

“SHE ALWAYS GIVES GRADES
LOWER THAN ONE DESERVES:”
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
RUSSIAN ADOLESCENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF
FAIRNESS IN THE CLASSROOM

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The influence of teacher care and support in students’ learning and motivation underscores the critical importance of fairness perceptions in the classroom. In this qualitative study we examined perceptions of unfairness and fairness among Russian grade nine students. We interviewed a total of 32 students in two traditional Moscow high schools individually and in focus groups. Students’ comments revealed a novel dimension of unfairness and fairness, centered on teachers’ pedagogical competence. In addition, the frequency and ways in which students spoke about unfairness and fairness differed depending on the interview format. We discuss our results in the context of the unique sociocultural and historical context in which these students were coming of age.

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Achievement motivation research is increasingly focused on the critical importance of supportive and caring relationships with teachers in fostering student engagement and adaptive learning beliefs (Dowson & McInerney, 2003). Students who feel cared for tend to have positive self-concept and be higher achieving, learning- and goal-oriented, and intrinsically interested in and responsible about their school work. In addition, they display more prosocial and supportive behavior towards their peers and report a stronger sense of connectedness and belonging in school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

The development of caring relationships can be quickly undermined by students' perceptions of injustice or unfairness as a basic moral sensibility. Research demonstrates that from elementary school through the college years, perceptions of unfair treatment inhibit achievement, undermine interest and enthusiasm in learning, suppress student morale, and foster negative affect and attitudes in the classroom (Chory-Assad, 2002; Wendorf & Alexander, 2005). In contrast, perceptions of fairness foster student engagement and learning (Wentzel, 2009). Therefore, it is important for teachers and researchers to better understand what students perceive as fair and how fairness criteria are (co)constructed.

Our focus on fairness in the present study was driven by our recently completed large scale research project about Russian adolescents' overall perceptions of their classroom experiences (see Bempechat, Mirny, Li, Wenk, & Holloway, 2011). In the 2011 study, students described their teachers and peers not as individuals, but as members of their cohort and confidently used the "we" voice in their accounts. They described relationships with teachers as being especially close and supportive, and expressed a shared image of a good teacher, which included strong subject matter knowledge, keen pedagogical skills, adept classroom management ability, and the fair and equitable treatment of students. This latter issue was particularly salient for the students, in that they passionately spoke about ways in which teacher feedback and treatment could be quite idiosyncratic. Inasmuch as some teachers were perceived as fair in their grading and feedback practices, others were described as inconsistent and biased. This discrepancy was a cause of much concern and discussion among these students, and it merits further investigation. Understanding what students identify as fair and unfair and why they do so can help educators and researchers identify classroom experiences and practices that support students' positive affect in the classroom, their relationship with teachers, and ultimately their achievement motivation.

Students' achievement beliefs do not develop in a vacuum. They are co-constructed with adults and peers in the context of the larger social, cultural, and historical context in which

they are developing. This notion has particular relevance for the students in the present study. They were coming of age in a new and increasingly individualistically-oriented Russia, but were raised and educated by adults who grew up in the Soviet Union, an authoritarian society that embraced wholly different values of a collectivist nature. Accordingly, our research was grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory of development, which positions the child at the center of five increasingly distal, complex, and interrelated spheres of influence. The spheres that are particularly significant for our study are the microsystem, which is the most proximal, and the macro and chronosystems, which are the most distal. The microsystem encompasses the immediate settings that contain the child, including home and school. The macrosystem refers to the overarching distal influences of a society's culture, which include its political, legal, and educational institutions. Shared beliefs and values are transmitted and communicated to individuals through these institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Importantly, Bronfenbrenner argued that development within these systems cannot be understood independently of historical events. He conceptualized the chronosystem as having a profound and differential effect on individuals, depending on the age at which a major historical event is experienced. As such, Russia provides a unique socio-historical context in which to study schooling-related beliefs.

Westernization and modernization have increasingly challenged societal beliefs and values since the collapse of Soviet rule in 1991. While many studies conclude that depictions of cultures as individualistic or collectivist obscure the variation that exists within them (Allik & Realo, 2004), much comparative research shows that Russia, like other Eastern European and emerging democratic nations, is characterized by traditions that are both collectivist and authoritarian (Elliott & Tudge, 2007; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). Russia's rapid transition to a market-based, more open society has upended established economic and social systems and led to unaccustomed employment and earnings uncertainty (Gerber, 2000). This confluence of changes has challenged established beliefs about development and learning.

Teachers, researchers, students, and parents widely acknowledge the need in the field of education for modernization and innovation in learning (Dubin & Zorkaia, 2010). Independent learning is increasingly noted as a reform-oriented goal for students (Borisenkov, 2007). In addition, public outcry against corruption in higher education (e.g., the bribing of professors for higher grades) is gaining wider media and research attention (Kofanova & Petukhov, 2006). Thus, in this nation in flux, beliefs about education and advancement are naturally evolving (Elliott & Tudge, 2007) and can be expected to influence students' perceptions of their classroom experiences, particularly around issues of fairness. Against this backdrop and with our preliminary findings in mind, we undertook a second, deeper analysis of individual and focus group interviews with Russian high school students to deepen our understanding of how they defined fairness through their talk. The present study contributes to a small, but growing research interest in education and motivation in Russia, post-1991 (see Bempechat, et al., 2011). To set the stage, we examine recent research on fairness perceptions in the classroom and present a brief review of the Russian education system. We then present our findings.

Fairness as an Inherent Quality of Good Teaching

The single most important school-related factor in student achievement is teacher quality (Stronge, 2007). High performing teachers can have lasting positive effects on academic and life outcomes, while it may take a child up to three years to overcome the effects of a low performing teacher (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011). Across a variety of national and cross-national studies employing survey, individual, and focus group methods, fairness consistently emerges as a salient characteristic of good teachers (Beishuizen, Hof, van Putten, Bouwmeester, & Asscher, 2001; Stronge, 2007). Students recognize fairness and equity as prerequisites for good teaching, and for good reason. If students do not perceive feedback as neutral, it can be seen as personally driven, which can undermine learning. Indeed, lower student morale and negative classroom climate are associated with the "teacher's pet" phenomenon, the

tendency among some teachers to favor one or more students over all others (Babad, 1995).

Fairness itself is a multidimensional construct, as has been shown by researchers who have applied fairness principles from organizational settings to educational contexts. Researchers have identified three types of fairness (or justice): interactional, procedural, and distributive. In an educational context, the first type, interactional fairness, speaks to the nature of the relationship between teacher and students. Interactional unfairness is consistent with the ethics of care and the philosophy of caring as described by Noddings (2005). Rodabaugh (1994) found that students react negatively when teachers show overt preference for some students over others, are overtly angry and shout at or embarrass them, and when they show a lack of care and otherwise ignore students' queries.

