TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP THROUGH THE LENS OF PARENTAL AUTHORITATIVE FEATURES

Maria Nicoleta Turliuc [•]
*Alexandru Ioan Cuza University,
Romania*

Marius Marici [••]
*Alexandru Ioan Cuza University,
Romania*

Abstract
Parents and teachers are part of the micro system that influences the psychological and behavioral development of children. The socialization theory of Baumrind showed that, in general, parental influence is expressed most adequately through an authoritative style, which is characterized by high support and control, as well as autonomy granting. There is evidence that an authoritative parenting style facilitates positive psychological and behavioral development of children. In addition, recent research has shown that features of an authoritative parenting style characterizes some other types of relationships. One is the teacher-student relationship in the formal educational system. In general, the tendency of the public school system was mainly to develop children's knowledge and skills, and unfortunately, one of the contexts of learning, which is, teacher-student relationship, was mostly overlooked. The hypothesis that the teacher-student relationship resembles the parent-child relationship was formulated and, that is because of the common features of the authoritative style. The purpose of this study is to present a short review of the literature concerning the impact of authoritative features of teachers upon the psycho-behavioral functioning of students, as well as to bring some evidence concerning the similarities between parents' and teachers' relationship with children.

Keywords: parenting styles, parent-child relationship, teacher-student relationship, psycho-behavioral outcomes

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to:

[•] Ph.D. professor, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Department of Medical Psychology, Iaşi, Romania. E-mail: *turliuc@uaic.ro*

[••] M.A., Ph.D. student, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Faculty of Psychology; Pinilor Street, No. 1112, Ipoteşti, Suceava, Romania. E-mail: *maricimarius@yahoo.com*

_____

Introduction

Lately, research literature in the field of formal education seemed to assimilate more and more from family realities with the aim of promoting high levels of school achievement and character building (Khan & Siraj, 2012).

The ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1994) suggests that child development must be treated in the context of the whole ecological system in which it takes place. Parents and teachers belong to the same microsystem. Human development with its psychological, social and physical components expresses its highest potential only in certain conditions. Whether at home or in the classroom, in their relationship with parents or teachers, research has shown that children's healthy development requires a certain combination of 'support', 'control' and 'autonomy'.

The purpose of this article is to bring some evidence concerning the resemblance between parents and teachers, in their attempt to assure an optimum development for their children/students.

Features of authoritative style in educator-student relationship

Recent research has shown that the features of parenting authoritative style 'characterize effective educators, work supervisors and coaches in contemporary industrial societies' (Baumrind, 2010, p. 2). There is little research that deals with the authoritative style of educators in the formal education system, although there is research dating as far back as the 80s which treated similar concepts, such as care for students (Mayerhoff, 1971). In addition, in Romania, as well as in well-developed countries, the formal educational system most often focuses on the development of academic performance, and less on the other aspects of education. Under the pressure of yearly written aims and of more quantitative than qualitative evaluations, teachers often feel pressure to get more involved in making students obtain good grades. As a result, they focus mainly on building and assessment of abilities and knowledge and less on creating a context which could facilitate learning and increase student motivation. It is to be mentioned that the teacher-student relationship counts much in the global interaction and school performance of students. To our knowledge, there are a few national and

university programs aimed at teaching teachers how to effectively manage behavior in class based on evidence based practice.

Walker (2009) argues that both constructs, support as well as teacher's control, are necessary in order to understand the teacher-student relationship, the outcomes upon children or the best way to improve the educational system. Actually, the teacher-student relationship must be viewed as a process of socialization. Wentzel (2002) finds that the four dimensions of parenting (control, maturity demands, nurturing and clear communication) are related to specific consequences upon children regardless of their gender or ethnic group.

