Care Ethics in Universities: Beyond an Easy “Add and Stir” Solution

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Abstract

The work of Nel Noddings has represented a profound challenge to androcentric thought in philosophy of education. The paper poses the question of whether care ethics could be something to be added to university policies or not. To pursue this end, it explores whether the addition of ethics of care in university policies would transform research orientation, university administration, and the entire learning experience. The paper then turns to the implications of Noddings’ meaning of a care ethics path to address morality as applied to university settings. Finally, it concludes by offering care ethics as an alternative to traditional ethical theories for its strengths, converging on the real possibility of producing better adults.

Keywords: care ethics, university, sustainability, feminist epistemologies, diversity

Éthique des soins dans les universités: au-delà d'une solution facile “ajouter et remuer”

Résumé

Le travail de Nel Noddings a représenté un défi profond à la pensée androcentrique

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dans la philosophie de l'éducation. Le document pose la question de savoir si l'éthique des soins pourrait être un élément à ajouter ou non aux politiques universitaires. Pour poursuivre son exploration, il examine si l'ajout de l'éthique des soins dans les politiques universitaires transformerait l'orientation de la recherche, l'administration universitaire et l'ensemble de l'expérience d'apprentissage. L'article se penche ensuite sur les implications de la signification de Noddings d'une voie d'éthique des soins pour aborder la moralité appliquée aux milieux universitaires. Enfin, il conclut en offrant l'éthique des soins comme une alternative aux théories éthiques traditionnelles pour ses forces convergeant sur la possibilité réelle de produire de meilleurs adultes.

Mots-clés: éthique des soins, université, durabilité, épistémologies féministes, diversité

La ética del cuidado en las universidades: más allá de una solución fácil de “quita y pon”

Resumen

El trabajo de Nel Noddings ha representado un profundo desafío para el pensamiento androcéntrico en filosofía de la educación. El documento plantea la cuestión de si la ética del cuidado podría agregarse a las políticas universitarias. Para lograr este objetivo, se explora si la incorporación de la ética del cuidado en las políticas universitarias transformaría la orientación de la investigación, la administración universitaria y la experiencia de aprendizaje en su totalidad. Más adelante, el documento analiza las implicaciones del significado de la ética del cuidado de Noddings como un vía para abordar la moralidad aplicada a los entornos universitarios. Finalmente, el artículo concluye ofreciendo la ética del cuidado como una alternativa a las teorías éticas tradicionales en base a sus puntos fuertes que convergen en la posibilidad real de formar mejores adultos.

Palabras clave: ética del cuidado, universidad, sostenibilidad, epistemologías feministas, diversidad

Introduction

Universities provide people with professional and personal skills and capabilities. They have access to large concentrations of young and curious people who are passionate, creative and have a desire for a better world (SDSN, 2017). Universities can influence how global and local development is driven. The ways of being at universities, teaching future generations, and developing and transferring knowledge have a profound role in cultural and socioeconomic transformations. Literature has appeared in recent

decades about ethics of care as a model for seeking global change, which has recently been documented (Collins, 2015; Okano, 2016). Ethics of care scholars have influenced fields of study such as philosophy, political and social theory, economics, pedagogics, and psychology. The purpose of this article is to explore ethics of care as an eligible paradigm for university settings.

The work of Nel Noddings represented a profound challenge to androcentric thought in philosophy of education almost a quarter of a century ago, and has been developed considerably since then (Lynch, 2007). Her publications have been well received among the English-speaking public and have become stimulating internationally, including in the Spanish context¹ (Vazquez-Verdera, 2009). Noddings' philosophy of education is inspirational for developing theories and practices that are better suited to the current needs of a citizenry in transition to making more sustainable realities for the lives of people and the planet. Noddings' focus on caring is rooted in an account of human development that assumes interdependence and nurturing, by which educational institutions can be articulated to be able to understand care as a responsible response. Sustainable human development needs the individual and collective management of the citizenry to stop being organized in ways that disregard care for the person, families and the planet.² Nel Noddings' work can also inspire universities to work together to build a culture that universalizes care ethics and fosters an "ecological cosmopolitanism" (Noddings, 2012a) based on conceptions other than the patriarchal pacts that placed womanhood outside of citizenry.

