Linköping University Post Print

The moral construction of the good pupil embedded in school rules

Robert Thornberg

N.B.: When citing this work, cite the original article.

Original Publication:

Robert Thornberg, The moral construction of the good pupil embedded in school rules, 2009, Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, (4), 3, 245-261.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1746197909340874>

Copyright: Sage Publications

<http://www.uk.sagepub.com/>

Postprint available at: Linköping University Electronic Press

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-51661>

The moral construction of the good pupil embedded in school rules

Robert Thornberg

Linköping Universitet, Sweden

Abstract

The aim of this field study was to investigate the hidden curriculum of school rules delimited to the moral construction of 'the good pupil' embedded in the system of school rules in two primary schools. According to the findings, the rule system mediates a moral construction of the good pupil to the children, and this actually includes two constructions: the benevolent fellow buddy and the well-behaved pupil. Furthermore, a picture of a final learning outcome of this hidden or implicit citizenship education of school rules emerges: the good citizen who (1) does good to others and does not harm others, (2) functions well in the society and lives by its laws and norms, and (3) takes responsibility and does her or his very best. Critical thinking and the possibility of questioning, critically discussing and abolishing explicit rules are not parts of this picture.

Keywords: *citizenship education, hidden curriculum, moral socialization, school rules*

Introduction

Regulating pupil's behaviour is an essential part of everyday school life. In traditional as well as progressivist views, rules in school are usually seen as an unproblematic mean to organize and regulate pupils and their behaviour in school as well as teaching them to be good citizens or helping them to acquire moral and social skills (Carter and Doyle, 2006; DeVries and Betty, 1994; Durkheim, 1925; Gettinger, 1988). Nevertheless, because rules both serve to protect or safeguard values and function as instruments used in the pursuance of these values (Tattum, 1982), they could be investigated, and thus problematized in terms of a hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968). Sherman (1996) calls the process of socialization into rules and routines in school, 'studentizing' in which compliance with authority, rules, time-keeping, routines and so on ensures their inclusion as a student in the school world as a preparation for the world of work. In a study by Tattum (1982), 29 disruptive pupils were interviewed, and when they explained their misbehaviour, it was expressed in the language of the school. 'Many, in fact, use the label "disrupter" or "disruptive behaviour", thus adopting the vocabularies of the teachers as a new category of pupil is created in our education system. In this way, as in many other examples, they accept the defining power of the dominant culture of the school' (Tattum, 1982: 108–9). What do pupils actually learn by being exposed daily to rules of their school? What are the moral messages embedded in the system of school and classroom rules? According to Boostrom (1991: 198), 'as students embrace rules, they take part not only in short-term behaviours but also in far-reaching ways of thinking about themselves and the world'. Inevitably, school rules are a part of the moral life of school or sources of moral influence (Fenstermacher, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993; Thornberg, 2006).

Indeed, educational research needs to deal with the technical issues of how teachers teach efficiently and effectively, but also to go beyond these issues with a more critical point of view, because education is not a neutral enterprise, but rather it is immersed in ideology, morality, power, cultural control and social reproduction (Apple, 2004; Bernstein, 2000; Buzzelli and Johnston, 2002). The *hidden curriculum* can be defined as ‘all the things that are learnt during schooling in addition to the official curriculum’ (Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford, 1997: 65), or as a ‘set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes’ (Skelton, 1997: 188), and it has always a normative or moral component (Portelli, 1993). The function of the hidden curriculum is social control, and has been identified variously as political socialization, inculcation of values, maintenance of class structure, training in obedience and docility, and so forth (Vallance, 1983). Thus, formal learning as well as informal learning take place in school (Kvalsund, 2004), and pupils learn a lot from their experiences of school rules (Cullingford, 1988; Johansson and Johansson, 2003). According to Merrett and Jones (1994), even if most schools have quite elaborate systems of rules, very little research has been conducted in order to investigate the nature of these systems. The aim of this study is to investigate the hidden curriculum of school rules delimited to the moral construction of ‘the good pupil’ embedded in the system of school rules in two primary schools.

