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‘It’s Not Fair!’—Voicing Pupils’ Criticisms of School Rules

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Socialisation theories have traditionally focused on how children are socialised in a rather unidirectional manner, according to a transmission model. However, more recent research and theories show that children are not just passive recipients, but active agents in their socialisation process. At the same time, children are subordinated to adult control. In school, they are regimented and involuntarily subjected to mass routines, discipline and control. The aim of this study was to explore and give a voice to pupils’ critical thinking about school rules and their teachers’ behaviour in relation to these rules. Ethnographic fieldwork and group interviews with students were conducted in two Swedish primary schools. The findings show that pupils criticise some school rules, distrust teachers’ explanations of particular school rules, perceive some school rules and teachers’ interventions as unfair and inconsistent, perceive no power over the construction of school rules, and express false acceptance and hidden criticism. The findings are discussed in terms of hidden curriculum, power, mentality resistance, democracy, participation and democratic citizenship education.

Introduction

In this article, I will report on a qualitative study conducted with the aim of exploring and giving a voice to pupils’ critical thinking about school rules and their teachers’ behaviour in relation to these rules. With reference to Schimmel (2003), teachers can work with school rules either (a) with an authoritarian and traditional approach without explaining rules or letting pupils participate in rule-making, or (b) with a pedagogical, democratic and collaborative approach in which rules are explained and constructed together with pupils.

Socialisation theories have traditionally focused on how children are socialised in the values, norms and behaviour patterns of their society, culture, or social group in a rather unidirectional manner, according to a transmission model (e.g. Durkheim, 1961/2002). However, more recent research and theories show that children are not just passive recipients, but active agents in their socialisation process. With reference to the new sociology of childhood, children are both constrained by structure and at the same time active agents acting in and upon structure (Prout and James, 1997). They do not simply internalise the social world but strive to make sense of their culture and to participate in it (Corsaro, 1997). Nevertheless, children are often expected to show more or less unquestioning obedience and loyalty to their parents and teachers. They are dependent on adults and subordinated to adult control. In school, children are regimented and involuntarily subjected to mass routines, discipline and control (Alderson, 1999). As a social institution, the school mediates the dominant values and ideas in a more or less uncritical, taken-for-granted manner, and hence without permitting any critical analysis. It just rewards or punishes pupils for their degree of conformity to its values, ideals, rules and regulations (Besag and Nelson, 1984).

Thus, the school and its curricula are both social and political structures, containing assumptions about how children best ought to be, and reproduce a social control of them

‘through the constitution of the child’s body and consciousness into the form of an educational identity’ (James and others, 2001, p. 42). By this exercise of discipline, children will soon learn adult rules defining appropriate and inappropriate behaviour; what, when and where they are allowed to do things or not (James and others, 2001). School rules, disciplinary procedures, teachers as role models, teacher interventions and many other types of teacher behaviour are therefore parts of the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968/1990; Schimmel, 2003). However, power is not possessed by individuals but constructed and maintained in and through ongoing processes of social interactions. According to the culture of the classroom, teachers also need to conform to an unwritten set of assumptions about their conduct — a need to establish classroom control — if they are to survive and flourish. Both teachers and pupils learn about the difference in power that exists between them and which actually is upheld by their definitions of situations and social interactions in everyday school life (Denscombe, 1985). Socialisation in school is more complex and fragmentary than suggested by traditional or functionalist theorists (see Besag and Nelson, 1984). Research has, for instance, shown (a) inconsistencies regarding school rules and teacher behaviour in relation to these rules (Jackson and others, 1993; Tattum, 1982), and (b) resistance and countercultures among certain subgroups of pupils (e.g. Willis, 1977).

Current research on pupils’ reasoning about school rules and teachers’ behaviour in relation to them

Research indicates that pupils expect schools to have rules (e.g. Kim, 1998; Laupa and Turiel, 1986), and to a great degree accept and have confidence in school rules and teachers’ ways of upholding them (Cullingford, 1988; Johansson and Johansson, 2003). Nevertheless, pupils also reflect upon, value, and judge school rules and teacher interventions (e.g. Elliott and others, 1986; Killen, 1990; Lewis, 2006; Scarlett, 1988; Taylor, 1996; Thornberg, 2006; Weston and Turiel, 1980). In a study by Alerby (2003), schoolchildren reported negative opinions such as there is too much strictness and too many rules, even if some of them stressed the importance of certain rules. Other studies show that pupils judge their teachers in terms of worthiness or honesty and are critical of disrespectful and unfair treatment (Devine, 2002; Tattum, 1982; Thomson & Holland, 2002), public reprimands (Turco and Elliott, 1986), abuse of teacher power and injustice in the application of rules, e.g. some teachers treat some pupils more harshly than others or do not follow the rules they themselves make (Devine, 2002; Tattum, 1982).

