



JOURNAL: EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The Role of Teacher's Communication, Involvement, Enthusiasm and Humor in the Behavior Control of Preschool Pupils

Simona POJOGA, Marius MARICI

Education and Development, Research and Practice (EDRP)

Vol. 2, No. 1, (2015), October, pp. 35-44

On behalf of "The Education Sciences Faculty" U.SV.



The Role of Teacher's Communication, Involvement, Enthusiasm and Humor in the Behavior Control of Preschool Pupils

Simona POJOGA

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Iași

Marius MARICI

"Ștefan cel Mare" University, Suceava

Abstract: *The present study aims at investigating how the teacher's capacity to manage the educational activity influences the perceived control of the pre-schoolers' behaviour, taking into consideration variables such as: teacher's communication, involvement and humour. We used self-reported data, based on questionnaires, from 82 preschool teachers, all women, from Romania. The results indicated that teacher's characteristics are associated with teacher's perception of pre-schoolers' behaviour. The teacher's level of enthusiasm and humour plays a significant role regarding the perception of pre-schoolers' behavioural. Nevertheless, the perception concerning the pre-schoolers' behaviour is not influenced by the teacher's level of communication and involvement.*

Key-words: *teacher's communication, involvement, enthusiasm, humor, behavior control*

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The preschoolers' *ontogenetic* development is shaped by the teacher's influence. The teacher is mainly responsible for their psycho-behavioral and cognitive development (Kokkonen, Kokkonen, Telama, & Liukkonen, 2013). The *Social Learning Theory* formulated by Bandura shows that individuals imitate behavior after being exposed to the behavior of the others (Bandura, 1991). The children's behavior is determined by the social abilities they acquired, either from the family or from kindergarten. In addition, the recent research shows that the teachers-student relationship, based on a cooperative atmosphere, contributes to child's school performance and, at the same time, increases the child's level of responsibility and involvement in school (Khan, & Siraj, 2012). This makes teachers responsible for building an efficient learning context for preschoolers, through various and creative ways.

The present research investigates whether the teachers' perception of preschoolers' behavior can be influenced by the teacher's communication, enthusiasm, involvement and humor.

Children often face difficulties in conforming to teacher's authority, as well as adaptive difficulties in kindergarten integration (Hammarberg, 2003, Marici, & Turliuc, 2012). The leading responsibility for the educational activity belongs to the teacher who is considered the manager of the educational activity (Kagan, 1992). Teachers are crucial for the educational activity because they are the leading educational factor and they communicate,

choose their degree of involvement, identify and solve different problems. Teachers' perception of the preschoolers' behavior is determined not only by the teacher characteristics, but also by elements outside the educational activity. The amount of time the kindergarten children spend with their mother, negatively correlates with the adult-child conflict and with externalizing problems (Marici, & Turliuc, 2011).

1.1. Educational/teaching communication

Cucoş (2006) defines educational communication as a complex transfer of desirable information, through more channels, between two entities, who become simultaneously, and successively emitters and receivers in the context of the instructive-educative process. Communication in the educational context involves the existence of feedback, which is intended to regulate the teaching process, and which triggers the exchange of ideas and feelings with the purpose of expanding the horizon of educational knowledge.

The present research views communication from the perspective of the educational ideal, age particularities and language characteristics (Balint, 2008). The quality of child experiences is determined by the effectiveness of communication and coherent, explicit and correct verbal expression, in all possible forms of communication (Denis, & Horn, 2014).

The efficacy of communication in preschool context is given by the correctness of the method used, the teacher's communicational competence, the expressiveness in conveying the message, and by the child's understanding of the fact that through communication he is valorized and important. In this case, communication is the instrument by which constructive motivating interaction is realized (Matterlart, & Matterlart, 2000). The linear model of communication of Lasswell views communication not only as a method of information transmission but also as a variable which influences learning (Escarpit, 1978).

1.2. The teacher's involvement

The motivational involvement is defined as the drive that activates, directs and orientates the personal disposition towards the achievement of objectives (Constantinescu, n.d.).

