Elementary School Teachers' Reflections on Shy Children in the Classroom

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This study explored teachers' perceptions of shy children in the classroom during the elementary school grades. Seven teachers (1 male, 6 female) from elementary schools located in geographically diverse areas of Canada participated in semistructured telephone interviews that explored their perceptions of and experiences with shy children in the classroom. Transcripts were analyzed for emerging themes about teachers' conceptions of shy children and teacher-shy child interactions. Findings suggest that shyness and social communication may influence elementary schoolteachers' classroom practices and the teacher-child relationship. Teachers' roles in shy children's socio-emotional functioning and academic success are discussed.

Cette recherche a étudié les perceptions qu'ont les enseignants au primaire des enfants qui sont gênés. Sept enseignants (1 homme, 6 femmes) d'écoles primaires situées dans des zones géographiquement diverses au Canada ont participé à des entrevues téléphoniques semi-structurées portant sur leurs perceptions des enfants gênés et leurs expériences avec eux en salle de classe. Nous avons analysé les transcriptions pour en dégager des thèmes sur les conceptions qu'ont les enseignants d'enfants gênés et les interactions entre les enseignants et les enfants gênés. Les résultats indiquent que la gêne et la communication sociale pourraient influencer les pratiques des enseignants au primaire et leur rapport avec leurs élèves. Nous discutons des rôles des enseignants dans le fonctionnement socio-émotionnel des enfants et dans la réussite académique.

Shy children are fearful and anxious when encountering new people and tend to be embarrassed and self-conscious when they perceive themselves as being evaluated by others (Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009). Shyness is moderately to highly stable across the lifespan, particularly among children considered to be extremely shy (Degnan & Fox, 2007). Results from a growing number of studies indicate that shyness is associated with a host of socio-emotional and school difficulties from early childhood through adolescence including difficulties with peer relationships (e.g., exclusion, rejection), internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem), and maladjustment at school (e.g., academic difficulties, school refusal; see Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009, for a recent and extensive review).

The elementary school environment appears to be a particularly stressful context for shy children (Evans, 2010; Lund, 2008). The transition from the relatively holistic curriculum and assessment of early childhood competences to a more structured, oral-language-based

assessment may provide further pressure on children to perform orally. For example, Coplan and Arbeau (2008) identified the presence of a large group of (initially unfamiliar) peers, increased demands for oral participation, and a high child-to-staff ratio as factors that may exacerbate shy children's feelings of social fear, self-consciousness, and fear of others' evaluations or judgments based on their oral interactions. Given this fear of judgment, some shy children are also less likely to speak and tend to withdraw from social interactions in school, particularly during the middle childhood years (Rubin et al., 2009).

Earlier research suggests that teachers' expectations and beliefs about children may directly influence students' self-perceptions and behaviors in the classroom (Curtis & Altmann, 1977; Purkey, 2000). To date, relatively little is known about teachers' beliefs about childhood shyness and its implications in educational contexts (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008). Accordingly, building on psychocultural theories of self-systems and social behavior to help frame our research and interview questions (Maccoby, 1998), the goal of this study was to explore how teachers perceive and understand the mental states, motivations, emotions, and socio-communicative competence of shy children in their classrooms. Also, given the conceptual inconsistencies about the definitions of shyness and quietness (Coplan & Rubin, 2010), we explored teachers' perceptions of the similarities and differences between the constructs of *shy* and *quiet* for children.

Shy Children at School

Shy children at school tend to display comparatively poorer social skills than their non-shy peers, such as speaking less and initiating fewer social interactions with peers and teachers (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Bohlin, Hagekull, & Andersson, 2005; Coplan & Prakash, 2003; Evans, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Kagan, 2005). Some researchers have suggested that shy children may be comparatively "invisible" to teachers (Keogh, 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Kagan, 2005; Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009) and that shy behaviors might even be encouraged because they maintain order in the classroom (Rubin, 1982). However, results from other recent research on teachers of younger children suggest that shy children are not going unnoticed (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008; Coplan & Prakash, 2003; Thijs, Koomen, & Van der Leij, 2006). For example, Arbeau and Coplan (2007) reported that kindergarten teachers were likely to predict that shy children would be equally at risk for future social difficulties as aggressive children, suggesting that teachers perceived shyness as a serious behavior problem in early childhood classrooms.

