Transforming ourselves/transforming curriculum: spiritual education and Tarot symbolism

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This paper is threefold. It is grounded in the philosophical work of two educational theorists: John Dewey and our contemporary Nel Noddings. It also brings into the conversation the ancient system of Tarot, arguing that its pictorial symbolism embodies intellectual, moral, and spiritual ‘lessons’ derived from collective human experiences across times, places, and cultures. For Dewey, to call somebody spiritual never meant to invoke some mysterious and non-natural entity outside of the real world. As a system of communication and interpretation, Tarot is oriented toward the discovery of meanings in the real experience and performs two functions, existential and educational, focusing on the ethical and spiritual dimension of experience. The pictorial images create an adventure story of the journey through the school of life, each new life experience contributing to self-understanding and, ultimately, spiritual rebirth. Tarot not only speaks in a different voice, therefore bringing forth the subtleties of Gilligan and Noddings’ relational ethics, but also enables a process of critical self-reflection analogous to the ancient Socratic ‘Know thyself’ principle that makes life examined and thus meaningful. As a techne, it can and should become a valuable tool to complement an existing set of educational aids in the area of moral and spiritual education.

Keywords: Dewey; educational philosophy; learning from experience; Noddings; Tarot; the search for meanings; relational ethics; self-knowledge

Introduction

This paper is a philosophical treatise grounded in the works of two philosophers of education, John Dewey and our contemporary, Nel Noddings, both concerned with the significance of human experience for our moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth. Like Dewey, who professed to change the course of moral ideas in order to overcome the dualisms between mind and world, soul and body, nature and God, Noddings calls for including moral and spiritual questions in the curriculum as their deep exploration will have contributed to an enhanced capacity for students to make intelligent connections to the spiritual realm while also better understand the deeper meanings of our ordinary experiences. Within discourse on children’s spirituality, Radford challenges the dualist approach to ‘inner and outer realities … in favour of an understanding in which we see ourselves as part of the social and natural’ (Radford 2006, 385), greater, world. This perspective takes our minds out of the confines of the Cartesian Cogito.

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and extends experience towards its spiritual dimension that, being part of our mentality, nonetheless originates relationally and ‘publicly in shared experiences, feelings and thoughts’ (Radford 2006, 392).

This paper also aims to bring into this conversation the ancient system of Tarot (see Semetsky 2006a), arguing that its pictorial symbolism embodies intellectual, moral, and spiritual ‘lessons’ constituting collective human experiences across times, places and cultures. Tarot establishes this much sought after connection between ‘self’ and ‘other’ akin to the famous ‘I-Thou’ relation in Martin Buber’s metaphysics, which was a source of inspiration for Nel Noddings’ relational ethics of care as a feminine alternative to the traditional model of character education (Noddings 1984). As a metaphysical system, Tarot is oriented toward the practical discovery of meanings for the multiplicity of experiences (that would otherwise lack meaning and significance) that are symbolically represented in the form of images and pictures. The images (illustrations) that will be used in this paper belong to two decks: the classic Rider-Waite Tarot deck designed by the artist Pamela Colman Smith and the Whimsical Tarot. The latter is specifically designed for children and those young at heart; the pictures, as drawn by the artist Mary Hanson-Roberts, are based on children’s classical fairy tales and fables.

The paper’s overall aim is to reach educators for the purpose of their own personal and professional development so as to eventually position Tarot as one of the educational ‘aids’. Tarot can be employed as a techne for transforming and enriching curriculum so as to educate youth in the diversity of the matters of Spirit and spirituality and against the background of a deep metaphysical system that has its roots in Hermetic and Neoplatonic philosophies and Christian mysticism. The late Vatican Cardinal Hans Urs von Balthasar related Tarot images to Hermetic tradition. In his Afterword to the latest 2002 edition of the book Meditations on the Tarot: A journey into Christian Hermeticism von Balthasar considered images of the so-called major arcana to be the expressions of the ‘all-embracing wisdom of the Catholic Mystery’, while tracing its history back to the revival of Greek, Arabic, and Jewish philosophies during the Renaissance, followed by the ‘accommodation of Hermetic and Cabbalistic wisdom into Biblical and Christian thought’.

