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Reimagining Care in Contemporary Education: Evolving Beyond Nel Noddings' Foundations

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Abstract

In the presented research paper, an attempt has been made by the researcher to understand the changing nature of the relationship between student and teacher in the field of education. In the present times, education is constantly changing by moving away from its traditional form. Student-teacher relationship is also impacted in this shifting kind of education. The researcher has attempted to know the personal experience of teachers in the classroom by the means of their interviews. The researcher has also attempted to understand among the students how the teachers care about them, how they attempt to establish emotional connection with their students, and what influences care to students, and emotional relationships. The research student has interviewed 50 teachers of CBSE board of Prayagraj city using an interview schedule that she has made herself. To analyze the information presented in this study research, the researcher has performed thematic and content analysis.

Keywords: *Care Education, Changing Contours of Care, Nel Noddings. NEP-2020*

Introduction

The philosophical approach of Nel Noddings towards education, which involves care, is truly humanistic and transformative, as opposed to inflexible, results-focused, approaches to teaching. Her model emphasizes relational aspects between teachers and students, and teachers are supposed to get into the inner world of their students by empathy, attentiveness, and mutual respect. Although such a direction was revolutionary at its moment, the contemporary learning environment, influenced by digital innovation and societal transformation, as well as, the increasing demands of students, requires a revised understanding of care that remains based on the ethical vision put forth by Noddings but broadens its scope. Amongst other critical areas where evolution has taken place is in the

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online and digital learning environments. The model proposed by Noddings is strongly based on face-to-face interaction whereby one can directly perceive the emotional and interpersonal cues and react to them. Nevertheless, as virtual and hybrid education is becoming increasingly popular, it demands new types of care. During teaching in an online environment, teachers can demonstrate care by creating accessible and inclusive learning environments, providing personalized feedback, and creating a sense of community even when students are separated physically. Care-based principles also have to be addressed with educational technologies as emotional and social well-being should be of the top priority along with performance and efficiency. The other important change is the incorporation of the ethics of care with the concept of the culturally responsive practices. Although Noddings concentrated on the universal needs of people, critics have claimed that there was no focus on the problem of systemic inequality and cultural specificity. Caring education today has to be attentive to the racial, gendered, and economic realities of heterogeneous groups of students. This is not only about knowing the lived experiences of students but doing something to break down the barrier that they experience. Teachers are being required to reflect continuously and embrace pedagogies that uphold and maintain cultural identities, and care is another tool towards equity and compassion. The so-called mental health crisis in schools is making matters even more complex. Although Noddings concentrated on the teacher student relationship, the present issues require institution wide approaches. The increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma among the students cannot be dealt with at the classroom level only. An ethical culture of care in the present-day world should include policies at the school-wide level, teaching that is traumatized, and coordination with mental health workers. Good practice in this regard is not limited to daily teaching experiences but goes way beyond to systematic school changes. Another issue that is significant is the necessity to focus on support of educators themselves. Even though Noddings recognized the emotional investment that teaching must entail, the existing rates of teacher burnout and attrition make clear that there exists a severe disproportion in the mutual care. A sustainable model should involve institutional interventions to decrease workloads, offer emotional and professional assistance and develop a culture in which the well-being of teachers is appreciated and guaranteed. In this respect, educators care is an indispensable component of student's care. Lastly, the concept of care should be extended to care student agency so that an extra dimension is introduced. Whereas Noddings viewed the student as a reciprocating

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receiver of care, the current understanding of care promotes the potential of students co-creating the caring relationship. With the participation of the students in decision-making, the support, and the encouragement of ethical reflection among the students, the process of education becomes a more democratic and two-way environment. The students are not only made empowered to be given care but also to play a significant role in the emotional and moral landscape of the learning environment.

To sum up, although the framework of Noddings is a fundamental guideline, the needs of the modern educational environment and the requirements of a more inclusive society require more comprehensive and inclusive re-definition. Care is now to be made conceptual as relational and ethical, as well as digital, systemic, and designed in a collaborative manner in order to satisfy the needs of all the stakeholders in a world that is continually changing. The researcher in this research paper attempted to establish some key shifts in the outlook of the caring relationship between the teachers and students.