Nel Noddings' philosophy of education has been developed mainly in the field of compulsory education, but very little has been done for higher education. In this paper, I aim to link Noddings' ethics of care to the role universities can play in human and sustainable development. A number of authors have done interesting fieldwork using an ethics of care perspective in university settings (see e.g., McBee, 2007; Bozalek, McMillan, Marshall, November, Daniels, & Sylvester, 2014; Scott, 2015; Done, Murphy & Knowler, 2016; Cantini, 2017; Motta & Bennett, 2018; Bergland, 2018; Lu, 2018). The paper poses the question of whether or not care ethics is something to be added to university policies. To pursue this end, it explores whether the addition of ethics of care in university policies would transform research orientation, university administration, and the entire learning experience. The paper then turns to the implications of Noddings' meaning of a care ethics path to address morality as applied to university settings. Finally, it concludes by offering care ethics as an alternative to traditional ethical theories for its strengths, converging on the real possibility of producing better adults.

Whether the Addition of Noddings' Ethics of Care Can Apply or Not to University Settings

In Noddings' epistemological framework, the evolution of morality through maternal path relies on infant bonding and the cognitive and emotional capacities to respond in the basic experience of mothering. Providing protection and meeting needs are the roots of an ethical caring that has been present in the female experience for thousands of years (Noddings, 2010). Caring is usually understood as a set of dispositions to respond positively in interpersonal relations. Teaching, as a fundamentally relational form of work, includes a deeply implicit care dimension that can surface through the learning-teaching relationship.

Authors such as Fiona Robinson (1999) warned that if care ethics is understood simply as a "useful addition" to our vocabulary, it will always retain its image as part of the private and feminine sphere of the household. There is a historical link between care and women's work that simultaneously devalues this human capacity and decreases the likelihood of caring as a civic responsibility. The link between caring responsibilities and women's work also means that care elements of professional teaching practices are often unrecognized and under-valued. This is especially pronounced in pedagogic work with older students in higher age phases of educational systems, where the emotional and bodily aspects of teaching are separated out and dismissed from the business of teaching and learning (Warrin & Gannerud, 2014).

Therefore, it may be wondered whether the addition of caring vocabulary and affective reasoning can apply to university settings. Nowadays, universities and academics in general are aware that there is a gender blindness that reinforces the link between neoliberal expectations and a re-gendering society. There is enough empirical evidence to show that because teaching is associated with the relational, affective and feminine, it has been either scorned or romanticized. Women today are in academics, but can their presence transform the way knowledge is addressed? Moreover, regardless of gender issues, do current universities tend to privilege neoliberal principles and not care about transforming unsustainable patterns of behaving, producing, and consuming which are contributing to exclusion and violence?

Thinking of ethics of care as a strategic addition to the mainstream model can lead us to assume that adding a dash of caring vocabulary can be seen as an easy "add and stir" solution. Students, teachers, staff, and relatives can be quite comfortable with it, especially when it offers the prospect of a safe setting, easy working environment, and optimistic job finding opportunities. Caring, in this case, is understood as something to be added to a university model developed in part to satisfy the needs of the labor market and the individual fears of people and their relatives. At some universities, adding care vocabulary through expressions such as "we take care of our students" while offering a safe and clean environment, sports, and recreational

activities, or advisors for finding a job, may seem to be one of the ways to include care ethics.

The notion of care proves particularly useful for understanding the complex ways in which universities, not only private, struggle to measure teaching effectiveness, as well as the quality of their services, in a general (more or less self-) auditing context, as well as to market themselves in an increasingly competitive market. But taking care of students can mean effectively controlling them, as well as controlling the people working in this context, bringing care almost to its opposite end (Cantini, 2017, p. 263).

Within a context in which university degrees are increasingly seen as a commodity and students as customers, caring vocabulary can easily become an accomplice in the maintenance of current conditions. In this scenario, caring is used as a commodity and as a part of the branding process of institutions. Neoliberal thinking promotes a euphoric belief in the efficiency of the market and tries to penetrate into universities by producing atomized individuals and altering the management, funding structure, and autonomy of “academic institutions.” The superficial fulfillment of externally imposed targets is keeping us from deep reflexive thought, engaged research, joy in writing and working with concepts, ideas, and materials.

