

CURRENT ISSUES IN PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Sintha Wahjusaputri

Postgraduate Programe Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka University, Indonesia
sinthaw@dnet.net.id

ABSTRACT

After analyzing some paths of research on affectivity in pedagogical relations, I present the main findings of two recent research projects carried out in Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary schools based on the views of 2nd and 3rd cycle primary school pupils. The first, among other methodologies, analyses pupils' narratives to bring to the fore their (dis)satisfaction as regards the quality of relations with their teachers. The second is based on an analysis of data gathered through interviews and application of the Relations with Teachers sub scale from the Academic Experience Questionnaire, pointing out the qualities pupils appreciate in their teachers, chiefly as regards relations, in line with their age group and gender and looking at some implications for the teacher education.

Keywords: *Pedagogical relations; Affectivity; Pupils' views.*

Despite the heavy investment in teacher education, difficulties continue to be felt in the area of pedagogical relations. Little has been done regarding this facets of the teaching activity, either in initial training or in ongoing training. Especially in the former, the problem of pedagogical relations is dealt with (if at all) in a haphazard, non-systematic and non-grounded manner. However, when teacher education needs are analysed or the effects of the initial shock with the reality are studied, it can be seen that this is a relevant and well - referenced domain. We also know that a large proportion of teachers, throughout their careers, are unable to overcome difficulties concerning relations, which has a negative impact on the success of the pupils, and the teachers' well-being and sense of professional fulfillment, as studies have shown. While it is true that the current socio-economic and cultural climate challenges teacher education to come up with innovative answers in fields such as curricular development or information and communication technology, we cannot forget that the relational dimension is the true *crux* when it comes to creativity, capacity for self control and self affirmation, and in tandem lends the teachers the ability to decentralize, and work in a team. As well as these skills and competences of a personal and social nature, teachers need to feel "equipped" to know how to observe and analyze educational situations through the application of research techniques and tools, and have the ability to "look" at the information in the light of a multi referenced theory that enables them to carry out good diagnoses and devise suitable responses for the different contexts.

It is up to the research to build knowledge about this reality, supplying the reference frameworks and methodological guidelines that provide the background to this dimension of professional training of teachers and their praxis. This text derives from our conviction that, as well as other dimensions of the pedagogical relationship, it is necessary to produce knowledge concerning the relevant affective dimension of the lives of teachers, pupils and the interaction between the two.

The dominant pedagogical relation in modern times “*smothered*” any expression of affectivity for a long time, given that the ideal relation was considered the transmission of knowledge and the keeping of a distance between the master and the pupil. In line with this thinking, and despite the gradual and progressive impact of other pedagogical models that highlighted the role of affectivity and its expression in the pedagogical relation, research has not paid particular attention to its study.

In this article, after clarifying some crucial concepts to enable analysis of the topic, we review the research and pedagogical models that have contributed to further understanding in this field. We focus especially on the pedagogical relation in its restricted sense, namely the pupil teacher interactions and pupil-pupil interactions. In the second part we present the results of two research studies carried out with primary school pupils about their perception of their relations with the teaching staff.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach with survey method. Related to the survey, according to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010: 201-204), explains that “*Descriptive survey research, the approaches share the following common characteristics: (a) Identify a Research Topic; (b) Conduct a Review of the Literature; (c) Develop Research Questions; (d) Develop the Survey*”.

In this second part we shall briefly describe two research projects carried out on the topic of affectivity and emotions in the context of the pedagogical relation. The first study aimed to find out, among other aspects, how the pupils interpret the interactions of “*classroom life*”, how they perceive the didactic-pedagogical relationship established and what, in their opinion, are the main factors that help create a climate for learning, expressing emotions and well-being. A questionnaire was used to gather the data containing “open” questions, applied to a sample of 310 pupils spread over the 5th, 7th and 14th years of schooling in two public schools in central Jakarta, Indonesia.

The questionnaire, made up of 6 questions, aimed to find out the pupils’ thinking about what happened in the lessons in which “they learned and felt happy”, and what happened in the lessons when their results and feelings were the opposite. For example, the first question was as follows: “Imagine you are in a lesson in which you believe you have learned a lot and at the same time felt happy. Write down what the teachers did in these lessons when you learned well and felt good”.

Analysis of the content allows us to establish the following thematic areas: teaching methods, communication style and relational aspect of the teacher’s action. We shall briefly outline the conclusions as regards the relational aspect.

