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Social rules according to young children

Abstract

This paper reports the viewpoint of 10 children (aged 5-6 years) on social rules in their Catholic (Singapore) preschool classrooms. Rather than doing research on children and construing a judgment on their behalf, data was collected through semi structured interview with the children. This study provides valuable insights into children's meaning making about social practices, examples and non-examples of social rules, and how children view themselves as rules learners and followers. Themes identified through the analysis process identified children united in their views about conventional social norms, including their understanding of and necessity for the rules (Thornberg, 2008b). The children acknowledged specific social standards as essential practices for an orderly and harmonious preschool environment.

Key words: young children; social rules; social norms; social conventions, preschool; educational caregivers; school rules; Singapore

Persons involved with early childhood education work together to ensure standards of social practice are meaningful understood, properly interpreted, and appropriately translated for classroom use. The role of these educators is establishing principles and values that inform behavioural standards so children learn how to work together non-violently, good-naturedly and effectively in their surroundings. The findings reported in this paper are part of a larger project conducted in Catholic (Singapore) preschools investigating the implementation of character education. The worldview of educational caregivers and parents in relation to young children's social behaviours has been reported previously (Carter, 2015); this study reports on the paradigm of children in relation to conventional social norms in their preschool classrooms. This paper commences with an introduction to the Singapore context where the research was conducted, followed by a review of the literature on young children and social rules characteristics. The study is introduced and the methodology is explained. Data is analysed and discussed. Practical implications are proposed, followed by suggestions for future research.

Singapore

Singapore is a politically stable, modern South East Asian state with a population of 3.84 million residents and 1.55 million non-residents. The ethnic composition consists of Chinese (74.2 %), Malay (13.3 %), Indians (9.1 %), Eurasians and Peranakans (3.3 %) (Department of Statistics, Singapore,

2014). Non-residents are foreigners living, studying or working in Singapore on a non-permanent basis. Although traditional Eastern cultures are predominately dominated by Confucian values, a growing body of research identifies collectivist ethics such as deference to authority and filial piety, combine in a culturally sensitive manner, with individualistic Western doctrines including autonomy and individual liberty (O'Dwyer, 2003; Lieber et al., 2006; Carter, Frewin, & Chunn, 2014). Traditional values (obedience to elders) are being taught, with an emphasis on reasoning, guidance, assertiveness, responsibility, and independence.

Literature Review

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological systems theory postulates the view of individual development taking place in a complex set of nested bidirectional environmental systems, each one influencing the other. Bronfenbrenner theorised that it is necessary to focus on the reciprocal and influential nature of the systems since changes in one system has the potential, directly or indirectly, to influence the developing person over time. Social rules or norms are the glue that bind ecological systems, reflected in the "individual human's tendency to do things the way that others in the group do them" (Schmidt & Tomasello, 2012, p. 231). Systematically learned from more competent members of the group, rules are the general standards of appropriate behaviours prescribed within specific settings (Rakoczy, Hamann, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2010). The longevity of context sensitive rules is generally influenced by children's identification with group members, acceptance and readiness to comply, which in turn is influenced by social pressures exerted within the group to behave in expected ways. There could be times throughout this process that children comply with the groups' outlook, irrespective of their allegiance to this perspective (Over & Carpenter, 2012).

Acknowledging there are differences in cultural orientation about how children relate to their caregivers, many studies document that the quality of social attachments children develop in these environmental systems, influence their social and emotional development (Kochanska, 2001; Sullivan, Perry, Sloan, Kleinhaus, & Burtchen, 2011; Hazen, Jin, Jacobvitz, & Jung, 2012). Children experiencing responsive and supportive caregiving tend to show self-reliance, developing trust in themselves and in others, compared with restrictive and insensitive caregiving resulting in restrained, low trust relationships. Risk factors (e.g., poor behaviour control; family violence, authoritarian childrearing attitudes, social rejection by peers, limited economic opportunities) and protective factors (e.g., caregiver sensitivity, connectedness to family, supportive social network, involvement in social activities, and social norms) have implications on the stability of young children's attachment (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002; Cassidy, Woodhouse, Sherman, Stupica, & Lejuez, 2011). The more cumulative the risk factors young children are exposed to, the higher likelihood that they will develop negative schemas, experiencing difficulties with interpersonal relationships (Lieberman, Chu, Van Horn, & Harris, 2011). On the other hand, protective factors, contribute to young children's

development of emotional regulation and social competence. It is important to note that when there is a substantial shift toward nurturing caregiving, the quality and security of attachment may improve (Landry, Smith, Swank, Assel, & Vellet, 2001).

