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Self-Identified Childhood Shyness and Perceptions of Shy Children: Voices of Elementary School Teachers

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Abstract

Childhood shyness plays an important role in terms of learning and socialization and can have profound effects on individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that can carry over into adulthood. The present study investigated how self-identified childhood shyness might influence elementary school teachers' current perceptions of shyness among their students. Participants were 14 elementary school teachers. Interviews were conducted over the telephone and transcribed for content analysis. Analysis revealed themes of *social factors, personal factors,* and *relating to shyness* that contributed to childhood shyness. Moreover, these experiences of childhood shyness appeared to contribute to teachers' current perceptions of shyness (among teachers who self-identified as shy children). Implications for future research and holistic educational practices are discussed.

Keywords: Childhood Shyness, Teacher Perceptions of Shyness.

Introduction

Coplan and Armer (2007) define shyness as an individual's feelings of uneasiness or hesitation when faced with a novel or unfamiliar situation. Growing evidence suggests that shyness, particularly in early childhood, may pose a risk for later adjustment difficulties such as internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety, depressive symptoms), problems with peers (e.g., rejection, victimization), and school difficulties (e.g., poor academic achievement, school refusal) (see Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009, for a recent review). Harter (2008) suggests that individuals make meaning from their experiences by constructing theories about the self and the world around them. As such, an individual's childhood plays an important role with regards to learning and socialization, not only in the classroom (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008), but may also continue throughout the lifespan and continue to play a role in adulthood (Hamer & Bruch, 1994).

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Conversely, individuals who were shy may have had experiences that allowed them to outgrow their shyness. One only needs to look to the Internet to discover the many self-help books, online forums, and stories of individuals dealing with their shyness available for children and adults, with advice on overcoming shyness and dealing with shy children from psychologists and other professionals. The website (www.shyandfree.com) documents stories and experiences of individuals who have overcome or are still in the process of dealing with their shyness. This website also contains a database of information that can be found online, available for reference for shy individuals wishing to address their shyness. Information readily available by the Internet clearly indicates a growing fascination with shyness, particularly the idea of overcoming shyness.

Increasing awareness for shyness, particularly at the elementary level has been brought to attention, mainly due to teachers considering shyness as a possible problem in the school environment (Coplan, Hughes, Bosacki, & Rose-Krasnor, 2011). Coplan et al. suggest that this growing awareness is due to empirical literature linking to future socioemotional difficulties in adolescence and subsequently, adulthood.

Regardless of individual experiences, the literature supports that childhood shyness may affect adults' thoughts and feelings of their current world, their intentions, and future behaviors. This may hold particular relevance for elementary school-aged children, as Berry and O'Connor (2009) point out, the elementary school years marks a markedly rapid increase in social skill development. As teachers spend a majority of their careers interacting with and influencing their students, the present study explored how teachers' previous experiences with shyness, as students themselves, affected their daily interactions with their students and their general perceptions of shyness.

Teacher Perceptions of Shyness

According to Harter (1990), the self is a social construction, based largely on others' beliefs about the self. These significant others include parents, classmates, close friends, and teachers. Undoubtedly, a child's shyness has potential effects on how teachers perceive them, as positive teacher-child relationships may play a particularly important protective role in the socio-emotional adjustment of shy children at school (Arbeau, Coplan, & Weeks, 2010; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta, Steinbergy, & Rollins, 1997). As young children spend a majority of their days within an early childhood education setting (Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011), this early experience affects both a child's short- and long-term educational experiences, as there are increased social interactions between their peers and educators.