The researcher’s perspective

Here, I take a broad interactionist position (Atkinson and Housley, 2003), including Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) notions of social constructions, in which they draw on different traditions such as symbolic interactionism and phenomenological movement. Instead of taking a starting-point in the ‘sacred’ text of a particular tradition, I have, with reference to Atkinson and Housley (2003), been suspicious of grand theory and been quite free from the constraints of orthodoxy. The repertoire of ideas that interactionism provides is adapted here into a pragmatic and empirical approach, in a pluralistic rather than a purist manner. Selves and identities are social products which are never fixed but in an ongoing process in and by social interactions with others (Atkinson and Housley, 2003; Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2007). Identity, social life and morality are thus inescapably social, collective and cultural processes, constructed and reconstructed in everyday social interactions (Atkinson and Housley, 2003). According to this perspective, moral refers to ‘a broader sociological concern with the achievement of a socially organized identity and the construction of actors as moral agents, responsible for their actions and subject to the evaluations of others’ (Atkinson and Housley, 2003: 63). In this study, values, norms, rules, and morals are viewed as social constructions, with reference to Berger and Luckmann (1967). Furthermore, the everyday social life in school as well in other contexts is manifested, maintained but also changed by the processes of interactions and exchange. Order is thus not fixed but it is the ongoing outcomes of processes. Meanings are socially constructed, constantly available to change and re-definition (Atkinson and Housley, 2003). Interpretations and meanings are constructed and mediated in and by social interactions (Berger, 1969; Berger and Luckmann, 1967). People act in a world they define. Even if there may be a reality out there, people’s definition of the situation is far more important for what they do (Charon, 2007).

Method

The study is based on 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. The sample represents pupils from working-class as well as middle-class families. Two kindergarten classes, two classes in Grade 2, and two classes in Grade 5 participated in the study. In total, 141 pupils and 13 teachers participated in this study. Participant observations and audio-recordings as well as interviews with the teachers and group interviews with 139 pupils (49 groups altogether with two–four pupils in each group) were conducted. The qualitative analysis of the fieldwork data was accomplished by procedures influenced by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and by Dey's (1999) and Charmaz's (1990, 2006) revised versions of grounded theory. Moreover, in line with broad social interactionist and constructionist positions I view myself as 'an active, not neutral, observer whose decisions shape both the process and the product throughout the research' (Charmaz, 1990: 1165). The choice of method in this study is also in line with the aim of studying morality and school rules in everyday school life in terms of a hidden curriculum. In contrast to input–output studies of school achievement, if the researcher 'lives' in classrooms, seeing the complex forms of interaction that occur in classrooms, the tacit teaching of a hidden curriculum can be documented, according to Apple (2004). Moreover, with reference to a broad interactionist position, which stresses a flexible and unorthodox theoretical pluralism (Atkinson and Housley, 2003), external theoretical concepts and findings from other research are sometimes used here as analytic tools. However, instead of beginning the research with a preconceived theory in mind, I tried to be open and sensitive to the data, without rejecting pre-existing theoretical concepts and constructions. Theories have here been used, not to mechanically derive a hypothesis to test, but as a source of inspiration and interpretation in the processes of qualitative analysis in order to develop patterns that might lead to understanding.

A categorization of school rules

The analysis of the rules in the two schools and the six classrooms resulted in five rule categories. *Relational rules* refer to rules about how to be and how to behave in relations with other people, for example, not to fight, not to bully, to show others respect, not to tease others, and to be nice. *Structuring rules* refer to rules with the aim of structuring and maintaining the activities that take place in school (activity rules) or of structuring and maintaining the physical milieu – including physical properties – where the activities take place (milieu rules). Examples: not to interrupt classmates in their seatwork, no talking during the seatwork, to raise your hand if you want to speak, not speaking when someone else is, to be careful with school property, and to clean up after yourself. *Protecting rules* refer to rules about safety and health, for example, not to eat sweets, not to run in the corridors, to be careful when you play on ice, and not to cycle or roller-skate on the playground. *Personal rules* refer to rules, which call for self-reflection upon one's own behaviour and taking a personal responsibility for oneself and one's actions. Finally, *etiquette rules* refer to rules, which manifest customs or traditions in school ('school etiquette') or in society ('society etiquette') about how to behave in social situations, and which are not covered in the concept of relational rules. Examples: not to wear your cap in classroom, not to swear or use bad language, and to sit up straight in class. In accordance with the prototype model of categorization (Dey, 1999), these five rule categories overlap to some degree.

The dual functions of the system of school rules

According to the teacher discourse as well as observational data, the system of school rules serves two functions: (1) social regulation, that is, to construct order in school by regulating pupil behaviour; and (2) moral socialization, that is, to foster the pupils in a moral sense.

