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A study of children's conceptions of school rules by investigating their judgements of transgressions in the absence of rules

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This study investigated 202 elementary school children's judgements and reasoning about transgressions when school rules regulating these transgressions have been removed in hypothetical school situations. As expected, moral transgressions were judged as more wrong and less accepted than structuring, protecting and etiquette transgressions. In turn, etiquette transgressions were judged as less wrong and more accepted than moral, structuring and protecting transgressions. Structuring transgressions were judged beyond expectations as more wrong and less accepted than protecting transgressions. Judgements and justifications made by the children showed that they discriminated between transgressions as a function of school-rule category (relational/moral rules, structuring rules, protecting rules and etiquette rules). The findings confirm as well as extend previous social-cognitive domain theory research on children's socio-moral reasoning.

Keywords: challenging behaviour; discipline; management; perception; student

Introduction

In school, classroom rules and other school rules are often intended to regulate student behaviour in order to create and maintain an environment conducive to learning and to prevent all kinds of student conduct that are likely to disrupt activities, cause injury or damage school property (Thornberg, 2008a). However, school rules also define ways of thinking about oneself and the world. They highlight issues of right and wrong, good and bad, and are thus inevitably a part of the moral socialisation project of children in school (Boostrom, 1991; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Thornberg, 2008c). A lot of research has been conducted in order to investigate teachers' perceptions and strategies regarding classroom management and student misbehaviour (e.g. Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008; Lewis, 2006; Liljequist & Renk, 2007; Little, 2005; Shen et al., 2009; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006) and to explore students' perceptions and conceptions of classroom management and behaviour problem in school (e.g. Infantino & Little, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). Nevertheless, much lesser studies have been done in order to investigate students' perceptions and conceptions of school rules.

According to the social-cognitive domain theory, children are not just passive receivers in their socialisation process. Children as well as adults actively interpret and reflect upon their experiences. Some social norms or rules will be accepted while others will be questioned or doubted, or even rejected by them (Neff & Helwig, 2002; Wainryb, 2006). 'The active stance of individuals in relation to their social environment results in both shared and non-shared aspects of culture, both within and between individual members of society' (Neff & Helwig, 2002, p. 1431). Children as well as adults can have different views on the meaning of social practices and of values and norms regulating these practices. They can develop critical attitudes to different aspects of the social milieus they live in, and oppose or even try to change them (Wainryb, 2006).

According to the social-cognitive domain theory (Nucci, 2001, 2008; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983), cognitive structures are developed and organised within the boundaries of fundamental categories, or so-called domains, as a result of being constructed through the individual's interactions with the environment. Based on that, the theory claims that children construct their social

knowledge in three different domains: (1) the moral domain, (2) the conventional domain, and (3) the personal domain (see Table 1). Here, morality refers to 'conceptions of human welfare, justice, and rights, which are functions of the inherent features of interpersonal relations' (Nucci, 2001, p. 7). Morality is structured around considerations of the intrinsic effects that one's actions have upon the well-being of other persons. Examples of moral prescriptions are 'treat people fairly', 'don't hit, kick, or harass others' and 'help people in distress'. Moral judgements are not dependent on socially agreed norms or authorities but are structured by the individual's understanding of fairness and human welfare.

In contrast, social conventions have been defined as 'contextually relative, shared uniformities and norms (like etiquette or manners) that coordinate individuals' interactions in social systems' (Smetana, 2006, p. 121). They are based upon authority, traditions or customs and provide individuals with social norms and expectations regarding appropriate behaviour in different social contexts. Unlike moral issues, social conventions are arbitrary since there are no inherent interpersonal effects of the actions they regulate. Nevertheless, they help to facilitate social interactions and the smooth and efficient functioning of social organisations and activities. Examples of social conventions are 'shake hands when greeting', gender roles, 'address certain people with titles', table manners and so on. Personal issues refer to 'the set of actions that the individual considers to pertain primarily to oneself and, therefore, to be outside the area of justifiable social regulation' (Nucci, 2001, p. 54; also see Helwig, 2006). Thus, these actions are not matters of right and wrong but of personal preferences and choice. Examples of such actions within western culture are actions that focus on the state of one's own body, privacy and choice of friends, partners, or recreational activities. In addition, prudential issues, which refer to actions that the individual engages in which either result in or have the potential to result in self-harm, are included as a specific aspect of the personal domain (see Table 1). Examples of prudential issues are hanging out with 'bad' friends, smoking cigarettes, drinking too much alcohol and engaging in extreme sports. Moreover, the domains are prototypical constructs and therefore overlaps between them exist (Crane & Tisak, 1995b; Nucci, 2001; Nucci & Weber, 1991).

Previous research has shown that children judge moral transgressions as wrong regardless of the presence or absence of rules, while they tend to judge conventional transgressions as acceptable if there are no rules about them. They also consider moral transgressions as more serious and wrong than conventional transgressions (Crane & Tisak, 1995a; Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983; Nucci, 1981; Nucci, Camino, & Sapiro, 1996; Nucci & Herman, 1982; Nucci, Turiel, & Encarnacion-Gawrych, 1983; Nucci & Weber, 1995; Smetana, 1981, 1985; Smetana & Bitz, 1996; Smetana & Braeges, 1990; Smetana, Kelly, & Twentyman, 1984; Smetana, Schlagman, & Adams, 1993; Tisak, Crane-Ross, Tisak, & Maynard, 2000; Turiel, 2008; Weston & Turiel, 1980). Furthermore, children most often justify judgements of moral issues in terms of the harm or unfairness that actions cause, while they most often justify judgements of social conventions in terms of social norms, social expectations, customs and authority (Davidson et al., 1983; Nucci, 1981; Nucci & Weber, 1995; Nucci et al., 1996; Smetana, 1985; Turiel, 2008; Tisak et al., 2000). In addition, with increasing age, children are able to identify and consider both moral and conventional components of mixed-domain events (domain overlap events) in their judgements and reasoning about the events, whereas younger children tend to view mixed-domain acts from only one domain perspective (Crane & Tisak, 1995b; Killen, 1990). Moreover, children rank moral transgressions as well as conventional transgressions as more wrong than transgressions that could be related to personal issues (Nucci, 1981; Nucci & Herman, 1982). Children also rank moral transgressions as more wrong than prudential transgressions (Tisak, 1993).

