
WHAT DOES CARING SHARE WITH DOING?

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In 1984, Nel Noddings published *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics*. In explaining the purpose of her book, she claimed that contemporary work on morality in education focused on what she called moral reasoning separated from actual human activity. As a result, ethics appeared to be similar to mathematics because ethicists made decisions according to logical necessity. To Noddings, an over concern with principles and propositions represented the voice of the father who urged attention to fairness and justice. She wanted to add what she called the voice of the mother by including concerns for human caring that derived from memories of caring and the joy of being cared for.¹

Although Noddings claimed that educators ignored the voice of the mother, she did not think that men lacked the capacity for caring. She quoted Carol Gilligan indicating that women tended to approach moral problems by placing themselves in concrete situations and thinking through the difficulties as a person connected to the other people in some way. In this sense, Noddings took the view that the experiences of women would provide the basis of an ethic of caring although she added that men could acquire it.²

About seventy years earlier, John Dewey became aware of the miseries that people suffered as they moved from farms to newly industrialized cities such as Chicago seeking employment. One of his biographers, Arthur Wirth contended that Dewey's experiences working as trustee with Jane Addams' Hull House gave him a sharper and deeper meaning to his faith in democracy as a guiding force in education.³ This contention is reasonable because in her autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, Addams devoted a chapter explaining how Abraham Lincoln established democracy as the prevailing American ideal. She added that the settlement house movement would help this ideal to flourish so that it could become America's most valuable contribution to the moral life of the world.⁴

From 1896 until 1904, Dewey ran a laboratory school at the University of Chicago in which he tested his ideas about philosophy and psychology. In the school, he had the chance to modify his theories and demonstrate how a curriculum could be built around what he called occupations. According to Lawrence Cremin, in 1916, Dewey summarized the articles he had written about the school and his experiences in *Democracy and Education* which he intended to serve as a textbook for teachers and administrators in public schools who wanted to change their schools from places where students listened to teachers' to places where teachers and students cooperated in reconstructing the students'

experiences in ways that moved from their interests to the organized bodies known as subject matters.⁵

Thus, Noddings and Dewey wanted the educators of their days to include theoretical orientations that they felt most people overlooked. Noddings thought that she could do this by asking people to follow what she called the feminine approach to ethical thinking in the place of what she saw as an overly rational, patriarchal model. Dewey thought he could do this by asking people to recognize the educational implications implicit in the ideal of democracy that would overcome the conflict between idealism and realism. While these orientations differ, this paper will suggest that the two notions have a great deal in common. Consideration of the similarities in these distinct approaches may help educators realize the role that concern for human community plays in a range of educational theories.

To show the similarity between these works, this paper will compare the authors on four aspects central to teaching. These are the aim of education, the role of the teacher, the construction of the curriculum, and the criteria for determining a good action or a good society. The sections that follow will consider each of these aspects in turn.

AIM OF EDUCATION

For Noddings, the aim of education was what she called the nurturance of the ethical ideal. The foundation of this ethical ideal was what she called the recognition of and the longing for relatedness. By connecting moral behavior to relationships, she believed that she could inspire people to live morally by recalling the joy that they had felt when they cared for someone or when they realized they were being cared for by someone else.⁶

When Noddings directed attention to the ways that schools could build ethical and intellectual understandings based on relationships, she pointed out that she did not want to discard intellectual and aesthetic aims of education. At best, she wanted these aims to be set aside if they endangered the ethical ideal. For example, she described a teacher who loved mathematics and considered her aim to be the communication of this love to a student. Noddings pointed out that, in this situation, the teacher did not care about the student who hated mathematics. Instead, the teacher was concerned with mathematics or with her professional competence. As a result, the teacher turned the student into an object to be manipulated. In Noddings' view the teacher ignored the essential aspect of caring because she did not apprehend the reality of the student. According to Noddings, the teacher should begin to develop empathy by asking what it means to hate mathematics.⁷

At first glance, Dewey appears to hold a different view. He disdained discussions about the ultimate or abstract aims of education. Instead, Dewey compared education to growth. He noted that the value of education was measured by the extent to which it created the desire for continued growth. For Dewey, when students had aims, they could predict, in general terms, where they were going. Thus, they could participate in an orderly process that enabled them to observe conditions, select means, and select alternatives. To determine if aims could provide these benefits, Dewey suggested that teachers ask if the aims were outgrowths of present conditions, could they be changed as conditions or knowledge changed, and could the students apply their accomplishments to do many other activities. He complained that none of these conditions prevailed when teachers sought the aims of education outside the activities of the students.⁸

