

NKUZI: AN APPRAISAL OF NEL NODDINGS ETHICS OF CARE

Ikea, Chidimma Stella. PhD
Department of Philosophy,
Imo State University Owerri, Nigeria
mmaimsu@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper makes an appraisal of the concept of teaching in Nel Noddings ethics of care. Nel Noddings is one of the prominent feminist philosophers who proposed ethics of care as an alternative to establishing peaceful co-existence. She emphasizes education in care giving as the root to solving the moral deficit in the society. Nkuzi is an Igbo word, which means “to teach”. Analytically, Nkuzi means to knock, hit, strike aright or to repair, to shape to required proportion. Therefore, to teach is to knock, straighten or shape the pupil, student or subject aright. This paper however argues that there should be a different way of teaching, that is centered on correction and care. It concludes that there would be harmony and peace, if the society adopts a care-centered form of teaching.

Keywords: Nkuzi, ethics, care ethics, Nel Noddings, society

Introduction

Ethics is a branch of practical philosophy, interested in human action or character. The concept of ethics is considered normative as it deals with human beings and human activities. In other words, ethics is prescriptive in nature, as it prescribes what humans ought to do and ought not to do.

In the words of C.S Ikea, (2018:23): ethics can also be used in everyday activities. To a layman, ethics suggests a set of standards by which a particular group or community regulates its behaviour and by that regulation, it distinguishes between what is legitimate or acceptable behaviour within the group and what is not.

Ethics can also be defined as the branch of philosophy that investigates into the fundamental principles and concepts that govern human action. According to Mackenzie (1980:22):

Ethics is the general theory of conduct and it considers the actions of human beings with reference to their rightness or wrongness, their tendency to good or evil...Ethics discusses men's habits and customs, or in other words their characters, the principles on which they habitually act, and considers what it is that constitutes the rightness or wrongness of those principles, the good and evil of those habits.

1. It can therefore be deduced that ethics is the science of human action (which is free and deliberate), thus, Joseph de Finance (1991:14) in his *Ethical Inquiry* explains:

Ethics is the science which is concerned with what man ought to do so as to live as he ought to do, so as to be what he ought to become, so as to attain his supreme value, so as to be true to his *raison d'etre*, true to that towards which and for which he exists.

It can be understood from the above, that ethics or moral philosophy is therefore a technique or medium for leading a happy life. Frankena (2013), Supports de Finance that:

Ethics is the systematic study of human actions from the point of view of their rightness or wrongness as means for the achievement of ultimate happiness.

In this way, ethics becomes a philosophical investigation or inquiry into the contents of morality, that is to say, the content of what human beings should do and not to do or in other words, how human beings should interact with one another in the society. Peter Baelz (1977:88) in his book, *Ethics and Belief* explains more on the nature of ethics:

Ethics is the study of morality. Ethics is the theoretical business, aimed at understanding.... It steps back from the immediate practical and attempts to discover some underline patterns in moral decisions and practice.

From his analysis, ethics revolves round understanding and understanding revolves round human beings who perform actions. It is only when the human being (who is the moral agent) understands certain things around him/her that he/she can make decision (which he/she is responsible to), as such, decision making becomes parts and parcel of human lives and experiences. M.A Conslaves (1986:3) in his book, *Fagothey's Right and Reason: Ethics in Theory and Practice*, explains further:

Ethics grows out of life situation in which we are confronted with some sort of perplexity or doubt about what is the right thing to do or the best course to follow, situations in which different desires strive for opposed goods or in which incompatible courses of actions seem to be justified.

Ethics is concerned with reason, as such, it deals with what is right or wrong in human behavior and conduct. From the above definitions of ethics, the following deductions can

be made about the subject matter: it is centered on care, practical life, on the human being (character, habits, duties, virtues, pleasures, happiness and final end), human conduct, human conduct according to principles and good and bad conduct or judgments.

Ethics like philosophy is question asking and some questions it asks include: what constitutes any person or action being good, bad, right, or wrong? How should one live, act or treat others and so on.