Therefore, school rules are also an aspect of everyday values or moral education (Halstead and Taylor, 2000; Johansson and Johansson, 2003; Thornberg, 2006). In an ordinary English lesson in one of the Grade 5 classrooms, pupils are sitting doing their individual schoolwork when following incident occurs:

‘Marianne! Sandra is rifling in my bag!’ Victor suddenly exclaims.
‘You don’t need to shout in the classroom’, Marianne says. ‘First of all have you talked to Sandra?’
‘Yes, but it doesn’t help’, Victor says.
‘Alright, but we don’t shout in the classroom’, Marianne declares.
‘I didn’t rifle in your bag’, Sandra says. ‘I didn’t mean to grab his bag. It just happened.’
‘Oh no!’, Victor exclaims.
‘Well, I didn’t see what happened here, but of course we don’t rummage in others’ things’, Marianne says. (Sound-recorded field-note, English lesson in the classroom, Grade 5, age 11)

The classroom incident above illustrates how school rules and the teachers’ work with them in their interactions with pupils, constitute part of daily life in school and teachers’ practices. Through the everyday work with rules, teachers attempt to create and maintain a social order, to regulate pupil behaviour and to make lessons, breaks and other school activities function. Simultaneously, this excerpt also exemplifies how values are manifested and mediated by everyday rule work. Openly and in front of the pupils, the teacher morally judges rule-transgressions of classroom rules such as shouting in classroom and thus behaviour that disrupts orderly work as wrong or bad. To be silent, nice and calm are here mediated as something valuable or morally good. Furthermore, by verbalizing the rule ‘we don’t rummage in others’ things’, the teacher mediates moral constructs about ownership and respect of other people and their property to the pupils. Moreover, the teacher in the excerpt above also indicates to the pupils that because she did not see how the conflict started, a correct conflict resolution cannot be reached. Instead of asking the pupils to give their versions and inviting them to actively participate in a joint conflict resolution process, she just verbalizes a rule to them. By doing that, the teacher communicates to the pupils the taken-for-granted power asymmetry between adults and children as well as a de-evaluation of children as competent participants in resolving peer conflicts. As Jackson et al. (1993) point out morality is daily expressed in classroom by teacher corrections or commentaries on pupil behaviour and by classroom rules and regulations. ‘Irrespective of whether or not moral education is an explicit and intentional part of the curriculum, values education is embedded in the fabric of classrooms and instructional practice’ (Narvaez, 2006: 705). According to Halstead (1996), the values expressed in school are not fully explored or articulated, at least partly because these values are deeply embedded in school and in teachers’ taken-for-granted world view, and because teachers have to make so many day-to-day decisions in the classroom without any further reflection. In my study however, teachers see a dual function in the system of school rules. The aim of *the social regulation function* is to organize and regulate the social life in school. This is clearly expressed in a teacher discourse. ‘Explicit rules exist to make it as smooth as possible for all these individuals to be together’ (Kristina, a Grade 5 teacher). Many of the teachers in the study tell me that they have all these school rules in order to get the everyday life in school to function and to create a nice and a safe milieu. This function is also very significant regarding the rule system in classrooms. ‘Well, if you have thirty pupils in a classroom, it has to work, and this is a way of getting teaching and everyday life to work, so you can say: We have these rules in the classroom’ (Karin, a Grade 5 teacher). The function is to co-ordinate, organize, and regulate pupil behaviour in different situations, and thus, to construct social control and discipline discourse in school, that is, to get pupils to comply with these rules. The second basic function – *the function of*

moral socialization – is, according to some of the teachers, to foster or teach pupils certain civic values as well as moral or ‘socially appropriate’ behaviour by these rules.

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 in school. But the rules also exist so that the children can learn to behave, what normal behaviour is quite simply. They learn–, whole the society–, well how to behave. (Urban, a kindergarten teacher)

According to all the teachers in the study, the relational rules are valued as the most important rules to teach and to maintain in school. While some teachers only include relational rules, or relational rules and personal rules in their views about values education, other teachers include all school rules in their view of values education. The former teachers see basic values as something deeper than merely school order rules even if they perceive basic values as a set of rules too. ‘It’s about respecting others, not hurting others, not harming others. Well, it’s about how to treat each other. It’s another type of rules, “buddy rules”. What I’m allowed to do and not allowed to do to others. In other words, how to be a good buddy, a good fellow human’ (Viveka, a kindergarten teacher). Thus, she is referring to relational rules when she describes the ‘values’ behind values education and argues that values education is about teaching pupils these rules. However, other teachers also see rules of order (structuring, protecting and etiquette rules) as expressions of deeper values and therefore include them in their view of values education. For instance, Liselott, a teacher in a kindergarten class, argues that the rule about raising your hand and waiting for your turn instead of just talking out loud during circle time is about ‘making a little bit order’ but ‘also has do with respect and consideration’, and is thus an aspect of values education. Society is built on rules and pupils must learn to follow rules, some teachers argue. Therefore, values education is to some extent about developing pupils’ understanding of why a rule system exists and enhancing their ability to adapt to different rule systems, they reason.