Table 1. Domains of social knowledge according to social-cognitive domain theory (Nucci, 2001; Nucci, Guerra & Lee, 1991; Turiel, 1983)

Domain	Cognitive content	The logic of judgments, and examples of norms and behaviours
Moral domain	Conceptions of human welfare, justice, and rights, which are a function of the inherent features of interpersonal relations.	A moral judgment about unprovoked harm (e.g., "It's wrong to hit" or "It's wrong to bully") or unfair treatment could be generated solely from the observed intrinsic effects of the act in terms of harm or injustice.
Conventional domain	Conceptions of agreed-upon uniformities in social behaviour (i.e., non-moral social norms) depended on authority, traditions, customs, or consensus, and determined by the social system in which they are formed.	A judgment about conventional transgressions (e.g., not wearing sex-appropriate dresses, wearing a cap in the classroom, or not addressing certain classes of adults by their titles) is depended on the very existence of social norms or standards (i.e., social conventions) because there are no inherent interpersonal effects of this type of actions.
Personal domain	Conceptions of behaviours that the individual considers to pertain primarily to oneself – personal preferences and choices – and therefore, to be outside the area of justifiable social regulation. Whereas conceptions of some actions constitute the *prudential* areas of the personal domain (i.e., they result in potential or actual self-harm), conceptions of other actions constitute the *non-prudential* areas of the personal domain (i.e., they do not result in any potential or actual self-harm).	Examples of actions that might be judged, not as a matter of right and wrong but of personal choice and preference are choice of friends, music, and hairstyle. A prudential judgment (e.g., "I think smoking cigarettes is stupid") could be generated from the fact that the behaviour results in potential or actual self-harm, but could still be considered as a matter of personal preference and choice since the act just harm oneself, not others (e.g., "It's up to me if I will hurt myself or put myself in some danger as long as I don't harm others").

Note that while social-cognitive domain theorists view moral issues as universal and culture-independent (because of the interpersonally inherent effects of moral acts and transgressions), they view conventional and personal issues as culture-dependent.

Children are less accepting of adult constraint when it is used to control their actions in the personal sphere than they are when adult authority is applied to conventional or moral actions. As long as their behaviour in the personal sphere does not harm themselves, they think they, and not the adults, should make the decisions (Killen & Smetana, 1999; Nucci, 1981; Nucci & Herman, 1982; Nucci, Killen, & Smetana, 1996; Nucci & Weber, 1995; Smetana & Bitz, 1996; Tisak & Tisak, 1990). However, actions that harm the actor (prudential issues) are viewed by children as something wrong to do (Nucci et al., 1996; Tisak, 1993) and should be regulated by adult authority (Nucci & Weber, 1995; Smetana, 1989; Smetana & Bitz, 1996; Tisak, 1993; Tisak & Tisak, 1990), but in later childhood and adolescence, the prudential issues are increasingly appropriated by children as matters of personal regulation and choice rather than adult authority regulation (Nucci et al., 1996; Smetana, 1989; Smetana & Bitz, 1996).

Research also shows that students discriminate between school rules and reason about and value them differently in accordance with moral, conventional and personal domains, for example, moral rules are attributed more importance than conventional rules and prudential rules and justified in terms of fairness and others' welfare/harm (Nucci, 1981; Tisak & Turiel, 1984; Weston & Turiel, 1980). According to a study conducted by Smetana and Bitz (1996), children rated moral and prudential rules more positively and moral and prudential violations more negatively than conventional and personal rules and violations. Moreover, conventional rules were rated more positively and conventional violations more negatively than personal rules and personal violations.

A systematic analysis of the muddle of school rules embedded in the everyday school life in two Swedish elementary schools and six classrooms resulted in a classification system of school rules, containing five rule categories (Thornberg, 2008a):

(1) *Relational rules:* refer to rules about how to behave in relation to other people and regulate actions that affect others' welfare. Examples: 'don't fight', 'don't hit or kick others', 'don't tease', 'don't bully' and 'take care of others'.
(2) *Structuring rules:* refer to rules aimed at structuring and maintaining the activities that take place in school or at structuring and maintaining the physical environment, including physical property, where activities take place. Examples: 'no talking during deskwork', 'raise your hand if you want to speak' and 'be careful with school property'.
(3) *Protecting rules:* refer to rules about safety and health and thus comprise rules aimed at promoting or protecting students' health and prohibitions on harming oneself or exposing oneself or others to risks of accidents. Examples: 'don't run in corridors', 'no candy in school', 'don't cycle or roller-skate in the playground' and 'be careful when you play on ice'.
(4) *Personal rules:* refer to rules which call for self-reflection on one's own behaviour and taking personal responsibility for oneself and one's actions. Examples: 'think before acting' and 'do your best'.
(5) *Etiquette rules:* refer to rules which manifest customs, manners or traditions in school ('school etiquette') or in society about how to behave in social situations and which are not covered in the concept of relational rules. Examples: 'don't wear your cap in classroom', 'don't swear or use bad language' and 'don't sit like a "sack of potatoes"'.

In accordance with the prototype model of categorisation (e.g. Dey, 1999), these five rule categories overlap to some degree. So, for example, the ban on swearing is an etiquette rule in regard to swearing when, for example, talking about a movie, telling a story or expressing sudden pain, but a relational rule in regard to swearing at others. The classroom rule against running around in the classroom can be seen as a structuring rule (structuring and maintaining work activity and preventing students from disturbing or disrupting themselves or others in this activity) as well as a protecting rule (preventing students from accidents such as running into furniture or other students, slipping and unintentionally harming themselves or others). With its overlapping characteristics, this category system reflects the multifarious complexity of the school rules and school life (Thornberg, 2008a). In relation to the social-cognitive domain theory, relational rules can be associated with morality and thus can be viewed as moral rules, while structuring rules and etiquette rules may be linked to social conventional issues and hence can be seen as conventional rules.