***Nkuzi*: A Conceptual Analysis**

Nkuzi is an Igbo Nigerian word, derived from *nku* and *zi* which means teach/teaching. According to Panteleon Iroegbu (2005:78) *Nkuzi* is derived from the verb: *kuzie*-knock aright.

Analytically, *Nku* means to knock, hit, strike aright or to repair, to shape to required proportion. On a piece of iron that is crooked or rugged, one hits with a hammer to straighten it, to make it fine.

Zi is the base-morpheme of the Igbo word- *ezi* (truth, true, and real). This same root-morpheme is used in various constructs to form new words that have somewhat unique inclinations to the perfectionist consciousness of *zi*. Like in a furtherance of Chidi Osuagwu's (2002:333) discourse of the etymology and morphemes of *eziokwu*, which marks the *zi* as a constant morpheme used in words generation in Igbo language.

Jerome Okonkwo (2021:45) conceives *zi* as “a constant word in Igbo language use, no matter where it is part of any other word-formation building and stands always as the efficacy per se for human, pragmatic, relational and operational 'teacher-teaching-knowledge (wisdom)' actions and activity-modes for Igbo philosophy of life, the world and life (*uwa-ndu*) existential showcases. Accordingly, *zi* becomes a perfectionist consciousness morpheme in Igbo language, which constantly portrays same significance in words constructions; notwithstanding the varying positions of the *zi* in such words formulations and speech functions.

The inner and ontological nature of *zi* shows an optimal and perfectionist consciousness inhering in most Igbo words and varying constructs. This perfectionist consciousness emerges in verified forms as denizens of certain Igbo concepts. Their internal structure (morph) and how they are put together depicts constant optimal and perfectionist consciousness such as: Totality/entirety, replenishment, imperatives (commands), envoi and missioning, teaching/saying and preaching, directional, correctional, properness, immediacy/instantaneity, questioning, and disclosure/ revelation, etc.

These are complementary to Otakpo's (2009:34) view of *Zi* (as portraying- Show, to let appear, to open, to let see or the let hear) and Okonkwo's (2021:37) regulators of *eziokwu* (the way, the road, the method, and the rule), which are the elemental denizens-moderators for the truth conditions in Igbo language. *zi* is a morpheme for construing words that signifies totality and entirety. As a perfectionist morpheme, *zi* appears in two separate

classes: As a base (or root-word) and as affixes (attached to words- prefix and suffix).

According to Jerome Okonkwo (2021:37-40), as a base or root-word, the morpheme *zi* gives formed words perfectionist significance in Igbo words; totality and entirety. In this instance, *zi* is the base-word to which morphemes are affixed as prefix and suffix. Irrespective of the affixation, it retains same perfectionist constant, as in: *zichaa* (finish showing/messaging); *ziga/zipu/zipucha* (send out wholly); *Ha nile zi?* (All of them?) ... Imperative. The morpheme *zi* in some formations accepts imperative forms and may or may not have affixes, as in: *zi m* (show me); here ordering or demanding; *zikwa* (endeavour to show/message). Envoi/Missioning. As a root-morpheme, *zi* in this formulation assumes mission-ing constructs and significance. It comes out fully as a verb or noun, as in: *I zi* (to show); *Ozi* (message, news, tidings); *Ezi* (be messaged); *Zie* (send); *Zipu* (send out); *Zikwa* (ensure/endeavour to message).

