School Well-being of Primary school Students with Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties

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Introduction and Aims

Students with Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties (EBD) face multiple challenges in school. Recent researches indicate that students with EBD exceed all other disability groups in incidents of school removal because of health-risk behavior (like substance abuse, weapon-related violence, or physical violence resulting in serious bodily injury) (ED, 2017). Educators should understand factors contributing to their difficulties to prevent consequences such as mental health issues and delinquency (Kern, 2015; ED, 2015). Teacher–child relationships (STR) have been widely acknowledged as significant factors in children's academic success and adjustment (Pianta, 1999). Research indicates that students who experience more positive and supportive relationships with their teachers tend to perform better academically than those with less supportive connections (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta, 1999; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). As such, fostering strong teacher–child relationships may act as a protective factor or even as an intervention strategy for students who are at risk of underachieving academically (Birch & Ladd, 1996).

The aim of this study is:

to assess EBD children's well-being at school, from teachers', children's and parents point of view also considering the role of STR.

Method

Participants: 433 7-11 year old children (221 boys), their parents and teachers.

Measures:

Teachers filled out
- Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS; Pianta, 1999)

Parents filled out
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997)

Children filled out
- Questionario sul Benessere a Scuola (QBS. Marzocchi e Tobia, 2015).

Results

Pearson correlations showed that:

1. Children with **behavioural difficulties** (BD) are generally dissatisfied with school (r=-.27), including negative relationships with peers (r=-.26) and teachers (r=-.24), low self-efficacy (r=-.16), and a negative emotional attitude (r=-.13).
2. Children with **emotional difficulties** (ED) are less satisfied too (r=-.13) and they report negative relationships with teachers (r=-.23) and peers (r=-.20). Teachers report conflictual relationships only with children with BD (r=.13).

Students evaluation	BD	ED
School satisfaction	-.27**	-.13*
Peer relationships	-.26**	-.20**
STR	-.24**	-.23**
Self-efficacy	-.16**	-.09
Emotional attitude	-.13*	-.10

Teachers evaluation	BD	ED
Conflict	.13**	.01

** p < 0,01
* p < 0,05

Regression Analyses showed that:

1. **BD** are connected with **low school satisfaction** (β=-13; p=.006) and **high conflict** perceived by teachers (β=.16; p=.03)
2. **ED** are connected with **poor STR** as perceived by children (β=-18; p=.01) and **high dependance** perceived by teachers (β=.17; p=.02).

Conclusions

The results indicate that students with BD show difficulties in the relationship with teachers and peers, and teachers report conflict with them too. Students with ED perceive a negative relationship with teachers, who don't seem aware of that. Maybe because students with ED are less visible than students with BD, whose behaviors are more visible. Children who enter school with higher ratings of behavioral problems are likely to experience greater conflict and less closeness to teachers, and this effect may continue to impact over time on the quality of teacher-child relationships (Howes et al, 2000).

The present study is useful to identify the differences about the perception of school environment in children with BD e ED. This could be useful to address specific prevention actions, in particular in teacher's perception of the relationship with students.

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