A qualitative group interview study with 139 primary school students organised in 49 groups (Thornberg, 2008c) shows that the students' reasoning about rules varies across the rule categories. According to the students, relational rules are the most important rules in school, which they primarily justify by relational explanations (referring to harming consequences transgressions have for others, the function of promoting everyone's welfare in school, or referring to relational values such as care and people's equal value). Hence, the study supports the research within the socialcognitive domain theory tradition. Many students also value protecting and structuring rules as important and primarily justify them in terms of protecting explanations (promoting health or preventing accidental injury) and structuring explanations (transgressions result in interrupting or

disrupting ongoing activities or those who are participating in the activities), respectively. Etiquette rules were valued as the least important or even unnecessary by the students. Typically, they viewed etiquette rules as pointless, arbitrary or just 'rules'.

In the light of the category system of school rules, developed and grounded in data (Thornberg, 2008a), and how students reason about and judge school rules (Thornberg, 2008c), the conventional domain within the social-cognitive domain theory could be further developed, at least in application to school rules, because 'conventional rules' appear to be a fusion of at least two rule categories – structuring rules and etiquette rules – and the students actually make distinctions between them in terms of how they value and reason about them. However, the analysis in Thornberg (2008c) was qualitative and conducted by grounded theory methods. It is urgent therefore to further investigate this by quantitative methods and statistical analysis in order to explore the possibility of developing and refining the social-cognitive domain theory.

The aim of the present study was to examine whether children's transgressions judgements and reasons behind such judgements vary as a function of rule category in hypothetical events in which students make transgressions in the absence of formal school rules. Based on previous research, the following hypotheses were tested: (1) children judge moral transgressions as more wrong compared with other transgressions, (2) children judge etiquette transgressions as more acceptable and less wrong compared with other transgressions, (3) children use moral reasons more frequently in their judgements of moral transgressions compared with other transgressions, (4) children use structuring reasons more frequently in their judgements of structuring transgressions compared with other transgressions, (5) children use protecting reasons more frequently in their judgements of protecting transgressions compared with other transgressions, and (6) children use indifference reasons (i.e. claiming it is acceptable because the act makes no difference or has no negative consequences, or just referring to the fact that the rule has been removed) more frequently in their judgements of etiquette transgressions compared with other transgressions.

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 202 students (103 girls and 99 boys) in Grades 4–6 (age range = 10–13 years, M = 11.19, SD = .97) recruited from eight school classes in four elementary schools in Sweden. A non-probability two-step sampling was used in the study. First, a purposive sampling of schools was carried out, which resulted in the inclusion of four schools: (1) a school in the countryside, (2) a school located in a wealthy residential district of a city, (3) a school in a lower-class suburban area of a city, and (4) an inner-city school. Then, a convenience sampling, based on the cooperation of class teachers and volunteer students, was conducted in each school. This two-step sampling procedure resulted in a sample of students from different socio-economic (from lower class to upper middle class) and sociogeographic backgrounds.

Procedures and measures

Two student teachers, at the end of their teacher training, administered a questionnaire to the participating children in their ordinary classroom settings. On the first page of the questionnaire, there was an introductory text, 'This questionnaire is about a school, called Aspen Grove School, and it is quite like your own school. There are many rules at Aspen Grove School. Here are some examples of rules that Aspen Grove School has', and eight typical school rules found in many Swedish elementary schools were listed: (1) 'no bullying', (2) 'be quiet in classroom during deskwork', (3) 'don't run in the corridor', (4) 'don't swear when talking', (5) 'no candy in

school', (6) 'don't speak without permission but raise your hand and wait for your turn if you want to speak', and (7) 'don't hit or kick others'.

After this list, the first page ended with the following text, 'Now, the teachers at Aspen Grove School have decided to take away some rules at the school. In this questionnaire we ask you what you think about this. When you answer, try to ignore what the teachers or other adults at your school think. We want to know what you as a student think'. Eight vignettes (stories) then followed. These vignettes were hypothetical situations representing prototypical examples of moral, structuring, protecting and etiquette transgressions in school settings. The common structure of each story was that it began with the teachers at the fictional school telling the students that they had repealed a specific school rule. After that, the story described an incident in which one or more students engaged in the act, which had previously been forbidden by the repealed rule. There were two stimulus stories presented in each condition. Hence, each condition consisted of two separate transgression events, which were prototypically examples of transgressions of each rule category (moral/relational rules, structuring rules, protecting rules and etiquette rules). Here is an example of a vignette about a structuring transgression from the questionnaire.

> The teachers told the students that they have taken away the rule about no talking in classroom during deskwork. After a while, when they have math, some students are sitting and talking about what they are going to do during the break while other students are doing deskwork in math.

The eight rules in the list on the first page of the questionnaire were used in these eight vignettes. Hence, the moral stimuli were 'bullying' (M1) and 'kicking' (M2). The structuring stimuli were 'talking during seatwork' (S1) and 'speaking without raising their hand' (S2). The protecting stimuli were 'running in the corridor' (P1) and 'eating candy' (P2). The etiquette stimuli were 'swearing' (E1) and 'wearing their cap in classroom' (E2). In order to cope with order effect and carry-over effect, the questionnaire had an A-B-C-D-D-C-B-A design, which means that the eight vignettes were presented in following order: M1, S1, P1, E1, E2, P2, S2 and M2.

Transgression judgements

After each vignette, the children were asked what they thought about the behaviour of the transgressor(s). In the social-cognitive domain theory research tradition, this measures how important children think the specific rule is in terms of *rule contingency*, that is, whether children perceive that the wrongness of a given action depends upon the existence of a governing rule (Nucci, 2001). While domain researchers normally code rule contingency as a dichotomous nominal variable (e.g. 'OK' vs. 'not OK' or 'wrong' vs. 'not wrong') (e.g. Kim, 1998; Nucci & Weber, 1995; Smetana, 1981, 1985; Tisak & Turiel, 1984), in this study, responses regarding transgression judgement (and thus rule contingency) were coded on a five-point scale (1 = 'very bad', 2 = 'a bit bad', 3 = 'I don't know', 4 = 'a bit OK', 5 = 'absolutely OK') in order to be more sensitive to children's judgements and to enhance the quality of the statistical analysis. In this study, an 'I don't know' response was assumed to indicate that the participant could not decide whether to judge the behaviour in the vignette as 'bad' or 'OK'. In other words, responses with 'I don't know' demonstrated that the behaviour in the vignette did not elicit a predominantly positive or negative attitude from the participant. Therefore, 'I don't know' was used as a midpoint.

