

# Mission Statements, Values, and Practice: The Case of Love of Learning

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*'Love of learning' is a phrase that appears frequently in school mission statements, among others with similar connotations. Using 'Love of learning' as a case, I employ comparative conceptual analysis to characterize the value underlying the phrase before reviewing the implications this holds for practice in schools that use the phrase in their mission statements. I argue 'Love of learning' refers to a distinct, intrinsically valuable phenomenon that implies a particular type of learning experience. A commitment to fostering 'love of learning' at school would require developing environments conducive to each student having this particular learning experience. This carries implications for practice, particularly in schools that include fostering 'love of learning' in their mission statements. As a case, the conceptual analysis of 'love of learning' presented here demonstrates the need to review mission statements to assess whether values conveyed therein align with institutional practices.*

## Introduction

'Love of learning' is a pervasive, yet ambiguous phrase used in education discourse. A simple internet search of the phrase shows it is frequently used in school mission statements and names. For example, both the Love of Learning Montessori School and the Academy for the Love of Learning list nurturing a natural love of learning as their mission (n.d.; 2025). They are not alone in this; countless other schools boast missions to cultivate, inspire, empower, foster, deepen, develop, achieve, stimulate, and embrace 'a love of learning' or 'a life-long love of learning' (Daycroft School, 2025, para. 1; Del Ray Montessori School, n.d., para. 5; Prospect Hill Academy Charter School, n.d., para. 1). And perhaps with good reason: this phrase is echoed in parenting blogs (Daily Dad, 2022; Cullins, 2022), teaching statements (Daniels, 2024), job descriptions, performance reviews, and life-coaching curriculum (Dean, 2004; Bryan, 2019). Writing in *The Washington Post*, Vivek Wadhwa (2015) urges parents to encourage their child's love of learning as a ticket to future employment, a call reiterated by an eLearning site that suggests love of learning ought to be an employer priority (The eLI Team, 2022). Bloggers encourage teachers and parents to foster love of learning in children while schools, in title and mission, claim to do the same. Presumably this is because love of learning is worth pursuing; it holds some normative valence with schools, parents, and teachers. But even with widespread usage, it is unclear what that is. The phrase is rarely accompanied by definition or defense, though its invocation surely must be purposeful.

In this paper, I review where and how love of learning appears in school mission statements and educational discourse to foreground my conceptual analysis of the phrase. Then, I complete a "differentiation-type analysis" (Soltis, 1978, pp. 101-103) of the phrase to distinguish love of learning

from similar phenomena such as curiosity and need-for-cognition. This comparison-based analysis, supplemented by hypothetical scenarios, draws out the intuitions behind the phrase to get at its potential value. Third, I build on this analysis by characterizing love of learning as a distinct phenomenon that has intrinsic value, sought for its relationship to the human experience rather than for the outcomes it may produce. Lastly, I argue love of learning implies a particular approach to learning that carries implications for practices in schools that use the phrase in their mission statements, to the extent that these statements are intended to be instructive and communicative.

## Educational Concepts, Slogans, and Mission Statements

First, a note on how I approach love of learning as a phrase employed in educational discourse in ways that differ from educational concepts and slogans. Education, as with many other practices, employs a set of concepts. Philosophers of education have long made it their business to understand those concepts and what role, if any, they play and ought to play in educational practice. Philosophers of education disagree as to whether this is a worthwhile practice<sup>1</sup>. Without directly contributing to this debate, my goal in this paper is to provide some demonstration as to why better understanding educational phrases like ‘love of learning’ might be a worthwhile project for philosophers of education especially when such phrases are neither clearly educational concepts nor merely educational slogans.

