored my value of unconditional positive regard or, as I decided in the enquiry, unconditional warmth. In this MA Unit 'Understanding learning and learners' I want to explore the kind of environment which supports educational learning taking place and what contribution my value of unconditional warmth can make in creating that environment.

I very often find that I have a tune stuck in my head-prompted either by music on the radio or in a shop or sometimes by something that happens to me for which song lyrics spring to mind. When I started to think about writing this account the Beatles 1967 song 'All You Need is Love' announced itself as the title to this essay about the affection (or unconditional warmth) which I feel for my colleagues and the pupils I work with. The speculative '-or is it?' refers to my uncertainty, which I explore here, about the relevance or importance of this 'love'.

I will start by explaining what I mean by an 'educational learning environment' referring to ideas that I have come across both through my reading but also in conversation with colleagues. I then want to look at how I can have an impact on my environment, again referring to my own ideas and the Buddhist concept of the 'Oneness of Self and Environment'. Finally I will return to the idea of unconditional warmth, a term I use and explain in the essay to describe the kind of 'love' I am referring to, and look at the part this might play in the development of both the young people and the staff with whom I work. I will reflect on how this relates to my practice at work –my relationships with pupils, colleagues and parents and come to a conclusion about whether love <u>is</u> all you need.

<u>Method and methodology</u>
I am intending to use this piece of writing as a way of finding out the answer to my question. I genuinely don't know what my conclusion is going to be as I set out on this journey. In my enquiry, referred to above, I use the metaphor of that piece of writing being a lay-by, a stopping off point where I can consider where I've got to and what I've learned. This account feels more like setting out on a journey without a map but, hopefully with some helpful signposts, to guide me on my travels.

In order to distinguish between method and methodology I remind myself of when I am following a recipe. Recipes usually have a part called <u>method</u>, which follows the list of ingredients, and tells you what to do and how to do it. The <u>methodology,</u> however, is the rationale behind why you need to make the recipe in this particular order in order to get the result that you want (you can't make an omelette without breaking the eggs first). Similarly in order to get the result I want, i.e. an improvement in my practice, I need to choose an appropriate method. If I am to account for myself to myself- and to others-my methodology must take into account the fact that <u>I</u> am at

the centre of my enquiry. I have therefore chosen to use a living theory methodology, as developed by Whitehead (2008).

> 'A living theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work'.

Drawing on Huxtable's (2009) insights into the use of video and visual narratives I use visual and other forms of narrative to clarify and communicate my own living theory through researching and answering the above question.

I consider my writing will be a contribution to self-study research (Tidwell, Heston and Fitzgerald, 2009). I have relied heavily on my Conversation Café colleagues to check that what I am describing is understandable and relevant. My working standard of judgement is George Orwell who said:

> 'A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?' (Orwell, 1946)

I'm not sure I would stand up to Orwell's rigour however these are standards I aspire to.

<u>What is an educational learning environment?</u>
My own teacher, Josei Toda, often said that the greatest error of modern humanity was that it confused knowledge with wisdom. Knowledge itself is a neutral tool that can be used for good or evil. As history sadly proves, educated monsters can wreak far greater horror than their unschooled brothers. At least seven of the participants at the Wannsee Conference where the Nazis planned the 'final solution'-extermination- to the 'Jewish problem' had doctoral degrees. It is hard to imagine a greater perversion and debasement of education.

> 'Wisdom in contrast, always directs us towards happiness. The task of education must be to stimulate and unleash the wisdom that lies dormant in the lives of all young people' (Ikeda, 2004, pp 69-70)

The fact quoted above by Daiseku Ikeda about the Wannsee Conference is often used as an illustration that learning *per se* is not necessarily used in positive or wise ways. From cradle to grave we are all learning all the time- certainly not just when we are in school. Bloom's taxonomy of learning domains breaks learning down into three domains- cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Fig. 1 illustrates the levels of the three domains.

