



# **An Ethics of Care Approach to Cultivating Relationships:**


**The Story of an Elementary School Art Club  
Supported by a Health Promoting Schools Grant**

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Voices of Equity - IURN Educational Research  
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# Teacher-Scholar

 Grade 4/5 Math, Science and Visual Arts Teacher,  
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Board

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 Focus on teacher wellness and ethics of care theory - lens  
of positive psychology

 Art Club - where research and practice collide



# Ethics of Care



- Care is a basic human need (to be cared for and to care for others)
- Education as “a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding, and appreciation” (Noddings, 2002, *Starting At Home: Caring and social policy*, p. 283)
- Teacher as facilitator of relationship-building
- Reciprocal relationships



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# Ethics of care and joy

A classroom built on an ethics of care is one in which joy is experienced by both teachers and students:



Sometimes when we become aware of our relatedness - when reciprocal receptivity is at its height - we experience joy....[J]oy...offers itself as an unsummoned reward or by-product of relation. It seems to be triggered by receptivity, an openness to the other that is somehow reciprocated in an almost mystical fashion. We are momentarily overwhelmed by a feeling of joyful oneness with this other.... Joy helps to maintain us in caring and, thus, adds to our ethical ideal (Noddings, 2013, *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. 2nd ed., p. xvii).



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# Positive Psychology and Wellness

- PERMA - Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* (2002); *Flourish* (2011):

Positive emotion  
Engagement  
Relationships  
Meaning  
Accomplishment



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- Positivity Resonance and Broaden-and-Build Theory - Barbara Fredrickson -
  - ❖ Love as micro-moments of connection between people (2013, pp. 17-18).
  - ❖ Love and connection have long-term positive effects on physical and mental wellbeing (2013)

# Positive Psychology and Teacher Wellness

## Relationships between students and teachers essential for both students', but also teachers' wellbeing:

- Turner and Thielking (2019):
  - ❖ Use of PERMA strategies in classrooms - teachers less stressed, more relaxed, calmer, positive, and engaged
- Split, Koomen, and Thijs (2011):
  - ❖ Teacher-student relationships are beneficial to teachers' wellbeing because they contribute to a basic need for relatedness
- Aldrup et al. (2018):
  - ❖ A positive teacher-student relationship predicts increased work enthusiasm and reduced emotional exhaustion



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# SEL and Focus on Relationship-building



- School focus on student wellbeing and SEL
  - Relationship building
  - Trauma informed approach



## Research and Practice Align

Grades 4 and 5

Meet weekly during first half of lunch time

Relationship building, ethics of care




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# Health Promoting Schools Youth Grant

 Health Promoting Schools (HPS) approach - NS Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DOEECD)

 Youth Grant:

- ❖ Health Promoting Schools Leadership Team
- ❖ Partnership between Chignecto-Central Regional School Board and NS Public Health, Northern Zone
- ❖ Applications reviewed monthly (until February 2023)
- ❖ Students in grades 5-12 - “students have a voice in making their schools healthier places”
- ❖ Program must focus on improving student health and well-being
- ❖ In the grant application, students pointed out that Art Club:
  - is a positive factor in their mental health
  - provides an opportunity for them to relax and decompress during the school day,
  - is an outlet for their emotional and artistic expression



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# Student Agency and Wellness

- Anindya Kundu - looking at the “roses in concrete”
  - ❖ Agency - “the potential ... to enact free will and impact their own lives” (2016, p. 20)
  - ❖ “Critical thinking on one’s social position and deliberate efforts to change one’s circumstances for the better” (2016, p. 21)
  - ❖ “Circle-jumping,” social capital and networking (2017, pp. 73, 79)
- Art Club - student initiated, based on their interests - empowerment, emotional regulation, coping skills
- Grant application:
  - ❖ opportunity structure for developing self-efficacy → wellbeing (Bandura, 1977)
  - ❖ skills that lead to cultural capital and access to resources (circle-jumping)



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# For Further Information



To continue this conversation, you can reach me at:

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