To clarify, on my view, love of learning is a phrase that includes two concepts that have a rich history in education—love and learning—but itself is not clearly an educational concept that “sit[s] at the heart of debates in education and whose meaning has the potential to shape policy and practice” in the way that ‘knowledge’, ‘skills’, or ‘flourishing’ might (Gatley & Norefalk, 2024 p. 5). On the other hand, it is not merely an educational slogan, intended to be used either ‘ceremonially’—“to appeal to the feelings of the listener or reader”—or non-ceremonially—“to give information and direction to educational activity” (Komisar & McClellan, 1961, p.196). Rightfully, Komisar and McClellan (1961) are wary of placing too much stock in educational slogans employed in these ways because they are either a facet of public relations, not apt for logical inquiry, or devoid of particulars in a way that renders them meaningless. For slogans to be informative and directive—when they are not being used ceremonially to merely rouse some feeling—they need to be interpreted in a way that fills in their particulars, but in doing so, the interpretations arbitrarily and deliberately limits the application of the slogan. The information and direction entailed by a slogan, for Komisar and McClellan among others<sup>2</sup>, cannot be discovered by only examining the slogan. My analysis of love of learning, derived from the phrase itself without added particulars, suggests it is not clearly an educational slogan, primarily useful for rousing feeling or meaningless without interpretation that curbs its applicability. Further and importantly for my purposes, if I am wrong and love of learning is indeed an educational slogan, its inclusion in mission statements suggests that whatever feeling it elicits or information and direction it might provide upon interpretation is meaningful to educational stakeholders, otherwise why include it in the mission? Even if it merely serves to rouse sentiment, the general familiarity with the phrase in educational discourse and its frequent appearances in institutional mission statements suggest that sentiment, however useful for school public relations, means something. My goal is to identify what meaning, feeling, information, or direction is implied by the phrase such as would render it valuable to include in mission statements.

Mission statements are a peculiar entity in educational institutions and research. They signal value to internal and external stakeholders to communicate guiding principles (Ireland & Hitt, 1992; Davis et. al., 2007; Stemler et. al., 2011). These statements can be instructive and communicative: intended to guide

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<sup>1</sup> See Gatley & Norefalk’s edited volume *Conceptual Engineering in Education* (2024) for a recent addition to this debate. See also, R.S. Peters (1973), Othanel Smith & Ennis (1961), Wilson (2003), Standish (2007), Winchester & Manery (2019).

<sup>2</sup> See Reboul (1979), Scheffler (1960), and Hare (1986).

institutional practices or communicate to external constituents an alignment with their values (Morpheus & Hartley, 2006). Though school mission statements are required by many accrediting agencies, they also spark dialogue among stakeholders about the school's purpose and communicate that purpose to relevant parties, providing direction and focus for practice (Stemler, et. al., 2011). It remains an open question among education researchers as to whether there is a reliable, observable connection between mission statements and individual practices within an institution. Some suggest mission statements can and ought to be used to unify, energize, and motivate individuals in pursuit of strategic school change while others suggest individuals within an institution see little connection between their work and the institution's stated mission (Rey & Bastons, 2018; Gurley et. al., 2015; Davis et. al., 2007; Dean, 2020). To date, however, they remain a requirement of strategic school change and educational development initiatives suggesting, whether supported by evidence or not, missions have some role to play in institutional practice (Miller, 2013).

As included in school mission statements, love of learning might be instructive or communicative. It could both embody a school's ethos or pull on some shared intuition held by parents that signals the school has their child's best interest in mind. In either case, the phrase is meant to convey some shared value. And the fact that love of learning is rarely accompanied by a definition suggests its value need not be articulated or defended, i.e., it is intuitive. Yet, if love of learning is meant to be a school's guiding principle, as well as a signal to parents, understanding what is meant by the phrase is necessary for not only assessing institutional practices, but also ensuring a school's external perception is in alignment with its practices. Though the opacity of love of learning as a phrase might play into a school's marketing strategy, it might attract parents by playing on their intuitions about what is valuable for their child without delivering on that promise. First understanding the nature of love of learning clarifies what is at stake when schools claim to inspire a child's love of learning: Are they merely playing on some shared intuition of parents or is the phrase intended to be informative, instructive, and directive? If schools consider instilling a love of learning in students an aspect of their mission and are not merely appropriating it as a marketing buzzword or ceremonial slogan, understanding what this phrase entails likely bears on educational practices to the extent they follow from, or ought to follow from a school's mission.

Without making a definitive claim about the relationship between institutional mission statements and the value and practice they convey (or ought to convey) to institutional stakeholders, I explore the meaning of love of learning as an education phrase to identify and articulate what value it may have. Proceeding from the premise that phrases included in mission statements are intended to convey something of value to institutional stakeholders, whether merely a shared sentiment or some information and direction made meaningful upon interpretation, this paper explores the meaning of love of learning to identify and articulate its potential value before discussing the implications of its usage in school mission statements.