RESULTS

An analysis was subsequently carried out of its psychometric qualities, concluding that they were good (SD, 7.47; Alfa, 833). Only afterwards were these procedures applied to 142 pupils from the 6th year (n=85.60%) and 9th year (n=57.40%) of a public school in central Jakarta. As for the gender breakdown, in

the two school levels together 69 pupils were male (48.6%) and 73 female (51.4%). Their ages ranged from 11 to 18, with the average age of 6th-year pupils 11.59 (SD=0.89) and 9th-year pupils 14.44 (SD=0.73). The sub-scale is made up of 12 items concerning dialogue with the teachers, contact inside and outside the classroom and perception of the time teachers have to help the pupils. One can say that, as well as the methods and communication style, there are a set of relational characteristics established in the classroom which can be considered responsible for the positive or negative feelings of the pupil: (a) *The teacher's style of relation*. In lessons in which the pupil feels satisfied and happy an understanding relation is built, above all one which includes comprehension and trust. "This lesson made me feel good, as if I was at home, at ease without anybody saying: "Sit still, don't touch that!- It was good". The ideal situation for many of the interviewees is a teacher "who knows how to have fun and a joke but who is able to command respect at the same time." Humour, when integrated into the teaching content, leads to better learning, arouses interest, makes tasks more enjoyable and enables the involvement of the pupil in the learning, to such an extent that the pupil perceives time as "going more quickly" and even "feels like staying for longer". But these aspects are definitively linked to the management of verbal and non-verbal communication, the methodologies used by the teachers and the content itself. Descriptions such as the following express this view: "Me, in the Visual and Technical Education lesson felt good because I didn't know how to draw a face and I asked the teacher and she explained how to do it very well. She came to me, was very friendly and had a lot of patience." The positive feedback of the teacher's initiative is another communicative factor that satisfies the pupil, having a big impact on their self-esteem: "I felt an intelligent, more complete person. I made an effort to understand"; (b) *The teacher's personal characteristics* that were pointed out and valued positively in this sample were as follows: kindness, calmness, tolerance, patience, comprehension, respect, fairness, equality, justice and impartiality. These characteristics, as well as the teacher's values and attitudes, have considerable weight in the relation that is established in the classroom and intertwine with the learning and positive feelings of the pupil. Many of these aspects are clearly outlined by another pupil: "In lessons where I considered that I learned more and where I felt satisfied and happy the teacher was kind, caring, looked at everybody in an equal light and treated all the pupils the same way. The teacher considered us all equal, did not get angry with the pupils and did not have favourites".

These are teachers who are there to help, show understanding, give everybody the same chance to take part and are fair: "there was no injustice: if I was the first to put up my hand it was me who would speak"; (c) In order to *manage classroom behaviour* it is essential to instil some rules which are clear and negotiated and which all the actors have to stick to. Making sure the rules are followed implies adopting strategies that are effective to a greater or lesser extent depending on each teacher and the image they transmit of themselves to their pupils. A summary of the pupils' representations as regards keeping order and controlling behaviours, and which the pupils associate with "good" teaching, includes aspects such as: creating a climate of respect, establishing rules and making sure they are followed, reprimanding when need be, reprimanding calmly, punishing fairly and monitoring the tasks set.

A large proportion of pupils stated that in the lessons in which they learned a lot and felt emotionally good there was an *environment of respect and order*. In order

to foster this environment students have to understand the reasons for the rules, which also depends on the teacher's effort: "When somebody tells a joke the class starts to laugh and then doesn't stop fooling around, but if the teachers talked with us calmly and explained that we can't do that I think it would have the desired result. Although he may think we are too old to be told that".

The differences between the averages of the sub-scale separated per school year shows that the 6th-year pupils present significantly better averages than the 9th-year pupils. This finding suggests that the school year has a differential effect in the pupils' perception of their relations with the teachers. The results suggest that as the pupils progress through school, the relational aspects with the teachers become less relevant.

Analysis of the correlation between the pupils' ages and the data obtained also allows one to conclude that as the average age increases, the points on the aforementioned sub-scale go down; it seems that the age of the pupils negatively correlates to the perceived relations with their teachers. As the pupils "grow", they put less emphasis on the "proximity" of the teachers and give more importance to their academic and pedagogical skills. It is also seen that pupils from the sample have a very positive representation of their relations with the teachers.