Only limited research exists on how teachers respond to shy children in their classrooms. It has been suggested that in response to children's shyness, teachers are more likely to employ *peer-focused* approaches (e.g., encouraging a shy child to work with a classmate or to join activities with other children) and are less likely to use *high-powered* strategies (e.g., punishment; see Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981; Cunningham & Sugawara, 1988; Martin, 1983) than other types of strategies or with other types of children such as non-shy children. In support of this notion, Arbeau and Coplan (2007) recently reported that compared with their responses to other problem behaviors in class, kindergarten teachers indicated that they would be more likely to intervene and promote acquisition of social skills with shy children, as well as to monitor the situation.

Given the importance of school as a social institution and learning community, it is surprising that little is known about the social and emotional processes that may underlie shy children's classroom experiences. In particular, whereas much research attention has been

devoted to teachers' responses to aggressive/acting-out children, relatively little is known about teachers' behaviors toward shy children in the classroom (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007). The emotional culture or atmosphere of the classroom may also play a role in a child's learning and social interactions (Bruner, 1996), but to date little is known of the influence that school culture or environment may have on shy children's school adjustment. Gazelle (2006) recently reported that classrooms with negative emotional climates (e.g., ineffective class management, unfriendly atmosphere, irritable teacher) may have a particularly negative influence on shy-anxious children. Shy children in such classrooms showed an increased risk of suffering from peer rejection, victimization, low peer acceptance, and symptoms of depression.

One factor that appears to play a critical role in creating an emotional atmosphere in the classroom is the teacher-child relationship (Arbeau, Coplan, & Weeks, 2010; Bruner, 1996). Overall, compared with non-shy children, shy children tend to develop less personal, less confrontational, and more dependent relationships with their teachers (Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994; Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009; Rudasill, Rimm-Kaufman, Justice, & Pence, 2006; Rydell, Bohlin, & Thorell, 2005). However, results from recent research suggest that positive teacher-child relationships may play a particularly important *protective* role in the socio-emotional adjustment of shy children in school (Arbeau et al., 2010). For example, a positive and supportive teacher-student relationship will provide an atmosphere of psychological and emotional safety to help shy children feel comfortable and secure in the classroom (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995). Researchers need to continue to explore how teachers play a role in young shy children's school adjustment.

Given the important role that teachers may play in children's academic and social and emotional lives in the classroom, the dearth of in-depth analyses of teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about shyness is surprising. Qualitative researchers have noted that children's social experiences in the classroom are multidimensional and dynamic, and that it is difficult to capture the "lived experiences" (van Manen, 1990) of these peer interactions through traditional paper-and-pencil self-report or peer measures. As such, given the value of a narrative approach to developmental research (Knupfer, 1995; Rogers, 2000) and building on past qualitative research on children's self-perceptions and social behaviors (Lund, 2008; Coplan & Arbeau, 2008; Goodwin, 2002), in our study we explored (a) elementary teachers' understanding of shyness, (b) its implications for children's development, and (c) educational practices related to shyness.

Method

Participants

Participants included seven elementary school (i.e., grades K-6) teachers (6 female, 1 male) from three Canadian provinces (Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan). The teachers were currently teaching classes ranging from Grades 2-5 (children aged 7-11 years) and were drawn from a larger sample of participants who participated in an online survey study of elementary teachers' attitudes and beliefs (Coplan, Hughes, Bosacki, & Rose-Krasnor, 2011) and subsequently indicated willingness to be interviewed in this follow-up study. Participation in the study was confidential, but not anonymous, and unfortunately, no additional information about the teachers was available. Interviewees were given a $25 gift certificate in appreciation of their contributions to the study.