## **Love of Learning in Education**

A simple internet search reveals the phrase 'love of learning' is used with some frequency. Sometimes with definition, other times without, sometimes with explicitly educational connotation, others without. The most frequent place love of learning appears in relation to education is in school mission statements. Various schools state aims to embrace, inspire, stimulate, develop, achieve, deepen, cultivate, foster, or nurture 'a love of learning' or 'a life-long love of learning' (Bennet-Hemenway Elementary, 2025; Fernbank Elementary, 2025; McDougle Elementary, 2023; Stevenson Elementary, 2023; Beaver Local School District, n.d.; Daycroft School, 2025; Summit School, 2020; Carolyn Barron Montessori, 2015; Hill Country Montessori School, 2020; The New School, 2021; The Raleigh School, n.d.; Del Ray Montessori School, n.d.; Portsmouth Abbey School, 2023; University Co-op, 2024; Jeffrey Trail Middle School, 2025; Prospect Hill Academy Charter School, n.d.; Tabor Academy, n.d.). Various educational

institutions are even named for the phrase, e.g., Love of Learning Academy, Love 2 Learn Preschool, Love of Learning Montessori, Academy for the Love of Learning, Love of Learning Homeschool Learning Center, etc.) The connection between love of learning and education or schooling is rarely clarified in these statements.

Insight on this matter, however, can be found in the various parenting blogs and online articles that encourage fostering a love of learning in children (Cullins, 2022; Loveless, 2023; Daily Dad, 2022). Writers urge parents to recognize their child's innate curiosity and assist its development via strategies such as hands on exploring, asking the child questions, and exhibiting curiosity as a parent. These bloggers suggest children's natural love of learning fades or is lost overtime if it is not stoked; hence the need for tips on encouraging its development. There is little discussion of why love of learning might be valuable. Rather, it is framed as worthy of pursuit to ensure something that is natural is not lost.

Elsewhere, the phrase appears with more direct ties to education, specifically as it relates to motivation. Some teachers testify that cultivating a love of learning in their students motivates them as educators. As one teacher writes, "knowing you have the opportunity to create a lasting love for learning is what makes teaching so special" (Daniels, 2024 para. 14). Additionally, education researchers suggest that teachers can inspire their students to love learning by reinvigorating or demonstrating their own love of learning (Liston, 2000; Parker et. al., 2020; Butcher, 2022), while other researchers ask whether educators even have a sense of their own love of learning or that of their students (Penman & Ellis, 2009).

The relationship between love of learning and education has been discussed elsewhere in educational discourse, particularly by philosophers of education as part of a larger conversation on the role of love in education. Much work has been done on various types of love that appear in Plato's dialogues, tying love to the pursuit of wisdom and occasionally referring to this connection as love of learning (Hinchliffe, 2006; Hull, 2002; Sun, 2019). Other philosophers discuss love in education as it appears in educational relationships, i.e., a teacher's relationship to their students or one's relationship to their object of study, including how it complicates, enriches, or is essential to the educational process (Alston, 1991; Todd, 2003; Kenklies, 2019; Aldridge, 2019). This philosophical literature on love and education provides essential theoretical framing for establishing love of learning as an aim of education, worthy of pursuit in schools, though it does not provide an explicit account of the phenomenon as it is upheld and pursued in education. Rather, these pieces gesture to love of learning, use language that could be understood as love of learning, or discuss love in education related to but not directed at the learning process.

The frequent use of the phrase in educational settings and educational research alongside philosophical discourse on love in education suggests love of learning is thought to be of value in education such that schools list it as part of their mission. It remains unclear, however, what is meant by love of learning and what of value is implied by this phrase. Whether schools intend to merely allude to some shared value or establish an instructive principle to guide school practices—i.e., whether love of learning as included in mission statements is meant to be communicative or instructive (Morphew & Hartley, 2005), clarity is warranted. If it is the case that schools aim to communicate something to parents or teachers via the phrase, it is worth understanding the value underlying the phrase to discern what resonance it has with potential audiences of the mission statement. Even if it is only used to rouse emotion in potential stakeholders, that sentiment communicates something about education worth of exploration. the other hand, if schools intend for their mission statements to also be instructive—a guiding principle for institutional ethos and practices—it would seem important to know what is entailed by the phrase. Consistency in institutional practices, both in terms of mission alignment and across an institution, is likely guided by clarity in guiding principles. That is difficult to achieve when guiding principles are ambiguous. This allows for varied interpretation among members of an institution and discrepancy between institutional ideals and practices, potentially forgoing the possibility of an institution achieving its mission or aims, however lofty. Such is the case with love of learning. If the phrase is ambiguous, value-laden, and potentially instructive, a school might easily contradict its own mission by

engaging in practices contrary to the pursuit of love of learning. Again, the debate as to whether institutional practices can reasonably be expected to align with its stated mission remains open, especially among empirical researchers eager to gauge institutional effectiveness. To the extent that mission statements are intended to communicate something about institutional values and practices, it is worth exploring what could be communicative and instructive about ‘love of learning.’

