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TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARD STUDENTS
AT RISK OF SCHOOL DROPOUT:
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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School dropout and its consequences

According to the ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (1999), 33.8% of students dropped out of school in 1997-1998.

With a dropout rate of 40%, male students are in a more critical situation than female students .

Youths suffer serious adverse consequences.

Several of them exhibit social maladjustments such as behavioral problems and delinquency (LeBlanc, et al. 1993).

From an economic stand point, these youth experience substantial difficulties in integrating the labor market, and endure very high unemployment rates (Langlois, 1990).

Causes of School dropout

School dropout results from a long interaction process between the student and his/her environment (Fortin, et al., 1998; LeBlanc et al., 1993; Potvin & Papillon, 1993; Rumberger, 1995).

The decision to drop out of school results from a long evolutionary process that is characterized by an accumulation of frustrations.

Often induced by academic failures and difficult relationships with peers, teachers, and parents (Fortin, 1992; Parker & Asher, 1987; Rumberger, 1995).

Importance of the teacher-student relationship

According to Lynch and Cicchetti (1997), the quality of the teacher-student relationship has an impact on the student's school adjustment.

During preadolescence, youths' representations of the relationships they maintain with their parents and teachers become predictors of their school motive and adjustment.

It seems that positive relationships with teachers and parents improve the strategies of school adjustment, school commitment, self-monitoring and perception of control.

Importance of the teacher-student relationship

Studies conducted on class climate have shown that the quality of the teacher-student relationship is associated to the youth's school motive and attitudes toward school (Eccles, et al. 1993) .

Students in school with perceived positive atmospheres may be more encouraged, like school better, and become more engaged; this increased engagement may in turn stimulate them to work harder, thus fostering higher achievement (Voelkl, 1995).

Also, it has been demonstrated that meaningful social interactions of students with teachers have an impact on these students' learning

Importance of the teacher-student relationship

The teacher's behaviors, which nurtured the emotional needs of her students, showing care, respect, and physical closeness, helped to increase the student's level of academic attitude and their formation of more positive attitude toward school and self (Pierce, 1994).

The frequency and quality of these interactions improve students' self-respect who acquire a sense of belonging to the class and school (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1994).

Importance of the teacher-student relationship

Pace, et al.(1999) findings, highlight the importance and influential role of teachers in the social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment of children. Teacher attitudes and interpersonal reactions may serve to either foster further distress and impairment or to support positive adjustment.

Potvin and Rousseau (1992) have mentioned that teachers take more positive attitudes toward regular students and female students than toward students with learning difficulties.

In the literature, the teacher-student relationship has been found more negative among youths with learning difficulties and dropouts (Kortering et Braziel, 1999; Parent et Paquin, 1994).

Importance of the teacher-student relationship

According to certain studies, the teacher-student relationship has been cited by students as one of the reasons for school dropout (Himreich & Théorêt, 1997; Royer et al., 1995. Violette, 1991).

Dropouts are less satisfied with teachers and less attached to them (Le Blanc and al, 1993). Also, the quality of the teacher-student relationship is lower (Franklin and Streeter, 1995; Potvin & Rousseau, 1992).

Goal and questions of the study

This study analyses the teacher-student relationship, i.e. teachers' attitude toward students at risk of school dropout.

This longitudinal study aims to answer to the following questions :

Do teachers' attitudes change based on the student's status (at-risk vs. at-low-risk students) and gender?

Are these attitudes stable over a period of time?

Definitions of concepts

At risk of school dropout : The student at risk of dropping out is a student (teenager) who exhibits several of the characteristics associated to dropout students (personal, social, familial and educational characteristics) and is unlikely to complete his/her secondary V (High school diploma).

Teachers' attitudes : In the present study, we refer to Staats's (1975, 1986) definition of the attitude as a positive or a negative emotional response to social stimuli whose effect is to unveil a whole set of approach or shunning behaviours. The affective dimension of attitude is related to the emotions aroused by the subject of the attitude. In our study, the subject of teacher's attitude is the student.

Method

The subjects

The sample consists of 800 students who were in secondary I (12th and 13th years old) when the first measure was taken. They have been followed up for 3 years (Sec.1, Sec2 and Sec. 3) and measures have been taken 3 times.

292 teachers (140 woman and 152 men) participated in the study.

Method

Instruments of measures

The Teachers' Attitude Toward their Students scale (TATS) (Potvin and al., 1993) was used to measure teachers' attitudes. The TATS was made with the help of a differential semantic scale of Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum type (1960).

