

# The Three Epochs of Education: Outlining Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Montessori and Nel Noddings

Anasuya Adhikari<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Birbal Saha<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Education, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, India

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Education, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, India

Corresponding Author: Anasuya Adhikari

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20230178>

## ABSTRACT

Every country is currently concerned with education since it alone has the power to create a new world and offer up possibilities for positive outcomes. Three notable female educators from three separate eras who contributed to the advancement of education in the west have been recognised. Through their quick work in education, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), Maria Montessori (1870–1952), and Nel Noddings (1929–2022) have brought important concerns relating to women and children's education to light. These three women educators were connected by their interest in education despite being born in various eras and regions of the world. In this paper the researchers have tried to bring the educational thoughts of these iconic educationalists into one frame, making it a comprehensive study of educators from different eras.

**Keywords:** Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Montessori, Nel Noddings, Education, Women Educators

## INTRODUCTION

Education has presently been a concern of every nation, since education alone has the capability to construct a new world and open dimensions for positive outcomes. Raja Rammohan Roy and Henry Derizio paved a new direction to education in Bengal, India during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, giving the century an educational awakening. When it comes to the field of women's education, India is currently a leading country. However, the

circumstances were not always the same. Tarabai Modak, Durgabai Deshmukh, Anutai Wagh, Pandita Ramabai, Pandita Brahmacharini Chandbai, Nawab Begum Sultan Kaikhusrau Jahan, who were path breakers in their attempt to transcend the homely domain and set a new milestone. The western world has witnessed similar awakening and educational philosophies of three iconic women educationalists in three different centuries, whose educational ideas and thoughts have created milestones in education. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 – 1797), Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952) and Nel Noddings (1929 – 2022), through their expedite works in education have pointed vital issues concerning women and child education. Born in different centuries and in different parts of the world, these three women educationalists are threaded together through their concern on education.

## The 18<sup>th</sup> Century Feminism and Education: Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 – 1797) was a British author, philosopher and strong proponent of women's rights and witnessed the French Revolution. Wollstonecraft's writing is infused with a deep and urgent concern for education, especially the upbringing of girls, and this concern carries through to the abrupt end of her professional life. Her major work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, starts as an appeal for the equitable education of women and includes an ambitious and long-range proposal for a

national school system. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, the title of her first book, is a speaker for itself. Wollstonecraft valued education highly, since she was a liberal reformer and a radical thinker. She felt that only a strong, intelligent mother could be expected to provide her children with a truly correct upbringing and education. Women might use this domestic sort of subordination as the basis for educational reform if they were to be primarily or fully restricted to domestic duties. Such arguments were made by Wollstonecraft and a variety of female reformers, who covered the ideological spectrum from conservatives to liberals. The two years that Wollstonecraft directed and taught in her own school on Newington Green, England which served as the foundation for her career as an author, had a significant impact on *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*.

Wollstonecraft's studies of earlier educational treatises and the conduct-book tradition were major influences on Johnson's 1787 publication of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. In fact, if Wollstonecraft had not gone on to write the two *Vindications*, it is unlikely that anyone would still regard *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* as a radical literature today. Here, the significance of a family education under parental supervision is emphasised (*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, pp. 22). In contrast to relying solely on adults, Wollstonecraft emphasises that children learn to think for themselves best when they collaborate with other children and actively solve problems.

Wollstonecraft encourages the development of a strong moral awareness, much like the modern writers who complain about female education. She argues for a logical acceptance of current social norms. Unfortunately, repetitious chores and meaningless manners are typical of ladies boarding institutions. Unless the children would be left with servants in their place, these institutions should be avoided, "where they are in danger of still greater

corruptions" (*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, pp.22). The mother of the children is the best person to impart this lesson because early education's primary objective is to equip a woman to carry out the significant responsibilities of a wife and mother. Wollstonecraft also advises against being married too young since moms who are barely out of childhood themselves cannot be trusted to raise children and be relied upon to do so (*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, pp. 31).