Caring as an Alternative Path, Not Something to Be Added

Teaching has long been considered a caring profession, but it was not until branding found caring to be strategically useful as an appeal that this discourse began to insinuate itself. Only very recently has caring vocabulary been heard in university settings. A great deal of empirical research demonstrates that the language we use models the society we are trying to establish and maintain. However, when caring is simply added to the dominant discourse, it can easily be turned into a form of paternalistic control, as reported in the case study of a private university in Egypt by Daniele Cantini (2017). For example, when students’ needs are determined by external factors such as families’ expectations or fears, adding caring vocabulary may become a mechanism of control³:

Caring for students, both on campus and in dormitories, is particularly close to controlling them, or at least making sure that they do not use the spaces in any alternative way. Rigid rules exist regarding, for example, food, drink, and opening hours. While the curfew for girls almost coincides with the university’s closing time, boys are allowed slightly more freedom – the gates of their dorm close at 11 pm during the academic year, at midnight during the summer, and at 1 am on weekends (Thursdays and Fridays) (Cantini, 2017, p. 269).

Caring, as understood from Nel Noddings (2001b), is not something to be added and stirred. Noddings' framework is not virtue ethics. She starts from a phenomenological analysis of caring, which brings her to considering care ethics as a relational ethics: "Care ethics concentrate more on the relation, virtue ethics on the moral agent" (Noddings, 2012c, p. 236). Relational use of the caring practice emphasizes the specific interpersonal relationship and situation through which one learns professional ethics and citizenship ethics. Care theorists focus their attention on "caring relations which come first, and it is thought that the virtues develop almost naturally out of these relations" (Noddings, 2002a, p. 5). This is precisely the perspective that makes care ethics able to transform the meaning we give to the policies that manage the funding of research, the rules that govern administrative processes at universities, and the learning experiences at universities in all their dimensions.

The way to understand the practice of caring from the relational perspective contrasts sharply with the way defended by those who understand care as a virtue. In this case, from the traditional paradigm of the education of character, one would act in favor of what one understands the other needs, without stopping to listen to what the other party is asking for. The paradigm that considers care as a virtue acts on the basis of what is generally accepted as necessary, even if it is not for the specific person we are relating to (Noddings, 2001a). In contrast, the value of ethics of care sets the centrality of response attitude, to twist the angle for addressing what would be considered an issue that requires everyone's collaboration. Receptive attention can make the difference and remind us which purposes are to be fulfilled.

For a relationship—even a very brief encounter—to be caring, the caring must be received. The consciousness of being cared for shows up somehow in the recipient of care—in overt recognition, an attitude of response, increased activity in the direction of an endorsed project, or just a general glow of well-being. This response then becomes part of what the carer receives in new moments of attention. If this analysis is correct, it is easy to understand why so many students complain that their teachers "don't care"....Can coercion be a sign of caring? (Noddings, 2002a, p. 28).

When authorities for what we have accomplished or failed to accomplish force us to use coercion, attention is focused entirely on doing one's job, with little or no concern about its effects on those it impacts. It is worth having a clear vision and remembering that accountability and coercion do not belong to the deep structure of educational language at all. In education settings, the purposes that are to be fulfilled are related to responsibility, not accountability. Moreover, authoritarian and punitive measures instituted to control do not encourage people to discuss issues openly or help them construct and maintain caring relations from the relational perspective. Using coercion

with students, staff, teachers, and administrators is the use of an unnecessary instrument from the care perspective. As we think about shaping our universities to promote genuine caring, it is essential that teachers and administrators respond with consideration and intelligence to others and their demands. In other words, the importance of answering the concerns of students, colleagues, staff, or citizens with an “I am here” is a keystone in achievement and motivation. Caring is not “I’m just doing my job”; our first responsibility is to help students and the whole society flourish, not to only help employers or funding agencies fulfill their short-term desires.

Caring as an alternative path to morality is based on the ethical experience of the impossibility of turning a deaf ear to the other’s call. The manifestation of caring cannot be coercion (or imposition of what others deem necessary), but, rather, trust in receiving the help one needs and of being taken in and listened to, even in silence. Caring must originate in the needs stated by the person receiving the care, either expressly or through their behavior, but not in the needs inferred from financial or cultural demands or any others that try to direct the work of teaching. True caring consists of listening and responding, not of imposing measures to comply with needs inferred by external agents.

The coercion used in attentive love really is different. It is open to negotiation, it pays attention to expressed needs even as it presses for inferred needs, and it weighs harms and goods and stands ready to back off if harms threaten to overwhelm goods. Attentive love is direct-contact work, and it is the function of public policy to establish the conditions under which it can flourish (Noddings, 2002b, p. 135).