To sum up, these schools appear to be, what Tattum (1982) calls ‘rulegoverned organizations’, meaning that every action a pupil commits in school is covered by rules, and if there is no rule, authorities in school such as teachers can create one and put a name on the deviance from it. The functions of the school as an agency established to socialize pupils into social and moral patterns places heavy emphasis on the regulation of pupil behaviour by formal rules as well as informal, unspoken social rules which influence every aspect of a pupil’s life. ‘In fact rules of conduct, performance, and appearance are probably the most pervasive aspect of what has come to be called the hidden curriculum’ (Tattum, 1982: 140). This could be related to Bernstein (2000), who sees the regulative discourse, which constructs the rules of social order in school, as a moral discourse, because it creates the criteria that give rise to character, conduct, manners, etc. Hence, investigating the social construction of ‘the good pupil’ embedded in the system of school rules is a way of exploring the everyday values education or moral socialization mediated by school rules.

The definition of the ‘the good pupil’

According to the analysis of the school rules and their everyday practice in my study, the rule system mediates the construction of *the desirable or good pupil* to the children, and this actually includes two social constructions. The relational rules have a particular position in the system of rules and define desirable and non-desirable behaviour concerning how to treat others. Indeed, this rule category contains a set of rules, of which the idea and the objective are to promote the spreading of *the benevolent fellow buddy*. This is a construction of a pupil who complies with the relational rules such as being nice and friendly to others, not bullying,

fighting, teasing, and so on. However, the rule system as a whole and the rule-following in general here are significant ideas in themselves too, because of the assumption of generating order, regularity and school-appropriate behaviour in everyday school life – ‘all from to taking off your cap when you enter the classroom and bringing your pens with you’ (Liselott, a kindergarten teacher) to ‘not leaving litter all over the playground, to keeping quiet during lesson and listening to the teacher’ (Torbjörn, a physical and religion teacher). Thus, the rule system as a whole contains a set of rules, of which the idea and the objective are to promote the spreading of the construction of *the well-behaved pupil*. This is a social construction of a pupil who obeys the whole rule system. In other words, a good pupil is a pupil who behaves appropriately by following all the formal rules in school.

The moral language of school rules

The rules are about do’s and don’t’s (Boostrom, 1991), right and wrong, or desirable and undesirable behaviour. Hence, they contribute to the construction and maintenance of the moral life of school. According to interview data with pupils, many of them report what they are learning in school, about how to be to each other, is that you should be *nice* and not *mean*. This pair of words appears to be common key concepts in their moral language about social interactions. When they explain to me the meaning of being nice and mean, they usually give examples of behaviour of what you should do or should not do, such as no teasing, no fighting and no kicking and so on. Hence, they give examples of relational rules and behaviours that follow or break these rules. In everyday social interaction between pupils they judge each other and their behaviour in terms of being nice or mean.

Felicia: There are some kids who need to practise being nice.

Interviewer: Practise what? What do you mean, Felicia?

Felicia: Yeah, to be a bit nicer. There is actually one special person in the class who needs that. She is mean.

Interviewer: Mean?

Felicia: She teases other kids quite often and says mean things.

Jessica: Yeah, Linda! And sometimes she pushes people for no reason.

Felicia: Yes, she is mean. (From group interview with three girls, Grade 2)

However, the moral language of ‘nice’ and ‘mean’ that pupils and teachers use in their day-to-day work with rules in class as well as in the playground stretch the distinctions between the two pupil constructions, the benevolent fellow buddy and the well-behaved pupil, because of the dual meanings of ‘nice’ and ‘mean’ in the moral discourse of everyday school life. To be nice is not only about fulfilling the role of the benevolent fellow buddy and following relational rules. To be nice is also about fulfilling the role of the well-behaved pupil and following all the school rules. If a pupil breaks relational rules in a way that other pupils perceive as frequent, he or she risks being defined as ‘mean’ in other pupils’ view, as the excerpt above illustrates. However, if a pupil often transgresses all kinds of rules in school and in class – especially the structuring rules of classroom – he or she risks attracting teacher disapproval, mediated through negative cues, comments or corrections (for example, a telling-off, stern gazes, angry face expression and negative verbal judgements). In this way, the pupil can be constructed and defined as a pupil who is not nice but mean.

‘Hey! No talking in the classroom! Sit still and work nicely’, Ellen (the teacher) says in a firm voice.

A lot of the pupils stop talking, but not all of them.

‘It’s not nice talking in classroom during a lesson’, Ellen says and looks angrily at some boys talking. (Sound-recorded field-note, lesson in the classroom, Grade 2, age 8)

Later, when I asked a couple of pupils about the incident, one of them told me: 'I think they are rather mean.' Another one added: 'Yeah, especially Robin and Daniel. They often do things you're not allowed to do during lessons.' Hence, the words nice and mean are here used in a way that is typical in everyday school life. If you behave well in classroom, listen to teacher and follow the classroom rules, then you are defined as nice, but if you misbehave in class and are disruptive, do not listen to teacher, and do not follow the classroom rules, then you are defined as mean. Thus, the two moral constructions of the good pupil are constructed and maintained via the moral language of nice and mean, manifested in the pupils' as well as teachers' everyday conversation.