Wollstonecraft supports a comprehensive national education programme, departing from both her previous position and the bourgeois liberal dogma of her period when it comes to actual schooling. Scholars from John Locke to Edgeworth promoted a home education directed by parents or a dependable, competent tutor over the then-available boarding schools and day schools. Boarding schools were frequently criticised, and Wollstonecraft supported this criticism of 'national schools,' which spend the most of their time educating men (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 229 – 235). In Wollstonecraft's view, attending public schools with boys would help females become free and independent. This would also prepare them for future relationships with men. The woman who has studied science would also be better able to nurse the physical and spiritual health of her family.

However, Wollstonecraft's ideas on women's education permeated modern literature across a wide range of genres, from domestic fiction to pamphlets on educational reform, even during the time when mentioning her name was typically meant to make fun of or criticise her. It is especially pertinent today to take into account Wollstonecraft's astute analysis of the ways in which institutions, practises and inequalities in education which leads to social injustice.

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Child – Centered Education: Maria Montessori**

Maria Tecla Artemisia Montessori (1870–1952) was a renowned science nurturer, psychiatrist, feminist and educator. She is most recognised for her contributions to education and the philosophy of education that carries her name. Montessori's career has been a combination of several roles in which she has been active in addition to teaching. Since her first appearance in front of the public, at the International Women's Conference in Berlin in 1896, feminist educator Maria Montessori has been effective in capturing the attention of the media. Her paper on female emancipation, which she wrote, gave her additional notoriety adding to the fact that she had a fascinating personality. She had a flair for public speaking, which helped her transition into society easily. Her *National League for the Care and Education of Mentally Deficient Children* (1899) received publicity. She pioneered a new approach to teaching with her *Casa dei Bambini* or Children's Houses. Her first book, *The Montessori Method; Scientific Pedagogy as Applied to Child Education in the Children's Houses* (1912), directed her and her work to a much wider public sphere, and it brought her remarkable success. Within a decade, her work rose to fame, enjoyed immediate success, and was translated into numerous languages.

During her nearly two decades as a vocal militant feminist, Maria Montessori continued her administrative work as the head of her own institutions and an educator. Due to their connection to the career and professional success of the second gender, these two decades not only sing the story of her enormous success all the more, but they also chart the development of a phenomenal career, moving from a psychiatrist to an educator to a university lecturer to the creator of new institutions. From a historical perspective, virtually little has been written and researched about her and the scientific pedagogical technique. Maria was born and

raised in an Italian environment that provided educated women who wanted to pursue careers with little to no opportunity. She may have been recognised as an international success in a field that diverged from her initial training, which may have diverted attention away from her scientific credentials to a greater extent. Montessori was a fervent supporter of social medicine and the emancipation of women. She was well ingrained in positivist culture. A profound secularism praised her works and endeavours. Maria aimed to demonstrate that free masonry played a significant role in the cultural acceptance of her methodology.

The Montessori educational approach is created in a way that encourages and promotes the development of a child's innate desire to be autonomous. Children are given freedom to explore on their own in this setting and are given access to a variety of chances for 'real work.' The students are able to complete their daily tasks with confidence and self-esteem thanks to these difficulties. The Montessori approach is built on stability and routine work. If there are consistent and predictable timetables, the learners' temper and tantrums can be prevented. The Montessori curriculum is made in such a way to support and stimulate deep learning while fostering excellent academic abilities.

This extraordinary woman, a feminist, an educator, a scientist, and a social cause advocate, has received very little attention in Italian history studies. It is possible to give Maria Montessori credit for her tremendous contribution and undeniable fame. She is appropriately referred to as the '*Pantheon of Pedagogy*'. It is still unclear what factors are behind the lack of interest in additional studies on Maria Montessori. Not even the research on the history and accomplishments of women was kind to Montessori. As a result, her contributions to science and education have actually been adversely correlated with historical interest. However, there is no denying Montessori's

impact on the field of education, which is vast and can be considered a milestone.

