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Rules in Everyday School Life: Teacher Strategies Undermine Pupil Participation

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the strategies which teachers use in their everyday interactions with pupils to work with and uphold school and classroom rules and to what extent their rule-work strategies give pupils opportunities to have a say and participate in rule-making. The study is based on fieldwork in two Swedish primary schools. According to the findings, the teachers use four main rule-work strategies: (a) assertion, (b) explanation, (c) negotiation, and (d) preparation. The findings show that it is usually the adults in school who make decisions about school rules and that pupils are seldom given any opportunities to create, modify or abolish formal rules through open negotiations. Furthermore, when school democracy meetings take place, they tend to be illusory, reducing negotiation to a matter of figuring out the “right” answer and confirming to proposals from authorities.

Keywords

school rules; teacher strategies; pupil participation; decision-making; school democracy; negotiation; participation rights; rule-work

According to the Swedish national curriculum for the compulsory school system, teachers are told to use a democratic approach in everyday work, develop rules for work and social life in classroom together with pupils, and prepare pupils for participation, shared responsibilities and those rights and duties which characterise a democratic society. The democratic principles of having a say, taking responsibility, and pupil participation should include all pupils (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1998), and is in line with the Swedish Education Act, which claims that everyone working in school has the duty to promote democratic practices of work (Skollagen, 1985 : 1100, Chapter 1, 2§). A recently published policy document about school rules from the Swedish National Agency for Education claims that pupil participation is the most important factor in order to gain pupil respect and acceptance regarding school rules. Pupils should be able to influence the content and to participate in rule making and revision (Skolverket, 2006). Furthermore, documents from the National Agency for Education have advocated an application of *deliberative conversation* based on the so-called *deliberative democracy* model as an essential aspect of values and citizenship education (e.g., Englund, 2000 ; Skolverket, 2000). The main idea is that pupils as well as others in school take a stand by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments, and evaluating, with a collective effort by these conversations to find values and norms on which everyone can agree (cf., Englund, 2006).

The Swedish political intention for school democracy and pupil participation regarding rules and other issues reflects the international movement for children's rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which in Articles 12-13 asserts the child's right to freely express his or her opinion in all matters affecting him or her, and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. The 1989 Convention's rights are often divided into three categories:

- (a) *Protective rights*, which address safety from discrimination, abuse and injustice;
- (b) *Provision rights*, which refer to issues such as health care and education; and
- (c) *Participation rights*, premised on rights to speech, representation, information and participation in decision-making (see for example Alderson, 2008 ; Raby, 2008 ; Taylor *et al* ., 2008).

The third form of rights is in focus in this study. It is clear that according to national policy documents from the National Agency for Education and their connections to the Swedish Education Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, schools in Sweden are expected to work with school and classroom rules in a democratic manner, inviting pupils to have a say and to participate in making rules, and thus to put the participation rights into practice in this matter. Very little research has been conducted about school and classroom rules in Swedish schools from the perspective of children's rights and democratic participation. The aim of this study is to examine the strategies which teachers use in their everyday interactions with pupils to work with and uphold school and classroom rules and to what extent their rule-work strategies give pupils opportunities to have a say and participate in rule-making.

School Rules and the Lack of Pupil Participation in School

With reference to Schimmel (1997), teachers' work with school rules can be categorised into two main approaches. In the *authoritarian approach*, rules are usually negative ("thou shalt not"), restrictive, unexplained, and contain little or nothing about pupils' rights. These rules are handed down in an authoritarian manner. In contrast to this, in the *collaborative*

approach, pupils, school staff, and parents are encouraged to participate in the development of school and classroom rules. School rules balance rights and responsibilities. They are relevant to educational goals, fair, explained, clear, and treated as educational material and learning issues. According to questionnaires and interviews with more than one hundred elementary and secondary principals and teachers in the United States, the former approach is however most common. Even if a few pupil representatives may be given an opportunity to comment on certain school rules, the vast majority of pupils are not invited to participate in the development or revision of school rules. The school staff usually see school rules as administrative or legal documents, not as educational materials and issues. Thus, there is often no process for assessing whether pupils understand the rules. Furthermore, there are usually no agreed procedures that allow pupils to challenge or question the fairness of specific rules or their implementation, or for judging whether rules are unnecessary, discriminatory, irrelevant, ambiguous, or inconsistent.

According to an ethnographic research conducted by Devine (2000 , 2002) in primary schools in Ireland, pupils usually have neither any say nor are consulted regarding rules or other aspects of their school lives. Interviews with them show that they actually want greater democracy and participation including voting for rules and expressing their views on school matters of direct concern to them. Nevertheless, “children’s construction of themselves as a group with subordinate status within the school was also evident in their perception that teachers did not always listen to them or take their frustrations seriously, by virtue of their child status” (Devine, 2002 : 314), relating themselves to a position at the bottom end of the social hierarchy within the school. Furthermore, the findings also indicate a developmental discourse among teachers, which centred around children’s immaturity to justify their need to be contained, directed and controlled. “Thus the involvement of children in decisions on matters which may directly affect them was discounted by most teachers for both practical and ideological reasons, related to large class size and time constraints, as well as the perceived immaturity of children and the need to learn self control” (Devine, 2000 : 28). The widespread perception among pupils in primary schools that decisions on rules are made by teachers and head teachers and that pupils have no say has also been found in British studies (Davies, 1999 ; Thomas & O’Kane, 1999) as well as in Swedish studies (Johansson & Johansson, 2003 ; Thornberg, 2008a). Moreover, Raby (2008) conducted nine focus groups with Canadian secondary students. According to the findings, most students had never been consulted regarding their school rules. They have no say in their school rules and they have also noted the impotence of student councils. Many students argue that participation in decision-makings of school rules would in turn foster their greater respect and acceptance of the rules and suggested that teachers, administration and students should all be involved in the development of rules, but they thought that it would never happen in their school. Furthermore, they doubted that the students in the school have the skills to participate successfully.