Implicit citizenship education by the system of school rules

According to Schimmel (1997, 2003), school rules and rule-making in schools can be related to citizenship education. 'A vital part of education for citizenship is an enlightened process for developing school rules and teaching students about them. School rules are, after all, a form of law that applies to student' (Schimmel, 1997: 70). However, instead of encouraging active and democratic citizenship, this hidden curriculum of citizenship education in many or most schools does just the opposite, Schimmel (2003) argues. 'It undermines the goals of citizenship education when students have no voice in the development or revision of school and classroom rules' (Schimmel, 2003: 18). On the basis of rule practice and all the rules this practice comprises in my study, a picture of a final learning outcome of this hidden or implicit citizenship education emerges: *the good citizen* who (1) does good to others and does not harm others, (2) functions well in the society and lives by its laws and norms, and (3) takes responsibility and does her or his very best. However, critical thinking and the possibility of questioning, critically discussing and abolishing explicit rules are not parts of this picture. Instead, rules come from above, that is, from the adults, and the children are expected to conform to them. Hence, *the virtue of obedience to rules from authorities* is the underlying moral construction of the good pupil – obey relational rules as well as all other school rules. According to some progressivist theorists, such an over-emphasis on rules can undermine the goal of fostering self-discipline, critical thinking and democratic skills in children. Instead, it may just lead to superficial order and blind compliance (Render et al., 1989; Schimmel, 2003). In such a case, moral socialization 'does not appeal to pupils' reasoning, feelings and participation, but to authority and power, and it reduces morality to the valuing of obedience and respect for authority. This can hardly promote and empower pupils to develop democratic skills and more complex moral reasoning and understanding' (Thornberg, 2006: 91).

From a postmodern viewpoint, this hidden curriculum means that the pupils acquire discourses which will control them and their opportunities to define themselves (Skelton, 1997). By supervision and disciplining of pupils in school, 'normality' will be rewarded and 'deviance' will be punished – which are defined in the discourses (Foucault, 1979). In a postmodern sense, the hidden curriculum would refer to those disciplinary practices that reduce individuals to docility. 'Students become objectified, and often accept institutional definitions of themselves which enable them, subsequently, to be politically dominated as docile beings. Schools legitimate themselves through using power in this way to define individuals' (Skelton, 1997: 186). Appropriate behaviour is rewarded and inappropriate behaviour is punished by techniques of discipline and surveillance, such as school rules and routines, time-keeping, judging, observing, testing and documenting aspects of pupils' activities, behaviour, feelings and skills. This can also be related to techniques of power in pedagogy elaborated by Gore (1998) with reference in a Foucaultian tradition: normalization

(invoking, requiring, setting, or conforming to a standard, which defines the normal), totalization (addressing them all as pupils, expecting them to behave as pupils), regulation (invoking a rule, controlling by rule, subject to restrictions, including sanction, reward, and punishment) and surveillance (supervising, watching, closely observing, threatening to watch, or expecting to be watched). Furthermore, with very few exceptions, the pupils express during the conversations with me that it is the teachers who create and make decisions about school rules, not them. Sometimes, the principal is also included in their reports.

Interviewer: Who make 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 schoolgirls in Grade 5)

The rules are perceived to a great extent as something from above, that is, from teachers and principals. 'The teachers decide most things by themselves/.../ [A child] may come with 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/.../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, Grade 5). Also in other studies pupils report that they have no say (Devine, 2002) and that they perceive that their teachers are the ones who make decisions about school rules and order (Davies, 1999; Johansson and Johansson, 2003; Sherman, 1996). According to Sherman (1996), schoolchildren express a 'the teacher know best' attitude.

In contrast to this 'ideology of immaturity' (Grace, 1995: 202), which underestimates pupils and ignores their perspectives, Rudduck and her colleagues (Rudduck, 2006; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000, 2004) argue that the movement of pupil voice, that is, real pupil consultation about and participation in things that matter in school, is an urgent direction for school improvement, because of pupils' experiences of and insights into the social dynamics of school and the classroom, which at the same time is very close to the principles and practices of democratic citizenship education and in line with the United Nations 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).