Ethics of care theorists have explored this issue through empirical experiences in university contexts. There are studies that show that many women teachers prioritize an ethics of care in resistance to neoliberal performative university cultures (Done, Murphy & Knowler, 2016). Others show interest in how university teacher candidates value being compassionate, caring about the individual and giving their time (McBee, 2007). There are even empirical studies that reveal that there is a coexistence of the language of effectiveness, competition, accountability, and rankings to embrace the imperative to scale up within smart-economy discourses for employment reasons, with an ethical and epistemological commitment to the centrality of caring in university performance.

Some emergent research, such as that developed in Australian university settings, highlights the powerful pedagogies of caring already existent in the cracks and margins of hegemonic spacetimes that are so increasingly focused on performances of neoliberal careless subjectivity and pedagogy (Motta & Bennet, 2018). Others explore how the capacity of university teachers to positively influence students both academically and emotionally has an impact on students’ achievement and satisfaction

with their learning environments (Scott, 2015). At South African higher education institutions, the piloting and implementation of a professional development model of teaching and learning highlights that using the framework of care allows us to focus on the importance of collegiality, relationality and vulnerability (Bozalek, McMillan, Marshall, November, Daniels & Sylvester, 2014). Similarly, a cross-sectional study drawn at three third-level institutions in Dublin (Ireland) explored the extent to which smart economy discourses affect students' goals and aspirations (Lolich & Lynch, 2016): one of the sections of the questionnaire used in this study, which was filled out by more than 4000 individuals, focused on how important seven different goals and values were for students. The three most important factors as rated (from 1 to 7) by students were "becoming an expert in my field" (n=3825 M=2,80), "helping others who are in difficulty" (n=3812 M=2,60), and "raising a family" (n=3809 M=2,80). This empirical study reveals that many students embrace the imperative to up-skill within smart-economy discourses for employment reasons, but also to safeguard what matters to them in terms of their relational identities.

Transforming Research Policies, University Administration, and the Whole Learning Experience

When we situate caring ethics from a relational perspective, we are obliged to go beyond the "add and stir" approach. As has been shown, Nel Noddings takes this stance in her publications, especially in her article "The Care Tradition: Beyond 'Add Women and Stir'" (2001b) and in Chapter Five of her book *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education* (2002a). Care ethics takes apart the structural roots of disdain for what is considered feminine and the subtle or brutal violence imposed by silencing other voices different from the dominant one. Furthermore, care ethics questions the principles that articulate any notion of citizenry that fails to acknowledge interdependence and the need to collaborate.

Our current universities are under so much pressure due to urgency and to meeting quantifiable, objective indicators that we run the risk of losing sight of what is truly important. Reporting, applying, accounting, and guiding from the ethics of care perspective all need receptivity to and recognition of what gives people a feeling of being secure to face all kinds of difficulties. Students and workers need to know that we who make up the institutions care about their well-being in all its collective and individual dimensions. Universities are called upon to build organizational cultures that are tolerant, open, and diverse. Narratives and attitudes should be changed to become more inclusive for people with cultural or individual differences of any type. Unfair discrimination or less favorable treatment must not be accepted on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion or disability. A morally sustainable education is one that is both gratifying and satisfying, which introduces a deep feeling

of satisfaction in people and produces satisfactory results. Therefore, Noddings (2002a) affirms that academic success without positive affect is morally and esthetically empty. Students, colleagues, staff, and every single citizen need receptivity to and recognition of:

The basic attitude, one captured by the response “I am here”, [which] arises in the original condition. There we learn to feel secure or insecure, able to control events to a certain degree or unable to do so, willing to share both joys and burdens or selfishly protect our own future. Gradually, we gain (or fail to gain) the capacity to respond to others, “I am here” (Noddings, 2002b, p. 231).

Universities are invited to respond with an “I am here” to halt the planetary crisis we find ourselves in. Our future and our present need a moral drive to transform how we understand quality. Providing good care in an institutional context may require that we make certain elements of care explicit that otherwise go unspoken and that may be taken for granted in the family setting; therefore, we need to adequately account for power, purpose, and plurality (Tronto, 2010). Universities can raise the visibility of different people and contribute to overcoming stigmas and making information and infrastructures accessible to anyone who may need them. As reported by people who have suffered from harassment or a handicap of any type, we must heed the importance of problematizing tired neoliberal discourses concerning leadership, teacher quality, and ethics as a key element to address those issues.