Hence, the international and national movement of children’s participation rights can be contrasted with the fact that in our Western societies, children are still usually expected to show more or less unquestioning obedience and loyalty to their parents and teachers in everyday life. 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). Children are subject to many sets of power relations, at home and at school, and are positioned as minors with few decision-making rights (James *et al* ., 2001). With reference to an interactionist view, power is not possessed by individuals but constructed and maintained in and through ongoing processes of social interactions. By 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 differences in power that exist between them and which are actually upheld by their definitions of situations and social interactions in everyday school life (Denscombe, 1985 ; also see Hammersley, 1990).

According to Denscombe (1985), teachers have to develop certain classroom strategies to establish and maintain classroom control during lessons, and these strategies can be divided into three broad categories. *Domination strategies* refer to strategies that use the official authority of the teacher as a framework for imposing order and control, for using force and coercion, for strongly insisting on rules, rituals, and regimentation, and for having a high level of demands on pupil obedience to teachers' commands and instructions. Different forms of punishments and rewards are used to get pupils to obey and accept teachers' law and order. While domination strategies can be linked to traditional teaching styles, *cooptation strategies* are associated with progressive pedagogy and are attempts to make pupils positive to school by incorporating their interests and using methods to involve them in the process of the lesson. The aim of these strategies is to neutralise oppositional forces among pupils by promoting self-regulation among pupils. Hence, there are strategies of control by imposing self-control on pupils. One strategy is democratisation, i.e., promoting a high level of participation by pupils in the policies of the school, such as school councils with elected pupil representatives. "Like other co-optation strategies the democratization tends to be illusory and is geared primarily to securing a certain commitment on the part of pupils to the existing social order" (Denscombe, 1985 : 111).

Reasoning is another co-optation strategy, i.e., teachers discuss the issues and attempt to "reason" with the pupils. However, even if this strategy gives some recognition to the pupils' ideas and rationality, the teacher's aim is ultimately to transform or neutralise them by demonstrating that the reasons behind teacher's wishes are better. Another co-optation strategy is to motivate unmotivated pupils by capturing the pupils' interests in lesson situations. Friendliness is another cooptation strategy in which teachers use a friendly approach to pupils as a means of eliciting co-operation. *Classwork management strategies* provide a third category of control strategies in which the teachers attempt to control the pupils' behaviour in the classroom by organising the classwork so that the pupils are busy doing this work. Furthermore, according to Denscombe (1985), the possibility of coexistence as well as interchange between the strategies exists because they all serve similar functions. The functions of these three broad categories are to help the teacher to establish and maintain classroom control as well as a particular body of work, to minimise the uncertainty of classroom event and thus give a pattern of predictability, and to give teachers a rationale for control. A main finding in Denscombe's study is that even when teachers use progressive strategies (cooptation) school and classroom life can still overrule participation rights of children, being more child-friendly but leaving traditional structures of domination between teachers and pupils intact. To better understand democracy, power, and pupil participation in relation to school and classroom rules and why pupils usually have no say in the making and deciding of rules, it is urgent to further investigate how teachers in their daily interactions with pupils work with rules.

Method

The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork in two schools (one K-9 school and one K-6 school) conducted 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 kindergarten-classes (6 years old), two classes in Grade 2 (8 years old), and two classes in Grade 5 (11 years old) participated in the study. In sum, 141 pupils and 13 teachers participated. By using participant observations and audio-recordings, issues of values and norms were identified and documented in the everyday life of school. Moreover, interviews with the teachers and group interviews with 139 pupils (in sum, 49 groups with 2-4 pupils in each group) were conducted in order to examine how teachers and pupils reason about the practice and the content of everyday discipline and values of education, including topics such as school rules, class councils, and democracy. The qualitative analysis of the fieldwork data was accomplished by procedures influenced by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 ; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and by Dey's (1999) revised version of grounded theory. Coding of relevant indicators, indicator sorting, systematic comparisons of differences and similarities, concept and category-system construction, and finally, theoretical descriptions, were central aspects of the analysis process. Findings regarding the pupils' voice are presented elsewhere, such as how they value and make meaning of different rules (Thornberg, 2008b), their main criticism of school rules and teacher behaviour in relation to school rules (Thornberg, 2008a), pupils' experience of moral dilemmas in the classroom as a result of teachers' indiscriminate hushing (Thornberg, 2006), and how pupils experience and view inconsistencies of rules and teacher behaviour (Thornberg, 2007). In this paper, the focus is on the strategies teachers use in their everyday interactions with pupils regarding school and classroom rules.

Teachers' Rule-Work Strategies

In this study, *rule-work* refers to all aspects of everyday activities when teachers and pupils in and through their interactions with each other construct, maintain, mediate, or negotiate explicit school rules. According to the ethnographic observations, the typical pattern of teachers' rule-work is:

- (a) Pupils' rule transgressions; and
- (b) Teachers' interventions caused by these rule transgressions.

The following excerpt is an example of this rule-work pattern in the classroom during a lesson in mathematics.