The cognitive structures of social domain theory - morality, social convention and personal responsibility - refer to “organized systems of thought about distinct aspects of the social (and non-social) world (Turiel, 1983, 1989)” (Dahl & Kim, 2014, pp. 13 - 14). Related research has demonstrated that children’s understanding of social norms involves their understanding of these domains (Thornberg, 2008c). Such understandings, involving monitoring, reflecting, evaluating, and adapting, contribute to the development of effective communication, self-control (impulse control and goal attainment), positive work habits, and engagement in learning. Encompassing the constructs welfare, justice, beneficence and rights, morality refers to the impact of one’s behaviours upon others to make a determination of right and wrong or/and fair and unfair. Social conventions characterize the agreed customs expected within the environment within which they are formed (Dahl & Kim, 2014). Thornberg’s (2008b) writing ascertains that children “justify judgements of moral issues in terms of the harm or unfairness that actions might cause, while they justify judgements of social conventions in terms of norms and expectations of authority” (Thornberg, 2008b, p. 38). Behaviours pertaining to personal responsibility are distinct from social conventions and morality, focusing more on self-regulation and individual lifestyle choices. Friendship choices, personal dress style, and self-reflection are examples of this cognitive domain.

These structures of social domain theory align with rule categories, primarily interpersonal, structuring, safety, propriety, and personal responsibility (Thornberg, 2008a). Interpersonal rules are aligned with respectful relationships; Structuring rules transmit to orderly environments so learning and teaching transpires; Safety rules convey protection and security; Propriety rules refers to politeness in social situations; Personal rules include responsibility for behaviour choices and self-reflection. These norms are agent-neutral, meaning social rules can be a “reason for acting and grounds for evaluating and criticizing other acts” (Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013, p. 17). As such social norms frame baseline social interactions in the early childhood context by identifying appropriate and inappropriate behaviours essential for peaceful productivity within this context.

In our multicultural world, schooling is perceived as a panculture system, inclusive of the cultural beliefs and values of all children, and responsive to the socialization needs associated with the whole group. Chen and French (2008) explain social contexts are governed by culturally valued behaviours and prescribed social norms, and the manner in which these conventions are communicated and performed is reflective of the socialization style of the panculture (Rakoczy, Warneken, & Tomasello,

2008; Newman & Newman, 2015). McInerney and Liem (as cited in Burton, Westen, and Kowalski, 2009, p. 808) explain:

Schooling is a second culture for all ... schools wash out the impact of culture-specific socialization practices on students' motivation and learning as well as on values and goal preferences, in particular when it comes to learning and achievement-related goals... schooling requires the development of a new set of social, cognitive and motivational attributes in all children. (p. 808)

Social norms in this panculture are socially constructed, intentionally coming into existence to represent the social conventions for living and working together harmoniously and productively in the specific contexts.

The current study

This research conducted in Catholic (Singapore) preschools is part of a larger character education study across 19 preschools. The specific focus of this project was to learn children's viewpoints about the social rules in their preschool classrooms. With the intention of contributing to the larger project and the literature on young children's understanding of preschool rules, one research question was posed:

1. How do young children reason about the social rules in their preschool classrooms?

Methodological Framework

As the project focused on children's viewpoints and gaining an understanding of their perspectives, the researchers collected data from semi structured interviews. The framework for organizing, analysing and reporting patterns of meaning (i.e., themes) across the semi structured interviews was thematic analysis. The data was triangulated into themes, aligned with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic analysis process.

Participants and Site

The research site was located in the district of Jurong West Singapore and was selected as it was one of the preschools involved in the larger Catholic education character education project. Data was collected through small group semi structured interviews with ten, five - six year old children. The participants (seven girls and three boys) were recruited from two kindergarten classes in one preschool setting. All children were enrolled five days a week, attending the afternoon three hour preschool program.

Group Semi Structured Interviews

The semi structured interviews were conducted in the Church building in the preschool grounds, as this was considered by the school principal, the quietest space in the school. The group of ten children participated in small group semi structured interviews about their experiences with the social rules. The children's interviews were recorded and they had the opportunity to listen to parts of the recording, to both further clarify and / or confirm their information.