Past research has found that teachers perceive shy children to be more socially competent in terms of cooperation and self-control compared to bolder children (Rudasill & Konold, 2008) and tended to be good listeners, less likely to get into trouble, and tended to develop intimate, close relationships with one or two friends (Bosacki, Coplan, Rose-Krasnor, & Hughes, 2011). Conversely, teachers also perceived shy children as less socially competent in areas of assertiveness (Bosacki et al., 2011.; Rudasill & Konold, 2008). In terms of success, Hughes and Coplan (2010) found that teachers tended to rate shy children as less academically competent, despite a child's actual academic performance, as based on standardized test scores. This has important implications for student achievement, as shy students may be perceived as being less engaged and therefore, have weaker academic skills than more outgoing children. The results of these studies suggest there are clearly different ways of interpreting shyness, leading to different types of consequences.

In further extending Hughes and Coplan (2010), Coplan et al. (2011) reported that a teachers' own personality can affect their perceptions of student behavior. In their study, teachers were given hypothetical vignettes of shy and outgoing children. It was found that non-shy

teachers, as indicated by self-report measures of shyness, rated shy/quiet children as being significantly less intelligent whereas self-reported shy teachers did not. It was suggested that shy teachers tended to draw from their own experiences with shyness may have contributed to their current perceptions of shy children. It was in their experiences of shyness themselves that shy teachers tended to attribute a child's shyness to other factors such as self-consciousness and anxiety as opposed to less intelligence. Although there were differences in perceptions of shy children, all teachers use a variety of different strategies in encouraging shy children to be more outgoing, regardless of whether teachers self reported as shy or outgoing.

With regards to how teachers deal with shyness, Arbeau and Coplan (2007) suggest that teachers are more tolerant of unsociable children than shy children, as teachers perceive shy children to exhibit far greater anxiety or distress in social situations whereas unsociable children prefer solitary play and are not distressed from it. Teachers may therefore be more likely to directly encourage social skills to shy children (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007; Bosacki et al., 2011).

Teacher perceptions of shyness have a bi-directional effect in that a child's characteristics affect teacher behavior and perception and teacher behavior affects a child's behavior (Rudasill, 2011), with higher quality teacher-child relationships relating to greater social skills compared to children with lower quality teacher-child relationships (from kindergarten to sixth grade; Berry & O'Connor, 2009). Teachers who have a negative perception of their students can negatively affect a child's social development and academic success (Hughes & Coplan, 2010), particularly among children whose shyness goes undetected by parents and teachers (Spooner, Evans & Santos, 2005).

Arbeau et al. (2010) investigated the moderating role the teacher-child relationship has on a shy child's school adjustment. Child shyness, teacher-child relationships, and child adjustment measures were taken throughout a school year. It was found that a close teacher-child relationship, as defined as warm and supportive, provides a "secure base to help [children] explore the classroom" (p. 263), thereby helping children better adjust in the school environment. Conversely, shy children who are too dependent on teachers may miss opportunity to interact with peers and explore the classroom environment, potentially alienating themselves from peers. Thus, it is important to take into consideration the caregiver-child relationship, as how it pertains to the child's social development.

Although there have been many studies on teachers' perceptions of shyness, considerable attention paid to teacher-child relationships, particularly focusing on its affects on a child's social behaviour in the classroom and academic success in the classroom (Arbeau et al., 2010; Myers & Pianta, 2008). What these studies have not addressed is how teachers form these perceptions of shyness. Few studies explore teachers' perceptions of their own learning experiences as grade school students, and how these reflections may influence their current perceptions of shyness and their own teaching styles.

Present Study

This exploratory study sought to gain a better understanding of elementary school teachers' perspective of their students by incorporating their personal characteristics. The current study aims to complement the recent findings by Coplan et al. (2011) by exploring teacher characteristics from a qualitative perspective and incorporating teachers' personal characteristics and stories, as shaped by their own experiences as children, in forming their current thoughts and feelings towards shy children in their classroom. Our research questions were as follows:

1. Is there a difference between teachers who self-identified as shy children as compared to teachers who self-identified as outgoing with regards to how they perceive the shyness in their students?
2. Has a teacher's self-identified childhood shyness affect the way in which they deal with shy children in their own classroom?