Preach/teach/say. The morpheme *Zi* in this formulation assumes basement for saying, preaching and teaching. It accepts affixes that do not change its perfectionist consciousness, as in: *Ezi* (to say, preach); *Ezi ozi* (deliver/make speech); *Ozioma* (good message). Directional. The morpheme *zi* often either assumes a root or affix in perfectionist consciousness aiming at proper direction, as in: *ziputa* (come out forth, send forth); *Ntuzi* (pointing properly, directing well); *Atuzi* (dictating, identifying, and demonstrating); *Nkuzi* (panel beat properly). Correctional. In this formulation, *zi* plays a conjoint base-morpheme, signifying making right or the correctional, as in: *mezie* (do well, make well); *Nyazi* (to bend well); *Gwazie* (tell correctly, say correctly); *Dozie* (keep well, make well). Properness. *zi* as a morpheme of perfectionist consciousness often assume affixes which significances are adverbial, adjectival and gerundial, as in: *Lezie* (take good care, look well, watch properly); *Ihazi* (arrange well, organize, set up); *Gozie* (invoke nicely, bless); *Agozi* (blessing well)... Questioning. *zi* is also used in forming questions, to get perfect answers. In this instance, the morpheme takes varied positions, as in: *I jeziri?* (Did you go?); *I meziri?* (Did you do?); *I ruziri?* (Did you work); *I biaziri?* (Did you come?). Disclosure/revelation. *zi* here is used to form words signifying unveiling, as in: *zi* (show, reveal, expose, etc); *zi mu* (show me, reveal/expose to me), etc. As a morpheme of disclosure, *zi* in modern linguistic variation, is also understood as *gosi* (show, unveil, reveal) and also assumes the act of permitting the other to totally perceive something that is formerly hidden or closed. It is the aura of understanding the Igbo notion of truth.

However, the same word is used for the verb, to teach, *nkuzi*. In the very real sense, to teach is to knock, straighten or shape the pupil, student or subject aright. This time it is not with harmer or stone, but with knowledge, instruction, wisdom and good example. To educate is concretely to put into a person the proper shape, right behaviour and adequately effective way of life and performance of duties. Education in this sense of *Nkuzi* prepares one for a sound professional role.

From this *Nkuzi* terminology, teaching is a life-long task. One will never stop learning,

being straightened in behaviour and activities. This explains why G.E. Igbiwu (2004:46) describes teaching as the conscious and deliberate effort by a teacher to impart information, knowledge, skill et cetera on pupils with the intention to induce learning. He further states that teaching is an occupation engaged upon by teachers to produce a change in behaviour of the learners. It is the guidance of pupils through planned activities so that they may acquire the richest learning possible from their experience.

Accordingly, Pantaleon Iroegbu (2005:76) states that education (formal and informal) imparts skills and capabilities and thereby equips one to perform well in all spheres of life. Education is such an important component of societal life and activity that no people who wish themselves well will joke with. This is because the future and wellbeing of a people are centered around proper education. In other words, education is a door opener to the realization of needs and wants.

Teaching cannot take place without the teacher. This explains why Iroegbu (2005:80) gives first place to teaching profession and the ethics of teaching. He uses the two Igbo words, *nkuzi* and *onye nkuzi* to argue his thought;

Knowledge given in teaching by teachers has three basic foci: information, formation and reformation. It is information in that it is a communication of ideas and facts that are meant to be used to achieve some goals. It is formation in that those facts given in information are destined to constitute the mental and personality structure of the recipient. They make him or her behave this way or that, thereby structuring the person's way of life. Teaching also has reformative function in the aspect that it helps to change already formed ways and manners of behaviour. Teaching is not just activity in which knowledge or skills are acquired, but activity that shapes the behaviour of a person into generally acceptable manner...

Consequently, education reforms and reconstructs humanity/personality. It makes a new; and all things being equal, a better person for oneself and for the society in which one lives and operates. Pantaleon Iroegbu (2005: 84) explains once more:

Teaching is the *kpim* of education and the word is onomatopoeic in origin. It indicates the sound of a hard substance when struck with instrument. When one hits the hard core of something the sound *kpimis* heard. From this re-sounding resonance, *kpim* comes to mean the hard core and essential meaning of something. *kpimis* the essence, kernel or innermost substance of a given reality. It is the quintessence, that is the thingness of a thing and the somethingness of something. A

proper education should have teaching.

The implication of this is that teaching is the core aspect of education and the goal of education is the provision of peoples' needs: individual, social and communal. These needs include the necessities of life and other desired values that a people aim at for their flourishing and satisfaction.

