

Video 1: Becoming Dr. Noddings

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Okay, we're going to go ahead and get started with our interview with Nel Noddings. Inside the Academy, the third one we've presented. The first one we did Dr. David Berliner. The second one was Dr. Carl Bereither. And our third guest, our honoree, is Dr. Nel Noddings, Professor Emerita from Stanford University. Thank you all so much for coming.

"Becoming Nel" Where did you grow up?

NEL NODDINGS

I grew up in New Jersey.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

On the beach in New Jersey?

NEL NODDINGS

No, we started out in north Jersey in a town called Bloomfield. We lived there through sixth grade, and then we moved to the Raritan Bay area, and there was a dramatic change in schools that I told you about earlier today. I'm pretty sure that the school I went to in Bloomfield was a progressive school (1:00). My parents wouldn't have known the difference, and kids don't know. But when I look back on it, there was a lot of art, music, drama, and no homework; so it must have been a progressive school. I loved it. Then we moved to the Raritan Bay area, and it was a little dinky school, four room school with eight grades in it. So I had seventh grade in a classroom where we had seventh and eighth grade, and where at least two of the boys were just out of reform school. It was a big change, an enormous change from what I had had. Nevertheless, I had a wonderful year. So there were two years in that school, and then I went to high school.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your parents and your younger sister.

NEL NODDINGS

Yeah I had one sister. (2:00) Neither of my parents graduated from high school, so I was the first person from my family on either side to go to college; in fact, I guess I was the first person to graduate from high school in my family. It's a peculiar history that I won't spend a whole lot of time on; but somewhere around age seven I, my whole sort of psychological orientation changed, and school became my real home. It wasn't anything wrong with my home. I mean, there was no abuse or anything like that, and my mother was reasonably supportive. But for some reason or another, I made that psychological change. Apparently it does happen sometimes, but it's relatively rare. Psychologists have told me. Anyway it happened.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about how your experiences in school (3:00) impacted the person you have become.

NEL NODDINGS

Well they had everything to do with it. You know they had everything to do with it until, of course, I had my own children. That was another tremendous influence on the way I taught. And the range of children. I mean, having ten kids, we had five of our own biological children, and then we had five more. We had a tremendous range of interests and abilities. I was telling Audrey earlier that I am so grateful for that experience because I learned so much from those kids. I think, maybe it wouldn't have happened, but I suspect that if I hadn't had all those kids, I might have become an intellectual snob. (4:00) I hope not, but I might have.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What do you mean?

NEL NODDINGS

I have been rescued by them.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And how many of those are biological, and how many...

NEL NODDINGS

Five each. We had our five biological children very close together because I wanted to get them here and get on with it, you know. Then when the fifth one was born, and she's here today with me. Came by surprise, which is very nice of her. We were then embarrassed by the population explosion, figured that we had done enough damage there. But we still wanted more kids, so that's when we started adopting kids. We adopted them pretty much in the same age range. So nine of them were in about eight years. The youngest one's a little bit behind. He's six years younger.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

From where did you adopt your kids? (5:00)

NEL NODDINGS

Three of the kids are Korean American, adopted through Pearl Bucks Welcome House because we were still living in New Jersey at that time. We hadn't moved to California. Her adoption agency works within 200 miles of Bucks County, so that's where we adopted three of our kids. Then two girls came along, just joined up with the family, and that's the way it happened, so.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your husband, Jim.

NEL NODDINGS

Jim. That's Jim there (points to picture) with the car. That was our family car because we both felt strongly that the kids ought to see the country. So each kid had a map in his or her room and colored in each state that they had stayed the night in. (6:00) So we took them all over the country. We camped all over the country. Sometimes I wonder why I did some of it. I remember

cooking a lunch—you probably remember this—in Utah, in the rain. Why would we do that? I should simply have said, “I’m not going to do this. Let’s go to the nearest restaurant.” Cooking spaghetti in the rain in Utah. I’ll never forget that. But, anyway, that’s the car we used to take the kids all over the country. We did manage 48 of the states. The last one we managed was Colorado because for some reason we always went around it, you know. Finally we said, “We’ve got to get Colorado in there.” So we went to Colorado.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

When did you meet Jim?

NEL NODDINGS

I met Jim in high school. In fact, I told Audrey earlier that he and I have been best friends since age 14. But that was sophomore year. (7:00) In freshman year, when I came home from school after the first day of high school, all I could talk about was algebra and Latin. I was so excited for algebra and Latin. My mother was, for some reason or other, itchy, and she said, “What about boys?” And I said, “Well, there is one. There is one. He’s blonde, and he has blue eyes. He was wearing a royal blue shirt.” That was Jim. That was Jim. But nothing happened, you know, for, until sophomore year when we began to kind of like each other. Audrey asked, “Well, did you date?” And I said, “Well this is really ancient history because you didn’t do that in those days.” You did things in groups for the most part. But in that year, in our sophomore year, he did give me a small, heart-shaped box of chocolates (8:00). And I kept, not the chocolates, but box for a long, long time. I guess it got lost in one of our moves. But when my mother finally met him, and that was, it was early on, it was our sophomore year, she said to me afterwards, she said, “He’s so small.” And I said, “Well, he’ll grow!” Which of course he did. He grew six inches over, between the sophomore and the junior year. My mother saying, “He’s so small.”

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Then 10 kids later, right? So not only did you just date, but you got 10 kids after that and then how many grandchildren?

NEL NODDINGS

Well, it’s around 30. Jim keeps track of that. I don’t keep track of it. When they come to the house I feed them, and I’m (9:00) glad to see them, but I don’t keep track of the numbers. It’s around 30 isn’t it?

Daughter in audience:

Yes.

NEL NODDINGS

Well it would be, you know, if you’ve got 10 kids, it’s likely that you’ll have 30 grandchildren.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And how many grandchildren?

NEL NODDINGS

Great grandchildren?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY  
Great grandchildren.

NEL NODDINGS

Well that's happened very recently. You know when you have all your kids close together, and then the grandchildren are close together, you're likely to get great grandchildren together. And so we do have I think 11. I think it's 11 now, and they're all babies of course.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY  
Tell us about your 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

NEL NODDINGS  
About what?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY  
Your 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

NEL NODDINGS

Oh, 60<sup>th</sup>. Yeah that was last summer, so we had a tremendous reunion, and since we live in a resort town, it's very easy to rent rooms at bed and breakfasts. In fact, right down the street from us we have a few bed and breakfasts. So, we managed to (10:00) get everyone into a room, and we had good weather. We had good time.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY  
How did Jim keep track of all the kids?

NEL NODDINGS

Well, in the summer, I try not to take any lecture engagements. Typically through the academic year I have about two a month, sometimes more than that, but usually about two a month. But I don't take any during the summer. He keeps a big chart that tells us when people are arriving, and whether we have to go to the airport to meet them, or the train station, or wherever. So we want to be sure that we have enough room for people. So we have to space it out a little bit.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY  
You need a spreadsheet to keep on top of y'all.

NEL NODDINGS  
Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY  
How have your relationships with your family impacted your scholarship?