The TATS is composed of 18 bipolar adjectives, and each of them can get a value between -3 to $+3$ ($\times 18 = -54$ to $+54$). In the present experimentation the Cronbach's alpha is 0,95

Bipolar adjectives

- Good-Bad
- Honest-Dishonest
- Pleasant-Unpleasant
- Peaceful-Restless
- Docile-Stubborn
- Serious-Foolish
- Hard-working-Lazy
- Obedient-Disobedient
- Polite-Insolent
- Sociable-Aggressive
- Meticulous-Neglectful
- Achiever-Non-achiever
- Mature-Immature
- Creative-Non-creative
- Cooperative-Uncooperative
- Attractive-Unattractive
- Happy-Unhappy
- Tenacious-Inconstant

Example: *Student name* _____

Mature _____ **Immature**

Method

Instruments of measures

At risk of school dropout

The French version of the *Décisions* Questionnaire (Quirouette, 1988) was used to identify subjects potentially at risk of school dropout . *Decisions* is a validated questionnaire that can identify students at highest risk of dopping out.

Students complete a series of multiple choice questions grouped into six factors of equal value that can influence their decision to stay in school.

Method

Instruments of measures

At risk of school dropout

The questions deal with the following important areas in the student's life : 1) Family Environment, 2) Personal Traits, 3) Educational Plans, 4) School Habilities, 5) Teacher-Student Relationship, 6) Motivation for school.

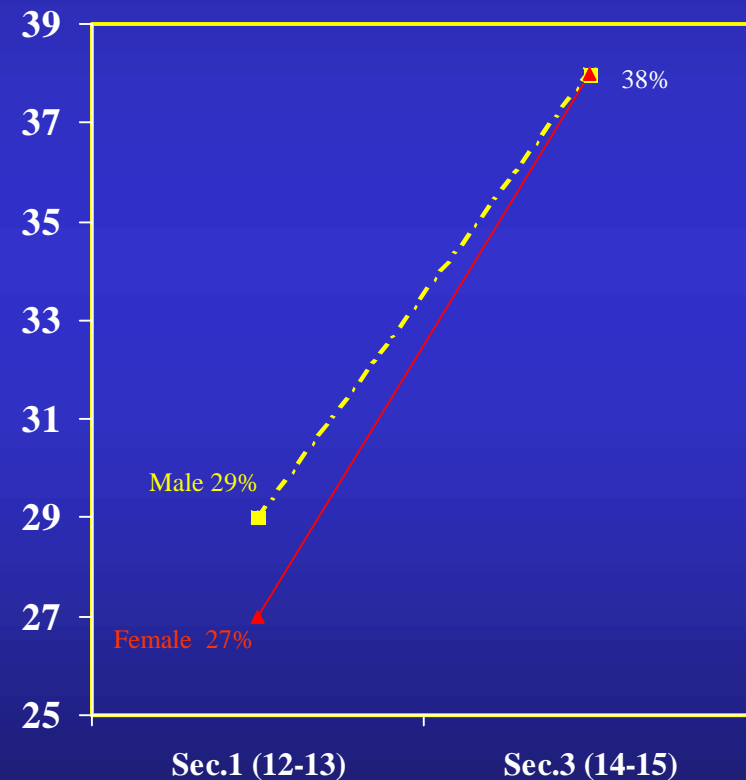
The total score was used for the 39 items of the questionnaire Décisions as a risk measure of school dropout. From this perspective, higher is the score, higher is the risk for the student to drop out of school.

Results (1)

Percentage of risk of school dropout according to grade school level (sec.1 vs sec.3) and student's gender

- Increase in risk by 10%, from sec.1 to sec.3
- Risk is greater according to grade school level
- Stability of risk:

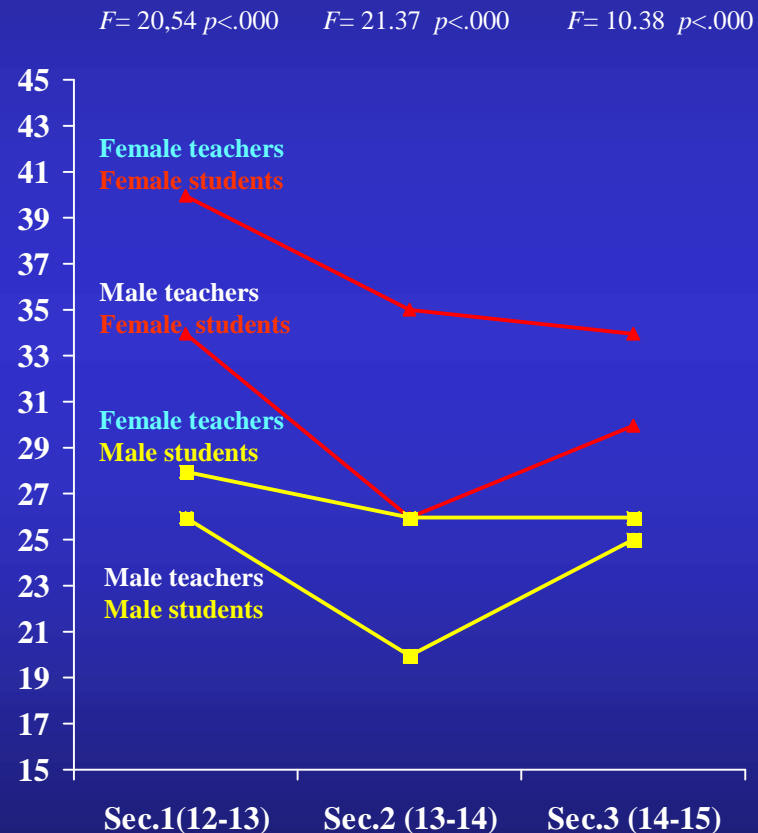
Low Risk	(0/2)	51%
Changing Risk	(1/2)	31%
Steady Risk	(2/2)	18%



