

# Chapter 2: Heart-Centered Teaching

*The Five Love Languages of Children* by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell, MD, is one of the best books I've read. I recommend it to all teachers and parents. You can find a quick survey on-line on their website. The five love languages are:

Physical touch

Words of affirmation

Quality time

Gifts

Acts of Service

I was sitting at my desk checking school email just before class started when M plowed into my room sobbing. I turned around and had just enough time to stand before she collapsed into my arms. I held her while she cried until she was ready to talk. The last thing her mom had said to her as she dropped her off at school was, "I'm glad I'm going to work so at least I don't have to be with you for a whole day."

M's love language is **words of affirmation**. Not only does she crave positive words, but negative words hurt her more deeply than they would hurt a physical touch kid. Knowing that this is what she hears at home, I now know to work extra hard at giving her honest, true, positive feedback. I don't give her empty compliments. I praise and admire her for her strength and resilience.

On the first day of school, J walked into my class and was instantly disruptive. He walked around the room for no reason. He stood near the door as though he was plotting an escape. He loudly interrupted with contributions that made the whole class laugh. He was oppositional. He was defiant. He was letting me know from day 1 who was the boss in the class. Worse, his interruptions were streams of potty mouth and he seemed to have no awareness even afterward that he had just dropped an F-bomb.

I looked at him and thought.... "Oh no you don't. I am not fighting with this kid for a whole year." So instead... when he said funny things... I laughed. When he refused to do things I said.... "Okay." When the other kids were distracted by him, I watched him, too. I made him part of the class entertainment, narrating his antics in comprehensible Spanish. Little by little

I was able to insist that he knock off the inappropriate vocabulary. He stopped sitting in his desk and instead pulled a chair up and sat about 2 feet from my right leg. I let that be his spot. I was close enough to place a hand gently on his shoulder every time I needed him to stop talking. I stopped even looking at him when I did it. That touch made him stop talking and say, "Sorry, Miss." Every time.

Every time he came into my class in a horrendous mood and refused to do any work at all it was because he had just come from a teacher who had made a different decision on that first day. They butted heads every day and he was frequently thrown out of class or suspended.

I called his mom to tell her every time he was successful in class. I never called her to tell on him. By the time I called her she had already received six other calls. I was the only teacher she hadn't heard from.

He became an actor in our class stories. He was like our class mascot. He picked up passive language skills and can understand and read. His production remained anemic and his ability to turn in assignments was poor to non-existent.

J's love language is **physical touch**.

### **Tell me what's going on in your life**

Blaine Ray used to offer students extra credit at the end of their tests for answering this question. I offer one point of extra credit on each test. They can write in any language. If they write "nothing", they still get one point. If they write a page, they get one point. I often write back to them. It is the single best teaching tool I have as it always makes me a better teacher to read what is going on in their lives. This might be the most important thing I do as a teacher. Those students need words... and my responses to them give them **words of affirmation**. Some of this information will be confidential and sensitive and not appropriate to share with the class. Some of it will be useable in class. Some of it will require one-on-one conversations. I let them know right up front what I am required to report and what I am not required to report, so they can feel safe sharing whatever they want and know what will happen if they share that they are being abused.

### **Personalized questions and answers**

Entertain yourself. Be entertained by them. If you're bored... they're more bored. If they're bored... they aren't listening to the input because it's not compelling.

Listen... and remember details from previous lessons and bring them back.

Seek liars. Let students share silly and pretend information instead of real information.

Encourage unusual and bizarre responses.

This is **words of affirmation** and **quality time**.

With some stickers and some well-timed hall passes and help resolving problems, you will easily reach the **gifts** and **acts of service** love language receivers.

***Small deeds, simple acts of kindness – that is what makes me a lover of God. People are God incarnate in this world. Each person is a different face of God. To love people by being a giver is to love God. There is no great deed of loving God. There are only small deeds of giving to people – done with great love! – Marc Gafni***