The second type, procedural fairness, refers to policies and procedures related to grading. At both the high school and college level, students who perceive that procedures for grading are applied equally and consistently tend to display greater satisfaction with their grades and instructors than those who perceive these procedures to be unequally and inconsistently applied (Chory-Assad, 2002; Wendorf & Alexander, 2005). The third type, distributive fairness (or outcome fairness) refers to students' perceptions that grades are equitably allocated. In general, students who perceive that their grades are fair and that their instructors are fair and accurate graders tend to evaluate their instructors more highly (Chory-Assad, 2002; Tata, 1999). Indeed, students' satisfaction with their grades is more strongly related to distributive and procedural fairness than to their actual grade. In other words, if students perceive the former as fair and equitable, then they tend to be more accepting of lower grades.

In the Russian educational context, we do not know the extent to which students' fairness perceptions might map onto dimensions identified in Western research. The educational experience of Russian students differs in important ways from that of their Western counterparts, owing to vastly different cultural ideologies about development and learning, as we describe below. Thus, we proceeded with the present study.

Education in Russia: Increasing Inequality and Slow Change

In order to contextualize our present study, we point out that until the 1980's, Soviet education was characterized by equity of access across the entire nation, with nearly universal enrollment from kindergarten through the junior secondary level. Education from primary through university levels was highly traditional, centralized, and authoritarian, with federal control over curriculum, personnel, and enrollment criteria. Indeed, little autonomy was accorded to schools or school districts (Gerber, 2000). In higher education, as in other sectors of Soviet life, corruption practices, or "blat," are widely disparaged, yet tolerated as inevitable and as a way of life (Temple & Petrov, 2004). Students can be forced to pay illegal fees directly to professors in order to sit for exams or re-examinations. Families who can afford the cost engage as tutors the very individuals who would grade their students' performance on oral entrance examinations.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought seismic changes to school curricula and financing at all levels of education. Both were quickly decentralized, and Western-influenced reforms have seen the emergence of alternative and private schools (Elliott & Tudge, 2007), including international schools with links to Western countries, and schools associated with progressive Western educational philosophies, such as those of Maria Montessori and Rudolph Steiner (Grigorenko, 1999). At the university level, professors' salaries greatly decreased and school infrastructure and resources eroded (Temple & Petrov, 2004).

Public schools also instituted curricular reforms aimed at modernizing education, and recent research has documented the emergence among middle class parents of Western-oriented child rearing goals, such as encouraging individualism, self-direction, freedom, and independence (Ispa, 2002). Despite these changes, several researchers have noted that Soviet-era values endure in schools (Alexander, 2001; Elliott & Tudge, 2007; Gerber, 2000). For the most part, teachers enjoy broad support for their authority, education remains teacher-centered, and there is little individualized instruction (Alexander, 2001; Wertsch, 2001). The pace of educational change is slow and undoubtedly

reflects the difficulties inherent in the "cultural borrowing" of educational ideology. At the university level, the practice of "blat" continues, but it has become the subject of increasing public protest and official investigation (Nemtsova, 2008). The enduring nature of corruption can be expected to inform parents' beliefs about educational attainment, which in turn would necessarily influence children's developing beliefs about educational fairness.

In the Russian context, education ("obrazovanie") implies the development of a "form or image." This word is connected to the concept of upbringing ("vospitanie"), which signifies the development of personal strengths, moral character, and civic responsibility. The notion of development in Russian suggests a "task that requires teachers' active involvement" (Alexander, 2001, p. 512). This view implies stronger teacher agency, involvement, and responsibility than is understood in English or American education, and it is reflected in the structure of classroom learning.

The Structure of Classroom Learning

Education in Russian public schools is characterized by stability and continuity in peer and adult relationships that, for the most part, are unknown to English or American education. Students advance through their school years as a cohort, with the same group of 20-30 peers. Student mobility is rare, and this cohort remains relatively intact over the course of its 11 years of education (Hufton & Elliott, 2000). Each cohort is assigned a homeroom teacher who is responsible for teaching his or her subject and planning two non-academic activities per month. Thus, the students and their homeroom teacher spend about six hours per week together, and students typically have the same homeroom teacher for three to four years at a time.

Teachers provide feedback openly and publicly, which serves to heighten social comparison in an already closely knit group. At any given time, teachers ask students to respond publicly to questions or solve problems, whereupon teachers announce their grade (on a scale of one to five, with one representing the low end of the scale) to the class. Teachers record these marks in a daily diary that students share with their parents. In what may be interpreted as humiliating from a Western perspective, students

who have made mistakes on homework or tests must often come forward and resolve their errors. Their mistakes are laid out on the board in full view of their classmates, who are encouraged by the teachers to help their peers resolve their confusions. Students' privacy does not seem to be a concern. Rather, teachers appreciate the pedagogical value of scaffolding student learning in these public ways (Alexander, 2001). It could very well be that, in this time of transition, social comparison and concerns around fairness may become quite salient, reflecting the tension from past cultural practices and current (more contemporary) trends. To address this needed contribution, we posed two overarching questions for the present study: 1) What are the ways in which students speak about and describe their concerns over fairness in the classroom? 2) To what extent are some concerns more salient than others are?

Method

Participants

A total of 32 grade nine students from two public schools in southwest Moscow participated in the present study. At each school, 16 randomly selected students (half male, half female) were invited to participate. All agreed to take part and obtained parental permission to do so. At the time of the first interview, the mean age of the students was 14 years, 11 months. All except five students (who did not volunteer their place of birth) were Moscow-born. According to the students' self-reports, all had small immediate families, where a little more than half were only children, 39% had one sibling, and 9% had two or more siblings. The majority of the students (81%) lived with both their parents or with one parent and a step-parent, and 13% also lived with a grandparent. All the students reported that they spoke Russian at home.

As reported by the students, parent education and occupation was varied. Most (61%) mothers were college educated, 29% had attended vocational or technical school, and 10% had not continued their education beyond high school. Most (66%) of the mothers were in professional fields, while 14% worked as non-professionals (e.g., janitor, cook). Relative to the mothers, fewer fathers had attended college (42%), while half had received vocational or technical degrees. Less than 10% had not

pursued their education beyond high school. Most fathers were employed as managers or professionals, and a few were nonprofessionals (e.g., police officer, security guard).