When the university’s needs are determined by external factors – such as industry or the labor market’s expectations or even family members’ fears – simply adding caring vocabulary may become a form of mechanisms of control. The language of business can infiltrate universities with an emphasis on “scaling up,” without challenging the dominant and unsustainable model of unequal expectations, consumption, production, transport, use of material resources, time, and space, etc. In consequence, the students’ focusing only on education’s instrumental value can produce universities that ignore its intrinsic meaning, while academics invest in themselves unless this sharing can be measured and rewarded. Caring – in those cases – acts simply as a juxtaposition, not as a transformative pedagogy. Adding caring vocabulary without exploring its significations would fail to offer a way of coping with real people’s situations on our fragile planet. Thus, authors such as Greta Gaard (2017, p. 19) affirm:

Positioning a critical ecofeminism to make significant contributions to ongoing sustainability discussions that do more than “add and stir” considerations of gender, sexuality, and species. Critical ecofeminism is rooted in a relational standpoint that illuminates inequalities from the personal to the political – ecological, economic, sociopolitical – promoting just and equitable relations.

As an alternative path to morality, ethics of care has the potential to act as a catalyst to transform university policies, curricula, and practices. Pedagogical authority depends on an institution's ability and actual desire to respond with consideration and intelligence to people and their demands. Universities can act as models of creating inclusive and safe environments, reporting discrimination or even harassment, and playing an active part in allocating time and support to attend to people's needs. We thus show the importance of answering the concerns of citizenry with an "I am here." Empirical evidence shows that the teacher-student relationship is a keystone in student achievement, motivation, and engagement and their capacity to trust what they know (Raider-Roth, 2005; Averill, 2012; Rivera-McCuchen, 2012). Likewise, universities have a significant role to play in showing other ways of researching, teaching, and living to change habits of consuming and producing in order to be more responsible in industrial, rural, family, and citizenship life. The so-called Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework maintains that the value and purpose is to practice an action-oriented transformative pedagogy that engages university learners as change agents:

ESD concerns the core of teaching and learning and should not be considered as an add-on to the existing curriculum. Mainstreaming ESD requires integrating sustainability topics into the curricula, but also sustainability-related intended learning outcomes. Curricula need to ensure that all children and young people learn not just foundation skills, but also transferable skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, advocacy and conflict resolution, to help them become responsible global citizens (UNESCO, 2017, p. 49).

Ethics of care can catalyze universities' present actions, which may play very different roles in the future and may cope with global change and the complexity and uncertainty linked to these changes. Higher Education guidance can be useful to know what strategies could be used and what measures could be taken to ensure that universities can meet these challenges with resilience. Transformative pedagogy is needed to adapt those aims to regional, biological, and cultural particularities, and to put into action key competencies such as those for systemic thinking and the handling of complexity, anticipatory thinking, and critical thinking (Rieckman, 2012).

We at universities have a duty to make a commitment to the present and the future. In keeping with the axiological points in the 2030 Agenda, the need arises to turn ourselves into agents of transformation. Our so-called information societies are saturated with information of all kinds, but are lacking in meaningfulness. Between research data and technologies there is a gap that makes it difficult for citizens, business firms, and institutions to make decisions that make them responsible for the well-being of the planet and its different inhabitants. To shift toward sustainability, that gap must be bridged by educating moral people. We need to step away from the

processes that currently dictate patterns of how we behave, produce and consume science and culture, which have a direct impact on our teaching and our research.

Implications of Noddings' Meaning of a Care Ethics Path to Address Morality, as Applied to University Settings

Genuine relationships encourage enough trust in oneself and in the world for us not to be paralyzed by solitude. People feel safe where differences are accepted and the contributions of all are encouraged, valued, and respected. Trust arises in caring practices between colleagues, workers, students, and institutions because receptivity and recognition give people a feeling of being secure enough to challenge all kinds of difficulties and to practice ethical decision-making. If we avoid seeing the ethics of care as a useful addition to the current dominant model, we might see the radical potentiality of care ethics. Noddings' philosophy of education changes our perspective towards epistemologies, transference targets, innovative methodologies, and teaching authority, among others.