Referring to motivation Cosmovici writes: "a motive is a mental structure, leading to orientation, initiation and adjustment of actions towards a more or less defined purpose." (Cosmovici, & Iacob, 1999, p. 99).

Sălăvăstru states that "learning is pluri-motivated" (Sălăvăstru, 2004, p. 51), and child performance is determined by motivation. The educational context and child perception about the ongoing activity determines their motivation. Therefore, the teacher's involvement is essential in determining the child perception about the ongoing tasks.

The dynamics of child motivation is influenced by the level of the teacher's competence, his involvement, enthusiasm, humor and passion with which he practices his job. "Few studies seem to have related pre-school teachers' perceived control to child behavior

problems” (Hammarberg, & Hagekull, 2000, p. 155). Studies found that there is an association between teacher’s perception of child’s behavioral control and teacher's intention to get involved, when a behavior problem arises (Gutkin, & Hickman, 1988).

1.3. Teacher's enthusiasm

Teacher's enthusiasm influences both the students’ and the teacher’s mood. The body language communicates the children's delight for what they are about to do, and the children's expectations determine the success in the activities the teacher proposes (Mitchell, 2013).

A study (Mitchell, 2013) found that there is a positive correlation between child behavior and teacher enthusiasm. In addition, teacher enthusiasm is not the most important factor for the educational activity. The success of the classroom activity involves taking into consideration other determining factors. The limits of enthusiasm have been synthesized by Metcalfe and Game (2006) who found that the teachers who tried to demonstrate fake enthusiasm generated inappropriate attitudes in the children and reached personal exhaustion. Furthermore, the studies of Wood (1998) suggest the idea the teacher enthusiasm significantly stimulates motivation, attention, as well as memorizing capacity. The teacher’s enthusiasm stimulates the children in reaching the proposed objectives. Even more, the research of Patrick, Hisley, and Kempler (2000, p. 217) shows that “enthusiasm was the most powerful, unique predictor of student intrinsic motivation and vitality.”

1.4. Teacher’s humor

In the educational context humour can refer to the implications of humour on child learning and the effect on child behaviour (attention and discipline) (Askidson, n.d.). In general, studies focused more on identifying the effects of humour and less on the humoristic message (Graham et al, 1992). A number of studies have shown that there is a positive relationship between “the teacher's humour and students' learning” (Wanzer, & Frymier, 1999, p.3). The theoretical explanation of the relationship between humour and teaching is based on the idea that humour captures children’s attention and can even influence behaviour (Ziv, 1979). Moreover, Terry and Woods (1995) found that stress, in elementary school and in kindergarten, can be diminished by using humour. Strong negative emotions lead to disturbances in assimilating information, and child behaviour might become uncontrollable. Actually, most research on humour seems to confirm that, as negative emotional atmosphere dissipates, anxiety decreases and relaxation takes its place. Through humour the teacher adjusts his speech, points out specific elements he considers relevant or teaches young children sophisticated linguistic concepts (Deneire, 1995). In spite of the positive effect, Wanzer and Frymier (2006, p. 82) draw attention on the “appropriate and inappropriate humour, positive or negative implication”. Gorham and Christophel mention several ways to increase humoristic attitude in the classroom and notices the fact that, when used appropriately, humour reduces tension, decreases the risk of aggression, diminishes boredom, and stimulates interest and motivation.

The study by Askildson (n.d.) concludes that humour is an important element in creating a favourable educational environment. The participants interviewed confirmed that humour reduces anxiety and tension, improves the relationship with teachers and increases children's interest for educational activity. All these benefits generate behavioural changes which can be effectively attained through humour.

2. THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to determine the relationship between variables related to teachers (communication, involvement, enthusiasm and humor) and teacher's perception of behavior control over preschool children.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study is a cvasi-experimental research, based on self-reported questionnaires. The data gathered was analysed in SPSS 20. We used the Independent Sample t Test and Pearson Correlation analyses.