Procedure

The ethical guidelines of the university were followed with approval for ethical conduct of this research obtained prior to the commencement of the study. Gaining consent from the child participants involved two phases: parent or guardian informed consent and child assent. The process of getting assent required time and continuing negotiation. It included the researcher assessing the child's capacity to give informed assent; explaining the research in developmentally appropriate language; ensuring the child understood what research they were being invited to participate in; the data analysis process; how and with whom the data would be shared; and their right to the dissent - stopping or withdrawing from the project (Einarsdottir, 2007).

One of the researchers was known to the children as she frequently visited the school and their classrooms in her role as the project director for the region. The second researcher was known to the educators but not the children and was introduced to the children by the first researcher. The researchers explained their role in this project to the children as learners, wanting to learn from the children about their knowledge, understanding and experiences of the social rules in their classrooms.

The researchers, both early years trained educators, sought informed consent from parents and verbal and 'written' assent from the children. The researcher already known to the children visited the classrooms one week prior to the scheduled interviews to introduce the project to the children, including the participatory nature of the project. On a second occasion, both researchers spoke with the children whose parents provided informed consent for their participation in the project. This conversation enabled the children to learn about the project and their rights as child participants in the project. After this second conversation, the children made their decision to proceed or discontinue with the small group semi structured interviews scheduled later in the day.

All ten children, independently, choose to continue with the interviews. They listened as the researchers explained their parent's informed consent, making reference to their signatures on the form; they indicated their assent to participate in the project by ticking the relevant box on the same form. Prior to commencing the interviews, the researchers ask children some questions to ascertain

their understanding of what they have volunteered for. Through this process they observed children's nonverbal behaviours to ascertain their comfort level with the semi structured interview process. With children's permission, the interviews were recorded and transcribed at a later date. At the conclusion of the group interviews, children were invited to listen to parts of their recoded interviews, prior to being thanked and affirmed for their participation.

Analysis

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) systematic analysis process (Table 1), the researchers generated a transparent thematic map representative of "patterns of explicit and implicit content" (Joffe, as cited in Harper & Thompson, 2012, p. 209), connecting inductive themes with the research question under examination.

Table 1: Thematic analysis process

Phase 1: Familiarization with the entire data set
Phase 2: Generating initial data
Phase 3: Searching for themes
Phase 4: Checking identified themes
Phase 5: Refining themes
Phase 6: Writing a scholarly report connected to the research questions and the literature

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87)

Findings

Central to this research is the belief that children are authorities on their own worldviews and that they "have the right to express their views about matters important to them" (Bell, 2008, pp. 8-9). The researchers worked *with* the children to ascertain their worldviews of the social rules in their preschools. Children's meaning making became evident in the four key themes emerging from Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process: working together, peacefully, productively and safely (code of engagement); knowing what I know (being together with others); growing and developing (uniformity and conformity); norm enforcement and violation (rule transgressions).

Working together – peacefully, productively and safely

The children were accepting of the social rules, implying the norms were achievable, even though acknowledging some limits were easier to conform to than others. There was alignment between preschool and classroom rules, with rules being explained as necessary to promote everyone's welfare while at the same time contributing to structured, peaceful, productive and safe surroundings.

Children's self-regulatory behaviours were developed within the social norms matrix. These findings confirm Malone and Tietjens's (2000) claim that rules are "rational, easily understood and deal with behavior that is necessary for an optimum of learning environment" (p. 165).

Learning:

Bella: We use our sight to see our teacher, listening, ears, and we also talk softly when the teachers are talking.

Bella: Don't talk when the other class is talking, you might disturb them, and then they could not listen.

Joshua: Listen, look at the peoples who are talking to you... keep quiet when teacher is talking.

Sam: Raise up your hands to ask a question. ... Talking in one voice.

Safety:

Joshua: Walk carefully, do not run up the stair.

Prudence: Be careful when you're walking.

Crispin: You have to be careful with the slippery floor. Sometimes you will fall down, but you need to be careful so you will be never hurt.

Relational:

Bella: You care for your friends, care for your teacher, care for the poor people, and care for anybody.

Jacqueline: You need to keep quiet so that you can listen to your friend.

Lydia: Share and be kind.

Jacqueline: If you do something, like what your teacher do, then your teacher will be happy with you.

Social graces:

Jacqueline: "Polite" means you say something really nice about your friend. And if you say something rude to your friend, that's not polite.

Joshua: Speak nicely.

Personal responsibility:

Neesha: Make the classroom clean.

Neesha: Walking softly so the other children cannot hear the teachers.