NEL NODDINGS

Clearly it was (11:00) sort of basic in thinking about the effort of care. Two things that were basic there, the family was one, but the other was my first teaching experience. That was in south

Jersey in small town called Woodbury. My first teaching assignment was a sixth grade class. I was trained as a high school math teacher, but they weren't any math jobs that year. Can you believe that? There weren't any math jobs that year. And of course I applied very late in August. So I got this job teaching sixth graders, and it was wonderful. That affected my entire professional life. It was just wonderful. The end of the year we were asked if we would stay together (12:00) for another year because the junior high was overcrowded, and the parents had to consent. We did stay together for another year. We added a few kids. And at the end of that year, the junior high was still overcrowded, so they asked if we would stay together for another year. So I taught the same kids for three years. I taught them everything except that one day, one afternoon a week, they went off to the junior high for art, and shop, and a couple other things along those lines. And at the end of the time, they did take a look at the standardized test scores. See in those days we gave standardized tests, but we weren't maniacs about it, you know. The scores didn't go on the kids' report cards. There was none of this nonsense that we have now. But they did give the standardized test. And I was hoping my kids would do better than the kids at the junior high that were all taught by specialists. They were almost just exactly the same. But they did an (13:00) affective review and asked their art, and shop, and music, and other teachers about them. And there my kids came out heads and shoulders above the other kids. They were more polite, they were happier, they were nicer to each other. So I was really proud of that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's definitely something to be proud of.

When I asked your oldest daughter, Vicky, who's here with us tonight as a surprise, to define your essence, she replied you are always there for anyone who needs you, for your husband, your children, your grandchildren, your great grandchildren, your spare relatives, students, colleagues, neighbors, pets, and, of course, your plants. You are Vicky's "garden boss" in the summer and "slave driver" when it comes to weeding. Tell us about your garden in Ocean Grove, New Jersey, the Garden State in which you live.

NEL NODDINGS

Well both my husband and I are gardeners, and when we moved into the house (14:00) we have now—when I took retirement at Stanford it was, I had an offer at Columbia, and it turned out we could get the house that we had our eye on for a long time because we vacationed in Ocean Grove, and there are not very many properties where you can garden. It's a called an urban Victorian village, and the houses are close together, and people are there mostly for the summer. But this property has enough room for a garden. Then people told us that, "You won't be able to grow anything here because you're too close to the ocean." We're right across the street. Well that's not true. You can. We have a wonderful vegetable garden, and we have lots of flowers. It's a lot of work. So when Vicky comes in the summer, she helps with the weeding. And the man across the street said to her, she was standing up one day, and he said, "Gosh, I'm glad to see your face. All I've seen is your backside all this summer long." So she's been a big help. (15:00) Yeah, we both like gardening.

---

Video 2: Becoming Dr. Noddings Continued

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You spent 17 years as a elementary and high school mathematics teacher. You received your bachelor's degree in mathematics and physical science from Montclair State College, a master's degree in mathematics from Rutgers University, and PhD in education from Stanford University. Tell us about Professor Lawrence.

NEL NODDINGS

He was my advisor at Stanford. I didn't start out with Lawrence Thomas. (1:00) I started out with Elliot Eisner actually. My first quarter there, I took four courses, and they all had to fit into the timeslot 1:15 to 5:15 because I had to get home to feed the kids, and I couldn't just, you know, hanging around campus all day. So I had four wonderful courses. I had psychology with Nate Gage, sociology with Liz Cohen, and then two philosophy of ed classes with Larry Thomas. I took those because there were very few requirements in the Stanford program, but people were required to take two philosophy or normative courses, so I took them to get them out of the way. That was my reason for doing it. By the end of that quarter, Jim and I both remember that philosophy books were beginning to pile up around the house. By the end of that quarter, I knew that I was going to switch to philosophy. And Elliot was very gracious about it. I mean, he and I remained good friends for forever. But that's when I made that change. And I tried hard to stay away from math education even though Ed Begle was there at the time doing wonderful work with SMSG. But see I wanted to get away from that for a while. I wanted to fill in all these gaps in my education. So, but the funny part of it is, (2:00) of course I had to do a lot of work in the philosophy department at Stanford, and if you think you can get away without math in that philosophy department, forget about it. It's highly analytical and logical. So, my background was an enormous help to me because I had never had any philosophy courses before, and I loved them.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about Michael S. Katz and your time together at Stanford.

NEL NODDINGS

Michael and I were graduate students together at Stanford. We didn't have a lot of time to just hang out because of obvious reasons. I couldn't spend a lot more time on campus.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Because you had 10 kids. That's five times as many as I have.

NEL NODDINGS

But we had social events at Larry's house, and occasional area meetings, and that sort of thing. So Michael and I got to know each other pretty well. But he, I was telling (3:00) Audrey earlier, that I went through my graduate studies rather rapidly. I did it all in seven quarters. I finished my coursework and my dissertation in the same quarter. This bothered Michael quite a bit. He went to talk to our advisor, "How can this be? How can she do this?" Larry just smiled and said, "Well, she's got the skills to do it, so." So then Michael decided he was going to get through with his too and stop hanging around, and so he did. And we've been very good friends ever since.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He says the you and he were virtually the only two graduate students at Stanford who did not do dissertations on the work of John Dewey.

NEL NODDINGS

You know that's probably true.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What did you study for your dissertation?

NEL NODDINGS

Yeah, this is a good story in itself. The title of the dissertation, I think, is, "Constructivism as a Theory of Teaching." (4:00) Now this was 1972 that I was writing it. So it's mainly Piagetian constructivism, with a little tad of social constructivism, but mostly Piagetian constructivism. When the dissertation was finished, Lee Cronbach was not on my committee, but he talked to people a little bit about it, and he said, "Well, this is just fine; but it's not the way of the future." I think it's the only time in his entire life that Lee Cronbach was ever wrong on anything.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Lynda Stone. Tell us about Lynda.

NEL NODDINGS

About Lynda? Okay. Lynda was one of my graduate students. She probably holds the all time record for the number of courses taken. I couldn't get her to stop taking courses (5:00). She and I became very close. This, by the way, for those of you who are graduate students, something to look forward to, one of the most wonderful things about doctoral studies is that the outcome is often lifelong friendships. Lifelong treasured friendships. And that happened in this case. The kids consider Lynda one of the family. She's a little too old to be my child, so we call her "little sister."

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your broccoli soup.

NEL NODDINGS

Broccoli soup. This had to have come from Lynda. Everybody who comes to the house in the summer wants cream of broccoli soup. I grow my own broccoli. I grow quite a lot of it (6:00). I cook, and grind it up, and freeze it. So I have ready to make broccoli soup. And it's the specialty of the house, so everybody likes broccoli soup. So I have to cook it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

She mentioned that and also your not-so-secret that you still you 3x5 cards to organize your references and do all of your writing longhand on paper.

NEL NODDINGS

I still do all my writing longhand. But, since I retired, I have to put it all in the computer myself. I mean, I had a secretary all those years to do it, so I didn't have to do it. But I'm a pretty fast

typist. One thing I'm so grateful for is that I did take typing in high school. The school principal was annoyed with me for that because I had five majors plus typing. He said, "Well, you should be taking," whatever it was. But, typing I'm very glad I took.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You had five majors? What were those (7:00) majors?

NEL NODDINGS

Hm?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You had five majors. Is that what you said?

NEL NODDINGS

This was a small high school, and you remember in the Cohen studies, he said we've got to have larger high schools so that we can provide all these special courses. Well I had four years of English, four years of math, four years of science, four years of history, and four years of Latin, and I had three years of public speaking, and a year of typing.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Wow.