The problem of finding the metaphysical cure for the human predicament so as to revisit our conceptions of spirituality through education has been articulated by Jack Priestley. Nel Noddings, in her book Educating for intelligent belief or unbelief (1993), calls for introducing spiritual questions into curriculum. The question of the meaning and purpose of life is of equal importance to children and adults alike. Addressing questions of children’s belief or unbelief in God, Noddings stresses that they should be subject of intelligent inquiry. Noddings reminds us of John Dewey’s view on democracy, that it should include a common faith and ‘truth’, which is understood as an encounter of God in people in their actions and experiences. Noddings’ discussions focus on the nature of God and many gods; the possibility of spiritual progress and the danger of religious intolerance; human desire to experience a sense of belonging; feminism and the politics of religion; immortality, salvation, and humanistic aspirations; religion in connection to mathematics and sciences; human dependence on God and secular ethics. Dewey, in his classic Experience and nature (1958 [1925]), noticed that to call somebody spiritual never meant to invoke some mysterious and non-natural entity outside of the real world. To be a spiritual person meant for Dewey to possess qualities of rich, coordinated, and sensitive participation in the many situations of life. Soul and spirit are not to be considered as belonging
exclusively to a mythic realm; just the opposite: they are embedded in real human experiences.

That is what Dewey called ‘learning from experience’: the ability to make multiple connections between what we do to things in the world and what we can enjoy or suffer from things in return. The idea of God, for Dewey, represented the active, creative relation between the ideal and the actual. The human desire to unite the two, thereby intending to overcome the long-standing dualist perspective, belongs to what Dewey suggested considering as a spiritual act. Dewey distinguished between religion (a noun) and the religious as a specific attitude that – importantly – was not to be identified with the supernatural. The religious reorientation brings forward a sense of security and stability by virtue of creating a better and more enduring adjustment to real-life circumstances. New, spiritual values are created so as to help carry one through the moments of desperation and, by virtue of the discovery of meaning for such an experience, not submit to fatalistic resignation.

Learning from experience

It is a specific contribution of Dewey’s philosophy to education that an important aspect of learning is to be found in experience and that the development of practical life as moral amounts to our progressive capacity to intelligently evaluate and reconstruct this experience. We become capable of understanding the structures of knowledge at a deeper level, and our practical experience is a necessary element in the very formation of those structures. Experience, for Dewey, is not confined to the private world of mind. In fact, the world of mind is not at all private but is to be considered a meaningful pattern that emerges in the relational dynamics within transactions between an organism (a living body) and environment (the greater, collective, and public world of experience). Mind arises in a system of dynamic tensions between the two because of the practical necessity to evaluate and reconstruct a particular experience, that is, to understand its meaning and discover its value.

A new relation is being established between subjective experience and objective knowledge because, for Dewey, experience is equivalent to the unified purposeful process: it has continuity. In this framework, values are not reduced to subjective feelings but appear to reside in the whole experiential world, because the start of any inquiry and acquiring knowledge (facts) is motivated by our experiencing the world of values that make us strive for certain, even if implicit, goals. These goals and purposes, reciprocally, do shape our experience and contribute to the realisation of new values and meanings. Experience therefore has both a logical and bio-logical character, and values cannot be simply represented by a fixed set to be transmitted to students in the instructional mode (as, for example, in the traditional character-education programmes on which the Australian national values education programme is modelled) but, in their functional role, are dynamic and depend on the evolving meanings of experience.

For Dewey, experience is not just the knowledge of facts: an experienced person does not just possess knowledge; rather, she makes connections in the relational dynamics between perceived facts and the multiplicity of implicit aspirations, multiple purposes, explicit goals, etc, in order to construct a meaning for a singular experience, that is, to re-construct it, to re-valuate, to create the value anew by virtue of assigning meaning to a singular experience. The patterns of experience are represented by the dynamic moving forces, ‘whether perceived or presented in imagination’ (Dewey
The nuance ‘in imagination’ is significant as it expands the boundaries of experience beyond what is immediately given to the senses. Imagination expands the world only narrowly apprehended in knowledge or realised in reflective thinking. Importantly, imagination exceeds faith which is based on the truth of the propositions solely by virtue of their supernatural author. The process of learning from experience is natural, not supernatural; and the patterns of real experiences when integrated into consciousness contribute to human growth because:

What [a person] gets and gives as a human being, a being with desires, emotions and ideas, is … a widening and deepening of conscious life – a more intense, disciplined, and expanding realization of meanings … And education is not a mere means to such a life. Education is such a life. (Dewey 1924 [1916], 417)

