



Informing and Whistleblowing in Education: Constructing a Classroom Moral Platform

Yuanhang Chen

College of Humanities, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China

Email: 740476464@qq.com

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Abstract

Informing and whistleblowing behavior in education displays differentiated characteristics across age groups, with clear variations in motives, methods, and purposes. This paper argues that the destructive impact of whistleblowing on classroom interpersonal relationships does not stem from its motives, but rather from whether teachers guide such behavior toward institutionalized norms. By introducing the principle of procedural justice and establishing standardized channels for whistleblowing, it is possible to balance order maintenance and privacy protection, integrating students' whistleblowing needs with the classroom system. However, institutional improvement must rely on the endogenous construction of a classroom moral platform. On the one hand, democratic consultation can transform whistleblowing into public participation; on the other, moral internalization education—through theme-based class meetings, situational simulations, and other activities—can reshape an ethic of “mutual-assistance-based supervision”, promoting the transformation from rule authority to value consensus. This study proposes that only by integrating institutional safeguards based on procedural justice with the construction of a democratic moral platform can classroom governance shift from “passive whistleblowing” to “autonomous management”.

Subject Areas

Sociology

Keywords

Informing and Whistleblowing, Procedural Justice, Classroom Moral Platform

1. Conceptual Deconstruction: The Nature of Behavior in the Educational Context

According to the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, “whistleblowing” refers to “reporting

others' private remarks or activities to the relevant authorities". Some scholars distinguish between "whistleblowing" (negative connotation) and "reporting and exposing" (positive connotation), based on whether the reported content involves misconduct and whether the action is driven by a sense of justice [1].

Historically, whistleblowing has deep roots in China. In ancient society, it referred to subjects reporting crimes to the government. The legal codification of whistleblowing aimed to combat crime and maintain social order. However, in practice, it often led to issues such as false accusations and difficulty in curbing concealment, creating conflicts with concealment systems and contributing to the increasingly negative perception of whistleblowing behavior [2].

At different educational stages, due to varying degrees of mental maturity, students exhibit different whistleblowing behaviors. In early childhood, children tend to engage in "self-protection complaints". Liu Jingbo defines this behavior as children reacting in kindergarten settings when harmed or witnessing behavior that contradicts collective rules or teacher expectations, primarily aiming to stop the peer's actions [3]. Two main types are: "help-seeking complaints", when children seek protection from teachers or parents after being hurt by peers, and "reporting complaints", in which children, based on emerging moral awareness, report inappropriate peer behavior to uphold rules or justice [4]. These behaviors stem from psychological development traits: budding moral awareness, desire for adult approval, increased social interaction needs, and limited cognitive capacity requiring adult intervention [5].

In primary and secondary school stages, "rule-monitoring whistleblowing" becomes prevalent, often rooted in students' immature sense of order. According to Piaget's theory, students are in the heteronomous morality stage, viewing rules as absolute and believing that reporting violations is "right". Especially when teachers deliberately cultivate whistleblowers to maintain classroom order, some students assume the role of "moral supervisors" but in doing so, contribute to unequal educational power dynamics [6].

By high school, "interest-driven whistleblowing" emerges. Some schools assign students to monitor peers or encourage mutual reporting, even offering cash rewards. Under such incentives, students may be guided into instrumental whistleblowing for personal gain, posing serious threats to students' moral development [7].

Based on the above, we can categorize students' whistleblowing behavior as follows:

- 1) Motive: Maintain classroom order or existing rules; Goal: Fulfill sense of justice or earn praise; Outcome: Optimization of classroom order/system.
- 2) Motive: Maintain order; Outcome: Breakdown of classroom interpersonal relationships.
- 3) Motive: Seek personal gain (e.g., monetary rewards); Outcome: Breakdown of peer relationships.

This hierarchy illustrates a spectrum from legitimate reporting to pathological

whistleblowing. However, this classification has a major limitation: it focuses excessively on students' motives and lacks sufficient attention to how whistleblowing affects the classroom system. Thus, a critical question arises: Is the motive behind whistleblowing the decisive factor in its impact on the classroom system?

Real-life experience suggests otherwise. Even when students intend to protect order, the atmosphere of pervasive whistleblowing often leads to broken trust and interpersonal bonds. Worse, some homeroom teachers ignore classroom democracy, forcing students to report others, equating whistleblowing with secrecy and betrayal. Some schools even implement collective punishment for silence, compelling students to “betray” friends for self-preservation [8]. Therefore, this paper argues that the key determinant in whether whistleblowing harms or supports classroom order lies in the degree of procedural justice guiding the behavior.