Reasons for transgression judgements

Furthermore, the children were asked an open question to provide reasons for each judgement, 'Why do you think so? I think so _____ ' ('I think so' was followed by five blank lines), assessing their justifications regarding their transgression judgements. Reasons or justifications behind transgression judgements were coded in categories using a coding scheme described in Table 2. Most of the categories were derived from previous research. *Moral reasons* and *personal choice reasons* were derived from the research body of the social-cognitive domain theory (for a review, see Nucci, 2001; for main references, see Davidson et al., 1983; Nucci, 1981; Nucci et al., 1983; Nucci et al., 1996; Tisak, 1986; Tisak & Turiel, 1984; Yau & Smetana, 2003). Moral reasons can also be related to students' relational explanations in Thornberg (2008c). *Structuring and protecting reasons* were derived from students' rule explanations in Thornberg (2008c). In addition, structuring reasons can be linked to the part of conventional items in the social-cognitive domain theory research, which indicates appeal to the need for social organisation, maintaining a system of shared expectations between persons in order to promote the smooth running in the social group and to avoid disruption or creation of disorder (e.g. Davidson et al., 1983; Nucci, 1981; Tisak, 1986).

Moreover, protecting reasons can be compared in part with prudential items in the social-cognitive domain theory. However, while protecting reasons are about considering harming consequences on oneself as well as risks of accidents in which oneself as well as others may be injured, prudential reasons are confined to the former. *Indifference reasons* are found in Thornberg (2008c) as typical reasons among students behind their critique of etiquette rules and why they think it would be okay to engage in etiquette transgressions if such rules were removed. Indifference reasons have also been found in the social-cognitive domain theory research regarding children's non-judgement of conventional transgressions (e.g. 'Because there is no rule', see Nucci, 2001, pp. 7–8). Other categories used in this study (i.e. socio-normative, pleasure and impulse reasons) were empirically derived from the responses of the present study by using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) before the final coding. Even if socionormative reasons (the parts which refer to social norms, customs, traditions or politeness) can in part be related to conventional items in the social-cognitive domain theory research, this category is nevertheless well grounded in the empirical material by the constant comparative method. While two raters coded the reasons by working together, a third rater coded the reasons independently of the other two raters. A comparison of the two coding outcomes showed a 96% agreement. The raters discussed the minor disagreements with each other until a consensus was reached and the consensus was then coded.

Result

Transgression Judgments

Means and standard deviations for the transgression judgments are presented in Table 3. Because there were no specific hypotheses about sex or age differences, sex and age were not included in further analyses. Mean responses for each transgression type were analysed using a one-way ANOVA with repeated measures on transgression judgments across the four transgression types. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumptions of sphericity had been violated (χ^2 = 31.52, p < .001); therefore degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity (ε =.907).

Table 2. Reason categories.

Category	Description	Examples
Moral reasons	Refers to the intrinsic effect of the act upon the well-being of the others or to moral values such as fairness, care, equality, or altruism. Points to the intrinsic negative consequences of the transgression of a rule in terms of harming others or unfairness.	"Because the other person gets hurt and becomes upset", "The victim gets hurt inside as well as outside", "Unfair because everyone doesn't get the time he or she needs to figure out the answer",
Structuring reasons	Refers to the need to maintain the activity (such as a lesson) or promote the smooth running in the social group during the activity. Points to negative consequences in terms of interrupting or disrupting ongoing activities or interrupting or hindering those who are participating in the activities.	"The kids who are working have to have peace and quiet to be able to concentrate" "Even if there is no rule, you shouldn't sit and talk in the classroom because then you disturb the others", "Because if everyone talks at the same time, then you can't hear what others are saying"
Protecting reasons	Refers to the need to promote health or prevent accidental injury. Points to negative consequences in terms of ill health on behalf of the transgressor or risks of accidents where the transgressor or others unintentionally get hurt.	"Because they might run into others so they get hurt, and you might slip and fall", "Because candy is unhealthy and you might get holes in your teeth", "It may be dangerous", "In the worst case you might get tinnitus"
Insignificant reasons	Refers to the unimportance, insignificance, meaningless or arbitrariness of a rule in itself by (a) stating that the transgression does not result in any negative consequence, that nothing happens or that it does not matter, or (b) stating that it is acceptable to engage in the act because the rule has been removed.	"You don't hurt anybody by swearing", "Because it doesn't disturb anyone and you don't work any worse because of that", "It makes no difference if you work with a cap on or not", "Because I don't get disturbed by someone talking" "It's okay because the rule has gone", "Because it was allowed"
Socio-normative reasons	Refers to normative statements ("It's wrong to…", social norms (including rules and laws), customs, traditions or politeness.	"Because it's not a rule, it's the law!", "Because it's bad", "It's wrong to fight", "Because almost everyone actually swears", "Because it's normal to talk a bit", "Because every child must use proper language",
Personal choice reasons	Refers to individual's preferences or prerogatives, that it is up to the individual to decide for her- or himself.	"Because I think you should make the choice yourself if you want to swear or not. That's none of the school's business, as long as you don't harass anybody", "Because a cap could be a part of their personality", "Because you should decide what to wear yourself"
Pleasure reasons	Refers to pleasure, wants or amusement, that the act is fun to do, or to avoidance of boredom, hardiness or things the actor does not want to do.	"It's fun to talk", "Because almost everyone likes candy – it's good", "It's comfortable wearing a cap", "Because it's boring to just be quite"
Impulse reasons	Refers to lacks of impulse control in the situation, an inability to impose self-regulation or self-control in the situation, or a spontaneous act without thinking	"Because when you get hurt like that, you don't think", "It hurts so much that you can't control yourself"
Other reasons	Reasons such as negative role modeling, negative influence on the reputation of the school, and so on.	"Because you might teach younger kids to bully", "Because you might have a bad hair day and want to cover your hair"