An Exposition of Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care

Nel Noddings, an American educator, philosopher, and feminist, is **one of the principal figures in the development of the ethics of care. Her approach offers a powerful alternative to dominant moral theories such as Kantian deontology and utilitarianism. First articulated in her seminal work *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* Noddings' (1984:8) theory centers on relational interdependence and emotional engagement rather than abstract principles or duties. At its core, Noddings' ethics of care is grounded in relational ontology—the view that individuals are fundamentally interconnected rather than atomistic. Unlike traditional ethical theories that emphasize impartiality and universality, care ethics emphasizes the contextual, interpersonal, and emotional dimensions of moral life.**

She explains 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 argues that a caring connection, or a relationship in which people engage in a caring manner, is ethically important to humanity.

Caring is a relationship between those providing care and those being cared for. Caring should be the foundation for ethical decision-making. Caring is the foundation of education. Teachers develop a trust relationship to establish and maintain caring relations. Everyone has natural caring, a longing for goodness that arises out of the experience or memory of being cared for. A caring person 'is one who fairly regularly establishes caring relations and, when appropriate, maintains them over time.' Caring involves connection between the carer and the cared-for and a degree of reciprocity; both gain and both give from the encounter.

Care ethics, long identified with feminism, arose out of criticisms of traditional psychological theories of moral development. From these traditional perspectives, women have been seen as morally inferior. Nodding got influenced by Feminists like Carol Gilligan, who has critiqued such frameworks as masculine-identified, attributing their assertion of women's moral inferiority to sexist bias.

Nel Noddings defines caring as a relation involving two parties: the one-caring and the cared-for. She describes the caring relation as one between one-caring and one cared-for; hence **the ethical ideal arises in us as we care and are cared for, and it guides us to maintain and enhance caring.** The primary action of the one-caring is engrossment in the reality of the one cared-for, such that she is motivated by the goals of his best self (2003:48ff)

Moral goodness arises from the engrossment and motivational displacement that the one-caring experiences for the cared-for. Ethics, in this model, is not about rule-following, but about maintaining caring relationships.

The phenomenological analysis of caring reveals the part each participant plays. The one-caring (or carer) is first of all attentive. This attention, which is called “engrossment” in caring is receptive; it receives what the cared-for is feeling and trying to express. It is not merely diagnostic, measuring the cared-for against some pre-established ideal. Rather, it opens the carer to motivational displacement.

In a caring relation or encounter, the cared-for recognizes the caring and responds in some detectable manner. An infant smiles and wriggles in response to its mother's caregiving. A student may acknowledge her teacher's caring directly, with verbal gratitude, or simply pursue her own project more confidently. The receptive teacher can see that her caring has been received by monitoring her students' responses. Without an affirmative response from the cared-for, we cannot call an encounter or relation caring.

First, as we listen to our students, we gain their trust and, in an on-going relation of care and trust, it is more likely that students will accept what we try to teach. They will not see our efforts as “interference” but, rather, as cooperative work proceeding from the integrity of the relation. Second, as we engage our students in dialogue, we learn about their needs, working habits, interests, and talents. We gain important ideas from them about how to build our lessons and plan for their individual progress. Finally, as we acquire knowledge about our students' needs and realize how much more than the standard curriculum is needed, we are inspired to increase our own competence. (2002:207ff)

Noddings has applied her ethics of care extensively in the field of education, asserting that caring relationships between teachers and students are foundational to learning. She also applies care ethics to social and political life, though cautiously, warning against scaling the model indiscriminately. The ethics of care works best in close or networked relationships, though Noddings acknowledges its potential to inform broader policies by cultivating caring attitudes and social structures that support caregiving.

The concept of ethics of care in education creates a nurturing and supportive environment that empowers students to become responsible, empathetic, and caring individuals who actively contribute to the well-being of others and society as a whole. The concept of value is a topic covered by the philosophical area of ethics. The moral principles and laws concerning right and wrong that shape teachers' behavior, attitudes, and goals are known as the ethics of the teaching profession. In educational environments, it is crucial to foster a supporting and caring atmosphere, according to an ethics of care. It places a focus on creating strong bonds between educators and students in order to promote emotional health, trust, and respect.