Measures

Teachers participated in a semistructured interview. The content of interview questions for this report was gleaned from a larger interview protocol. For this article, we focused our questions on the following issues: (a) teachers' understandings of shyness in general (e.g., How would you define a shy child?); (b) teachers' perceptions of shy children's socio-communicative abilities in the classroom (e.g., What are some advantages/disadvantages of shyness in the classroom?); and (c) teachers' attitudes toward possible intervention and educational strategies to promote the social and communicative competence of shy children in the classroom (e.g., What are some ways that teachers can create a positive learning and social environment to better engage shy children in the classroom?). Interviews were conducted over the telephone and audiotaped for subsequent transcription and analysis. The transcribed interviews were sent to the participants for editing and confirmation of accuracy of content.

Coding of Interviews

Drawing on earlier coding protocols for studying children's social experiences in the classroom (Bosacki, Marini, & Dane, 2007; Harris, 1989; Hughes & Dunn, 1998), preliminary data analysis included an exploration of the interview content to the selected text for emerging psychological themes. Guided by the interview questions, two researchers from the study independently read through the transcripts to search for common words, phrases, and sentences connected to the topic of shy children. These key words became codes to help make sense of the transcripts, and then the researchers met to discuss the coding. The discussion of these codes then led to the emergence of larger themes from the data. Following discussion among the coders, a collaboratively developed summary of themes was co-created, which indicated themes reflected in the responses to each set of questions outlined below. Selected quotes from the participating teachers provide further illustration of the themes.

Results

Definitions of Shyness

All the responses to questions exploring teachers' understanding of shyness referred to shy children's (a) lack of oral communication, (b) preference for solitary and/or one-on-one communication as opposed to larger groups, (c) focus on observing their surroundings, and (d) hesitation to join larger groups. For example, one teacher referred to a shy child as "Somebody who is less eager to talk around other people or in front of a group" (female Grade 2/3 teacher, March 2009). One teacher reported that shy children may experience feelings of embarrassment and nervousness when talking to larger groups as illustrated by the following female teacher's description of a shy child as someone who is "nervous to express ideas, reluctant to raise their hand, almost coming across as embarrassed sometimes" (Grade 2 teacher, May 2008).

Regarding a question addressing the distinction between shyness and quietness, all the participating teachers stated that shyness was different from quietness in that not all quiet children may be considered shy. The responses focused on lack of knowledge, understanding, and self-confidence; and insecurity as some of the main reasons why children might choose to remain quiet or hesitate to speak. More specifically, six of the seven teachers said that some of

the reasons why quiet children might choose not to speak would include fear of being wrong or making mistakes, as shown by the following comments. "Sometimes the quiet kids are nervous about making mistakes, so I sort of look at social behavior with kids . . . I would say it's more fear than shyness" (female Grade 2 teacher, July 2008); and "Sometimes what might appear to be shyness is insecurity. Possibly embarrassed to get the wrong answer, sometimes they're embarrassed to have the right answer in the class setting" (male Grade 4 teacher, June 2008).

We asked the teachers to discuss individual differences in shyness, as well as the stability of shyness over time and situations. All the teachers said that shy children differed from one another due to at least one of the following factors: (a) personality differences, (b) different educational and life/family experiences, and (c) varied exposure to modeling or reinforcing reflecting differences in oral communication. Most (5 of 7) teachers reported that most shy children remained shy across situations, although this consistency might differ according to their social communication with others. However, another perception emerged in terms of the consistency of shyness across the lifetime. In this case, most teachers (5 of 7) reported that shy children would be likely to *change* as they become adults, as illustrated by a female Grade 2 teacher who said, "I think as people age and their interest[s] change they find groups that fit them more closely and where they're more comfortable that those kinds of things can change" (March 2009). Similarly, this teacher also thought that shy children were likely to change, commenting, "Just because as a child is growing, I think so is their personality, and the environment around them, and I think shyness would progress in a shy environment" (May 2008).