Rationale of the Study

The phenomenon of changing nature of care in the context of education has become a critical issue in the 21 st century especially as teachers and students encounter a swiftly developing educational condition. It has been revealed that care and emotional attachment between teachers and students are important in promoting student involvement, motivation, and achievement (Noddings, 2012). Nevertheless, policy pressures, accumulation of teacher workload, and conversion to standardized curricula among others have added to an increasing emotional distance between the student and the teacher (Hargreaves, 2000; Day et al., 2007). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated these changes because it compelled schools across the world to move to the use of digital learning technologies in a way never seen before. Although this transition allowed remaining access to education, it also changed the relations in the classroom and tended to restrict the intimacy, human aspects of teaching (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Educators have claimed that they have a difficulty with emotional connections with students in the virtual environment, and students also reported feeling isolated and ceased (Bubb and Jones, 2020). The purpose of this research paper is to examine the relevant factors that are presently shaping the teaching process with more particular consideration on how the dynamics have impacted the education care. It examines the importance of digital technology, institutional requirements, and the changing needs of students, and how these factors are leading to the increasing emotional detachment between

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students and teachers. Through these issues, the study will aim to provide evidence-based suggestions to policymakers and leaders in the education sector. It outlines the need to re-connect on meaningful relationships in the classroom as well as redefine care in a manner that reflects the realities of the modern-day education. These emotional connections have to be reinforced to create strong learning communities and to make the educational process more effective in the 21 st century.

Statement of the Problem

Reimagining Care in Contemporary Education: Evolving Beyond Nel Noddings' Foundations.

Research Questions

What is the nature of the changing contours of caring in education?

Research Objective

In this research paper, six sub-objectives are centred around the changing contours of care in education, which are as follows-

1. To examine the changing contours of caring in education.
2. To examine the contours of care in education and technology.
3. To examine the contours of care in education and school culture and climate.
4. To examine the contours of care in education and curriculum and teaching methods.
5. To examine the contours of care in education teachers and students' relationship.
6. To examine the contours of care in education and family background.
7. To examine the contours of care in education and socioeconomic factors.

Research Methodology

The researcher has used the descriptive phenomenological method to complete this study. Phenomenology is used to understand experiences of specific emotions such as grief after the death of a loved one, pain, guilt, and anger, etc. Therefore, the researcher has chosen the qualitative research method to understand the experiences and insights of the teachers.

Tools & Techniques for Data Collection

The researcher prepared a semi-structured interview schedule for those teachers who were participants in online classes and experienced the circumstances of online classes. The

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questions of this semi-structured interview are based on four components of Nel Noddings's care education and her philosophy, which are modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. The questions in this interview schedule help us understand the teachers' insights into the changing contours of care in education.

Population

All CBSE board schools of Prayagraj district of Uttar Pradesh are considered the population of this study.

Sampling Method

The researcher used purposive sampling methods in this study.

Sample of this Study

Through purposive sampling, the researcher chose 50 teachers of different schools that are affiliated to the CBSE board from Prayagraj city, Uttar Pradesh.

Analysis and Interpretation

To fulfil the above objectives, the researcher collected data and tried to understand insights through a self-made semi-structured interview schedule for the CBSE board teachers of Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. In this process, 50 teachers from classes 6 to 12 were interviewed: 40% were from classes 11 to 12, and 60% were from classes 6 to 10. The researcher classified the common responses of teachers into themes through the coding process. During the data analysis, the researcher identified similar teacher responses and extracted the following themes to examine these objectives.

1.1 To examine the changing contours of care in education and the use of technology.

Use of Technology- 40% of teachers answered that caring in education changed rapidly due to the use of technology; they agreed that technology is one of the significant factors that affect caring in education. They shared their experiences of online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic and said caring for students during online classes is more difficult than face-to-face care because there is no control over the online classes of teachers; thus, sometimes students could be indisciplined and disturb the whole class. But technology helps us to connect with our students in such difficult situations and keep them in communication during the holidays. Teachers utilized WhatsApp groups, Google Meet, and Zoom classes to connect with their students. Teachers were able to share their contact numbers with students