According to her (2002:96), engrossment, compassion, reciprocity and motivational displacement were the crucial elements of the theory of care. At bottom all caring involves engrossment and engrossment refers to how the person providing care perceives and addresses the wants of the person for whom they are providing care. When a teacher and student have a loving relationship, the caring teacher emotionally invests in the learner. 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 (1995:675-690) intentionally uses 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;

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”

Furthermore, 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. Empathy and motivational displacement are related to engrossment. In an ethical caring relationship, a sympathetic teacher sympathizes 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.

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.

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 carers 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. 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. Ethical caring relationships can take many different forms, there are numerous methods to reciprocate and complete them.

According to the theory of care, (2003:109) 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 ... 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.

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. 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.

Nel Nodding's argues that education from the care perspective has four key components: modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. In modeling, education is concerned with the growth of people as cares and cared-fors. Unsurprisingly, from a care viewpoint, educators are worried about how individuals develop as caretakers and those being cared for. Though moral reasoning is acknowledged to be vital, they are not mainly concerned in it, unlike cognitive developmentalists. Teachers need to demonstrate what it means to care via their actions.

Dialogue is such a crucial component of caring that we could not demonstrate care without engaging in it, as Nel Nodding's has noted. Additionally, since care may take many various forms, it is crucial to discuss it openly and explore it. Thus, it can aid individuals in evaluating and better understanding their own interactions and methods. Crucially, dialogue contributes to the growth of cared-fors.

In practice, Nel Nodding's (2003:206ff) argues that the experiences in which we immerse ourselves tend to produce a 'mentality'. 'If we want to produce people who will care for another, then it makes sense to give students practice in caring and reflection on that practice. In confirmation, it is believed that this specific element distinguishes caring from

other methods of moral instruction.

Nel Noddings ethics of care in education creates a nurturing and supportive environment that empowers students to become responsible, empathic, and caring individuals who actively contribute to the well-being of others and society as a whole.

Connection between Igbo understanding of Teaching (*Nkuzi*) with Nodding's Philosophy

The Igbo concept and understanding of *nkuzi* centers on knocking, straightening or shaping the pupil, student or subject aright. In other words, it is axiological and knowledge-based. As education is value-base, and ethics is axiologically and foundationally centered on care, that is, it concretely puts into a person the proper shape, right behaviour and adequately effective way of life and performance of duties. One will never stop learning, being straightened in behavior, knowledge and activities.

In Noddings philosophy, caring relationships become the foundation of education. In her view, the role of a teacher is not just to transmit knowledge, but to care for students as whole persons—emotionally, socially, and intellectually. In other words, the teacher is not merely an instructor, but a "carer" whose responsibility is to engage in a genuine relationship with each student.

Additionally, in her ethics of care, Noddings describes two roles in a caring relationship:

the one-caring (e.g., the teacher) and the cared-for (e.g., the student). In education, the teacher becomes the one-caring, attentive to the needs, interests, and well-being of each student. This relationship is reciprocal, meaning the cared-for (student) responds in a way that acknowledges the care being offered. In practice, a caring teacher listens, responds empathetically, and adjusts their teaching to support students' needs and aspirations.

However, Noddings' philosophy promotes a relational approach to pedagogy, where the focus is not only on content delivery but also on building trust, respect, and understanding between teacher and student. This approach emphasizes dialogue, not just monologue. Teachers show authentic concern for students' perspectives and experiences. For instance, instead of rigidly following a syllabus, a caring teacher might explore topics that resonate with students' lives or emotions.

Noddings believes that moral education happens best when teachers model caring behavior. Through their actions, teachers demonstrate how to care for others, fostering empathy and compassion in students. This therefore implies that teachers serve as role models of ethical relationships, showing what it means to be attentive, responsible, and responsive.

The Relevance of Noddings Ethics of Care

Nel Noddings' **ethics of care** is highly relevant to teaching, offering a compassionate and relational approach to education. Her theory emphasizes the importance of caring relationships, empathy, and responsiveness over impersonal rules or abstract principles.

