

The Influence of Emotional Behaviour on Teacher-Student Relationship in the Classroom Setting: Nurse Teacher-Student Nurse Perspective

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ABSTRACT The interaction between the teacher and the student in the classroom is the first exposure to learning in which the relationship between the two parties starts. This paper therefore sought to answer the question "How does emotional behaviour influence teacher-student relationship in the classroom setting?" The paper used a qualitative, descriptive design. The population was all students studying at the University of Venda and following the four-year degree in Nursing Science. A non-probability purposive sampling was employed to sample 45 students and 4 teachers. Data was collected from the students through focus group interviews. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with teachers. The researcher was guided by Techs' steps in the analysis of data. The ethical principles were observed. The findings showed that a sense of humour and tolerance enhanced student performance, whereas, negative emotional behaviour associated with aggressiveness and short temperedness were perceived to hinder learning. The attitudes and behaviour displayed by teachers and students in the classroom were found to have both a positive and negative impact on teacher-student relationship.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of teacher-student relationships is the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management which can enhance student academic success (Riley 2009). Smith (2003) considers identifying students' gifts and getting to know them better as very important steps in building relationships and creating a positive classroom environment. This is supported by Elaine et al. (2007) and van Uden et al. (2014), who claim that creating a positive learning climate is focused on student success. When teachers model a caring attitude, support students, evaluate students work and foster a sense of belonging or ownership, the failure rate can be reduced or even eliminated. In contrast aggressive teachers who respond inconsistently to students create a negative classroom atmosphere (Veldman et al. 2013). Other elements of classroom management, such as the delivery of instruction and direct feedback also influence the creation of a positive learning environment (Penning et al. 2014). Marzano et al. (2015), and Marzano and Marzano (2015) assert that teacher-student relationships are the keystone for the other effective classroom management factors. Teachers need to apply ethical behaviour, in order to encourage a positive student-instructor relationship and to create a safe, nurturing environment (Savage and Favret 2006; Tobell and O'Donnell 2013).

Students are faced with many challenges of adjusting to a new environment, coping with their studies or course content, peer acceptance and school engagement are all significantly associated (Ali et al. 2015). Doubts of whether they will manage to satisfy the requirements of the degree sometimes overwhelm them. Orientating these students to the new environment is needed to avoid most of the uncertainties that students might be faced with. Bezemer (2008) concludes that induction programmes for newly-arrived students has a significant impact on their educational career. Furthermore, the benefit of induction is that it enables a person to effectively transit to the new environment. Marzano et al. (2015) and Boynton and Boynton (2015) emphasise that without the foundation of a good relationship, learners might resist rules and procedures along with the consequent disciplinary actions.

According to Thompson (1995), attributes are characteristics or qualities ascribed to a person or thing. Good attributes are those that have a positive impact on building constructive teacher-student relationships (Gallagher et al. 2013; Kurt et al. 2014). As teachers' relationships play an important role in students' overall school or college adjustment, it is important for an investigation to be conducted to find effective ways of facilitating positive relationships (Wood and Campbell 2004).

The response to interaction between the teachers and students depends on the type of stimulus that they are exposed to in the classroom setting, which might affect their emotional behaviour. What goes on in the classroom would describe the degree in which the teacher and students interact in harmony or disharmony (Veldman et al. 2013). Teachers' expectations of student achievements are related to systematic differences between teacher behaviour and subsequent student learning (Cornbleth 1980). The conclusion of a study on burnout and perceived self-efficacy in classroom management indicates that in the educational framework, burnout is considered to be a process where teachers become emotionally exhausted in response to a demanding working environment (van Uden et al. 2014). The consequence of burnout on the teacher could be the development of negative attitudes towards recipients, decreased mental and physical well-being and the deterioration of relationships with students and colleagues (Nicholas 1999; Riley 2009).

Quality teacher-student interaction in the classroom setting will also depend on how teachers respond to challenging behaviour of students and the overall perception of stress. This is cited in a study conducted by Neville (2004), who examined teachers' perceptions of their own ability to handle challenging behaviour of students, and to establish positive relationships as possible influences on the quality of relationships. It was found that teachers with high efficacy were more positive and responsive to students, and promoted positive classroom environments, which resulted in a better relationship with students. Literature affirms that having sufficient self-efficacy and high responsibility is essential to be able to become a competent teacher and improving communication with students (Kurt et al. 2014). These teachers' perceived students who manifested challenging behaviour as being in need of support and striving for adaptation, and they understood that students' progress well if their behaviour is managed in a positive way (Tobell and O'Donnell 2013). Although Nurmi (2012) states that students' characteristics play an important role in the organisation of classroom learning, teachers' stress and negative affect (feelings) should never be projected on students in the classroom. The researcher views teacher stress and negative affect as contributing to negative relationships in the classroom setting (Neville 2004).