In what follows, I complete a differential conceptual analysis, where I explore love of learning alongside related concepts to map out the logical terrain of the idea (Soltis, 1978). This comparative exercise highlights the distinct qualities of love of learning and what it might imply for educational practice if it is intended to be a communicative and instructive aspect of the institution’s mission. Drawing on thought experiments and examples, I analyze each component of the phrase, to illuminate what I see to be the conviction that posits love of learning as an educational aim, as implied by popular usage such as in school mission statements. I proceed by breaking down the phrase into its component parts.

## **Love of Learning: A Distinct Phrase**

### ***Why Love?***

What distinguishes love of learning from other relationships to inquiry? In a sense, love of learning appears akin to curiosity; simply look at children. Driven by curiosity and a natural desire to know their world, children seem to possess an inherent ‘love of learning’ without provocation. In observing an infant discovering their senses, watching a child at play, or enduring a long car ride with a toddler, it is easy to see that a child’s curiosity is coupled with an insatiable desire to know. There is some foundational motivation towards inquiry that compels children to explore the world, ask questions, and (with guidance) acquire knowledge and skills. John Dewey’s epistemology relies on the existence of a fundamental spark that, he suggests, must be fanned into interest to fuel our “spirit of inquiry” (1976, p. 207). For Dewey, spark and curiosity are akin. But are these the same as a love of learning? Is a curious child one who loves learning?

Here, Dewey provides essential insight. In the same way he suggests the “sacred spark” of interest can fade if not intentionally stoked, curiosity can be idle, it can simply occur (1976, p.207). If one is curious about something, their interest does not necessarily imply action; they may simply be curious without ever pursuing their curiosity via learning. For Dewey, the spark of interest, or curiosity, is necessary but not sufficient for learning. Additionally, one can satisfy their curiosity. In cases where it is not idle, curiosity may lead to learning, but that inquiry can end when the curiosity has been satisfied, implying the curiosity also ends. This potential for idleness and an end to inquiry and curiosity via satisfaction suggests curiosity is different than love of learning. Though love may also be idle and may also end, when we say someone has a love of learning, this suggests dynamism and continuity that is not fully captured by curiosity.

Consider also the rigor with which one pursues their curiosity. Learning pursued out of curiosity appears to differ from that pursued for love. Picture someone who is curious about dolphins. How might their curiosity manifest into learning? They may check a book out at the library, visit the zoo, or watch a documentary. They may peruse books on aquatic mammals or even consider a career in dolphin training. If, however, the frequency of their visits to the library and the zoo substantially increases or they seriously pursue becoming a dolphin trainer, the tone of their inquiry seems to shift. To say this person is curious about dolphins does not fully capture their motivation; curiosity does not necessarily imply rigorous learning, it may not imply learning at all. ‘Love,’ however, in ‘love of learning’ captures a rigorous pursuit of learning that differs from curiosity.

Additionally, one can be curious about something or even love something without necessarily enjoying the process of acquiring information about the object of their desire; one may love the thing,

but not the learning. If curiosity is akin to love of learning, one would have to be curious about learning itself to possess a love of learning, not merely curious about a subject about which they want to learn something. When someone is curious, learning may be a means to pursuing their curiosity, though it is not necessitated by curiosity itself. Love of learning, however, suggests the desire is directed at learning itself.

Educational psychologists call this a ‘need for cognition.’ Individuals who have a need for cognition, have a “tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking” (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982, p.116). Need for cognition is framed as a psychological phenomenon that describes a degree of motivation to learn. Some people have high levels and others low (Petty et. al., 2009). If someone exhibits a need for cognition, they are motivated to engage in high-order thinking; they ‘need’ it. In this sense, need for cognition captures a relationship one can have with learning where inquiry is sought for pleasure, as is implied by love of learning. Unlike curiosity which can imply idle interest without pursuit of inquiry, need for cognition implies desire tied to learning itself. Like curiosity, however, the ‘need’ in need for cognition suggests this, too, can be satiated; if one possesses a need for cognition, learning “satisfies a desire”. The affinity for learning conveyed by need for cognition goes beyond curiosity in an important way by conveying the connection between desire and learning, suggesting need for cognition is akin to love of learning. The phrasing, however, implies a potential difference between love of learning as a phenomenon and need for cognition as used by educational psychologists.