Our goal was to interview students who were enrolled in traditional schools and whose families would not be considered affluent by Russian standards. As we have reported elsewhere (Holloway, Mirny, Bempechat, & Li, 2008), the fact that the Russian economy is in flux makes it difficult to assess the socioeconomic status of these families. While a higher education and professional position are indicative of a middle class lifestyle in more developed nations, such as the United States, this is not the case in Russia. For example, at the time of our study, the average monthly salary of a teacher in Moscow was reported by one of the school principals as between 6,000-7,000 rubles per month (about \$240-\$280).

We carefully selected these two schools from the more than 1,500 schools in Moscow because of several important criteria. First, because we wanted to interview students who were neither from a privileged nor from an impoverished background, we selected the two schools using the insider knowledge of the third author, a native Muscovite who has an intimate understanding of the city's socioeconomic geography. Second, following Grigorenko (1999), in order to ensure that the schools were representative of a traditional Moscow school, we selected schools that used the grading standards and the traditional curricular programs developed by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science. The schools did not self-identify as providing a non-traditional orientation towards education, were not specialized in any way, and had not changed their names to "litsei" or "gimnazia," either of which would have signaled their status as non-traditional schools. Third, neither school was included in a government report on the top 20 academically excellent schools in the southwest region, indicating that these schools were not elite.

The schools are both near enough to the city center to be considered as in Moscow, but they are on the outskirts of the city. At the time of data collection, one school enrolled 634 students and the other enrolled 500 students from first to eleventh grade. At the high school level, there was a total of 216 students in School

1, including four grade nine classes ($N = 95$), two grade ten classes ($N = 50$), and three grade eleven classes ($N = 71$). In School 2, there was a total of 142 students, including 20 grade nine students in one class, two grade ten classes ($N = 44$ students), and three grade eleven classes ($N = 78$).

Procedure

Students participated in two standardized, open-ended individual interviews, conducted separately in the fall and spring of their ninth grade. Each interview was approximately 30-60 minutes in length. We audio recorded and transcribed each interview verbatim for later coding. At the end of the school year, we randomly assigned the students to one of eight focus group sessions. Due to scheduling conflicts, a total of 16 students were able to participate in both the focus group and individual interviews. The third author, a native Muscovite who completed graduate training in the United States, conducted all the interviews in Russian. A research assistant who is also a native Muscovite translated the interviews into English. The bilingual interviewer then double-checked the translations against the Russian transcriptions to make sure the translation respected and maintained the original Russian meanings.

Interviews

Individual interviews. We designed two standardized, open-ended interviews (about 50 minutes in length). The first interview focused on aspects of students' daily lives and included questions about their classes, homework, and attitudes towards their schoolwork (e.g., Which are your favorite subjects? Which subjects do you dislike? What do you hope to get out of going to school?). We conducted the second interview approximately one month after the first, and tapped students' perceptions of learning and included their coursework, teachers, peers, and learning beliefs.

We used Kelly's (1963) theory of personal constructs to guide the design of our questions in the second interview. We asked students to provide detailed responses to our questions about what teachers think makes good students, teachers whom they considered made learning enjoyable, and classes in which they

perceived that students learned a lot. Specifically, the interviewer asked students to contrast both poles of each dimension (good and poor students, enjoyable and non-enjoyable classes, classes where students learn and do not learn a lot). She then asked them to provide two positive examples and contrast them with one negative example. To illustrate, she asked students to name and describe three attributes of two classes in which students learned a lot. She then asked them to name and describe three characteristics of a class where students did not learn a lot. The interviewer sought deeper meanings in students' answers by requesting examples and explanations of any comments that were vague or ambiguous.

Focus group interviews. We designed the focus group interviews (approximately 50 minutes in duration) to elicit more nuanced accounts of students' learning experiences. This format allowed for participant check, and was thus an important validation tool. We presented students with the themes that emerged in both of the individual interviews, and we also asked them to reflect on their overall judgments of their learning experiences. The interviewer managed the discussion, encouraged responses from all participants, probed for deep meanings, and encouraged students to respond to their peers' observations and comments. There were eight focus groups in all. Six were composed of four students and two contained three students.

We designed both interview formats to elicit responses about the same experiences. In the focus group interview, we asked questions about the students' experiences in school, about what it means to be a good or poor student, and about motivation for working in school. In the individual interviews, we asked questions about students' experiences in school and out of school, their definitions of a good and poor student, their motivation for learning, and their peers' attitudes about school. Both interview formats had a similar ratio of positive (e.g., "What do you like about this class?") and negative (e.g., "What would you change about this class?") questions (focus group: 3 positive, 3 negative, and 3 neutral; individual interviews: 2 positive, 2 negative, and 11 neutral).

Interview Coding

Thematic coding. We adopted a multi-layered approach to analyzing the focus group and individual interview data. Our primary concern was to maintain the integrity and meaning of students' open-ended statements. Toward this end, we engaged in an inductive method of reading and re-reading the interviews in order to identify all statements related to perceptions of unfair and fair classroom experiences. Specifically, we recorded distinct ideas related to unfairness (e.g., "...even if you study well, they might personally dislike you and give you bad grades"), as well as fairness (e.g., "I like teachers; I think they are fair and honest with kids. I think they give me the grades I deserve."). Following Li's (2006) suggestions for qualitative coding, we considered an idea distinct if it was not interchangeable with another. Across the eight focus groups, the coders independently identified a total of 113 fairness/unfairness statements. Inter-rater reliability between the coders was 82%, and they resolved disagreements through discussion and consensus. Across the 32 individual interviews, the coders independently identified a total of 231 statements, and inter-rater reliability was 83%. Again, the coders resolved disagreements through discussion and consensus.

We then created a matrix of the fairness/unfairness statements for each focus group and individual interview, and conducted a content analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). In other words, we sought to uncover distinct categories of fairness and unfairness statements. Coding was both inductive and deductive. We used existing theory to help make sense of the emergent findings (deductive coding), and we further inductively coded for a more nuanced and context specific understanding of students' statements. Following Morgan (1997), we independently created codes for one focus group at a time, shared memos, and refined the codes during this process. We defined the content and boundaries of each code (Tesch, 1990), and developed a codebook of definitions and examples. We double or triple coded statements that conveyed more than one unfairness or fairness concept. For example, we triple coded the following statement from Vera as an instance of Instructional Unfairness (Sub-theme: Unprofessionalism), Procedural Unfairness (Sub-theme: Unfair grading

scale), and Interactional Unfairness (Sub-theme: Rude teachers): "Well, she always forgets what was the homework assignment and asks completely different questions, her system of giving grades is really weird, and she can be rude with students."

