

Nel Noddings- creating peace with care and compassion

Copyright Ann Mason February 2018

www.brownmousepublishing.com

Introduction:

In a world in which many leaders continually cultivate the threat and use of military force as the strategies that will lead, supposedly, to the creation of peace, where do we, as concerned individuals stand? The Australian Government recently announced that it intends boosting Australia's export of weapons of war and become within the world's top 10 weapons exporters. This policy decision means Australia will be competing with the United States, which accounts for one third of all international weapon sales. Other major players are China and Russia (Calcutt, 2018). Are we willing to support this decision? Most importantly, what do we tell our children?

Peace Education development, since its commencement in the early 20th Century, has responded to the many voices, ones who have constantly reminded us about the dangers of military action. The voices of the individuals who have born witness to war, lived through it and suffered as a consequence of it, have their concerns been heard by our world leaders? Have the powerful, haunting voices of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Martin Luther King been forgotten in a world in which powerful leaders are intent upon proving which country is more powerful?

According to Professor Nel Noddings, who has been an advocate of peace education since the 1980s, the situation presently unfolding would be indicative of the conflicting ethics that persist in today's world about war and peace. The prevailing confusion, she suggested, still continues to permeate political thinking and action, infiltrates our educational programmes, while it reveals our muddled morality not only at a political level, but within community attitudes towards war and how we are to work to create peace in our everyday lives. She has written extensively about the importance of incorporating 'an ethics of care' into any teaching and learning programme, as one means of addressing our conflicting ideals.

This article will invite the reader to explore the worthy contributions of Nel Noddings's research and writings to peace education development and discuss how her ideas echo the sentiments expressed by other significant voices for peace. It is such peace-building ideas that guide the creation of Brown Mouse's peace-building stories. These stories can be used in any teaching and learning environment, in classrooms or homes or in any situation in which adults, children and young people can begin exploring together how they can create peace in their lives and communities. Such sharing can provide a beginning, a positive impetus yet a simple means that can practically contribute to and help cultivate a peace-building consciousness among our children and young people.

Nel Noddings and peace:

In Nel Noddings book – *Peace Education: How We Come to Hate and Love War* – she acknowledged that humanity is generally wanting to establish a more universal sense of citizenship, guiding patriotism towards becoming a cosmopolitan form whilst accepting global needs and contributions (Noddings 2012, p52). But, she proposed that it is our dualistic, contradictory attitudes and morality that disrupt our peace-building thinking and action, because of the confusion that exists between the different set of moral principles that apply in war to those which apply to everyday living. In particular, she especially identified this kind of thinking in those people associated with the military.

Noddings further qualified her understanding and suggested underlying this confusion is the 'vocabulary of war' and the culture of masculinity and myths that have continued to be central to human experience (2012, p12&36). She further related this to the fact that our mostly patriarchal societies and acts of war create situations in which normally moral people commit immoral acts (p18).

Noddings was also concerned that male researchers in the past have defined peace as simply the cessation of war (p119). By reminding the reader that *'sometimes the cessation of official war is followed by continuing violence'*, she stated *'conditions of peace should provide a context for the pursuit of justice; the achievement of justice should help prevent war'* (p119). Therefore, perhaps Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull and other world leaders, might benefit from reading Noddings's research and gain some better understandings in relation to creating peace.

An ethics of care- morality and reasoning:

Both the research and writings of feminists Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan, being focussed upon 'an ethics of care' (and caring) and gender and moral development, have dramatically influenced thinking about ethical systems. The ethics of care (and caring) refers to relationships between people and their needs.

These ideas contrasted to those established by ethicist John Rawls and psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, who both defined morality as a set of personal characteristics. By adopting Rawlian principles, Kohlberg contended that children could be taught how to think morally in relation issues of truth and justice (Gilligan 1998, pp128-129). Simply, Kohlberg's ideas implied that children can learn rules and laws of right and wrong.

Fortunately, Noddings' feminine approach to ethics and moral education sited care as being basic to human life and all people want to be cared for (Noddings 2002, p11). Rejecting such 'justice' or 'principled' approaches to ethics, she suggested these ideas reflect masculine approaches that deny human beings as being unique individuals and every situation they encounter as also being unique. This idea, she believed, underpins 'an ethics of care' (Schutz 20, p373).