**Tarot functions: existential and educational**

Dewey distinguished between religion as a noun and as a truly religious attitude which is not limited to what is actually out there but is inspired by belief into what is possible, even if only ideal in character. The metaphysical realm of the possible is much broader than an intellectual assurance or rational belief can encompass. This paper presents such a realm of the possible in the mode of its symbolic representations embedded in the Tarot system with its 78 pictorial images, each representing an embodied ‘lesson’ that the human soul must learn in the ‘school of life’, that is, in real practical experiences. Through the images, a symbolic connection is established between the realm of the spirit (the ideal, in Dewey’s terms) and the patterns of real experience. The metaphysical realm thus becomes embodied in the real, experiential, in knowledge. The pictures are full of symbols, and the symbolic interpretation of the sequence of pictures leads to the discovery in practice of a deeper dimension of meaning, not unlike the interpretation of dreams in Jungian depth psychology (Semetsky 2001, 2005a, 2006b, c). The images on the 22 major cards may be considered to symbolically represent the archetypes of the collective unconscious posited by Carl Gustav Jung, as the collective memory pool ‘recording’ human experiences across times, places, and cultures. The remaining 56 minor cards represent multiple patterns of typical human actions together with the spectrum of feelings, emotions, desires, beliefs, and other psychodynamic processes and related affective and mental states, all adding up to an extended, relational experience.

In his book *Educating psyche: Emotion, imagination and the unconscious in learning*, Bernie Neville comments that ‘archetypal psychology can find its images in … religious systems, or in … the Tarot or the I Ching’ (2005, 127). Almost all of the pictures contain an image of a human figure as an anti-dual symbol of both body and psyche in its multimodal dimensions. And while a body goes through life, accomplishing various life tasks, the psyche goes through transformations by virtue of learning its life lessons, in the process called by Jung the individuation of the Self. As pictorial artefacts, Tarot pictures represent meaningful life-patterns of thoughts, affects, emotions, feelings and behaviours thus embodying the very values implicit in collective experiences that transcend times, places, language barriers, disparate beliefs and cultures.

Indeed Noddings, in the context of feminist moral philosophy, pointed to such common global human experiences as birth, marriage, motherhood, death, or separation, even while denying moral universals as predestined rules for our actions. These
experiential events are fundamental; thus, they can be considered to have universal meanings for humankind, even when they are happening in different places across the globe, geographically, or in different periods in history. These common human experiences are illustrated by the Tarot pictures. The Tarot layout comprises a particular pattern of the cards. Each position in the pattern has some specific connotations that become clear when an experienced reader creates an imaginative narrative out of the pictorial story, thus converting the pictorial language of the unconscious into verbal expressions and facilitating this very ‘widening and deepening of conscious life [as] a more intense, disciplined, and expanding realization of meanings’ spoken for by Dewey.

Pictures, according to Chinese wisdom, are worth more than many thousands of words and can be ‘read’ – that is, used constructively in order to make implicit or explicit inferences to derive a meaning for an unfolding pictorial story ‘situated’ in this or that layout or spread. As embodying a set of common meanings of experience, Tarot pictures lay down – in front of our very eyes – an unorthodox foundation for the existing, both actual and potential, moral knowledge in the form of the memory gained by humankind over the course of its history (Semetsky 2006b). In total, the images create an adventure story of the journey through life, with its many events and experiences. Indeed, the multiple ‘stories lives tell’ (Witherell and Noddings 1991) bind together disparate events and represent a lengthy narrative describing in a symbolic form that what Charles Taylor (1989) called a quest for the Good. The multiple narratives constituted by our journey through Tarot pictures ‘give shape and expression to what would otherwise be untold’ (Witherell and Noddings 1991, x).

Each story comprises a set of pictures distributed in a particular layout, and constitutes a learning experience: a story is educational because once we realise all the deep meanings ‘embodied’ in the sequence of pictures we can step on the road toward self-understanding, personal development, and, ultimately, spiritual rebirth. In the Tarot deck, the idea of Rebirth is signified by ‘The Sun’ card, as shown in Figure 1, from the Whimsical Tarot, with its image of a happy child warming in the sunshine, the psychic energy of a child enriched by the solar energy of the world of nature and welcomed by the kingdom of Spirit.

The philosophy of Tarot is grounded in the anti-dualistic (anti-Cartesian) metaphysics that does not posit humans as separate from nature, nor mind and matter as

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two separate substances. Tarot psychology is transpersonal, and each card in the deck, in the psychological terms, carries a strong humanistic aspect by virtue of the persistent human drive to grow, develop, differentiate, and nurture our spiritual feelings in the process of Jungian individuation as becoming a whole, integrated personality. Such self-transcending personality becomes equipped with the sense of identity, the Self, which is the name given by Jung to the archetype of wholeness when all unconscious, both actual and potential, meanings are realised, hence integrated into consciousness.