There was a significant main effect for rule category for transgression judgments, F (2.72, 546.82) = 488.64, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .709$. Post hoc Bonferroni t tests (all $ps < .001$) showed that the children differentiated among all four types of events. As expected, moral transgressions were judged as more wrong and less accepted than structuring, protecting, and etiquette transgressions. In turn, etiquette transgressions were judged as less wrong and more accepted than moral, structuring, and protecting transgressions. Structuring transgressions were judged beyond expectations as more wrong and less accepted than protecting transgressions.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for transgression judgments

Judgment means	Moral items	Structuring items	Protecting items	Etiquette items
Total (N = 202)	1.18 (0.41)	1.99 (0.84)	2.98 (1.07)	3.62 (1.06)

Frequency Changes in Reason Responses across the Transgression Events

Percentages of children using different reasons behind judgments are shown in Table 4. As can be seen, moral reasons were the most frequent reasons when children judged moral transgressions (60%). Structuring reasons were the most frequent reasons among the children when they judged structuring transgressions (67%). Protecting reasons were the most frequent reasons among the children when they judged protecting transgressions (39%). And insignificance reasons were the most frequent reasons among the children when they judged etiquette transgressions (54%).

In order to test hypotheses c-f, the frequency changes regarding moral, structuring, protecting, and indifference reasons were analysed. Cochran's Q tests for each of the four response categories were conducted to find out if a significant change existed in each of these response categories as an effect of the transgression variation, i.e., across all eight events. The level of significance (α) used in this statistical significance testing part of the analysis was .05. If a significant change was found in a variable, pair-wise post hoc comparisons were conducted. The first step was to rank all the mean differences from the largest to the smallest between the eight events. Then the largest difference was tested by McNemar's test. If this difference was significant, the next step was to test the second largest difference with McNemar's test. If this difference was significant, the third largest difference was tested by McNemar's test, and this procedure continued until non-significance was detected. In order to maintain $\alpha = .05$ across all the comparisons, the significance was tested according to $\alpha' = \alpha/c$ in which c refers to the number of operated comparisons (cf., Thornberg, 2006).

Frequency Changes in Moral Reasons

The results from the first Cochran's Q-test indicate a significant change in the frequency of moral reasons across the eight transgression events ($\chi^2 = 546.4$, $p < .000$). The follow-up post hoc test shows that moral reasons were significantly more frequent in the bullying event, as compared to the swearing event ($\chi^2 = 118.01$, $p < .000$), the cap-wearing event ($\chi^2 = 117.01$, $p < .000$), the running-in-corridor event ($\chi^2 = 117.01$, $p < .000$), the talking-during-seatwork event ($\chi^2 = 108.21$, $p < .000$), the speaking-without-raising-hand event ($\chi^2 = 62.84$, $p < .000$), and the candy-eating event ($\chi^2 = 52.08$, $p < .000$).

Table 4. Percentages of children using each reason response in order to justify their transgression judgements.

	Moral items			Structuring items			Protecting items			Etiquette items		
Reason categories	Bullying	Kicking	*Mean*	Talking during seatwork	Speaking without raising hand	*Mean*	Running in corridor	Eating candy	*Mean*	Swearing	Wearing cap	*Mean*
Moral	60	59	60	3	18	11	1	22	11	0	1	1
Structuring	0	1	0	64	70	67	24	3	14	0	5	2
Protecting	2	17	10	0	2	2	37	41	39	0	1	0
Indifference	0	1	1	13	8	11	35	17	26	51	56	54
Socio-normative	47	27	37	11	5	8	5	11	8	25	12	19
Personal	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	3	6	11	9
Pleasure	0	0	0	5	0	3	3	16	10	0	12	6
Impulse	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	0	14
Others	2	4	3	6	1	4	7	3	5	2	4	3

Note: Since participants might operate with more than one reason category in their responses, totals add up to more than 100% in each event.

In addition, the post hoc test also indicates that moral reasons were significantly more frequent in the kicking event, as compared to the swearing event (χ^2 = 117.01, p < .000), the running-in-corridor event (χ^2 = 114.08, p < .000), the cap-wearing event (χ^2 = 112.21, p < .000), the talking-during-seatwork event (χ^2 = 107.21, p < .000), the speaking-without-raising-hand event (χ^2 = 62.84, p < .000), and the candy-eating event (χ^2 = 52.08, p < .000). Hence, the children more often responded with moral reasons to both events of moral transgressions (the bullying event and the kicking event), as compared to structuring transgressions, protecting transgressions, and etiquette transgressions. There was no significant difference between the bullying event and the kicking event regarding the frequency of moral reasons.

Furthermore, the post hoc test also indicates that moral reasons were significantly more frequent in the candy-eating event, as compared to the swearing event (χ^2 = 39.20, p < .000), the cap-wearing event (χ^2 = 36.54, p < .000), the running-in-corridor event (χ^2 = 36,54, p < .000), and the talking-during-seatwork event (χ^2 = 27.57, p < .000). Thus, the children more often used moral reasons as a response to protecting transgression of candy-eating (e.g., "because some people might not have any candy and then it becomes unfair"), as compared to protecting transgression of running-in-corridor, structuring transgression of talking-during-seatwork, and etiquette transgressions. Moreover, the post hoc test also shows that moral reasons were significantly more frequent in the speaking-without-raising-hand event than in the swearing event (χ^2 = 34.03, p < .000), the running-in-corridor event (χ^2 = 29.64, p < .000), and the cap-wearing event (χ^2 = 29.64, p < .000). Thus, the children more often used moral reasons as a response to structuring transgression of the speaking-without-raising-hand event, as compared to protecting transgression of the running-in-corridor and etiquette transgressions.