Based on the theoretical framework of Harter (2008) and the recent findings by Coplan et al. (2011), it was hypothesized that teachers who self-identified as shy children will draw upon their experiences as shy children in their current perceptions and subsequently, draw on these experiences when they are in dealing with shy children in the classroom. Conversely, teachers who self-identified as outgoing children may not draw on experiences of shy individuals they may know, but nonetheless can sympathize with shy children in their classroom.

Methods

Participants

The present study involved 14 elementary school teachers (12 female; 2 male) from kindergarten to grade 8. They were recruited as part of a larger, ongoing study on elementary school teachers' perceptions of shyness within the classroom (Bosacki et al., in press; Coplan et al., in press). Participants' taught in a variety of different community settings (5 urban; 3 suburban; 6 rural), with teaching experience ranging from 1 to 40 years (M=12.2, SD=9.93). One participant did not disclose their years of teaching experience. Table 1 provides a brief description of each participant in the study. For reasons of confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned for each participant.

Table 1. Description of participants

Participant	Gender	Teaching experience (years)	Grade taught	School community setting	Date of Interview (Month/Day/Year)
Jennifer	Female	1	Grade 8	Suburban	05/01/2008
Melanie	Female	15	Grade 3/4 split	Rural	05/15/2008
Alexis	Female	3	Grade 4	Rural	05/08/2008
Jeremy	Male	21	Kindergarten	Rural	05/27/2008
Joe	Male	8	Grade 4	Suburban	06/04/2008
Tanya	Female	12	Grade 4/5 split	Urban	06/11/2008
Ada	Female	10	Grade 2	Suburban	07/24/2008
Jessica	Female	6	Grade 8	Rural	08/11/2008
Judy	Female	12	Grade 2	Rural	04/18/2009
Megan	Female	n/a	Grade 2/3 split	Urban	03/31/2009
Annie	Female	14	Grade 2	Urban	04/02/2009
Wendy	Female	5	Grade 6/7 split	Urban	04/07/2009
Ashley	Female	40	Grade 2, 3/4 split	Urban	06/03/2009
Michaela	Female	12	Kindergarten	Rural	06/08/2009

Procedure

Upon clearance from the University research ethics board and permission from participating professors, a researcher visited continuing education classrooms outlining the scope of the study. Teachers interested in participating contacted researchers through e-mail to arrange a date and time that was convenient and provided a telephone number for researchers to contact them. Interviews were conducted over the phone, during the time period of 2008 to 2009. After the interview, participants received a small honorarium, as a thank you for participating in the study.

Measures

Data collected were open-ended questions with a semi-structured interview format. Interview questions were part of a larger ongoing study on teacher's perceptions of childhood shyness. In the current study, we focused on the following questions:

1. Were you a shy child? Why or why not?
2. Are you a shy person now? Why or why not?
3. Has your shyness—or the shyness of the people you know—affected your ideas about shyness and your responses to shy children? Why or why not?
4. How confident are you that you know how to deal with shy children in the classroom?

Follow up questions were also asked if needed, to further clarify, elaborate or explain the participants' responses.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. According to O'Connell and Kowal (1999), transcribed interviews are a representation of the recorded data, which in turn is a representation of the original data, thus, it "cannot incrementally approximate the experience of the original participants" (p. 111). In the transcription process, proper punctuation was used, to ensure that redundancy in the data was minimized. Repeated words, utterances, and prosodic information were excluded in the interview transcript.

Since the transcribed data is only a representation of what was expressed in an audio-recorded interview, member checking was utilized to confirm reliability and validity of data (Creswell, 2008). After transcription, participants were provided the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview. Member checking allowed the participants to review what was recorded during the interview as well as confirm that what was interpreted by the researcher was a valid representation of what the individual meant to convey during the interview (Creswell, 2008). At this time, participants had the opportunity to review what was said during the interview and also to ensure that the data was an appropriate representation of what they wanted to express. The participants were free to edit, add, or choose to withdraw parts of the interview that they felt uncomfortable in sharing. Electronic copies of the transcript were provided to participants.