Forty-two per cent of the pupils participating in a survey study by Lewis and Lovegrove (1987a) reported that they often think that teacher’s disciplinary interventions into pupil misbehaviour are unjustified and in these cases have a negative attitude towards the teacher because of the way the incident of misbehaviour was handled. The following types of teacher behaviour are related to negative attitudes to teacher and less concentration on school work in pupils’ reports—mistargeting, either by the teacher picking on the wrong pupil or by blaming the whole group for misbehaviour performed by individuals, showing anger, not providing clear and rational rules, using arbitrary or unreasonable sanctions and moving pupils without any warning. According to a study by Williams (1993), students consider some of their teachers as insincere and inconsistent, because they do not follow the rules and standards themselves. For example, these teachers say things like, ‘you should be kind’ and ‘respect others’. Yet, students report that they ‘treat us like babies’, they ‘don’t listen’ and they ‘choose favourites’. They also report that they talk behind these teachers’ backs and ‘respect’ these teachers only because they ‘have to’. Pupils usually prefer democratic teachers rather than authoritarian or reward–punishment-oriented teachers (Chiu and Tulley, 1997;

Lunenburg and Schmidt, 1989). They rate reasoning and discussion as the most desirable teacher styles in disciplinary matters compared with authoritarian or permissive styles (King and others, 1990; Lewis and Lovegrove, 1987b).

Lewis and Lovegrove (1987b) concluded that even if pupils want clear rules, they want these to be designed in consultation with pupils and based on a number of reasons including the needs of the pupils and the teacher. Furthermore, according to a study by Scarlett (1988), pupils appear to see a qualitative difference between school rules that are perceived as appropriate or rational and those that are not and foremost among the latter are rules relating to clothing. With reference to a study by Thornberg (in press), if school rules make sense to pupils, they usually consider them to be good rules, but if they do not see the point in them or do not believe in the teacher's explanation about them, they more often have a negative attitude towards them.

Methodology of this study

The data for this article were derived from an ethnographic study conducted in two primary schools in Sweden, from October 2002 to May 2003 in the first school, and then from November 2003 to May 2004 in the second school. The schools are located in different areas in a medium-sized Swedish town. Two pre-school classes (six-year-old children), two classes in grade 2 (eight-year-old children), and two classes in grade 5 (11-year-old children) participated in the study. In total, 141 pupils and 13 teachers participated in the study. By using participant observations and audio-recordings, issues concerning values and norms were identified and documented in the everyday life of school. Moreover, qualitative interviews with the teachers were conducted to examine how teachers reason about the practice and the content of everyday values education, including issues of discipline and school rules. Qualitative group interviews with 139 of the 141 pupils (in total, 49 groups with two to four pupils in each group) were conducted to examine how pupils reason about and make meaning of school rules, teachers' discipline and value education practice. In my fieldwork in schools and in my conversations with the children, I have used a so-called least-adult-role (Mandell, 1991) or what Tammivaara and Enright (1986) call out-of-the-ordinary adults. Like many researchers interested in children's daily life and perspectives (e.g. Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Mayall, 2000; Thorne, 1993), I have avoided any position of authority, such as behaving like a teacher and managing or controlling children's behaviour, and I have been closer to the children than the teachers. During the interviews I have, in accordance with Prout (2002), approached the children and treated them as the main informants and competent commentators on their own lives as pupils in school. A qualitative content analysis was performed during and after the fieldwork period, by coding and comparing the interview data with each other and with observational data, and by asking analytical questions (cf. Glaser and Strauss, 1967/1999). Here, the analysis results in a set of themes of pupils' critical reasoning about school rules and their teachers' behaviour in relation to these rules.