Implications of Shyness in School

In this section we describe teachers' thinking on some of the advantages and disadvantages of shyness in the classroom. In this regard, some teachers considered the positive influence of shyness on academic competence. For example, shy children were seen as being more likely than others to comply with the teacher's instructions and classroom routines and might also spend more time and effort on classroom activities as explained in the following: "Positives are very shallow kinds of things, but the teacher might see it as a positive because students are compliant and quiet and not disrupting things" (male Grade 4 teacher, June 2008). Improved listening skills were also mentioned by some teachers (3 of 7) as a possible advantage of being shy in the classroom. As suggested by some teachers (3 of 7), effective listening and learning skills may also have a positive influence on academic competence. This idea was explained by a female Grade 3/4 teacher: "Teachers tend to like them. Because they're not being the class clown, they're good listeners, they sit quietly, and they're ready when they're supposed to be ready" (May 2008).

In contrast, teachers also described some of the more negative costs of shyness in the classroom. For example, most teachers (6 of 7) suggested that shy children may experience lower self-esteem or self-confidence than others. However, this disadvantage may depend on how children think of themselves in terms of shyness, as illustrated by the following response.

> I guess it depends on how people interpret their shyness. Often if they're shy it might indicate that they have not very, you know, not a lot of self-confidence or self-esteem. But some kids who are shy are just comfortable being quiet, I guess it depends on the children and how happy they are with the way that they are. (female grade 4/5 teacher, June 2008)

Shyness may be detrimental to children's sense of self-worth, as reflected in the following comment. "I think it can hinder your feelings about yourself. If you don't necessarily see yourself as the most popular person and maybe you want to have those friends but you have just that sort of barrier that you're wanting to go out and make them" (female Grade 2 teacher, April 2009).

Given the dependence of academic competence on oral expression, shy children may be at a disadvantage because they choose to communicate orally less frequently than their classmates (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008). For example, shy children may be orally reticent and may choose not to participate in whole-class dialogue or may avoid or remain fearful of being called upon in class to answer a question or to speak in front of the class. A teacher had similar thoughts,

> Sometimes if you're in the classroom they don't always ask questions when they should because they don't understand what they're doing and then they go ahead and do their work incorrectly because they don't have the confidence to ask the questions (female grade 3/4 teacher, May 2008).

Teachers' perceptions of how shyness can influence children's peer relations focused primarily on the potential negative aspects such as experiencing difficulty making friends and being more likely than other children to be ignored, neglected, and bullied by peers. This view was explained as follows:

> If they're overly shy they may be pulled into the sway of a strong personality who could manipulate the shy student into doing things that are against his or her own wishes in order to have the friend that they're too shy to . . . because most kids want friends whether they're shy or not, so they may do things that they're otherwise not willing to do. (male Grade 2 teacher, June 2008)

However, some teachers said that shy children may also develop intimate, close relationships with one or two friends, as illustrated by the following female Grade 2 teacher's comment, "So I think in terms of making new friends it's hard for them sometimes but once they've found a connection with somebody that tends to be pretty solid, they tend to be pretty consistent with those relationships" (July 2008).

Finally, regarding the shy children's relationships with teachers, some (2 of 7) teachers said that the advantages of being shy in the classroom may lead to more positive teacher evaluations in that shy children may be more likely to receive the teachers' time and effort. This point is well illustrated by the following comment. "Some teachers will go out of their way to try to get to know a shy student and be cognizant of the extra needs for that student" (male Grade 4 teacher, June 2008). In addition, particular skills that shy children may have may also serve as an advantage such as in the following example.

> I find kids that are a bit quieter to take a lot in, so they are very observant often very, and I really think they are very thoughtful, especially when it comes to just having conversations with them, and it's very satisfying when they start to warm up to you. (female Grade 3/4 teacher, June 2008)

However, the same two teachers also said that shy children may have difficulty communicating with the teacher given their difficulties with oral expression as this teacher explains: "It's harder for them to get to know and feel comfortable with the teacher, and hard for . . . it takes the teacher a bit longer to get to know them" (female Grade 3/4 teacher, June 2008).

Shyness in the Classroom: Educational Strategies

In this final section, we examine teachers' attitudes toward possible intervention and educational strategies to assist shy children in the classroom. In this regard, all teachers described activities that focused on encouraging oral communication in the classroom in order to represent the children's thinking (self-expression), as well as social communication. For example, one female Grade 2 teacher focused on the use of dramatic arts to encourage communication with self and others as illustrated in the following example: "I also do a lot of sort of work using music and drama and movement, so sometimes we'll do artistic stuff as our catalyst for talking and then sort of have that community circle type so they can communicate that way" (July 2008). However, some (2 of 7) teachers claimed that some shy children may be neglected or ignored by the teacher, as shown in the following male Grade 4 teacher's comment.