NEL NODDINGS

In just a small high school. So it can be done. You don't need a great big high school. Of course years later I found out that my teachers didn't know as much as I thought they knew when I was in school. Do you know what I found out actually? I found out that the Latin teacher had a, what do you call it when people are kind of cheating? (8:00) Well in her desk drawer she had the translation. I didn't know that. I mean, four years, and I didn't catch on to that. Someone had to tell me afterward. And here we're going through Ceasar's *Gallic Wars*, and Cicero, and Virgil, and she was cheating. Imagine that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

On that note, tell us about the time that you took your kids to *Star Wars*.

NEL NODDINGS

Tell you about what?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The *Star Wars* movie.

NEL NODDINGS

Oh, the *Star Wars* movie. I'm trying to block on some of these things. We wanted to go, you told on that one (pointing to daughter in audience). We wanted to go to see *Star Wars*. When we got to the theater, there were no more tickets for *Star Wars*. So we were disappointed, but we bought tickets for something else. I don't remember what. But when we got in, I noticed that people were just going into the *Star Wars* theater (9:00). They had just emptied out one batch. And so I

said to the kids, “Let’s go. Let’s go. Come on.” And they said, “Mother!” I said, “Come on.” And we went in, and we got very good seats. It was lovely. But they were right—it was very uncharacteristic of me, but we did that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Stephen Thornton. Tell us about your relationship with Steve.

NEL NODDINGS

Steve was one of my graduate students also. He was actually Dick Rose’s. He became more mine than Dick’s, I guess. He started his graduate, he was very young when he started his graduate studies, Australian, and he has become one of the family as well. So I’m very proud of him. He heads up the department (10:00) of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of South Florida. And Lynda is full professor now at the University of North Carolina.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He calls himself your 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> son, and Lynda calls herself your 15<sup>th</sup> daughter. They believe that they’re part of your family. What he says he admires most about you is the continuity of caring, which you write about, you live.

---

### Video 3: Significant Accomplishments

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In terms of teaching, you won the Teaching of Excellence at Stanford for three years. In terms of service, you have served as the past president of the National Academy of Education, the Philosophy of Education Society, and the John Dewey Society. In terms of honors, you have been awarded Contributions to the Education of Women awards from Harvard University and the American Educational Research Association. You’ve earned a medal for Distinguished Service from Teachers College Columbia, the Lifetime Achievement Award from AERA, and the award for Distinguished Leadership in Education from Rutgers University. In terms of scholarship, there is your work on mathematical problem solving, and, of course, the philosophy of education, educational theory, and the ethics of care. You have authored more than 200 articles and chapters on these topics. (1:00) How many books have you authored?

NEL NODDINGS

Well the 17<sup>th</sup> book just came out. I was out at Ohio State to do something, and when I got home there were advanced copies. No matter how many books you write, it is always a delight to hold a new book in your hand—actually have it there. So that book is, it’s on Amazon now, and you can pre-order it; but it will be available by the end of the month.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That’s amazing. That’s an amazing career.

NEL NODDINGS

It’s a follow-up to the original *Care* book because you’ve got 25 years of care ethics there. I rely very heavily on Virginia Held’s work. She put out a lovely book a few years ago entitled, *The*

*Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, (2:00) which is an indication of what's happened to care ethics. It has moved from just the inner circle to out into the whole world. Virginia and I talked quite a bit when I started this book. The title of the book is *The Maternal Factor* was a subtitle to, *Two Paths Morality* because if you look traditional ethics, traditional moral theory, it's all come out of masculine experience. I mean, it's just the way it is. It's nobody's fault or anything. It's just the way it is. We've been edging up on this in care ethics, but this is a frank recognition that we can probably trace the beginnings of morality, at least in part, to maternal instinct and work from there. You can also trace it as traditional ethics (3:00) has done to self-interest. It's not selfishness. It's self-interest. So in traditional masculine ethics, the idea is, I better be nice to you so that you'll be nice to me. See that's the self-interest thing. But the maternal relation is the only relation that starts out other interested. See think about that. It's the only one where the other is more important than the first self.

#### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So the foundation to that book was the ethics of caring that you referenced, *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, in which you write, "We will see that teachers not only have to create caring (4:00) relationships in which they are the carers, but that they also have a responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care. Students should be given opportunities to learn how to care for themselves, for other human beings, for the natural and human-made worlds, and for the world of ideas." Tell us what inspired you to write this book.

#### NEL NODDINGS

Well I guess all the things that I've already said, but I wanted to apply care ethics to teaching and schooling, and to make it a little more accessible. A whole batch of my books, the challenge to care is probably one of the most accessible, and I wanted it to be useful to people who are actually teaching. But when we talk about helping (5:00) kids to learn to care for one another, group work is a wonderful opportunity. But, like so many other things that come up in education, it has been pretty badly warped. So sometimes people do group work—they cooperate with one another in order to compete with another group. If you look at Bob Slavin's work, you've got cooperative, competitive groups. If you look at some other work, the kids do group work in order to learn to play various roles in the group, one is the leader, and one is the scribe, and the other people have other roles in it. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, with the variety of uses to which you can put in cooperative groups. They're all sort of interesting. But what I've suggested is that the main purpose of working together is to help one another. (6:00) You know, it's that simple. In my math classes when I was serving an explanation and gave an assignment, I said, "You can work together." You work together. You help one another. That also gives the teacher the opportunity to walk around the room and see if any kids are left out when you're working together. If any kids are being mean to one another. And if a kid is being left out, what do you do? Well you pick a couple kids you know are going to be decent and receptive, and you say, "Hey, how about if Johnny joins you. He's got a couple good ideas." And you know these kids are going to say, "Sure." You're not going to pick out two nasty kids and wind up with problems there. So it's so much easier than getting all of these highly technical, efficient groups put together. Work together. And as you go around the room, if kids are (7:00) being mean to each other, you just tap them on the shoulder, and you say, "Hey, remember why we're doing this. We're doing this to help one another. That's the idea. Help one another." It works pretty well actually.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In this book, which happens to be my favorite book that you've written, you present a conceptual framework that we as educators might follow in education. Nel Noddings keeping things as is, but also spending substantial more time discussing caring issues, including caring for self, caring for the inner circle, caring for stranger and distant others, caring for animals, plants, and the earth, caring for the human-made world, and caring for ideas. In the traditional philosophical sense. It sounds like the Nodding school in the making. Have you entertained that thought?

NEL NODDINGS

By the time I thought about it, my husband and I (8:00) thought about it, we decided not to do it. Starting a school is a very, very big job. I would, rather than do that myself, I would rather work with people who are already established in schools. The beginning of that, Audrey said, "keeping things as they are and still making changes." The reason for that, if I had my druthers, I would throw the whole blankity blank school curriculum out and start all over again. I think we could do a much better job. I mean, again, there's nothing against men here. I'm married to a wonderful man, as you know, and I have wonderful male friends; but the curriculum was established by men. It just was. Do you suppose that the curriculum would be devoid (9:00) of parenting, say? Or homemaking if women had been involved in the beginning? I don't think so. But that's not going to change. The curriculum that we have in place is pretty much what they had when Plato put it in. Now we've got computer science. If they'd had computers, I'm sure Plato would have had computer science in there. But what you can do, and what I find enormously powerful is you can stretch the disciplines from within, and that's what we really have to do. So math teachers should teach more than math. They should include poetry, and fiction, and biology, and history, and all the possible connections you can make with math. They so rarely do it that when a math teacher does it, they kids say, "What? The math teachers can read?" (10:00) Well, yeah. That I think we can do—to get teachers to move beyond the narrow borders of their own disciplines and show what it means to be an educated person. Look at what we do to high school kids. They have to study four or five subjects, right? And they're taught by people who know only one. Now why is that? Why is that? There ought to be some indications. I'm not saying, don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that all high school teachers ought to be able to teach all the subjects. That would be impossible. We need specialists for a lot of reasons. But there ought to be some indications that people have studied these other subjects. Otherwise, why bother with it? Why go through it if all you're going to do is just specialize in one thing and forget everything else you ever learned? Well that's (11:00) a thought project for you.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In 1993 you then published your book, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief*. Tell us more about this book and its main premise.

