

Pupils at risk benefit more from a good relationship with the teacher

September 21 2012

Pupils at risk, such as pupils with a low socioeconomic status and children with learning difficulties, benefit more than other children from a good relationship with their teacher. Teachers, however, often appear to be less friendly and supportive towards disruptive children, whereas these children are not less friendly towards the teacher. Furthermore, teachers act in a more dominating manner towards withdrawn children as a result of which these children become even more passive still. These are the conclusions of NWO researcher Debora Roorda, who gained her PhD on 4 September 2012 from the University of Amsterdam.

Amongst other things, Roorda carried out literature research into the correlation between the personal relationship between the teacher and the child and the child's involvement in the school and the child's performance at school. She observed that [pupils](#) are more involved and perform better if they have a good relationship with their teacher, especially as pupils get older. A personal relationship with the teacher is particularly important for pupils with a [low socioeconomic status](#), pupils with learning difficulties and for boys. According to Roorda teachers could make an extra effort in this area: 'Teachers could, for example, show that they are interested in the children and care about them. In addition to this it is important that teachers provide opportunities for the children's own input.'

Negative relationships extra harmful at primary school

The correlation between positive, warm relationships and more involvement and improved performance at school is greater in [secondary](#)

[education](#) than in primary education. However, for children in primary education a [negative relationship](#) between the teacher and child that is full of conflicts has a stronger negative effect on the involvement and [school performance](#). 'The [negative consequences](#) of a poor relationship in [primary education](#) make it even more important still to intervene at an early stage if the relationship between a teacher and pupil is not going well,' says Roorda.

Relationship with 'disruptive' and 'withdrawn' children is difficult for teachers

To gain a better understanding of the actual relationship between teachers and young children and the possibilities to change the relationships between them, Roorda also carried out empirical research with different groups of infants and their teachers. Roorda: 'Interestingly teachers are less friendly and supportive towards disruptive children even though these children are not less friendly towards the teacher. Teachers also act in more dominating manner towards withdrawn children as a result of which these children become even more passive still. In addition to this the children also respond in a less friendly manner if the teachers are more dominant.'

Training in interpersonal skills helps

The teachers followed a course in interpersonal skills with which they could improve their relationships with withdrawn children. 'The training had no effect on the [children](#), but it did influence the teachers,' says Roorda. 'We observed that after the course teachers were less dominant and consequently more opportunities arose for the child's own contribution.'

Background information

The PhD research entitled "Teacher-child relationships and interaction processes: effects on the learning behaviour of pupils and the reciprocal influences between teacher and child" was funded by the Programme

Council for Educational Research, a unit of NWO, and was carried out at the University of Amsterdam.

Provided by Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)

Citation: Pupils at risk benefit more from a good relationship with the teacher (2012, September 21) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-pupils-benefit-good-relationship-teacher.html>

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