

Quiet at School: An Educator's Guide to Shy Children

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reviewed by [Melissa M. Jozwiak](#) — January 22, 2018

Title: Quiet at School: An Educator's Guide to Shy Children

Author(s): Robert J. Coplan & Kathleen Moritz Rudasill

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Quiet at School, a new book by Robert J. Coplan and Kathleen Moritz Rudasill, illuminates the complexity of a teacher's work and provides practical strategies for teachers to positively impact the educational experience of shy children. The book begins by helping the reader understand what constitutes shyness and why it is critical that teachers are thoughtful about how they respond. By clearly describing what shyness is and what it isn't, the authors dispel common misconceptions and, importantly, resist positioning shyness as a weakness. Instead, they illustrate potential positive and negative outcomes associated with this trait.

In defining shyness, the authors provide a brief history of shyness, including an approachable summary of relevant research. They then examine the challenges professionals face as they work with shy individuals, including definitional challenges, common misconceptions about shyness (for example, the difference between being an introvert and being shy), and the biological and genetic factors that may influence shyness. Their examination of shyness occurs within the contexts of family and school, and consistently emphasizes the complexity inherent in working with individuals for whom there is no single best practice.

The book moves from the definitional aspects of shyness in Chapter One to the biological and genetic foundation of shyness in Chapter Two. Chapter Three considers the impact of nurturing on shyness, looking specifically at attachment and parenting to consider the impact of parenting styles on shy children. More and less helpful parental behaviors are considered with an explanation as to why that behavior may be more or less helpful. While considering the role of attachment and parenting, Chapter Three provides numerous points at which the reader can see the implications of child development theory on parenting and professional work with children. Some examples from this chapter include theorists such as Bowlby, Ainsworth, Bandura, Baumrind, and Mead.

In the chapter on parenting and throughout the rest of the book, the contexts of family and the classroom are examined from various perspectives so that the reader sees possible outcomes associated with various responses. For example, in talking to "shy parents of shy children, teachers should be mindful that these parents will likely be worried about their child... [and] may over-identify with their shy



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children” (p. 37). By alerting the reader to the possible reactions a shy versus non-shy parent may have, the specific communication strategies a teacher employs can be more or less effective. This non-prescriptive approach affirms teacher agency.

Adding depth to this examination of shyness, Chapter Four asks, “should we worry about shy children?” In considering that question, the authors inform the reader about how shy children may be experiencing school. Specifically, they discuss the impact of shyness on social skills, social interactions with peers, and the impact of decreased social skills on academic learning. One laudable contribution of the book is the author’s consideration of the benefits of being a shy child, as being a shy child may enable the child to be viewed by others as “a good listener, easier to approach and as having a calming influence on others” (p. 52). This presentation of shyness as a potential strength gives dimension to how shyness impacts children’s lives. The authors remind us that “shyness does not define children—it is but one aspect of their personality” (p. 52). In doing so, the authors avoid portraying shyness as a fault that must be overcome. This multi-faceted presentation of shyness makes the book ripe for reflection and discussion on the complex work of teachers. By assisting the reader in understanding how the shy child may be experiencing the classroom, including situations which are more likely to produce stress for the child (e.g., testing and highly dynamic classrooms), the reader can evaluate their own classroom. By highlighting that “academically, shy children tend to perform less well than their non-shy peers” (p. 63) and by helping the reader differentiate between ability and outcome, the important role a teacher plays in supporting a shy child is reiterated.

Across chapters, the authors provide numerous opportunities for the reader to be reflective about their role in supporting shy children as they negotiate stressful situations, as well as how they may be perpetuating shyness. The reader can examine how their own attitudes and actions influence interactions and consider the importance of their relationship with students. In a way that inspires hope about the tremendous opportunity teachers have to make a positive impact on all, and especially on shy children, this book creates safe spaces for the reader to be honest and self-reflective. The frequent use of scenarios provides opportunities for discussion on current practices, field-based observations, potential responses, and the impact of student diversity. Cautionary explanations of how we can mistakenly interpret behaviors or enable unproductive behaviors while attempting to help children are examples of the safe spaces for reflection provided within this book.

As Chapter Six outlines why relationships matter, Chapters Seven and Eight build on this foundational principle and maintain optimism for teachers whose work is heavily impacted by factors beyond their control. These chapters highlight various approaches to supporting children as they navigate school. They include practices commonly used outside of the classroom and classroom strategies. The strategies cited recognize the “heavy emphasis on evaluation, both real and perceived” (p. 93), as well as the role expectations, consistency, communication, and mentoring all play in the classroom. The strategies identified will be familiar to many educators. This is both a strength and missed opportunity in the book. The familiarity may help teachers feel more optimistic that they can support shy children. It is also a missed opportunity to propose novel uses of digital technology and applications to foster continuity and transition.

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MELISSA M. JOZWIAK is an Assistant Professor at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Her research interests focus on examining continuity and discontinuity in early childhood education, continuity in early childhood systems, Transformative Learning Theory, and sustainability in university laboratory schools. She is the co-author of *Continuity in Children’s Worlds: Choices and Consequences for Early Childhood Settings*. She holds a doctorate from New Mexico State University.

The last chapter provides the reader with a succinct list of key messages presented in preceding chapters, highlighting the three most important takeaway messages. This quick reference tool is valuable to pre-service teachers, who may read the book as part of a course on child development, curriculum and instruction, or classroom management, then revisit the book to evaluate their practices in the classroom. These bulleted summaries also serve as conversation starters for instructors or professional development coaches to generate and evaluate educational implications and strategies.

Teacher preparation coursework includes examinations of diverse learners. This book adds shyness to these examinations, considering factors that impact students' educational experience and success. Through a blending of research, theory, and scenarios, this book provides education professionals with a new forum where they can reflect on and consider how they can better support diverse learners, especially the shy child.