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Teacher perceptions of socially withdrawn children

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses how understanding teacher's beliefs and perceptions about socially withdrawn behaviours offers insight into how teacher-child relationships may support or harm the child. This study examined teacher perceptions of characteristics such as 'intelligent', resilient' and 'assertive', at primary school level by using teacher ratings in response to vignettes describing shy and unsociable children of both genders. Teacher beliefs about the negative costs of socially withdrawn behaviour, and attributions of socially withdrawn behaviour were also explored through teacher ratings, and teacher reported pedagogical practice was investigated through open-ended questions.

Ninety seven teachers responded to an online survey. They rated withdrawn children most highly on the characteristics of intelligent, self-controlled and capable, and least highly on the characteristics of assertive, self-confident and cooperative. This study found that teachers do differentiate between shy and unsociable children, with unsociable children generally viewed more favourably than shy children. Teachers did not distinguish between withdrawn children on the basis of gender, however, interaction effects were also found across a range of characteristics, with a general pattern of less concern for 'female shy' and 'male unsociable' types. Teachers perceived more negative cost (both academic and social) for the shy type of child. The teachers who answered this survey demonstrated knowledge about ways if assisting socially withdrawn children, although suggestions differed vastly. Recommendations were made that teachers be encouraged to be more aware of the consequences of social withdrawal and of their own responses to socially withdrawn children.

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