NEL NODDINGS

That came out of the invitation to do the John Dewey Lecture. Usually the Dewey Lecture does become a published book. I was telling Audrey earlier that it was probably the easiest book I've ever done because I had a whole stream of lectures to do, and each lecture became a chapter. And the feedback I got from the lecture helped me write the chapter. So it went along very smoothly. The basic idea is that we should teach about religion in our public schools. How can

you leave out one of the most culturally (12:00) important features of a society? Just leave it out? Now I am not religious. I do not belong to any religious institution, but I think it's enormously important that that material be included in someone's education. In fact, so does Richard Dawkins. He's the most outspoken atheist in the world, I suppose. But he says that all kids should have an opportunity to read and study the Bible as literature, otherwise there's a big hole in their education. And I think that when you teach about religion, you have to find a way to do it with critical intelligence, and that's where we get in trouble, right there. That's what's so hard.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So would you take the approach of teaching multiple (13:00) religions in schools?

NEL NODDINGS

I didn't get the last part.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Would you take the approach...

NEL NODDINGS

There's an echo.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sorry about that. Would you take the approach of teaching multiple religions in school?

NEL NODDINGS

Yeah. That would be better than nothing. But it doesn't usually help very much. There are courses in world religions. And if you look at the textbooks used, they very carefully avoid every controversial issue. Now why do it and avoid all the controversial issues? Somewhere along the line we have to learn to come to grips with these things without being mean to each other, you know? You have to be able to talk about these things. Not too long ago, just a couple of weeks, in fact, I had a conversation with another former student who is a Rabbi, and he is one of the very best TAs I ever had at Stanford. So we got to talking about Passover, (14:00) and I said, "But how can you admire a god who would kill all the firstborns of the Egyptians?" That was the question that I asked him. I said, "What would we say of a human being who did a thing like that?" And he told me a long story about it. About all of the studies that Jewish thinkers have done because they have agonized over this question. See if you can have that kind of conversation and talk about the agonizing over it, and the partial resolutions, and the problems that still remain, then you're bringing critical intelligence to, in his case believe, and in my case unbelieve.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Certainly. Instead of just avoiding the topic.

NEL NODDINGS

Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In 2003 you published the book, *Happiness and Education*. (15:00) What are the principles of happiness? It makes me happy talking about it.

NEL NODDINGS

It's one book that I enjoyed writing. Well I enjoyed writing all my books, but when I finished *Women and Evil*, which was published in 1989, I was depressed. I don't want anymore of this evil stuff. But writing *Happiness and Education* really was a joy. The idea is simple enough. If you talk to parents and say to a parent, "What do you want for your children?" The vast majority of them will say, "I want my children to be happy." Right? They want them to be happy. Yet we never seem to include happiness as an aim of education. I mean you can go over all the school lists of aims, and I have never found one with happiness in there, but you may. There may be one out there. I would not tell kids what happiness is. (16:00) I would not tell them they should be happy. I wouldn't say that happiness is fun, and we'll have fun all day. That's no good. But I think we should talk with them about how people have looked at happiness. What the great thinkers have said about it. What the novelists have said about it. What ordinary people have said about it. So a question such as, can a bad person be happy? You've got to sneak up on that one because if you start right out with that at the high school level, kids are going to say, they'll point out to some bad person in the world and say, "I'd like to be as unhappy as that guy." So you've got to start somewhere else. Relationships are, sociologists tell us, are the single greatest source of happiness. They're also our single greatest source of misery. (17:00) We need to talk about these things. For many people, spirituality is a source of happiness. In public life, occupations can be a source of happiness. Some of us are doubly blessed—we're happy in our occupation, and we're happy in our home life. Others are happy in one and miserable in the other. And some poor folks are miserable in both. So there is all this wonderful stuff to read and to talk about with happiness. And then there is a chapter on happiness in schools and how you can create an atmosphere that might be called a happy atmosphere.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In terms of the path that students choose to pursue for their professional careers, how do they find happiness?

NEL NODDINGS

To talk with students about their eventual professions? (18:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes.

NEL NODDINGS

You know, this I something that came up yesterday when I did some work with the children of the HOPE organization, which, by the way, is doing really some wonderful things. The question has to be this, we want all kids to succeed, but they don't all have to succeed at the academic stuff that we pour into them. Child self-worth should not depend on high academic performance. There are kids who are not much interested in it. There are kids that are not very good at it. Their aptitudes lie somewhere else. And they should know that we love and support them regardless of this. I know from experience that when a math teacher compliments a kid on a work of art, or an athletic performance, or something else, (19:00) it means a great deal. It means a great deal. It

really, really matters. So to help kids to realize that there are many paths to success, not just one, and there are people in this country, I have heard some of them, who more or less say to kids, “You’ve got to work hard. You’ve got to ready for college. You’ve got to go to college or be nothing.” That’s awful. That is really, really awful to people.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In 2006 you published the book, *Critical Lessons: What our Schools Should Teach*. What should our schools teach?

NEL NODDINGS

This book is really just taking off now, and I’m pleased with it. It did win an award. That made me happy. I don’t think (20:00) what I’ve suggested in there will ever be done, so I don’t know how useful it is. But we talk about critical lessons—we ought to give kids an opportunity to think critically about some big issues. Advertising, for example is one fairly obvious one. Why is it that advertising works? It isn’t that we believe it, usually. How come it works? How come there’s a whole science of advertising? Our other critical issues. One is war. There’s a chapter on that. One on self knowledge—another place we don’t give enough attention in schools. (21:00) Now in elementary schools kids get, I think, more homework that they should get. I told you already that I don’t think I had any homework in my first six years of school. Didn’t seem to do me any harm. Kids now get a load of homework, and parents, schools try to involve the parents, right? They try to involve the parents. Parents should be interested in their kids’ homework. This causes more family fights, probably, than anything else. Parents worked all day, and they’re tired. Now they’re faced with a worksheet from second grade. They don’t know what the teacher wants because you can’t tell from a second grade worksheet what’s wanted. I’ve looked at some of them. I don’t know. I know you’re supposed to color in little things somewhere, but what are the criteria? I don’t know. So what does the parent say to the child (22:00)? “If you’d been paying attention, you’d know.” Oh, boy. So then you’ve got a fight over second grade homework. Then there are lots of parents, even through high school age, who tell their kids when to do their homework. The kid comes home from seventh grade, some parents make them do their homework before they can do anything else. Well, gee, you’ve been in school all these hours. You need a break. It would be much, much better, and I talk about that in the chapter, to help kids figure out when they do their best work. When do you do your best work? Under what circumstances? With music? Or without music? With food? Or without food? With drink? Or without drink? I’m talking about innocent drinks here. When I write, I like a glass of wine. With kids it would be a coke or something. Before (23:00) exercise? Or after exercise? I mean, these are important to figure out. And there’s a wonderful book by a mathematician, Jacques Hadamard, called the *Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field*, you may be aware of it. And in it he looks at studies of how mathematicians work. He’s making a contrast between rational and intuitive. But in asking these questions, he came across a scientist who said, “Legs are the wheels of thought,” and he did all his work pacing back and forth. Then he ran across a mathematician who did his best thinking in the bathtub. He took five baths a day, so he was always lying in the bathtub thinking. Then you’ve got the example of Descartes, who did his best thinking in bed. He stayed in the bed in the morning and did his thinking (24:00). Well, of course, if you tell high school kids that, they’ll want to know why they can’t stay in bed all morning. But you get them thinking about themselves. When do you do your best work? Under what conditions? And help them move on from there, instead of this coercive parental control.