> Disadvantages are that students may fall between the cracks and be ignored by the teacher. The kids that are very outgoing, whether it is negative or positive behavior, are noticed by teachers more readily. The shy ones are the non-squeaky wheels get ignored a little and don't get the same kind of contact. (June 2008)

Content analyses also involved exploration for emerging main themes relating to socio-communicative competence and educational strategies. Regarding how to promote success in the classroom through activities that promote oral participation, all teachers reflected on the importance of creating a comfortable, secure classroom atmosphere or culture to encourage children to share their thoughts orally with others. A number of examples were given for educational activities that might reduce anxiety levels typically experienced by shy children when talking with a large group in class. These included a *talking circle* (a small group of children encouraged to engage in conversation), practice with and exposure to public speaking, maintaining a continuing dialogue/conversation, and additional group or collaborative work. To promote healthy self-expression of one's thoughts and feelings in the classroom, several teachers (3 of 7) also mentioned a variety of nonverbal activities including the use of arts-based programs such as drawing, puppets, drama, and videotapes. For example, one male Grade 4 teacher explained the following learning activity.

> I have them videotape themselves doing public speaking. . . . They videotape themselves and when they critique themselves quietly to themselves—how can I improve, what areas of my public speaking can I improve on? They're looking at their eye contact and body language and things like that and doing real self-assessment on that. And it's a very gentle kind of process as I talk to them about it one-on-one and geared towards the needs of that stuff as a kid and how they respond to things. (June 2008)

Such educational activities may help to promote critical self-assessment, reflection, and self-confidence and competence in shy children.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to explore teachers' concepts of shyness and its effect on children's development, as well as the teachers' ideas about appropriate educational strategies

for assisting shy children in school. In general, findings from this study suggest that shyness and social communication may influence teachers' classroom practices and their interactions with children in the elementary school grades. Teachers' reported conceptions of shyness were consistent with the extant psychological literature (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008). Moreover, their understanding and attitudes toward shyness appear to incorporate many complex social and psychological factors, including the teacher-child relationship, child-peer relationships, and how children view themselves in the context of the classroom (i.e., self-conceptions). Below we discuss results pertaining to each of the central themes of the shyness interviews.

Conceptualizations of Shyness

In their descriptions of shy children, teachers referred to behaviors and emotions that are commonly described in the current psychological literature. Teachers most commonly referred to shy children as not participating either orally or socially in class, instead being more likely to observe events from a safe distance. Results from more quantitative research (a) indicate that shy children speak less at school, (b) are more socially withdrawn, and (c) tend to refrain from initiating social interactions with both teachers and peers (Coplan, Arbeau, & Armer, 2008; Coplan, Findlay, & Nelson, 2004; Evans, 1996; Rimm-Kaufman & Kagan, 2005). Moreover, during opportunities for peer interaction, young shy children are more likely to engage in onlooking behaviors than their peers (i.e., watching but not joining in; see Coplan et al., 2004). Teachers also said that shy children could be distinguished from other *quiet* children by their fear of making mistakes. Increased self-consciousness and fear of negative evaluation are typically included in most theoretical conceptualizations of shyness (Asendorpf, 1991; Buss, 1986; Crozier, 1995).

These findings thus reflect the current research and theory on the conceptualizations of various types of shyness as a multidimensional psychological construct, which suggests an omnibus of behaviors, cognitions, physical actions, and emotions (Lund, 2008). In future, researchers need to continue to explore teachers' and students' understanding of shyness, exploring such dimensions as the subjective experiences associated with shyness, its potential roots in genetic predispositions and environmental conditions, and its relative stability versus malleability.