Until Noddings presented her ideas, ethics or moral reasoning had concentrated upon the development of logical principles, on rights and duties rather than on nurturing and kindness. Noddings suggested that this thinking was *'in the language of the father'* and in principles and propositions that underpinned notions of fairness and justice (Noddings 2003, p1; Page 2004, p7). Human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for provides the basis of any ethical response, that she contended, was grounded in the feminine, in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness, involving a moral attitude or longing for goodness and not with any moral reasoning (Noddings 2003, p2). Noddings believed that concern for the other should be the priority and override all over principles of what is moral or right (Page 2004, p7).

Therefore, Noddings (2012) proposed that *'caring is a moral way of being in the world, of responding morally to living others; caregiving is a set of tasks to be done with or without caring'* (pp114-115). It does not depend upon or require any religious belief as its source. Neither does it accept rationality as the sole base of morality as 'an ethics of care' is anchored in natural caring (p97). When we discuss issues about military action and war with our children at home or in classrooms do we suggest they consider the rights of those innocent souls or even the soldiers who are forced to bear arms to protect their families and communities? How many different sets of rules would we require in order to examine and then differentiate between the changing ethically challenging landscapes? Is the idea simply - if you care then you won't deliberately cause any harm.

Noddings argued that caring should be a foundation for ethical decision-making. Believing that while men and women are guided by an ethic of care, it is a 'natural' caring which is *'a form of caring that does not require an ethical effort to motivate it'*. Stating caring was, in itself, a moral attitude – *'a longing for goodness that arises out of the experience or memory of being cared for'*. Noddings added, that *'every child possessed a special capacity for love and a capacity of tenderness, of feeling and reciprocation that developed well before reasoning'* (Noddings 2003, p120). Care ethics, therefore, is positioned as a refusal to encode or create a list of principles and rules as Kohlberg described. One could again question the underpinning principles of world leaders, who imply by their words and actions, that war is necessary, right and is an ethical way of dealing with conflict. Does Turnbull and his Government care about those

innocent families and children, who would be confronted by Australian built tanks and arms sold to other countries then used during times of conflict, even if Australian soldiers are not involved?
Human beings are emotional creatures (Noddings 2012, p 154) and caring demands attention and a willingness to listen and respond as positively as possible. Even when we must fight to save our children, Noddings recognised that hurting is not desirable and we should not inflict deliberate hurt or pain (p109).

Caring and peace advocates

Noddings' ideas echo the voices of many other significant peace advocates. By aligning caring with the idea of 'doing no harm' or *ashima* the refusal to do harm, then the resonant voice of Gandhi can be heard. His programme, *satyagraha* (soul force) was a form of nonviolent warfare inasmuch as it demanded constant, dedicated action that would inflict no harm (Noddings 2012, p103). Seeking to always overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth, *himsa* by *ahimsa* (Bondurant 1965, p36) *satyagraha*, sought vindication of truth (p4) and did not require co-operation in humiliation (p57) or further injustice.

Italian peacemaker, Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Montessori asserted that all children possessed innate tendencies toward compassion and care (Duckworth 2006, p85). She believed that between 6-12 years of age a child experienced a '*period of acquisition of culture*' in which he/she was capable of knowing and understanding why things occurred. She proposed it was a time when children were capable of understanding the meaning of 'doing no harm' and were not just receptive to merely absorbing impressions as they sought to understand and not accept just facts or rules. During this time of moral development the '*child now stands in need of his(/her) own inner light.*' (Montessori 1973, pp4-5). Montessori also viewed the child as being pure and uncorrupted, and '*capable of regenerating the human race and society*' (Duckworth 2006, p40). Her views implied that perhaps children have inbuilt propensities for moral being and were sympathetically attuned to others (Goodman & Lesnick 2001, p20). She stated: '*The child is both the hope and promise for mankind.*' (Montessori 1949, pp35-36)

Montessori developed a peace centred curriculum that de-emphasised nationalism and encourages children to view themselves as citizens of the Earth. Her educational philosophy and practice encourage children to be peaceful within themselves, with others and with the environment (McFarland 2004, pp24-25). Children learn to respect differences and develop sensitivity to and appreciation for different cultures. They learn to work with rather than against others. Montessori's vision of the child was one of being an agent for peace, steward of the earth and reformer of humanity (Brunold-Conesa 2008, pp40-44).