Nel Noddings' ethics of care presents a powerful alternative to traditional ethical theories based on justice, rights, or rules. Her approach emphasizes the moral significance of *caring relationships*, particularly the interaction between the "one-caring" (caregiver) and the "cared-for" (recipient). In the educational context, caring denotes the relationship between students and teacher, rather than being limited to those who offer care. In other words, this theory prioritizes empathy, attentiveness, and emotional connection over impersonal objectivity. Shankar Mondal and Sudeb Ghosh (2025: 52) explain:

Nodding's theory of care ethics emphasizes the importance of relationships and empathy, advocating for the nurturing of student's emotional and intellectual well-being. In the field of education, her teaching philosophy focuses on establishing a nurturing classroom atmosphere and encouraging significant relationships between teachers and students.

However, a major strength of Noddings' ethics is its emphasis on relationships. In other words, care places great importance on the specific psychological aspects of independent subjects in their relationships with others and *education is fundamentally relational* practical relevance in real-life teaching. It further urges teachers to understand students as whole people—intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Shankar Mondal and Sudeb Ghosh (2025:53ff) explain the importance of relationship:

Child-centric education highlights the significance of empathy, compassion, and responsiveness in guiding moral behaviour. Nodding's educational philosophy posits that caring is the foundation of morality and ethical decision-making. Concern for the preservation of children's lives and their individual development constitutes a powerful curiosity about moral education and the ethical life.

However, the teacher-student relationship is central, and ethical teaching begins with genuine care for students. This creates a learning environment where students feel seen, valued, and supported. Students are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and open to learning when they trust their teacher and feel emotionally safe. According to Adhikari and Saha (2021:34):

Nel Noddings' theory of care seeks to assist individuals in moral thinking and behaviour through caring relationships and affirmative exchanges, steering them toward a lifelong

path of moral excellence and care. Noddings posits that caring equates to moral action, and that the process of learning to care is both lengthy and progressive. It seeks to assist individuals in moral thinking and behavior through caring relationships and affirmative exchanges, steering them toward a lifelong path of moral excellence and care.

This perspective is especially beneficial in creating inclusive, supportive classroom environments that nurture not only academic success but also emotional and moral growth. M. Ammarul (2024:42) agrees:

Students are more likely to engage meaningfully and cultivate an appreciation for learning when they sense their worth and supported in the classroom. A caring ethics promotes a learning environment that is friendly, accepting, and encourages taking risks, allowing students to express themselves freely.

Similarly, her ethics of care encourages educators to consider students' individual needs, contexts, and voices. Rather than treating students as passive recipients of knowledge, teachers become responsive facilitators of growth. In other words, promotes personalized learning, accommodates diversity, and addresses social-emotional as well as academic development.

Moral education through modeling. Noddings believes teachers should model caring behavior. By consistently demonstrating kindness, patience, and empathy, teachers implicitly teach students how to care for others. **Hence, it** fosters moral development in students and creates a respectful, cooperative classroom culture.

Noddings emphasizes the adaptation of curriculum to align with students' personal interests, not be forced. In other words, her ethics challenge traditional structures of schooling that prioritize grades, competition, and standardization over well-being and human connection. In addressing student needs, teachers may recognize the necessity of creating a differentiated curriculum, as their close interactions with students will highlight the varying needs and interests of those students.

It encourages reflective practice. Teachers are urged to reflect not only on their methods but also on their relationships with students. Care ethics promotes continuous self-awareness about how one's actions affect others. Leads to more ethical, compassionate decision-making in everyday teaching practice.

Moreover, the theory promotes integrity and moral education by example. Teachers model care through their interactions, thus teaching students to value compassion, respect, and

responsibility. This contrasts with more abstract or authoritarian moral instruction that may lack emotional engagement.