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for support during the holidays.Nel Noddings (2005) suggested the inner circles and outside circles of love and care (p.117). Through the use of technology, teachers can spread their circles of love and care from inner to the outside. Nel Noddings argues for keeping the lines of communication open in order to extend the care relationship to the outside circle and to establish and strengthen it through online interactions (Noddings, 2005, p.119). Thus, in the world of education, technology is constantly evolving. This evolution has also impacted the traditional caring environments and the interaction between teachers and students in schools because technology leads the students toward self-directed learning, during an interview a teacher said that many students in their classroom try to cross-check the knowledge of teachers by using Wikipedia in google, thus we teachers have to be more concern about our dialogue during a teaching in the classroom, but this increasing dependency on the technology of students may affect the reliability of students toward teachers, During the interview, all teachers commonly agreed that technology could not replace teachers from the education system but it is necessary to trend the teachers with evolving technologies in the field of education. 40% of teachers agreed that technology could help them feel connected and care for their students during holidays. Teachers said that they connected with their students to know their well-being during holidays through virtual meetings on Google Meet or Zoom, sending those personalized messages and holiday greetings, providing resources through personal and WhatsApp groups, and connecting with their students through various social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

1.2 To examine the changing contours of care in education and school culture and climate.

School Culture and Climate- Nel Noddings (2011) argued that the duties of schools are not limited to teaching and learning subjects in the classroom, but also help students to understand themselves, along with their neighbourhood and society. The school culture and climate should ensure students about their well-being and flourishing. The researcher found that 10% of teachers are not happy with the school culture of the 21st century. During the interview, a teacher of the Sanskrit subject in a government school clearly said, *"Technology is the bane in the context of respectful relations between teachers and students*". He believes that this generation is becoming too dependent on technology, which is affecting students' study habits, level of patience, and creativity; thus, nowadays in schools, students and teachers do not feel connected emotionally like our ancient Guru-Shishya Parampara.

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Another teacher shared their views by saying that the school culture and climate have been affected by increasing dependency on technology because school is a place where discussion, cooperation, and collaboration play a very significant role in the holistic development of students.The irony is that technology has led to decreased communication between students and teachers, which is a matter of concern because excessive use of technology leads to isolation rather than engagement. Teachers said that they want to care for our students, but we have observed that after COVID-19, there has been a lot of change in the personality of students, their tendency to be angry and irritable has increased, and they avoid interaction with teachers and do not take participate in any common discussion in the classroom. When the researcher asked teachers how they care for their students in this situation in schools, they said as teachers, to care for students, we try to create a positive and supportive environment where students feel valued, respected, safe, and sound. Teachers said that we help our students to make decisions in both their personal and professional lives by providing them with proper guidance, support, and opportunities for critical thinking and reflection, teachers encourage their students to open dialogue and discussion where students can explore their interests, values, and goals, and this guidance fosters critical thinking skills and encourages self-awareness, ultimately helping students confidently navigate life's complexities. Additionally, teachers offer resources, mentorship, and real-world examples to help students navigate the decision-making process effectively. A teacher said that schools are the representation of society where different age groups, cultures, and creeds exist; thus, if we want to create the pathways of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" and global citizenship, it's important to emphasize creating an inclusive and democratic school environment.

1.3 To examine the changing contours of care in education and curriculum, and teaching methods.

Curriculum and Teaching Methods- 10% of teachers said that, due to changing teaching methods according to the needs of society, the contours of care are changing rapidly. The following are the teaching methods shared by the teachers during the interview: 1. Experiential method, 2. Role Play, 3. Blended mode, 3. Cooperative learning, 4. Inquiry-based teaching. 5. Game-based learning, 6. Presentation method, 7. Explanatory method, 8. Project method, 9. Collaborative learning, 10. Interactive session.