Thus, in a manner similar to that of Noddings, Dewey criticized the tendencies of teachers to force or to bribe the students to master subject matters on the grounds that such knowledge would be useful one day or that by completing the lessons the students exercised their faculties of memory, perception, or judgment. Dewey contended that, when teachers held these aims of preparation, unfolding, or formal discipline, they ignored the social benefits that should accrue from education. For Dewey, education should enable the students to become effective competent members of the group with which they were associated. This meant that the subject matter had to be associated with the social life of the students.⁹

The point is that both Noddings and Dewey held that the aim of education was to make students more aware of the other people around them. Both theorists held that teachers could do this by setting up conditions wherein the students had opportunities to learn to act in ways that enhanced everyone's life.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Noddings claimed that the role of the teacher was to act as a model of what Noddings called one-caring. This meant that the teacher had to be engrossed in the student. To nurture the ethical ideal, Noddings recommended that teachers utilize three important means. These were dialogue, practice, and confirmation. In dialogue, the teacher accepted the students opinions on any controversial topic they wish to discuss. In practice, the teacher and the students should participate in service activities for hospitals, animal shelters, and botanical gardens that enabled them to develop what Noddings called competence in caring. In confirmation, the teachers attributed the best possible motive to the student. Thus, she urged that teachers avoid any sort of summative evaluation such as semester grades. Instead, teachers and students could work together to pass externally imposed exams.¹⁰

Noddings took these terms of dialogue, practice, and confirmation from her analysis of how people could construct what she called the ideal of caring. Taking the view that people naturally want to feel sympathy for other people and to recapture childhood feelings of attachment, she considered the various social constraints that diminished the person's ability to construct more humane alternatives. For example, she contended that established institutions diminished peoples' capacities to act as one caring by perpetuating such traditions as competition. In what appeared to contradict the literary revelations of female athletes, actresses, and lawyers, Noddings claimed that, by nature, women avoid competitive activities. Nonetheless, she posited dialogue, practice, and confirmation as regular exercises to help everyone overcome the tendencies of everyday life that placed people against rather than with each other.¹¹

Since Noddings decried the tendency of institutions to pursue bureaucratic rather than human ends, she suggested that teachers pay less attention to professional development. Instead, she urged that teachers serve apprenticeships in caring and that schools be organized in looser more convivial ways.¹²

In a manner similar to that of Noddings, Dewey urged teachers to recreate in the schools the relationships that existed between children and adults in more primitive societies. In those societies, children learned by participating in essential social activities directly with adults. The problem in modern societies was that institutions had become so complicated and the amount to be learned had become too great to allow for such an informal method of transmission. Thus, people established schools to initiate young people into a complex society. This separated schools from life and made it possible for the subject matter to lose its connection to the life of the society.¹³

For Dewey, relationships remained more important than subject matter. Pointing out that society exists in transmission as well as through it, Dewey claimed a conglomeration of people did not become a society by living near each other or by pursuing the same goals. They had to communicate. This meant that the recipient had to have an enlarged and changed experience because he or she shared in what another has thought. As a result, Dewey concluded that genuine communication was educative because it enlarged the perspectives the people held.¹⁴

Given such conditions, while the role of the teacher was to ensure that the students come to understand organized society, the teacher had to be careful that the activities came from the students' life experiences. Thus, the teacher had to be open to the students' perceptions. For example, the teacher should consider how the activities would arouse observation and experimentation outside of school. Further, the problems could not come from a text or from the teacher's understanding of the material. Instead, the questions or the tasks had to come from the students' experiences. To work in these ways, teachers did not need

more training in pedagogy, Dewey wrote. They needed to offer more opportunities for the students to do things.¹⁵

In short, Noddings and Dewey contended that teachers worked in the midst of contradictory institutional tendencies. While schools should enhance social life, many of the traditions they advanced reduced the possibility of strengthening human connections. Both Noddings and Dewey wanted teachers to become aware of the students' interests, attitudes, and previous experiences. The teachers had to be open to the students' ideas and be ready to respond with activities that captured their fancies in ways that advanced their abilities to cooperate with other people.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE CURRICULUM