It is interesting to note that teachers identified both *personality* and *environmental* factors that may influence the development of shyness. In contrast to the present findings, a growing literature indicates that shyness has biological substrates (Kagan, 1997) and is quite stable across time (Pedlow, Sanson, Prior, & Oberklaid, 1993) and situations (Coplan, DeBow, Schneider, & Graham, 2009). This stability notwithstanding, environmental influences also appear to play a critical role in the life paths of shy children, including both family (Rubin, Burgess, & Hastings, 2002) and peer factors (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003).

Findings from this study indicate that some teachers perceive differences between quietness and shyness in the classroom. Thus future research needs to be conducted on a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of shyness and quietness as being similar or different with respect to trait-like characteristics that are intrinsic to a child's personality or behavioral decisions that are contingent on a particular context (e.g., home, school) or relationships with others (e.g., peer-peer, teacher-peer). For example, in a learning context such as the classroom, some children may find themselves more talkative or quiet with particular people. Contextual variations and socio-communicative behavior may thus influence how teachers label students as

either shy or quiet. Furthermore, we know virtually nothing about the implications of categorizing children as shy versus quiet on teachers' behaviors and attitudes toward individual children.

Based on a constellation of behaviors and emotions consistent with the psychological literature in this area, these results suggest that teachers are able to define shyness consistently with current research literature and theory. Teachers also are able to provide educational implications for assisting shy and quiet children in their classrooms. Moreover, the complex and nuanced understanding of the nature of shyness in childhood displayed by teachers may have positive implications for shy children in school. A better understanding of the nature of this construct will help provide teachers with the relevant background information to help develop appropriate intervention strategies for assisting shy children in their classes.

Implications of Shyness at School

Teachers reported a more mixed response when expressing the implications of shyness for children in school. They were clearly aware of the potential negative outcomes of shyness. For example, teachers worried that shy children might be more prone to experience self-concept issues such as lower self-esteem or self-confidence (although they also noted that this may depend on how children think of themselves in terms of shyness). Such findings support past research that suggests that shy children may experience lower self-confidence and self-esteem than non-shy children (Coplan et al., 2004; Crozier, 1995). Teachers also noted that shyness may negatively affect children's peer relations, including increased difficulty in making friends and a tendency to be ignored, neglected, and bullied by peers. Shy children are at increased risk for experiencing difficulties in their peer relationships, including peer rejection, exclusion, poor quality of friendship, and victimization (Coplan et al., 2004; Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Hart et al., 2000; Perren & Alsaker, 2006). However, shy children have also been found not to differ from their less shy peers in either the number or stability of mutual best friendships (Rubin, Wojslawowicz, Rose-Krasnor, Booth-LaForce, & Burgess, 2006). Awareness of these skills may help teachers build on these strengths in their attempts to improve the social experiences of their shy students.

Thus teachers displayed awareness of both the personal and interpersonal problems that shy children tend to experience at school. These findings add to the growing literature that suggests that teachers do consider shyness a significant difficulty in the classroom that merits attention and ameliorative intervention.

However, it is important to note that teachers also articulated some potential *advantages* for children who experience shyness in the classroom such as being a good listener; not getting into trouble; and developing intimate, close relationships with one or two friends. Indeed, consistent with the earlier postulation that some teachers may encourage shy behaviors in the classroom (Rubin, 1982), it was even suggested that teachers tend to like shy children because they are comparatively quiet and well-behaved. Because teachers perceive shyness as both a possible advantage and a disadvantage for various competences in the classroom, our findings suggest that to encourage children's development and self-growth in all areas of education (e.g., academic, social), educators need to create programs and specific educational strategies that are strength- or competence-based.

Educational Implications: Strategies for Assisting Shy Children in the Classroom

From an educational perspective, this study provides some empirical groundwork for curriculum development aimed at promoting socio-emotional literacy in elementary school. Teachers suggested a number of intervention and educational strategies to assist shy children in the classroom. Highlighted educational activities focused on encouraging oral communication in the classroom to represent one's thinking (self-expression), as well as social communication (peer interaction). These ideas were consistent with the types of strategies suggested by earlier research with teachers (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007; Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981; Cunningham & Sugawara, 1988; Martin, 1983).