A study conducted by Csikszentmihalyi (2000) on teacher and student perceptions of creativity in the classroom environment, concluded that teachers perceive positive attitudes such as giving students choices, providing them with learning opportunities, accepting them as they are and boosting their self-confidence as contributing to creativity and positive relationships in the classroom. The use of teaching strategies that foster creativity such as cluster groups, cooperative groups, brainstorming, flexible direction and free time, foster students' self-esteem and create a sense of ownership. Teachers also reported that students were capable of progressing well if teachers prepared the environment that contributed to the development of students' creativity. As a result, the attrition rate should diminish or be completely eliminated (DeCapua 2008). The need for orientation of students is supported by studies conducted by Ngidi and Sibaya (2003), who found that briefing, effective supervision and guidance from subject teachers is needed to reduce students' anxieties.

Students need guidance throughout the process of learning until they become independent. The teacher should encourage and promote different ways of knowing to empower future nurses to be able to respond in caring ways towards clients. Teachers should also encourage students to be creative in finding solutions to their problems. They should also emphasise the value of learning and the teaching of student (Leininger and Watson 1990). This is supported by Vallant (2006) who states that the interactions that take place in classroom have a significant influence on students' learning (Vallant 2006). On the other hand the pressure on the climate of nursing education has increased in recent years as a result of changes in the curriculum, teaching strategies, admission policies and public accountability. Students are now ready to challenge instructors' academic qualifications; consequently this has affected the relationship between students and instructors (Wood and Campbell 2004).

Problem Statement

It is widely accepted that the teaching and learning environment established during the initial learning experiences of students can affect their mental health. During the encounter in the

classroom, students are fully dependent on their educators. As researchers are interacting with student nurses at various levels of their education and training, the present researchers observed that students had problems in establishing learning relationships with the teacher and adjusting to the classroom environment. Some students appeared to be anxious and tense, sometimes failed to participate in the classroom, failed tests and some dropped out of the profession. Some literature consulted supported the notion that student-nurses experienced stress during their initial experience because of poor teacher-student interaction, peer group pressure, inappropriate teaching strategies and having to adapt to a strange environment (Beck and Srivastava 1991; Jones and Joneson 1997). This is corroborated by Gupchup et al. (2004), who argue that unsupportive faculty and excessive study loads are predictors of stress associated with negative outcomes to students' progress. This paper therefore sought to answer the question "How does emotional behaviour influence teacher-student interaction in the classroom setting?"

Objectives

The objective of the paper was to determine how emotional behaviour influence teacher-student interaction in the classroom setting.

METHODOLOGY

The paper used a qualitative, descriptive design. The population was all students studying at the University of Venda and following the four-year degree in nursing science. The University of Venda (Univen) is found in Vhembe district, one of the five districts on the north-east of Limpopo Province in South Africa. A non-probability purposive sampling was employed to sample 45 students as follows: 12 level 1; 13 level 2; and 10 levels 3 and 4 respectively, as well as 4 teachers directly interacting with students at different levels. Data was collected from the students through focus group interviews following their levels of study. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with teachers. According to Polit and Beck (2010), a homogeneous group can provide participants with the freedom to express their perceptions, thoughts and feelings. Data gained from written

words and audiotapes were analysed. In this paper the researcher was guided by Techs' steps (Creswell 1996) in analysing data. Transcriptions were made from the audiotapes in the form of written words. The researcher reflected on the possible meaning of the relationships of what had been recorded. Data was analysed as soon as it was collected. Coding and categorisation were generally initiated as soon as data collection had begun. Coding was used to recognise the data collected in the interviews. Themes were derived from the questions asked. The researcher adopted Lincoln and Guba's contracts (1985) to ensure trustworthiness of the study (that is credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability). The researcher applied ethical principles to protect the rights of the students and teachers who participated in the paper as well as the institution in which the research was conducted. English was used to interview all the participants, because they all understood the language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the sake of simplicity, the four student groups were categorised as 1 and 2 levels and 3 and 4 levels denoting junior and senior levels respectively.

Acceptable Emotional Behaviour in the Classroom Setting

The attributes of a good teacher and a good student in the classroom setting (sense of humour; self-control; patience and tolerance) were perceived to enhance students' performance in the classroom setting.