Now I think that, I'm pretty sure, that I never did that, right (looks at daughter in audience)? Yes, she agrees that I never did that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Well this begs the question, where do you do your best thinking?

NEL NODDINGS

Where do I do my best thinking? I do a lot of thinking as I am falling asleep at night. And my husband can testify to that because I will say, "Yes, that's right." And he'll say, "I didn't say anything." (25:00) And some of it while I'm reading. I'll stop reading and think.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And some on the beach that we discussed before. And there is one of your most recent books, *When School Reform Goes Wrong*, in which you talk about how out of school factors impact schooling, and you critically look at the devastating effects of *No Child Left Behind*. What are your assertions in this book?

NEL NODDINGS

This is a short book, and it's written with the expressed purpose of inviting people to think. So there are hardly any footnotes in it, which is very unusual because my books are usually loaded with them. So there are hardly any footnotes, and I only refer to a couple people, David Berliner is one because I think it is vital that people look at his stuff. And at the time I was writing it, he was looking at the work that led to (26:00) *Collateral Damage*, the dreadful cheating epidemic. And I referred to Jerry Bracey's work, his columns in the *Kappan* were enormously useful. We corresponded a little bit, and then he died. It was really too bad. But the book is just meant to get people thinking, to ask what do we mean by choice? What do we mean by standards? What's the purpose of this thing called *No Child Left Behind*? Is there any rationality in it at all? It's an easy read.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What do we mean by national standards? Do we need national standards?

NEL NODDINGS

What do I think about national standards? I can't understand why we need them. Think about it for a minute. (27:00) What would we need them for? National standards. If you're preparing for college, and these folks who are so crazy about national standards want to prepare everybody for college, right? Don't we already have national standards? We have textbook publishers that pretty much control what's taught. We have the universities, which have utter control over what will be acceptable to them. Back to the hill are the SATs and the ACTs. So what will we gain from national standards? I just can't see the point. On top of that, we already have state standards, and no state has been able to meet them, right? If we have standards at a particular city level (28:00), we have the same problem—we can't meet them, right? So what's the point? And then on top of that, and this makes really mad, we're spending billions of dollars on this. No, because what follows standards? Tests. And what follows on tests? More tests. Implementing them. Grading them. Evaluating them. Reporting them. Arguing over them. Billions of dollars that could go into something meaningful in education. So I am not a strong advocate of national

standards. And when people say, “Yes, but the countries that are ahead of us have national standards.” That’s only half true. Some do, and some don’t have national standards. And the ones that have national standards begin separating kids out as early as age eight or so, right? And we would not do that. (29:00) So, don’t give me that stuff about other countries and national standards.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

How many honorary doctorates have you earned?

NEL NODDINGS

I will be getting my fifth in a couple of weeks. I have four, and I’m getting one more.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Congratulations. That’s an amazing accomplishment. You say that you cannot imagine running out of ideas. So what is next for you?

NEL NODDINGS

Well I’m in the middle of a book on war and peace. It’s under contract with Cambridge. And we haven’t settled on a title. I said, “Well it’s on war and peace.” And my editor said, “You can’t do that. They’ll think it’s on Tolstoy.” Well that’s right, she’s right about that. So we juggled around. I think, eventually, the title will be *Loving and Hating War* because the more I study it, the more I see this ambivalence (30:00), the ambiguities that, in almost every feature of war there’s this love/hate attitude. And our presidents often say, “No one wants war.” You heard George Bush say it more than once, “No one wants war.” That’s not true. There are a lot of people who do, and for a variety of reasons. Just studying for this, which is half the fun of writing a book, really, I mean, just learning stuff, I think is just wonderful. The great scientist, Haldane, you could tell a lot of stories on him. He had to go into the army in World War I, I guess it was. And he admitted that he enjoyed killing people. Enjoyed it. (31:00) How do you come to grips with that? He wouldn’t have enjoyed murdering someone because that would be illegal. But in war, it’s legal, see. So that’s just one example. I’ve got a whole slew of examples where almost every feature you pick out, you’d find this love/hate relationship. So that’s what I’m working on now. I’m a little less than halfway on it. But there are other things after that. So here’s for graduate students, one of the things that always kind of worried me, and it didn’t happen often, but once in a while it would happen, students couldn’t get (32:00) an idea for a dissertation. They say, “Well I’ve got to get an idea.” That worries me because I can’t imagine running out of ideas. I can imagine running out of time to do something with those ideas, or having difficulty figuring out how to do it, that we all suffer. But running out of ideas, no, I just can’t imagine that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That’s a wonderful problem to have.

According to Michael Katz, your ego needs have never been dependent on extrinsic acknowledgement of your professional achievements. You are a consummate teacher scholar whose breadth of wisdom extends far beyond the realms of academic and reaches into the spaces where ordinary people who have animals for pets, enjoy gardening and cooking and parenting, and you love detective novels, and you live your day-to-day lives there. You convert the abstract

into the concrete through the lens of a parent, (33:00) a mother, an animal lover, and a gardener, and you find joy in the simplest things—growing your vegetables, canning your strawberries, taking walks on the beach, playing with your cat and dog, cooking dinner, having conversation about a wide range of topics, but you never let your status as a famous scholar, and lecturer, and author interfere with treating everyone with the same kindness, thoughtfulness, and consideration that you would expect people to show you. No matter how busy, people always come first for you. That’s a nice tribute to you.

NEL NODDINGS

He’s very generous.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

A very nice man.

---

#### Video 4: Philosophical Questions

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Question one. Who helped you become the person you are today?

NEL NODDINGS

Who?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes.

NEL NODDINGS

Well a lot of people, I guess. Certainly all of my teachers because I said right in the beginning that school was a second home, in many ways primary home for me. I think, in fact I know, that I could name all my teachers from first grade through high school. I forgotten a couple of my college teachers. But see, you’ve got this lack of continuity there. Once you get into graduate school, I never forget any of my teachers there because there, again, you’ve got some continuity. So teachers were very, very, very important in my life, (1:00) and friends, and my kids, extremely important. And many of the books that I’ve read.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What inspires you?