Personal growth is a lifelong process, and the Self is never given *a priori* in the form of a Cartesian subject; rather the search for meanings embedded in experience leads to human development and the construction of identity as a continuous function of our learning from experience. In this respect, the subject or Self becomes, as Noddings would say, *constituted*, rather than being an *a priori* constituting subject forever separate from the world of objects. This nuance is significant, and the process of the constitution of the Self and discovering one’s identity is what the existential function of Tarot is all about. Existential function is very much concerned with the problematic of identity – self-creation, or creation of the Self – because it is when new meanings are constructed and become available to consciousness that ‘the old self is put off and the new self is … forming’ (Dewey 1958 [1925], 245). The educational function derives from the holistic dimensions of such an experience, the scope of which expands to incorporate the spiritual domain. We thus acquire a better ability for self-reflection, self-knowledge, and a sense of value and meaning of our experiences.

Tarot brings to our awareness many initially unperceived meanings, thereby contributing to human learning and development based on both actual and potential experiences. Importantly we can achieve a better understanding of what may seem to be irresolvable moral dilemmas; the better understanding of a situation and the relational self-other dynamics subsequently leads to choosing a right course of action and a better informed – or intelligent, as Noddings would put it – decision-making ability. As Crawford and Rossiter (2006) point out in their study devoted to the exploration of young persons’ reasons for living:

> meaning and identity are the same psychological reality looked at from different perspectives. From the viewpoint of meaning, it is an explanation of individual intentionality. From the viewpoint of identity, it is the individual’s distinctive self-understanding and self-expression. (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, 33)

The ‘different voice’ of Tarot images

Tarot speaks ‘in a different voice’ that brings forth the subtleties of Carol Gilligan’s pioneering work, which challenged habitual assumptions about human development, and Nel Noddings’ relational ethics. Gilligan’s (1982) contrasted feminine – relational – way of moral thinking with the prevailing Kolberg’s model of fixed stages. Her focusing on women’s motives, commitments, and priorities was further advanced by Nel Noddings’ research in the area of moral education. Building on Gilligan’s psychological research, Nel Noddings developed an ethics of care in philosophy of education. Through her career of more than 30 years long in education, Noddings in her many books has continually argued that our modern liberal education, devoid of feeling and/or caring dimensions, tends not to enrich the human mind and spirit but to narrow their scope.

Presenting feminist spirituality as an alternative to traditional patriarchal religion, Noddings acknowledges that women have long suffered inferiority under the
prevailing theological and philosophical theories. She suggests that students should be exposed to both the story of the Fall and to its alternative feminist critique, with the emphasis on the Goddess religions, in which the biblical serpent is not presented as evil but instead educates humans in Gnostic form of knowledge, therefore bringing healing and wholeness to human condition. Such Gnostic knowledge that embodies the ancient Socratic ‘Know thyself’ dictum can become available to us by virtue of the different voice – that I called elsewhere the language of signs (Semetsky 2006b) – that ‘speaks’ in images and symbols and articulates many of humanity’s ethical, intellectual, and spiritual ‘lessons’.

Indeed, Noddings (2006) is adamant about the importance of self-knowledge as the very core of education: ‘when we claim to educate, we must take Socrates seriously. Unexamined lives may well be valuable and worth living, but an education that does not invite such examination may not be worthy of the label education’ (Noddings 2006, 10). In the Tarot deck, the potential of such self-knowledge, and hence examining one’s life, is embodied in the image in Figure 2, from the Rider-Waite deck, the major card called ‘The High Priestess’.

The High Priestess, as a feminine antidote to the patriarchal figure of Pope, is a symbol for Sophia (in Greek philosophy) or Shekinah (in Jewish mythology). It represents the feminine principle of Wisdom, the purpose of which is to unfold the scroll she holds in order to reveal to the humankind the secrets of Gnostic knowledge lost in the scientific (read, overly of a masculine type) rationality. Sophia (Σοφία is Greek for wisdom) is a concept equally important for Hellenistic philosophy and religion, for Platonism and Gnosticism, as well as for Orthodox Christianity and Christian mysticism. In the Hebrew Bible Wisdom/Sophia is personified in the Proverbs (8:22–31).