DISCUSSION

Affectivity in The Pedagogical Relation

We view the *pedagogical relation* as one of the tasks encompassed in the *educational relationship*. This occurs when ever "a relationship is established between at least two human beings, whereby one seeks, to a greater or lesser extent in a systematic and intentional manner and in the most wide-ranging circumstances, to transmit to the other certain cultural contents (*educate*), ranging from the most basic needs for survival to others that may be of gratuitous fruition". As for the pedagogical relationship in its more restricted sense, it consists of the "interpersonal contact" that is established, in a demarcated time and space, in the course of the "pedagogical act" (hence, in a teaching-learning process), between the teacher-pupil-class (well defined agents) (Owen and Donnachie, 2002, p. 36). Both the quality of these contacts and their results depend on multiple factors, among which the personalities of the teacher and the pupil, involving subjectivity, interpretations (individual and shared) around situations and experiences in the classroom and school, life paths and personal projects.

It is this combination of subjectivity that is essential and demands an ethical code that keeps the teacher aware of his responsibility as a "mediator" in the construction of the pupil's "itinerary", as an authority in the cognitive, moral and affective perspective. This responsibility goes beyond the construction of each particular branch and its scope impacts both on society and the future. Just as one expects teachers to tell the truth (logical, scientific and moral), one also expects them to have behaviours and attitudes "that bring to the fore their civic, ethical and moral values" (Donnachie, 1997, p.73) and consequently interact with justice, not restricted to compliance with the law and regulations, but devotion and recognition of the other.

Affectivity is a polysemous concept. The dictionary definitions suggest sentiments of affection and tenderness, a relation of mutual caring and help, as well

as empathy, friendliness, warmth, love and compassion. Mallaguzzi (2001), following in the wake of other authors, proposed analysing affectivity in five components: motivation, confidence in oneself, attitudes, emotions and causal attribution. Alexander (2004:37), These five components play “*a hugely important role in learning and teaching*”. Research into the topic, in line with the presuppositions of each author is deepening certain aspects, and adding new ones, such as beliefs, feelings, interests, values, etc, which translates the complexity and amplitude of the object under analysis. Our approach does not break free from these ambiguities; however, we highlight the attitudes of respect, empathy, openness towards the other, and the aspects linked to feelings (*subjective well-being*) and emotions (joy, satisfaction, confidence, one’s own feelings), deriving from the pedagogical interaction in which these attitudes prevail.

The discussion on the role of affectivity in education is as old as the discussion on relations between thinking and feeling, reason and emotion, mind and heart. According to Oberhuemer (2004: 16), the major problems of education come from the absence of continuity between reason and the body, the person and society, the person and nature; and Donaldson (1998) believes that the major problem of traditional education is in the distance that it maintains between the child and the adult, with the former intending at all costs to subject the latter. In general, all reforming pedagogical thinking of the 20th century, regardless of the conceptual and procedural differences of each movement, proposes the connection and functional interdependence between the intellectual, emotional, social and manual capacities, in the name of the integral and autonomous development of the child.

Research has shown that it is through affectivity that the individual gains access to the symbolic-cultural systems “*originating cognitive activity and making it possible to make progress, as these are the desires, intentions and reasons that will motivate the child in the selection of activities and objects*” (Leite and Tagliaferro, 2005, p. 50). Cognitive and affective processes interrelate and influence one another mutually. This line of research is strongly backed up by the work of Wallon (1968) and Vygotsky (1998). One of Vygotsky’s central ideas, contained in the concept of *zone of proximal development*, is that specific relations between people are associated with the development of superior functions, making the teacher’s willingness to provide help and support essential. Likewise, recent research in the field of neurosciences has shown that feelings and conscience are not alien and separated; feelings and emotions have a strong impact on the mind, and one can even say that they constitute the roots of conscience (Moyles, Adam and Musgrove, 2000). Studies in this area also suggest that “the human brain requires a certain challenge to activate emotions and learning”, and that “a safe physical environment is especially important to reduce high levels of stress”, which hinder well-being and learning. It therefore seems there is a strong relation between the learning of pupils and: the quality of the educator-child relationship, namely the safety and emotional comfort felt in early schooling; the social support which is obtained by the educators (Hughes *et al.*, 1997); the school ethos where one cultivates close human relations, in articulation with the authority of adults (Freire, 2001).

Analysing the issue in the light of the *teacher’s relationship with the pupils*, implies the teacher understanding aspects such as how his action is understood (including the ability to listen to the pupils), competence (concern for the actual learning of each pupil), a fair relationship and distribution of power (absence of

favouritism or exclusion, sharing of decisions and initiatives), and personal facets (open to the pupils' interests and problems, showing care and concern, valuing their freedom and feelings, etc).