2. Institutionalized Channels: Procedural Justice in Classroom Systems

Complaint behaviors—whether teacher-led or not—will persist unless strictly banned (which is impractical). Thus, the most effective response from teachers is to institutionalize these behaviors.

The *Guidelines for the Prevention of School Bullying* in Taiwan region offer valuable insight into implementing procedural justice in school governance. The principle of “protecting both parties’ right to education, bodily autonomy, and personal development” is central. For example, the guidelines require response teams to include teachers, parents, student representatives, and legal professionals, promoting balanced decisions and avoiding teacher bias. These align with the procedural justice ideal of “respectful treatment”. The requirement to notify parties in writing and provide appeal mechanisms also makes justice actionable. In classroom management, this could mean establishing a “double-blind investigation process”: maintaining anonymity for informants while assigning a neutral arbitration team—composed of students, parents, and teachers—to judge through hearings or secret inquiries. This model ensures transparency and trust while fostering rule identification [9].

However, procedural justice mechanisms themselves are not immune to potential power imbalances. To prevent student representatives or arbitration teams from evolving into a privileged “monitoring class”, safeguards must be implemented. These include ensuring rotational participation (e.g., term-limited student jurors selected by lottery), enforcing strict anonymity for informants to avoid retaliation, and providing training for teachers to recognize and mitigate implicit biases. Crucially, the accused must have clear avenues to challenge evidence and confront the substance of anonymous allegations through mediated processes, such as indirect questioning facilitated by a neutral teacher ombudsperson. Without these precautions, the reporting system risks reinforcing existing social hierarchies within the classroom or becoming an instrumental tool for dominant cliques.

With a fair, reliable whistleblowing system in place, informal and arbitrary teacher responses are restrained. Students gain confidence in the confidentiality and fairness of the process, which avoids the interpersonal crises triggered by malicious whistleblowing. Still, such mechanisms are external. To truly foster harmonious relationships, further construction of an internal “classroom moral platform” is essential.

3. Constructing a Classroom Moral Platform: From Rule Constraint to Value Internalization

While institutionalized whistleblowing channels grounded in procedural justice offer structural support, without internal moral consensus, they may devolve into “formal justice”. Moreover, whistleblowing inherently introduces a disruptive third-party force to the class structure, even when well-regulated. To resolve this, innovation beyond institutional frameworks is required. As Guo Guirong noted in her paper *Class Rules Are Useless*, “The highest level of management is student self-governance”. Constructing a classroom moral platform requires moving beyond rigid systems and instead fostering internalized morality and democratic participation—thus creating an order that no longer requires whistleblowing [10]. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this integrated approach—combining procedural justice with the moral platform—requires empirical validation. While theoretical frameworks and anecdotal evidence suggest promise, robust longitudinal and mixed-methods studies are needed to quantitatively measure outcomes (e.g., changes in student trust levels, frequency and resolution rates of reported incidents, perceived classroom climate) and qualitatively explore student and teacher perceptions across diverse educational settings. Such research is crucial to demonstrate the practical impact of transforming whistleblowing into public participation and fostering internalized moral norms for collective stewardship.

3.1. Fostering a Democratic Classroom Atmosphere

Yu Feng argued that “in a democratic atmosphere, voluntary whistleblowing should be encouraged”. Building on this, the present paper contends that “if a true democratic atmosphere exists in class, whistleblowing can be replaced by public discourse”. Teachers can integrate democratic meetings and open discussions into daily management. In this way, whistleblowing shifts from an act of dependence on authority to an act of public participation. Once it becomes a public matter, it is no longer “secret” or disruptive.

3.2. Moral Internalization through Values Education

Yu Feng also emphasized that whistleblowing must meet the ethical premise of “helping others and protecting collective interests [11]”. If the goal is to help others, whistleblowing can take a non-traditional form—e.g., not personal accusation but class-wide persuasion. Practically, this can be implemented through themed class meetings using scenario simulations and role-playing to help students grasp

ethical boundaries [12]. Teachers can foster a spirit of unity and mutual help, resolving conflict invisibly through positive class culture and moral influence, thereby laying a foundation for a strong classroom moral platform.

4. Conclusion

Whistleblowing and reporting have long been persistent challenges for teachers. To turn these behaviors into positive contributions to the collective, it is essential to construct a classroom moral platform. Only by transforming the authority of rules into internal recognition can management evolve to a state where “rules become invisible, and morality becomes explicit”.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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