An acceptance of many school rules

According to the analysis of group interviews and informal conversations with the pupils, they think that many school rules are good — without these rules, the school would not be a pleasant place. Moreover, pupils' reasoning about school rules varies over four rule categories. The perception of reasonable meaning behind a rule seems to be significant for the pupils' acceptance of the rule. According to them, relational rules (e.g. don't bully others, don't tease others, be nice to each other) are the most important in school. Many pupils also

value protecting rules (e.g. don't run in the corridor, be careful when you play on ice) and structuring rules (e.g. no talking during deskwork, raise your hand if you want to speak, be careful with school property) as important because of the meaning given to them. In contrast, etiquette rules (e.g. no caps in the classroom, no swearing, no chewing gum, including fluoride chewing gum, in school) are valued as the least important or even unnecessary by the pupils (for a deeper analysis of how pupils reason about rules in relation to the different rule categories, see Thornberg, in press). In this article, the focus is on those rules, rule explanations, and teacher behaviour in relation to school rules, which seems to provoke distrust and criticism among pupils.

Criticising etiquette rules

While the pupils seem to make sense of the other school rules, it appears to be more difficult for them to explain and justify, and hence, make sense of etiquette rules. A lot of the older pupils (and even some younger pupils) express the opinion that they view etiquette rules as arbitrary. They argue that transgressions of these rules do not have any negative effects. They do not interrupt, disturb or harm others. 'The thing about caps is that they actually don't bother anyone and you don't start fighting because of them or anything. Why can't you wear them? I really wonder' (second-grade girl). In addition, many pupils also consider etiquette rules unnecessary, worthless or wrong. Some of the pupils actually express the opinion that they feel insulted by these rules because they think they are being treated like little children. 'Well, we have to respect each other, but I don't think they respect us /.../ they treat us like little kids, as if you aren't allowed to decide these things for yourself' (fifth-grade girl). Hence, they perceived the rules as an expression of adults' disrespect of children.

Distrusting some of teachers' explanations of school rules

Many pupils, especially the older pupils, criticise teachers' motives or reasons for etiquette rules.

Maria: And then there is the thing with caps, and they (the teachers) say: 'Yes, but it's just because we want to be able to see your faces'.

Interviewer: Mm, what do you think about that then?

Maria: It's a bad answer.

Interviewer: It's a bad answer?

Maria: Yes, because, well, why do you have to see the whole face? And, if you are going to say something, then you sometimes look at the person. And then you usually still see the whole face, although they are wearing a cap.

Samira: Yes, maybe there's a small part of the forehead that you can't see, but does that matter?

(From interview with two girls in the fifth grade)

Now and then, pupils also distrust teacher explanations of other rules besides etiquette rules. In both schools it was not allowed to stay indoors during the breaks — the pupils had to be outdoors in the school's playground during the breaks. In spite of this school rule, pupils stayed often in the cloakrooms during parts of the breaks. Teachers explained this rule for the pupils as follows — you can get a headache or concentration problems if you do not go outdoors during the breaks. During my group interviews with the pupils, it seems that the pupils understood this teacher explanation. However, many of them did not accept the reasoning.

Interviewer: All right, but the rule that says you're not allowed to stay indoors during the breaks, why do you have this rule?

Martin: So that we don't get headaches. So that we should get a breath of fresh air, she said.

David: But we don't get them.

Interviewer: What did you say?

David: We don't get headaches.

Interviewer: What do you think when she said, 'so that you don't get a headache'?

Martin: I thought: Yeah! Sure! [sarcastic tone] Why do the teachers stay indoors during the breaks? Don't they get headaches?

Felix: Yeah, the teachers are just lying to stop us from staying indoors. (From a group interview with three schoolboys in the fifth grade)

These pupils do not accept the explanation the teachers give them as a reason for the ban on staying indoors during breaks. The explanation is not perceived as credible by the pupils because the teachers themselves are indoors during the breaks and because the pupils do not seem to believe that they can get a headache just because they are not outdoors during the breaks. In sum, a lot of (especially older) pupils seem to think that teachers sometimes tell lies and use deceptive arguments to justify some of the school rules. Pupils' meaning-making of this teacher behaviour can be viewed in terms of a hidden curriculum — in situations where pupils interpret teacher's explanation as a deceptive argument, teachers as role models communicate that it is acceptable to lie in order to get others to comply with rules or with one's wishes. However, my findings show that there are pupils who criticise this perceived teacher behaviour and hence view teachers as bad role models in this matter.