We began by coding the focus group interviews. We identified four categories (with eight subcategories) of unfairness talk: (1) Distributive (concerns over the fairness of grades); (2) Procedural (concerns over grading procedures); (3) Interactional (concerns over teacher treatment of students); and (4) Instructional (concerns about teachers failing in their roles as instructors; see Appendix A). We also identified four categories (with three sub-categories) of fairness talk, including (1) Distributive (comments about grades as having been deserved); (2) Interactional (comments regarding fair treatment of students by their teachers); (3) Instructional (comments about effective pedagogy); and (4) Procedural (comments indicating appreciation of grading procedures; see Appendix B). Inter-rater reliability of the codes was 81%, and discrepancies were resolved through consensus.

We approached coding of individual interview matrices in a like fashion. We used the codebook created from the focus group analysis as a starting point and independently read and coded two interviews at a time. We discussed questions about the meaning of words, expressions, and phrases with the third author, whose status as a cultural insider allowed for a check against any assumptions held by the United States coders. In addition, her position as the individual who conducted the individual and focus group interviews placed her in a unique and advantageous position with respect to data analysis. Specifically, she brought unique insights and contextual knowledge that enhanced our understanding of the students' emerging concerns (Litosseliti, 2003).

Results

Our analysis of students' comments revealed not only the extant unfairness and fairness themes described in the literature, which include distributive, procedural, and interactive unfairness/fairness, but also the emergence of salient concerns around teachers' pedagogical inadequacy. For the purpose of the present study, we labeled this emergent theme

instructional unfairness/fairness. Quite surprisingly, our quantitative analysis of statements and themes found that when students talked with peers, more of them spoke about unfairness than fairness, particularly interactional unfairness. In contrast, when students talked with the interviewer, a similar number talked about fairness and unfairness. This differential talk suggests that both interview methods were essential to eliciting a broad range of beliefs about classroom fairness experiences.

We illustrate the distinct themes using student comments about unfairness because these were more prevalent across both interview formats (see Appendix A). Both fairness and unfairness statements are important for understanding students' classroom experiences. However, it is impractical to present both fairness and unfairness statements for each theme and sub-theme. Thus, we refer readers to Appendix B for sample fairness quotes for each theme and sub-theme. We examine each of the four themes below, beginning with the novel theme, Instructional Fairness. In addition to describing each theme, when applicable, we note whether there were significant differences in the number of students who mentioned each theme and/or differences in the average number of statements each student made in focus group as compared to individual interviews.

Instructional Unfairness and Fairness

Students' comments revealed that they were quite concerned about the failure of teachers to be instructional leaders. They expressed consternation over ineffective pedagogical practices that resulted in low grades, as well as unprofessional behavior that limited their learning. Interestingly, we found that a greater number of students talked about instructional unfairness and instructional fairness in the individual interviews as compared to the focus group interviews. Thus, instruction (whether adequate or inadequate) was more prevalent as a topic of conversation when students talked with the interviewer than when they talked with peers.

Ineffective teaching affects grades. Students were particularly troubled by teachers who failed to explain material clearly and, as a result, saw their grades suffer. For example, in their individual interviews, Evgeni and Galina complained about their chemistry teacher.

Evgeni noted: "Our chemistry teacher, he is so weird! He never explains anything. He asks us questions we can never answer and almost everyone gets 2 [a poor grade]." In a similar vein, Galina ironically spoke about the teacher's inability to explain concepts:

Nobody understands his explanations. He doesn't explain anything. He wants us to figure out everything by ourselves. We don't like it because he, well, we can't really guess what he is trying to make us guess, that is why we have bad grades. His questions are usually so complicated that it is really hard to understand what he wants. You have to think for like five minutes before you actually get what it is that he wants and by the time you figure it out and start thinking about the answer you already got 2 [a poor grade]. So this is his way to develop our logical reasoning skills (laugh).

Many students expressed dismay over the lack of clarity in teachers' explanations, which points to teacher failure as a form of instructional unfairness. Due to such ineffective pedagogy, students did not believe that their efforts would result in the grades they expected. Students seemed especially unappreciative of teachers who wanted them to learn on their own, a topic we examine further in our discussion.

Unprofessionalism. Students raised concerns, independent of grades they received, about teachers who simply did not know how to explain the coursework, rushed through lessons, and/or were unwilling to take the time to clarify any confusion. In addition, they were displeased with teachers who were unable to maintain control of their classrooms. For example, Zoya pointed to the incompetence of some teachers as a reason she wished to leave her school:

Well, frankly I don't want to stay in school, because some of the teachers are not so, like the algebra teacher they gonna have next year. She is terrible, very closed-minded and just a bad teacher. And also, you know the girl you just interviewed, she wants to be a translator, and to become a translator you need a really good English teacher. Our current teacher of English, she just

asks you to copy the textbook in the notebook or learn something by heart, but she doesn't really teach you. Some of the teachers here they don't give you knowledge, they just spend time with you.

Unprofessional behavior was demoralizing to many students and took a toll on their achievement motivation.

In her focus group discussion, Vera discussed what she perceived as a change in her teachers when compared to the previous year: "Our chemistry teacher briefly explains us new material and then we have a test on the next lesson. And I am not that kind of person who can understand the material quickly, I need a detailed explanation." Alonya added: "They don't help us with anything. If we don't get the material it is our problem, as if it is not their job to make sure we understand everything."

Lack of discipline also emerged as an aspect of teacher unprofessionalism. In her individual interview, Klara argued that discipline is the teacher's responsibility. She maintained that students "mess around" because the teacher essentially allows it:

Well, I think the matter is in the teacher; she can't really calm kids down. Like if the teacher was strict from the very beginning, kids wouldn't mess around on his lessons. Very often kids disrupt lessons because of something insignificant and the teacher gets angry. Sometimes teachers disrupt lessons themselves, like they start yelling at us because of something and do it till the end of the lesson.

Many students' comments revealed that they felt betrayed in their basic expectation that teachers demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility.

Overall, comments within this emergent theme amounted to a performance assessment of teachers' pedagogical and classroom management skills. Students expected teachers to be instructional leaders and to lead with authority. In contrast, comments around Interactional Unfairness served to convey the personalization of classroom experiences, as we report in the next section.

Interactional Unfairness and Fairness

Students spoke in four distinct ways about being treated unfairly by some teachers. First, they reported experiences in which teacher favoritism affected their grades. That is, they spoke about seeing their grades suffer either because a teacher did not like them or because a teacher favored another student. Second, they reported instances in which students were treated inequitably independent of their grades, largely due to teachers' personal preferences for some students over others. Third, students spoke about their perceptions that some teachers tended to reward obedient students, namely those who conformed to their expectations and never questioned or challenged them. Finally, students were especially disparaging of teachers who were rude and unsupportive and who publicly berated, yelled, and insulted them.

