

NEL NODDINGS' THEORY OF CARE AND ITS ETHICAL COMPONENTS**Anasuya Adhikari**

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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.

Keywords: Nel Noddings, Care, Theory of Care, Education, Ethical Components

Introduction

For her contributions to educational theory, educational philosophy, and care ethics, Nel Noddings, an American educator, philosopher, and feminist, has won global praises. Educational ethics contribute to the efficiency of the system. It establishes practical norms and safeguards the interests of both learners and teachers (Adhikari, 2023). Given that Noddings' Theory of Care is a relational and useful theory of morality and moral reasoning, it makes sense that it would have a significant influence on moral education and the ethics of teaching. However, its influence has spread to other areas of education, including nursing education,

curriculum and instruction, teacher preparation and educational philosophy (Noddings, 1993). It has provided a different, relational perspective to be used in moral education. However, its impact on moral education and educational philosophy, as well as how this theory has contributed to these fields, has not yet been examined in depth. As Montessori also noted (Saha & Adhikari, 2023b; 2023d), the domains of moral education and philosophy of education intersect. As a result, certain discussions in these subjects frequently co-occur. We shall concentrate on the crucial elements of morally responsible caring interactions in this study.

Essential Components of the Ethical Caring Relationships Promoted in Nel Noddings' Theory of Care

Through caring relationships and positive interactions, Nel Noddings' Theory of Care aims to help people think morally and behave morally, guiding them to be morally superior and caring people throughout their lives (Adhikari & Saha, 2021; 2023). According to Noddings, caring is the same as acting morally, and learning to care is a lengthy and progressive process (Noddings, 2003a; 2005). The four main elements of ethical caring connections must be incorporated into this drawn-out developing process and any instructional activity built on Theory of Care. Engrossment, compassion, reciprocity and motivational displacement were listed by Noddings (1995a; 2013) as the crucial elements of the Theory of Care.

Not every connection meets the criteria for an ethical caring relationship that results in the ethical caring ideal, Noddings had envisioned. The ethical caring connection has crucial elements in and of themselves; motivating displacement, reciprocity, and engrossment (Noddings, 1995a; 2013). A relationship might not be regarded as an ethical caring connection if it is missing one or more of these elements. The goal is for one to recall what it feels like to be cared for before becoming a caring person who cares. Engrossment and motivational displacements are recognised as the traits of the caregiver or caring in these interactions, whereas reciprocity is recognised as the trait of the cared-for. The development of an ethical caring connection requires engrossment because:

“At bottom all caring involves engrossment” (Noddings, 2013, p. 17).

The term '*engrossment*' refers to how the person providing care perceives and addresses the wants of the person for whom they are providing care. The Montessori method also emphasises that engrossment is mostly intrinsic, meaning that the desire to get absorbed in a well-cared-

for student should be anchored in the devoted teacher rather than being dependent on outside influences (Saha & Adhikari, 2023a; 2023c; Adhikari & Saha, 2021a; 2021b;). When a teacher and student have a loving relationship, the caring teacher emotionally invests in the learner (Noddings, 1992). Additionally, the student may tell that the teacher is interested in his or her thoughts, experiences, and values because of the caring teacher's engrossment, which is evident in all of the teacher's actions. The carer's feelings and sympathies for the one being cared for are linked to engrossment. Noddings intentionally used the word '*sympathise*' and meant sympathy rather than empathy. Sympathy calls for relating and attaching, but not through engaging in these activities and letting them overtake one. Noddings (2010a) asserts that sympathy is crucial to a caring relationship because:

“caring relation is coloured throughout by sympathy — an attitude of solicitude toward the cared – for and a willingness to listen and be moved” (p. 392).