Perceiving some school rules as unfair and teachers sometimes as bad role models

The school rule that says that no one is permitted to stay indoors during the breaks is problematic in another way. The pupils perceive the rule as inconsistent and unfair because the teachers do not follow this rule themselves. In the pupil group interviews a lot of pupils in the fifth grade seem to be very irritated about this unfairness and inconsistency — particularly when they do not see any good reason for being forced to be outdoors and they think teachers are lying.

Robin: I think it's unfair because the teachers stay indoors during the breaks, but we have to stay outside. They stay indoors eating biscuits.

Victor: Yeah that's very unfair. Why do we have to stay outside when they don't? (From a group interview with three schoolboys in the fifth grade)

Even if a lot of them like to be outdoors during the breaks, pupils are also critical because the rule does not take the weather into account. 'Yeah, how much fun is it to stand out there in the playground and freeze? Yeah, very funny break! And the teachers are inside. Damn!' (boy, fifth grade). Another example of a school rule that some of the teachers break in the eyes of the pupils, according to some of them, is the ban on chewing gum at school. Furthermore, a group of schoolgirls report that some teachers actually lie when these girls asked them 'Why have you got chewing gum? I will also bring some to school tomorrow then, because you teachers are allowed to have it', by saying, 'No, it's just a throat lozenge';

although the girls can see that it is not. Some pupils also report that they have heard teachers swearing. Teachers are perceived as bad role models when they break school rules.

Another example that some pupils report is about the school rule about not wearing outdoor shoes indoors, because that would make the floor dirty. They say that they often see teachers doing this, which my own observations also confirm. 'The teachers should understand that too. They are the ones who have made these rules. So they should follow them too' (boy, fifth grade). One conclusion the pupils can draw from these experiences in terms of a hidden curriculum is that those in power use it and therefore the right to make rational rules as well as arbitrary rules that they themselves do not have to follow. 'Well, it feels like just because they are adults; they don't need to follow the rules. That's unfair!' (boy, fifth grade). Furthermore, the teachers who chew gum but are not willing to admit it when the pupils ask them about it, seem to communicate to these pupils that it is alright to lie in order to get away with one's own rule transgressions, which in turn is a transgression of the rule 'you must not tell lies' often made explicit by teachers in their interaction with pupils in situations when pupils are telling lies or trying to deny their rule transgressions. Furthermore, pupils also criticised school rules when these only apply to younger pupils but older pupils do not have to follow them, i.e. different rules for different age groups of pupils. Younger pupils then perceive these rules as unfair.

Criticising perceived injustices or inconsistencies in teacher interventions

Some of the pupils' report that teachers now and then treat pupils differently, even if the pupils have actually misbehaved in the same way or broken the same rule. These pupils perceive this teacher behaviour as odd, wrong or unfair. For example, according to some boys in the fifth grade, girls in their class get fewer reprimands from the teacher than boys do for the very same rule transgression like calling out in the classroom without raising their hands. Indiscriminate or collective punishment is another teacher behaviour reported that comes in for criticism by some pupils. 'And those kids who have been quiet, like Maria, get a telling off too, just because they happened to be sitting there [around the same table as other classmates who were talking instead of working]' (a girl, fifth grade). Some girls in second grade said that their teacher sometimes sends misbehaving pupils out of the classroom. According to one of them, she was sent out, although she was actually innocent.

Linne'a: Gabriel was talking very much to me and tried to take my rubber, and then our teacher sent us both out. But it wasn't my fault. It was his fault.

Interviewer: How did it feel to be sent out too?

Linne'a: Odd.

Interviewer: How do you mean?

Linne'a: Because I didn't do anything. (From a group interview with three schoolgirls in second grade)

Some girls in fifth grade report that their teacher sometimes tells them that they are not allowed to help each other during deskwork because there is too much chatting in the classroom. 'It's bad because the effect of that is those kids who really need help may have to sit and wait for a long time just because some others can't be quiet' (a girl in fifth grade), i.e. they perceive that innocent kids are punished by the teachers because of others' misbehaviour.

Perceiving powerlessness in the construction of school rules

With very few exceptions, during the conversations with me the pupils express that it is the teachers who create and make decisions about school rules, not them. Sometimes, the principal is also included in reports.

Interviewer: Who makes the decisions about all these rules at school?

Lina: The teachers and the principal, I think.

Interviewer: Okay, but what chance do you pupils have to participate in these decisions?

Lina: A little bit in the pupil council, but we can't do much there either.

Interviewer: Why not?