3.1. Participants

The research included 82 participants, from Suceava district. All respondents were women, between 20 and 60 years old. 76% were from urban and 24% from rural setting. Concerning the level of education, 25% finished high-school, 14% post-secondary school, 52% graduated a college, and 9% had a master's degree. The participants had between 1 and 40 years of teaching experience.

3.2. Instruments

"Educational communication" – the instrument contains 9 items and it is a sub-scale of the *Caregiver Interaction Scale* (Arnett, 1989). The items are statements such as: "I speak warmly with the kids when I interact with them" measured on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). For this sub-scale we obtained an Alpha Cronbach of 0,87.

"Teacher's involvement" – the instrument contains 9 items and it is a sub-scale of the *Caregiver Interaction Scale* (Arnett, 1989). The items are statements such as: "I hug and embrace the children". The items are measured on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). For this sub-scale we obtained an Alpha Cronbach of 0,72.

"The teacher's enthusiasm" – the instrument contains 2 items and is a sub-scale of the *Caregiver Interaction Scale* (Arnett, 1989). The items are statements such as: "I am glad when I am with the children" and are measured on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). For this sub-scale we obtained an Alpha Cronbach of 0,72.

"Teacher's perception of preschoolers' behavior control"- the instrument contains 10 items, which are statements such as: The items are measured on a scale from 1 (total

disagreement) to 5 (total agreement). For this questionnaire we obtained an Alpha Cronbach of 0,81.

”The teacher’s humor”- the instrument contains 13 items, grouped in 1 single scale. The items are statements such as: “I communicate with children making jokes”. The items are measured on a scale from 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (partial agreement). For this questionnaire we obtained an Alpha Cronbach of 0,78.

3.3. Hypotheses

The present research had the following hypotheses:

H. 1: Teachers with a higher level of didactic communication will perceive that they have a higher level of behavioural control over preschool pupils, than teachers with a lower level of communication skill.

H. 2: More enthusiastic teachers will perceive that they have a higher level of behavioural control over preschool children, than teachers who are less enthusiastic.

H. 3: More involved teachers will perceive that they have a better behavioural control over preschool pupils, than less involved teachers.

H. 4: Higher levels of teacher didactic humour will be associated with a higher perception of child behaviour control, as compared with lower levels of teacher humour.

4. RESULTS

4.1.Results for Hypothesis 1

In order to test the hypothesis that “Teachers with a higher level of didactic communication will perceive that they have a higher level of behavioural control over preschool pupils, than teachers with a lower level of communication skill” we used the Independent Sample t Test, in SPSS. The results indicated no significant differences between teachers with a higher level of didactic communication (N = 40, M = 2,31, SD = 0,81) and teachers with a lower level of didactic communication (N = 42, M = 2,21, SD = 0,71) regarding the perception of behaviour control over preschool children: $t(70,540) = -1,008$, $p = 0,315$ ($p > .05$). The hypothesis is infirmed.

4.2.Results for Hypothesis 2

In order to test the hypothesis that “More enthusiastic teachers will perceive that they have a higher level of behavioural control over preschool children than teachers who are less enthusiastic.” we used the Independent Sample t Test, in SPSS. The results indicated that there is a significant difference between teachers who are more enthusiastic (N = 38, M = 2,38, SD = 0,70) and teachers who are less enthusiastic (N = 42, M = 2,21, SD = 0,71), regarding the perception of behaviour control over preschool children: $t(80) = 1,993$, $p =$

0,047 ($p < .05$). The hypothesis is confirmed.

4.3.Results for Hypothesis 3

In order to test the third hypothesis “More involved teachers will perceive that they have a better behavioural control over preschool pupils, than less involved teachers.” we used the Independent Sample t Test, in SPSS. The results indicated that there are no significant differences between teachers who demonstrate a higher level of involvement ($N = 42$, $M = 2,35$, $SD = 0,85$) and teachers with a lower level of involvement ($N = 40$, $M = 2,22$, $SD = 0,63$), regarding their perception of behavioural control over pre-schoolers: $t(80) = 1,447$, $p = 0,149$, ($p > .05$). The hypothesis was infirmed.