1.4 To examine the changing contours of care in education teachers and students' relationship.

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Teachers and Students' Relationship- 20% of teachers agreed that teachers and students' relationships are changing rapidly. During the interview, a government teacher shared his insights by saying that the *commercialization of education has greatly affected the emotional relationship between students and teachers*. Taking the matter further, he said that the main reason for the decline in respect for teachers in India's educational system is the commercialization and privatization of education because as a result of commercialization, education is becoming a means of earning money, hence in this system the process of education is becoming a matter of give and take only, it is concerning for students and teachers' emotional relations. Another teacher, while sharing his views, said that the coaching culture has reduced the dialogue between teachers and students in schools, and the dependency of students on coaching and tuition is increasing, because of this reason, the reduction of classroom dialogue in schools concerning matters of students and teachers' emotional relationships. The researcher asked about the possible ways to overcome the challenges of emotional drawbacks in the relationship between students and teachers. A teacher of Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan shared his view by saying that establishing a caring relationship between teachers and students is not only the responsibility of teachers but also students and their parents because parents play a crucial role in the upbringing of children. How respectfully or disrespectfully a child views the world around him depends largely on the values given to him by his parents. We, teachers, can help to grow their goodness to help students' family values by providing them with a respectful and positive environment in schools. Another teacher shared her insight in this context and said that virtues like public behavior, lifestyle, politeness, discipline, respect, spontaneity, equality, and the feeling of respect for each other cannot be taught by writing or reading. To inculcate these qualities in the behaviour of students, teachers will have to be aware of their behaviour because students learn all these qualities by observing the behaviour of their teachers and their way of talking while living in the school environment. All the teachers of the CBSE board-affiliated schools of the Prayagraj who participated in this interview commonly agreed that care is important in education, they expressed their views and said that when the teacher takes care of the students, they learn faster and better and care creates a nurturing environment where students feel emotionally supported and valued, leading to enhanced learning outcomes. When educators prioritize care, students are more motivated, engaged, and able to develop social-emotional skills, crucial for success in school and beyond.

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Additionally, caring environments foster strong teacher-student relationships, which are fundamental for effective teaching and learning. Another teacher shared his insights by saying that in the 21st century, relationships between teachers and students should be based on open communication and boundaries with mutual respect and better understanding. In the 21st century, the unrest among students toward the education system is increasing day by day. The teacher of Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan of Prayagraj said it is because of emotional detachment between students and teachers, which is a topic of concern. The researcher concluded that by providing education without values like care, honesty, cooperation, and love, our education system will never produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people, which is the main aim of Nel Noddings' philosophy. Thus, it's high time to think about and understand about establishment of a caring relationship between students and teachers.

1.5 To examine the changing contours of care in education and family background.

Family Background- Schools are considered second homes by Nel Noddings (2002, p.167)**,** who said that most of us learn about caring in our homes, when this is not possible at home, schools should act as a second home, and our attitudes are influenced by the people in our social circle. Thus, family background and environment are considered as a means of caring education. During the interview, a teacher who was the principal of a CBSE board school in Prayagraj shared her experiences that nowadays parents of students do not understand the circumstances of school environments and directly come with their children with lots of issues and complaints before principals, that's why teachers hesitate to establish any long-term emotional relationship. She shared an incident regarding this topic, a teacher scolded a student for disturbance in class eight during teaching, and the next morning, that student came to school with his father in the principal's office and the student's father said 'From now on no teachers should scold my son if any teacher does so I will file a police case against him'. In this way, due to the rude behaviour of the student's father, the teacher has to limit themselves only to the work of teaching-learning. Another teacher of this school shared his view that family support is significant in the positive transformation of students' personalities because the act of caring does not work alone, rather caring about is dependent on caring for. The home environment is crucial in shaping a child's upbringing. The atmosphere and arrangements at home significantly impact our dreams and aspirations. A child raised in a home where books are valued and other adults are always eager to read and

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engage in new activities is more likely to develop a strong attachment to books than children for whom books are seen as obscure objects. Nel Noddings (2002, p.5) argued that the origin of a caring attitude began at home, and this caring attitude flourishes in those who belong to well-educated families and are always ready to help others, and every good parent wants to see their children successful, like a good human being. She also recommended that the school curriculum should not only focus on professional life but also prepare their students for home life, which is why Noddings recommends that home life should be part of the school curriculum (2002, p 6).

1.6 To examine the changing contours of care in education and socioeconomic factors.

Socioeconomic Factors-Today, technology is being rapidly incorporated into this changing form of education. The education process today is not limited to traditional classroom learning; rather, education is reaching people living in remote areas with the use of modern technical mediums. The National Education Policy (2020) also talks about encouraging the extensive use of technology in the field of education. Hence, in the future, education will be provided in a blended mode instead of a face-to-face mode, which has started rapidly in the 21st century. Hence, the attachment, concern, and care that teachers have for students, which was prevalent during traditional classroom interaction, is also changing in its form. Now, teachers have to prepare themselves for this rapidly changing educational environment. This increasing use of technology in education has some advantages as well as some disadvantages. In this context, after talking to 50 teachers working in various schools of the Central Board of Secondary Education in Prayagraj and knowing their experiences, it was found that 90% of the teachers are not happy with the increasing technological intervention in education. According to them, the ground reality of the system of imparting education through technology is very pathetic. Teachers said that neither teachers nor students are fully prepared to adopt this educational change. Many schools neither have smart classrooms for online education nor do they have any arrangements for trained teachers. A teacher of a private school in Prayagraj affiliated with the Central Board of Secondary Education said that due to the inclusion of technology in education, education is becoming expensive day by day. As a result, students from lower-class families do not have smartphones or laptops to attend online classes, and there is no proper arrangement for proper internet connectivity. Therefore, full access to online education is currently possible only for students from higher socio-economic backgrounds.A teacher at a private school shared his experiences during the