Interactional unfairness and fairness was a prevalent theme across both interview types. In fact, in focus group interviews, treatment by teachers, whether fair (mentioned by 30% of students) or unfair (mentioned by 57% of students), was the most common topic of conversation. In individual interviews, treatment by teachers was as prevalent as talk about instruction. Interestingly, a significantly greater number of students talked about interactional fairness in the individual interviews than in the focus group interviews. In contrast, on average, participants made more comments about interactional unfairness in focus group interviews than in individual interviews. Thus, talk about fair teacher treatment was more likely to occur when students spoke with the interviewer. In contrast, talk about unfair teacher treatment was more likely to occur in focus group interviews.

Favoritism affects grades. Students expressed both confusion and anger when teachers treated students inequitably. The following exchange between Polina and Lidya demonstrates their struggle to make sense of instances in which one student's performance is seemingly enhanced by some teachers. We asked them to name one feature about their school that they did not like, and the discussion led them to wonder whether teachers might be favoring Lina to win the coveted golden medal, awarded by the district education authority to

the student who earns a “5” (highest possible grade score) in all subjects:

Polina: The matter is in the teacher, not in Lina. It is the teacher’s fault.

Lidya: They want her to finish school with a golden medal, so they will give her 5s in all subjects. She doesn’t know English, but she sits with Marina and Marina helps her, so she has 5 in English. And the same thing about other subjects. She is really good only at chemistry.

The realization that favored students received higher grades than they deserved was difficult for many students to accept.

Other students noted that perceptions of favoritism had a negative impact on their motivation for learning. In his individual interview, Yevgeni shared that, having always enjoyed and done well in physics, he could not name a substantive reason for his low performance. As a result, his attitude towards a previously favored subject had dimmed:

Physics, for example, was easy for me, but now it is something in the teacher’s attitude that I don’t like. [Interviewer: Do you have a new teacher?] No, the teacher is the same, but she started treating me badly. I don’t even know why it happened. She doesn’t like me anymore. And even though I understand physics, she gives me bad grades.

Students found it quite demotivating when their grades fell because of a teacher’s prejudicial attitude towards them, especially when a teacher’s attitude change was mystifying.

In the context of his position about the importance of grades, Fyodor shared his view of the impact of some teachers’ preferential grading practices:

Hmm, I think that grades are not very important, because there are some schools like ours where teachers give you grades not on the basis of your knowledge. There are some teachers who give kids lower grades than they deserve, and they have like their favorite students. I think that the most important thing is the knowledge that they give because grades don’t really reflect the knowledge.

In the face of teacher bias, other students also adopted a relativistic stance towards their grades and spoke about the greater importance of mastery over outcomes.

Inequitable treatment. Independent of evaluative practices, students were troubled by the fact that some teachers tended to discriminate against students based on an initial negative evaluation of them. When speaking of her English teacher, Kristina stated: “Well, her attitude to students is, well, if she thinks that someone is a bad student, she will never change her attitude. Yesterday, we had this meeting, and she was trying to humiliate Luba in front of other kids.” Likewise, in their focus group discussion, Vadim and Elena spoke about how one gets to be a student whom the teacher considers to be a good student:

Vadim: Well, you need to gain the respect of the teacher.

Elena: Yes, sometimes you find it most difficult to change the teachers’ attitude to you, because the first impression is the strongest and sometimes it is negative. For example, if a girl seemed smart to the teacher at the first glance, the teacher would continue thinking that she is smart even if she doesn’t understand some subjects. And vice versa.

Many students were quite open about and united in their view that some teachers held rigid views of certain students, even in the face of contradictory information.

Obedience is rewarded. Students were dismayed that a good relationship with some teachers could be achieved by refraining from raising challenges or questions in the classroom. For example, in her individual interview Galina complained about the threat students feel around being open with their views: “Well, you see there are some teachers who are strict not only in terms of discipline, but also in teaching, and I don’t think it is right, because kids shouldn’t be afraid to express their opinion.” A similar view emerged from Dina and Anatoly’s focus group discussion of how one can become a student that teachers would think is a good student:

Dina: I guess sometimes it is better not to argue with them [teachers], because usually those kids who don’t

say anything to them are their favorite students.

Anatoly: I think one should be hard-working and a little bit sneaky.

Interviewer: How do you think being sneaky helps to become a good student?

Anatoly: Well, one needs to understand that he shouldn't argue with teacher, he should endure.

Not only did students strongly dislike having to inhibit their opinions, they also resented having to endure disrespectful treatment at the hand of some teachers, as we discuss in the next section.

Rude teachers. Students were distressed by teachers who openly insulted them. For example, in his individual interview, Mihail noted that the Chemistry teacher treated students "badly:" "He yells at us, scolds, us, he can say things like 'Shut up!'" Evgeni offered that Chemistry is one class in which students do not learn very much. In speaking of the teacher, he stated: "He is crazy, he can say to you like, 'Stupid idiot, you need to go to the doctor!' Or like, he says, 'You are all from the village,'" comments clearly made to insult and insinuate ignorance. During his focus group interview, Ivan ultimately expressed disappointment that little is done about this kind of behavior: "Though they told us that if the teacher swears and calls kids bad names, he will be fired, it doesn't happen, nobody fires them."

Students were very much aggrieved by the lack of respect they were accorded by some of the teachers. Their displeasure was heightened by their powerlessness to effect any positive changes in some teachers' offensive behavior. Furthermore, the process by which grades were assigned illustrated a dimension of unfairness experiences rooted in teachers' sometimes questionable assessment practices.

Procedural Unfairness

Students expressed dissatisfaction with grading criteria in two ways. They complained about teachers' use of unfair and inappropriate grading scales and objected to teachers who, against school policy, used grades to punish students who did not adhere to behavioral norms. We discuss these in turn below. Interestingly, when we compared the two types of interviews, we found that concerns about unfair grading procedures were a salient topic in focus groups

but not in individual interviews. Specifically, significantly more students talked about procedural unfairness in the focus group interviews than in the individual interviews. Furthermore, on average, students who spoke about procedural unfairness made more comments about it in the focus group interviews than in the individual interviews.

Unfair grading scale. In her focus group interview, Regina affirmed that she would like to change the way teachers, particularly the physics teacher, assign grades:

She keeps telling us that the material and problems are so simple that even kids who have all 3s [average grade] should be able to solve it. So if you do everything right she still gives you 4, just because the level of difficulty is very low.