Moreover, many pupils in my study express during the interviews that if the rules did not exist at the school, then pupils would start to commit the forbidden actions. They think that pupils would start to fight, tease, and swear, to run in corridors and to shout indoors, to throw snowballs and to cycle in the playground, to chat during lessons etc. 'It's good that the rules exist because otherwise, everyone would run around during lessons, teasing, fighting, and doing things like that' (a boy, Grade 5). When I ask the pupils to imagine situations in which the teachers abolish rules, many pupils say spontaneously that pupils in class or in school would start to do all these forbidden things, no matter the rule category. It appears to be a widespread idea among pupils that without school rules, chaos will emerge in the classroom as well as in the playground.

Mariam: And if there were no rules then you wouldn't –
 Jasmine: It would be a mess.
 Mariam: – want to go to school
 Jasmine: No, you wouldn't want to go to school.
 Interviewer: If there were no rules? Why not?
 Fatima: Because the school would be chaos.
 Jasmine: Yeah, and many kids would start fighting.
 Fatima: And do mean things. (From a group interview with three schoolgirls in second grade)

Thus, a part of the hidden curriculum of the rule system seems to be that among the pupils, a social construction of pupils as lacking skills to be able to live a harmonic, well-functioning and good life together without adults' explicit rules takes shape. They think they are dependent on these rules, given by the adults, in order to function together and function in school. This could be interpreted as a construction of *the pupil lacking in moral autonomy*, who cannot manage without explicit rules, which to a great extent are made by teachers and other school staff.

Discussion

This study indicates that school rules and their regulation of everyday social interaction in school can be viewed as a powerful hidden curriculum of values education as well as citizenship education. The system of school rules mediates moral constructions of 'the good pupil' and in the long-term 'the good citizen' in which obedience to rules made by authorities is a main part. The hidden curriculum of school rules teaches pupils to be non-questioning and non-participating. They have no say and they think they are dependent on teachers' school rules to be able to work together and to function in school. In an interview study conducted by Cullingford (1988), school rules seem to influence schoolchildren to regard rules as necessary in school in a way that appears to demoralize their conception of themselves as schoolchildren and strengthen their view of being dependent on teachers and their rules. 'Never do we seem to meet the expectation that with maturity will come greater self-control, improved behaviour or more natural kindness to others. In fact all the children seemed to assume that rules continue to be necessary because children do *not* learn' (Cullingford, 1988: 5). There was a moral assumption among the primary schoolchildren that the older they get, the more difficult they are to control, and thus they saw a greater need for rules in the secondary school. According to young schoolchildren, they need to know and follow the school rules in order to function well within the school and to keep out of trouble. For them, a critical part of getting ready for school is to find out about these rules (Dockett and Perry, 1999; Perry et al., 1998). Hence, both my study and other studies indicate that school rules appear to socialize pupils into an uncritical 'we-need-rules-and-we-must-obey-them' attitude. The social control function of school rules 'educates for docility and obedience, subservience to hierarchical authority, and an awareness of one's place in a stratified social system' (Tattum, 1982: 141). School rules can therefore simply not be viewed as unproblematic means to organize and regulate pupils and their behaviour in school nor to teach them to be good citizens and to help them to acquire moral and social skills, which is a quite common view (Carter and Doyle, 2006; Durkheim, 1925; Gettlinger, 1988).

School rules and the values behind them should not be taken for granted in an uncritical way but they should be critically investigated as social constructions (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). However, the statement that there is a social construction of reality can be criticized for being a bit too general. It does not explain why certain social constructions and not others are distributed through schools, nor how this can be linked to the ideological dominance of

powerful groups in a society (Apple, 2004). In its most extreme form, it takes a relativist position and hence is fumbling in the dark, and thus we can question the same question as Hacking (1999): 'The social construction of what?' With roots in a neo-Marxist tradition, Apple (2004) argues that the school is a significant agent of cultural and economic reproduction, and refers to Bourdieu, Bernstein, Young and others. Education allocates individuals to a relatively fixed set of positions in society, determined by economic and political forces. Furthermore, 'the process of education itself, the formal and hidden curriculum, socializes people to accept as legitimate the limited roles they ultimately fill in society' (Apple, 2004: 30). In this critical school research tradition, the rules which govern social behaviour, morals, and beliefs are viewed as having filtered down from the macro level of political and economical structures to the individual via family socialization, educational processes and work experiences. Hence, school rules, obedience pressure, and pupils' degree of alienation from the culture of school can indeed be discussed and analysed in relation to social class and economic and cultural reproduction.

The sample of this study contains pupils from middle class as well as working or lower class families, and regardless of their social background, these pupils are exposed by school rules and everyday moral influence from their teachers to the moral construction of 'the good pupils', described in the findings. However, when children from parents with little formal education enter school, they do not come with the same linguistic, academic and cultural repertoire as do children of parents with more schooling. The repertoire of middle-class pupils is a much closer match to the school's curriculum and teachers' norms and expectations than the repertoire of working- or lowerclass pupils (Cohen, 2006). Hence, even if this is not empirically analysed in this study, it is reasonable to assume that differences in pupils' cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 2004) interact with the regulative discourse as well as with the instructional discourse in school (see Bernstein, 2000), and thus contribute to the social and cultural reproduction processes.