The second aspect that both writers considered was the construction of the curriculum. Noddings devoted a brief section to the construction of the curriculum. She noted that people could become engrossed in ideas or in subject matters in ways that mirrored the relationships they had with other people. Experiences with the ideas or subject matters differed from experiences with people, though. Subject matters could not respond to the attention they received. Despite this limitation, Noddings wanted students to enter into relations with subjects such as mathematics or history. To encourage the students to become fascinated, Noddings suggested that the subject matters be laid out along the lines of human experience. This would enable students to approach the subjects in many different ways. For example, she approved of biography as one way to show how a subject influenced people's lives.¹⁶

Unlike Noddings, Dewey devoted several chapters of *Democracy and Education* to consideration of the ways to construct the curriculum. He approved of using what he called occupations. He noted that activities such as gardening, metal work, and sewing had entered the schools by 1916. Dewey recommended turning these handicrafts into avenues to enable the students to understand how the industrial order had come into being. Thus, gardening became a way to learn about the role of soil and climate in developing human relations. To accomplish this end, history and geography had to be closely related and the aim was always to understand present conditions. Dewey acknowledged that the study of biographies was popular, but he warned that biographies of famous people could separate their accomplishments from the conditions that led to those actions. The danger was that the personal attractiveness of biographies could lure students away from understandings of the forces that governed social change.¹⁷

The differences between the ideals the two authors shared appeared in this category, construction of the curriculum. Since Noddings was concerned with enhancing personal relationships, her ideas of curriculum reinforced this

aspect of life. As a result, she seemed unwilling to teach about social change or wider historical forces. On the other hand, Dewey wanted people to recognize the educational implications of a social ideal, democracy. As a result, he constructed a curriculum that enabled the students to explore the ways that society had changed and the differences those changes made in people's lives.

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING A GOOD ACTION

The third aspect of education that both authors considered was the way people could decide if something was good or bad. Both of them chose to postulate criteria from which people could make individual judgments. This system allowed people the freedom or flexibility to make judgments appropriate to specific situations. It avoided inflexible, ultimate value statements. More important, it avoided a relativistic perspective in which people could see any action as acceptable. The decisions were justifiable to other people on some objective grounds.

Although Noddings claimed that logical thinking in ethics represented the voice of the father, she acknowledged that such rational thought enabled people to determine how they should respond to situations in which they faced obligations but did not feel the ties that came from what she called natural caring. The obligations derived from the need that people felt to consider themselves to be caring individuals. To help solve such problems, Noddings offered two criteria from which people could devise a sort of ethical calculus to arrive at an ethical decision. The first criterion was the existence or potential of present relation. The second was potential for growth in relation.¹⁸

Noddings showed how such a calculus might work by considering two situations concerning abortion. In both cases, she imagined the fetus to be an object or what she called an information speck. In the first case, a woman became pregnant by a man she loved. Although the couple never married the woman had the baby, a girl, because the fetus was endowed with prior love. The second case involved the daughter of the first woman. When grown, she became pregnant by a man she did not love. Since this pregnancy was not marked by love or the possibility of love, the mother recommended that her daughter terminate it. Noddings did not explain if or how students would learn to use this calculus, but she may have wanted it to play a role at least among older students.¹⁹

Dewey made use of such a calculus when he sought to demonstrate that the social life in a democratic society was superior to the social life found in a Platonic society, an eighteenth century individualistic society, a twentieth century nationalistic society, or a twentieth century socialistic one. For Dewey, the first criterion was how numerous and varied were the interests shared by the individuals within a society and among the members of other societies. The second criterion was how full and free was the interplay among different social

groups. These principles came from Dewey's original notion that all communication was educative. In those societies where communication flourished, the citizens grew and the qualities of everyone's lives were superior to the quality of life found in those societies that restricted communication.²⁰

Both Noddings and Dewey used what might be called a pragmatic test to determine when an action was ethical or a social arrangement was beneficial. By using such a calculus, people explain their judgments without resorting to fixed principles. Although the criteria that each author used indicated somewhat different directions, they were remarkably similar. In Noddings case, the direction was in favor of relationships. In Dewey's case, it was in the direction of increased communication.

CONCLUSION

Noddings' book, *Caring*, appeared more than a half century after Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. Although the two books shared many important ideas, the times within which they appeared seemed to dictate the differences that separated them.