Sandra: Because the teachers have already made up their minds.

Lina: Yes. (From a group interview with two girls in fifth grade)

The rules are perceived to a great extent as something handed down from above, i.e. from teachers and principals. 'The teachers mostly decide things by themselves /.../ [A child] may suggest a proposal, but they don't choose that then, they choose their own proposal' (a boy, kindergarten class, about meetings). Some pupils are positive to this. They trust the teachers' competence in making good rules. 'They make it fair /.../ so that all the children have the same rules' (a girl, kindergarten class). Other pupils are critical and argue that they should also participate in the decisions about rules. 'Well, it's the pupils who go to this school. I kind of think that we should be the ones who decide what rules we should have' (a girl, fifth grade). My observations confirm that school rules are most often made and decided by teachers (even if some school rules actually have been brought up in pupil council or in class meetings) and that pupils are rarely given the opportunity to make, modify or abolish school rules. Class meetings are held once a week in three of the six classes. Nevertheless, decisionmaking as regards school or classroom rules is seldom conducted in these meetings. More often, if school rules are on the agenda, the meetings deal with incidents in which pupils have transgressed rules, and thus, have a disciplinary rather than a democratic function. Two of the other three classes have so-called 'plenary meetings' once a month, in which three classes (one of the pre-school classes and one from grade 2 in the study together with another class in grade 1) and their teachers meet to discuss and decide upon issues about school life. However, even here they deal with rules in a more disciplinary than democratic way. One of the six classes has neither class meetings nor plenary meetings. Pupil councils exist in both schools. However, not all classes are represented in these councils. Furthermore, if pupils get a chance to make proposals about school rules and these do not fit in with existing school rules or with teachers' proposals or views, their proposals are ignored or rejected by the teachers during the meetings. Hence, when schoolchildren start in the school, there is already a set of school and classroom rules which they are expected to comply with and which teachers to a great extent try to maintain in everyday school life and in class meetings and such like.

False acceptance and hidden criticism

Even if pupils accept and have confidence in many school rules to a great degree, a lot of pupils, especially older pupils, are critical towards some of the rules, some of the rule explanations given by teachers and some types of teacher behaviour. Hence, many pupils reflect on and make judgements of their teachers and the school rules in relation to fairness or justice, rights, consistency, reasonableness and credibility. However, according to my

observations, they never articulate their critical arguments in front of their teachers. What is more, in everyday school life, many pupils never or almost never express any disapproval of these rules or teacher behaviour, which they actually criticised during the interviews. Hence, there are false acceptance and hidden criticism among pupils about some school rules and teacher behaviour which in part could be explained by these pupils' experiences of teacher power and their own feelings that there is no point in trying to change the school rules, because of their perceived lack of power.

Discussion

According to this study, the pupils think that many school rules are good, in spite of the fact that their opportunities for participating in real democratic rule-making are very small (cf. Cullingford, 1988; Johansson and Johansson, 2003). They report that teachers are the ones who create and make decisions about school rules, which my observations confirm. Hence, school rules reflect the adult view of the incompetent child and the taken-for-granted power asymmetry between adults and children in our society (cf. Alderson, 1999; Denscombe, 1985; James and others, 2001). This study also shows that school rules and teachers' behaviour in relation to school rules can be problematised in relation to the hidden curriculum (cf. Jackson, 1968/1990; Schimmel, 2003), deficient democracy (Alderson, 1999; Schimmel, 2003), and failings in educating pupils in democratic skills, such as participation competence and critical thinking, by fostering them to be uncritical rule-followers.

Research has shown inconsistencies in the system of rules in school and in teachers' intervention behaviour (Jackson and others, 1993; Tattum, 1982). This study indicates that pupils' perceptions of such things, as well as their perceptions of arbitrary rules, unfair rules and rule applications, and bad or poor rule explanations from teachers, appear to lead to criticism and negative attitudes among pupils. Thus, this study supports the new sociology of childhood that suggests that children are not just passive recipients but active agents in their socialisation process (Prout and James, 1997; cf. Corsaro, 1997). The findings confirm earlier research, showing that pupils reflect upon, value, and judge school rules and teacher interventions (e.g. Alerby, 2003; Elliott and others, 1986; Killen, 1990; Scarlett, 1988; Taylor, 1996), and that pupils judge their teachers in terms of worthiness, sincerity or appropriateness, and are critical of disrespectful and unfair treatment (e.g. Devine, 2002; Lewis and Lovegrove, 1987b; Tattum, 1982; Thomson and Holland, 2002; Williams, 1993), injustice in the application of rules (e.g. Devine, 2002; Tattum, 1982), arbitrary rules (e.g. Scarlett, 1988) and collective punishment (Lewis and Lovegrove, 1987a; Taylor, 1996).