In the 1960s, an intense discussion occurred among academics exploring the relationship between peace and feminist issues (Morrison 2008, p3). Elise Boulding's theoretical work on the role of the family, education for social change and women's role in peacemaking, influenced educators' thinking about connectedness, caring and the importance of thinking globally and acting locally. Her ideas in relation to ecological sustainability and the culture of war pre-empted any contemporary discourses in relation to those issues (Morrison 2008, pp1-4). Building images of a disarmed world, of a new culture free from patriarchy and the techniques of dominance associated with male cultures, was her particular focus (Brock-Utne 1985, p130). Children and young people, she stated, were co-participants in the shaping of the future and not victims of it. She argued for the teaching of everyday conflict management, mediation procedures and peace and conflict resolution (Brock-Utne 1985, pp122-123).

Profoundly influencing educational thinking, especially in the United States in more recent years, has been education activist and Quaker, Parker Palmer, who identified the important link between hearts and minds and the physical and the spiritual aspects of existence (Palmer 1998, p66). He (2004) contended that violence (doing harm) included the various ways individuals could violate the identity and integrity of another individual. Palmer drew attention to the forms of violence being acted upon persons during times of war, the demeaning of a child in a classroom by teachers, when parents insulted children, when employees were treated as disposable objects to meet economic outcomes, and when racists enacted behaviours that revealed their beliefs about people with different skin colour. He saw no distinction- it was all violence and as violence can lead to physical death, spiritual violence can also result in death of a sense of self, trust in others, risk taking and of a commitment to working for the common good (p169).

Like Noddings, Palmer identified the muddled thinking associated with war and how we engage with others in our everyday lives.

Noddings ideas certainly reflect very similar understandings. Care and compassion and doing no harm, being able to think and act while balancing both heart and mind are ideas mirrored in Brown Mouse's peace-building stories. The stories are structured in a manner that allows for guided exploration of ethical decision making in relation to building peace with ourselves, peace with each other and peace with the environment.

Nel Noddings and peace education

Noddings (2003) contended that the major goal of all education should be the nurturance of the ethical ideal of caring yet she appreciated that dialogue and practice were essential in nurturing it (pp102&105). It involves talking through issues with caring and engaged adults. Yet she also questions whether even as adults, or teachers in classrooms, *'while acknowledging our own feelings, **can** we can listen to possibly opposing views without prejudging them'* (p139). Noddings believed that open-minded provisional belief is a tremendous aid to learning, and a strategic way of listening (p140). It involved *'teaching people to listen to one another and maintain the lines communication'*. This is perhaps, she continued, the greatest task in peace education (p141).

Dialogue is a central feature of care theory and a powerful approach to moral (ethical) education. The emphasis in care theory is on caring relations, not so much on the virtue of the moral agent. But, according to Noddings, peace education does not go far enough; *'it does little to help students understand the love-hate relationship people maintain with war and the forces that manipulate their attitudes'* (p141). Educators have to show in their behaviour what it means to care. *'We do not merely tell them (students) to care and give them texts to read on the subject, we demonstrate our caring in our relations with them'* (Noddings 1993, p190).

Noddings elaborated further and suggested that without imposing values upon others, we must realise that our treatment of them might considerably affect the way they act in the world. Just as no individual can escape responsibility for their actions, neither can communities disregard their responsibilities in relation to that individual (Noddings 2010, p3).

Noddings (2010) asserted, that caring relations provide the best foundation for moral education. Teachers should show students how to care and engage them in dialogue about moral life, supervise their practice in caring, and confirm them in developing their best selves while highlighting the importance of providing an educational experience that is ingrained in the ethics of care perspective. She has argued that there are four necessary mechanisms for doing this: modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Generally speaking, modelling involves educators acting in sensitive and caring ways in order to provide an example to their students about how individuals must act to establish caring relationships with others—especially the relationships between educators/teachers and students (p10).

Noddings (2012) called upon all educators to *'become keenly aware of their responsibility to promote moral awareness and a commitment to peace'* (p150) as she believed *'we cannot..usually should not – tell our students what they should believe and act upon, but we can get them to think'* (p151). Sensitive, as always, Noddings reminded us to also acknowledge the great pride many citizens have in the military and its history (p152) by being *'sensitive to loved memories'*. Noddings emphasized that educators have to show in their behaviour what it means to care. *'We do not merely tell them to care and give them texts to read on the subject, we demonstrate our caring in our relations with them'* (Noddings 1993, p190). Therefore, she has reminded all individuals, educators and even world leaders about the importance of engaging in *'global dialogues aimed at understanding, not blame-finding'* (2012, p80), encouraging individuals to speak freely but openly and lovingly (p154).