Some of the pupils have raised their hands and the teacher walks around in the classroom to assist them. For the moment, the teacher is helping Emelie with her math task. Hanna who has raised her hand for a while suddenly takes her hand down, leaves her seat, and goes up to the teacher.

"What does this mean when ..." Hanna begins to ask and shows the teacher her math book but is quickly interrupted by the teacher.

"I'm helping somebody else right now! Can't you see? Go back to your seat and put your hand up and I will come", teacher says (Field note, Grade 2, in the classroom).

Here Hanna is breaking a set of classroom rules (raise your hand if you want to get help, stay in your place and don't walk around in the classroom, and don't interrupt the teacher when she is helping or talking to another pupil) and the teacher responds by drawing Hanna's attention to the fact that she is helping another pupil at the moment and then orders her to go back to her seat and raise her hand. Some preventive rule-work regarding a minor part of the rules takes place in the ethnographic data, e.g., in one (but only one) of the six classes, both class teacher and some of the pupils report that when the class and the teacher were new to

each other, the teacher invited the class to come up with rules about how to treat each other in the group (see Negotiation below). Nevertheless, teachers' rule-work is most often unplanned and reactive, as in the excerpt above. It is a continuous process, embedded in the daily life of school. According to the teachers themselves, their work with values and norms is, to a great extent, about intervening when things happen, i.e., reactions to and corrections of pupils' misbehaviour. "I actually don't have a conscious strategy, that I'm going to do this or that, but instead I deal with a lot of things as they happen" (Karin, a teacher in Grade 5). Examples of such incidents are conflicts or fights between pupils (which usually result in a lot of rule-transgressions, especially in regard to rules about how to treat each others), when pupils tease or call others names, act disruptively in the classroom or in other ways break one or more rules. To be better able to see and understand the process of rule-work in relation to participation rights and power, I have categorised and analysed how teachers interact with pupils in a lot of rule-work situations (preventive as well as reactive). By this focus on teacher behaviour it is possible to investigate the extent to which teachers act in accordance with the children's rights to have a say and to participate in decision-making regarding school and classroom rules. According to the findings, the teachers use four main *rule-work strategies* :

- (a) Assertion;
- (b) Explanation;
- (c) Negotiation; and
- (d) Preparation.

Assertion

Assertion is the most frequent strategy and includes acts that aim at getting pupils to follow a specific rule or getting a rule transgressor to stop her or his transgression without articulating reasons for the rule or being open to negotiation. This main category contains three sub-categories: rule indication, rule referencing, and decision referencing. In *rule indication* the rule is indicated but not verbalised. Examples: commands or orders like "Stop!", "Take off your cap!", or "Don't do that!", facial expressions like angry stares, wrinkling one's forehead, serious looking facial expressions, etc., physical interventions like touching, seizing a person by the arm, carrying away or physically removing a person, etc. Other examples are threats, bribes, appeals, requests, punishments or rewards. Verbal commands or orders are frequent strategies among teachers.

"Now, I think that--", the teacher begins.
Philip and David are sitting and pinching each other.
"Ouch!" David bursts out and giggles.
"Philip and David - cut it out immediately!" the teacher exclaims.
Carl turns to David and Philip and says:
"Cut it out!"
Alexander turns around too. He giggles and looks at David and Philip.
"What are you doing, Alexander?" teacher asks.
"Nothing", Alexander answers and quickly turns back again (Field note, Grade 2, in the classroom).

The excerpt illustrates a rule indication, initiated by the teacher, which Carl also concurs with. However, this rule-work appears to be threatened or countered by Alexander, who seems to reinforce Philip and David's off-task behaviour by expressing approval. This leads to a new rule indication from the teacher, directed at Alexander, after which he stops and turns round again.

In the second subcategory, *rule referencing*, the teacher also articulates the rule. Some examples: “Philip, you know that we don’t run in the classroom”, “No one is allowed to kick anyone else in our school” and “It’s wrong to tease”. Teachers verbalise a rule to one or more pupils in order to point out what is desirable and what is undesirable behaviour. At the same time, these verbalisations represent an assertion, an attempt to get the pupil or the pupils to act in a specific way, i.e., to obey the verbalised rule. Rule referencing can take the form of a one-way act (the teacher articulates a rule) as well as a two-way act, i.e., teachers ask questions and via these questions they try to get pupils to verbalise existing school rules or at least confirm them, such as in the following excerpt.

“Matteus!” the teacher exclaims and stares at him very sternly. “Are you allowed to talk during the circle-time?”

“No”, he answers (Field note, kindergarten class, circle-time in the classroom).

Teachers often ask leading questions, as in the excerpt above, by which pupils are not only reminded about school rules but also have to conform to them by saying “Yes” or “No”. At other times, teachers try to get pupils to articulate given school rules by more open questions such as “What should you do when you enter the classroom after a break?” and “What are you allowed to do and not allowed to do when you get angry?” By this questioning technique, teachers often get pupils to make rule referencing, i.e., to articulate school rules.