Children voiced that while there was within group conformity with social practices, these norms were context specific (Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013).

Bella: You don't stand up in the car when the car is moving ... I sit in my own car seat.

Jacqueline: If your mummy says, "It's time for you to eat and you can play again after you eat" you should listen to your parents.

Jacqueline: When grandma and grandpa are taking care of you, you should also listen to them.

Knowing what I know

Children were clear and consistent in communicating their knowledge about the reasoning behind the social rules, their definition of the rules, their understanding of the motives for the social standards, and their self-regulatory behaviours in working according to these values. This supports Thornberg's (2008c) observation that, "if teachers want students to accept a rule it seems to be important that students can make sense of the rule, i.e., perceive or recognise the reasons behind the rule" (p. 57).

Jacqueline: If you don't listen to the rules, then you will forget what you should do.

Neesha: Don't step really loudly or else you will make the class very noisy.

Children associated listening with structuring the learning context; movement with being safe in the surroundings; taking turns, consideration and caring with relationships; social graces with politeness and manners; behaviour choice with personal responsibility. Respectful reciprocal relationships, interdependence, and self-responsibility were core principles underpinning the generality of social practices in the classrooms and the preschool.

Learning:

Hugh: Take turns to listen

Neesha: Raise your hand when you want to tell something.

Jacqueline: If teacher reads us story books, we need to keep quiet and listen, because sometimes the

teacher will ask questions.

Safety:

Neesha: Walking softly ... or else the other children cannot hear the teacher.

Neesha: You must wait in a queue.

Relational:

Bella: My friends will play with me and we always take turns.

Bella: There's not enough pencils so we take turns.

Social graces:

Ruby: Kind words ... "Please", "No, thank you"; you must respect "Please", "Thank you" you must "respect".

Personal responsibility:

Jacqueline: Don't splash water on--don't splash water when your teacher is talking.

Bella: If you don't listen then you don't know what to do. Then the teachers say, "What are you going to do?" then you say, "I don't know what to do" because you or he didn't listen properly. And when we want to talk, we raise our hand.

There was an unquestioning acceptance of the rules, with children implying it was taken for granted by teachers and themselves that they would behave according to the prescribed social customs. The key to this acceptance was children's understanding of and willingness to conform to the justification for the conventions and the associated behaviours. Children's actions, far from blind compliance, were intentional when engaging with one another and their environment, evidenced by their adherence to "conventional, communally shared norms" (Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013, p. 17). Through this process, children develop social responsibility, an essential element for active community engagement.

Extract 1

Jacqueline: If you are talkative and you didn't listen to the teacher, you don't know what to do and if...

Joshua: If you want to talk, you need to listen ...

Jacqueline: Put up your hand.

Joshua: One person talks and the other listens.

Scaffolding children in the form of social coaching in living peacefully together was not spoken about. No mention was made to explicit instruction being embedded in class activities and routines throughout the day, yet children commented the social rules were learned. Children indicated they have an active role in following the class rules, with the role of thinking being prioritized. What children think about when they are thinking, learning and remembering the social limits requires further attention in the research.

The distinction between telling children what to do and teaching children the desired social behaviours was unclear.

Extract 2

Interviewer: If you had somebody new coming to your class, a new student, how would they know the rules in your class? Who would teach them?

Joshua: Teacher.

Interviewer: Teacher. How does she teach them?

Joshua: Tell them.

Jacqueline: If she needs help, we will help her.

Nevertheless, what was apparent was children's sense of belonging and social engagement with peers and teachers as they readily conformed to social norms (Rakoczy et al. 2010; Rakoczy et al., 2009), with adults making the rules - educational caregivers in the school and parents in the home. It was unclear if children have a role in the formulation of social rules and if they do, what is this role.

Growing and Developing

Acknowledging that some conventional rules were easier to follow than others, children's responses indicated social limits were always present in the daily life of preschools and that learning them was a developmental process. As Thornberg, (2008a) found, rules are "maintained by habit and routine" (p. 30). There were differences between the children regarding the degree of difficulty of performing the

rules, but there was a consensus that younger children (K1 and K2) are developing their knowledge and mastery of the rules. The children implied there was an expectation that they would support younger children develop mastery by consistently modelling the expected social behaviours to them.

Joshua and Jacqueline: Listening is sometimes very hard to do for nurseries' ... they find it so hard ... because they are still very small.