‘The High Priestess’ is a symbol of feminine ways of knowing and reasoning such as those in the Gilligan’s later empirical findings. She displays intuition, sensitivity, and deep spiritual, even if implicit (esoteric), knowledge. She knows the secret code of the biblical lost speech (the different voice, indeed) that describes the true nature of things in a symbolic language similar to that used by Adam before the Fall (or the confusion of tongues in Babel). This lost or forgotten speech may manifest itself in unconscious contents such as a slip of the tongue in Freudian psychoanalysis, in dreams, in Jungian active imagination, or in the symbolic language of the Tarot pictures. In the Whimsical Tarot for children, The High Priestess is portrayed as the fairy godmother – a character who assists Cinderella in the famous tale. The fairy

Figure 2. The High Priestess. From Rider-White Tarot Deck, known also as the Rider Tarot and the White Tarot. Games Systems Inc., Stamford, CT 06902, USA. © 1971 by US Games Systems, Inc. Further reproduction prohibited.
godmother has her roots in the figures of the Fates of Greek and Roman mythology; the same idea is also seen in another tale for children, Sleeping Beauty, where they decree her fate and are associated with spinning (Figure 3).

In the context of youth education, Crawford and Rossiter (2006) notice the link between the search for meaning, that for personal identity, and for spirituality. They specifically point out the diversity in the aspects of pedagogy if and when education is oriented towards wisdom. Helping students ‘to look on their experience of education with a greater sense of its value’ (2006, 321) is a noble task – but it should be performed by teachers equipped with at least an equal if not greater sense of value and meaning of their own professional practice and their own personal development, which may very well include the knowledge and practical implications of the Tarot metaphysics. As Noddings (2002) keeps reminding us, the aim of moral education is to contribute to the continuous education, of both students and teachers, in the relational dynamics between selves and others.

The wisdom of ‘The High Priestess’ is preceded by earlier events and experiences along the road towards spiritual development and Jungian individuation. The spiritual journey starts from very first card in a deck which is numbered as zero and is called ‘The Fool’ (Figure 4).
Let us articulate (*in a different voice*) what this image might tell us. It is about a symbolic child within many of us, the Jungian archetype of *puer aeternus*, symbolising new beginnings, the potentiality of life, novelty itself. It portrays a youth projecting the image of wide-eyed innocence, curiosity, and a trusting heart. The Fool is standing at the edge of the cliff, but with its head high in clouds, the Fool doesn’t seem to notice the uneven road or the possibility of falling down. The world ahead is full of encounters and experiences of which the Fool has no knowledge yet, but independently of that, the phenomenal world is here in the picture, symbolised by the abyss just a step away, and has always already been here even before the youth approached the edge. In the Whimsical Tarot, we see a happy child stretching her hand to catch a butterfly (itself a symbol of spirit) in the skies while not noticing the cliff ahead (Figure 5).

The Fool’s youthfulness, bordering on infantile carelessness, expresses a sense of connection that is present in a small child’s perception of the world as an undifferentiated totality, a whole, in which indeed there is no difference between inner and outer realities. Only venturing into a novel and as yet unknown territory might bring a relative order into the chaotic flux of childish perceptions. And the free choice of coming to a decision to ‘take a step forward’ that would have separated oneself from the present but enabled one to leap forward into the future in search of authentic experience and Jungian individuation, is transmitted by this card’s imagery.

The wandering Fool is always on the road, always learning from experience. She carries her sack on the wand as the universal symbol of vagabonds and minstrels and is pictured as though subsisting in a fleeting moment of having stopped at a pivotal point on the edge between knowledge and ignorance: we remember that for Dewey, the task of education always involves more education, more learning from experience. At a higher level of interpretation, this picture embodies the idea of numinous Spirit itself: free, unconstrained and ready to step into the world of experiences. Dewey noted that:

> when the organization called soul is free, moving and operative, initial as well as terminal, it is spirit … Spirit quickens; it is not only alive but it gives life … Soul is form, spirit informs. It is the moving function of that of which soul is the substance. Perhaps the words soul and spirit are so heavily laden with … mythology … that they must be surrendered; it may be impossible to recover for them in science and philosophy the realities designated in idiomatic speech. But the realities are there, by whatever names they be called. (Dewey 1958 [1925], 294)
At the level of sociocultural reality, the idea of ‘The Fool’ is inscribed in cultural practices: as a signifier of innocence and nostalgic wholesome times, the Fool’s presence can be traced, for example, in the cultural artefacts of Walt Disney’s world(s) or Kasdan’s film *Grand canyon*, the title itself implying the image. In the journey through subsequent experiences embedded in the pictures, the Fool’s very identity will be contested and will reappear under the guise of the names of other major cards in a deck. All major cards from ‘the Fool’ to ‘The World’ represent the evolution of consciousness as an ‘eventual function’ (Dewey 1958 [1925], 308) of learning from experience.