Results and Discussion

Transcribed interviews were subject to content analysis. According to Berg (2001), content analysis seeks to understand "better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words" (p. 242). Data analysis was done by hand, highlighting and grouping the transcribed data into codes. Hand analysis entails researchers reading through the data, coding by hand and organizing it into its subsequent themes (Creswell, 2008). Coding of data was completed inductively, with the first author reading through all transcripts for recurring key terms that were in the data (Berg, 2001). Highlighting key words throughout the interviews lead to the emergence of codes, and were subsequently used to create a coding scheme (Appendix) that was used for all the teacher interviews. Reliability was established by having the second author code all transcripts independently using the coding sheet developed for the purpose of this study. Reliability was established at 95% and differences in coding were negotiated between the first two authors.

Preliminary analysis revealed 10 of the 14 (71%) participants self-identified as "shy" when they were children. Of these 10 participants, nine (90%) indicated that they were no longer

shy as adults. The remaining four (29%) participants reported that they were either outgoing or was neither "shy" nor "not shy" as children. Of these four participants, one (25%) indicated that they are shy as an adult, dependent on the situation.

Emergent Themes

Part of the inductive process of content analysis includes incorporating codes into general themes. Themes were derived when the first and second authors grouped similar codes to minimize redundancy. This was a three-step process in which the combination of codes to create a general code resulted in a more complex definition of the resulting code. Tables 2 and 3 below show our progression of how codes and subsequent definitions were grouped together:

Table 2. Grouping of codes to create super codes—step 2 of analysis

New code	Definition
Self-consciouness	Participant describes negative factors that contribute to shyness
Fear of judgement	
Need to be perfect	
Confidence	Participant describes positive factors that contribute to shyness
Experience	Participant describes specific instances from the past that contribute to shyness
Drawing from experience	
Learning from experience	
Social dynamics	Participant describes external situations that contribute to shyness
Family dynamics	
Normalcy	Participant describes individual factors including a predisposition to shyness that contributes to shyness
Individual differences	
Genetics	
Sympathy	Participant describes feelings of concern for shyness.
Raising awareness	
Communication	
Empathy	Participant describes feelings of putting themselves in the place of a shy student.
Preferences	
Connection with student	

Note.—The first two authors grouped the redundant codes together to form new codes and subsequent definitions.

Table 3. Grouping of codes to create themes—step 3 of analysis

New Code	Definition
Personal factors	Participant describes internal factors that contribute to shyness
Self-consciousness	
Confidence	
Normalcy	
Social factors	Participant describes external factors that contribute to shyness
Experience	
Social dynamics	
Relating to shyness	Participant describes relating to individual who are shy
Sympathy	
Empathy	

The resulting codes revealed three themes. Shyness, as perceived by the participants in this study, was seen as a combination of the themes of *social factors, personal factors,* and *relating to shyness*.

Social factors. *Social factors* pertained to issues of shyness that were affected by the participants' immediate environment (including situations that occurred in the classroom and family environment) and relationships with others (including family, teachers, and peers). Among self-identified shy participants, relationships with others often sparked fears of being judged by others, which is generally considered a core component of shyness (e.g., Crozier, 2010). For example, Michaela (a female kindergarten teacher) indicated that she were shy as a result of being judged negatively by peers: "afraid I'd be wrong, afraid that I'd look, I guess, really silly in front of my peers." Overcoming a fear of being judged was something that the self-identified shy participants stated, particularly concerning being in front of others: "I became more sure of myself. Like when I was giving an answer, I wasn't scared to be wrong. I was giving my opinion and that was what I felt was right" (Jennifer, female grade 8 teacher).