Noddings (2010b) asserts that there is a thin border between empathy and sympathy. This line should ideally emerge when the caretaker and the cared for determine what to do with the knowledge gained after knowing one another's issues and conditions. According to Noddings (2013), addressing the issue for the other person who is concerned is an example of empathy rather than analysing the other person's condition as an informational unit. According to the Theory of Care, addressing an issue for the person being cared for is not advised because it restricts their ability to develop morally. It is advised that the carer empathise with the other:

“receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other. I become a duality...The seeing and feeling are mine, but only partly and temporarily mine, as on loan to me” (Noddings, 2013, p. 30).

Empathy and motivational displacement are related to engrossment. In an ethical caring relationship, a sympathetic teacher sympathises with the student they are caring for and moves on with their motivation. When a caring teacher voluntarily sets aside his or her own interests and confronts the cared-for and their circumstance in an effort to understand it, motivational displacement occurs. By using motivational displacement, the caring teacher may comprehend the demands, difficulties, and realities of the cared-for student from that person's perspective. An ethical commitment to act is revealed as a result of this new comprehension of the reality of the cared-for. As Noddings noted in her 2013 book,

“I feel also [sic], that I must act accordingly; that is I am impelled to act as though in my own behalf, but in [sic] behalf of the other” (p. 16).

The commitment of the caretaker, the caring teacher, to the caring relationship is reflected by the word ‘*must*’ in this context. Understanding the student’s emotions and difficulties with the subject matter is necessary for the caring teacher to continuously work towards involvement and acknowledgment in the cared-for (Noddings, 1992; 2013; 2016). As both parties commit to the relationship by their actions, an ethical bond, or caring relationship, is developed between the caring instructor and the cared-for pupil. The final element of this ethical ideal is reciprocity, which is defined as the cared-for person acknowledging the caregiver’s actions. A definition of reciprocity is the contribution of the cared-for to the ethical caring relationship. The presence of reciprocity in an ethical caring relationship is important for the betterment of the carer’s and cared-for’s moral wellbeing. Reciprocity is the duty of the cared-for in an ethical caring relationship, as opposed to engrossment and motivating displacement (Noddings, 2013). The caring connection may and should be deemed to be insufficient if the person being cared for does not reciprocate, acknowledge, or react to the actions of care. In order to maintain an ethical caring relationship, reciprocity in that relationship is crucial. Here are some reasons why:

What the cared-for gives to the relation either in direct response to the one-caring or in personal delight or in happy growth before her eyes is [sic] genuine reciprocity. It contributes to the maintenance of the relation and serves to prevent the caring from turning back on the one-caring in the form of anguish and concern for self. (Noddings, 2013, p. 74)

Because ethical caring relationships can take many different forms, there are numerous methods to reciprocate and complete them. This diversity is encouraged by Noddings’ Theory of Care because it recognises that there is no one right way to finish the process of establishing an ethical caring relationship. Here, a word of caution is needed because it is easy to become lost. According to Noddings (2013), establishing an ethical caring relationship is a process that must be completed in order for the ethical caring ideal to be realised. According to Noddings (2013), this process is preferable to receiving moral praise for acting in a particular way. It seems improbable that a theory of moral philosophy would include this aspect; in fact, this is what sets her idea apart from other theories of morality like utilitarianism and Kantian ethics.

Noddings (1984) provided the following argument for her choice of process over justification, people over principle, and continuation over product:

“As one-caring, I am not seeking justification for my action; I am not standing alone before some tribunal. What I seek is completion in the other-the sense of being cared-for and, I hope, the renewed commitment of the cared-for to turn about and act as one-caring in the circles and chains within which he is defined. Thus, I am not justified but [sic] somehow fulfilled and completed in my own life and in the lives of those I have thus influenced.” (p. 95)

According to the Theory of Care, it is necessary to establish ethical caring relationships in order to create the ethical ideal of care. These interactions serve as a roadmap for helping people improve as morally compassionate humans (Noddings, 1984; 2013). Noddings (2003), in the second edition of her book *Caring*, writes:

“It is that condition toward which we long and strive [sic], and it is our longing for caring-to be in that special relation -that provides the motivation for us to be moral” (p. 5).