Teacher's support

The support manifested by the 'significant ones' in the lives of students is important as long as the recipient perceives it as well. Teachers' support is a belief endorsed by students, rather than a set of specific educational practices (Kagan, 1978) and it is a very strong moderator of the effect of parents'/teachers' practices upon children's outcomes (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

According to the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1999), at an early age children become recipients of their parental support which leads to the development of a secured attachment and hence to positive child outcomes. There is evidence that the acceptance-rejection expression is universal and the perception of acceptance or rejection produces worldwide consequences upon children. This is called an acceptance-rejection syndrome (Rohner, 2004). Similarly, research has indicated that children *are more likely to internalize* teachers' values if the later are supportive, as opposed to being critical and harsh (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Learning is a soliciting activity, which implies effort. Positive emotions, resulting from a supportive teacher-student relationship, broaden students' momentary thought-action repertoire and build their personal resources, ranging from physical to intellectual, social or psychological (Fredrickson, 2004). Classical conditioning of emotional reactions in students makes them embrace or reject school subjects and teachers.

Moreover, a secure relationship with educators motivates students to be more open to adopt riskier strategies, which facilitate learning, such as: asking additional questions when they do not understand, getting involved in solving

_____

challenging tasks or showing perseverance when they face difficulties (Stipek, 2006a). In one study (Hamre & Pianta, 2005), children who manifested functional problems and were exposed to risk – an issue established on the basis of demographic variables – and received less support during class, had a lower school performance and a higher level of conflict with teachers. One the one hand, some claimed that an authoritative style may lead to more positive outcomes in case of people with a higher risk of failure at school (Hughes, 2002), or in case of aggressive students (Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003). People with disabilities are the most exposed to risks and they need the most support from teachers. On the other hand, it was suggested that this particular parenting style could, actually, be universal, and would lead to more positive outcomes for all students (Baker, Clark, Crowl, & Carlson, 2009).

There are some teacher practices which convey in the mind of children the idea that teachers care. These are: the teacher is available to listen to the students, is calm and comes with explanations as opposed to being harsh, and punitive. Moreover, teachers express their emotions positively, smiling and being kind (Stipek, 2006b). The lack of support, measured through questions such as: 'The teacher scolds me for not trying' or 'The teacher makes me feel bad when I don't have the right answer', which express a lack of encouragement, was the most consistent predictor of a reduced pro-social behavior and of a high level of irresponsible behavior (Wentzel, 2002, p. 292). The educator-student relationship is a good predictor of positive academic adaptation. In addition, when teachers are supportive, students feel that they owe something to their teacher, they feel indebted. In this case, the responsible process for this effect is 'reciprocity' (Davidson, 1999).

Teacher's control

Form of teacher's control
The control dimension is found not only in family, but also in most human societies, including the classroom. Educators, like parents, set rules, monitor and use various corrective discipline methods in order to create structure, order as well as to mold students through a process of socialization, in the classroom. Most often, problematic behaviors arise as a result of maladaptive forms of control expression of the authority figures. Actually, firm intervention and the exertion of control over students' behavior in the

_____

classroom is absolutely required from teachers, but only the appropriate form of control will lead to the desired behavior. A recent observational study (Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, & Hunt, 2010) showed that when misbehavior was allowed in the classroom, due to the teacher's inappropriate use of control, teaching and learning were disrupted. Interaction often followed a cycle of the following type: (1) students misbehave, (2) teachers try to control misbehavior (3) students continue to misbehave (4) teachers step back in frustration and (5) student's misbehavior increases. Skills in behavior management, such as 'being alert and redirecting off-task behaviors, avoiding retreating, using appropriate praise and rewards and being aware of pacing and keeping children engaged' (p. 313) were required from effective teachers.

'Psychologically Controlling Teaching' (PCT) is a newly coined term, based on parenting literature, especially on 'psychological control' (Schaefer, 1965) referring to the pressure teachers exert upon students' feelings and thoughts in order to comply (Soenens, Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Dochy, & Goossens, 2012). The items used to refer to psychological controlling teaching are equated from parenting literature and are of the following types: 'My teachers are less friendly with me, if I do not see things their way', 'My teachers avoid talking to me when I have disappointed them', or 'My teachers often interrupt me' (p. 112). PCT negatively correlates with child self-regulation strategies, and it is positively related to academic achievement (Soenens, Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Dochy, & Goossens, 2012). In addition, psychological control does not facilitate internalization of values and norms. Psychological control was labeled as intrusive in the personal domain, manipulative, coercive and disrespectful to children (Barber, Xia, Olsen, McNeely, & Bose, 2011).