The culmination of the journey manifests in the connection with Spirit represented by the last major card called ‘The World’ as a symbol of an individuated Self that finally overcomes the dualistic split between itself and the material world and embodies a greater numinous, spiritual dimension (Figure 6).

This card is also called ‘The Universe’ in some of the decks. In Dewey’s words, the Universe is precisely the ‘name for the totality of conditions with which the self is connected’ (Dewey 1998 [1934], 407). As he emphasised:

> the unification of the self through the ceaseless flux of what it does, suffers and achieves, cannot be attained in terms of itself. The self is always directed toward something beyond itself and so its own unification depends upon the idea of the integration of the shifting scenes of the world into that imaginative totality we call the Universe. (Dewey 1998 [1934], 407)

The idea of integration is conveyed by the circular shape of the garland on the picture accompanied by four symmetric sacred symbols and surrounding a dancing female figure. In the framework of Christian mysticism this card conveys the very metaphysics of the universe akin to the rhythmic movement and dance: world as created in a series of creative or performing acts, not unlike Moses’ Genesis. The archetypal Self is by necessity a (self-)creative personality, an integrated personality that is capable of re-creating itself through many life-experiences represented by the preceding cards and that becomes inseparably connected with its life-world. In The Whimsical Tarot for children, this card transmits the same idea of unification and wholeness, even if the four symbols are different. Two red dancing shoes, a book, a heart, and a garland carry the message of a performing or creative art in symphony with intellectual knowledge (Figure 7).

Still, our personal wholeness, total self-knowledge, and oneness with the world are the ideal limits (Dewey’s ‘imaginative totality’), and the Fool will start again, as if from nothing (zero), stepping anew on the road toward discovery of the existential

meanings by means of learning its experiential moral lessons so as to ultimately resolve that which otherwise would have remained an ‘inescapably tense relationship between inner and outer perspectives’ (Radford 2006, 393). As Dewey asserted, education always consists in *more* education; experience is unbounded. The ever-expanding and varying multitude of experiential situations and events can always present new challenges, new lessons to be learned. Spirit is unbounded, and the dynamics of spiritual development never stop. The pictures tell us multiple stories about complex experiences, and the list is endless because real-life experience always presents new contexts and encounters that would have called for new evaluations, new meanings, and more education in practice, especially considering that each layout would have combined the pictures in a new ‘constellation’, each time reflecting novel circumstances and presenting a perplexity of an unexpected problematic situation.

Not all images are joyful; some reflect the different nuances of what St John of the Cross called the dark night of the soul accompanied by the feelings of confusion or helplessness in the absence of spiritual guidance. The journey through the images becomes even more important in case of emotional insecurity so that enable the actualisation of the potential Self searching for meanings. It is when the meanings are interpreted, integrated and realised via tapping into ‘an imaginative projection’ (Dewey 1998 [1934], 407) of the spiritual realm that appears to be merely *ideal* in character, then these dynamic moving forces become existentially *real*.

The culmination of the journey as embodied in the picture of ‘The World’ represents the existential lesson of accepting an ethical responsibility *in* the world and *for* the world. It is our participation in the world – that is, taking a responsibility for others, both human and non-human – which is fundamental to Nel Noddings’ ethics of care (1984) and should be an integral part of spiritual education. Care theorists turn upside down the abstractions of moral philosophy, insisting that universal experiences are grounded in concrete human conditions described as ‘the commonalities of birth, death, physical and emotional needs, and the longing to be cared for. This last – whether it is manifested as a need for love, physical care, respect or mere recognition – is the fundamental starting point for the ethics of care’ (Noddings 1998, 188) in education.

**Conclusion: transforming curriculum?**

We should include the much talked about *transformative* aspect, which is a pressing issue in contemporary curriculum theory and pedagogical practice in our present time.
conversation about Tarot. Jim Garrison, addressing the problematic involved in the ‘ever creative curriculum’ (Garrison 2000, 117), describes such a curriculum in terms of it being a transformative and participatory process that would have continuously embodied new emergent meanings and values. Traditionally, that is within the boundaries of rigid logic and formal thinking, those new meanings have been considered ‘inaccessible to sense’ (Dewey 1980 [1934], 32). According to the thesis of this paper, however, the conditions enabling the possibility of accessing the otherwise inaccessible may be realised in practice when one is using Tarot as an educational aid and interpreting Tarot images.