Overlaying all of the domains must be the question however what is this learning going to be used for? Returning to the quotation at the beginning of this section Ikeda points to the fact that 'knowledge' is often confused with 'wisdom'.
(Joke: what's the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit, wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad!).

Although wisdom is not referred to directly in the taxonomy it is implicit in the affective domain, however it would still be possible to 'Internalize a value system' and for that value system to include the 'final solution'. A wise person, on the other hand, will always have in mind the best possible outcome for themselves and for others and will bring together their knowledge and their emotions and take action based on a synthesis of the two. Wisdom also comes through experience and in particular learning from our mistakes.

Cognitive	Affective	Psychomotor
knowledge	**attitude**	**skills**
1. Recall data	1. Receive (awareness)	1. Imitation (copy)
2. Understand	2. Respond (react)	2. Manipulation (follow instructions)
3. Apply (use)	3. Value (understand and act)	3. Develop Precision
4. Analyse (structure/elements)	4. Organise personal value system	4. Articulation (combine, integrate related skills)
5. Synthesize (create/build)	5. Internalize value system (adopt behaviour)	5. Naturalization (automate, become expert)
6. Evaluate (assess, judge in relational terms)		

Fig. 1 Blooms taxonomy of learning domains (from www.businessballs.com)

So in order to create an environment in which we can all learn to become wise what do we need to do? I am including here a link to a conversation between myself and my colleague Nigel Harrison (Inclusion Support Services manager, B&NES) who is developing ideas about 'learning organisations' in his doctoral research programme Part of our conversation is transcribed in the Appendix.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxiONShcrqU

An educational learning environment will be one where everyone feels able to be open and honest with one another, not afraid to make mistakes and learn from them. An environment in which everyone is learning to make wise choices based on the best possible outcomes for themselves and for others. A crucial element of this, as Nigel points out, is that the leaders of an organisation, or the teachers in a school are able to model the behaviours they wish to encourage in their employees, or pupils.

> 'Of the many factors that contribute to the overall ethos or environment of the school, that which has the greatest significance in encouraging pupils to apply their learning and consolidate their skills is the adult modelling that they experience (the way we interact with pupils and with each other, the language we use, the way we demonstrate that we value ourselves and others). You may have come across these wise words:
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> *Don't worry that you do not think the children are listening to you; worry that they are watching everything you do'.* (Morris and Casey, 2006, p xviii)

My relationship with my environment
I used to feel, growing up, that everything that happened to me was out of my control. I was powerless to affect anything not just in the wider world but in my own immediate environment. I was fortunate to be introduced to Buddhism when I was in my 40s and this has had a transformative effect on my life. One of the concepts I have found most revelatory is that of *esho funi* –the oneness of self and environment.

> 'The principle of the oneness of self and environment (*esho funi*) means that life (*sho*) and its environment *(e)* are inseparable (*funi*). *Funi* means 'two but not two'. This means that although we perceive things as separate from us,

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there is a dimension of our lives which is one with the universe. At the most fundamental level of life itself there is no separation between ourselves and the environment' (Allwright, 1998, p52)

'We tend to think of our life as being somehow contained within our body and of our environment as being outside and separate from us, but Buddhism teaches that our life encompasses our family, our friends, our immediate physical environment, our nation, our world-ultimately even our universe. John Donne was absolutely right when he said 'No man is an Island' for just as islands appear to be separated from each other by wide expenses of water, but at the bottom of the ocean are all parts of the same earth, so people appear to be separate from one another and the physical environment around them, and yet, in the very depths of life, are all part of the great cosmic life-force' (Causton, 1995, p118)

As my understanding of this concept grew I began to realise that I am not powerless but that my actions could have a direct effect on my environment. To give a very simple example: I now, whenever possible, let people out in front of me in the traffic. Most times they acknowledge me (not always!) and I know, from my own experience that if someone lets me out I am very grateful and to a small extent it lightens my day. I believe that by letting people out in traffic I am contributing to creating a more positive, friendly and polite environment.