Both the students and teachers identified having a sense of humour in class as being a critical aspect to be considered in the classroom setting. Some of the senior male students were of the opinion that it is not really a key element in this sub-category, while others, including the majority of junior female students, identified it as a characteristic that was needed in the classroom. Their views are encapsulated in the following verbatim responses:

"It is very important that our teachers should have a sense of humour to enhance the conducive learning environment." (Female junior student)

"Yes, I would like to second this speaker for I have also realised that the classroom envi-

ronment becomes tense if lecturers do not have sense of humour.” (Male senior student)

“My first exposure as a teacher was really horrible, standing in front of students who do not have a sense of humour. I even felt that the following day I’ll make sure that I come to class wearing a fearful mask on my face.” (Teacher interacting with senior students)

“I think we lecturers and students must have a sense of humour always, be it in the class or clinical setting.” (Teacher interacting with junior students)

“Bright and smiling face displayed by our lecturers are good emotional behaviour which enable students to be free to ask questions and give suggestions.” (Female senior student)

These verbatim responses are supported by the following authors who consider humour to be healthy behaviour that can be achieved by always smiling, laughing and making jokes. Schuster (1996) as cited by Moore (2005), Grutzner (2008) and McTuttyre (2007), all agree on the importance of praising students and smiling to achieve a positive learning environment. According to Reese (2007), the one-to-one connection between teacher and students often involves praise, which is regarded as a powerful tool for establishing respect in the classroom. The present researchers also consider a sense of humour to be a good emotional characteristic that can promote interaction in the classroom. Teachers and students who are happy or who make fun in class are usually approachable and this simplifies the achievement of learning outcomes. In contrast to the above commendations by participants, in another study, Tobell and O’Donnell (2013) quoted the following citation made by a student “...A teacher comes in front. I have never seen him before and he doesn’t introduce himself. He tells them how disappointed he was by their actions, they walked too slowly, and talked when they were in their lines....”. Student felt that the teacher was unruly, shouted at them and harangued them for talking.

All participants perceived controlling of emotions and/or having self-control as examples of positive emotional behaviour. This idea is reflected in the following verbatim responses:

“As teachers we should always be consistent with the level of emotions when we are happy, smiling and caring. The teacher and student nurses should both have an understand-

ing of each other that is, being able to detect each other’s emotions.” (Teacher interacting with junior students)

“Teachers should be able to control their negative emotions towards us as their students so that students may do the same to their patients.” (Female senior student)

“Students should try by all means to overcome loss of control, especially the first entering students who are still in the adolescent stage, for there is no excuse if a student bursts in to the class. It is more likely to stir our emotions as educators.” (Teacher interacting with junior students)

This sub-category is supported by Bergin (2009) who found that poor attachments indirectly affected children’s behaviour at school. Teachers with healthy attachments were able to control their emotions and were more socially competent and willing to take on challenging tasks in the classroom. However, the degree of control the teacher has over what goes in the classroom would describe the degree to which teacher and students interact in harmony or disharmony (Veldman et al. 2013). Furthermore, students with positive attachments to their teachers were able to control their emotions and attempt challenging learning tasks in the classroom. The researcher suggests that the ability to control emotions should be included as one of the important examples of positive emotional behaviour because it helps to build good relationships, improves cooperation and prevents unnecessary conflicts between teachers and students.

The senior groups and all teachers also identified patience and tolerance (which are similar in meaning) as critical components of interaction. These subcategories are encapsulated in the following verbatim responses:

“Tolerance for one another is vital, mistakes should be accepted where possible, that is no harsh decision against one another, for this is the usual practice by our lecturers.” (Male senior student)

“The educator should always be helpful in the class and be patient with all of us as students.” (Female senior student)

“Every person has got a weak and strong point, therefore we should try to exercise patience and tolerance among the students that we teach.” (Teacher interacting with junior students)

According to Marlowe et al. (2006), tolerance is one of the five strategies beneficial to classroom interaction. Showing tolerance is necessary when there is a misunderstanding between two or more parties, (which, in this study were the teachers and students), to ensure that goals are achieved. Teachers should consider that students are unique and that they behave differently, all of which need to be accommodated. The present researcher is of the opinion that tolerance is needed in order to achieve positive relationships in the classroom. Students and teachers are individuals with many differences that are indicative of their uniqueness. Boynton and Boynton (2015) indicate that it is critical to remember that when a teacher treats students with respect, they tend to appreciate and like the teacher.