In the third subcategory, *decision referencing*, the teacher refers to decisions or assents declaring that the rule is in force. There are two types of decision referencing: authority referencing and consensus assertion. In authority referencing the teacher refers to decisions made by the teacher or by a group of teachers/school staff. Teachers can use authority referencing by referring to teachers or principals’ statements or decisions about the legitimacy of certain rules. “We teachers have come to an agreement that no children are allowed to play this game in the corridor. You have to play it outdoors.” Furthermore, in rule-work situations, teachers can refer to their own ongoing decision-makings by their power of authority as teachers. “Because I say so” as a motive for following a rule and “No, I decide that we don’t do that anymore”, are examples of teachers’ ongoing decisionmakings. The decisions, which teachers refer to can be formal as well as informal, have been made in an earlier situation as well as in the current situation. The assertive message to the pupils is: this is a rule that you have to follow because I, in my position as a teacher, or we, as teachers/adults, now make or have already made that decision.

In consensus assertion the teacher refers to joint decisions or agreements among teachers and pupils. Teachers for example can refer to decisions that have been made in earlier pupil councils or class meetings. “This is something we have decided together.” “We have an agreement about following this rule.” However, consensus assertion does not need to be built on real consensus. For example, a non-unanimous majority decision is not the same as consensus. The extent to which all the pupils really have a say can be discussed. Reiterated observations from class meetings for example, show that there are pupils who systematically get lesser speech spaces than others, that there are certain pupils who in principle have no say in the meetings, and that pupils are exposed to group pressure, authority-influence from teachers, and social influence from high status pupils. There are power asymmetries between teachers and pupils as well as between pupils. Therefore, consensus assertion can be built on false consensus as well as real consensus. To sum up, as long as teachers only use assertion in a rule-work situation, there will be no scope for pupil participation. The message to the pupils is simple: Obey.

Explanation

Explanation includes strategies that attempt to get pupils to understand or recognise the reasons behind rules, either by direct mediation or by asking questions. Explanations are usually expressed as *consequence descriptions*, e.g., the teacher asks “How do you think Isabella feels when you tell her that?” and then the following conversation will describe some harmful or negative consequences of the rule transgressor’s actions in the actual situation. The descriptions of consequences can be categorised in empathic, ego-protecting, interactive, structuring and accident risk-oriented consequence descriptions. By *empathic consequence descriptions*, teachers draw pupils’ attention to others’ feelings as a consequence of rule-following or rule-breaking behaviour, as in the example above. Sometimes teachers also draw pupils’ attentions to rule transgressions’ negative or harmful consequences to the rule transgressor, i.e., *ego-protecting consequence descriptions*, as in the following excerpt.

Teacher: Why do you keep doing these things, Martin?

Martin: I don’t know.

Teacher: Don’t you understand that if you go on fighting and name-calling, in the end, others won’t want to be with you. Would you like to be with someone who goes on fighting with you?

(Kindergarten class, in the classroom).

Now and then, teachers also use *interactive consequence descriptions*, which means that they describe how certain rule compliance or rule transgressions end up or may result in certain social processes or interaction patterns. The following example is a teacher’s explanation of the rule that states that if someone teases you, do not tease back. “The important thing is that you don’t end up with two groups against each other, and start doing those things that went wrong yesterday. If one group begins to tease, then it’s better go and tell a teacher than to tease them back. So try to not tease them back then, because otherwise it will end up in a big fight. It becomes so big, and then it’s very hard to stop. If someone starts, come and tell us instead of hitting back. If you start to hit back, then they want to hit back too, and it will go on and on like that” (class teacher in the fifth grade, in the classroom). Here the teacher describes an escalating process that may arise quite easily when pupils begin to tease back. By going to a teacher instead, the negative escalation and further rule transgressions, which might build up the escalating interaction pattern, can be avoided. Now and then teachers use *structuring consequence descriptions* to explain, motivate, or justify certain school or classroom rules, as in the following excerpt.

Teacher: There are just two things that you should do when you come in from the break. What are the things you should do? What is one of them?

David: Take off your jacket and go and sit down.

Teacher: Go and sit down is one of the things I had in my mind about how to behave in here. And the second one? Frida?

Frida: Be quiet.

Teacher: Yes. Then it’s easier to begin for everyone. If some still haven’t sat down and if it isn’t quiet, then the lesson can’t begin. Those who are sitting quietly are disturbed and can’t hear what I am saying. It’s very important that you come in and take a seat and be quiet and listen attentively. Then we will have a good lesson (Sound recording, beginning of a lesson in the classroom, fifth grade).

Structuring consequence descriptions refer to explanations that point to consequences for activities or the structure of order as results of following or breaking certain rules, e.g., that the rule transgression results in disruption of classroom activities, reducing or destroying peaceful surroundings conducive to work, and so on. *Accident risk-oriented consequence descriptions* also exist in my field notes, referring to drawing pupils’ attention to the risk of

specific accidents as a result of breaking certain rules. “It’s very important that everyone follows the rule that says that you are not allowed to ride your bike in the playground. It could easily lead to accidents that you crash into each other because there are so many children playing or running around and so on, in the playground during the breaks for example. So we all have to follow that rule, adults too. No one is allowed to ride their bike in the playground” (teacher, second grade, class meeting in the classroom). As in the case of assertion, when teachers use explanation in a rule-work situation, there will typically be no room for pupil participation. The message to the pupils is still that they have to obey, but with the addition of why they have to obey, and the explanation the teacher wants to make clear is most often not negotiable.