At the same time, teachers can use control inappropriately when they become overinvolved, being too helpful and suffocating the child's initiative and responsible behavior (Dinkmeyer & Eckstein, 1993).

Content of teacher's control

A research direction with an already long tradition is the socio-cognitive domain theory, which deals with the way adolescents interpret and construct their world. It was found that adolescents think differently in different domains of social knowledge. For example, adolescents do not treat 'hitting somebody' or their 'choice of clothing', the same way. Most adolescents think hitting

somebody is within a parent's jurisdiction, whereas their choice of clothing is a personal issue, and thus it is within their own jurisdiction. Once children reach adolescence, they claim a higher autonomy from their parents and this happens by creating a personal domain, which is desired to be within their jurisdiction. The personal domain refers to those issues that are beyond social or parental regulations, which have only personal consequences and include choices concerning: appearance, choice of friends, use of their free time, personal preferences, such as music, a. s. o. (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). These themes of the personal domain represent the universal need of adolescents to develop their ability to be the agents of their actions, for unicity and effectance (Nucci, 1996).

There is ample research literature which shows that adolescents perceive the issues assigned to their personal domain as within their own jurisdiction and parents should not interfere with them. It is natural to ask the question whether the adolescents' need of autonomy is to be found only in parent-adolescent relationship or it also extends to other relationships, such as the teacher-student relationship. Smetana and Bitz (1996) showed that adolescents viewed personal issues such as, choosing who to have lunch with, reading comics in class or talking to friends, as belonging to personal jurisdiction, whereas moral, conventional, and prudential issues as belonging within the teachers' legitimate authority. At the same time, one conclusion of this study was that students' misconduct happened because contextually conventional conducts, such as kissing a boyfriend or a girlfriend at school, were interpreted as belonging to personal jurisdiction. Moreover, from the parenting research literature we know that the regulation of a child's personal domain often leads to conflict between parents and adolescents. At the same time it leads to internalizing problems including: anxiety, depression, somatization and interpersonal sensitivity (Hasebe, Nucci, & Nucci, 2004). Taking into account the particularity of teacher-student relationship, it is not very clear, yet, whether the consequences of parental control over their children's personal domain, are true for the teacher-student relationship.

Knowing all this, it seems harder to find the balance between providing individual freedom, as adolescents require, and manifesting control in order to assure order and achievement of school objectives. Further research is needed to compare teachers who use different styles during class time within the same socio-cognitive domain. For example, authoritative teachers, who allow for

_____

personal autonomy, use explanation and reason, and non-punitive methods of discipline, could make students feel freer and promote a healthier development in children, as compared to authoritarian teachers who decide for students, do not leave room for discussion and negotiation and use punitive disciplinary methods within the same personal domain. Further researches would clarify the role and importance of using appropriate teacher practices in the classroom with adolescents and would emphasize the role of each theory – the socialization theory and socio-cognitive domain theory – in healthy child development.

How much are parents and teachers alike?

In his article, Wentzel (2002) legitimately asks 'Are Effective Teachers Like Good Parents?' Wentzel (2003) argues that educators influence students similarly to parents, but this does not mean, in our opinion, that effective teachers are 'good' parents, although this remains a fair research hypothesis. An explanation in favor of this hypothesis would be that there could be a transfer of competence from the 'good' parent role to that of an 'effective' teacher.