Unacceptable Emotional Behaviour in the Classroom Setting

Negative emotional behaviour in the classroom setting was associated with shouting, being aggressive and short tempered whilst,

- ♦ Poor performance was perceived to be lack of commitment to studies
- ♦ Quietness was perceived to be lack of interest
- ♦ Failure to assist students was perceived to be an uncaring behaviour of the teacher

Participants emphasised that shouting, being aggressive and short-temperedness are examples of unacceptable emotional behaviour. Some participants (senior students' groups) felt that projecting personal stress and anger onto students as well as holding grudges against students were examples of improper emotional behaviour. The following responses were captured:

"Being shouted at us as students because of disagreement with the boss who is a lecturer, being verbally and emotionally aggressive towards students are bad emotional behaviours." (A male senior student)

"My view dear students, both the teachers and students who take out stress on each other are really bad. They and we should not bring stress from home to the classroom, avoiding unnecessary arguments." (A male senior student)

"I also support my colleague insulting and being aggressive to students is a bad emotional characteristic." (A female junior student)

"Stress and aggression displayed in the class has been taken or carried from home that is very bad." (A male junior student)

"Students get irritated easily, that sounds like bad emotion. If everyone has an attitude, for example, short temper, bullying others, interaction won't be easy." (Teacher interacting with junior students)

"Some throw temper tantrums which is bad behaviour towards us as their educators." (Teacher interacting with senior students)

"Most people, including us teachers and students, display anger as defence mechanisms." (Teacher interacting with senior students)

Disruptive behaviours such as aggression, bullying, lying and non-compliance are among the top problems that school going youth experience (Ali et al. 2015). Studies investigating how teachers who were identified as at-risk of aggression conducted by Gilbert et al. (1997) in (Yoon 2002), revealed that students often experience inconsistent responses from aggressive teachers as well as from negative school environments. Similar views were identified by Howes et al. (1994), Birch and Ladd (1997) and Tobell and O'Donnell (2013) state that unfavourable outcomes in the classroom were hostile aggression, negative school attitudes and school avoidance. The present researcher is of the opinion that aggression is an emotional behaviour which disturbs the learning environment and the development of positive relationships. Ali et al. (2015) indicate that students who do not have a positive relationship with their teachers are less likely to enjoy school as a result they avoid going to school. According to Hughes and Cavell (2009), aggression was identified as a behavioural problem which can be reduced by creating a warm, close relationship with those who are at risk, thus reducing opportunities for aggressive behaviour in future.

According to Hamzah and Abdulla (2009), the quality of teachers should be measured according to the following five categories: physical, spiritual, intellectual, good social skills and emotional. Teachers often become short-tempered towards students when they are short-staffed and exhausted (Veldman et al. 2013). The present researcher is of the opinion that it is unacceptable for teachers to show aggression and to be short tempered towards students. Teaching is a challenging occupation. Nevertheless, teachers should remember that they hold

influential positions in society and they should behave appropriately. Van Uden et al. (2014) describes self-efficacy as attitudes towards students and the importance for teacher to invest in improving their interpersonal behaviour, so that students perceive them to be more cooperative.

Lack of respect, poor communication and using unknown or vulgar language were considered by most student participants to be examples of unethical behaviour. Participants felt that when students skip classes, arrive late, and do not perform tasks assigned to them, arrive under the influence of alcohol, or display other type of misbehaviour, such as absenteeism or bullying; they also show a lack of respect towards the teachers. All the teacher participants were of the opinion that students are capable of achieving their goals as long as they receive enough guidance and orientation. Marzano and Marzano (2015) also assert that teachers must keep in mind that aggressive students, although they may appear highly resistant to behaviour change, should be considered being children who are experiencing a significant amount of uncertainties in their lives. Skipper and Douglas (2015) indicate that students view positive criticism influencing good teacher-student relationship despite their failure.

CONCLUSION

The current study identified how perceptions and attitudes could influence relationships in the classroom. Aggression, stress, short-temperedness, and anger were other negative aspects identified by participants and supported by literature as examples of poor emotional behaviour which spoiled interaction in the classroom. The most effective way of forming such relationships is to learn to listen and respect students' voices. The subcategories identified as good characteristics for interaction in this study will surely enhance a good teacher-student interaction and should always be observed, while bad behaviour will spoil the interaction and should be avoided by all means if successful teaching and learning is to be achieved. Furthermore, the researcher felt that successful teachers need to place a high value on forming mutually respectful, trusting and positive relationships environment with their students in order to create classroom environments that are

safe and caring, and that allow a strong focus on realising students' potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings, the study recommends that:

- ♦ Teachers and students should display a sense of humour, enthusiasm, self-control, tolerance, confidence, patience and empathy
- ♦ Teachers and students should change their negative perceptions and attitude towards each other by perceiving each other as unique individuals with different strengths and weaknesses
- ♦ Teachers and students should always deal with their emotions to overcome challenges of poor relationships which hamper education and effective learning in the classroom and
- ♦ Teachers should be given the opportunity to attend workshops, seminars and in-service training regarding ethical issues, personal behaviour, customer care, change management and other relevant topics dealing with a person's behaviour or attitudes.

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