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ethics of Care and Need: Nel Noddings**

Nel Noddings (1929 – 2022), an American educator, philosopher, and feminist who is lauded around the world for her contributions to educational theory, philosophy of education and care ethics. She was involved with several facets of the educational system. She spent more than seventeen years working as a mathematics teacher and administrator in elementary and high schools. Her next endeavour required her to work as an academician in the domains of ethics, educational theory and philosophical thought. She received praise for her work in care ethics.

Noddings had the honour of being the Jacks Professor of Child Education in 1992, a position she held until 1998. Nel Noddings received three awards for outstanding teaching, in 1981, 1982, and 1997. The first book Noddings wrote *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, which was published in 1984. In 1984, her next endeavour resulted in the publication of *Awakening the Inner Eye: Intuition in Education*. Noddings wrote *Women and Evil* in 1989 since she clung to ethics even then. *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, published in 1992, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief*, published in 1993, and *Philosophy of Education*, published in 1995, share Noddings' ideas and beliefs on the theory and philosophy of education. Nel Noddings presents her social psychology works concurrently. *A Richer, Brighter Vision for American High School*, which she wrote and published in 2015, and *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach*, which was released in 2006, are two more visionary books in the realm of education. The book *A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* elaborates important ideas. The dictionary definition of 'care' states that it "is a state of mental suffering or of engrossment: to care is to be in a

*burdened mental state, one of anxiety, fear, or solicitude about something or someone."*

According to Noddings, this is how we typically interpret the word. Preference has a lot to do with care. The addition of having care for someone or something, or more specifically, if one is disposed towards it or them, is a matter of choice. For example, if someone has a preference for literature, they might actively spend quality time with it. Similar to this, if someone cares about you, they will undoubtedly be interested in what you want, believe and feel. In addition, the dictionary definition of 'to care,' which is "to be responsible for the upkeep, welfare, or protection of someone or something," may be given more meaning by the word. It is significant that the definitions of care reflect the numerous ways that the word is used. In stark contrast to this, it may be noted that "elements of each of them are involved in caring" in the most personal sense of the word (*On Caring*, p.9). After that, sense changes and one may associate 'care' with 'burdens.'

In a different context, we would say that caring can be a tendency toward something or someone; similarly, if A cares for B, A will undoubtedly be interested in B's opinions. It is significant to highlight that we occasionally evaluate 'care' from an external perspective. We consider them to be 'third parties'. But when we do, it becomes quite simple to see that there are two significant and crucial components that may be found in the space between the carer and the person being cared for. In his book *On Caring*, Milton Mayeroff gives a vivid description of 'caring'. "To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself," Mayeroff pens down (pp.9). Noddings acknowledges this equation of concern under particular headings.

### **CONCLUSION**

The physical world has changed into a digital one through metamorphosis and modification. With the introduction of computers, it is accelerating instantly with

technical momentum, happening continuously at an accelerated pace, and concluding that it is well-connected. The same is true of the educational landscape, which has undergone its own transformation. With her ground-breaking theories on female education and its strong relationship to women's inferiority in society, politics, and the household, Wollstonecraft both inspired and enraged her contemporaries. However, Wollstonecraft's ideas on women's education permeated modern literature across a wide range of genres, from domestic fiction to pamphlets on educational reform, even during the time when mentioning her name was typically meant to make fun of or criticise her. It is especially pertinent today to take into account Wollstonecraft's astute analysis of the ways in which institutions, practises, and inequalities in education lead to social injustice. Maria Montessori followed a scientific education and became Italy's first female doctor. She set up several experiments and introduced the Montessori Method of instruction. Her techniques were innovative and became well-known all around the globe. In addition to being avant-garde, Montessori went on to become one of the world's leading educators. Nel Noddings attributes her intellectual and educational growth to her kin. She also gives early teachers, with whom she shared a workplace, credit for the same. Many people refer to Noddings' notion of the 'ethics of care' as 'relational ethics.' According to Noddings, caring is frequently a fundamental, organised, and desirable approach to ethics and is "rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness." These three women in can be readily called the pillars of education. Their contribution in education and in a way social reform, can be taken as milestones and so very relevant in the contemporary era, where we are encouraging women education, growth of ethics, child care and education.