Care theorists would add that this “integrity” belongs not so much to the teacher as individual but to the teacher-in-relation. The caring teacher strives first to establish and maintain caring relations, and these relations exhibit an integrity that provides a foundation for everything teacher and student do together. The matter of competence, it might be said that caring implies competence... teachers in caring relations are continually pressed to gain greater competence. The caring relation is essential as a starting point and a continuous framework of support, but it is not enough by itself to ensure competent teaching (2023:4)

Recognition of emotions and context: Where traditional theories often view emotions as obstacles to moral reasoning, Noddings sees them as central. Her focus on engrossment and motivational displacement highlights the moral importance of emotional responsiveness and attentiveness to others. Hence, Shankar Mondal and Sudeb Ghosh (2021:34) add:

Nodding's theory revolves around the connection in the middle of the “one-caring” (instructor) and the “cared-for” (students). Education encompasses more than the mere transfer of knowledge; it is also about cultivating relationships that foster learning and development. A caring teacher customizes teaching methods to meet the individual needs, interests, and challenges of every student, promoting a sense of belonging and self-esteem.

Her ethics of care therefore places a strong emphasis on the value of fostering connections and compassion for others. This method encourages children to think about the needs and feelings of their peers, instructors, and community members while teaching them the importance of showing compassion for others.

Educational and Social Applications: Noddings has shown how care ethics can reshape schooling, policy, and public life by fostering communities that value mutual support and moral development through caring relationships.

Her ethics of care pushes pupils to accept accountability for their activities and the effects they have on others. In other words, ethics of caring in education pushes students to take ownership of their actions. This encourages accountability and instills in kids the value of

making moral choices.

Enhances the learning settings. Students are more likely to participate in meaningful ways and grow a passion for learning when they feel encouraged and cared for in the classroom. An ethics of caring encourages a friendly, accepting, and risk-taking learning atmosphere where students feel free to express themselves.

The development of interpersonal skills including communication, active listening, and conflict resolution is a key component of an ethics of care education programme. These abilities are crucial for achieving academic achievement as well as for forming positive connections and thriving in a variety of social contexts.

Promotes social justice and equality: An ethics of care places a strong emphasis on the significance of identifying and correcting injustices and inequities. It encourages students to question accepted beliefs and seek to build a society that is more compassionate and just.

6. Supports holistic development: An ethics of care recognises that education encompasses students' social, emotional, and moral development in addition to intellectual success. It strives to promote students' total wellbeing, including their emotional resiliency, sense of purpose, and ethical awareness. It takes into account the full person.

Evaluation

Nel Noddings' ethics of care is a significant philosophical approach that has had a profound impact on educational theory and practice. Developed in response to traditional male-dominated ethical theories that emphasize justice, rights, and rules.

Noddings' care ethics prioritizes relationships, empathy, and responsiveness to others. In the context of teaching, her ideas remain deeply relevant, particularly as schools and educators strive to create inclusive, compassionate, and student-centered learning environments.

At the heart of Noddings' ethics is the idea that caring relationships are fundamental to moral and educational life. She argues that the teacher-student relationship should be rooted in receptivity, attention, and concern for the well-being of the student. In today's classrooms, where students face increasing mental health challenges, diverse learning needs, and social pressures, this relational approach promotes a more humane and responsive pedagogy.

Noddings contends that moral education cannot be effectively taught through abstract principles alone. Instead, students learn to care by being cared for. Teachers model ethical behavior by demonstrating genuine concern for their students, and in doing so, create a moral climate conducive to learning and ethical development.

Noddings has been critical of rigid curricula and high-stakes testing that often ignore the

individual needs and interests of students. She advocates for an education system that listens to students' voices, fosters autonomy, and adapts to their emotional and intellectual needs.

Noddings' work emerges from a feminist perspective that values traditionally “feminine” qualities such as empathy and nurturing—qualities historically undervalued in professional and academic settings. Her ethics of care offers a counterbalance to competitive, achievement-driven models of schooling.

Conclusion

Nel Noddings' ethics of care remains a deeply relevant and transformative philosophy for teaching. It encourages educators to view students not just as learners, but as whole persons worthy of compassion, attention, and respect. In a time when education faces increasing pressures from standardization and social inequality, her vision offers a powerful reminder of the moral and relational dimensions at the heart of teaching.

Nel Noddings' ethics of care offers a transformative vision of morality—one rooted in the lived realities of human relationships rather than detached rationalism. It challenges dominant paradigms by highlighting the moral value of attentiveness, empathy, and the desire to maintain caring relationships.