A further way of looking at my relationship with my environment and how I can affect it is the idea of 'filters'. When I first started thinking about what I was going to write for this Unit I tried to come to my own understanding of what I mean by 'learning'. In order to do this I started writing a 'learning diary' in which I intended to capture each day what I had 'learned' that day. I found this quite challenging in that it very soon became apparent that what I use the word 'learned' it could easily be changed to 'realised' or 'found out' and I questioned whether these were in fact learning.

I sought some advice from my colleagues Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable about how they would define 'learning' and as a result changed my question to 'what has happened today that will stay with me?' I have found this more easily answerable and I have found that I am writing more about my feelings than previously.

What has also struck me is that by changing the question I have changed the way that I am looking at the world. When I started I was looking for things that I had learned but now am reflecting on what has happened to me that I think will be significant. This reminded me of the notion of the 'filters' through which we see the world which was introduced to me by a family therapist.

I went to see this particular therapist when my older son was about 9 because I was worried about him and his anxieties. In our discussions she described the coloured filters such as those used in stage productions and put forward the idea that we all tend to have a filter or filters which colour how we see things. These then determine how we act. She said that she felt I was viewing my son through a filter of anxiety and therefore was only seeing his anxiety not seeing him for who else he was. The whole

of my relationship with him was coloured by the anxiety filter. When I realised this and, with her help, became able to see his other qualities and strengths the anxieties began to dissipate.

I liken this to a game I amuse myself with in queues or traffic jams where I give myself a colour and then have to see how quickly I can notice everything that colour around me. I am always amazed at how my eyes are able to pick up everything red for example as soon as my brain has thought 'red'. When I change the filter through which I view the world, the world changes. I believe that what we look for will, to a large extent, determine what we see.

I think that in terms of my contribution to the environment in which I work I have three main filters, or ways of viewing everything that I do. These are:

> ➢ The absolute necessity to separate the person (child or adult) from their behaviour

> ➢ That everyone, children and adults, have talents and gifts to offer

> ➢ That everyone should be treated with unconditional warmth

These filters colour the way I look at my world and determine how I interact with the people around me.

Unconditional warmth
I currently work at a special school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). There are 45 pupils in the school aged between 4 and 16. I work as the Special Needs Manager for the school and also for the Behaviour Support Outreach Service. Much of my work is spent supporting and advising teaching staff rather than directly working with the pupils themselves. However I am out and about in the school every day and know all of the pupils by name as well as knowing a great deal about their backgrounds and why they have been referred to us. I also work quite closely with many of their parents and the many other professionals who support the families.

Although I trained as a teacher I soon went into youth work and for the first part of my professional life I ran a youth centre in central London which provided social activities and education for a wide variety of young people. The young people who came to the centre did so voluntarily and so the relationship we as youth workers had with them was very different to that I had had with the pupils I had been teaching. It had to be based on respect and regard otherwise they simply wouldn't come in. Many of them were homeless, some were living away from home for the first time, we also had quite a lot of foreign students. What we tried to do was to create an environment where all of them could feel 'at home' and that there were people there who cared about them. I think this experience laid down the pattern of my relationships with young people.

When I moved to Bath I got a job as a part-time Education Welfare Officer and found myself back in schools on a regular basis. This meant that I spent most of my working life either in various schools or visiting the families of pupils with poor attendance.

One day I happened to be in the office of a junior school when I heard shouting in the corridor. I looked outside and saw the deputy headteacher with a 9 year-old boy whose family I knew well. The teacher had the boy backed up against a wall and was standing very close and shouting very loudly in his face. "You'll never come to anything, you're just like the rest of your family, you're going to end up in prison just like your father!"
I was appalled and went out into the corridor to try and calm things down. The headteacher also then appeared and told the deputy to leave the boy and go away. I'm not sure what happened afterwards as I had to leave to go to another school however I know that some time later the boy was permanently excluded from the school and never returned to mainstream education.