### **Declaration by Authors**

**Acknowledgement:** None

**Source of Funding:** None

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Adhikari, A. & Saha, B. (2021). And There Was Light: The Bengal Renaissance and The Pioneers in Education. *International Journal of Current Advanced Research*, 10 (08), 25000-25003. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijcar.2021.4986.25003>
2. Adhikari, A. & Saha, B. (2021). Lesser Known Indian Women Educators and Reformers. *International Journal of Research and Review*, 8(9), 442-447. <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20210956>
3. Adhikari, A. & Saha, B. (2021). Life, Works and Philosophy of Nel Noddings, *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*, 10 (8(2)), 61-64. <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.08.34>
4. Adhikari, A. & Saha, B. (2021). Maria Montessori: An Intellectual Biography, *EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)*, 6 (9), 242-245, <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra8535>
5. Adhikari, A. & Saha, B. (2021). Rationalizing Maria Montessori's Teaching Methods in Global Contexts: 'When Education met a femme reformatrice', *European Academic Research*, 9(2), 1431-1439.
6. Adhikari, A. & Saha, B. (2022). Contouring Education: Ruminating Mary Wollstonecraft's Thoughts, *IAR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(4), 12-17. [10.47310/iarjhss.2022.v03i04.003](http://10.47310/iarjhss.2022.v03i04.003)
7. Adhikari, A. & Saha, B. (2022). Deconstructing Mary Wollstonecraft: Reconstructing Modern Woman, *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*, 11 (7(5)), 90-94, <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.07.84>
8. Adhikari, A. & Saha, B. (2022). The Context of Sexuality in Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vidyawarta: Peer Reviewed International Journal*, 47 (09), 176-187
9. Adhikari, A. & Saha, B. (2022). The Feminist Responses to Mary Wollstonecraft: A Reading, *EPRA International Journal of*

- Research and Development (IJRD)*, 7 (9), 32-38. <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra11181>
10. Botting, E.H. (2013). Wollstonecraft in Europe, 1792–1904: A Revisionist Reception History, *History of European Ideas*, 39:4 (May), 503–527.
  11. Brown, C. M. (1995). Mary Wollstonecraft, or, the Female Illuminati: The Campaign against Women and “Modern Philosophy” in the Early Republic, *Journal of the Early Republic*, 15(3), 389-424, Special Issue on Gender in the Early Republic, University of Pennsylvania Press on behalf of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3124116>
  12. Cohen, S. (2015). *The Montessori Movement in England, 1911-1952*, Routledge.
  13. Davis, R., Maher, C. & Noddings, N. (Eds) (1990) Constructivist views on the teaching and learning of mathematics. *JRME Monograph*, Reston, VA, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
  14. Gutek, G. L. (Ed.). (2004). *The Montessori Method; The Origins of An Educational Innovation: Including an Abridged and Annotated Edition of Maria Montessori's The Montessori Method*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.
  15. Montessori, M. (1915). *My System of Education*, House of Childhood Inc, New York.
  16. Seldin, T. (2017). *How To Raise An Amazing Child The Montessori way*, Dorling Kindersley Ltd., Second Edition.
  17. Slote, M. (2007) *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, Routledge, New York.
  18. Todd, J. (2000). *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life*, New York: Columbia University Press

How to cite this article: Anasuya Adhikari, Birbal Saha. The three epochs of education: outlining Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Montessori and Nel Noddings. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2023; 10(1): 698-703.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20230178>

\*\*\*\*\*