By definition, anything that fosters and furthers the development of this morally upright and caring relationship is desirable, but both parties must acknowledge the existence of their relationship. The development of organic caring relationships fosters the development of ethical caring relationships. Natural caring interactions are so essential to human life, in fact, that Noddings (1984) asserted that no person would be able to survive past infancy without having someone care for them. This natural care, in contrast to ethical caring, is unplanned, *“arises out of [sic] love or natural inclination”* (Noddings, 2003a, p. 5). Noddings (2010) questioned the moral thinking's reliance on ethical principles and distinguished thinking based on natural caring from principled thinking by narrating,

“Natural caring ...[and] it is exercised with no need for reference to moral principles or direct reasoning from such principles” (p. 350).

Natural caring is a natural act that can be observed whenever two people coexist. Another indication of Noddings' opposition to the dominance of the principled reasoning in moral philosophy and moral education could be her insistence on natural care and its spontaneity. Another explanation for Noddings' defiance of rules is because, in most cases, rules are

accompanied by descriptions of exceptional circumstances that lessen the application of the moral norm in real-world situations, according to Noddings (2003a). In addition, according to Noddings (2003a), the theories of moral philosophy's rules are static, making it difficult, in most instances, to apply them practically to moral dilemmas that arise in everyday life. Moving beyond this restriction, Noddings (2013) argued that the dynamic moral standards are in a worse position than the ethical caring relationships since these ties change frequently and help people adjust to new circumstances. These interactions vary, but also the environment that supports them does, rendering everything almost non-identical to one another. The ethical ideal of care is powered by these nourishing, caring relationships according to Noddings (2002a). It is because life in educational settings is dynamic due to the flexibility features they have, they serve as more adequate and effective guides for teachers to enhance students' moral thinking than the teaching of moral behaviours through arbitrary rules and dictating school policies. Because loving relationships are responsive, the ethical act of caring must extend beyond the words and feelings of the person who is showing it. It must also be demonstrated via the person's deeds. In the prologue of Beck's (1994) book, Noddings makes the case that the ethical act of caring must be represented and characterised as responsive, "*To care is to respond*" (pp. ix-x). Noddings made a conceptual distinction between simply thinking about ethics, which is, theoretical knowledge of morality, and behaving ethically, which is, practical knowledge of morality, by highlighting the responsive nature of the ethical caring connections. This border blurs, in Noddings' (2003a) opinion, if the carer is not present in his or her activities and is not meaningfully responding to the cared-for because, "*Caring is largely reactive and responsive*" (p. 19). The promise of the caring connection may not be realised if the person providing the care is not evident in his or her actions. The Noddings Theory of Care promotes a child's holistic and all-encompassing education and works to close the gap between the home and the public/school spheres. Noddings stands in direct contrast to the practises and regulations that support traditional education and conventional teaching methods with her idea of a holistic and relational education. Noddings (1995) outlined the justification for instilling compassion and improving a person's education:

"We should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement and ... we will not achieve even that meager success unless our children believe that they themselves [sic] are cared for and learn to care for others" (p. 675).

Conclusion

The specificity of relationships is essential to care ethics. According to Noddings, every caring relationship involves at least two individuals—the carer and the person being cared for. As the one caring and the one being cared for may develop a reciprocal commitment to each other's well-being, such a relationship can be more than just dyadic, a relationship based on influence. However, what sets apart all such relationships is that the carer always responds to the cared-for person's perceived need. The act is driven by an understanding of the reality of the cared-for, where the carer experiences and perceives what the cared-for is going through and then decides to offer assistance. This does not imply that the carer always complies with the wishes of the person being cared for. Instead, the person providing care takes into account the cared-for's perspective, assessment of their needs and expectations of the person providing care while coming up with a solution that offers them the best chance to be of assistance. However, the justification(s) provided by the carer would be adequate to persuade an impartial observer that the carer in fact took action to advance the well-being of the cared-for. Thus, caring entails sentiment but is not always an emotional activity.

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