Clearly this is not how anybody should be treated let alone a 9 year-old boy. In a way what shocked me most was the venom with which the teacher was shouting. He sounded as though he really hated the boy. I wondered at the time and continued to wonder what on earth he was doing being a teacher. He clearly disliked this boy and I had heard him on other occasions making very derogatory remarks about pupils.
As I continued to visit schools I became very attuned to how staff talked about pupils and whether, in my view, they actually <u>liked</u> the children who they taught. The schools I looked forward to visiting were those where the pupils were not only talked <u>to</u> but also talked <u>about</u> with warmth and affection. The teachers might describe their difficulties with some of the pupils but it was clear this was in the context of an ongoing 'deep and abiding regard' (Leon 2006).

In all the years that I have been working with young people I can honestly say that I have never met one who I haven't liked. There have been many whose behaviour has been appalling, who have been exceptionally rude and aggressive however I am always able to separate their behaviour from them as individuals and maintain a respect and affection for them as people.

I have been reading the 'learning log' of a teacher called Don Ledingham who lives in Scotland and has written some interesting pieces for TESS (the Scottish TES) including one called 'Unconditional positive regard - does a child need to be liked? which concludes with:

> 'I believe that a person's capacity to treat children with unconditional positive regard lies at the very heart of what it is to be a professional teacher. Although, at first glance, the term smacks of psychobabble it is actually possible to tease out it's meaning in a way that translates very well in to the Scottish classroom.
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> If I am to be allowed one dream it would be that every teacher, leader and professional person connected with Scottish education set out firstly to treat every child with unconditional positive regard, and secondly, to treat their colleagues in a similar manner. What a place we would have created!' (Ledingham, 2008)

Ledingham also talks about the position of the teacher as being 'in loco parentis' and what this means in terms of the unconditional warmth which most parents have for

their children translating into the classroom. I understand him to mean that the teacher is <u>feeling</u> as a parent would not just <u>behaving</u> as one.

In my enquiry 'Can I reconcile the tension I feel between living my values at the same time as exercising professional judgements and, in doing so, improve my practice? (Kemp, 2010) which I referred to earlier, I explore what I mean by 'unconditional warmth as opposed to the other terms such as 'unconditional positive regard' which Leddingham refers to.

> 'Unconditional positive regard' to me means not making judgments about people but accepting them for who they are and feeling positively about them. 'Non-possessive warmth' is more a description of a feeling whereby you feel warmly affectionate toward them but are not seeking, or needing to have, this feeling reciprocated. 'Deep and abiding regard' coupled with 'approval and affection' to me implies a joining together of the other two phrases in describing an approach to people which is both respectful and affectionate. I realise that in trying to define terms I am still using words and not really getting close to what I mean because these phrases are all about relationships which are living things difficult to pin down on a page. I have included here a clip of me discussing the Donna Leon quote at the beginning of this enquiry in order to try and illustrate what I mean. In the meantime the shorthand version I will use is 'unconditional warmth'

http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=JackWhitehead#p/search/0/cDcggqIb7J4
(Kemp, 2010, p4)

A couple of days ago, when I was still writing the section above on what is an educational learning environment, I had a phone conversation with a colleague of mine who works in B&NES Integrated Services. I was explaining to her what I was trying to write about and about my idea of unconditional warmth. She told me that she had recently used the word 'love' in a meeting with other professionals (An email from her describing this experience is included in the Appendix). I myself notice that I use the word when talking to parents about their children and indeed have used it in professionals meetings about pupils in our school. I might say something like: 'we love John, he has his difficulties but he can be such a pleasure to have around' or 'we love Jane and we really want her to do well and be happy here at school'.