Results (2)

Scores on TATS according to teacher's gender, student's gender and grade school level (N= 765)

- For each grade school level, male and female teachers' attitudes are more positive toward female students than male students.
- Female teachers have more positive attitudes than their male colleagues.



Results (3)

TATS and various other variables in connection with the risk of school dropout

In order to verify the contribution of each predictor variable (gender, absenteeism, depression (Beck), mental capacity, achievement in french, english and math, teacher's attitudes, class climate) to the risk of school dropout (Décisions), we have conducted a regression analysis integrating all the predictor variables into the model.

Thus, this model includes nine variables which explain 44% of the variance for the total score of the questionnaire Décisions with the value of $\{F(9,761)=64,55, p<.000\}$.

Results (4)

TATS and various other variables in connection with the risk of school dropout

In order of importance, the predictor variables of the risk of school dropout are the following :

Depression (Beck)	= β , .450	p<.000
Teacher's Attitudes (TATS)	= β , -.331	p<.000
Class Climate	= β , -.131	p<.000
Mental Capacity	= β , -.122	p<.000

Results (5)

TATS and the risk of school dropout

In order to verify the specific contribution of the variable TATS, we have conducted a regression analysis integrating this variable into the model.

The TATS' mean score (Sec1, 2 and 3) explains 15% of the variance for the total score of the questionnaire Décisions (Sec.1 and Sec.3) with the β -.384 and the value of $\{F(1,763)=131.85, p<.000\}$.

Results (6)

TATS and the risk of school dropout

The variance analysis which compares at-low-risk students with at-changing-risk students and at-steady-risk students on the TATS ' mean score shows the following results

Low Risk	(0/2)	33,25 (13.61)
Changing Risk	(1/2)	26.00 (16.21)
Steady Risk	(2/2)	16.78 (17.32)

$F(2, 769) = 64.09$ $p < .000$

Low Risk > Changing Risk > Steady Risk

Post Hoc Tests: Scheffe $p < .000$

Results (7)

The most significant TATS' bipolar adjectives and the risk of school dropout

Adjectives	Low Risk	Changing Risk	Steady Risk	F and <i>p</i>
1 Hard-working-Lazy	1,83	1,20	0,37	66,16 <i>p</i> <.000
2 Achiever-Non-Achiever	1,58	0,94	0,25	56,49 <i>p</i> <.000
3 Meticulous-Neglectful	1,67	1,06	0,36	55,63 <i>p</i> <.000
4 Tenacious-Inconstant	1,55	1,00	0,35	53,37 <i>p</i> <.000
5 Serious-Foolish	1,88	1,33	0,72	47,80 <i>p</i> <.000
6 Docile-Stubborn	1,77	1,34	0,76	31,48 <i>p</i> <.000

Summary (1)

The risk of school dropout

- The risk of school dropout varies according to grade school level
- The risk of school dropout is higher in percentage and greater according to grade school level
- Female students seem to be as much at risk that male students

Summary (2)

Teachers' attitudes

- Overall, attitudes are positive toward 90% of the students and seem to be steady in time
- In general, female teachers have more positive attitudes than their male colleagues
- Attitudes are more positive toward female students than male students and toward at-low-risk students than at-risk students
- The more at-risk are the students and the less positive are the attitudes

Summary (3)

Teachers' attitudes and the risk of school dropout

- Among personal and academic variables, teachers' attitudes are the second most important variable after depression
- Teachers' attitudes explain 15% of the variance for the scores mean of Décisions

Summary (4)

Teachers 'attitudes and the risk of school dropout

- As it is a longitudinal study, it would be important to go deeper into the role played by the teacher's gender in connection with the attitudes toward students.
- Prevention programs on school dropout should be effective on certain qualities related to academic work:
 - Commitment to a task and school persistence
- Help teachers to be aware of their attitudes toward At-Risk students
- Among at-risk students, identify and help those who show signs of depression

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