Consider the distinction between love and need. Describing a desirable relationship with learning as a ‘need for cognition’ feels sterile compared to the rich, sentiment-filled relationship implied by love of learning. There is a distinct relationship quality suggested by love of learning that is not fully captured in the phrase need for cognition. Though love can include need, love certainly goes beyond need. It is less mechanical and more vibrant. Love implies a variability, uniqueness, dynamism, and potential for growth that extends beyond need. Though need for cognition may vary among individuals and particular instances, needs themselves can only be met by specific things associated with that need. For example: if I need to get to work, only a specific set of activities are going to meet my need. Riding my bike or taking the bus to the office will meet my need, but sitting and reading will not. The nature of the need dictates a distinct set of potential inputs: Only what is necessitated will satiate. Love, on the other hand, varies. It can be expressed and explored via an array of means. How it manifests and what it requires might look different day to day. Additionally, love connotes presence rather than lack. While need for cognition suggests a student has a dearth of engagement, love of learning suggests generation from something already present. The use of need for cognition as a proxy for love of learning in educational psychology may be illuminating for research, but it also draws out intuitions about love of learning as a phenomenon distinct from need for cognition.

Using curiosity and need for cognition as markers on a spectrum of motivation to learn, it is clear how love of learning is different. Neither phrase captures the dynamism or richness of love of learning. Additionally, neither conveys the sentiment one looks for in a school mission statement. Whether it is meant to be communicative or instructive, one might infer that a school with a mission to pursue curiosity lacks rigor and active learning compared to one that lists love of learning as a mission. Conversely, the school that aims at need for cognition communicates a far less lively and varied learning environment than the school that aims at love of learning. Whether this is born out in practice has surprisingly less bearing on the intuition that one might think. To the extent that mission statement communicates to stakeholders both internal and external to the institution, mission statement phrasing provides a picture of the institution, conveying a value it upholds or a shared focus of its practice, even if they are not carried out in actuality. The phrase still has the potential to be communicative, instructive, informative, and directive. The intuition evoked from the phrase love communicates a different value than curiosity and need for cognition. Love is an evocative word and, as the heart of this phrase, it intimates a value-laden, sentiment-filled relationship with an object of desire: learning.

### ***Why Learning? Learning as the Object of Love***

Much work in philosophy of education argues for the place of love in education. Analyses of Plato's dialogues demonstrate the essential role of eros in the pursuit of wisdom and, by extension, its connection to learning (Tsabar, 2014; Jannat, 2022; Schwab, 1954). A recent edition of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* discusses 'Love and Desire in Education,' reinvigorating the conversation on erotic love in education. Within the literature, 'love' describes the affectionate relationship teachers have with their students, the devotion they have to their subject, and the "love triangle" (Aldridge, 2019, p.531) that complicates navigating between the two (Kenklies, 2019; Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019; Elliot, 1974). Some argue love is essential to education given that desire is the foundation of both teaching and learning: love of one's subject or the object of one's inquiry drives learning, and a teacher's affinity for their subject and/or affection for their students motivates their teaching (Elliot, 1974; Alston, 1991). In most references to love in education, love exists in relation to some subject or object, most often directed towards students or the object/subject of study. Love is relational: simultaneously inspired by and directed at something. 'Love' in love of learning is similarly relational, but the thing towards which it is directed is learning itself, rather than a subject of inquiry or one's students. In this case, the use of a gerund in the phrase (love of learn-ing) is telling. Though seemingly obvious, love of learning is to love the process of learning. It is not object/subject or outcome bound.

R. K. Elliot's (1974) description of love for one's object of study clarifies this distinction. Following Plato, Elliot describes a type of love in education as desire for 'contemplative experiences'—spontaneous experiences that bring insights, knowledge, and a sense of "joy, wonder, astonishment, [or] awe" (p. 144). This desire for more contemplative experiences arises from awareness of lack: that one's knowledge is incomplete.<sup>3</sup> For Elliot, both desire for these contemplative experiences and the experiences themselves arise from a loving relationship with the object of inquiry. This relationship to contemplative experiences that recognizes their ebb and flow provides the "worth-whileness [*sic*] of intellectual life" (p. 146). The joy and awe sparked by these learning experiences is intoxicating and, paired with one's awareness of what is lacking in their knowledge, creates a desire for more learning experiences. A desire for contemplative experiences, spurred by initial contemplative experiences, seems similar to love of learning. But for Elliot, this process is inspired by and tied to the object of inquiry in a way that, I suggest, does not necessarily track with intuitions about love of learning, particularly concerning its variability. Elliot is right that the sentiments inspired by contemplative experiences—joy, awe, wonder, etc.—are intoxicating and spawn desire for further such experiences. His misstep, however, is in suggesting this desire is inspired by the object about which one acquires knowledge, rather than from the experience itself. For Elliot, the love springs from the object of the contemplative experience. Love of learning, on the contrary, seems to be less directed at the thing that is studied, but rather at study itself. Here again, it is helpful to review scenarios that appear to be love of learning but test the bounds of our intuitions related to the phrase.

