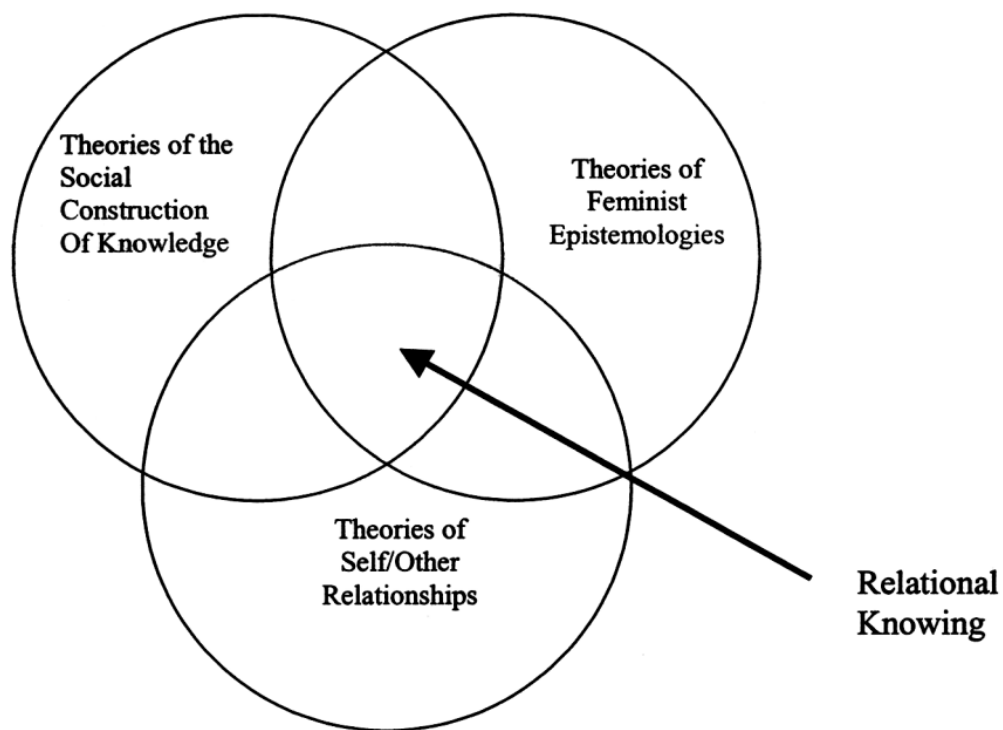


## What is EoC (Ethic of Care)?

EoC or "ethic of care" or "ethics of care" is a teaching mindset about the practical application of *virtue* in various professions, including education. The first use of this term was by social psychologist and scholar, Carol Gilligan, in her 1982 landmark book, [\*In a different voice\*](#), after which [Nel Noddings](#) and [Joan Tronto](#) gave it shape and application. It centers on moral action through the intentional expression of care within our interpersonal relationships. EoC is associated with ontological rather than epistemological theories of ethical action. Therefore it is non-normative, and not aligned with generalizable standards of behavior, codes of ethics and moral paradigms.



**Figure 1** — Hollingsworth's theoretical framework of relational knowing.

Gilligan dismissed normative theories of ethics, calling them *morally blind*, indifferent to actual human suffering, detached from *lived injustice* and apathetic by design. As a result, she viewed traditional ethical theories as amoral and irrelevant.

EoC identifies the dependence and interdependence we have for each other, that we are all affected by the choices of others and that they too are affected by our decisions. EoC describes a *model of moral self-regulation* where we imagine the potential consequences of our actions for others, strategically, taking into consideration how those potential effects for other people may harm them. And, also, to reflexively after we enact our decisions, how they have affected others. This dynamic ethical schema is a *situational ethic* rather than one that relies on intellectual abstraction the way traditional ethics have been framed.

Characterized by: empathy, compassion, attentiveness, intuition, recognition and responsiveness, an ethic of care re-constructs the concept of *responsibility*. Instead of placing “obligation” at the center of our understanding of what it means to be responsible where societal norms and cultural roles serve as parameters for our situational application of morality, ethic of care is less abstract and considers how power structures and relations around gender, class, race and other socially constructed societal roles are essential factors on which to reflect in the application of our morality.

As Hollingsworth’s (1992) *theory of relational knowing* describes dynamics of interpersonal comprehension of the self as we relate to others in various societal contexts, involving accessing prior knowledge and reflecting on what that knowledge means as perceived within a relationship, our understanding of teaching is based on social constructivist as well as feminist epistemologies. This *relational knowing* is how we as teachers learn to teach and then continue to develop throughout our professional careers in an evolving, care-centric dialog with ourselves and other like-minded teachers. Teachers like us who practice EoC believe that we “create our own knowledge” of the world and of ourselves, and we do this with our students. Teachers who embrace an EoC honor a diversity of skills, talents and styles among their students, instead of merely accepting or tolerating them.

Most importantly, EoC considers those human needs that are articulated in [Maslow’s hierarchy of needs](#) to be essential for building educational communities and not merely from a broad societal perspective but as applied to individuals. For example, social developmentalists’ goal to create curriculum standards in general in order to “build a better society,” restricts teachers autonomy, and reduces the independence of individual children. This represents a challenge to students’ specific psychological, educational and emotional needs. Conversely, the ethos of EoC does not support building a better society, if the individuals in that society are joyless.

The application of EoC relies on a plurality of thought within education that is aligned with [constructivist](#) and [critical pedagogies](#) where the relationships between education leaders, teachers and students are based on trust and respect, first, and generalized goals standards are

understood as secondary. We believe that when our pedagogies are innovative and mainly based on our students' needs, our teaching is not about learning facts, concepts and ideas, but is about holistic student growth.

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