4.4.Results for Hypothesis 4

In order to test the fourth hypothesis according to which “Higher levels of teacher didactic humour will be associated with a higher perception of child behaviour control, as compared with lower levels of teacher humour.” we applied the Independent Sample t Test, in SPSS. The results indicated that there is a significant difference between teachers who use more often didactic humour ($N = 42$, $M = 2,40$, $SD = 0,77$) and teachers who use less didactic humour: ($N = 42$, $M = 2,10$, $SD = 0,69$), regarding the perception of behaviour control, over preschool children: $t(80) = 1,993$, $p = 0,047$ ($p < .05$). The hypothesis is confirmed.

5. DISCUSSION

The present research aims at analyzing the role of teacher's communication, enthusiasm, involvement and humor in the perception of preschoolers' behavior control.

Firstly, teachers with a higher level a communication report that they do not have a stronger perception of the preschooler's behavioral control, in comparison with teachers with a lower level of educational communication.

On the one hand, one explanation for these results is given by the fact that the communication scale used in this research refers to communication dimensions such as: listening, asking open questions, communicating during children's play, etc. Thus, these forms of communication are not intended to produce a behavioral change in children. The teacher's perception is directly dependent on the children's expressed behavior. If the scale had included items referring to communication methods intended to modify behavior (Lewis, 2009), this would have made teachers report a stronger perception, regarding behavioral control of preschoolers.

On the other hand, efficient educational communication can improve the teacher-student relationship, because communication indirectly influences the children's behavior (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005). We know that the optimal educational style involves high support, here also being included a high level a communication, but also a high level of behavioral control (Bălan, 2012).

Secondly, the analysis indicated that teachers who demonstrate a higher level of enthusiasm will report a higher perceived control than those with a lower level of enthusiasm.

In the present research the teacher's enthusiasm was measured by two items, which refer to the teacher's visible joy, exhibited when watching kids being involved in their activities. One explanation regarding this association is given by the reciprocity principle (Davidson, 1999). For example, the teacher's positive attitude can generate reactions of the same valence in the children in the classroom. On the other hand, a teacher who exerts an authoritarian educational style will behave punitively, harshly and will demonstrate less understanding and respect for the student's actions (Marici, 2014, Turliuc, & Marici, 2013). This can also generate similar reactions among students, who will shift their behavior according to that of a teacher.

Thirdly, the results of the research invalidate the hypothesis according to which the teachers with a higher level of involvement would manifest a stronger perception of child behavioral control, than the teachers with a lower level of involvement.

One explanation for the non-significance of the results could be that the continuous answers to the *Teacher's Involvement* scale were transformed to become dichotomist answers, through the median method. Because we had a lower number of participants, we considered that it wouldn't have been appropriate to differentiate between low and high involvement by eliminating the average answers and keeping the more extreme ones. We speculated that such a method could have influenced the results. Secondly, another speculation is that some items used to measure the teacher's involvement do not refer to behavioral modification, thus they have no effect on the teacher's perception of child behavioral control. Some items refer to teachers' participation in games, watching children, helping them in their play, hugging them or being firm.

Future studies should take into consideration the scale used for measuring teacher's involvement and make a separate analysis for the items that involve the teacher's unspecific involvement (i.e. participation) and for the items that refer to the teacher's specific involvement (i.e. rewarding children), which have as their primary goal behavioral modification.

Finally, the results have indicated that the teachers with a higher level of humor would have a higher perception of the children's behavioral control, than those with a lower level. This indicates that there is an association between educational humor and children's behavior. Some research showed that the role of humor in the classroom is to make the pedagogical impact more powerful (Lance, n.d, Wanzer & Frymer, 2006).

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to analyze the effects of some variables concerning teacher's communication on the perception regarding the preschoolers' behavioral control.

Firstly, this research found that the teacher's high level of communication and involvement does not influence the perception regarding the preschoolers' behavioral control. In order to have obtained significant results for the association between teacher's

communication and involvement and the teacher's perception of the preschoolers' behavioral control it would have been necessary to include items which would have aimed at behavioral modification (Kokkonen, Kokkonen, Telama, & Liukkonen, 2013). General involvement and communication normally do not target specific behavioral modification (Marici, & Turliuc, 2011).