The search for different frameworks is unquestionably under way. And the university may be part of the platforms that seek a comprehensive, global transformation that involves a variety of actors, dimensions, and aspects, be they epistemological, cultural, economic, political, axiological or organizational in nature (Novo & Murga-Menoyo, 2015). University curricula may also be reorganized around categories different from the traditional ones. Courses, syllabi, and programs may be revised by means of technical, reflexive, and responsible processes that let us reconsider the epistemologies and methodologies of teaching and evaluating. "Surely the search for real-life meaning is fundamental in learning to communicate, in developing the willingness to face changes and engage in analysis, self-reflection, and problem solving" (Noddings, 2007, p. 78). This deliberation linked to the context of the action will help articulate plural, non-dogmatic conceptual tools that can turn the teaching-learning spaces into places for ethical reflection instead of acts of obedience. University spaces are ideal for each professional to develop general and transversal competencies in accordance with a professional and ethical identity, thereby addressing the questions every human being poses regarding their work, citizenship, family, and leisure. The questions that may guide these technical, reflexive and responsibility processes that bring us to re-think epistemologies and teaching methodologies may go along the lines of the ones proposed by Noddings:

I would question the whole organization of curriculum and teaching. Where do we address the great existential questions: How should I live? Is there meaning in life? What does it mean to be good? To be happy? Where do we address the issues traditionally associated with women: What does it mean to make a home? What

constitutes good parenting? What do we owe to elderly parents? To other people's children? And where do we address issues that are particularly pressing in our present condition: How can we achieve and maintain peace? What violence and cruelty are we (and I) capable of? How can we restore and preserve our natural environment?...Can we develop a satisfying spirituality without succumbing to dogma or superstition? What is happiness, and how might one find it? (2003, p. 235–236)

University practices run the risk of becoming filled with trivial, mostly irrelevant facts, and leasing their responsibility to present and future generations. Our aim is to encourage careful thinking, critical examination of information, and a commitment to examining all sides, and to allow time for genuine education. Research, transfer of knowledge, and the social impact of universities can act as a lever for social transformation and highlight relevant facts and wisdom on phenomena that would otherwise remain in secondary positions. Authors such as Noddings have made it manifest that when the perspective of care ethics becomes part and parcel of scientific and political construction, it shakes the established paradigms, the alleged neutrality of theoretical terminology, and the pretense of universality of its models and metaphors.

We consider that for a change to come about in beliefs and behaviors that can reorganize times, spaces, and rules regarding what constitutes the university, professionalism, citizenship, womanhood and manhood, it is not enough to appeal to universities to enact policies of co-responsibility and work/family balance. Rather, the university itself must assess its own curricula, its conditions for faculty and staff career development, procurement policies, lines of funding, etc. Indeed, the institutional denial of the different realities of care work and care relations at universities has highly gendered and unsustainable outcomes that must be overcome.

The 19th and 20th centuries in the United States were marked by an almost fanatical admiration for autonomy in the form of individualism and self-sufficiency. In the complex 21st century world, there should be a healthy recognition of interdependence at every level. Recognizing that all of us need a caregiver at some stage of our lives, we should encourage greater appreciation of those who provide that caregiving. More generally, appreciation of interdependence is vital in identifying and solving our social problems (Noddings, 2013, p. 10).

We have much to gain from a critical and appreciative appraisal of the past and, perhaps even more, from a cooperative and imaginative exploration of the future. This can only be done by drawing on the concept of relational autonomy developed from the perspective of care ethics. Thus, universities should offer conditions of possibility by providing reasonable adjustments for individuals and communities, so that each one can develop the capacity to manage themselves with autonomy. No one is utterly

independent or self-sufficient. We all need the collaboration of others or certain conditions to be able to conduct ourselves. The ethics of care is articulated through a relational autonomy that recognizes our heteronomy about ourselves as individuals, but also the importance of critical thinking about every group to which we belong (Noddings, 2011).

These purposes may be gathered and debated to rethink the ethical commitment in university education and the students' future job satisfaction in relation to ethical values. From an ethics of care perspective, contemporary life requires critical thinking and moral education to make institutions and people capable of being attentive, open to the world and to others.

There are situations where stakeholders seem as if they are anesthetized or as if they are not listening while speaking. Contemporary ethos sometimes takes other people for granted and keeps issues at a distance. There is a dangerous tendency to follow bureaucratic patterns of behavior rather than experiencing receptive and personal approaches. In contrast, human and sustainable development needs to avoid attitudes of cognitive presumption and narrow-mindedness, to allow awareness of the desire to learn, to reflect, and to explore something that affects us and the future of our students on our fragile planet.

