

The Key Role of Parents-Teachers Relationship and its Effects on Teachers' Self-Efficacy.

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Abstract

Being a teacher means not only to perform specific teaching tasks. Current school context characteristics require capabilities to handle different situations and relationships. Hence, communication and flow of information among involved informants become prior and worthy of attention. Integrated information of students' parents and colleagues could facilitate teachers' work.

Existing research has found that parents-teachers active communication is a fundamental component to a child's quality education [1], [2]. Up to date literature already recognized the importance of communication among teachers and children's parents, but little has been done in relation with colleagues' communication.

This study aimed to explore the relationship between teachers' communication with parents, teachers' communication with colleagues and teachers' perceived general self-efficacy [3], [4]. Several researches showed positive effects of self-efficacy such as teacher's well-being, good professional practices, and positive students' outcomes [5]. Our focus was to analyze teachers effectiveness in dealing with complex situations.

Participants: 562 teachers working in North-East Italy primary school, lower secondary school and upper secondary school. They completed an on-line questionnaire using a 7-point Likert scale including: i) measures related to how teachers perceived their students' parents: features of the shared language between parents and teachers, relationship/collaboration, and two dimensions of mind's state perception [6]; ii) measures related to relationship among teachers: self-efficacy in verbal communication, trust and respect.

Data were analyzed with SPSS.18 using descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis of the data indicated that teachers communicated easily with parents (Average = 5.28; SD = 1.36), they established a good relationship with them (Average = 5.07; SD = 1.25) and they attributed Agency (Average = 4.38; SD = 1.05) and Experience (Average = 4.33; SD = 1.13) equally.

Teachers' level of self-efficacy in communication with colleagues was high (Average = 5.41; SD = 0.69); they share goals and interventions (Average = 5.91; SD = 1.00) and they have high level of confidence in their colleagues (Average = 5.30; SD = 1.17).

General self-efficacy correlated positively with self-efficacy in communication with colleagues ($r = .580$, $p < .001$), ability to establish a good relationship with parents ($r = .360$, $p < .001$), Agency ($r = .280$, $p < .001$) and Experience attribution to children's parents ($r = .157$, $p < .005$), perceived respect ($r = .390$, $p < .001$) and trust in colleagues ($r = .365$, $p < .001$).

Our findings are aligned with literature: a good communication between teachers and children's parents as also trust among teachers increase teachers' perceived general self-efficacy.

1. Introduction

According to Schiavone [7] recent school's reforms in recording practices, documents, and administrative practices as also the decentralization of school departments lead the teaching staff to enhance their ability in different professional practices. Paquay and collaborators [8] claim that teachers should be able to interpret and act into the complexity of situations in relation with their professional practice, but also considering institutional transformations. They should use all their resources: cognitive, affective, practical and relational.

2. Theoretical background

Teachers should feel competent in performing very different tasks: teaching tasks, responsiveness to students' needs for help, coping with job stress. The generalized sense of self-efficacy is referred to a stable perception of personal competence to deal effectively with a variety of stressful situations [9], [10]. General self-efficacy could explain a large range of human behaviors and coping outcomes [11] when the context requires focusing on multiple behaviors simultaneously. Self-efficacy's measure does not correspond to an outcome evaluation, but it is an index of the ability to cope with stress and

to mobilize resources [11]. Literature states that high self-efficacy enables people to overcome obstacles, to focus on opportunities and to solve problems [11]. Up to date research has shown that a high sense of teaching efficacy is related to personal positive behaviors and job satisfaction [12], to students' success [13].

The above mentioned complexity of teacher's tasks and commitments requires teachers to improve their social and relational competence: they have to be able to collaborate with school officials, to develop a good relationship with colleagues and children's parents, to give support and to recognize children's very differentiated needs (SEN students) [14]. Recent studies showed that parental involvement in school issues has a positive impact on teachers' performance and student's achievement [15], [16]. Effective communication with parents is an essential component of children's quality education [1], [2].

This study aims to explore the relationship between teachers' communication with parents, teachers' communication with colleagues and teachers' perceived general self-efficacy [3], [4].

Several researches have showed that high scores in perceived general self-efficacy are related to teacher's well-being, teacher's good practices, and students' positive outcomes [5]. Our focus was to analyze the relationship between high perceived self-efficacy and the ability to cope with complex task related to different domains: cognitive, practical, affective and relational.

3. Method

3.1 Design, sample, and procedure

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Department of Philosophy, Education and Psychology, University of Verona. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, and an on-line questionnaire was administered to a sample of 562 teachers working in North-East Italy primary school, lower secondary school and upper secondary school. Data were collected in October 2014. Informed consent was obtained from each participant (see Table 1 for sample characteristics).

Table 1. *Sample Characteristics*

Variables	%	Mean	SD
Gender			
Males	15%	-	-
Females	85%	-	-
Age	-	47.23	8.60
Length of service	-	19.95	10.65
Type of school			
Primary school	28.3%	-	-
Lower secondary school	26.5%	-	-
Upper secondary school	45.2%	-	-

3.2 Instrument

Responses are given on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 "completely disagree" to 7 "completely agree". The on-line questionnaire includes the following measures:

3.2.1 Measures referred to the features of the relationship between teachers and students' parents

The measure is articulated into three subscales. One item measures if teachers communicate easily with parents. Four items measure if teachers perceive to have established a good relationship with parents (e.g., "At least one parent cooperates with you when necessary", $\alpha = .903$). Nine items measure two dimensions of mind perception [6]. In particular, the factor *Experience* includes two capacities (e.g., "Pride", $\alpha = .719$), and the second factor *Agency* includes seven capacities (e.g., "Self-control", $\alpha = .910$).