In this field, among the conclusions drawn from the research we highlight those that show the more the pupils perceive the absence of favouritism and the neutrality of the teachers, the more they trust them and attribute them the status of authority draws attention to the phenomenon of reciprocity of feelings and behaviours that "are translated into a direct relation between the 'kindness' of the teacher and the affective and behavioural conduct of the pupil," in a kind of "*circular causality* between kindness, mutual respect and appropriate behaviours". There are also classic studies that reveal sharp differences in the interpretation and valuing of the teachers' actions according to the age, schooling level and sex of the pupils. On this point Alexander (2001, p.404) pointed out that in adolescence, when the teacher oversteps the mark in terms of verbal manifestation of warmth and affection for the pupils and the class, they interpret these attitudes as a *strategy of seduction*, used for "exercising control that in their eyes is not legitimate, constituting a kind of unacceptable violence (*albeit symbolic*)". The facts suggest that at this age "the teacher's kindness is not shown through the affective aspects, but through technical competence, *the ability to make the pupil take part in the lesson*".

The affective dimension in the curriculum management is linked to the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the teacher; as regards non-verbal postures, we are talking about *proximity* (teacher moving physically closer to the pupils to help them) and *receptivity* (translated by the effort to look at and listen to the pupil). As for the verbal communication of the teacher, there are multiple positive facets to be assessed, such as *oral incentives*, *support*, *feedback* and *praise*. These are *teaching behaviours* that, according to: (1) encourage pupils to carry out tasks, showing positive expectations about their potential; (2) help and collaborate in the understanding of content (repeating, making an effort to be clear), solving problems, in carrying out the task; (3) encourage a humanised assessment (and therefore a "fair" one), respecting the abilities and characteristics of the pupils, leading them to actively take part in the process, to reflect and learn from their own mistakes; (4) involve the pupils in the decisions and choices made in the lesson, both as regards the *structure of the curricular activities* (some optional contents, teaching and learning methods, processes and assessment moments, etc), and as regards *the structure of the social relations* (definition of rules, debate on non-compliance, decisions regarding penalties for infractions, etc.); (5) do not marginalise, stigmatise or ridicule pupils or exclude anybody from obtaining help, providing individual support when possible.

In a study on a *customised management of the curriculum*, in which a large proportion of the teaching behaviours listed above were observed, Siraj, Sylva and Muttock (2004:12) concluded, "defining criteria of choice at individual level makes it possible to create an affective connection concerning the choice, hence immediately asking the pupils to reflect, decide and accept responsibility for their decision, as such nurturing an affective attachment".

In addition to all these aspects of "know-how" and professionalism, one must take into account the personal characteristics of the teacher, such as their supportiveness (*ability to listen and understand without being critical*), a friendly and respectful *approach* (for example, greeting and talking to the pupil outside

school and the classroom) and especially the *ability to foster a climate of well-being and good humour* (where the pupil can laugh at the same time as feeling motivated to work). The teacher's need to be able to temper strictness with humour has long been acknowledged. According to Alexander (2001: 345) the pupils, in getting to know their teachers well, are able to regulate their behaviour in line with the predominant traits of each teacher: "there are, regarding this matter, at least three kinds of teachers: *those who the pupils can joke with and abuse and who do not reprimand them; those who they can joke with but cannot abuse; those who can never be joked with*".

Another aspect related to the management of the interactions concerns the instilling of discipline. The way the teacher exercises this control is crucial for the success or failure of the pedagogical relation. Research (Siraj, Sylvia, Muttock and Gilden, 2002) has concluded that the imposed and legitimate basis of power is negatively linked to the affective and cognitive learning of the pupils; whereas the use of referent (personal) power and expertise (*cognoscitive*) power by the teacher, are accepted by the pupil, leading to learning in a disciplined manner. Although teachers in the case of class disturbances should impose their authority, they have to do it within the parameters of respect for the pupil. It is the pupils themselves who value the teacher's ability to "constrain" (*just as their ability to "teach"*), but demand that it is done with "*humanism*". Another analysis angle of the teacher's relation with the pupil concerns the intention of achieving a set of goals of an affective nature through the classroom practice.

However, the need to foster, in tandem with the curricular knowledge, a positive socio-affective climate amongst the pupils (ability to work in a group, show solidarity and mutual help, accept differences, raise awareness of the incompleteness of the individual and the knowledge) is viewed not only as necessary and urgent but possible, which calls for a big investment in teacher education in this field.