First, consider the student who is devoted to learning for the recognition and satisfaction it brings. This student recognizes the achievement to be gained from learning. To draw on vocabulary from educational psychologists: this student pursues learning for its attainment value, i.e., for the satisfaction of having completed the task, earned the gold star, or moved up the meritocratic ladder. Is this student's motivation to learn a love of learning? Barring the question of whether love is truly the sentiment at play here, focus on the object of the student's desire. Do they seek learning or something else? Consider, also, the student who understands that learning is instrumental to success in other places. If they develop a positive relationship to the learning process now and learn to inquire when they are stuck, tasks and problems will be easier in the future. Love of learning does have some instrumental value, meaning it is useful in that it makes the learning process, when required or necessary, more bearable, or even enjoyable. But, for the student who feverishly pursues knowledge as instrumental to some other end, is their relationship to learning truly a love of learning? For each student, their desire to learn is dictated by the

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<sup>3</sup> See also Sun (2019).

attainment or instrumental value they identify with the process. They are interested in what the process gets them, rather than in the process itself. Not only does this raise the question of whether desiring something for its attainment or instrumental value constitutes love, but also whether desiring the outcomes of learning is truly a love of learning.

### Love of Learning as Experiential

Rather than focusing on either attainment or instrumental value, to love something means to love it, for itself, as is<sup>4</sup>. To have a love of learning, then, is to love learning itself. Love of learning as an aim of education implies a desire for students to have a particular experience and relationship with learning. A love of learning is to experience that intoxicating desire, described by Elliot (1974), but in response to learning, then crave that feeling. To uphold this phenomenon as a school mission then is to aim for students to experience the joy and subsequent desire for more that comes from learning itself<sup>5</sup>. The ideal is for students to experience that loving—fiery, awful, passionate—relationship with the learning process that brings them back to it again and again. It is less about the product than the experience. Though educators or parents may see the attainment or instrumental value in children having this relationship to learning, and though, schools may justify their mission statement to parents on the grounds that love of learning will ‘get’ their children something in the future, intuitions about the good of love of learning suggest the value is something deeper.

Consider a scenario: Say as a parent your child arrives home from school with a series of questions about penguins. How would you respond? Do you shrug and admit your lack of knowledge on penguins and suggest they find some other topic of interest? Likely not. Perhaps you go to the library and let your child check out books on penguins. Maybe you find a documentary on penguins for them to watch. Better yet, perhaps you arrange a trip to the zoo to visit the penguin exhibit. At the least, you might ask them some follow up questions about penguins, not to quiz them on what they learned, but to allow them space to share their excitement and continue asking questions. These responses to the child’s initial curiosity suggest an underlying intuition about fostering curiosity with the hope it will lead to experiencing the joy of learning. The motivation to seek out materials and experiences related to penguins is likely not fueled by the hope that the child becomes an amateur zoologist or a belief that penguins are a particularly worthwhile object of study. In a sense, it has nothing to do with penguins and everything to do with what one hopes the child experiences. Not because it will make learning things easier in the future (even if it may), but rather because there is something about the child’s curiosity and wonder that ought to be sustained, cultivated, and encouraged. There is a fundamental relationship between experiencing pleasure in learning and being human. Stating love of learning as an educational mission appeals to the intuition that every child deserves to feel that feeling.

The Western philosophical tradition is ripe with claims that our ability, as humans, to reason—our rationality, inquiring, high order thinking, or complex processing—is a core tenet of what makes us human and is thus worthy of contemplation. Underscoring these claims is the same fundamental spark experienced when one exercises their reasoning capabilities by thinking and learning. It is a difficult sentiment to pin down; this somewhat tentative, intoxicating desire that sends one down a learning rabbit hole not simply because they need to know something, but rather because they enjoy the experience of desiring to know and letting the wave of curiosity carry them where it will. This sentiment, joy, desire, intoxicating experience is part of the intrinsic value of learning. It is what is meant by love of learning.