Another participant (Annie, female grade 2 teacher) indicated that she was concerned about being judged negatively by peers, but realizing that her immediate social environment forced her to re-think her own shyness:

Sometimes it's watching your own life and looking at people who had a bazillion friends and where they're at and where you are. And I think motherhood…You learn be it a medical thing or be it someone budding in line in front of your kid. There's way more situations as a parents where you need to be somewhat assertive.

Social factors were also found in the ways participants perceived the students they taught. Jennifer (female grade 8 teacher) indicated that the children in her class were shy for different reasons, including interpersonal factors: "Some of them are shy just because that's just the way they are and others are shy because they were raised very old-fashioned, children are being seen not heard. And again it is a social thing."

Similarly, Ashley (female grade 2 and 3/4 split teacher), based on her experiences as a child who was shy, states that talking is a part of the learning experience and incorporates it into her classroom: "As long as I can walk around and hear it's good discussion about whatever it is, then it's focused learning. I think that's wonderful. A quiet classroom, while it might be delightful some days, is not always a learning classroom, is not always a rich language learning environment. It can be a very sterile learning environment."

Interestingly, four participants (two self-identified shy and two self-identified outgoing) stated that they have a preference for students who were like them as children. Michaela (female kindergarten teacher) indicated that:

I tend to tune the kids that talk a lot out, and I know I shouldn't, but I do, and sometimes I give them less of my attention, well I know I give them less of my attention than someone who rarely talks and decides that they will speak. I pay more attention to that person, and probe deeper, try to get them to say more than I do with someone that's always talking.

Tanya (female grade 4/5 split teacher) expresses a similar perception of their shy students, indicating that she is "sort of familiar with that and [are] more sensitive to it and conscious of it…[she is] more aware and watch out for the child who might be shyer than others."

Judy (female grade 2 teacher), who self-identified as an outgoing child, also indicated that she had a preference for students that were like her, and attributed it to her experiences as a child who was not shy:

> I guess maybe the fact that I know that I've never had a problem talking. I don't know if I prefer those students in my class, but I would say that you sort of look for kids who were sort of like you, who were comfortable enough to speak out, like…I think you tend to be more…or maybe give them some privilege to take some things to the office for you, or go find out something for you, specially…who can handle extra jobs and stuff.

Jessica (female grade 8 teacher), a self-identified outgoing child, stated that she tended to be more patient around shy individuals, however, the patience is limited: "I tried to be sympathetic, maybe they're sure or unsure whatever, but if it continues I kind of start to lose sympathy."

These participants draw from their experiences and perhaps use those experiences to relate to students who were like them. However, this bias towards shy children is not always negative, as Ada (female grade 2 teacher) stated:

> When I catch myself, sort of pigeonholding a child and saying maybe they can't handle this because they are quiet or anxious or shy, I have to remember that people tried to do that to me and they didn't succeed and I was given an opportunity, and because of that opportunity, I grew.

Jessica (female grade 8 teacher) expressed a similar perception:

> I'm much more patient with shy children…I guess when I look at myself, I think, well I had to get over all this and I had to be more outgoing and that, so I don't know why other people can't, and I think that's a nice thing to say about myself but that's sometimes how I feel.

Finally, participants indicated the importance of connecting with their students. Similar to what Ada (female grade 2 teacher) indicated about giving each student an opportunity, opportunity acts as a way to increase a child's confidence in dealing with their shyness. Annie (female grade 2 teacher) reflected back on a shy student she had and indicated:

> I think of the girl especially that I taught last year, just how important it was to make sure that every dealing with her was on a level key and that every dealing with her built up her confidence. Because if you had, not that we yell a lot, but if someone had yelled or snapped at her it would have just devastated her…you sort of hold her in the palm of her hand and watch her grow.

Judy (female grade 2 teacher) stated:

> I just feel that talking and communicating is number one in education, and in life. I think that the biggest thing that parents can do, the greatest thing parents can do for their children is talk, and encourage them to talk, make connections in their head, and sometimes, and just that will prepare them for school, and will help them while they are in school, and that they have ideas, and practice how to convey them.