I notice in writing these phrases that I use 'we' rather than 'I'. Of course I truthfully ought to say 'I' as I cannot speak for all my colleagues about whether or not they love the pupil in question, however to say 'I' in this context seems a bit personal and parents/professionals might it little odd (and maybe worrying) that I love their children. And this is the problem with using the word 'love' because it has so many different meanings to different people. If I went around saying that I loved particular pupils in the school I suspect it wouldn't be long before suggestions of child abuse were raised by someone somewhere!

In child and developmental psychology however the word 'love' is inescapable. Most professionals working with children and young people will be familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943 and 1954). Maslow's proposed that there is a universal hierarchy of needs and people will not be motivated by 'higher' needs unless their 'lower' needs are met.

Fig. 2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs (from www.businessballs.com)

In Maslow's hierarchy the need for love and belonging come in the middle of the hierarchy-after physiological needs (food, water, shelter) and safety needs but well before cognitive needs (the need to learn and develop). In a school or work environment this means that pupils/staff need to feel that they are valued and cared before they are fully able to learn/contribute.

Some might suggest that love and affection can be even more critical in terms of child development than food or shelter. An influential study conducted by Dr Rene Spitz in 1945 compared babies in two children's homes. In the first, the babies were kept clean and fed but had little emotional warmth or care given to them. Despite having their physical needs met 34 out of 91 babies died before their second year. This home was contrasted with one based in a prison where convicted mothers were allowed to hold and cuddle their babies daily. Dr Spitz found that despite a lower standard of hygiene, none of their babies died.

Gerhardt in her book 'What's love got to do with it' (2004) explores why love is essential to brain development in the early years of life. She shows how the development of a baby's brain can affect their future emotional well being and describes how specific early neural 'pathways' are developed in the brain which can help or hinder our understanding of the world and our relationship with our environment.

> 'The basic systems that manage our emotions-our stress response system, the responsiveness of our neuro- transmitters, the neural pathways which encode our implicit understanding of how intimate relationships work-none of these are place at birth. Nor is the vital prefrontal cortex of the brain yet developed. Yet all of these systems will develop rapidly in the first two years of life, forming the basis of our emotional management for life. …… the weight of research now makes it clear that the biological systems involved in managing emotional life are all subject to social influences that are present at the time that they are developing most rapidly' (Gerhardt, 2004, p85)

And she concludes the book by saying:

> 'the babies that are born now and in the years to come will be the adults who nurse us in old age, who manage our industry, who entertain us, who live next door. What kind of adults will they be? Will they be emotionally balanced enough to contribute their talents, or will they be disabled by hidden sensitivities? Their early start, and the degree to which they felt loved and valued, will surely play an important part in determining that' (Gerhardt, 2004, p218)

It's a sobering thought that all of this development has taken place well before children start school and the question it surely poses is can the damage done by early neglect and lack of affectionate and attentive parents be reversed? I asked Sue Gerhardt about this and she kindly sent me the transcript of an unpublished talk about teenage parents which she gave in 2008 in which she discussed the development of the teenage brain.

> 'So what can be done if the teenagers we work with have missed out on positive attention and being soothed at the crucial time in their development- can they make up for it now? Can they learn to be better at soothing themselves and controlling their reactions?

There is no definitive answer to this, except that we do know that the brain continues to develop throughout life, continues to make connections. Working with teenagers is a great opportunity to develop them – because the brain IS re-organising at this very moment. However, just as in early development, these capacities don't develop through verbal instruction. They develop through lived experience. Just as the baby learns from the way he is treated, so does the teenager. So it's vital that the teenage parent is given the experience of firm, loving care. The first step, as with babies, is perhaps to provide the soothing she has missed out on, and a supportive, pleasurable relationship. Once this is established, the more advanced developmental things can be tackled – things like firm and consistent control of impulses, which will take some time to form new pathways. Likewise, building up the pre-frontal brain structures through providing an experience of empathy and modelling respect for different perspectives and points of view, which will help the teenager to activate those areas of the brain responsible for these capacities. However, they are likely to take a considerable time to get going'. (Gerhardt, 2008)

What Gerhardt is emphasising here is once again the importance of the quality of affectionate relationship between the adult and the teenager and the responsibility of adults to model how such relationships work.