NEL NODDINGS

What inspires? Well I think you never know for sure what’s going to inspire you. When I started working on caring, the dominant source was the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber. His relational ethics—I was just enormously moved by *I and Thou*. And I used it in some of my classes and got such extraordinarily different reactions. There were students that told me that the book changed their lives (2:00), and I thought, “Yeah, mine too.” But others said they couldn’t make any sense out of it at all and couldn’t figure out why in the world I would ever assign a book like *I and Thou*. So there you get these extraordinary differences. But that was certainly very influential for

me. John Dewey's work's been influential for obvious reasons. William James, particularly the *Varieties of Religious Experience*. I was influenced, this may be odd, but I was influenced by Pearl Buck, not so much her novels, although I enjoyed those, but her two biographies, the biography of her mother, *The Exile*. Even the title tells you something so important. And of her father, *Fighting Angel*. Two very, very powerful books. I was very influenced (3:00) by both of those. But you get influenced in small ways and in big ways. The ones I'm describing are in big ways, but I watch for things. You mentioned that I like mystery stories. That's one of my main recreations, is mystery stories. In one of P.D. James's novels, it's either her most recent or her next to the most recent, there's a police incident, and the man reports the main numbers from a license plate. He reports 341, and the other cop says, "Well, can we trust this?" And the first one says, "I think we can because he's a mathematician, and he says that 341 is a special number." And it is a special number. If you add one (4:00) to two squared, plus two to the fourth, plus two to the sixth, plus two to the eighth, you get 341. I watch for things like that. They are enormously useful, and you jot them down. They appear every now and then, like in lectures.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Numerology. What do you find uninspiring?

NEL NODDINGS

Sports. Money. Business. I was tickled pink to hear that my pension fund has gone up, and I'll be getting more every month. I thought, "That's just lovely." But that's it. I have no interest beyond that. When I was a kid, I loved baseball. In fact, I've got the two crooked fingers to prove it. But now I have no interest whatever in sports. I don't think there's anything wrong with it. (5:00) I think if people enjoy it that's terrific. But I just don't. You go through the newspaper, and there are certain sections that you just don't look at at all. So I'm totally ignorant on that topic.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your favorite word?

NEL NODDINGS

Favorite word?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes.

NEL NODDINGS

Caring, I suppose! I suppose that would be my favorite word.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

NEL NODDINGS

When I was in high school, I thought I would like to be a psychiatrist, and I read a lot of Freud. I can't say that I understood it because I was a high school kid. My parents, as I said, hadn't even gone to high school; and most of my teachers wouldn't have had any interest in this. But I read Freud, and without totally understanding it, I became very (6:00), very interested in it. One of the

most useful concepts I got from it was his notion of repression. As I said, I didn't understand it entirely, but I believed after reading Freud that you do yourself a lot of harm when you repress certain thoughts. And I decided right then, that ok, I wasn't going to do that anymore. So if you have really mean thoughts about someone, that's okay. You don't act on it, but you don't repress the thought. In fact, it can be a wonderful psychological experience, emotional experience to let that thought go (7:00) even farther than you might like it to go, until finally you have to laugh at it and say, "This is ridiculous." You know? "I'd never do that." And then it's over. It's over. Now, I don't know that that would be all that useful for other people, but it was enormously valuable to me to learn to not repress thoughts. If they come in, let them come in, entertain them, stay with them for a while. Then the whole thing's gone. As a result, maybe not as a result, I, I don't think I've ever had a broken friendship. Little things may come along, you patch them up. So you don't stay mad at people. But of course if they were with you while you were thinking some of these things, they might be mad at you. (8:00) So that was one thing. I thought I might like to be a psychiatrist. Then I realized I could never afford that education, and I really had wanted to be a teacher since second grade on. So that was pretty settled. Now when I think about it, maybe a botanist.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

A botanist?

NEL NODDINGS

A botanist. Yeah. And then sometimes I think, "Well, an astronomer, that would be neat."

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What profession other than your own would not like to attempt?

NEL NODDINGS

Oh, most others, I suppose. I don't think I'd want to be a lawyer, though we have several in the family, and they're very nice. I don't think I'd want to be a surgeon because I feel, I wouldn't want to be a surgeon. I'm quite content. (9:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your favorite movie?

NEL NODDINGS

Favorite movie? Probably *Casablanca*. We have a lot of favorite movies. We like old movies. In fact, Vicky, here, can remember that she, and another of my graduate students, and I used to go to the theater in Palo Alto to see the old movies. And we enjoyed those tremendously. If I think about, well, *Casablanca*, yes; but in general, you are going to believe this, but it is true, I love John Wayne movies. I have them all. There's just something about those movies where the good and the bad are so distinct that it's a moral (10:00) refreshment to watch the old westerns where the good and the bad are so distinct. In that sense, not like real life at all, but quite wonderful. So, who's my favorite actor? John Wayne. I didn't like it his politics, mind you, but his movies I love.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What about your favorite book?

NEL NODDINGS

My favorite book. I don't know. I'd have to think more about that. I have so many books that I love that that would be hard. In fiction, I guess it would be *Bleak House*. I read *Bleak House* years ago, and I read Harold Bloom's critique of it, and it was so lovely that I read (11:00) it again. It comes usually in two volumes, about 500 pages each. If you can read a book that long and be sorry that it's ending, you know, kind of wishing there was another volume there, then you know it's a pretty terrific book. That's the way *Bleak House* was for me. Somebody else back there likes *Bleak House*. Or you had the same reaction?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you could tell President Obama one thing, what would it be?

NEL NODDINGS

Well, I don't know about one thing. I guess, I would tell him don't call it Race to the Top because education isn't a race. Even though the derivation (12:00) of curriculum is a little racetrack, but never mind that. Education is not a race. On the heels of that, I would say don't give money to people who are already doing well. Put together the equivalent of what I said last night, the equivalent of a Manhattan Project. Identify the problem. Do something about our really troubled schools, and that might mean changing neighborhoods, providing medical and dental clinics, making sure that there are affordable goods in a walkable distance, doing something about inner city transportation, a lot of things like that. But I think we could do it. If we could put together a Manhattan Project that produced the atomic bomb (13:00), we ought to be able to put together a Manhattan-like Project that would address the problem of our most troubled neighborhoods and schools. Then lay off putting all the other junk on all these other schools. We don't need it. Leave them alone. That's what I would tell him.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you could have dinner with anybody dead or alive, who would it be and why?

NEL NODDINGS

Oh, I like having dinner with anybody.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Dead or alive?

NEL NODDINGS

When I'm away from home, I would like to have dinner with my husband. I miss him, you know.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's so sweet.

NEL NODDINGS

Well it's true.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's good.

If Heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates?

NEL NODDINGS

I'd like to hear him say, "I exist." (14:00) But I don't think that will happen.

---

Video 5: Words of Wisdom

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The next part is the "Words of Wisdom" section of the show. And now we'll speak to the audience.

NEL NODDINGS

There's the first one. **Find a topic or issue that fascinates you. Analyze and apply it over a wide range of related subjects.** This is special advice for new professors. One of the worst mistakes you can make is just try to get out a lot of publications scattered over a bunch of different topics. I've seen that happen to some young people, and it's a grief because that's not the way to get tenure. What you should try to do in the six years (1:00) you're working to get tenure is to make name for yourself on something, so that when that time comes to be judged for tenure, people will be able to say, "Oh, I know, she's the person who does such and such." Now it doesn't mean that you have to be stuck in a narrow niche. You don't have to be because you can take a really fascinating topic and apply it over a wide range of interests. So I don't know if that's a word of wisdom, but it's a word of advice that I think is good advice.

Integrate your research and teaching. If your institution will allow you to do that. There are institutions where you're pretty much told what you (2:00) have to teach. Unfortunately, some of our state institutions are like that, but in most of them, you'll get some choice in what you teach. I was extremely fortunate because at Stanford I had complete choice. I am not a great advocate for required courses, and I think I only taught a required course maybe three times. Aside from that, I always had a choice of what I was going to teach. And my teaching never got in the way of my research, and vice versa. That's wonderful. If you can set things up that way, then you've got a really good situation.