In the 1970s, several women's organizations such as the National Organization of Women and the Women's Equity Action League sought to imitate the strategies of the NAACP and make gender bias a national issue. After winning some court cases involving access to jobs, enrollment in schools, and participation in athletic programs, they petitioned the U.S. Congress to adopt the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution. The ERA failed in 1982, and the U.S. Supreme Court refused to apply the same scrutiny to cases of gender discrimination that the justices applied to controversies over racial discrimination.²¹

At the same time, what was known as the women's movement changed. In 1981, Betty Friedan wrote that the women's movement had reached a second stage. During the first stage, women sought full participation in political and professional activities. During the second stage, women sought to transform society by integrating family, love, and work.²²

The change that Friedan described matched the general mood of the 1980s. For example, popular works such as *Culture of Narcissism* by Christopher Lasch and *Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah and his coauthors described people reacting against the individualism derived from the civil rights movement and exploring more communitarian values. It seems reasonable that Noddings book, *Caring*, fit within this social context.

On the other hand, Dewey wrote his book at the end of what historians call the Progressive Era. Usually described as a middle class reaction against the excesses of nineteenth century development, the progressive movement

sought to ameliorate the dislocations caused by the transformation of the U.S. from a rural, agricultural nation into an urban, industrial one. As noted above, Dewey shared the concerns of such social welfare advocates as Jane Addams. His book, *Democracy and Education*, expressed in educational terms Addams' belief that the settlement houses should bridge the gaps that existed among groups of people.

As part of the activities of Hull House, Addams established the labor museum to show the children of immigrants that the skills their parent had learned in rural European villages were related to the trades the children learned in the city of Chicago. Setting up series of displays in chronological order, Addams wanted the museum to show that industry developed when workers in different countries shared ideas and techniques even when they spoke different languages and followed different religions.²³

It is reasonable to assume that Dewey created his school in a way that imitated the labor museum. He believed that children's interests derived from their situations in the world and could not be separated into categories of vocational, intellectual, or emotional concerns. These categories blended together as evidence that the self and the world were engaged with each other in developing situations. Thus, he constructed his curriculum on occupations, but these activities went beyond any vocational interest they might have had.²⁴

In addition to sharing similar perspectives, both books suffer from similar shortcomings. Noddings never mentioned social transformations. She seemed to ignore the possibility that caring could arise when people committed themselves to political movements. While Dewey contended that social arrangements influenced personal relationships, he did not discuss the ways that power relations could instigate or block social transformations. He seemed to operate from the belief that demonstrating the truth of some idea was sufficient to have people adopt it. Thus, he gave an illustration of how schools could be organized without offering suggestions on political strategies to make those changes.

The importance of comparing Dewey's ideas to those of Noddings does not lie in recognizing that they refused to become political scientists. It is enough for contemporary readers to think about the different approaches they took in determining the directions in which people should learn and grow. In this effort, Noddings sought to assert the primacy of caring relationships over intellectual efforts. On the other hand, Dewey wanted to show how concern for the contemporary and the real could lead to understandings of the traditional and the abstract. Thus, while Noddings wanted to reverse a dualism, Dewey tried to show that dualisms were flawed. Despite these different orientations, they emphasized the importance of human community and sharing in advancing personal and community development.²⁵

NOTES

1. Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 1.
 2. Noddings, *Caring*, 8.
 3. Arthur G. Wirth, *John Dewey as Educator, 1894-1904* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 23-24.
 4. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1910), 23-42.
 5. Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper, 1988), 167-173.
 6. Noddings, *Caring*, 5-6.
 7. Noddings, *Caring*, 15-16, 174.
 8. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 52-53, 101-103.
 9. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 66-68, 106-110.
 10. Noddings, *Caring*, 174-196.
 11. Noddings, *Caring*, 104-124.
 12. Noddings, *Caring*, 197-201.
 13. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 1-9.
 14. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 1-9.
 15. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 152-158.
 16. Noddings, *Caring*, 161-170, 191.
 17. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 196-214.
 18. Noddings, *Caring*, 81-86.
 19. Noddings, *Caring*, 86-89.
 20. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 81-84.
 21. Rosemary Salomone, *Equal Education under the Law* (New York: St. Martins, 1986), 112-136.
 22. Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (New York: Summit Books, 1981), 26-28.
 23. Addams, *Twenty Years*, 172-174.
 24. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 124-127.
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25. In its original form, the paper emphasized the points shared by Dewey and Noddings. A reviewer suggested that the paper would be stronger if the differences were highlighted first and the commonalities discussed from this perspective. He or she was correct.
