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The Perspectives of Noddings' Theory of Care: Critically Analysing Iconic Works

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ABSTRACT

Nel Noddings, an American philosopher, presented one of the first comprehensive conceptions of care and argued that caring is the foundation of morality. She held that interpersonal connections form the bedrock of mankind and that one's relationships with others define who they are as a person. In this assertion that compassion is a quality shared by all individuals, Noddings argued that a caring connection, or a relationship in which people engage in a caring manner, is ethically important to humanity. In this paper we have tried to talk about Nel Noddings' Theory of Care and its essential ethical components and how they are important towards educational policy. Doing this we here reviewed Three different research works Abowitz & Roberts (2007), Sockett (2009) and Stitzlein (2013) who discussed Theory of Care in connection with theoretical thinking in educational philosophy and with recent developments in the field of educational policy established in the micro and global sense.

Keywords: Nel Noddings, Theory of Care, Educational Policy, Education, Philosophy of Education

Introduction

Nel Noddings, an American philosopher and educator has won global praises (Adhikari & Saha, 2021c) for her contributions to educational philosophy, educational theory and care ethics. It seems sense that Nel Noddings' explanation of the Theory of Care would have a substantial impact on moral education and the ethics of teaching given that it is a relational and practical explanation of morality and moral reasoning. However, it has now paved its impact on a variety of academic disciplines, which includes nursing education, the teaching methods, curriculum, and instruction, and the educational philosophy (Noddings, 1993). Educationalists across centuries have stressed on the importance of morality, reasoning and sense (Kramer, 1976; Miller, 2013; Adhikari & Saha, 2021d; 2022; 2023). The effectiveness of the educational system is influenced by educational ethics. It provides useful standards and protects the interests of both teachers and students. It has given moral education a new, relational perspective to employ. But this theory's influence on moral education and educational philosophy, as well as how these fields have benefited from it, have not yet been thoroughly investigated. As Montessori also said (Saha & Adhikari, 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d), the fields of moral education and educational philosophy overlap. As a result, specific conversations about these topics typically come up together. In this study, we will focus on the critical components of morally upright caring interactions and how they are essential for educational policy.

Nel Nodding's Theory of Care and Critical Reviews

This research work examines Noddings' Theory of Care and its impact on the field of educational policy. Three different research works - Abowitz & Roberts, 2007; Sockett, 2009; Stitzlein, 2013, are discussed in relation to contemporary advancements in the field of educational policy established in the micro and global senses as well as theoretical thinking in educational philosophy.

In 2007, Kathleen Knight-Abowitz and Jay Roberts reviewed and analysed *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty – First Century* by Friedman. They were especially interested in the *"notion of the social contract, the moral centre of Friedman's hopeful vision of a globalised world"*. Despite being moved by Friedman's optimistic vision of a globally integrated society and the educational system needed to realise it, Abowitz and Roberts questioned this vision and used Noddings' Theory of Care to support their critique. Knight-Abowitz and Roberts (2007) outlined the dynamics of economic changes, political establishment influence and widespread use of technology that led to the globalisation trend in education in the introduction to their article. One of the identified educational theorists who was interpreting the effects of this globalisation trend on education was Nel Noddings (Abowitz, 1999; 2016). Noddings (2005, 2011, 2015), as an educational theorist who was engaged in the philosophical studies of education, and has written about how globalisation alters the educational landscape. The following sentences, which are taken from Noddings' analysis of universal education and how it alters educational theory and education as we currently know it, can be summarized: *"Children are not equal in their capacity for academic learning, and a*

universal, academic curriculum may well aggravate academic differences" (2003a). Noddings' Theory of Care is a perspective frequently employed in education. Knight-Abowitz and Roberts (2007) however, did not favor Friedman in this perspective owing to numerous reasons. They opined, Noddings' care-based perspective on education (Theory of Care) hailed for a more inclusive thinking in schooling and education (Adhikari et al. 2023). But Theory of Care opposes Friedman's view of education, which advocates for a single standard culture and the educational system developed within it, while Friedman (2008) defends an education system based on contract theory referenced back to Rawls (1971): *"…social contract provides a rationale for how a government can re-distribute resources so as to provide all workers with education and training opportunities at all levels…His social contract not only involves educational investment but a ringing endorsement of the idea that schooling is primarily an instrument for economic prosperity of individual and nation" (Knight-Abowitz and Roberts, 2007).*

Friedman's global account of education and schooling, in the opinion of Knight-Abowitz and Roberts, was a utilitarian explanation of education and should not be chosen by educational policy makers. It stated that aspirations for education are something that people should aspire to, but that these ideals depend on outside factors, such as better schools that graduate students who perform at the top of their class and are able to compete in the global market. Knight-Abowitz and Roberts (2007) came to the conclusion that any educational institution advocating this ideal and working towards this goal must take these drawbacks into account: *"schools, students, teachers, and administrators increasingly feel the pressure to 'perform' and 'achieve', terms borrowed from the market, popular texts… feed into perceptions that our schools, like our corporations, must be made more nimble, efficient, and productive. … This moral vision (in education), however, is dangerously naïve*". Noddings (2002) in her *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education*, opposing teacher pressure, sloganized education, rivalry in the classroom and the dominance of standardised examinations as a result of globalization's harmful consequences on education. According to Noddings (2002), globalisation re-positions the importance of education, and as a result, there is uncertainty about the demands of society and the objectives of the education given through societal institutions. Noddings (2007) expressed caution about the goals of education, however Knight-Abowitz and Roberts concurred with Noddings on what should be prioritised and sought after. They cited Noddings (2002a) to further clarify their perspective on this debate with Friedman (2007): "*The society does not need to make its children first in the world in mathematics and science. It needs to care for its children to reduce violence, to respect honest work of every kind, … to produce people who can care.*"