Frequency Changes in Structuring Reasons

The second Cochran's Q-test reveals a significant change in the frequency of structuring reasons across the transgression events (χ^2 = 721.7, p < .000). The follow-up post hoc test indicates that structuring reasons were significantly more frequent in the speaking-without-raising-hand event, as compared to the bullying event (χ^2 = 139.01, p < .000), the swearing event (χ^2 = 139.01, p < .000), the kicking event (χ^2 = 135.06, p < .000), the candy-eating event (χ^2 = 132.01, p < .000), the cap-wearing event (χ^2 = 129.01, p < .000), and the running-in-corridor event (χ^2 = 71.39, p < .000). In addition, the post hoc test also indicates that structuring reasons were significantly more frequent in the talking-during-seatwork event, as compared to the bullying event (χ^2 = 127,01, p < .000), the swearing event (χ^2 = 127.01, p < .000), the kicking event (χ^2 = 123.07, p < .000), the candy-eating event (χ^2 = 120.01, p < .000), the cap-wearing event (χ^2 = 115.07, p < .000), and the running-in-corridor event (χ^2 = 55.72, p < .000). Hence, the children more often responded with structuring reasons to both events of structuring transgressions (speaking-without-raising-hand and talking-during-seatwork), as compared to moral transgressions, protecting transgressions, and etiquette transgressions. There were no significant difference between the speaking-without-raising-hand event and the talking-during-seatwork event regarding the frequency of structuring reasons. Furthermore, the post hoc test also indicates that structuring reasons were more frequent in the running-in-corridor event, as compared to the bullying event (χ^2 = 47.02, p < .000), the swearing event (χ^2 = 47.02, p < .000), the kicking event (χ^2 = 43.18, p < .000), the candy-eating event (χ^2 = 31.13, p < .000), and the cap-wearing event (χ^2 = 30.72, p < .000). Hence, the children more often used structuring reasons as a response to protecting transgression of running-in-

corridor, as compared to protecting transgression of candy-eating, moral transgressions, and etiquette transgressions.

Frequency Changes in Protecting Reasons

The third Cochran's Q-test reveals a significant change in the frequency of protecting reasons across the transgression events (χ^2 = 368.0, p < .000). The follow-up post hoc test shows that protecting reasons were significantly more frequent in the running-in-corridor event, as compared to the swearing event (χ^2 = 73.01, p < .000), the talking-during-seatwork event (χ^2 = 72.01, p < .000), the cap-wearing event (χ^2 = 69.12, p < .000), the bullying event (χ^2 = 66.13, p < .000), the speaking-without-raising-hand event (χ^2 = 62.65, p < .000), and the kicking event (χ^2 = 20.78, p < .000). In addition, the post hoc test also shows that protecting reasons were significantly more frequent in the candy-eating event, as compared to the swearing event (χ^2 = 80.01, p < .000), the talking-during-seatwork event (χ^2 = 77.11, p < .000), the cap-wearing event (χ^2 = 74.30, p < .000), the speaking-without-raising-hand event (χ^2 = 69.60, p < .000), the bullying event (χ^2 = 69.60, p < .000), and the kicking event (χ^2 = 25.10, p < .000). Hence, the children more often responded with protecting reasons to both events of protecting transgressions (running-in-corridor and candy-eating), as compared to moral transgressions, structuring transgressions, and etiquette transgressions. There were no significant difference between the running-in-corridor event and the candy-eating event regarding the frequency of protecting reasons. Furthermore, the post hoc test also indicates that protecting reasons were significantly more frequent in the kicking event, as compared to the swearing event (χ^2 = 32.03, p < .000), the talking-during-seatwork event (χ^2 = 29.26, p < .000), the cap-wearing event (χ^2 = 26.70, p < .000), the speaking-without-raising-hand event (χ^2 = 21.19, p < .000), and the bullying event (χ^2 = 20.10, p < .000). Thus, the children more often used protecting reasons as a response to moral transgression of kicking, as compared to moral transgression of bullying, structuring transgressions, and etiquette transgressions.

Frequency Changes in Indifference Reasons

The fourth Cochran's Q-test reveals a significant change in the frequency of indifference reasons across the eight transgression events (χ^2 = 410.5, p < .000). The follow-up post hoc test indicates that indifference reasons were significantly more frequent in the cap-wearing event, as compared to the bullying event (χ^2 = 110.01, p < .000), the kicking event (χ^2 = 104.22, p < .000), the speaking-without-raising-hand event (χ^2 = 88.48, p < .000), the talking-during-seatwork event (χ^2 = 72.25, p < .000), the candy-eating event (χ^2 = 59.29, p < .000), and the running-in-corridor event (χ^2 = 25.57, p < .000). Furthermore, the post hoc test also shows that indifference reasons were more frequent in the swearing event, as compared to the bullying event (χ^2 = 100.01, p < .000), the kicking event (χ^2 = 96.01, p < .000), the speaking-without-raising-hand event (χ^2 = 73.72, p < .000), the talking-during-seatwork event (χ^2 = 70.31, p < .000), the candy-eating (χ^2 = 47.76, p < .000), and the running-in-corridor event (χ^2 = 13.65, p < .000). Thus, indifference reasons were significantly more frequent used in both events of etiquette transgressions (the swearing event and the cap-wearing event) than in moral transgressions, structuring transgressions, and protecting transgressions. There were no significant difference between the swearing event and the cap-wearing event regarding the frequency of indifference reasons.

Moreover, the post hoc test also reveals that indifference reasons were significantly more frequent in the running-in-corridor event, as compared to the bullying event (χ^2 = 67.01, p <

.000), the kicking event (χ^2 = 61.35, p < .000), the speaking-without-raising-hand event (χ^2 = 39.2, p < .000), the talking-during-seatwork (χ^2 = 26.33, p < .000), and the candy-eating event (χ^2 = 17.26, p < .000). Thus, indifference reasons were more frequently used in protecting transgression of running-in-corridor than in moral transgressions, structuring transgressions and in protecting transgression of candy-eating. In addition, the post hoc test also shows that indifference reasons were significantly more frequent in the candy-eating event, as compared to the bullying event (χ^2 = 30.03, p < .000), and the kicking event (χ^2 = 28.27, p < .000). This indicates that indifference reasons were significantly more used in protecting transgression of candy-eating than moral transgressions.