Jacqueline: We are bigger children, if we are going upstairs and the nursery is going downstairs, we need to give way for them.

Norm enforcement and violation

There was no reference to children being blamed or shamed when they did not follow social rules. No child identified that they were placed in negative roles. With the exception of time outside the classroom, there was limited reference to how misbehaviour was addressed. Children's responses indicated they were related to with courtesy and respect by teachers and peers when they misbehaved, but no specific details on what support they received to learn more appropriate behaviours was forthcoming. This is an important point for as Goetz (2001) explains, "casting some children in negative roles puts the very being of each and every child at risk. If even one child can be cast aside as unworthy, no child is truly safe" (p. 11).

Children were aware that their behaviours had implications beyond themselves.

Extract 3

Interviewer: How come you can't run when you're going down the stairs?

Joshua and Jacqueline: Because you will fall down.

Interviewer: How come you have to listen and only one person can talk?

Jacqueline: Because you will not know who is talking.

Joshua: And you don't know what the peoples will say.

Jacqueline: So you need to keep quiet so that you can listen to your friends, what they are saying ... if you don't listen to the rules, then you will forget what you should do.

With regard to not following social rules, the children were mostly unanimous that their peers would not play with them. Brief mention was made to logical consequences, when other children will not play fair.

Joshua: Your friends will not play with you. Nobody would play with you.

Conversely, children acknowledged the reciprocal nature of social norms learning; with educational caregivers and peers supporting them and them supporting peers. Some children made mention that it was their responsibility to remember the social standards, proudly stating “*I try to remember*”.

Timothy: My friend reminds me.

Jacqueline: Teacher teaches you.

Lydia and Manish: My mummy, my daddy and my teachers (teach me).

Children made no mention of control mechanisms such as rewards (e.g., stickers) (positive coercion), but they did refer to negative coercion in the form of punishment. The level of severity and intensity of the punishment was not discussed, nor if was based on negative controlling behaviours (e.g., criticising) or positive controlling behaviours (e.g., teasing). No reference was made to the self-evaluation process children engage with when misbehaviour occurs. However, when asked “*Does the teacher tell you what to think about?*” the children replied in the affirmative and agreed that “*thinking about the rule helps you learn to remember the rule*”. Reference was made to children thinking about social mistakes and giving an apology to the teacher when children misbehaved, before re-joining their class or the playground.

Ruby: Teacher will punish you. ... They just let you stand outside ... Like, half an hour ... We need to say ‘sorry’ to the teacher.

Extract 4:

Joshua: Sit and think.

Jacqueline: Sit and think what your teacher says.

Discussion

This study adopted the present-day image of the child as an active, capable, thoughtful person, adept at expressing their viewpoints as social actors on matters that affect them relevant to their lived experiences (Smith & Kotsanas, 2013). Children’s narratives identified a shared understanding of the

reasoning behind the socially constructed norms guiding social practices. Children acknowledged rules for structuring learning, safety and protection, respectful relationships, propriety, and personal choice (Thornberg, 2008b). An understanding of the purpose for the rules, as well as an overlap between the rules was recorded. The rationale for different social rules was articulated with synergies between the moral, social and personal domains identified in the thematic analysis. Children reasoned about orderly environments, and associated compliance with peaceful, productive and safe learning and teaching spaces, where learning could proceed without disruptions. Harvey, Bimler, Evans, Kirkl, and Pechtel, (2012) applaud such environments, concluding that learning is linked with well-ordered spaces and “related to improved student academic outcomes, reduction in internalizing behavior disorders, enhanced student social and emotional competence, greater engagement and motivation to learn” (p. 628).

In sum, while children did not refer to ‘right, wrong, fair or unfair’, their voices gave insight into shared understanding and acceptance of social conventions in their preschool (Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013). It is worth noting that the most frequent reasons given for rule compliance was productive and orderly work spaces, good-natured and fair social interactions, and safe and secure work spaces.

An analysis of the data indicated a close alignment with the rules categorisations used by Thornberg (2008a; 2008b; 2008c) in his ethnographic study conducted in Sweden. Whilst overlaps existed across these rule categories, in this study learning, safety and relational rules line up with the moral domain of right and wrong, the social graces rules parallel with the social conventions domain, and individual choice with the personal responsibility dimension. These domains received equal attention from the children in this study.

