Introduction: A Festschrift Celebrating 
Nel Noddings’ Work

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This issue celebrates the work of Nel Noddings on the occasion of her 90th birthday. Professor Noddings has had a close relationship with the Faculty of Education at Queen’s, and in 2006, she received an honorary LLD degree from our institution. She is part of our history and our search for meaningful education.

The contributors recreate central tenets of Noddings’ thought as a theorist of caring, and of understanding the need to ground education in caring relationships that include having a genuine concern for others, listening voluntarily, and cultivating benevolence. This generates an approach that is different from the teacher identifying and aligning students’ interests and motivation to external institutional aims. It is also different from the concept of good and efficient service. The connection with pragmatism, and in particular with John Dewey and William James, inserts her work in American intellectual history. Noddings’ approach has its own radicality, moving values associated with women and
with the “feminine” to the centre of an educational theory grounded in an ethics of care and the notion that schools should be more like homes. This also carries important questions and limitations that emerge when we place such proposals in time and space, in other words when we give them historical specificity and contextualize them in a particular social and economic order. It is not surprising that the taking up of Noddings’ theories has resulted in various meanings and forms.

Noddings’ themes and concerns have expanded over time. Three particular issues of continuing relevance are, first, her call for critical thinking on issues that divide Americans, such as religion, race, gender, class, and justice. The second is her call for the restoration of “aims talk” – “the continual dialogue and reflection on aims” at a time when economics, advancement in social status, and standardized testing seem to be the purpose of schooling (Noddings 2003, 4). In her view, happiness should be an aim of education (Noddings 2003, 4). The third is the notion of an ecological cosmopolitanism: “As we move towards ecological cosmopolitanism, we may experience a homecoming of sorts and begin to concentrate on Earth as a natural community and countries as interconnected home-place” (Noddings 2014, 100). The contributors to this collection will address these three major issues identified by Noddings.

Our collection opens with an article by philosopher of education Susan Verducci, from San José State University in California, entitled “Critical Thinking and Open-Mindedness in Polarized Times,” which expands Noddings’ argument by discussing proposals to deal with the limits of critical thinking for cultivating and participating in social and political life in light of current American polarization. Verducci argues that critical thinking, in Noddings’ understanding, should include efforts to produce open-minded listeners and needs to be supplemented with exercises that will help teachers and students to become open-minded toward alternative views. Next, she goes on to discuss strategies grounded in arts education. Verducci’s article also addresses the limitations of Noddings’ work and her own extension of it, mainly the decontextualization of critical thinking and open-mindedness that leaves aside structural forces and inequalities and the reproductive functions of schooling and of the state.

Gonzalo Jover, Dean of the Faculty of Education at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, and Alicia García, Université Catholique de Paris, contributed “Felicidad, Educación y Democracia en el Pensamiento de Nel Noddings” (Happiness, Education, and Democracy in Nel Noddings’ Thought). The article analyses Noddings’ argument on the relevance of happiness as an educational aim, rather than as objectives and goals based on standards and a prescribed system. The authors pay particular attention to the intersection of Noddings’ argumentation with pragmatism, while finding support in theories of pluralism and in Bachelard’s poetic imagination. There is somewhat of a contrast to the previous article.
Rosita Puga, Chilean educator and academic leader of Belen-Educa and Educa Araucanía, two Chilean Foundations, has been responsible for the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects like the one she discusses in her article, “Rural, Poor and Mapuche: A Window into the Power of Caring Education,” which is based on her first-hand experience. She examines, as protagonist, a process that started in 2010 at a small rural school of 88 students, ranging from PK to the 8th grade level, and 8 professionals; 98 percent of the students were Mapuche people. The project was grounded in an ethics of care, the construction of an inclusive pedagogy that integrated Mapuche knowledge, and the maintenance of conditions for caring to flourish. Happiness was an important educational aim. The key here is how the understanding of pedagogical principles was translated into actions in a school setting inserted in a system working with standardized testing. It is a truly fascinating account.

Stephen Thornton, philosopher of education from the University of South Florida, wrote for this festschrift “Geography Taught as if It Matters” and addresses a topic dear to Noddings – geography as a study of the earth, of humans and living forms. Thornton makes the case that no other school subject sounds more fundamental to education as a source of concepts in an era of environmental degradation; he talks of “the right kind of geography accompanied by a relational pedagogy” that will provide the skills and relationship to make judgement on the issues of the day.

The article by Toya Vásquez, “Care Ethics in Universities: Beyond an Easy ‘Add and Stir’ Solution,” goes to the core of one of Noddings’ dimensions of her ethics of care: the permeation of public institutions with an ethics of care. Vásquez understands Noddings’ caring ethics as a challenge to androcentric thought, and in doing so questions relations of power and explores what the development of caring dispositions would mean in the university setting situated within a neoliberal framework. Vásquez makes the case for an ethics of care as relational ethics – not care as a virtue – as an alternative path, and not as something to be added. She critiques the adoption of a language dominant in business and industry, following Noddings’ notion that the main metaphor in education should be home, not business. Vásquez poses important questions that can lead us to rethink epistemologies, teaching methodologies, and curriculum, and move to a praxis of care and response.

This festschrift also brings in Nel Noddings’ own voice through the inclusion of three of her interviews conducted in 2011, 2012, and 2016 by Masao Yokota and originally published in Japanese. Nel Noddings visited Japan more than once and had a close relationship with innovative centres there, as explained in the introduction to the interview. Clarissa Douglass participated in and provided support for the interviews conducted at Nel’s home in New Jersey.

The festschrift closes with an Epilogue written by philosopher of education and co-guest editor Lynda Stone, a professor at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The Digital Section, edited by Ana Jofré (SUNY Polytechnic, Utica, New York), features an article by Leon Gurevitch, Tim Miller, and Simon Fraser, all from The
University of Wellington, New Zealand, entitled “Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality and the National Library of New Zealand.” This piece introduces the reader to the creation of a special interactive exhibition that took place between May 2017 and February 2018 at the National Library of New Zealand. The exhibition was the result of a collaborative project between the School of Design at Victoria University and the National Library. The project combined the best of educational technology (augmented reality) and tactile and physical materials with traditional archival research, creating means to break down the barriers between exhibited objects and archival data.

The next section, A Powerful Moment in the History of Education: Going Back to the Past to Understand the Present, presents “William Pinar Responding to Elliott Eisner, Milwaukee, 1976,” a paper transcribed and introduced by his former student Fernando Murillo. The reader will be shaken by the intense contemporaneity of this reflective piece.

This issue closes with an interview with historian of education Angela Giallongo, entitled “History of Education with Angela Giallongo and Her Snake Women,” conducted by Patrizia Caraffi from the University of Bologna, Italy, and translated by Anna C. Forster. Angela Giallongo’s latest publication, The Historical Enigma of the Snake Woman from Antiquity to the 21st Century, won the First National Award for Women’s Writing and Studies in Italy in 2013, and in 2014 was a finalist in a national competition sponsored by the Italian Publishers Association and National Research Council.

Encounters in Theory and History of Education always includes art, providing another dimension to each special issue. Our 2019 issue features silkscreen prints from artist Angela Solar, a lecturer in Elementary Visual Arts and Museum Education in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s, while the sculptures are from Sylviane Farnoux-Toporkoff, sculptor and former professor of economics at the Institute of European Studies, University of Paris 8, France, who was awarded the medal of Chevalier de la Legion de Honour and obtained the medal of “Arts, Sciences and Letters.”

References