Many students expressed frustration and a lack of a sense of agency in controlling their learning outcomes.

In her focus group conversation, Polina expressed displeasure with the fact that the grading policy did not take into consideration the reality that students might not have access to homework help at home:

If you didn't understand something and you are doing homework at school you can ask the teacher to explain it to you, but if you are at home and can't solve a problem, you will get 2 [a poor grade] for your homework on the next day.

Students were very sensitive to the seeming idiosyncrasies of teachers' evaluative practices. The unclear rationale for grading procedures also emerged when students discussed teachers who wielded grades as a way to discipline pupils.

Grades as punishment. Tamara noted that when teachers lose patience with a student they grade them down: "Well, for example when the teacher can't cope with a kid and says like, 'I will make sure you get only 2s in my subject.'" This issue emerged as well in Anatoly's focus group discussion. Picking up on a peer's contribution, he added:

Well, girls have just discussed it. It is about the way they give grades, sometimes they can give you bad grades for bad behavior.

Interviewer: Do you have special grades for behavior?

Anatoly: That's the point. We don't. Some teachers can just give you 2 for messing around, not for bad knowledge of their subject. And they can even fail you on the exams.

Interviewer: On purpose?

Anatoly: Yes, they even said so. Once we messed around on one lesson that was taught by a teacher who was covering for our regular teacher. And our classroom teacher said that this teacher promised to come to our exams as an official proctor. I think she wanted to fail us.

Teachers' practice of using grades for two seemingly different purposes, evaluating behavior and evaluating understanding, struck many students as patently unfair.

Overall, students signaled their displeasure with a grading process that might not take family circumstances into consideration and could be quite capricious. This disquiet stands in contrast to the concerns students expressed when teachers assigned grades that did not match performance and when they allocated grades on the basis of stereotypes they held about stronger as compared to weaker students. We describe this final form of unfairness in the following section.

Distributive Unfairness

In expressing their perceptions over distributive unfairness students described instances in which they had received grades lower than what they believed they deserved. We did not find significant differences in the number of students who talked about distributive fairness and unfairness, nor did we find significant differences in the average number of comments students made about this topic. Overall, very few students in either group talked about distributive fairness and unfairness.

In his focus group discussion, Rolan stated that the one thing he wanted to change was the way teachers graded students: "I want teachers to be unbiased. For example, our physics teacher always gives grades lower than one deserves. It is weird. Even if your answer is very good she still gives you 4." Likewise, Eva described situations in which grades did not reflect knowledge:

"Because one can get good grades even without knowledge, like if the teacher knows that you know something but you can't answer the questions the teacher will still give you a 4." These comments illustrate that students are keenly aware of the inequity that comes from receiving grades that do not match their self-assessment of their performance.

Discussion

Our findings validated and extended categories of unfairness and fairness identified in Western research to the Russian context. Our analysis revealed novel sub-themes for procedural and interactional unfairness and fairness. In addition, we found that the distribution of fairness and unfairness statements, as well as the distribution of fairness and unfairness themes, differed sharply across interview formats, thus highlighting the value of combining focus group and individual interviews. We examine these findings in detail below.

As we noted in our introduction, the socio-cultural context of schooling in Russia is one in which teachers have historically enjoyed great authority. "Blat" practices have operated with little public or official opprobrium until recent times (Alexander, 2001). Furthermore, previous research has found that over time, students come to believe that teachers are increasingly critical to their academic success. In this context, we argue that student talk about teacher inadequacy may indeed be a part of the wider discourse of unfairness in educational opportunity, and rises to the level of instructional unfairness, as we have labeled it for the purpose of this research.

Students' comments in this regard suggest that they are deeply aware of the impact that teachers have on their learning and educational outcomes. They expect their teachers to be professional and to support the learning of all students, and when these expectations are violated, they feel wronged. Students' comments demonstrate that they expect their teachers to behave professionally, take however much time is needed to support them in their learning, explain concepts thoroughly, and challenge them with engaging material. They take particular exception when their grades suffer as a result of teachers shirking what students perceive to be their professional responsibilities. Students' perception that grades suffer if they openly

disagree with teachers further underscores their sense that teachers' instructional practices and opinions of them are non-trivial factors in their school outcomes. In this cultural context, the students we interviewed signaled their expectation and implicit trust that their teachers would prepare them well for the challenges that awaited them in high school and beyond. In addition, students' comments about teaching and learning confirm researchers' views that despite the widely perceived need for education reform, learning in Russia continues to be largely teacher-directed, with little individualized instruction and unquestioned support for the authority of the teacher (Wertsch, 2001). Under these circumstances, students appear to perceive teachers as primarily responsible for their learning.

It is interesting that procedural fairness and unfairness were not more salient aspects of these students' statements. Procedures and routines are central to instruction. As a result, we expected students to talk more about them. At the level of the microsystem, the Russian school context is one in which teachers have always had great authority, and procedures perceived as unfair may not be contested. Once routinized, procedures, whether or not they are fair, might become invisible. Unless procedural matters are egregious they may not loom large enough in students' minds to be evoked and mentioned in conversation. More systemically, however, it is important to recognize that procedural fairness or justice is a hallmark of democratic societies and their legal systems. Given that Russia is an emerging and not a full-fledged democracy, the weight of procedural justice is not as prevalent and has not yet penetrated deeply in institutional practice. The institution of schools would be no exception. This is to be expected, as significant changes in the macrosystem cannot be immediately felt at the level of the microsystem, where belief systems are deeply entrenched (Elliott & Tudge, 2007).

There were very few comments regarding grades as being deserved or undeserved (distributive unfairness and fairness). We do not think that this implies students were not dissatisfied with the grades they received. The volume of comments around the negative impact of poor teaching (instructional unfairness) and poor treatment (interactional unfairness) on grades clearly indicates that students were

indeed concerned about evaluation and outcomes. Discursive theory suggests that our focus on the cognitive content of students' statements fails to consider their dialogic purpose (Edwards & Stokoe, 2004). That is, we focused on what students said, but we ignored why students said it. Thus, it is possible that students did not mention distributive concerns because the conversational context did not require it or make it possible. According to discursive theory, individuals manage language to make themselves credible and assign blame when outcomes do not match expectations. It could very well be that purely distributive comments (I received/did not receive the grades I deserved) were rare because such statements fail to effectively negotiate stake and responsibility, especially true when a claim is made that grades were undeserved. In such a case, the speaker clearly has a stake in the conversation and unless evidence or reasons are provided, the audience cannot assume that the "unfair" grades are undeserved.