Even though the researchers found “the social world of young children is pervaded by behavioral norms specifying how to interact with objects, with people, and in specific social settings” (Dahl & Kim, 2014, p. 12), the data was unclear about the role of educational caregivers and children in co-constructing social norms. The response to noncompliance was briefly noted as firm, calm and immediate. There was minimal explanation of the child repairing the situation, with the exception of apologizing to the teacher as part of re-joining the community of learners.

Children reported educational caregivers maintaining respectful relationships with them. Does this equate educational caregivers with being persons of influence, and that this influence is a contributing factor in children’s compliance to social rules? If this is the case then the interdependent reality of the social group is central to the behaviour teaching and learning paradigm.

The social rules were embedded in a climate of care within the daily curriculum of the preschool classroom. Children were knowledgeable about the rules, understood the reason behind the rules,

freely and intentionally enacting conventional behaviours, thus preventing learning from being disordered and social interactions becoming unruly. They could recognize the rationality of the rules and explain why certain behaviours were inappropriate, pointing out the consequences for themselves and others. For many children, social conventions were aligned with constructive social orientation and with academic engagement (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014). Modelling and reinforcement aided children in being compliant; social rules serving to guide their self-control and redirect them to behave in a socially expected manner. This suggests “that a given social norm can figure as both a reason for acting and grounds for evaluating and criticizing others’ acts” Rakoczy & Schmidt, p. 17, 2013).

The socialization approach reported in this study acknowledged children as active ‘agents’ in their own learning. Within this context, the educational caregivers and children enable each other to act responsibly as social norms once prescribed are translated into and taught as social rules. This interdependent reality is central to establishing a productive and joyful early childhood environment with children developing their social wellbeing.

Implications for practitioners

Thornberg (2008b) asserts that social rules are the codes of engagement representing baseline behaviours and consequently they need to be a “part of moral or values education in school” (p. 37). The four pillars of education reported in the 1996 UNESCO International Commission of Education for the twenty-first Century provides a framework for teaching children conventional social norms essential for peaceful and productive teaching and learning (Delors, 2013) (Table 2). Children are involved in the mental creation of these pillars so they become committed to the physical creation. Educational caregivers build children’s capacity as they come to know, understand, and behave in accordance with social norms when interacting with one another. This involves describing, explaining, reasoning, role playing, modelling, providing constructive feedback, and practicing social rule behaviours intertwined across the four pillars.

Table 2 Four Pillars of Education

Learning to know: Learning what social norms need to be known (e.g., taking turns).
Learning to do: Learning the skills to behave according to these social norms, depending on the context (e.g., turn taking when walking in line down the stairs).
Learning to live together: Learning to be with others harmoniously and productively (e.g., taking turns with being the leader when walking down the stairs).

Learning to be: Developing self-knowledge to be confident, caring, and responsible (e.g., responding nonviolently when another child pushes to the front of the line and takes your turn as the leader).

These practices could inform professional conversations with educational caregivers on the intentionality of their role in relation to young children's social rules learning. Are educational caregivers concerned with controlling children or are they focusing on lifelong learning, teaching children what to know, what to do, how to live together, and how to be? Are educational caregivers modelling nonaggressive responses to children's noncompliant behaviour? Are educational caregivers monitoring children's connections within their ecological contexts, and where appropriate, increasing exposure to respectful and responsive interactions with educational caregivers?

Limitations and Future Research

The current study has some methodological limitations, primarily the small sample size, and the monosyllabic responses of some children in the semi structured interviews. Broadening the participant pool to include younger children (Nursery 1 and Nursery 2) will provide data pertaining to the evolution of individual and communal social knowledge and understanding, social interaction in the classroom, norm commitment and norm enforcement. Studying the diverse cultural values and practices of children and families is worthy of research as some characteristics may be promoted in one cultural context (e.g., assertion), yet frowned upon in another context (e.g., silent participation). Son (2014) suggests "labelling children's aggressive behaviors as socially deficient and problematic without consideration of an individual child's social and cultural context can result in making hasty and insensitive judgments" (p. 106).

Future research is necessary in order to reveal children's experiences in learning social norms in their preschools and the role of consequences in this process. Based on the findings, further questions for consideration could including: what makes the rule a fair rule; would you change the rules; what happens when you have broken the rule? Designing this research with children will shift their active engagement from participation to partnership.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, the data from this study contributes to the existing knowledge of young children's views on social rules in their preschool classrooms. This data provides valuable insights into children's meaning making about the categories of rules, examples and non-examples of social rules, reasons for these rules, and how children view themselves as rules learners and followers.

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