Through a continuous moral dialogue and guided practice, we hope to show that the culture of care we build together is itself a reward – one that enriches both individual and community life.

(Nel Noddings 1993, p77)

Peace-building stories

Brown Mouse's peace-building stories have been purposefully written to help not only educators, but people in homes and community settings begin the dialogue, to which Noddings refers, when engaging with children and young people. Accompanying each story is a non-prescriptive guide that presents the peace-building ideas upon which individual stories focus. Many stories offered honour the work of peace advocates: ie Dr Jane Goodall, Mahatma Gandhi, The Dalai Lama, Nel Noddings, Hamid Hossaini, Campbell Whalley and many others, who are everyday people working to positively contribute to creating a better world. The hope is to build a peace-building consciousness through story sharing while nurturing the peace-building ideas of Nel Noddings and others. Perhaps such sharing might create future caring world leaders who promote peace rather than war- for the sake of our children, their children and the generations that follow. Rather than focussing upon war we can simply share stories that are peace-building. Perhaps a worthwhile place for any adult to begin would be to read Nel Noddings book- *Peace Education: How We Come to Hate and Love War*.

References

- Bondurant, J. V. (1965) *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*. University of California Press: Berkeley, USA.
- Brock-Utne (1985) *Educating for Peace- A Feminist Perspective*. New York, USA: Pergamon Press.
- Brunold-Conesa, C. (2008) *Reflections on the Internationality of Montessori Education*. Montessori Life; Vol.20, No.3, 2008: pp40-44.
- Calcutt, L. (2018) 'Game-changing': Australia to become top military exporter amid 'global arms build-up'. Article Retrieved Jan 29, 2018 from <https://www.9news.com.au/national/2018/01/29/11/41/malcolm-turnbull-s-plan-to-make-australia-a-top-military-exporter>
- Duckworth, C. (2006) *Teaching Peace: a dialogue on the Montessori Method*. Journal of Peace Education; March 2006; Vol.3, No.1: pp39-53.
- Goodman, J. F. & Lesnick, H. (2001) *The Moral Stake in Education: Contested Premises and Practices*. Addison Wesley Longman, Inc: New York, USA.
- Gilligan, C. (1998) *Remembering Larry*. Journal of Moral Education; 1998; Vol. 27, No. 2: pp125-140.
- McFarland, S. (2004) *Educating for Peace: A Montessori Best Practice*. Montessori Life; Vol.16, No.4, Fall 2004: pp 24-26.
- Montessori, M. translated by Lane, H. (1949) (1979) *Education and Peace*. Henry Regnery Company: Chicago, USA.
- Montessori, M. (1973) (first published 1948) *To Educate the Human Potential*. Kalakshetra Publications: India.
- Morrison, M. L. (2008) Elise Boulding and Peace Education. *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, Teachers College, Columbia University USA. Retrieved Feb 12, 2010 from <http://www.tc.edu/centers/epe/>

- Noddings, N. (1993) *The Challenge to Care in Schools; An Alternative Approach to Education*. New York USA: Teachers College Press.
- Noddings, N. (2003) *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (2nd ed.). Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, USA: University of California Press.
- Noddings (2010) *Caring in Education* Infed – ideas-thinkers-practice. Retrieved Jan 2018 from <http://infed.org/mobi/nel-noddings-the-ethics-of-care-and-education/>
- Noddings, Nel (2012) *Peace Education: How We Come to Hate and Love War*. Cambridge University Press New York New York
- Page, J. (2008) *Peace Education: Exploring Ethical and Philosophical Foundations*. Charlotte, North Carolina, USA: Information Age Publishing.
- Palmer, P. (1998) *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscapes of a Teacher's Life*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, USA.
- Palmer, P. J. (2004) *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. Jossey- Bass: San Francisco, USA.
- Schutz, A. (1998) *Caring In Schools Is Not Enough: Community, Narrative, and the Limits of Alerity* Educational Theory Summer 1998 1 Volume 48 Number 3. Retrieved Jan 2018 from www.educationaction.org/uploads/1/0/4/5/104537/caring_in_schools.pdf