Negotiation

Negotiation that takes place in rule-work refers to incidents when the teacher allows or creates some space for negotiation concerning rules in school. Negotiation is defined here as a process in which participants together construct, modify, or abolish school rules or make agreements about temporary deviations from one or more existing school rules. The starting position in negotiation is that pupils and teachers have conflicting opinions, pupils have conflicting opinions between themselves, or that pupils do not agree with or dislike existing school rules. Furthermore, negotiation here refers to explicit negotiation, i.e., that take place in an open and explicit manner. Hence, situations where pupils break rules and teachers do not intervene to uphold these rules but implicitly appear to “accept” their rule transgressions, are not included in the concept of negotiation in this study. Instead these kinds of implicit processes are interpreted as resistance among pupils and permissiveness among teachers (cf. research on resistance and counterculture among students, such as Willis, 1977). However, the conclusions that can be drawn from several months of fieldwork is that open and explicit negotiations between teachers and pupils about explicit rules are rare in everyday school life, and when they occur, they usually manifest and reproduce the power-asymmetry between teachers and pupils. They certainly do not participate on equal terms. Moreover, many school rules are non-negotiable, such as bans on bullying, fighting, teasing or running in corridors as well as bans on swearing, chewing gum, or wearing caps indoors. Indeed, a process labelled *pseudo-negotiation* in the analysis is more common.

There are two types of pseudo-negotiation. One variant, *pseudo-negotiation of non-conflict*, is when the teacher initiates a process that looks like a negotiation process but where the starting point of conflicting opinions is missing. Thus, there is nothing to negotiate about. The class teacher of one of the fifth grade classes, Marianne, and some of the pupils in her class told me that when the class and the teacher were new to each other, Marianne initiated a classroom discussion about important rules regarding how to treat each other. Together they constructed a list of rules they thought were the most important. However, interviews and informal conversations indicate that there never were any conflicting views between teacher and pupils about the rules they were talking about such as being nice to each other, no fighting and so on. “One classmate suggested that we should be nice to each other and we all agreed” (Lisa, fifth grade). Teacher and pupils were already in agreement about these rules. No pupils for example made any suggestions of rules like “It should be allowed to bully, name-call, tease, or fight”. Thus, existing school rules about how to treat each other were in no risk of being revised or rejected during this process (in contrast to rules like no caps indoors, no swearing, no chewing gum in school, or no talking during deskwork, which have never been brought up in a “negotiation” process by teachers but about which pupils may have disliking or conflicting opinions). Therefore, there was no authentic negotiation taking

place in this classroom discussion. Instead assertions took place in the form of pupils and teacher's concordant rule referencing statements, and in the form of agreements turning into consensus referencing.

The other type is *pseudo-negotiation as a deceptive game of school democracy*. Here, there is a starting point of conflicting opinions and the issue is brought into a formal school democratic meeting such as a class meeting, but it is not handled in an authentic negotiable and democratic way but in a non-negotiable and assertive way. In the study, three classes, a kindergarten class, a class in first grade, and a class in second grade, gather once a month in a so-called "plenary meeting", which according to teachers is a school democracy meeting aimed at teaching pupils democracy. In one of these meetings, the third item on the agenda is: "Dinner hall: How do we leave the dining hall?" The background of this item is that many pupils after having lunch run through the dinner hall on their way out to the playground. This behaviour can be connected to an already existing rule in all three classes: you are not allowed to leave the dinner hall until after a certain time. The purpose behind this rule is to prevent pupils from being negligent and stressful with the food in their effort to get to the playground as fast as possible. However, my own observations from the dinner hall show that many pupils still eat fast and then just wait and look at the clock on the wall. When the hands of the clock come to the magical time, they quickly rush out. This phenomenon gives rise to the following discussion.

"Then we come to the next item. Item number three. The dining hall. How do we leave?" The chairperson (the class teacher in the second grade) tells the pupils, "we disturb the other people eating when we are in hurry or run". The chairperson's serious gaze now sweeps over the pupils. "If you want permission to speak, then put up your hand, if you want to make a good suggestion." Five pupils put up their hand. Each of them gets permission to speak. The suggestions the pupils offer are:

"You walk and don't run."

"You can leave whenever you want."

"I also think you should be allowed to leave whenever you want."

"You should just run more quietly."

"You can leave when-ever you want, and then you walk."

After the five pupils have made their suggestions the chairperson turns to the other three teachers in the classroom and asks:

"What do you teachers think? I have come to an agreement with the parents of pupils in my class that we will wait for a while, a certain time, so it isn't so stressful."

"I think that's a great suggestion", one of the other teachers responds.

The remaining teachers agree.

"We'll try to follow the rules today", the chairperson says. "You wait until it's time to go. You can still sit and have a sandwich if you can manage to eat any more, or sit just still and talk to your neighbour at the table. Then, when it's time, you should walk out of the dining hall quietly and walk straight down the corridor. Has everyone understood?"

A lot of the pupils put up their hand.

"Good, we have now made that decision. Now we have to leave the dining hall. We have decided that we will try to follow these rules. Now we'll go on to the next item." (Field note, kindergarten class, first grade class, and second grade class, plenary meeting).

The proposals from pupils, which do not fit in with teachers' ideas or proposals, receive no attention and consideration in the meetings. The typical pattern when pupils put forward proposals incompatible with the existing rule system or teachers' intentions and proposals is that these pupil proposals (a) do not come up for discussion, (b) are verbally dismissed by teacher (e.g., "It doesn't work...", "We can't do..." etc.), or (c) receive doubting questions from the teacher ("Do you really think that...?") at the same time as he or she expresses

doubts or dislike by his or her voice, gestures and body language, which in turn invite pupils to answer “no” in chorus, leading to a dismissal of the pupil proposals. Thus, this procedure can be labelled pseudo-negotiation because the decisions that are made are pupil compliance to existing rules or to those rules teachers propose during the meetings. Even here, the result is assertion: rule referencing and/or authority referencing turning into consensus referencing. Open negotiations with teachers in which pupils actually carry out changes to existing school rules are very unusual in my fieldwork. Certain temporary deviations from certain rules can however be approved now and then by teachers during negotiations between teachers and pupils such as being temporary permitted to sit beside each other during a halfclass lesson. The following excerpt illustrates another example of this kind of negotiation.