Personal factors. The second theme of *personal factors* pertained to individual characteristics or experiences that might contribute to one being shy. Participants discussed their own individual reasons for being shy as children. For example, Ada (female grade 2 teacher) indicated: "I was an anxious child too, it took me a while to feel comfortable in an environment and until I was comfortable, I wasn't going to share with you." Annie (female grade 2 teacher) agreed: "I think it was class, made up most of my anxiety. Teacher's kid. Some pressure, and some of it was self-imposed pressure to think that things needed to be perfect." As with Ada and Annie, Jeremy (male kindergarten teacher) expressed similar sentiments about their own reasons for being a shy child: "To me, it was completely to divert attention from myself, so I just stay quiet and try to stay in the shadows." To these participants, childhood shyness was a matter of self-consciousness (Crozier, 2010), just a part of their personality.

Personal factors were also evident in the ways participants *grew out of* shyness. For instance, Tanya (female grade 4/5 split teacher) attributes maturity and independence as a way that she overcame her shyness: "I think you just become more comfortable with yourself as you get older…I've just become more generally self-confident. You sort of know who you are." Knowing oneself was an important factor for Michaela (female kindergarten teacher), who indicated: "I know what's safe for me now, and I know that people I can talk with, I know them pretty well and they know me pretty well. As for my administrators and teachers I don't know so well, I'm leery about what I say and tell them."

Among participants who self-identified as outgoing children, their *outgoing nature* was also due to their own personality. For example, Alexis (female grade 4 teacher) indicated that they were just "funny as a child." Wendy (female grade 6/7 split teacher) indicated: "I kind of think it's genetics a little bit. I think I was born just more social." Similar to the participants who self-identified as shy children, these participants also indicated a level of comfort and confidence as adults that contribute to their non-shyness: "I'm very very comfortable in my job and I'm very comfortable in my life right now which makes it very easy in many situations" (Jessica, female grade 8 teacher).

With regards to understanding shy children, *personal factors* were important in that participants understood that individuals were shy for different reasons, just as they were shy for different reasons. It is this understanding of individual differences that participants used to perceive and also approach shy children in their classroom. Jennifer (female grade 8 teacher) stated:

Getting to know [shy students] individually as people has shown me that there are many different reasons for being shy and that exposed me to a whole other reason to consider why a student may be shy…I mean, I was shy for different reasons than they are shy, but I can understand that fear of speaking up in front of your peers. I can relate to them on that level.

Within these perceptions was also a level of normalcy within shyness. For instance, Joe (male grade 4 teacher) stated, "I suppose it's a coping mechanism that can work in some ways and have some benefits for the kids." Wendy (female grade 6/7 split teacher) agreed:

> I think it's acceptable to be shy so I don't think of it as a big huge problem. If they're concerned about it, if they don't like their shyness, I'll try and help them get over it, but if they're fine with the way they are, I'm going to pressure them or make them change and be more outgoing or whatever.

Lastly, Joe stated that kids are generally "able to grow in different ways, academically and in their own, away from themselves."

Relating to shyness. Interestingly, two of the four participants (50%) who self-identified as outgoing children indicated that their own experiences did not affect their current perceptions of shy children and shyness in general. Wendy (female grade 6/7 split teacher) explains: "I don't think there's much in common. From what I've seen anyway." One participant (Jessica, female grade 8 teacher) who self-identified as an outgoing child stated, "I think I can be empathic and compassionate." These participants were still confident in dealing with shyness in the classroom. Judy (female grade 2 teacher) indicated, "I could read the visible signs of discomfort, and I can sympathize with them, when it becomes too much." Alexis (female grade 4 teachers) expressed similar sentiments of sympathy: "I just feel I have a good understanding of how to get through to them."

