

Research on primary-school club self-management strategies based on the theory of care

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Abstract: According to Noddings, the four elements of caring moral education comprise role-modeling, dialogue, practice, and affirmation. In primary school clubs, the "role-models" are parents and teachers; as role-models, they nurture the possibility of student self-management. The purpose of dialogue for self-management is to enable students to autonomously regulate their emotions, goals, time, and resources. The outcomes of self-management can be displayed through talent performances; different activity categories are organized as special sessions. Although the themes vary, they are fundamentally practices of caring for society.

Keywords: theory of care; club activities; self-management

1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of contemporary educational reforms—especially the "double-reduction" policy that calls for lighter academic burdens yet richer educational experiences—we selected class-based club activities as the research object. These clubs, operating inside the familiar classroom community yet outside the formal timetable, create a unique micro-ecology where responsibility, creativity and care can flourish simultaneously. By weaving Noddings' four caring components—modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation—into every procedural detail (from auditioning to curating public showcases), we identified several actionable findings and proposed a student-club self-management strategy grounded in Noddings' caring theory [1].

2 Cultivating autonomous role-models through care: caring for others

Noddings argues that students do not learn to care by studying principles or moral reasoning; instead, they develop caring abilities through role-models, generally referred to as "caring persons". In a reciprocal caring relationship, students learn to care precisely because they have experienced being cared for [2]. In self-management, we shape role-models through two modes: teacher-student caring and parent-child caring.

2.1 Teacher-student caring

Teachers serve as both caring exemplars and autonomous role-models. For example, a dance club teacher guides students in home-based autonomous practice and edits their practice videos into a work titled "Dedication." Likewise, a wind-instrument club teacher conducts regular practice showcases, provides a "check-in" template, and answers students' questions, thereby demonstrating care for each individual learner [3].

Through this mode, students acquire autonomous learning, creation, sharing, and communication skills derived from teacher guidance. According to caring theory, students who have been cared for by teachers will eventually care for others, enabling peers to experience care and develop self-management abilities, thus becoming caring role-models themselves [4].

2.2 Parent-child caring

Parents act as caring role-models. Parents involved in class clubs can help students connect with teachers for academic assistance, assist students in showcasing their autonomous practice results online, and participate in parent-child activities such as creating schedules and registration forms, thereby modeling self-management [5]. For instance, parents of a wind-instrument club record their child's practice, sends the video to the instructor for feedback, or, with the student's consent and teacher recommendation, share the practice video in a group chat or on a social platform as a "video check-in". The student directly experiences parental care, and his/her autonomous capability is nurtured through this support.

3 Learning self-management through teacher-student dialogue: caring for oneself

Building on role-models, students begin to attempt self-management. At this stage, caring is primarily realized through teacher-student dialogue. Noddings asserts that without dialogue, caring cannot be demonstrated [6]. Club activities incorporate dialogues concerning emotions, goals, time, and resources to promote self-oriented caring self-management.

3.1 Attending to one's emotions

Emotions can affect the likelihood of dialogue. Teacher-student conversations about emotions must include questions such as "Are you willing to participate in self-management? Why?" We guide students to monitor their emotional states and underlying causes. The emotional dialogue consists of three steps: questionnaire, trial plan, and feedback. In the wind-instrument club, we first help students experience personal caring (as seen in parent-child and teacher-student caring), then ask them to reflect, "How should I respond to care?" and "As a carer, what response do I expect?" Students evaluate their emotions in the questionnaire, develop a self-caring plan and registration sheet, and finally receive feedback through teacher-student interaction [7].

3.2 Setting personal goals

Goal-oriented dialogue asks, "Why did you choose or reject this component? What outcome do you expect?" Students are empowered to set individual learning goals, choose whether to participate, and select content, but all decisions must be grounded in self-caring reflection. Such dialogue is crucial because it informs subsequent activity directions. For example, based on students' goal of "self-display", we organized a vocal competition session and a calligraphy-painting exhibition session [8].

3.3 Managing one's time

Time-related dialogue centers on questions such as "How will you allocate your time? When will you practice autonomously and when will you learn with the teacher?" In the wind-instrument club, in addition to a unified "large class" schedule, students are allowed to book four individual "small class" sessions with the teacher, fostering time-management practice. To help students clarify goals and manage their time effectively, we provide a "self-management registration form" for recording study plans, which can be submitted to the club teacher for approval.

3.4 Mobilizing one's resources

Any human, temporal, or material asset that aids self-management can be considered a learning resource. Dialogue about resources encourages students to ask questions, "What help do you need? Who or what can assist you in completing self-management?" Our research identified two resource types:

- (1) human resources, including parents and teachers;

(2) digital resources, such as online tools and learning materials. Parents can provide assistance with internet use, preparation of learning tools, and even help create registration forms. Teacher resources offer platforms for discussion, clarification, and sharing. Digital tools — search engines, social media, etc. — must also be understood and utilized by students.

4 Showcasing autonomous creation through online practice: caring for society

Noddings affirms that collaborative learning in community activities embodies caring practice. Accordingly, we established a "Community Cloud Showcase" for class clubs. Its core purpose is to provide students with opportunities for autonomous creation and exhibition, thereby learning to care for society.

The cloud showcase functions not only as a display but also as a rehearsal space for "public caring". We prompt students to consider "What does the audience need?" and "What can I contribute to society?" Examples include: dance students performing pieces that honor medical staff; calligraphy and painting students transforming their works into e-postcards with handwritten blessings for local residents. Subsequent surveys showed that 85 % of students agreed, "I want to use my talents to do more," indicating that the public spirit has shifted from a temporary activity to an identity .

To sustain "caring for society" beyond a one-off impulse, we introduced a rotating "Community Curator" system: each month two students serve as chief curators, responsible for theme setting, artwork solicitation, community interaction, and data review. Through curatorial practice, students grasped the true meaning of "we jointly maintain a meaningful space".

5 Continuing outcomes through affirmation

Caring theory posits that "affirmation" aims to discover a better self and encourage its development. However, affirmation here is not limited to specific praise or encouragement; it should be a form of "empathy". Empathy can be understood as resonance: "I understand you are doing this because ..." and "I can feel your intention" In short, the caregiver conveys understanding and empathy to the cared-for.

We designed "empathy-based affirmation" as a three-level echo system:

Tier 1: One-on-one chat—teacher or parent uses "I" statements to describe observed behavior and motives.

Tier 2: Small-group roundtable—students take turns sharing the moments they most want others to understand; peers may only respond with "I heard... I understand..."

Tier 3: Cloud family letter — students write self-management stories as letters to their future selves; teachers and parents respond as "future selves" with empathy.

At the end of each semester, a "self-defense symposium" is held, where students argue to teachers, parents, and peers why certain aspects of their work deserve affirmation. This process emphasizes "self-evidence → self-narrative → self-defense," converting external evaluation into internal recognition.

6 Conclusion

The practice of primary school class-club self-management grounded in Noddings' caring theory demonstrates that autonomy does not emerge spontaneously after teachers' leave; rather, it is carefully nurtured through the presence of care. By progressing through the four stages of "role-model → dialogue → practice → affirmation", students learn to care while being cared for, develop autonomy through caring, and advance toward public responsibility through autonomy. Future work will continue to explore additional possibilities of "care + technology", positioning class clubs as sustainable engines for student autonomous growth and offering a replicable, scalable pathway for primary-school moral education in the context of the "double reduction" policy.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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