Secondly, the present work has found that enthusiasm and humor have an effect on children's behavioral change. Both variables have positive valences and the two could function based on the reciprocity principle: when children are treated respectfully by teachers they might feel indebted and want to pay back the teacher. The best way they can do that is to modify their own behavior and adapt it to that of their teachers (Davidson, 1999, Turliuc, & Marici, 2013).

The present study is not without limits. The sample included only women owing to the fact that men are scarce as kindergarten teachers. The data was collected using standardized questionnaires, whose filling out was done in a group. Auto reported questionnaires are less reliable than other means of data collection such as direct observation.

Future research should investigate the role of the mediating variables in the association between teacher didactic skills and teacher perception of preschoolers' behavior control. The effect of some independent variables in this research can be explained by other factors that interpose between these and the preschoolers' behavioral control. As we have already pointed out, the variance of the children's behavioral control could be better explained by some variables that directly target the preschoolers' behavioral control, such as: the explanation regarding the desirable behavior or the rewarding of pro-social behavior. In addition, future studies should differentiate between the variables that directly and indirectly influence the perceived behavioral control of children.

REFERENCES

- Askildson, L. (n. d.). Effects of humor in the language classroom: Humor as a pedagogical tool in theory and practice, *SLAT Student Association*, 12, 45-61.
- Bălan, C. C. (2012). *Managementul clasei de elevi*. Suceava, Universitatea "Ștefan cel Mare".
- Balint, M. (2008). *Metodica activităților de educare a limbajului în învățământul preșcolar - Didactica limbii și literaturii române*, Cluj-Napoca, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai.
- Bandura, A. (1991). Social Cognitive Theory of Self – Regulation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, 248-287.
- Barber, B. K., Stolz, H. E., & Olsen, J. A. (2005). Parental support, psychological control, and behavioral control: Assessing relevance across time, culture, and method. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 70(4), 1-137.
- Constantin, T. (n. d.). Predictorii ai persistenței motivaționale; Rolul implicării motivaționale. *Cercetarea psihologică modernă: Direcții și perspective*. Iași, Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 33-45.
- Cosmovici, A., & Iacob, L. (1999). *Psihologie școlară*. Iași, Polirom.
- Cucoș, C. (2006). *Pedagogie*. Iași, Polirom.
- Davidson, A. (1999). Negotiating social differences: Youths' assessment of educators' strategies. *Urban Education*, 34, 338-369.