In contrast, the self-identified shy participants indicated that their experiences affected their perceptions of the shy students in their classroom. These teachers also noted that children are shy for many reasons (whether it be for social or personal reasons), which may reflect their own experiences of growing up shy. These teachers also indicated that they can relate to their shy children because of their experiences. *Relatability* and *empathy* was a concept that resonated among these participants, who indicated that they were confident in dealing with shyness in their classrooms. For example, Melanie (female grade 3/4 split teacher) stated: "I tended to be one of the children that sat back and didn't like to put my hand up, so I know how they feel at times so I know not to pressure them too much." Drawing from one's own experience overlapped between the themes of personality factors, social factors, and sympathy vs. empathy. Ada (female grade 2 teacher) stated, "I think what helps is that I would have considered myself a shy child in school, so sometimes I do go from my own perspective and experiences and think that's helpful." Feeling empathic towards shy children meant drawing from their own experiences as children.

General Discussion

The current study explored elementary school teachers' perceptions of shy children in the classroom, particularly focusing on teachers' own experiences growing up as a shy or not shy student. Based on our sample, the majority of teachers reported being shy as children themselves and suggests that the idea of shyness is normal and individuals who self-identify as shy develop their own means of overcoming or dealing with their shyness. Overall, results suggest that teachers who self-identified as outgoing children were outgoing as a result of just being sociable or being forced to be sociable as children. In terms of their perceptions of shyness in their classrooms, although they did not indicate that they drew from their experiences as children, outgoing teachers indicated that they are more compassionate and sympathetic to shy children. Some participants indicated a bias towards shyness, with participants having a bias towards children who were like them.

The participants in the current study who indicated that they were outgoing as children were more favorable towards students who were also outgoing and more talkative, providing them with more opportunities such as assigning them extra jobs around the classroom (Judy). Conversely, the self-identified shy participants in the current study were more likely to encourage shy children, as they would try to provide learning opportunities for shy children, to coax them out of their shell by probing or encouraging shy children to speak up in class

(Annie & Michaela). Regardless of whether the teachers in this study were shy as children or not, all were confident in dealing with shyness in the classroom, as it seems to be a matter of getting to know each child while encouraging children to participate while simultaneously understanding that each child has individual differences and needs.

Spooner et al. (2005) reported that there is a moderate discrepancy between a child's self-reported shyness and shyness reported by parents and teachers. Thus, it is possible that parents and teachers may be unable to recognize shyness in children. Few studies to date have investigated the teachers' own characteristics (Coplan et al., 2011). Coplan et al. (2011) found that both shy and non-shy teachers reported that shy/quiet children would do worse academically in their class than talkative/outgoing and average children. However, outgoing teachers also rated shy children as less intelligent than average and talkative kids whereas shy teachers did not rate them as less intelligent, suggesting that shy teachers understood that shy children's academic performance may be affected by other factors (i.e., being anxious in class) as opposed to differences in intelligence. The results of the current study compliment the findings of Coplan et al., by demonstrating that self-identified shy teachers did draw upon their experiences as shy children when trying to understand students in their classroom. This indicates the importance of teachers recognizing a child's unique needs in terms of school adjustment (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007) and subsequently and constantly reflecting on their own biases to help shy children thrive (Hughes & Coplan, 2010).

As suggested by See and Arthur (2011), it is important for teachers to reflect in their behavior, as students' values "can be shaped by their school experiences outside the curriculum" (p. 143). Overall, the results from Coplan et al. (2011) and the current study indicate the importance of incorporating teacher personality within research and practice, as current research has indicated that teacher personality influences the classroom environment by having an effect on their students' behaviors, academic success, and interpersonal relationships (Arbeau et al., 2010; Hughes & Coplan, 2010).