Our research work analyses Hugh Sockett's (2009) book review *Self-Portraiture: The uses of academic autobiography,* about the influential educational theories. In this work, Sockett addressed how the distinctive self-portraits of significant educational theorists could be used to analyse the evolution of the area of educational policy. *Leaders in Philosophy of Education: Intellectual Self-Portraits* (2008) a chapter in this book was penned by Nel Noddings and edited by Leonard J. Waks. Noddings (2008) in this chapter outlined her relationship to educational theory and shifts in policy. As per Sockett (2009), this chapter demonstrated how '*the women's movement'* in education had an impact on her. In his article, Sockett (2009) outlined the ways in which Noddings' work differs from those of other feminist philosophers and academics including Patricia White and Iris Murdoch. Even though Patricia White and Iris Murdoch have also penned about *"the absence of women in philosophy of education"* (Sockett, 2009), a new orientation in educational philosophy, policy, and women's philosophical thought was signalled by Noddings' work with caring, education, and Theory of Care. Sockett (2009) used Noddings' Theory of Care in his book review to support this alternative course of action. Noddings' Theory of Care pointed in a direction where women's contributions to educational philosophy are significant because it views the world from a different angle and focuses specifically on the relational bonding experiences of women rather than the all-encompassing experiences of women as described by Roland-Martin (1985, 1986, 1987). It is true that both of them are attempting to incorporate women into their educational philosophies and alter educational policy in this manner. They concentrated instead on certain characteristics of women's thinking. Noddings reignited the disputes that existed among feminists over whether women should be considered as distinct and equal or the same and equal in society at large by advocating the moral worth of care. The former was based on the idea that women would never be treated equally unless society or rather men, saw them as possessing the same abilities as men. The latter stated that although women are different from one another, they should still be treated equally, just like Noddings' Theory of Care did.

The third discussed here is by Elizabeth Stitzlein (2013). In this article, she reviewed the quality of the debates present in *Dear Nel: Opening the Circles of Care (Letters to Nel Noddings)* (Lake, 2012). The goal of Stitzlein's review of this book was to discuss how Theory of Care has influenced our thinking on a variety of topics, including general educational research, educational standards, teaching through care, and applying the care ethics in life, family and student relationships and how Noddings' career was shaped by these relationships. The review completed its task in a straightforward manner, which Stitzlein criticised. The only positive thing Stitzlein could say about this work was that it made a valiant attempt to explain the significance of Noddings' Theory of Care in educational research. Stitzlein criticised Lake's method of explaining the need to compile this book, his role as the editor, and she expressed discomfort with the quotations included in this book because she believed they were either unrelated to Noddings' work or unable to adequately convey the strengths of Theory of Care. On the idea that Lake's book should be more thorough, present a stronger explanation about the development of the themes, and that the chapters should be categorised in a better way, Stitzlein's criticism can be agreed with. We believe the book has more potential than Stitzlein suggested, however, due to the role played by Noddings Theory of Care in educational research and because of its simplicity, which may appeal to readers other than academics. Stitzlein criticised the book's lack of a target audience in her review and the way the chapters were organised based on a reader-unknown rationale. Since Lake wanted his book to appeal to as many readers as possible who were interested in Noddings' work, it may be inferred that he purposely avoided providing an answer to the why and who queries and was not written by Lake to be a textbook. However, Noddings' view of the Theory of Care is still a very new opinion on education and educational ethics when compared to other theories of education, such as Dewey's experiential education (Talebi, 2015), Arnold's culture and education (Adhikari & Saha, 2021e) and Montessori's naturalistic education (Adhikari & Saha, 2021a; 2021b). Thus, there is much to be learned about Theory of Care and its contributions to the relevant disciplines of inquiry because experts are at odds about the extent and content of the words that make up its vocabulary. By using the language of the excluded other, Noddings Theory of Care is a theory that frames an educational policy that embodies the '*new scholarship*' as defined by Roland-Martin (1986). This theory and

an educational policy based on it would, in theory, address a number of issues that many students and scholars have. The present study has addressed some of these concerns through the major reviews and contribute to the conversations surrounding these concerns, influencing the field of philosophy of education.

Conclusion

This research work is an attempt to summarize Nel Noddings' Theory of Care and its essential ethical components and how they are important towards educational policy. The three different research works and reviews of Abowitz & Roberts (2007), Sockett (2009) and Stitzlein (2013) are discussed who have paved a major content on the Theory of Care in connection with theoretical thinking in educational philosophy and with recent developments in the field of educational policy and how they can be applicable in a global sense for a better educational process. Noddings' views can be used to summarise the explanation of universal education and how it alters educational theory and education as we currently know it. According to Nel Noddings, universal academic curriculum may possibly exacerbate academic disparities because not all children have the same capacity for academic learning.

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