It is lunch break. Rain is pouring down from the cloudy grey sky. Some of the pupils have already finished their lunch and hurried out to their cloakroom. The rain is pattering on the glass of the door. Their teacher is in the classroom.

“Please, can’t we stay indoors?” Lisa asks. “It’s raining a lot outside.”

The teacher takes a glance at the windows.

“If you walk twice around the school building, then you can come inside”, the teacher says to the pupils.

“Yes!” some of them shout. They hurry out of the cloakroom and begin to run around the building (Field note, fifth grade class, lunch break).

At the same time, such an *asking-permission ritual* confirms and reproduces the power asymmetry between teachers and pupils by being a sort of ritual in which pupils ask teachers permission to make a rule-deviation and teachers approve or refuse their request. The only rules which sometimes are subject to authentic negotiation (i.e., pupils in conflict with each other or with the existing school rules actually may develop or revise school rules) in teacher-pupils\$ interactions are rules regulating pupils’ play activities during the breaks or free time, such as rules regulating football or play activities in the school yard. The pupils get the rules for these activities by tradition (already established football rules or rule of games or play), or through negotiations or rule modifications conducted within the peer group, the class or the school, with or without teacher involvement. When teachers are involved in these processes and when they legitimise this kind of rules, they receive the status of school rules. Typically, these negotiations are initiated by conflicts or fights that arise between pupils during play activities, which attract the teachers’ attention to the conflicts in some way. Nevertheless, according to my observations, open and authentic negotiations are the most unusual teacher strategy in rule-work. Most of the explicit rules in school appear to a great extent to be non-negotiable. They are determined by the adults (and in some cases also processed in pseudo-negotiations with pupils) and seem more or less to be taken for granted in everyday interactions. Hence, the focus among teachers is on moulding pupil behaviour by influencing pupils to follow the rules, not on pupil participation in decision-making on rules.

Preparation

Preparation is the fourth main intervention strategy and refers to strategies that attempt to teach or develop rule-skills among pupils, i.e., skills to cope (think or act) in ways that promote rule-following behaviour in different situations. Thus, preparation implies stimulating or helping pupils to acquire a competence or a preparedness to cope with different situations in accordance with the rules in school. An example of a typical coping skill which teachers sometimes attempt to help pupils to acquire is to ignore or not to react when someone teases or calls you names. “But you know that you don’t do that. Just ignore him. Don’t bother if he says mean things. I’ll talk to him” (a teacher in kindergarten-class says that to a child who tells him that another child is teasing her). By ignoring the teasing pupil, there is a hope that this rule transgression will end (it is not fun to tease if it does not make the

target person upset). Furthermore, ignoring is also a strategy to avoid being angry or upset and thus avoiding teasing or fighting back. In this way the pupil reduces the risk of breaking such rules in this situation.

There are two subcategories of rule-skills that teacher now and then attempt to develop in pupils: thinking-strategies and acting-strategies. Preparation of *thinking-strategies* is about helping pupils to acquire cognitive strategies in order to cope with different situations in a way that the risk of starting to break rules is reduced and the chance of acting in accordance with rules increases. The instance above is an example of that. Another example is to try to help pupils (especially those who often get into trouble or behave aggressively) to think before acting or to calm down by for example mentally counting to ten before acting. Preparation of *acting-strategies* is about helping pupils to acquire a repertoire of strategies of how to act in different situations to reduce the risk of breaking rules and to increase the likelihood of following rules.

“We don’t tease or fight in this school. Instead we should be nice to each other. You have the right to be angry, but you are not allowed to fight or begin to run after someone in the classroom.” The teacher stops speaking for a moment and looks seriously at the pupils. “What happened if someone teases me? What should I do then?”

Some of the pupils raise their hands. One of them is Jenny and the teacher gives her permission to speak.

“You can say stop. If that doesn’t help, then you can say that in an angrier tone, but if that doesn’t help, you can go and tell a teacher”, Jenny says.

“Yes, you can do that. First, you can tell the other person to stop. And it’s important to say this in a firm way if the other person continues. And to show that you are serious.” The teacher asks if there are any more things they can do. Some pupils raise their hands. Patricia gets permission to speak.

“You can look into the other’s eyes and look angry”, she says. “And you mustn’t laugh.”

“Mmm, you can do that. Then you show that you are serious, that you don’t like what the other person is doing to you. To firmly make yourself clear. But what if that doesn’t help? If you tell the other person to stop several times and then look into the other person’s eyes, what can you then do?”

Some pupils raise their hands (Field note, second grade class, in classroom).

Other examples of acting-strategies that teachers mediate or attempt to bring pupils’ attention to are trying to talk to each other instead of using violence in conflict situations, to use humour and joking, to leave a provocative situation etc. When teachers use preparation they usually attempt to help pupils to acquire strategies in order to cope in accordance with school rules in situations in which they are subjected or exposed to others’ rule transgressions. Hence, the focus is neither on rule making nor on preparation in democratic decision-making, but on efficient rule compliance.