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<sup>4</sup> Here, I pull on intuition, though Hitz (2020), in *Lost in thought*, suggests our motivations and ultimate ends of learning may be opaque to us, making it unclear when we are pursuing learning for love or some other value.

<sup>5</sup> My take on interest-driven experiences and learning aligns with Dewey in those positive experiences with learning spur further experiences. I diverge from Dewey in that I do not identify this relationship between interest, experience, and learning as primarily instrumental. See Dewey's *Experience and education* (1938).

Those who uphold love of learning as an educational aim—as included in their mission statement as an institution, educator, parent, or as a stakeholder whose feelings are roused by the phrase—likely want students to experience this feeling, not merely because it will be helpful or because it makes learning the necessary subjects easier, but because there is something about this experience, feeling this sentiment, that is essentially human. Whether the magnitude, variation, and intimacy of this feeling is fully captured by the phrase love of learning seems doubtful. The underlying intuition and conviction that some aspect of humanity blossoms in learning and that education has some bearing on the experience of this phenomenon is, however, well founded. Love of learning hints at some seemingly widely shared intuition about learning and human life: That to experience joy in response to learning is a fundamental human experience. Embracing that feeling is to have a relationship with life and the world that is full of wonder, excitement, and potential for meaning. Its value lies in the experience itself. Love of learning as an educational phrase, employed in mission statements or elsewhere, suggests the school, educator, or parent committed to or even roused by the phrase likely shares the notion that children deserve to have this essentially human experience in their education.

### Implications

Where does this leave us in terms of the value of love of learning as an educational phrase. What purpose, if any, might it serve as part of an educational mission statement? Does it communicate anything? Rouse sentiment? Or provide some instruction on what ought to be done within the institution?

Love of learning as a phrase speaks to the shared intuition that experiencing intoxicating joy and desire in response to learning is a fundamentally valuable experience that all ought to experience. To use the phrase in a school mission statement is to suggest an educational institution is the sort of place where children ought to experience this phenomenon. This draws on the shared intuition that every child is curious and ought to experience the positive sentiment that arises when that curiosity is translated into learning. The appearance of this phrase in school mission statements and the names of educational institutions signals a shared commitment to parents that their child's educators also value and encourage the development of this fundamental relationship to learning: That they too share the intuition that loving learning is something all children should experience. Its usage is certainly communicative. Additionally, the use of this phrase and the intrinsic value of learning to which it potentially alludes is likely also meant to assuage parents' concerns that schools often over prioritize the attainment and instrumental value of learning: Listing love of learning in a school's mission signals that their child's curiosity and natural spark will not be squashed as often happens in schools. Given that schools are often the primary site of learning for children, it seems right to place stake in their commitment to love of learning if it is as foundational to the human experience as our intuitions suggest. If love of learning is something all children should experience and schools are a primary site (if not the primary site) of learning for most children, schools speak to a fundamental shared commitment when they use the phrase in their mission statements.

The issue arises when that commitment is implied by a mission statement, but not carried out via practice, i.e., when the communicated value is not also an instructive, guiding principle. The ambiguity of love of learning as a phrase means this likely happens frequently. Schools that have pursuing, cultivating, developing, etc. love of learning as a mission may be roughly aware of what they are communicating to parents, assuming their selection of the phrase was guided by these same shared intuitions and not merely a desire to rouse some sentiment to garner support. But without clarity on the meaning of the phrase, schools likely fail to deliver on these shared commitments by creating a learning environment that would allow for all students to have this experience. To pursue love of learning as an instructive ideal—i.e., beyond a phrase that communicates shared commitments (albeit facetiously when not accompanied by practice) schools would have to take student curiosity seriously as a driver of the educational experience.