Limitations and Future Research

Given the relatively small sample size (n = 14), the present study is not representative of the population of Canadian elementary teachers in general. In addition, there were only four participants in the study who did not self-identify as shy children, under representing the experiences of teachers who were not shy as children. Future studies could replicate the current study, involving more teachers, allowing a greater chance that a larger sample of self-identified outgoing teachers would participate. Furthermore, the current study under represents the number of male elementary school teachers and their experiences. Having only two male teachers participate in the study is unsurprising, as many elementary teachers are women. However, past research has indicated that the presence of a male teacher can greatly influence classroom dynamics and ultimately, the way in which children interact with the teacher and with one another (e.g., Coplan et al., 2011; Rubin & Coplan, 2004). Because the current study only had two male elementary teachers participate, it was not possible to draw gender comparisons and suggests the need for future research on the role male teachers' play in shy children's elementary school experiences.

Given the gender and cultural background of both the teacher and the student play a role in the classroom environment, researchers need to explore both children's and teachers' stereotypic gender-role expectations toward shyness. That is, gender may not only play a role in shy children's experiences in the classroom but may also continue to influence teachers' perceptions of shyness in both themselves and their students. Future studies could address the issue of why there is exists a gender-biased elementary school teacher population with a higher number of female educators. In addition, future research could

explore how the gender of the teacher and how a teacher's gender and gendered experiences can affect their views of shyness among their male and female students.

The current study involved teachers from a variety of diverse sociocultural teaching settings (urban, suburban, rural) and educational experience. The diversity of teaching experience provides us with different classroom experiences from which the teachers in this study could share with us. Despite this, participants in the current study did not report their own ethnicity or the ethnicity of their students. As a result, the influences of ethnicity and culture have in the classroom environment could have been missed in the current study. Future studies could investigate differences in perceptions of shyness in a variety of different ethnic and socioeconomic environments.

Despite these limitations, we believe that the current study provides a unique qualitative perspective of the experiences of teachers, and in particular, their experiences in dealing with shy children in their classroom by incorporating teachers' critical self-reflections of their teaching and learning practices based on their own school experiences as children. At time of writing this article, to the best of our knowledge, few studies have investigated teacher personality (e.g., Coplan et al., 2011; Roussi-Vergou et al., 2009) and how this could affect their thoughts, feelings, and behavior towards their students. Findings from this study may further our understanding of teacher-student relationships from the point of view of the teacher's own experiences as children, and how these experiences may have shaped their own teaching practices. Lastly, the present findings could be applied to teacher education programs aimed to promote children's social and emotional competence. In addition, findings could provide the foundation for professional development workshops to further understand teachers' perceptions of shyness and children's social and emotional development, specifically when it comes to engaging students in their classroom and in particular, improving academic performance and socioemotional competence.

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APPENDIX

Coding Scheme

Code	Definition
Family dynamics	Participant explains shyness in terms of family situation
Self-consciousness	Participant explains shyness in terms of not wanting to stand out (specify)
Fear of judgement	Participant explains shyness in terms of fear of being judged (specify: others, self, public speaking)
Confidence	Participant explains shyness in terms of confidence or being comfortable (specify: e.g. building, lack of, building independence)
Social dynamics	Participant explains shyness in terms of situations they experienced (specify: e.g. peers, social, educational)
Empathy	Participant explains how they can relate to their students (specify e.g. having patience, relating to child)
Sympathy	Participant explains how they can relate to their students (specify e.g. having patience, relating to child)
Normalcy	Participant explains shyness as normal stage of growing up
Preference	Participant explains having a preference for types of students (specify e.g: providing opportunities, understanding shyness)
Communication	Participant explains shyness as a way to communicate (specify)
Drawing on experience	Participant uses examples of their perceptions by drawing on their own experiences (specify)
Learning experience	Participant explains shyness as a learning experience (specify e.g.: maturity, learned assertiveness, practice)
Need to be perfect	Participant explains shyness in terms of wanting to be perfect
Connection with student	Participant explains the need to make a connection with students (specify e.g. relating to child)
Individual differences	Participant explains that shyness is different for each person
"Genetics"	Participant explains shyness/nonshyness result of just being like that normally (e.g. anxious)
Raising awareness	Participant explains need to raise awareness of shyness (specify)

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