However, independent of pupils' social background and acquired habitus, uncritical obedience to teachers' authority and their rules as a main aspect of everyday moral socialization process or implicit citizenship education of school can be problematized from a moral point of view. Moral reasoning and reflection, empathy and other feelings, deliberative discussions and democratic negotiations here are removed from the map of morality. Nevertheless, according to Bauman (1993), our moral responsibility to others cannot be reduced to the fulfilment of a limited set of rules. Milgram (1974) conducted a series of controversial social psychology experiments during the 1960s showing how the majority of ordinary people chose to obey authority even if they thought they might be endangering the life of another person. He argues that the widespread norm of obedience of authority, internalized in childhood at home as well as at school, is problematic because of the obvious risk of resulting in blind obedience and overriding people's other internalized norms and values, and even making people harm others. Furthermore, Milgram argues that this norm played an important role in Nazi Germany where ordinary citizens systematically slaughtered millions of innocent people, solely acting on orders. Classroom management and discipline in schools in democratic societies have to go beyond the traditional taken-for-granted view of teacher power and school rules if the aim is to educate democratic competence among pupils. School and classroom rules and how they are constructed and maintained in school are inevitable aspects of real-life citizenship education in school (Schimmel, 1997, 2003).

There seems to be a paradox between (1) the construction of the pupil lacking in moral autonomy and the virtue of obedience to the rules of authorities, and (2) the idea of taking

responsibility and doing one's very best. Both are mediated in the system of school rules. However, the latter duty is related in school to school rules and school work, that is, pupils are told to take responsibility and to do their best in following all the rules in school and doing their school work. This could be compared with Milgram's (1974) reasoning about focus shift in responsibility and morality: the person feels a sense of responsibility to the authority in terms of how diligently the person performs the actions the authority requires of him/her, instead of feeling responsibility for the content of the actions that the authority prescribes and its consequences for other people. Thus, the following question has to be raised: how good is the good pupil (and in long-term, the good citizen) as he or she is constructed in the system of school rules and their moral language communicated in the social interactions in everyday school life? The hidden curriculum of blind obedience appears to still be a part of the system of school rules, despite the movement of progressivism and democratization of school, at least at the two schools investigated in this study.

Although the present findings provide insights into the hidden curriculum of school rules, caution about generalization may be considered regarding the small sample. Nevertheless, Larsson (2009) talks about generalization by recognizing a gestalt, that is, the result could make sense by being recognizable to other researchers as well as to practitioners when it fits with the patterns they experience. Despite the small sample, the findings in this study suggest that it appears to be important to examine the morality and the implicit citizenship education that take form through the school rules and their applications, and thus making the hidden curriculum more explicit. By this conscious-making work it counteracts at least some of the problematic effects of the hidden curriculum as well as letting the moral and citizenship education of school rules become an integral and highly pedagogical part of the curriculum.

References

- Apple, M. W. (2004) *Ideology and Curriculum*, 3rd edn. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Atkinson, P. and Houlsey (2003) *Interactionism*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Bauman, Z. (1993) *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Berger, P. L. and Luckmann, T. (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor books.
- Bernstein, B. (2000) *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique* (rev. ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Blumer, H. (1969) *Symbolic Interactionism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2004) The forms of capital. In S. J. Ball (ed.) *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Sociology of Education*, pp. 15–29. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Boostrom, R. (1991) *The Nature and Functions of Classroom Rules: Curriculum Inquiry*, 21(2), 193–216.
- Buzzelli, C. A. and Johnston, B. (2002) *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching: Language, Power, and Culture in Classroom Interaction*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Carter, K. and Doyle, W. (2006) Classroom management in early childhood and elementary classrooms. In C. M. Evertson and C. S. Weinstein (eds) *Handbook of Classroom Management: Research, Practice, and Contemporary Issues*, pp. 373–406. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Charmaz, K. (1990) 'Discovering' chronic illness: using grounded theory. *Social Science and Medicine*, 30(11), 1161–72.
- Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Charon, J. M. (2007) *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, an Interpretation, an Integration*, 9th edn. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