This is for (3:00) those of you who are working on your dissertations. Of course your dissertation is important; but, it is an academic exercise. And if you want to publish your dissertation, you will have to rewrite it because no one wants to read a book that has the form that a conventional dissertation has. It's boring, you know. Really boring. In fact, my husband knows that I always have a stack of books beside the bed. One stack is mystery stories that I love, another stack would be novels, sometimes old ones that I want to reread, sometimes new ones, and there's the stack of professional reading, and when I'm having trouble sleeping, I read a dissertation. So do it. Do a good job on it. You know what an academic exercise is by the time (4:00) you get to the dissertation stage. Do a accurate, lovely job on it. Don't have a lot of typos and misspellings. I hate that when I see it because it makes me think, "Oh, if this person's careless on this, they may

be careless up here too. That would be very bad.” But do it, and be done with it, and get on with your life. Once in a while, a dissertation does become a life work. But that’s very rare, and don’t think of it that way at the beginning. If it happens, well it happens.

Keep expanding your repertoire with stories, poetry, history, and biography. Sure, of course you want to keep learning, and you want to keep an eye out for things like the 341 in the P.D. James novel. You find these little (5:00) interesting tidbits everywhere. On the plane on the way out I was reading the latest of Alexander McCall Smith’s series, the *No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency*. You know that? They’re so restful, these stories. They’re so restful. And in it, there was a paragraph that I can actually use in some of my lectures that talks about how important mechanics are. When you say not all kids have to go to college, then there’s this lovely paragraph, “What would happen to the world if we had no mechanics?” First the cars would fall apart, then everything would fall apart. Right? Everything would fall apart. Really neat. So I watch for those things. I use stories, and poetry, and fiction, biography, history in my work regularly. It’s a way of enlivening your lessons and enlivening what you yourself (6:00) write. And besides that, while you’re doing this, you can say, “I’m working.”

Don’t settle into a narrow niche. Enjoy contacts and colleagues all over your university (or organization). This is, it’s not so much for your advancement, as it is for your professional happiness. You can settle into a very narrow niche, and a lot of people in education do. And it may be alright for some people it may be alright. Again, I was very fortunate to work on a campus where if we wanted to we could work all over the place. So I served on the Peace Studies faculty for about five years. I was a regular on the Feminist Studies (7:00) faculty. I worked with the people on Science, Values, and Technology. I helped out with occasional lectures with the introductory course in the Philosophy department. I cooperated with a person in the Law School in putting together a book on feminist studies. And I did a cooperative study with a guy in the medical school on teaching on the university campus. So this is, it’s makes life more exciting and gives you a deeper appreciation for what other people are doing. So, if you can, branch out, find out what other people are doing and work with them. It also gives you a very healthy sense of humility (8:00) because you realize, my goodness, the things that are going on around you that you’ll never be able to do, but you can appreciate.

Don’t use last year’s lectures. Half the fun of teaching (and lecturing) is in the planning. It’s a way to keep growing. I keep notes from the lectures that I do around the country and around the world, but I never do the same one twice. It may incorporate parts. And certainly in my teaching, I never use last year’s lectures because look, you’re reading stories, and fiction, and biography, and all the rest of it. So your repertoire is going to grow, and so the outline may be sort of the same, but it’s going to be fresh and new. And that’s better for the students and much more fun. (9:00) All my life in teaching, I’ve found planning to be an exquisitely joyful experience. I just love it, you know. To sit down at the table to plan a lesson, whether it was a math lesson or later, philosophy, and you begin to think, “Oh, wait a minute, I want to check a book.” And you get that book out, and you do a little more, and then you say, “I’ve got to get this book out.” And you can sort of tell what’s going on because after a while there’s a stack of books coming up here. A stack of books over here. And it’s just a, for me, a joyful experience. So I would wish that for all teachers. Even for elementary school teachers. I am a sincere admirer of the Hawkins (10:00), David Hawkins, and his wife, Francis. Thinking back now to the days of open

education. They both did lovely work on open education, and Francis Hawkins once said to a group of people, “Of course you have to have a lesson plan. You should plan carefully. Have a lesson plan. But for Heaven’s sake, don’t follow it.”

---

## Video 6: Audience Questions

Audience Member:

Hello. I’ll be the first to go. I’m (name removed). I’m an assistant professor here. We’re delighted that you’re here at Arizona State University. It was great to hear you. I have two questions—two parts. But they’re very easy, I promise. The first question is, you sort of alluded to an educated person. So I wanted you to sort of talk about what is an educated person.

NEL NODDINGS

Easy question, right?

Audience Member:

Easy one, right, see? And if you could pick a person who is alive who is sort of an exemplar, besides yourself, of course, of an educated person. And then the second question is talk about a piece of fiction that has influenced your work. Something you read that really influenced your work—I’m curious about that. I know it’s two parts, but I can’t remember the second part, (1:00) so, those two questions. Thank you.

NEL NODDINGS

Let me start with the last part. A piece of fiction that I incorporated into my work. What comes to mind immediately, and later on I’ll think of something different, Samuel Butler’s, *The Way of all Flesh*. I’ve used that quite often in my work, and the reason is that the main character in it is really abused by his parents. They are what I call virtue carers, but not good virtue carers. They had utter control over their child. The father beat the little boy if he (2:00) didn’t learn fast enough. But everything that was done was done for his own good, right? And the poor kid believed this. He believed these things were being done for his own good. And it wasn’t until the narrator of the story came into his life to show him what caring really means—I don’t think they used the word. That was very influential and were others. The little book by Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*, I’ve used quite a bit and will use again in this discussion war and peace. So I draw on fiction quite a lot.

Now the first question, the hard one, how would I describe an educated person? (3:00) I think I’d hesitate to do it. I would hesitate to do it because there are so many different forms of educated people. One of the things that worries me is that when we get into a field, we become excited about it and think that everyone else should learn this too. Here’s an example, math teachers and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics get together and ask, what should kids learn in math? They start off very reasonable. Very reasonable, they have to be able to count, and add, and subtract, and whatnot. And about 35 minutes into the discussion, they’ll say, “They should have to know the difference between a definite and an indefinite integral.” That (4:00) somehow becomes the mark of an educated person to know that. Well, see now you’ve gone too far. Or people in music education, do you know that there are some people who don’t know that

Beethoven wrote five piano concertos? How can they go on living? They don't know this. That temptation to take our own field and suppose that there's something wrong with people who don't know what we know. I would like to avoid. Give me time, and we could talk about people in fiction and then in real life who I think are models of educated people. But it will be hard. I don't want them to become recipes, okay. Think of the James brothers, William James and Henry James. A lot of people have said (5:00) that Henry should have been the psychologist and William the novelist. So they have something in mind when they look at them and say that, but to me, yeah, they're models of educated people.

Audience Member:

Hello, my name is (name removed), and I...

NEL NODDINGS

Hold the mic up closer.

Audience Member:

I have a passion for studying parent-teacher relationships, especially K-12. Because of your experiences and your studies in feminist theory, what have been your experiences, and what would you, what can you help me understand more from your perspective and your experiences in parent-teacher relationships, especially with deferring social classes, middle class teacher, lower (6:00) middle class parent?