Another angle of analysis is the *pupil's attitude towards the teacher* and the personal consequences deriving thereof. The teacher's feelings with regard to the class's characteristics and the behaviour and performance of some pupils have led to studies on teacher motivation, teacher discomfort and teachers' emotions such as fears, guilt, pleasure and suffering. As stated by Hargreaves (1998: 159), although good knowledge has been obtained about teachers' thoughts in the different areas of their professional activity, "we know a lot less about how they feel when they teach, the emotions and desires that motivate them and moderate their work." This emotional facet of teaching, in spite of some recent studies (Alexander, 2008) continues to be an ongoing line of research.

The third analysis angle we refer to is the *relations amongst the pupils*. Research has shown that pupils like to go to school more because of the socialising and friendships made with their peers than because of the lessons and learning. However, there is also a positive correlation between liking school, the attention paid to the teacher and academic success (Feitosa *et al.*, 2005). The friendship and companionship built among the pupils and the repercussions in achieving the educational aims, even if relatively unstudied, have proven essential to nurture the pupil's liking for school and to obtain success. One can even say that "most of the information, attitudes and values that the young acquire at school are formed in the midst of this complex territory, unexplored to a greater or lesser extent, that constitutes the system of peers. Resuming what we stated above, the teacher has to

strike a balance in two major domains of their activity: *instruction*, as an *expert*, and *animation of the class*, as a mediator and leader. While the former is a straight-forward task, the latter is defined as a set of processes that allow the organization and coordination of the pupils' voluntary and collective efforts so that they achieve the goals, (personal, of the group and of the school). These aims are not merely cognitive, but also of an affective and social nature.

CONCLUSION

These conclusions back up the findings of other research already mentioned which underlines the negative correlation between age and the valuing of a "close" relation with the teacher. Other results, however, did not arrive at the same conclusions as the general tone of the research. Therefore, one has to admit that the question of repetition does not reflect, in differential form, on the kind of relations perceived by the pupils. Another contradictory fact is the issue of gender; according to the data obtained, gender seems not to exercise a differential effect on the relations perceived by the pupils with their teachers.

We aimed to show how questions of affectivity, understood as the ability to irradiate empathy, mutual respect, knowledge and belief in the capacities of others are basic competencies of teachers and pupils that make it possible to develop a high-quality pedagogical relation. In the *first part*, we saw how the research has highlighted several domains in which these effects are shown, pointing out their influence on motivation and learning and a climate of healthy socialising. In *the second* and *third parts*, a summary of two studies carried out - what most stands out is that, in the pupils' own words, effective teaching does not depend only on the scientific quality of the didactic procedures implemented but is strongly related to affectivity in the sense we attribute it above. We also reach the conclusion that through their professional competence, with regard to scientific, pedagogical and relational aspects, teachers can legitimise their influence on the pupil, stressing the importance of respect and openness to the "other". These findings allow us to put forward some suggestions concerning teacher education: (1) the relational aspect should be viewed as a major part of the initial training curriculum; (2) the professional development of the teachers is undertaken through interaction in work contexts; (3) training teachers means, above all, preparing people who will collaborate in the education of people undergoing development; which implies acquiring the ability to establish connections between the domains of cognitive learning and affectivity; endowing them with the ability, among other aspects, to actively listen to the "voice" of the pupil; (4) this has implications not only as regards the content and theoretical references but also in the selection of the very models of training, especially focusing on the reflexive models and those that strive to prepare future teachers through research.

REFERENCES

Alexander, R. (2004). Still No Pedagogy Principle, Pragmatism Compliance in Primary Education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. Vol. 34 (1), March.

- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to those who dare teach*.
- Lodico, Marguerite G., Dean T. Spaulding and Katherine H. Voegtle. (2010). *Methods in Educational Research, From Theory to Practice*. Second Edition. USA: John Wiley & Sons, h. 201-204.
- Malaguzzi, L. (2001). Summary of article, in Loris Malaguzzi Thoughts and Pedagogical Work, Cuadernos de Pedagogia n 307, Alfredo Hoyuelos.
- Moyles, J, Adams, S, Musgrove, A. (2002). 'A Framework for Effective Pedagogy', SPEEL Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning, DfES.
- Oberhuemer, P. (2004). Conceptualising the early childhood professional: policy models and research issues.
- Siraj-Blatchford, I, Sylva, K, Muttock, S, Gilden, R, Bell, D. (2002). *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years*.
- SOEID. (1997). A Curriculum Framework for Children in their Pre-school Year.
- Sylva, K, Melhuish, E, Sammons, P, Siraj-Blatchford, I, Taggart, B, Elliot, K. (2003). *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the pre-school period*.