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time of COVID-19 when the entire education system was shifted to an online mode. In such a situation, many children of the school who belonged to poor families did not have smartphones and laptops to attend online classes and there were many children whose villages did not have good internet facilities. In such a situation, teachers had to face a lot of difficulty in connecting with those students.

Major Findings of the Study

1. From the perspective of the above research objective, 40% of teachers argued that the massive use of technology in education is playing a significant role in changing the contours of care in education.
2. 40% of teachers said that the use of technology can help them to feel connected and care for their students during holidays.
3. All teachers agreed that technology can be assistive in making teaching-learning effective, but teachers cannot be replaced by technology.
4. School culture and environment help to ensure the well-being and flourishing of students, 10% of teachers are not satisfied with the schools' environment in the era of the 21st century because increasing dependency on technology affects students' study habits, level of patience, and creativity.
5. 20% of the teachers agreed that the emotional connection between students and teachers is deteriorating in current times. The maximum use of technology in education, the commercialization of education, and the evolving coaching culture negatively affect the respectful relationship between students and teachers and increase emotional detachment.
6. Excessive use of technology leads to isolation rather than engagement, and 10% of teachers argued that traditional teaching methods are also changing rapidly.
7. 90% of teachers are not happy with the increasing technological intervention in education because the ground reality about imparting education through technology is very pathetic, neither teachers nor students are fully prepared for these rapid educational changes after COVID-19, and many students have not smartphones, laptops, and proper internet facility to attend online classes and schools administration also have not proper online facilities like smart classrooms, trained teachers, overhead projector and smartboards for conducting online classes smoothly.

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Conclusion

After engaging in extensive discussions with several educators across various levels, the researcher observes that educational technology is rapidly emerging as a dominant force in shaping the future of teaching and learning. It is not merely increasing its pace around the world, but one can also see it gaining momentum in local educational practices and policies, and thus one must accept it as a fact that cannot be ignored or opposed anymore (Singh, 2022). With the further penetration of technology into the education systems, we will see radical and wide scale transformations in some of the fundamental facets of schooling. They involve the design and the work of conventional classrooms, resource distribution in the schools, the roles and expectations of the educational workforce, reorganization of curriculum content and delivery, and the implementation of new instructional and learning approaches. In addition to the structural, this technological transformation is also likely to touch upon the emotional and ethical aspects of education, including the provision of care and support to the students, and the interpretation and application of the foundational values in the education system (Kumar and Sharma, 2021). Considering the fact that the field of education is undergoing a very crucial and even disruptive change, then there would be need to be proactive in addressing such changes by providing on educators the skills and knowledge to succeed in the tech-enhanced learning environments. This involves the provision of intensive continuous training in digital literacy, pedagogical innovations, and successful use of educative tools. Besides teacher training, the schools should also be provided with proper infrastructure support such as good internet connection, computer devices, and state-of-the-art learning facilities to make sure that the students are all equipped to learn and utilise the power of technology (NEP, 2020). In addition, it is also necessary to deal with the increasing digital divide which leaves numerous students out of the online education and technology-based education. Many children, especially those in disadvantaged or rural settings, do not have access to the very simple tools and connectivity to engage in digital learning. To overcome this divide, state and central governments should actively engage in the process of availing free and accessible technological tools, including tablets, laptops, internet data, and online learning platforms. These activities must be done closely with the schools which can be the best to spot and suggest students who need them the most. These inclusive strategies will assist in making sure that every student, irrespective of the socio-economic status, is provided with a chance to become part of the

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digital mainstream and get a decent education comparable to that of his/her peers (UNESCO, 2020).

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