- Cohen, E. G. (2006) Equitable classrooms in a changing society. In M. T. Hallinan (ed.) *Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, pp. 265–83. Baltimore, MD: Springer.
- Cullingford, C. (1988) School rules and children's attitudes to discipline. *Educational Research*, 30(1), 3–8.
- Davies, L. (1999) Researching democratic understanding in primary school. *Research in Education*, 61, 39–48.
- Dey, I. (1999) *Grounding Grounded Theory: Guidelines for Qualitative Inquiry*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Devine, D. (2002) Children's citizenship and the structuring of adult–child relations in the primary school. *Childhood*, 9(3), 303–20.
- DeVries, R. and Zan, B. (1994) *Moral Classrooms, Moral Children: Creating a Constructivist Atmosphere in Early Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Durkheim, E. (1925/1961) *Moral Education*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Dockett, S. and Perry, B. (1999) Starting school: perspectives from Australia. Paper presented at AREA Annual Meeting, April, Montreal.
- Fenstermacher, G. D. (2001) On the concept of manner and its visibility in teaching practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 33(6), 639–53.
- Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish*. London: Penguin Books.
- Gettinger, M. (1988) Methods of proactive classroom management. *School Psychology Review*, 17(2), 227–42.
- Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L. (1967/1999) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gore, J. M. (1998) Disciplining bodies: on the continuity of power relations in pedagogy. In T. S. Popkewitz and M. Brennan (eds) *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, Knowledge, and Power in Education*, pp. 231–51. New York: Teacher College Press.
- Grace, G. (1995) *School Leadership*. London: Falmer Press.
- Hacking, I. (1999) *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Halstead, J. M. (1996) Values and values education in schools. In J. M. Halstead and M. J. Taylor (eds) *Values in Education and Education in Values*, pp. 3–14. London: The Falmer Press.
- Halstead, J. M. and Taylor, M. J. (2000) Learning and teaching about values: A review of recent research. *Journal of Education*, 30(2), 169–202. Cambridge.
- Jackson, P. W. (1968/1990) *Life in Classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Jackson, P. W., Boostrom, R. E. and Hansen, D. T. (1993) *The Moral Life of Schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Johansson, E. and Johansson, B. (2003) *Etiska Möten i Skolan*. [Ethical Encounters in the School.] Stockholm: Liber.
- Kvalsund, R. (2004) Schools as environments for social learning–shaping mechanism? Comparisons of smaller and larger rural schools in Norway. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 48(4), 347–71.
- Larsson, S. (2009) A pluralistic view of generalization in qualitative research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 32(1), 25–38.
- Merrett, F. and Jones, L. (1994) Rules, sanctions and rewards in primary schools. *Educational Studies*, 20(3), 345–56.
- Meighan, R. and Siraj-Blatchford, I. (1997) *A Sociology of Education*, 3rd edn. London: Cassell.
- Milgram, S. (1974) *Obedience to Authority*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Narvaez, D. (2006) Integrative ethical education. In M. Killen and J. G. Smetana (eds) *Handbook of Moral Development*, pp. 703–32. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Perry, B., Dockett, S. and Tracy, D. (1998) At preschool they read to you, at school you learn to read. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 23(4), 6–11.
- Portelli, J. P. (1993) Exposing the hidden curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 25(4), 343–58.
- Render, G. F., Padilla, J. N. M. and Krank, H. M. (1989) Assertive discipline: a critical review and analysis. *Teachers College Records*, 90(4), 607–30.
- Rudduck, J. (2006) The past, the papers and the project. *Educational Review*, 58(2), 131–43.
- Rudduck, J. and Fielding, M. (2006) Student voice and the perils of popularity. *Educational Review*, 58(2), 219–31.
- Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2000) Pupil participation and pupil perspective: ‘carving a new order of experience’. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30(1), 75–89.
- Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2004) *How to Improve Your School*. London: Continuum.
- Schimmel, D. (1997) Traditional rule-making and the subversion of citizenship education. *Social Education*, 61(2), 70–4.
- Schimmel, D. M. (2003) Collaborative rule-making and citizenship education: an antidote to the undemocratic hidden curriculum. *American Secondary Education*, 31(3), 16–35.
- Sherman, A. (1996) *Rules, Routines and Regimentation*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press.
- Skelton, A. (1997) Studying hidden curricula: developing a perspective in the light of postmodern insights. *Curriculum Studies*, 5(2), 177–93.
- Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn. London: SAGE Publications.
- Tattum, D. (1982) *Disruptive Pupils in Schools and Units*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Thornberg, R. (2006) Hushing as a moral dilemma in the classroom. *Journal of Moral Education*, 35(1), 89–104.
- Vallance, E. (1983) Hiding the hidden curriculum. In H. Giroux and D. Purpel (eds) *The Hidden Curriculum and Moral Education*, pp. 9–27. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.

Correspondence

Robert Thornberg, Linköpings Universitet, 581 83 Linköping, Sweden.
[email: robert.thornberg@liu.se]