But the depth, and nature of the parent-child versus teacher-student relationship is significantly different. On the one hand, adolescents reported that the relationship with their teachers, as compared to that with their parents, or friends, is significantly less supportive and conflictual (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). Yet, the classroom atmosphere created by teachers makes students see teachers as being supportive, which in turn is favorable for positive school performance. On the other hand, a parent-child relationship is much deeper. Attachment between parents and children do not depend only on proximity, but more on the special emotional bonds between them. Attachment to parents is much stronger than the bond with friends, (Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983) or teachers. Such evidence has led to the conclusion that there is a difference between 'interpersonal contexts' and 'interpersonal relationships' (Wentzel, 2002). There is a difference between being a child's friend and creating a supportive interpersonal context, favorable to an increase in motivation. However, no matter whether it is about parents or teachers, the psycho-behavioral consequences upon children are the same.

Conclusion

Firstly, *it seems obvious that teachers have to learn a lot from the parenting literature about how to educate students in a healthy and constructive manner at school* (Berkowitz & Grych, 2000). Teachers are in a working relationship with their learners who have preferences and learning styles which best fit their personalities. Thus, being aware of our as well as our learners' preferences and styles, we can improve cognitive acquisitions and facilitate learning processes. It is often suggested that teachers do not teach content but people (Walker, 2009) and their use of a combination of good teacher-student relationship and firm behavioral control is an optimal attitude for effective teaching.

Secondly, *the quality of the teacher-student relationship is an important resource which moderates the effect upon students' school performance*. Khan and Siraj's (2012) review of the literature concerning 'educational encouragement', which refers to some basic human relational skills including a cooperative atmosphere, the use of encouragement (referring to progress and task) instead of praise (referring to a person's value), the use of natural and logical consequences or of limited choices, showed that it led, in a number of schools, to more successful student performance in the academic area, and also in the responsibility and involvement areas (Evans, 1996). These features mirror an authoritative style.

Finally, teachers' authoritative features *facilitate internalization of values and positive character development of students.* The final aim of child education on the part of parents is to socialize their children according to the norms and values of their society, an aim much similar to that of teachers that teach in the formal education system. Although 'school' and 'home' are not one and the same the formal and informal partnership between parents and teachers is to enhanced the child's healthy development in general, and to prepare him/her to become a competent and responsible member of their society. Internalization is best achieved when the teachers' style is characterized, for example, by autonomy-supportive contexts which allow self-regulation, emotional acknowledgement, non-coercive methods such as explanations and reasoning or taking the student's perspective (Roth & Bibi, 2009).

_____

Acknowledgements

References

Baker, J. A., Clark, T. P., Crowl, A., & Carlson, J. S. (2009). The influence of authoritative teaching on children's school adjustment: Are children with behavioral problems differentially affected? *School Psychology International*, *30*(4), 374-382.

Barber, B. K., Xia, M., Olsen, J. A., McNeely, C. A., Bose, K. (2011). Feeling disrespected by parents: Refining the measurement and understanding of psychological control. *Journal of Adolescence, 35*(2), 273-287.

Baumrind, D. (2010). The authoritative construct revisited: history and current status. In A. S. Morris, R. E. Larzelere, & A. Harrist (Eds.), *New Directions in Authoritative Parenting*. Washington, D.C.: APA.

Berkowitz, M. W., & Grych, J. H. (1998). Fostering goodness: Teaching parents to facilitate children's moral development. *Journal of Moral Education*, *27*, 371-391.

Bowlby, J. (1969, 1999). *Attachment, 2nd edition, Attachment and Loss* (vol. 1). New York: Basic Books.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In *International Encyclopedia of Education, Vol. 3, 2nd*. Oxford: Elsevier.

Darling, N., & Steinberg, L. (1993). Parenting style as context: An integrative model. *Psychological Bulletin, 113*(3), 487-496.

Davidson, A. (1999). Negotiating social differences: Youths' assessment of educators' strategies. *Urban Education*, *34*, 338-369.

Dinkmeyer, D., & Eckstein, D. (1993). *Leadership by Encouragement*. Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing.