Teachers also talked about creating a classroom environment that is receptive to the social-communicative attempts of shy children. This is an important task for educators given the specific sensitivity that shy children appear to display in terms of the effects of teacher-child relationships (Arbeau, Coplan, & Weeks, 2010) and the overall classroom climate (Gazelle, 2006).

These findings may encourage educators to develop educational and clinical programs aimed at helping shy children learn *psychological pragmatics*. Such an approach focuses on the importance of developing healthy relationships with both oneself and others and promotes self-reflection and self-acceptance (Bruner, 1996). Language may provide a vehicle by which the theories of self and others' minds and feelings are created (Bruner, 1996). Language skills also appear to be particularly important for the social functioning of shy children (Coplan & Armer, 2005; Coplan & Weeks, 2009). In accordance with these views, teachers appear to believe that educational activities that promote children's oral competence may influence shy children's social and academic competence and their self-concepts and socio-communicative skills.

Teachers suggested that activities to assist shy children might be improved by integrating the use of dramatic arts to encourage children's self-expression and communication with themselves and others. For example, activities drawn from holistic and inclusive educational programs that incorporate the use of visual and dramatic arts such as role-play, puppetry, and drawing (Kessler, 2000; Selman, 2003) may provide shy children with nonverbal opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings, which in turn may help them to develop positive feelings of both self-confidence and social competence.

Limitations and Future Directions for Educational Research and Practice

Limitations of this study involve the lack of assessment of participants' general language competences (e.g., expressive, receptive), so varying levels of competence may have influenced teachers' interpretations and responses. That is, as with any research method that includes the use of language, the researcher-interviewer needs to check with the participant if he or she heard the question clearly and understood its meaning. Throughout the interview, participants were reminded that they had at any time the right to refuse to answer any question, or that if they did not understand, to ask the researcher to clarify the question. In addition, the interviews were conducted over the telephone and thus nonverbal language and behavior were not accessible. Perhaps future research could include the use of electronic media such as Skype or videoconference to address the problem of distance. It would also have been useful to have an equal number of female and male teachers to examine potential gender differences in attitudes and beliefs about shyness and quietness in the classroom.

Further research is also needed to explore potential differences between shyness and quietness. For example, although shyness is a primary contributor to a lack of oral participation in the classroom (Evans, 1996), other children may not speak as much in class because of language delays, learning problems, and lack of fluency in the language of primary instruction (Burgoyne, Kelly, Whiteley, & Spooner, 2009; Fernell et al., 2010; Hart, Fujiki, Brinton, & Hart, 2004). The degree to which teachers might make detailed discriminations in their attributions of these diverse underlying causes of classroom quietness remains largely unknown.

Despite these limitations, our findings provide some of the first in-depth explorations of elementary school teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and responses toward shy children in their classrooms. However, these findings represent only a first step. For example, in future, researchers need to explore the roles of gender and cultural background in shy children's classroom experiences (Maccoby, 1998). Moreover, given the role that the gender and cultural backgrounds of both teachers and students play in the classroom environment, both children's and teachers' stereotypic gender-role orientations toward shyness bear further exploration. Indeed, gender may not only play a role in shy children's experiences in the classroom, but may also continue to influence teachers' perceptions of both their own and their students' shyness.

Our findings will contribute to a better understanding and improvements in intellectual, material, and organizational resources to promote shy children's socio-communicative success in the classroom. Moreover, our results may have a direct effect on teachers' development as we seek to understand what teachers need to know to enable shy students to learn effectively. For example, our findings may encourage educators to develop educational programs that incorporate initiatives that support narrative, meta-cognition, and reflective practice in education.

Finally, findings from our study may also encourage educators and researchers to continue to draw from the psycho-linguistic and cross-cultural literature (Bruner, 1996; Salovey & Sluyter, 1997) and begin to integrate language tasks, both receptive and expressive, into socio-emotional and self-concept research with shy children. Such initiatives support the importance of narrative, meta-cognition, and reflective practice in education. Moreover, it is our hope that this research study may inspire educators to become dedicated to the promotion of social and emotional health in all students.

Acknowledgments

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