This carries a host of implications for school practices to the extent that an institution's mission statement is intended to convey something about what happens at the school. Even if the mission is intended to communicate a sentiment, value, or ideal that stakeholders tacitly agree might never be achieved in practice, the evoked sentiment is sufficient for us to look to practices and explore what might be entailed by a broader commitment to the instructive potential of mission statements, especially when we can identify something of educational value implied by the statement

What might education look like if it were designed specifically to ensure all students experience the spark of joy in response to learning, particularly compared with school structures that squash curiosity with routine, memorization, and meaningless tasks (Dewey, 1938)? If my characterization is correct, valuing love of learning—as a parent, a teacher, a stakeholder, a student, or as an institution that list it as their mission—entails a conviction that (1) all students are curious about something, (2) that this spark can and should be fanned through learning, and (3) that something is lost if spark is squelched, particularly in the name of some other type of learning. If love of learning as a mission is meant to be instructive, these principles would be taken seriously. Classroom practices, materials, and environments would likely respond to student interest. The breadth of subjects offered would likely expand to ensure each student has the opportunity to pursue their curiosity so that it may grow into a love of learning. Similarly, instruction would respond to students' needs in the learning process, guiding them through at a pace that feeds their enjoyment, rather than one that prioritizes outcomes. To the extent love is infectious, teachers might also model love of learning by pursuing it themselves, as researchers suggest (Carmichael, 2009; Renga et al., 2020). Not only would this potentially lead to school policies that support teachers fostering their own love of learning, but likely also an entire school ethos grounded in the value of these pursuits. Tellingly, this is what is implied by love of learning as a communicative school mission in the first place: That the school values love of learning itself. Exploring what practices might be entailed is mission statements are considered to be instructive such that they have some bearing on school accountability and effectiveness is telling.

Notice, the characterization I provide of love of learning rests on intuition, elicited from a combination of examples and theories from other educational philosophers. This account is not context dependent in the way an interpretation of an educational slogan (e.g., 'democratic classrooms for democratic life') would need to be to be informative and directive. But it is also not substantively thick as one might expect of an educational concept. Without a full, substantive exploration of what all might be entailed by love and learning as rich concepts in educational discourse, my somewhat modest exploration is sufficient to reveal implications for practice if mission statements are intended to convey value and potentially guide practice in the way I, and educational researchers and institutional change strategists, might hope. Further articulation of the substantive entailments of a thicker definition of learning and love drawn from a more substantive engagement with the richness of this concept in educational literature would only further the point that something far more substantive is required of educational practice if mission statements and the educational phrases included therein are intended to be instructive, directive, and communicative of the values and associated practices one might find in the institution.

Whether school mission statements are intended to be communicative or instructive, a school that lists love of learning as a mission and fails implement the core tenets of the phrase via school practices and ethos fails in their mission. If the school is merely trying to communicate shared value to parents in using the phrase, their lack of accompanying school ethos suggests these values are not actually shared. Parents, educators, and students attracted by the phrase are deceived by this. Further, if love of learning is intended to be an instructive mission, yet a school engages in commonplace practices known to discourage love of learning for all but the most academically inclined students, the mission is worthless. A school must first understand the phrases included in their mission if it is to be genuine and effective at communicating value and guiding practice.

This analysis demonstrates the need for schools to take seriously the language of mission statements. If mission statements convey value, it is incumbent upon the institution to first identify and

understand the value they intend to convey. Rather than relying on ambiguous buzzwords, however convenient they may be in playing on people's institutions, schools ought to aim for coherence between the aims they state and the practices they uphold. If love of learning is an ideal, it ought to permeate the school itself, not merely be listed on the website. Lastly, as with any aim, set of values, or philosophy of an institution, missions are meant to create consistency. Thus, in this case, school policy and practice ought not undercut aspects of the student learning experience essential to love of learning.

## Conclusion

By exploring the components of love of learning via analyzing synonyms and cases, this paper gives an account of the potential value underlying the phrase and what may be implied by its use in school mission statements to the extent one views these statements as communicative, instructive, informative, and directive of institutional values and practices. I suggest the phrase describes a human experience that is feeling joy, awe, and excitement upon exercising one's cognitive capacities—i.e., learning via the exercise of reason—that fuels desire for more such experiences. I suggest this experience is valued as a human phenomenon and, thus, something people wish for others to experience, which provides some explanation (if not rationale) for its inclusion in school mission statements. Schools with missions to promote love of learning, thus, signal to interested parties that they value this phenomenon and, depending on the relationship between and institution's mission and its practices, might reasonably be expected to encourage its development in students via their practices. If mission statements are to be taken as communicative and instructive to both internal and external stakeholders, however, further clarity on what all is entailed for educational practice by adopting love of learning as a school mission would require further exploration.

This conceptual analysis both disambiguates a frequently used term to provide some conceptual refinement to educational discourse and demonstrates the utility of evaluating mission statements in identifying potential discrepancies between stated missions, implied values, and practice.

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