Caring stimulates people to become aware of their inner self and the things and situations that matter to them. It encourages them to reflect on their own needs, while also assessing and reflecting on the implicit and explicit values that people and stakeholders assign to their practices. It helps people become aware of the progress women have made in a world still defined by male traditions. It invites us to think critically about our own identities and the way knowledge is approached. It tries to overcome the sharp separation of the disciplines in higher education, and to emphasize interdisciplinary approaches to restore meaningfulness and face today's challenges. Indeed, an interdisciplinary and connected-to-life approach in research, teaching and administration should give increased meaning to every aspect of human life. Quoting Noddings:

I have emphasized choice as stimulus for creativity, connectedness to generate meaning, critical thinking to promote democratic participation, collegiality to define and execute our plans, and continuity to support relations of care and trust. In a commitment to the unitary purpose of producing better adults, we do not seek or try to invent one uniform ideal; we celebrate the best of diversity. But we hope for a unified commitment to living fully moral lives – lives devoted to integrity, generosity, and care. (2015, p. 178)

Societies' great issues, principles, and values should replace hegemonic styles of thinking. We need to explore the depth and expanse of the ethics of care, which provides us with a more promising alternative. As to focusing responsively on

ecological cosmopolitanism, it may be worthwhile to address the conceptualization of a relational self. It is widely acknowledged today that measures need to be articulated for universities to implement their social responsibility and, especially, to relate the contents of every research or study program to develop an employability that is committed to the precepts of human and environmental sustainability (UNESCO, 2015).

The Need for Developing University Educational Aims to Stimulate Better Adults

Occasionally, regulatory university frameworks are accomplices to dominant economic scenarios that insist on repeating ad nauseam that being realistic means being more competitive, which means encouraging individualism and an employability that is not committed to the precepts of human and environmental sustainability. Employability of university students is at times arising from a biased understanding of competitiveness based on indicators that come from the dominant world of business rather than the world of education:

The language of business has also infiltrated education with an emphasis on data. Educators are urged to develop policy that is “data driven”. Again, there are certainly areas of policy that should be directed by data; we need data, for example, on finance, demographics, and the number of available subject matter specialists. However, policy decisions and directives on curriculum, pedagogy, diagnosis, and evaluation must be grounded in intellectual history, in a well-considered philosophy (Noddings, 2015, p. 98).

If policymakers and universities adopt the language borrowed from the dominant way of seeing business and industry instead of using frameworks of its genuine aims, the educational dimension becomes corrupted. The social Darwinism feeds domination–subordination mechanisms, and supports a financial power that is articulated on the assumption that some people can be left behind, and that it is legitimate to manage actions through a system that excludes those who do not fit into the norm. Such identity issues arise from the language of competition, accountability, scaling-up, rankings, effectiveness, zero-tolerance, and “what works” – which is currently dominating university discourse. The culture of results-based, efficiency-driven organizational operation to make rankings is overemphasized. The knowledge-economist model is about serving particular types of *business* rather than people. Those mechanisms of comparison are presented as an exercise in corporate social responsibility deemed appropriate and proper for universities. The language of accountancy and business is replacing words and slogans associated with genuine education, which invite people to construct places of support, intellectual stimulation,

cooperation, creativity, and conversation. Noddings warns that the main metaphor in education should be *home, not business*:

Accountability is rarely used, however, in homes or home-like settings. The far stronger, more fitting word is responsibility....Responsibility digs deeper and carries further than accountability. When we are moved by accountability, we are concerned with what may happen to us, what penalties we may suffer, what rewards we may gain. In contrast, when we are moved by responsibility, our concern is with others; it is not focused on ourselves. Probably most people who choose teaching as a profession feel their responsibility keenly. The current emphasis on accountability may actually undermine the moral/emotional state of mind that supports the best in teaching (Noddings, 2013, p. 154–155).

Universities should attract and retain members, supporters, staff, and visitors that reflect the diverse communities and those who are committed to educational aims. The promotion of social responsibility, teaching, and scientific excellence based on knowledge and moral development needs committed people. Therefore, if the original intentions are accomplices to patriarchal and neoliberal economic interests, university models can only pick up a few superficial objectives regarding sustainable development, equality, and wellness. There is a contradiction if the purposes of university juxtapose education in ethical values and these ways of understanding competitiveness without generating considerable tension between them. It would be inconsistent to suggest that universities should aim at ethical development and yet censure their impact on identity issues of the institutions at hand and the people in them.