Discussion

The findings clearly show that the adults in the two schools make almost all decisions about school rules (even if some of them are brought up in so-called “school democracy” meetings). Pupils are seldom given any opportunities to create, modify or abolish formal rules through open negotiations. This confirms earlier research (e.g., Devine, 2000 , 2002 ; Thomas & O’Kane, 1999 ; Raby, 2008). When pupils enter the school, there is already a set of explicit rules, which they are expected to comply with and which teachers to a great extent attempt to uphold by assertion. Assertion (especially rule indication) is the most frequently used rule-work strategy by teachers in their everyday interactions with pupils. This could be associated to Denscombe’s (1985) concept of domination strategies. Moreover, because of the dominance of assertion and the low frequency of authentic and open negotiations in

everyday school life, teachers' work with school rules can also be related to the authoritarian approach of rule-making described by Schimmel (1997) as the most typical teacher approach, and thus, my ethnography findings support his principal and teacher survey findings as well as Alderson's (1999) claim that children in our society are often expected to show unquestioning obedience and loyalty to adults.

At the same time, my study shows that teachers sometime use explanation as a rule-work strategy, which can be associated with reasoning as an example of cooptation strategies in Denscombe's (1985) analyses, but also with elements from the collaborative approach in Schimmel's (1997) terms. Nevertheless, even when teachers use explanation, they communicate teacher authority and power as well as pupil subordination. In their explanation practice, they attempt to teach pupils the "right" answers or the "correct" way of thinking regarding the question why the particular school rule exists (cf., Denscombe, 1985). This is also the case when they *ask* pupils instead of giving the answers themselves. In the same way teachers control pupils and their knowledge acquisition of school subjects in lesson settings by asking questions to which teachers want a particular answer and going on doing so until they get that answer or until they decide to provide it themselves (e.g., Hammersley, 1990). Teachers here are not asking for opinions or information unknown to them. As in school subject lessons, teachers know the point they are trying to make, and therefore, they know the answer they want to hear from the pupils. Pupils have to figure out the "right" answer and teachers openly judge their answers. As in the case of knowledge and authority in school (cf., Hammersley, 1990), pupils are socialised into a world in which morality or "good" manners or actions are bound to and dependent on authority figures. Moreover, explanation is much less common than assertion and when it is used, it is more often used in relation to rules that pupils value as important, such as rules about how to treat each other, e.g., don't bully, fight, tease, or name-call, when compared to other rules. According to my observations, teachers never or almost never explain rules that pupils value as least important or non-important, such as no caps indoors, no swearing, and no chewing gum at school (for a further reading of how pupils value and make meaning of different types of rules, see Thornberg, 2008b). In addition, preparation seems to be something teachers use in their attempts to develop pupils' skills in following rules. It is not about preparing pupils for democratic participation, argumentation, or critical thinking in relation to rules.

In everyday life at school, teachers as well as pupils most often take school rules for granted and treat them as non-negotiable. (e.g., "We have rules to create a good climate in class and at school. This is one of [the aims]. It has to work. Both children and school staff have to enjoy being at school. But the rules also exist so that the children can learn to behave, quite simply what normal behaviour is. They learn about–, the whole society–, how to behave", as a teacher puts it). "Concealed within daily taken-for-granted routines are endless decisions that have already been made and are no longer seen as decisions: 'we always do it this way'; 'that is the rule'; 'there is no alternative'; 'don't be silly'; 'because I say so'." (Alderson, 2008 : 91). Open and authentic negotiations about formal rules are thus exceedingly rare in my observations, but pupils are now and then able to negotiate with teachers about temporary deviations from certain rules, but at the same time, the power asymmetry between teacher and pupils is manifested and reproduced in these "asking-permission" rituals. Pseudo-negotiation occurs now and then. In some cases, there is no conflict to negotiate about. In other cases, the outcome is already determined before the "negotiation" situation and teachers ignore or make short work of pupils' rule proposals if these do not fit in with their own proposals or with the existing system of school rules. "Participation" in these cases functions more as a rhetorical device and can be related to what Hart (1992) labelled as "manipulation", "decoration" and

“tokenism”. Hence, this confirms the point Denscombe (1985) makes by arguing that democratisation in school tends to be illusory, aimed to bind pupils to the existing social control. There is also a risk that pupils acquire a view on rules and negotiation of rules as something they do not gain by participating in, but instead it is a matter of figuring out the “right” answer.

Children may view rule making as another exercise in trying to figure out the right answer or say what they think the teacher wants to hear (DeVries & Zan, 2003: 65).

Indeed, most pupils say during interviews that it is the teachers who make and decide the rules. “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; for a further reading, see Thornberg, 2008a). As Raby (2005) concludes in her study on conduct codes and rules in secondary schools, the school and classroom rules in my study ultimately neglect pupils’ abilities as active agents, harnessing their agency to a narrow, individualised and obedient self-discipline through what Raby called a discourse of responsibility, which is about taking individual responsibility by following the adults’ rules in the school. The rules “groom passive, docile citizens, rather than the critical, involved ones necessary for a thriving, participatory democracy” (p. 77). Hence, the school seems to be what Thomas and O’Kane (1999) called a *disempowering system* in which children’s behaviour and experiences are shaped by controlling forces with few opportunities for them to participate in decisionmaking or in negotiating rules.