3.2.2 Measures related to the perceive characteristics of the relationship among teachers

The measure is articulated into four subscales. Eight items measure self-efficacy in communication with colleagues (e.g., "I am able to assert my opinion when I communicate", $\alpha = .746$). One item measures if teachers use to share goals and interventions with the other teachers. One item measures if teachers trust each others, and another one measures how teachers perceived to be treated by their colleagues.

3.2.3 Measures related to teachers' general self-efficacy

The measure is composed of eight items [3], [4] (e.g., "I can make my students respect rules and codes of conduct", $\alpha = .887$).

3.3 Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed with SPSS 18, using descriptive and inferential statistics (correlations and linear regressions). Firstly, for each variable, a composite score was computed by averaging the respective items. Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between variables. Finally, multiple linear regression analyses were conducted.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Means and standard deviations for the study variables are reported in Table 2. As shown Table 2, teachers communicate easily with parents, they establish a good relationship with them, and they attribute Agency and Experience equally. Teachers' level of self-efficacy in communication with colleagues is high; they use to share goals and interventions with other teachers, and they trust them. Teachers also report high levels of perceived respect and general self-efficacy.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics*

Variables	Mean	SD
CEwP	5.28	1.36
RwP	5.07	1.25
E	4.33	1.13
A	4.37	1.05
SE OC	5.41	0.69
SGal	5.91	1.00
TiOT	5.30	1.17
PR	5.90	1.07
TGSE	5.34	0.79

Abbreviations: CEwP = Communicate Easily with Parents; RwP = Relationship with Parents; E = Experience; A = Agency; SE OC = Self-Efficacy on Oral Communication; SGal = Share Goals and Interventions; TiOT = Trust in Other Teachers; PR = Perceived Respect; TGSE = Teachers' General Self-Efficacy

General self-efficacy (Table 3) correlates positively with self-efficacy in communication with colleagues, perceived respect and trust in colleagues. General self-efficacy also correlates positively with the ability to establish a good relationship with parents, and Agency and Experience attribution. These results show that an effective communication between colleagues (based on respect and trust) and a good parents-teachers' relationship (based on cooperation and equal relations) make teachers feel competent and able to handle different situations.

Table 3. *Correlations*

	CEwP	RwP	E	A	SE OC	SGal	TiOT	PR
CEwP	1							
RwP	.259**	1						
E	.062	.263**	1					
A	.210**	.539**	.314**	1				
SE OC	.214**	.178**	.056	.206**	1			
SGal	.133**	.211**	.074	.192**	.309**	1		
TiOT	.156**	.259**	.034	.206**	.348**	.492**	1	
PR	.179**	.163**	.120*	.160**	.426**	.383**	.631**	1
TGSE	.236**	.360**	.157**	.280**	.580**	.401**	.365**	.390**

Abbreviations: CEwP = Communicate Easily with Parents; RwP = Relationship with Parents; E = Experience; A = Agency; SE OC = Self-Efficacy on Oral Communication; SGal = Share Goals and Interventions; PR = Perceived Respect; TiOT = Trust in Other Teachers

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

4.2 Linear regression models

Multiple regression analyses were carried out, teachers' general self-efficacy was the dependent variable. Identified independent variables included: perceived relationship with parents; perceived self-efficacy in communication; shared goals and interventions; and perceived respect. Results from the multiple regression, including the unstandardised regression coefficients (B), the t-tests and significance values, are presented in Table 4.

The regression analysis explained 41.9% (adjusted R² = 0.413) of the variance (F = 70.320, p < .001). General self-efficacy is predicted by the good relationship established with students' parents, high levels of self-efficacy in communication with colleagues, ability to share goals and interventions with other teachers, and perceived respect.

Our findings are aligned with literature showing that self-efficacy's measures are correlated. Moreover we identified the high impact of good features of the perceived relationship with children's parents on teacher's general self-efficacy.

Table 4. *Multiple regression analysis*

Variable	B	t	sig.
RwP	.145	5.749	.000
SE OC	.468	9.249	.000
SGal	.133	4.002	.000
PR	.086	2.697	.007

Abbreviations: RwP = Relationship with Parents; SE OC = Self-Efficacy on Oral Communication; SGal = Share Goals and Interventions; PR = Perceived Respect

5. Conclusion

The present research takes place in a renewed school context where teachers' role is complexified. Social competences are required and have to be implemented in different social domains: intra-school and school-family contexts.

Findings show that a good communication and a positive relationship with students' parents and colleagues increase teacher's perceived general self-efficacy.

The study is based on subjective self-ratings which could not correspond to real abilities and competence. Despite literature has already proved that self-efficacy is associated with personal positive behaviors and students' success, the unique use of self-report method could represent a limitation. Future research could therefore investigate the effectiveness in coping with increasing school complexity using different methods and involving all parties.

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