- Deneire, M. (1995). Humor and Foreign Language Teaching. *Humor*, 8, 285-298. In Askildson, L. (n. d.). Effects of humor in the language classroom: Humor as a pedagogical tool in theory and practice, *SLAT Student Association*, 12, 45-61.
- Dennis, L., & Horn, E. (2014). The effects of professional development on preschool teachers' instructional behaviours during storybook reading. *Early child development and care*, 184 (8), 1160-1177.
- Escarpit, R. (1978). *Ecrit et la communication*. Paris. In Cotoară, D. (2014), *Modele ale comunicării*. București, Universitatea Politehnică.
- Gorham, J., & Christophel, D. M. (1990). The relationship of teachers' use of humor in the classroom to immediacy and student learning. *Communication Education*, 39, 46-62.
- Graham, E. E., Papa, M. J., & Brooks, G. P. (1992). Functions of humor in conversation: Conceptualization and measurement. *Western Journal of Communication*, 56, 161-183. In Wanzer, M. B. & Frymier, A. B. (2015). The relationship between student perceptions of instructor humor and students' reports of learning. *Communication Education*, 48(1), 48-62.
- Gutkin, T. B. & Hickman, J. A. (1988). Teachers' perceptions of control over presenting problems and resulting preferences for consultation versus referral services. *Journal of School Psychology*, 26, 395-398. In Hammarberg, A. & Hagekull, B. (1999). Pre-school Teachers' perceived control and intention to Act Regarding Child Behaviour Problems. *Early Child Development and Care*. 160, 155- 166.
- Hammarberg, A. & Hagekull, B. (1999). Pre-school Teachers' perceived control and intention to Act Regarding Child Behaviour Problems. *Early Child Development and Care*. 160, 155-166.
- Hammarberg, A. (2003). Preschool Teachers' Perceived Control and Behaviour Problems in Children. *Comprehensive Summaries of Uppsala Dissertations from the Faculty of Social Sciences*, 123, 1-56.
- Kagan, D. M. (1992). Implications of research on teacher beliefs. *Educational Psychologist*, 27, 65-90. In Hammarberg, A. (2003). Preschool Teachers' Perceived Control and Behaviour Problems in Children. *Comprehensive Summaries of Uppsala Dissertations from the Faculty of Social Sciences*, 123, 1-56.
- Khan, A. & Siraj, S. (2012). Promoting educational encouragement for success. *Journal of Psychosocial Research*, 7(1), 119-125. In Turliuc, M. N., & Marici, M. (2013). Teacher - student relationship through the lens of parental authoritative features, *International Journal of Education and Psychology in the Community IJEPC*, 3(1), 43-53.
- Kokkonen, J. A., Kokkonen, M. T., Telama, R. K., & Liukkonen, J. O. (2013). Teachers' behavior and pupils' achievement motivation as determinants of intended helping behavior in physical education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 57(2), 199-216.
- Lance, A. (n.d.). Effects of humor in the language classroom: Humor as a Pedagogical tool in theory and practice. *Arizona Working Papers in SLAT*, 12, 45-61.
- Lewis, R. R. (2009). *Understanding pupil behaviour - Classroom management technique for teachers*, Oxon, ACER Press.
- Marici, M. & Turliuc, M. N. (2011). How much does it matter? Exploring the role of parental variables in school deviance in Romania. *Journal of Psychological and Educational Research*, 19(1), 9- 33.
- Marici, M. & Turliuc, M. N. (2012). A structural equation model of mediation between parental variables and school outcomes. The moderating effect of parents' level of education, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 33, 443-447.
- Marici, M. (2014). "Psycho-Behavioral Consequences of Parenting Variables in Adolescents",

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 187, pp. 295-300.

Mattelart, A., & Mattelart, M. (2000). *Istoria teoriilor comunicarii*, Iasi, Polirom.

Mitchell, M. (2013). Teacher Enthusiam: Seeking Student Learning and Avoiding Apathy. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*. 84(6), 19-24.

Patrick, B. C., Hisley, J., & Kempler, T. (2000). "What's Everybody So Excited About?": The Effects of Teacher Enthusiasm on Student Intrinsic Motivation and Vitality. *The Journal of Experimental Education*. 68(3), 217-236.

Sălăvăstru, D. (2004). *Psihologia educației*. Iași, Polirom.

Terry, R. L. & Woods, M. E. (1975). Effects of humor on the test performance of elementary school children. *Psychology in the Schools*, 12, 182-185. In Askildson, L. (n. d.). Effects on humor in the language classroom: Humor as a pedagogical tool in theory and practice, *SLAT Student Association*, 12, 45-61.

Turliuc, M. N. & Marici, M. (2013). Teacher-student relationship through the lens of parental authoritative features, *International Journal of Education and Psychology in the Community (IJEPC)*, 3(1), 43-53.

Turliuc, M., & Marici, M. (2013). What do Romanian parents and adolescents have conflicts about? *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 42, 28-49.

Wanzer, M. B., & Frymier, A. B. (1999). The relationship between student perceptions of instructor humor and students' reports of learning. *Communication Education*, 48(1), 48- 62.

Wanzer, M. B., & Frymier, A. B. (2006). Appropriate and Inappropriate uses of humor by teachers. *Communication Education*, 55(2), 178-196.

Ziv, A. (1979). *L'humor en education: Approche psychologique*. Paris: Editions Social Francaises. In Wanzer, M. B. & Frymier, A. B. (2015). The relationship between student perceptions of instructor humor and students' reports of learning. *Communication Education*, 48(1), 48- 62.

Accepted: september 2015

Published: december 2015