Although the self-sufficient and independent individual is at the apex of the neoliberal economic model, students report that they also want to be carers/cared-for persons in their adult lives (Lolich & Lynch, 2016). Enhancing competition, desegregation, measurable standards of performance, and attempts to control according to pre-set output goals have violently penetrated our universities, replacing the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge-production and problem-solving. In contrast, academic rigor is a deep interaction and ideational exchange to pursue meaningful sense rather than superficial fulfillment of externally imposed targets. Universities must respond to their third mission with “I am here.” We have a special role not only in removing barriers such as prejudice and stereotypes, but also in removing inflexible organizational procedures and inaccessibility in information, buildings, or transportation. The university’s third mission is invited to follow alternative paths in researching, teaching, and administrating in order to respond with consideration and intelligence to halt the planetary crisis we find ourselves in.

Nel Noddings certainly focuses on these discourses and concludes by suggesting that the main aim of education should be a unity of purpose: to produce better adults.

All teachers should be prepared to interrupt standard lessons in any subject for this purpose (Noddings, 2016). Higher Education Institutions should concentrate on academically conceived intellectual development and design programs that support satisfying ways for developing each subject as a perpetually cooperative work under construction. Each person at the university, as a professor, staff, student, or administrator, is invited to develop his or her capacities with respect, enthusiasm, and competence. Everyone, including the university as an institution, is responsible for creating a safe, inclusive environment by providing the conditions under which care can flourish. The ethics of care suggests a unifying purpose for all subjects in university setting: to produce better adults.

A morally better adult is one who offers help where it is needed, who avoids the deliberate or careless infliction of harm and suffering, who has the capacity to use critical thinking and reflection on both personal and public affairs, and who is committed to using that thinking for moral purposes (Noddings, 2015, p. 70).

Conclusions

If feminist ethics of care is addressed as an eligible paradigm for university settings, new research questions can arise. Noddings' contribution involves more than simply adding new vocabulary and enabling us to analyze the contradictions inside dominant approaches. Her ethics of care can change central questions of the university as we know it today.

Among the criteria for quality at universities are ones that foster making critical and responsible citizens. However, we currently find "educational" settings that prove to be abusively contradictory. Noddings' work offers a feasible form of resistance to and subversion from damaging processes and mechanisms to profoundly focus our research efforts on reverting all types of violent patterns. Feminist ethics of care is based on the claim that care and support are just as important functions and outcomes in the university as are efficiency and more measurable outcomes. It is argued that by building strong relations and engaging with each other as full human beings, we can create better and more meaningful processes, results, and impacts (Bergland, 2018).

Universities are invited to play a vital role in opening passages for a *praxis* of care and response. What is required is action and thinking that do not fit within the dominant, androcentric and neoliberal culture and its languages. Nel Noddings' ethics of care is not something to be added and stirred, but to transform the entire university experience and its policies.

Notes

1. To contextualize the situation of teaching and research at Spanish universities, the following references may prove useful:

- Lázaro Herrero, L. (2015). The future of Spanish public universities: The challenges of the excellence debate. *Encounters in Theory and History of Education*, 16, 146–164.
- Murga-Menoyo, M.A. (2017). Universidades en transición. Hacia una transformación institucional orientada al logro de la sostenibilidad. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*, 73, 61–73.
- Pérez Seldeño, E. (2018). Conocimiento y Educación Superior desde la perspectiva de género: sociología, políticas públicas y epistemología. *Artefactos. Revista de estudios de la ciencia y la tecnología*, 7(1), 121–142.

2. In Spain, a bill on Co-responsible Work Time was passed, although it is currently on hold. Its purpose was the normalization and socialization of care that would require reconfiguring times and budgets. The bill is transversal in nature, with an impact on many other regulations, especially labor-related ones. The bill was presented to the Spanish Legislature and passed on November 16, 2018 for consideration (BOE 122/000299). It is currently on hold for electoral reasons.

3. It is not the purpose here to analyze the effects of these forms of differentiated control for boys and for girls. While at this time we will not analyze the implicit and explicit messages women's bodies receive, we cannot remain silent without denouncing them.

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