One final point from the perspective of pupils themselves comes from research that has been done with pupils about what makes a good teacher. I have run sessions on this subject on many occasions with disaffected pupils on re-engagement programmes. There was always surprising unanimity between different groups and these I have also found summarised in Riley and Rustique-Forrester's book -Working with disaffected students (2002)

'Relationships with teachers were key….Both female and male students could identify with teachers who were 'human', 'laughing', 'smiling', they 'made jokes' and were 'fair to everyone'. 'Good' teachers were those who 'explained things well' and demonstrated a sense of fairness, equity and humanity. They 'took time to help' and 'treated you like a person', not 'like baby'… Students liked going to their classes 'cos you feel good' and because you actually learn something in their lessons' (Riley and Rustique-Forrester, 2002, p29)

Reflections and conclusions
At the beginning of this enquiry I described myself setting out on a journey. I knew the stages I was planning to travel through but did not know where I would end up. I have described my understanding of what an educational learning environment should look like and then outlined how I believe it is possible for me, and indeed for everyone, to have an impact on their environment. I hope I have then made the case for recognising the importance of 'unconditional warmth' in creating an environment in which people can grow and develop. Whilst on the journey there have been some side routes which I have been tempted to go down. I have become interested in finding out more about brain development in teenagers and also about how to develop emotionally literate staff. They will have to wait to be explored at a later date.

As I described earlier my contact with the young people I work with is not normally in the classroom. It is not me who is on a daily basis subjected to the chaotic,

emotional and often aggressive outbursts of the pupils in our school. Working with BESD students requires vast reservoirs of calm, patience and good humour - qualities which are sorely tested on a regular basis. I see my role as being able to stand back a bit and to remind staff of where the pupils have come from, of their particular needs and difficulties and, above all else, remind staff of pupils' achievements and talents. I also see my role as that of supporting staff working in this difficult environment by helping them to recognise the progress they themselves are making and endeavouring to help them find positive solutions to the difficulties they face.

Underlying all of this is the affection I feel for staff and students. The filter I currently have in my head is that of 'treasuring' them. I like this expression because it implies that they are all precious – which of course they are to me.

Having reached the end of this particular journey am I able to answer my question? I think it fair to say that I've never thought that love was <u>all </u>you need but I have found, in the course of writing this account, clear evidence that love (or unconditional warmth in my words) should play a crucial role in creating an educational learning environment. I also believe that I have made the case that I can have a direct effect on creating that in environment and that therefore my value of unconditional warmth will permeate my work and the relationships I have with my colleagues and pupils. The result, I hope, will be a school where staff and students alike are treasured for the talents and contributions they make.

> ' To create value and contribute to the world what do you need? You need to develop and polish your character until it shines. The ultimate strengths in life are not a clever tongue or wealth, nor fame or power. The real 'weapon' or 'tool' for living a successful life is what is left over when all empty artifice has been stripped away-the quality of your character as an individual… A person with a strong sense of mission is a source of light. For such a person there is no darkness in the world. And just as a single lighthouse can guide many ships through dangerous waters a single person shining with the light of genuine happiness can help friends and family – their entire society-find the smooth open waters of peace and fulfilment.' (Ikeda, 2004, p42-43)

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Appendix 1: Transcript of a conversation between Nigel Harrison and Kate Kemp 15.4.2010

NH: …if I can actually get to a point where people are saying 'I didn't do that very well' it'll be a real step forward and we can learn from that. In some ways it's a 'no blame' culture that we have to create here.
KK: I think I'm also

Appendix 2: Email from Jackie Deas to Kate Kemp 5.5.10

What I said came from a place of having sat with "clients", prisoners, big grown up violent men, murderers, rapists, dangerous young people in London and our own young people in Bath and