In other words, a simple distributive statement about unfairness fails to attribute responsibility and thus fails to achieve what we assume to be one of the main aims of unfairness talk, which is to negotiate personal responsibility for poor grades with a skeptical audience. This interpretation of our data is supported by the fact that the two main categories of unfairness talk were interactional and instructional unfairness and fairness. These two categories place responsibility outside the self and build upon expectations about the role of teachers as professionals who are obligated to care about teaching their students. This possibility deserves further analysis from a discursive analytic perspective.

Regardless of interview format, students spoke much more about interactional and instructional concerns (unfairness and fairness) than distributive and procedural concerns. This discrepancy suggests that students are deeply attuned to their relationships with teachers, both at an interpersonal and pedagogical level. It matters a great deal to the students in the present study that their teachers care about them and treat them with respect, a perspective that is supported in the Western literature on social motivation (Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010). In the Russian context, where

public evaluation is a daily occurrence, it is not surprising to find that students were sensitive to preferential or otherwise unequal treatment.

Teacher-centered classrooms, such as the ones these Russian students experienced, are the subject of considerable research in the United States, and are also characterized by authoritarian classroom management techniques (Watson & Battistich, 2006). American students in such classrooms report feeling emotionally unsupported and disconnected from teachers and peers, much to the detriment of their learning and psychosocial well-being (Stronge, 2007). Such experiences do not resonate with those of the Russian students in our sample. They spoke of close relationships with teachers and portrayed their classrooms as relational communities (Pianta, 2006) despite classroom experiences in which social comparison and concerns over fairness were highly salient. Their relationships with their teachers clearly are embedded in a socio-cultural context in which teacher authority and higher involvement, rather than being viewed as undermining, communicated care and support.

The differential emphases on thematic categories and the different proportions of fairness and unfairness statements across interview formats were surprising and underscore the value of combining individual and focus group methods. When students were conversing with their peers in focus groups, they tended to talk more about unfairness than fairness. Yet students' foci were more evenly distributed between unfairness and fairness when engaged in a one-on-one interview with an adult. Perhaps the focus group provided a relatively safe environment in which to voice complaints, as compared to a one-on-one interview with an unfamiliar adult. Once one member voiced a complaint, others may have felt emboldened to share their own stories of inequity by a feeling of social support. Methodological research on focus groups supports this notion.

More specifically, focus groups tend to foster conversations and interactions that reveal insights that may not surface without the interaction inherent in the group (Farnsworth & Boon, 2010). In other words, focus groups operate in such a way that they elicit information from participants that may not have appeared in individual interviews. The students in our

sample were already bonded by their cohort experience. Bringing them together likely served to make their shared experiences especially salient.

It is interesting that the average number of comments made by students and the number of students who made statements about interactional and instructional fairness differed across interview formats. That is, significantly more students spoke more about interactional fairness in the individual interviews, but on average, students made significantly more comments about interactional unfairness in the focus group. Further, more students talked about instruction (adequate or inadequate) in the individual interviews than in the focus group interviews. These differences occurred even though the questions in both interview formats tapped similar issues. It is possible that the interviews' different audiences led to this shift. During the focus group interview, students spoke in the presence of peers with whom they shared classroom experiences. It may be that students believed that talk about how unfairly their teachers treated them would be better received in the company of their peers than by the adult interviewer alone.

The opposite might have been true for the individual interviews. Students might have expected the interviewer to be more receptive to talk about instructional unfairness and fairness than about interactional unfairness. Students might have felt that an adult not familiar with the school would care more about whether a teacher explained the material well and took time to address students' questions than whether a teacher preferred some students over others. While speculative, this view suggests that students adjust their talk about unfairness depending on their audience. In other words, their talk about unfairness might be purposeful. Discourse analysis seems the best means by which to explore this notion further. It would allow us to probe more deeply into the situational purpose of unfairness talk.

These findings suggest that researchers investigating students' conceptions of fairness and unfairness (and students' interpretation of classroom events more broadly) should consider using a variety of interview formats and data collection methods to obtain a more complete understanding of students' conceptions

of their educational experiences. Had we relied solely on the focus groups or the individual interviews, we would have concluded (wrongly) that either instructional or interactional concerns were most salient for these students. The combination of both interview formats allows us to make a more nuanced claim: the Russian students we interviewed were equally attentive to both interactional and instructional concerns but talked more about one concern over the other, depending on the audience.

Implications for Practice

Our close analysis of students' comments about fairness and unfairness highlighted the nuanced manner in which students made meaning of their classroom experiences. Our analysis converged on core themes and sub-themes, but also found a large amount of variability between students. Not all students interpreted their classroom experiences in the same way. Since students' perceptions of fairness foster learning (Wentzel, 2009), we can infer that a shared understanding of the rules, procedures, and routines of the classroom between students and teachers is likely to support academic achievement. The descriptive codes and sub-codes that emerged from our data could be used to develop scenarios that teachers and students could read together to inform their understanding of what is fair and unfair in the classroom, both with respect to grades and the moral life of the classroom.

Limitations and Future Research

Given the qualitative nature of this research, we cannot generalize our findings beyond the students whom we studied. The experiences of students attending different kinds of secondary schools in Moscow (e.g., newer progressive schools, specialized technical schools) may very well be different. Furthermore, we do not know how rural students or students of different ethnic backgrounds might speak about their experiences with unfairness and fairness in their classrooms. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that our study was conducted during one period in these students' lives. We do not know the extent to which their beliefs about unfairness and fairness in the classroom are stable. Maturation and advancement through high school may influence students'

perceptions, and longitudinal research that examines the development of students' unfairness and fairness beliefs would be helpful.

In addition, our knowledge of teachers and their pedagogical practices originates entirely from the students' perspectives. As we mentioned above, in the absence of teacher interviews we cannot know the extent to which their teaching practices were designed to foster independent learning or simply represented their teaching styles. Thus, it would be useful to interview Russian teachers, a suggestion we discuss below.

Our findings point the way towards fruitful avenues for further research. For example, from a cultural perspective, is the notion of instructional unfairness unique to Russian students or schooling, or might such concerns be prevalent in other teacher-centered education systems? By the same token, how might conceptions of interactional unfairness and fairness vary in societies along the collectivist-individualist continuum? More specifically, it is apparent that the underlying narrative of the Russian students in the present study was that of disdain and resentment in the face of differential teacher treatment. Their primary and secondary public school experiences are deeply embedded in a cultural context that is supposed to place the needs of the collective ahead of those of individuals (Alexander, 2001). That certain students might be treated differently, then, did not conform to the social contract to which they were accustomed.

