



The Role of Conversation in Children's Co-Construction of Gender Norms

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Abstract

This presentation highlights a key finding from PhD research around how children use peer dynamics within social settings to co-construct gender norms. It draws on PhD research carried out with children in years 3 and 5 in a Birmingham primary school, exploring how they constructed and negotiated gender discourses through their writing, drawing and talk. Focusing on the talk element of the research design, this presentation reflects upon findings from focus group conversations exploring children's perceptions of gender norms, specifically ways of being and behaving. It was found that children used allyship and banter to manipulate power dynamics within the group, and this had both a direct and indirect impact on the co-construction of discourses and norms around gender. Poststructuralist theories of power (Foucault), positioning (Davies and Harré) and performativity (Butler) illuminate ways in which children both perpetuate and challenge dominant gender norms, pointing to the power of conversation for discursive shift. This finding is reflected upon in relation to opportunities for talk within the classroom.

Keywords: focus groups; gender; relationships; peer dynamics