51

_____

Evans, T. D. (1996). Encouragement: The key to reforming classrooms. *Educational Leadership, 54*(1), 81-81.

Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). The broaden-and build theory of positive emotions. *Philosophical Transactions of Royal Society Lond. B*, *359*, 1367-1377.

Greenberg, M. T., Siegel, J. M., & Leitch, C. J. (1983). The nature and importance of attachment relationships to parents and peers during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *12*(5), 373-386.

Grusec, J. E., & Goodnow, J. J. (1994). Impact of parental discipline methods on the child's internalization of values. *Developmental Psychology*, *30*(1), 4-19.

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2005). Can instructional and emotional support in the first-grade classroom make a difference for children at risk of school failure? *Child Development*, *76*(5), 949-967.

Hasebe, Y., Nucci, L., & Nucci, M. S. (2004). Parental Control of the Personal Domain and Adolescent Symptoms of Psychopathology: A Cross-National Study in the United States and Japan. *Child Development*, *75*(3), 815-828.

Hughes, J. N. (2002). Authoritative Teaching: Tipping the balance in favor of school versus peer effects. *Journal of School Psychology*, *40*(6), 485-492.

Kagan, J. (1978). The parental love trap. *Psychology Today*, *12*, 54-61.

Khan, A., & Siraj, S. (2012). Promoting educational encouragement for success. *Journal of Psychosocial Research, 7*(1), 119-125.

Lempers, J. D., & Clark-Lempers, D. S. (1992). Young, middle, and late adolescents' comparisons of the functional importance of five significant relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *21*, 53-96.

Mayerhoff, M. (1971). *On caring.* New York: Perennial Library.

Meehan, B. T., Hughes, J. N., & Cavell, T. A. (2003). Teacher-child relationships as compensatory resources for aggressive children. *Child development*, *74*, 1145-1157.

Nucci, L. P. (1996). Morality and personal freedom. In E. S. Reed, E. Turiel, & T. Brown (Eds.), *Values and knowledge* (41-60). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Ratcliff, N. J., Jones, C. R., Costner, R. H., Savage-Davis, E., & Hunt, G. H. (2010). The elephant in the classroom: the impact of misbehavior on classroom climate. *Education*, *131*(2), 306-314.

Rohner, R. P. (2004). The Parental "Acceptance-Rejection Syndrome": Universal Correlates of Perceived Rejection. *American Psychologist*, *59*(8), 830-840.

Roth, G., & Bibi, U. (2009). Beyond external control: Internalization of prosocial values as important in preventing bullying at school. *Planning and Changing, 40*(3), 242-254.

Schaefer, E. S. (1965). Children's reports of parental behavior: An inventory. *Child Development*, *36*, 413-424.

Smetana, J., & Asquith, P. (1994). Adolescents' and parents' conceptions of parental authority and personal autonomy. *Child Development*, *65*, 1147-1162.

Smetana, J. G., & Bitz, B. (1996). Adolescents' conception of teachers' authority and their relations to rule violations in school. *Child Development*, *67*, 1153-1172.

Soenens, B., Sierens, E., Vansteenkiste, M., Dochy, F., & Goossens, L. (2012). Psychologically controlling teaching: Examining outcomes, antecedents, and mediators. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *104*(1), 108-120.

Stipek, D. (2006a). Relationships matter. *Educational Leadership*, *64*(1), 46-49.

Stipek, D. J. (2006b). No Child Left Behind comes to preschool. *The Elementary School Journal*, *106*(5), 455-465.

Walker, J. T. (2009). Authoritative Classroom Management: How Control and Nurturance Work Together. *Theory Into Practice*, *48*(2), 122-129.

Wentzel, K. R. (2002). Are effective teachers like good parents? Teaching styles and student adjustment in early adolescence. *Child Development*, *73*(1), 287-30.

Wentzel, K. R. (2003). Motivating Students to Behave in Socially Competent Ways. *Theory into Practice, 42*(4), 319-326.