Discussion

The findings of the present study extend previous social-cognitive domain theory research on children's socio-moral reasoning (for reviews, see Nucci, 2001, 2008; Smetana, 2006) by examining whether school children's reasoning varies as a function of rule category based on a recent categorisation of school rules (Thornberg, 2008a). According to Thornberg (2008c), children appear to differentiate between four main categories of school rules, in a way, which points to different underlying logics. Even if the rule categories do not entirely correspond with the domains described in social-cognitive domain theory (e.g., Turiel, 1983; Nucci, 2001), the results in Thornberg's (2008c) as well as in the present study support claim that children make a distinction between moral and non-moral issues. The first hypothesis, i.e., children judge moral transgressions as more wrong compared to other transgressions, and the third hypothesis, i.e., children use moral reasons more frequently in their judgments of moral transgressions compared to other transgressions, were supported. Hence, the findings confirmed previous social-cognitive domain theory research regarding the concept of moral domain and the powerful impact this domain has on judgment and reasoning (e.g., Davidson et al., 1983; Nucci, 1981; Nucci & Weber, 1995; Turiel, 2008).

However, in the light of the category system of school rules (Thornberg, 2008a), and how students judge and justify their judgments regarding transgressions at school in the absence of school rules, the conventional domain within social-cognitive domain theory could be challenged and further refined. Based on theoretical descriptions (e.g., Nucci, 2001) and conventional items used in previous research (e.g., Davidson et al., 1983; Nucci, 1981; Tisak, 1986), structuring rules and etiquette rules are social conventions and associated with the conventional domain. However, the second, fourth and sixth hypotheses (i.e., children judge etiquette transgressions as more acceptable and less wrong than other transgressions, children use structuring reasons more frequently in their judgments of structuring transgressions and indifference reasons more frequently in etiquette transgressions compared to other transgressions) were all confirmed, showing that the children differentiate between structuring issues and etiquette issues. Based on how the children in the present study made transgression judgments and reasons for their judgments, (a) structuring transgressions are judged as less wrong than moral transgressions but more wrong than etiquette transgressions, (b) acts that are regulated by etiquette rules tend to be judged as rule-dependent while acts that are regulated by structuring rules tend to be judged as rule-independent, and (c) while children tend to criticise structuring transgressions by referring to their negative consequences in terms of disrupting, obstructing or disturbing the school lesson or those who participate in the lesson, they tend to accept etiquette transgressions by referring to the indifference to the act, i.e., the act has no negative effects (nothing bad happens) or it does not matter because the rule is gone. An essential difference between structuring rules and etiquette

rules is that to a considerably greater extent the students appear to make sense of the former rule category (structuring reasons), while they more often appear to see no meaning at all regarding the latter rule category (indifference reasons). Based on their responses, the structuring rules are conceptualised by the students as functional, whereas the etiquette rules are conceptualised as arbitrary.

An alternative or complementary explanation of students' discrimination of structuring and etiquette transgressions may be the possible existence of domain overlap between morality and social convention when judging structuring transgressions and domain overlap between social convention and personal issues when judging the etiquette transgressions. Previous research has shown that children rank moral transgression as more wrong than conventional transgressions, and both as more wrong than transgressions that could be related to personal issues (e.g., Nucci, 1981; Nucci & Herman, 1982). However, even if a minority of students in the present study used moral reasons regarding the second structuring event (speaking without raising hand) and few students used personal choice reasons regarding the etiquette events, the majority of the students in fact used structuring reasons in the structuring vignettes and indifference reasons in the etiquette vignettes. Thus, the results show that the theoretical construction of conventional domain needs to be developed by differentiating between social norms within this domain and it probably would improve the theory by being more sensitive to children's socio-moral reasoning, at least in the context of school. It seems to be relevant to construct sub-domains by pointing to the findings indicating that children themselves make a distinction between structuring and etiquette conventions.

Furthermore, the findings show that protecting transgressions were judged as more wrong than etiquette transgressions but less wrong and more accepted than moral and structural transgressions. Within the concept of protecting rules, Thornberg (2008a) makes a distinction between health-related rules, which refer to those rules aimed at promoting or protecting the students' own health, and accident prevention rules, which refer to those rules aimed at preventing students from unintentionally harming themselves or each other by accidents. Transgressions to the former sub-category of protecting rules can be related to prudential transgressions in the framework of social-cognitive domain theory (see for example, Nucci, 2001; Nucci et al., 1996). Hence, breaking the school rule of no candy in school is a prudential transgression because of the harming consequences on oneself in terms of teeth caries and unhealthy overweight. Such protecting reasons were also the most common reason category used among the children when they evaluated the transgression of this rule (also see Thornberg, 2008c).

Nevertheless, the later sub-category of protecting rules (accident prevention rules), which is represented in the current study by the transgression of the school rule of not running in corridors, is a bit trickier to relate with the social-cognitive domain theory, since the transgressor *might* harm him- or herself as well as *might* harm others depending on the fuzzy risk of accident. At first sight, this sort of rule transgression could be seen as a domain overlap between morality and prudential issues. However, the issue of unintentional harm and fuzzy risk of accidence is (a) in conflict with doing moral judgments in accordance with the social-cognitive domain theory since the harming effects of the act is *not intrinsic* but only possible in a rather unknown way, and (b) highlights the question of whether morality should be judged in terms of intentions, consequences or both, an issue which is reflected in some empirical research on children's moral reasoning (e.g., Feinfield, Lee, Flavell, Green & Flavell, 1999; Rule & Duker, 1973).

While it is not possible to kick another person with force and not hurt that other person, it might be possible to run in the corridor without hurting other persons. While the intention of kicking another person with force is to hurt the person, there is no intention of hurting others by running

in corridors (even if the action might result in such consequences as a result of bad luck). Considering these differences indicates that more work within the tradition of social-cognitive domain theory has to be done in order to better incorporate protecting rules and explain the children's evaluation of and reasoning about protecting transgressions, regarding its sub-category of accident prevention rules.