It is the interpretation of Tarot symbolism that performs the logical function of the ‘included middle’ (Semetsky 2008b) by means of creating a relation between what is usually considered irreconcilable, dualistic substances of mind and body. The dualism between the mind and the world dissolves by virtue of the inclusion of the third, spiritual dimension which thus becomes connected with the practical world of human actions, decision-making, and choices. What is usually considered as ‘disembodied’ Spirit is being brought down to earth, so to speak, and into the flesh-and-blood of our real human experiences. Tarot empowers us with the ability to make sense out of the chaotic flux of experiences: we become capable of learning from and within this very experience when it is being unfolded in front of our very eyes in the sequence of pictures thus serving also a therapeutic, healing function (Semetsky 2005a). This material enlightens soul and spirit by virtue of providing a valuable guidance toward solving what Dewey called a problematic and perplexing situation when – in the process of the interpretation of images that reflect our experiences – these experiential situations become converted ‘from the obscure into the clear and luminous’ (Dewey 1980 [1934], 266).

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) notice that the purpose of moral and spiritual education is not simply to ‘inject’ such a dimension into curriculum: ‘other strategies need to be employed’ (Crawford and Rossiter 2006, 320). Tarot can take its due place among these other strategies, even if this would mean restructuring schools and transforming them into what Noddings has long been advocating as centres for care. The pictures that follow each other convey implicit meanings similar to those that Noddings, for example, finds ‘at the bottom of each suffering event [such as] pain that cries for relief, a threat of separation that triggers an increased need for connection, and a dread of helplessness that begs for empowerment’ (Noddings 1989, 129). The process of interpretation of the implicit meanings not only creates a caring therapeutic environment (Semetsky 2005a, 2006c) but also contributes to establishing ‘a metaphysical context and [enriching] a human-to-human care process with spiritual dimension’ (Noddings 1989, 128, quoting from Jean Watson’s work in the area of nursing).

In regard to a spiritual dimension in education, let us return to the beginning of this paper and focus in particular on Dewey’s distinction between a single religion and a specifically religious attitude. Dewey insisted that what he called a religious phase of experience is totally separate from anything supernatural and should indeed be emancipated from a “religion” as a noun substantive’ (Dewey 1998 [1934], 404) as well as from any submission or ‘the servile obedience rendered to an arbitrary power by frighten men’ (Dewey 1998 [1934], 403). It is a moral and spiritual ‘import’ of practical life that should be present in education. For Dewey, it is what is ‘unseen’ (if by ‘seeing’ we mean the usual sense perception) that would decide what is there to be ‘seen’ in the reality that exceeds our habitual world of solely physical objects.

This invisible spiritual dimension is available to ‘an inner eye’ addressed by Noddings and Shore (1984) in the remarkable book, *Awakening the inner eye: Intuition*
Such ‘third’, inner, eye is capable of perceiving ‘the background of organised meanings [that] can convert the … situation from the obscure into the clear and luminous’ (Dewey 1980 [1934], 266), thus creating new understanding. Developing one’s intuition is indeed a challenge and is necessary for an educator who would want to both learn and teach the art of Tarot, thereby overcoming in practice the perceived duality between the psyche and the matter. When mind becomes embodied in its pictorial representations; then the unseen, invisible, spiritual dimension becomes literally ‘seen’ and visible in the material form of Tarot images, thus establishing the conditions in practice that create a possibility of accessing the otherwise inaccessible when it becomes instantiated and realised in real practical experience.

This reassurance moves us closer towards answering Jim Garrison’s persistent and disturbing question, ‘Dare we teach children to create ethereal things?’ (Garrison 2000, 117), especially keeping in mind that, as productive of real effects, these things are truly ‘knowable if not [yet] known’ (Dewey 1980 [1934], 269). Something that was only possible or potential and as yet disembodied – like spirit that, as Dewey insisted, informs but by itself lacks a material form – can become actualised in a singular experience in the material world and be known to us via its representation in the form of the pictures. Still, asks Garrison emphatically, ‘can we stop them [children]?’ (Garrison 2000, 117). But of course we can, and shame on us educators if we do! Too often we forget that the ‘more an organism learns … the more it has to learn in order to keep itself going’ (Dewey 1958 [1925], 281). Too often we as educators assume the position that Dewey (1958 [1925]) ironically dubbed the supreme dignity of adulthood, therefore betraying the very continuity of the growth process while at the same time trying to foster ‘growth’ in our students. But for them to learn, shouldn’t we too?