While the theory has limitations, particularly in its applicability to large-scale social justice or impersonal moral dilemmas, its strength lies in rehumanizing ethics and affirming the moral significance of care in both private and public life. Ultimately, Noddings provides a crucial corrective to overly abstract ethical systems, reminding us that moral life is relational at its core.

Nel Noddings' ethics of care represents a transformative approach to moral philosophy, emphasizing empathy, relationality, and the moral centrality of care. While it departs significantly from traditional moral theories, it provides a compelling framework for understanding human morality in everyday life. Its strength lies in acknowledging the emotional and relational nature of ethical life—elements too often overlooked in conventional theories.

Nel Noddings' ethics of care is profoundly relevant in today's educational settings. It calls for a shift from rigid, transactional models of teaching to one grounded in empathy, connection, and responsiveness. By prioritizing care, educators not only enhance academic outcomes but also contribute to the formation of emotionally intelligent and morally grounded individuals. This approach is especially valuable in addressing challenges such as bullying, student disengagement, and the mental health crisis in schools.

Nel Noddings' ethics of care also offers a transformative vision of education rooted in empathy, compassion, and authentic human connection. By centering relationships and

emotional understanding, her theory elevates the role of the teacher from knowledge-transmitter to moral guide and nurturer. While not without its limitations, particularly in highly structured or impersonal educational settings, the ethics of care remains deeply relevant in addressing contemporary challenges such as student well-being, moral development, and inclusive education. Ultimately, Noddings reminds us that at the heart of good teaching lies a simple but powerful principle: *to care is to teach well*.

Bibliography

- Adhikari, A., Saha, B. “Life, Works and Philosophy of Nel Noddings” *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*, 2021,10(8(2)).
- Ammarul, Md., Exploring the Educational Contributions of Nel Noddings, *International Journal of Research Culture Society* Volume - 8, Issue - 7, July, 2024.
- Baelz, Peter., *Ethics and Belief*, London: McGraw Hill, 1977.
- Conslaves, M.A., *Fagothey's Right and Reason: Ethics in Theory and Practice*, Columbus: Merrill Publishing Company, 1986.
- de Finance, Joseph., *Ethical Inquiry*, Roma: Gregorian University, 1991.
- Frankena, *Ethics*, www.google.com, assessed 23rd march, 2013.
- Igbiwu, G.E. *Basic Philosophy of Education*, (Agbor: Krisbec Publications, 2004.
- Ikea, Chidimma., *Understanding Ethics*, Owerri: Celbez, 2018.
- Irabor, Benson Peter, Olufowobi, Oludare Okikiola, “An Exploration of Pantaleon Iroegbu's Pedagogy of *Nkuziology* for Contemporary Africa” *OWIJOPPA* VOL. 4, NO. 3, 2020.
- Iroegbu, P., “Philosophy of Education: Ethics of Teaching profession” in P. Iroegbu & A. Echekube, (eds.), *Kpim of Morality: General, Special & Professional*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2005.
- Mackenzie, A., *A Manual of Ethics*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1980.
- Mondal, Shankar., Ghosh, Sudeb., “Revisiting the Pedagogical Aspects of Nel Noddings: A Critical Study”, *The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal*. January-February, 2025. Vol. 3. Issue 1.
- Noddings, N., *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education. (1st ed.)* Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press. 1984.
- Noddings, N. *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education.* (1st ed.) New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1992.
- Noddings, N. Excellence as a Guide to Educational Conversation. *Teachers College Record*, 1993, 94(4), 730-743.
- Noddings, N. “Complexity in Caring and Empathy”, *Abstracta*, 6(2), 6-12. 18. 2013.
- Okonkwo, Jerome I., *Zi: The Conditionality for Knowledge and Truth in Igbo Philosophy of Language*. Owerri: Applause Multi-Sector Ltd, 2021.
- Osuagwu, Chidi., “Dynamics of Truth within Igbo Cosmology” in *International Symposium. Religion in a World of Change: African Ancestral religion, Islam and Christianity*. Owerri: Whelan Research Academy, 2002.
- Otakpo, Nkeonye. *Justice in Igbo Culture*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd, 2009.