NEL NODDINGS

Yeah, I've seen some very interesting accounts of work in this area. One of them, as I recall, was done in the Seattle area, where the principal decided to, to really open the school up to have a coffee or tea hour in the morning and one again later in the afternoon, and encouraged parents to come in and to chat about things. To let them know that they were welcomed there. I think it was in this same account, but it might not be, involving parents in the actual school activities. She learned that that if you are working with parents (7:00) who are not really educated, it makes them extremely nervous if you ask them to be involved in curriculum decisions of any kinds because they know they're not up to it. So they would much rather be asked to be chaperone on a bus trip, for example; to help out somehow in the classroom with something that they are able to do; and as they are able to gain strength in that, they may be involved in some of these other discussions. So I found that very valuable. There was another one in San Jose, where the principal recommended that the school board buy a house in the neighborhood and (8:00) make it into a, make it into a weekday boarding house. And the way I understand it, more of this is going on in the country, but I haven't actually seen a case like that. She recommended it because some parents had actually told her that they just couldn't get up in the morning to get their kids to school, and there were a lot of reasons for it. Some you could excuse—some were pretty bad. But they had confessed this. So she thought, "Well, if we have a place that was like a boarding school, where parents could drop their kids off on Sunday night and pick them up on Friday afternoon, this would really help a lot." She was fired. So that was the end of that. But there are ideas like that out there that are worth considering. And principals should consider having more open forums on topics—not just (9:00) PTA, raising money and making cookies and whatnot—but open forums on topics to try to explain to parents what you're doing and why you're doing,

and then listen to them because they may have objections, and you want to hear those. So, we could spend a lot of time on that topic—it's a big one.

Audience Member:

(Name removed), an assistant professor here. I'm curious with your body of work if you could describe for us what you view as the purpose of public education, and then given the conversation about what's gone wrong with reform, if you could talk to us about maybe three things that are going right. What are the three things that you think we're doing well presently.

NEL NODDINGS

Well I know that I wrote somewhere that our aim should be to produce caring, competent, loving, and lovable people. It wouldn't be a bad (10:00) aim. But you could put in more politically acceptable terms, I guess. I think we should be trying to produce citizens who have a commitment to the common good. We're neglecting that very, very badly. So interested producing people with high intellectual capabilities. But look at some of the people that we're producing—graduates of some of our finest universities who don't give a fig for their fellow people. So to produce people who can think critically. I wouldn't make that the top aim, but I would make it one of them. To think, at least think critically; to have this commitment to the common good; (11:00) to have some sense for what makes for a happy life; all of those things I think should be built in to what we're doing. In fact, if you go back to 1918, and look at the Cardinal Principles that were produced there, you'll see that the people who were thinking then were ahead of what we're doing now. They said, "What are the big things that we should be paying attention to? Health, command of the fundamental processes, ethical character, worthy home membership, worthy use of leisure time, and..." There's one more, there's one more. Well, the one more will come to me. But look, already they were ahead of what we're doing now. Worthy home membership. (12:00) What do we mean by that? Worthy use of leisure time. What do we mean by that? Do we do anything about it in the schools at all? And we're talking about health, not just teaching the parts of the body, for example. We need to do something about childhood obesity. We need to do something about exercise and nutrition. So you could go back to those Cardinal Principles and have a sounder foundation for curriculum than what we have now. That was 1918. I'm always proud of the fact that the Cardinal Principles were written by a math teacher.

Audience Member:

I have to let you know, I've been in higher education for 25 years, and it's odd for me to use a microphone because I'm an old coach, even though I appreciate your take on sports. (13:00) Forty years ago, I was nine years old back at Kent State University, actually involved in their lab school as a fourth grader, when the students were actually shot on campus. And you had me reflecting a little bit about that time in my life because I think it was one of the greatest turning points in my life that love/hate situation. And I wanted to set that up because it was an active conversation with a lot of my former friends on Facebook: where were we at the time, at Burger Chef or shopping with our mothers. But it made me reflect even more so in your conversation about schooling and the passion and the care and the love. And I never had a grade from kindergarten up through sixth grade, I mean like an A, B, or C. We just didn't have grades at this lab school. In fact, we met with our teachers, and we were rated with a dialogue if we were working above our potential, at our potential, or below.

NEL NODDINGS

And see, you still turned out pretty good, (14:00) right?

Audience Member:

I am excellent. Yeah, I feel really good about that. I share that a lot of time with my graduate students that still to this day at 49 years of age, I have a challenge with grades, and we're ending the term right now, and I'm grading. There is a core piece of me that takes me back to the university school and this idea that grading doesn't have to be the way it is now, and I still struggle, and I have no answer.

NEL NODDINGS

Of course it doesn't.

Audience Member:

So being the great scholar that you are and the great person you are, how do you deal with just the basic thing that we can't get away from, and that's grades?

NEL NODDINGS

Well, again this is something that we could spend a lot of time on. At Stanford I did not give grades. Well the first year or two I think I did because I didn't know that we were allowed not to. As soon as I found that we didn't have to, (15:00) that there's such thing as instructor's option pass/not pass, all of my courses from then on were taught that way. Now when I say that, there are people who say, "Oh, there you go! No standards!" No standards, right? Well one of the years that I got the teaching award, the student who at commencement introduced it said, "She makes us write our papers over and over." I knew I was getting the award when she said that. Of course there are standards. I mean, gee, when I send an article off to a journal, it doesn't come back to me marked with A, B, C, you know. It comes back with constructive suggestions and some goofy suggestions, and you have to sort through those. So you don't need grades in order to have high standards. What you need is a cooperative effort (16:00) to produce the best possible product. At the high school level I agonized over this for years. I finally decided on a method that I still think is the right method, and that is that kids are not going to be allowed to go on to chapter two until they have mastered at least the elements of chapter one because you get this cumulative failure. And so you get, I used what might be called, what did I call it? A cumulative grading. You started at a certain level, and every test you pass, you go up; and that sort of eliminates test anxiety because you know you have nothing to lose by taking a test. You can only get something higher. So when you have to give grades, you can use a method like that, or the method that was cooked up somewhere (17:00) in the Midwest called contract grading. If you must use grades, then use contract grades so the kids know exactly what they have to do to achieve a certain grade. You keep working on this—teaching is a lifelong moral quest. You never get it exactly right. But you keep trying, right? I agree with you whole-heartedly. That grade business is just out of hand. You certainly don't need it at the elementary school. Somewhere along the line you need to be able to tell people, "Yes, you are good enough at this that you can plan a career around it." Or, "Just do what you have to do on this. What would you really like to do? Something else?" But thanks for asking that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Two minutes left for one last question. (18:00)

Audience Member:

Hi, my name is (name removed), and I have a simple question. This is my first year teaching, so I want to know, what advice do you give to, I guess first year teachers or brand new teachers out there?

NEL NODDINGS

Advice to brand new teachers. The advice I give today to brand new teachers is different than the advice I gave 10, 12 years ago. Now it's, be sure that you get into a school where you can use your professional creativity and judgment. Remember that when you go for an interview that you can ask questions. You will be asked questions, and you will have to answer them, of course. But you should ask questions. If the answers to those questions tell you that you're (19:00) going to get into a rigid system where everything is prescribed, where you've got to teach by a script, and the kids are treated like data, don't take the job, go somewhere else. It might even be that you'll have to go into an independent or a private school for a couple years in order to find out what teaching is. See it breaks my heart to say that because I love the public schools as they should be, but I would not want young people I'm fond of to go through what a lot of young teachers are going through today, see. So, that's tough advice, but I feel I have to give it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That concludes our show today. Thank you all audience members for coming, and thank you especially, Dr. Nel Noddings, (20:00) for attending.