The traditional curriculum rarely provides any conditions for discussing ‘genuinely controversial issues’ (Noddings 2006, 1) that would contribute, even if potentially, to the possibility of us connecting with the others and with world at large by means of understanding the plurality of different perspectives and viewpoints up to the point of becoming engrossed (Noddings’ term) in these public experiences. This kind of affective/emotional understanding would constitute learning as an experiment with the world and with ourselves. This type of education is genuinely moral because it, sure enough, ‘does … challenge deeply held beliefs or ways of life’ (Noddings 2006, 1). We tend to forget that education is inseparable from organic life and a spiritual dimension as embedded in experience would preclude human attitudes and dispositions from being considered as ‘separate existences. They are always of, from, toward, situations and things’ (Dewey 1958 [1925], 238), that is, they are relational.

Dewey acknowledged the significance as well as ‘inadequacy of our present psychological knowledge’ (Dewey 1958 [1925], 238), and the deep exploration of Tarot metaphysics, its archetypal psychology, and its unorthodox language of expression should not be ignored. If – as for Noddings and Dewey alike – it is Spirit that can inform us, then securing the continuity of our relation to Spirit in practice is a prerequisite for education defined and understood as spiritual. To use every opportunity to complement an existing set of educational aids in the area of moral and spiritual education so as to put into practice the fact that Spirit is a moving force and a source of information (Dewey 1958 [1925]) is not only an educational task of considerable challenge but is also our ethical responsibility. A valuable aid for spiritual education, as an art and techne, is available to us in the guise of beautiful pictures telling us a story (even if in a voice that is different, thus in need of being
interpreted) that could have equally happened to every one of us, locally or globally. Reading and interpreting these pictorial stories constitutes a practical art that can and should contribute to an enhanced capacity for all people to make intelligent connections to the spiritual realm, called for by Noddings, as well as to discover in practice the deeper meanings of our individual and collective experiences, which thus serve as our existential and moral lessons.

Notes on contributor
Inna Semetsky is a research academic with the Institute of Advanced Study for Humanity, University of Newcastle, Australia. She completed her PhD in philosophy of education in 2002 at Columbia University, New York, under the advisement of Professor Nel Noddings. In 2005–07 she was a postdoctoral research fellow with the Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia. Among her publications are Deleuze, education and becoming (2006) and an edited volume, Nomadic education: Variations on a theme by Deleuze and Guattari (2008). Her chapter, ‘Whence Wisdom? Human Development As a Mythic Search for Meanings,’ is forthcoming in the International handbook on education for spirituality, care and wellbeing. She is presently guest-editing a special issue, ‘Local Pedagogies/Global Ethics’, of the journal Educational Philosophy and Theory.

Notes
1. The first, abbreviated version of this paper, titled ‘In a Different Voice: Noddings, Dewey, and the Ethical Lessons of Tarot’, was presented at The 8th International Conference on Children’s Spirituality (2008a).
3. Citing Schumacher, Priestley (2008) insists on bringing metaphysics in the discourse on children’s spirituality and education. As a philosopher of education, I welcome the opportunity to discuss Tarot in this paper in the context of Dewey and Noddings’ philosophical positions.
4. Incidentally, imaginative narrative is one of the methodologies employed by the innovative interdisciplinary field called futures studies, which also uses utopian thinking, forecasting, and strategic planning. M. Peters and J. Freeman-Moir dedicate their recent volume, Edutopias: New utopian thinking in education (2006), to future generation of educators capable of understanding that, with imagination, education can indeed transform individuals, raise collective consciousness, and contribute to the development of global civic society.
5. I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers, who asked for the source of some assertions I make in this paper. They are not assertions, but rather meditations. In addition to my academic standing, I have been a Tarot reader and practitioner for many years (please refer to www.innasense.org). In 1994 I completed an MA in Marriage, Family and Child Counselling, under the auspices of the Board of Behavioral Science Examiners in California, on the topic ‘Introduction of Tarot Readings into Clinical Psychotherapy’. The research I have done for my 2002 PhD in the area of philosophy of education at Columbia University, New York, under the advisement of Professor Noddings, equipped me with the necessary theoretical knowledge to complement my earlier empirical studies. I have published widely since 1998, when my paper, ‘On the Nature of Tarot,’ appeared in the journal, Frontier Perspectives out of the Centre for Frontier Sciences in Temple University. In 2005 and 2006, vol. 6, no. 2: 187–97, two papers on the subject appeared in the journal Spirituality and Health International. Please also see my recent paper, ‘Simplifying Complexity: Know Thyself…and Others’ (2008b), followed by Tony Whitson’s critical review at http://www.complexityandeducation.ualberta.ca/COMPLICITY5/documents/Complicity_5_1_08_Whitson.pdf.

References