In contrast, as evidenced by spiraling special education costs associated with special and individualized services, education in the United States has increasingly focused on differences rather than similarities between students (Scull & Winkler, 2011). American students are well aware from early schooling experiences that some of their peers merit special individualized educational experiences by virtue of factors over which they have no control (e.g., learning disabilities). In the American socio-cultural context the differential treatment of students may not be perceived as problematic to the same extent.

In the context of the general consensus among essential constituents that Russian education is in need of reform, it would be very interesting to examine how teachers' pedagogical

beliefs may be shifting. Recall that the students in our study were displeased when teachers did not explain material clearly. It could be that some teachers may have been trying to encourage their students to seek out information themselves rather than depend on them for all the answers. Thus, to what extent and how might teachers be interpreting the call for pedagogical reform? A qualitative study of teachers' pedagogical beliefs, combined with classroom observations, would be fruitful in this regard.

In examining the ways in which students spoke about and described their unfairness experiences, we demonstrated that students altered the nature of their unfairness talk as a function of the interview format. An important next step would be to examine how these students spoke about unfairness across all the dimensions we identified. Discourse analysis is a particularly appropriate method to employ, in that meanings are created and negotiated through conversation in a social and cultural context (Edwards & Stokoe, 2004). As we mentioned above, when students state a belief (e.g., "She's biased.") they are participating in a conversation that has a purpose and in which they have a stake. Discourse analysis allows us to ask two important questions: (1) what are students doing with their language when they speak about their educational experiences? (2) How are they using language to manage issues of stake and responsibility in their educational outcomes? Addressing these questions would allow us to explore how students negotiate the meaning(s) of unfairness and the personal and social meaning of assessment.

The teachers of the students in our study were raised under the banner of Soviet ideology and had received their training under the pedagogical beliefs and practices of this former authoritarian regime. Yet they were teaching students who were coming of age in a society that recently had begun to embrace Western-style values. From a research perspective, this confluence of factors represents a unique socio-historical moment in which to examine students' meaning making around fairness and unfairness in the classroom. Our findings extended previously identified unfairness and fairness themes to the Russian context and identified a new dimension of instructional unfairness and fairness. In addition, our close analysis of the

saliency of themes across interview formats highlighted the sensitivity of students' talk to the context of the interview and suggested the need for diverse data collection methods that can capture the complexity of students' meaning making of their educational experiences.

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Appendix A

Codebook of Unfairness Themes and Sub-Themes

Instructional

Fairness in pedagogical treatment. Code for instances where students describe teachers failing in their role as instructors, failing to teach for understanding. This notion is distinct from interactional unfairness because the focus is clearly on teaching practice rather than on differential treatment.

Sub-theme 1: Ineffective teaching affects grades. Code for instances in which students describe grades as unfair because teachers did not teach them well. Students describe being held accountable for material that teachers did not teach well or well enough.

Sub-theme 2: Unprofessionalism. Code for instances in which students describe teachers failing to meet standards of good instructional practice, including using class time appropriately, not checking student work, and not taking responsibility for student learning.

Interactional

Fairness in interpersonal treatment. Code for instances in which students discuss differential treatment of students by teachers based on teachers' personal beliefs.

Sub-theme 1: Favoritism affects grades. Code for instances in which students describe preferential teacher treatment based on whether the teacher likes or does not like a particular student. This fondness is directly tied to higher grades.

Sub-theme 2: Inequitable treatment. Code for instances in which (1) students describe preferential teacher treatment based on whether the teacher likes or does not like a particular student, and (2) student indicates that teachers hold negative stereotypes of some students. No mention is made of a connection between teacher fondness and grades.

Sub-theme 3: Obedience is rewarded. Code for instances in which students describe teachers who reward students who conform to their expectations (behavioral or academic) and do not question their opinions (about behavioral or academic performance). This code includes instances in which students talk about teachers that punish students who disagree with them or act in ways counter to their expectations.

Sub-theme 4: Rude teachers. Code for instances in which students talk about teachers being rude, yelling at them, calling them names, and treating them in a disrespectful manner.

Procedural

Fairness of the rules and procedures used to allocate grades. Code for instances when students discuss the fairness of procedures or the criteria for grading.

Sub-theme 1: Unfair grading scale. Code for instances in which students question the grading scale or express disagreement about the connection between the product and the grade attached to that product.

Sub-theme 2: Grades as punishment. Code for instances in which students question the practice/procedure (against school policy) of using grades to punish students who did not follow behavioral norms.

Distributive

Fairness over outcome. Code for instances in which students discuss received grades as being deserved or not deserved.

Appendix B

Codebook of Fairness Themes and Sub-Themes, with Sample Quotes

Instructional

Fairness in pedagogical treatment. Code for instances where students describe teachers as meeting standards of good instructional practice, succeeding to teach for understanding. This is distinct from interactional fairness because the focus is clearly on teaching practice rather than on treatment of students. Examples include including using class time appropriately, checking student work, explaining material thoroughly, and taking responsibility for student learning.

Example: “Because teachers explain the material much better. The WHA (World History of Art) and Geography teachers give the information not only from the textbook, but also from somewhere else and they make everything so clear that I come home and I can repeat almost everything they told us in the class.”

Interactional

Fairness in interpersonal treatment. Code for instances in which students discuss ways in which teachers treat students fairly.

Sub-theme 1: Teacher does not play favorites. Code for instances in which students discuss equal treatment and its outcomes: “I think if the teacher treats people equally well, then they also respect him more and listen better to his lessons, and works harder.”

Sub-theme 2: Appropriate discipline. Code for instances in which the students indicate that the teacher’s discipline (e.g., yelling) is appropriate to the context.

Example:

Student: Well, basically all our teachers respect students.

Interviewer: But you say some of them yell at kids.

Student: Well, yeah, but they usually have a good reason for yelling at us.

Sub-theme 3. Caring-Respectful Teachers: Code for instances in which students talk about teachers being caring, displaying warmth, and treating them respectfully.

Example: “Well, there are some teachers who are more understanding. Even if you didn’t do homework, they let you do it for the next lesson, and you can always come and talk to them about different things.”

Procedural

Fairness of the rules and procedures used to allocate grades. Code for instances when students state that the procedures or the criteria for grading are fair.

Example: “Some teachers are unbiased and they evaluate your knowledge, not personal qualities.”

Distributive

Fairness over outcomes. Code for instances in which students discuss received grades as being deserved, or receiving a grade better than they deserved because the teacher understood their particular circumstance.

Example: “I think they are fair and honest with kids, I think they give me the grades I deserve.”