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Teachers' perspectives of gender differences in the social behaviours of preschool children

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Abstract

The present research study explored early childhood teachers' perspectives about social behaviours and gender in young children, in particular the way in which children's gender related to teachers' reports of the prevalence of, perspectives about, and strategies used in response to children's social behaviours. The specific social behaviours examined within this study were prosocial behaviours, social leadership, social dominance, and aggressive behaviours. This study was designed within an interpretivist and pragmatic epistemology, and used a mixed methods online survey to investigate teachers' perspectives. The online survey was comprised of four sections: demographics; defining social behaviours and their traits; social behaviour scenarios; and gender and *Te Whāriki*. To allow investigation of differential responses related to gender, two versions of the survey were created where the gender of the child portrayed in the social behaviour scenarios differed across survey versions. The gendered scenarios were used to gather data on whether there was a difference in teachers' perspectives about and the teaching strategies used for children's social behaviours based on the gender of the children involved. The majority of the responses to the survey indicated that the teachers identified there to be little difference in the display of social behaviours in young children based on children's gender. However, the two social behaviours which were reported by the teachers as having the most differences based on gender were social leadership and aggression. The teachers' strategies identified in the findings showed that there was some difference in teaching strategies used based on the children's gender, specifically in the areas of social dominance and aggression. The findings provide a snapshot of the way in which teachers define and interpret social behaviours, and suggest that gender plays a limited, but still potentially significant role in the teaching practices they chose to adopt in a variety of scenarios. The teacher's acknowledged the importance of ensuring gender equity in their practices, but findings suggest that further support may be needed to aid in the delivery of equitable practices.

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