The aim of this study was to give a voice to schoolchildren, and by assuming the role of a least possible adult and thus avoiding authority positions over them (cf. Mandell, 1991; Mayall, 2000; Tammivaara and Enright, 1986; Thorne, 1993), I seem to have come close to the culture and perspective of the pupils. They have let me know that their acceptance regarding certain school rules and teacher behaviours is false. They have shared some of their critical views and arguments concerning certain school rules and teacher behaviours with me — criticism that is normally unspoken and hidden in the daily interactions with their teachers. Even if the pupils do not express overt resistance and counterculture to the same extent that students express in studies like Willis (1977), their false acceptance and hidden criticism could be interpreted as a mentality resistance — a public compliance but no private acceptance. With reference to Besag and Nelson (1984), people who are critical of, or behave in opposition to, norms or rules are operating at risk. They are likely to be repressed, oppressed or ignored. In school, children sooner or later discover that their academic

achievement, as well as their behaviour, is judged on the basis of how well they have adopted the cultural values of the school. Thus, the school can be seen as an institution, Besag and Nelson (1984) argue, which forces the pupils to conform to the school's rules and routines or to accept the consequences of deviance in terms of being punished and negatively labelled. It is reasonable that this cultural pressure in school, at least in part, can explain pupils' false acceptance and hidden criticism in my study. Furthermore, the pupils in this study are much younger than the students in secondary schools, such as those studied by Willis (1977). In addition, during my fieldwork I have also observed covert resistance — e.g. that pupils now and then stay in the cloakrooms during breaks, swear when teachers are not nearby, and break rules when teachers leave the classroom for a while.

If school rules are unexplained, ambiguous, perceived as unfair and pupils have no voice in developing or revising them, 'the effect of this hidden curriculum of unreasonable rules and consequences is to unintentionally teach many pupils to be non-questioning, non-participating, cynical citizens in their classrooms, schools, and communities' (Schimmel, 2003, p. 18). According to Schimmel (2003), the way school rules are taught (an authoritarian and traditional approach) often violates every norm of good teaching, e.g. teachers simply give pupils a copy of the rules or at the beginning of the semester read out some rules and then just tell pupils how important it is to obey the rules. In contrast to this, Schimmel suggests a pedagogical and collaborative approach in which (a) all pupils and teachers participate in the development or revision of school and classroom rules, (b) teachers teach rules like they teach instructional content, (c) teachers teach about pupils' rights, and (d) the rules in school and classroom are clear, explained and fair.

Furthermore, the problematic examples of hidden curriculum messages that pupils are exposed to in school, according to schoolchildren's interpretation of some school rules and teacher behaviour, in this study, are: (a) the virtue of blind obedience to rules and authorities, (b) it is acceptable to lie or deceive in order to get others to comply with rules or with your wishes, (c) subordinate people should respect people in higher positions but not vice versa, (d) the ones in power use it and claim their right to make rational rules as well as arbitrary rules that they themselves do not have to follow ('might is right'), (e) it is acceptable to lie in order to get away with one's own rule transgressions, and (f) do not expect justice and consistency from rule systems. Fortunately, many pupils develop critical attitudes to these messages. Unfortunately, these critical attitudes are unspoken in everyday school life.

One main implication of these findings for policy is to be aware of the power relation taken-for-granted between adults and children as an obstacle when formulating policies about school democracy and pupil participation. At the level of school and classroom practice, pupils should be given many opportunities to experience participation in living pedagogical discussions and decisions concerning school rules and their motives, to develop a habit of critical thinking, taking perspectives of others, testing, evaluating and comparing different values and arguments, and experiencing that their voice is important and that their opinions are meaningful to express. The unspoken and hidden criticism among the pupils in my study should instead be a part of open and deliberative conversations in which pupils as well as teachers participate in developing, discussing or revising school rules (cf. Schimmel, 2003), and hence, (a) a practice of deliberative democracy in school and (b) an education in and a preparation for an active and competent citizenship in a democratic society beyond school.

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