Nevertheless, implicit norms, which seem to function as supplements or exceptions to explicit rules, can of course be seen as being implicitly negotiated by pupils and teachers in their interactions, i.e., instead of being simply imposed by teachers, they are products of a subtle bargaining procedure between teachers and pupils in which disagreements and resistance have to be overcome (Denscombe, 1985). Thus, instead of open and democratic negotiations, formal school rules are actually imposed by teachers through their authority and power position in their interactions with pupils, even if non-articulated norms in terms of supplements or exceptions to them are now and then constructed, modified, overruled, or erased by resistance and non-compliance by pupils and by permissiveness among teachers. For instance, even if pupils sometimes talk a lot during deskwork, the formal school rule of “no talking during deskwork” still exists and has not been altered. Furthermore, according to interviews with pupils, they are not even aware of these informal norms (Thornberg, 2007). They are indeed nonarticulated and hidden in everyday interactions and create inconsistencies regarding explicit school and classroom rules and how teachers enforce them. This in turn appears to create (a) *rule diffusion* , i.e., uncertainty and interpretation difficulties among pupils regarding which rules are in force and how they should be applied, (b) *prediction loss* , i.e., pupils cannot always predict what will be appropriate behaviour in particular situations, and how teachers will react to different behaviour, and (c) *negotiation loss* , i.e., because these implicit norms are unspoken and invisible, pupils are not given any opportunity to join teachers in an open discussion and decision-making processes for developing or revising them (for a further reading, see Thornberg, 2007).

According to the findings, teachers’ rule-work strategies regarding pupil behaviour in relation to school rules are typically unplanned and reactive assertive strategies embedded in everyday school life. Instead of planned and preventive interventions, and drawing attention to and reinforcing pupils’ rule-following behaviour (often recommended in traditional classroom management literature, see for example Evertson & Emmer, 2008 ; Evertson & Weinstein, 2006), teachers in my study usually react in a more or less negative manner to

pupils' rule transgressions and intervene to correct them by domination or coercive power. In contrast to this and with reference to Skinner (1971), it would be more efficient if teachers managed pupil behaviour mainly by focusing on and positively reinforcing appropriate behaviour (positive management) than most frequently drawing attention to and punishing pupil misbehaviour (aversive management). Beyond a pure behaviourist position, the teachers' rule-work strategies in the study can also be criticised from a constructivist position and progressive pedagogy, which stress reasoning, explanations, and pupil participation in rulemaking procedures (see for example DeVries & Zan, 2003; Schimmel, 1997). The latter is also more congruent with (a) the Swedish national curriculum (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1998), (b) the Swedish Education Act (Skollagen, 1985 : 1100, Chapter 1, 2§), (c) policy documents from National Agency for Education regarding school rules (Skolverket, 2006) and citizenship education (Englund, 2000 ; Skolverket, 2000), (d) the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, Articles 12-13), and (e) the new sociology of childhood, which claims that children are not passive receivers but active agents in their socialisation process (Prout & James, 1997) which is confirmed in many studies (e.g., Corsaro, 2005 ; Taylor *et al.* , 2008 ; Thornberg, 2008a , 2008b).

Even if some of the rules in the two schools can be related to protective rights (prohibitions of actions that will harm others physically or psychologically in school) and provision rights (e.g., some of the classroom rules that function in order to create and maintain an environment conducive to learning), children's participation rights are seldom related to the rules in school. By assertion, explanation, pseudo-negotiation, and preparation, and by the typical lack of real negotiation, the teachers are occupied with rearing pupils to behave in accordance with rules rather than inviting pupils to make, critically discuss, and revise rules. Furthermore, according to my observations, the teachers do not mention and inform pupils about the UN Convention on Children's Rights at all, which can be compared with an British survey study showing that among 7-17 years old pupils, over 75 per cent said they had not heard about the Convention, and most of the rest had heard only "a bit about it" (Alderson, 2000). As in Montgomery and Plevyak's (2000) survey study, the teachers appear to value duties and responsibilities as much more important to teach pupils than to teach them their rights. Nevertheless, according to Smith (2007), both the recognition of children's participation rights and the new sociology of childhood recognise that children are persons not property, that they have agency and are participants in social processes, and that childhood should be given at least as high priority as adulthood.

In contrast to the "ideology of immaturity" (Grace, 1995 : 202) which is expressed in how the adults deal with school and classroom rules in the two schools in my study and which underestimates pupils and ignores their perspectives, Rudduck and her colleagues (e.g., Rudduck, 2006 ; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006 ; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, 2004) argue that the movement of pupil voice, i.e., real pupil consultation about and participation in things that matter in school, is an urgent direction for school improvement. This is because of pupils' experiences of and insights into the social dynamics of school and the classroom, and at the same time the movement of pupil voice is very close to the principles and practices of democratic citizenship education and in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. "Being consulted and knowing that what you say is taken seriously builds students' self-respect and gives them a sense that others respect them and this, in turn, can also strengthen their commitment to learning" (Rudduck, 2006 : 140). Furthermore, in their study, Taylor *et al.* (2008) find that New Zealand children and young people are able to contribute meaningfully to discussions about their rights and responsibilities and want to take an active part, have a formative role in school, and participate more fully in decisionmaking processes.

Finally, the citizenship education created by how teachers work with school and classroom rules in interactions with the pupils in my study contains a hidden curriculum (cf., Schimmel, 1997) in which teachers communicate to pupils that “good citizenship” is defined as compliance to authority and competence in following their rules. Authentic and open discussion, deliberation, and negotiation, critical thinking, and democratic participation in rule making appear not to be a significant part of these learning outcomes.

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