In accordance with Neff and Helwig (2002) and Wainryb (2006), the findings in this study confirm that children are not passive recipients in their socialisation process, but actively interpret their experiences and reflect upon them, whereby some rules will be accepted while others will be questioned or doubted, or even rejected by them. The current study supports other studies showing that children reflect upon, value, judge, and differentiate between school rules (e.g., Nucci, 1981; Thornberg, 2008c; Weston & Turiel, 1980), and even criticise some of them (e.g., Alerby, 2003; Thornberg, 2008b, 2008c). A conclusion that is possible to draw, considering how the children judge different rule transgressions and make reasons for their judgments, is that children tend to be more positive to school rules (and hence negative to transgressions) if they: (a) can make sense of the rule, i.e., perceive or recognise explanations that justify the existence of the rule, and (b) believe in this sense-making, i.e., that rule explanations and justifications are perceived as reasonable and trustworthy.

The children view moral rules as important by judging moral transgressions as wrong, simply because they make sense of and believe in these rules by pointing to the harmful effects which transgressions have on the victims. One possible cognitive explanation of why these moral transgressions are judged as most wrong among the children is the empathic distress and "hot" cognitions such transgressions evoke (Hoffman, 2000) – affective processes that more seldom occur when witnessing non-moral transgressions (also see Nucci, 2001, pp. 107-123). The vast majority of the children in the current study also viewed structuring rules as important by judging structural transgressions as wrong, because they make sense in these rules and point to negative consequences which transgressions result in.

While many children judge protecting transgressions as wrong, others judge them as less wrong and more accepted. Those who think it is more or less acceptable to break the protecting rules often use insignificant reasons, indicating that they do not make sense of the rules or do not believe in the rule explanations. For example, as in Thornberg's (2008c) study, a typical reason why some children judge running in corridors as acceptable or not so wrong is that they believe that accidents do not happen (e.g., "I don't crash into other people. I look where I'm going", a second-grade boy, in Thornberg, 2008c, p. 47), and hence reject the teacher explanation of the rule (i.e., they see the point but do not believe in it). In contrast, those who judge a protecting transgression as more wrong and less acceptable make sense of the rule and believe in it, typically in terms of protecting reasons, but also other reasons come up. They find the rule explanation reasonable. In contrast to the other rule transgressions, etiquette transgressions are judged as most accepted by the children. The most frequently used reasons to justify such judgments are to refer to unimportance, insignificance, meaningless or arbitrariness of the rule in itself. As in Thornberg (2008c), a lot of children seem to (a) have a problem of making sense of etiquette rules, or (b) mistrust or reject explanations teachers have given them in order to justify such rules. This could, at least in part, explain why children tend to accept transgressions of etiquette rules significantly more than transgressions of other school rules.

Several notes of caution, however, need to be sounded regarding the generalisability of these findings. First, the particular examples of transgressions used in the vignettes limit the membership variation of the rule categories. Hence, it would be urgent to investigate children's judgments of transgressions related to other rules within those categories to better generalise the

findings. Second, the sample of participants in the study also limits the generalisability, because they are sampled from only four elementary schools in Sweden, and without using a representative sampling technique. Third, the events are confined to school setting scenarios. Fourth, it is also important to recognise that studying how children respond to hypothetical stories in "paper-and-pencil" tests is not the same as studying how they respond in real-life situations and could therefore easily be criticised in terms of ecological validity (cf., Cicourel, 1982). One of the main problems is that this procedure excludes a lot of factors that are more or less important in real-life situations, such as significant emotions (distress, anxiety, arousal, anger, etc.) and the presence of real people, group processes, and social relationships. Nevertheless, the use of hypothetical stories enables researchers to get responses from all the children to the same social situations and is economical in terms of time and resources needed to collect data (Eisenberg et al., 1994). Moreover, some studies have actually shown that the judgments children made of transgressions in real-life events generally corresponded with their judgments of transgressions in hypothetical events (Smetana et al., 1999; Turiel, 2008), which, according to Turiel (2008), points to the ecological validity of children's reasoning found in many studies.

Fifth, it is important to draw attention to the fact that the participants did not all react in the same way, which actually indicates some degree of overlapping between the four categories of transgressions, and hence, between the four rule categories. Also in previous social-cognitive domain theory research, overlaps between different domains have been found (see Nucci, 2001), and it is thus faced with the same problem. This effect in turn can be associated with the prototypical model of categorisation and contrasted with the classical model of categorisation (see Dey, 1999; Lakoff, 1987). "A prototype is seen as a set of typical characteristics of a category. Membership of a category is thus a question of degrees of family resemblance to a prototype rather than all members sharing the total set of common features" (Thornberg, 2008c, p. 50). The prototypical model may be interpreted as less elegant and systematic than the classical model, but is instead fairer and more sensitive to the multifarious complexity of the social reality. Furthermore, if categories are defined only by a set of properties that all members share (i.e., properties that are both sufficient and necessary to define membership of the category) as in the classical model of categorisation, then no member should be a better example of the category than any other member. Nevertheless, research within cognitive psychology as well as linguistics has shown the prototype effect – that is, certain members of a category are judged to be more representative of the category than other members, which shows that the prediction of the classical model has failed (see Lakoff, 1987). An alternative or complementary interpretation of the response variation found in the findings in the present study as well as in previous studies may be that it simply more or less reflects the individual variation across the children regarding their socio-moral reasoning, due to differences in their development of social and moral cognition or due to differences in their social history and environment.

The present study has practical implications. First, the findings show the importance of being aware of the existence of different types of school rules. A clear framework of rules can counteract vagueness. The rules can be analysed with a more conscious concern for priorities among them, which in turn makes it easier to consider the degree of reasonableness and necessity, as well as making rules clear and understandable. "A systematic categorisation of school rules highlights their content, logic and functions and, thus, provides a professional language of school rules that promotes a more conscious and professional classroom management and discipline in school" (Thornberg, 2008a, p. 31). Second, students' attitudes toward and conceptions of school rules seem to be linked to rule category, which is important to consider when conducting classroom management, working with school rules, and dealing with discipline issues. Third, to dis-

cuss and explain why different rules exist appears to be a significant educational strategy, because if students do not see the point of the rule or do not believe in the point (the rule explanation), they probably have a negative attitude toward the rule. Negative attitudes toward too many school rules might easily undermine students' trust in teacher authority and the school's system of rules.

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