

A Comparison of Parent and Teacher Perceptions of the Behavior of Exceptional Children

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ABSTRACT

Parent and teacher perceptions of the behavior patterns of exceptional children were compared before and after a series of parent-teacher meetings. The results indicated that there were no significant differences in the mean level of ratings on the pre and post measures. However, changes in the correlation between parents' and teachers' ratings indicated that the parents restructured the pattern of their perceptions to become more similar to those of the teachers.

THE INVESTIGATION of parent-teacher relationships, in general, has been an area long neglected in educational research (2). In any remedial setting, the ordinary need for communication and cooperation between parent and teacher becomes imperative if the remediation is to succeed. Czerniejewski & Tillotson (4), in presenting a learning disability program, noted that the total child, including his home and school situation, constitutes the environmental structure for remedial activity. Shaefer & Bell (13), in discussing research in the area of teacher attitude, suggested that a future study examine the extent to which teacher values are shared by the parents of the classroom children.

Several studies have substantiated teachers' abilities to act as effective observers of the children's behavior patterns (3, 7, 10, 15).

There have been, however, relatively few studies comparing parent and teacher evaluation of children's behavior and results have been somewhat contradictory.

In a study of kindergarten children, Medinnus & Johnson (9) found significant differences in perceptions of parents and teachers on semantic differential descriptions, with greater discrepancies among poorly adjusted children. Similar results were obtained by Del Solai (5). Stedman (14) reported that mothers tend to rate the attainment of pre-school children higher than teachers. However, Glidewell, Domke and Kantor (6) found positive relationships between degree of maladjustment reported by the teacher and the number of symptoms reported by the mother. Becker (1) extracted five factors from a child rating schedule and correlated the factor scores of the parents and teachers. The correlations ranged from .40 to .26, with the average .31. He also reported similar findings when another rating scale was used.

The above studies fall into two categories. One group of studies investigated parent and teacher perceptions by comparing their means, while the second category of studies correlated their perceptions. The former studies found dif-

ferences in elevation between parent and teacher, particularly for poorly adjusted children, and the latter studies found similarity in the pattern of perception. It is therefore likely that the pattern of parent and teacher perception is similar, although the levels of elevation differ.

The purpose of this study was a) to compare the elevation and pattern of perceptions of parents and teachers on a variety of behavior indices of exceptional children placed in special classes and b) to determine if parent-teacher interaction would bring about any change in the relationship between parent and teacher perceptions.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 52 children in 11 pre-placement classes throughout New York City under the auspices and supervision of the Evaluation & Placement Unit of the Division of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services of the New York City Board of Education. Children in these classes are multiply handicapped to the extent that they are unable to adjust to regular special classes. All manifested various combinations of neurological disorders, language impairments and emotional disturbances. The children ranged in age from 6 to 11 years, their intelligence test scores ranged from dull normal to superior and their families were in the lower and middle socio-economic groups.

Conferences between teacher and parents on the progress and behavior of the children were held at least once or twice a month, so the degree of interaction between parents and teacher was considerably higher than that of regular classes and even other special classes.

Instruments

The instruments used were developed by Schaefer, Aaronson & Burgoon (12). They were the Classroom Behavior Inventory (CBI), short form K-12, and the Home

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations and *t* Values of Parent and Teacher Ratings of Behavior on the Pretest

	Parent	SD	Teacher	SD	<i>t</i>
Extraversion	15.0192	3.233	14.1845	3.709	1.62
Task Orientation	12.519	3.134	12.800	3.695	-0.43
Considerateness	14.596	3.139	13.723	3.872	1.22
Introversion	12.25	3.002	11.0768	4.117	1.71
Hostility	11.75	4.063	10.646	4.579	1.62
Distractibility	14.0192	3.433	14.2461	3.235	-0.37

Behavior Inventory (HBI), companion to the CBI, short form K-12. Both inventories measure six behavior areas. They are: extraversion (emotional expression), task orientation, considerateness, introversion (ease of interpersonal relations), hostility and distractibility. Higher scores for the first three dimensions and lower scores for the latter three represent more desirable behavior.

Procedure

Three months after the children were placed in the special classes, the mother and the teacher of each child were asked to fill out the inventories. Six months later the mothers and teachers completed the inventories again. Scores were adjusted for differences in the number of ratings in each behavior area.

Results

Means, standard deviations and *t* values of the parent and teacher ratings on the six areas of behavior for the pretests are presented in Table 1.

The *t* values for the differences between parents and teacher on the pretests were all insignificant. A discriminant function analysis separating parents and teachers was conducted using all six areas simultaneously. It also yielded an insignificant *F* value, 1.822.

Parallel analyses were performed on the post scores. Several *t* tests between parents and teachers were found to be significant. However, a repeated measures analysis of

covariance presented in Table 2 indicated that these differences were not significantly greater than the nonsignificant pre scores. The discriminant function analysis also yielded an insignificant *F* value, 1.710.

The data were also analyzed to determine if the children showed any improvement between the pre and post condition. The results were generally insignificant. A more detailed report on the behavioral change in the children can be found in Rosenshein & Ribner (11).

In effect, then, there was no difference in elevation between the parents and teacher on the pretest nor did any changes in elevation occur on the posttest.

In order to measure the similarity in the pattern of perceptions between teachers and parents, Pearson product moment correlations were computed between the parents and teachers on the pre and post scores.

Table 3 contains the correlations between the teacher and parent ratings on the pretest and posttest scores.

The results indicate that there were no significant correlations between the parents and teachers on the pretest scores for considerateness, task orientation, introversion and distractibility. Only hostility and extraversion had significant positive correlations. On the posttest scores, however, all the correlations were significant with the exception of considerateness. Although there are no known procedures which can formally test the significance of the differences between correlations of dependent samples, some authors have stated that a change from insignificance

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations and *F* Values of Parent and Teacher Ratings of Behavior on the Posttest

	Parent	SD	Teacher	SD	<i>F</i>
Extraversion	16.000	3.119	14.923	3.1167	3.824
Task Orientation	13.000	3.112	13.323	3.799	158
Considerateness	15.212	3.089	14.400	4.180	784
Introversion	11.289	3.274	10.923	3.496	135
Hostility	11.923	4.781	10.554	4.649	3.717
Distractibility	13.827	3.661	14.492	3.345	1.634

Table 3 –Correlation Between Parent and Teacher Ratings on the Pre- and Posttests

Behavior	Pre Rating	Post Rating
Considerateness	-.069	.267
Hostility	.362*	.663**
Introversion	.056	.327*
Extraversion	.437**	.427**
Distractibility	.116	.483**
Task Orientation	.073	.300*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

to significance can be used as an indication that a significant change has occurred (8). A dramatic increase from .362 to .663 was also found for hostility. Thus there were significant increases in the correlation between parents and teacher on the posttest for almost all the ratings.

Having established that there was greater congruence between parents and teachers on the posttest than on the pretest, the next step was to determine the direction of the change. Were the parents realigning their perceptions in accordance with the teachers or were the teachers moving closer to the parents' perceptions?

Accordingly, correlations were obtained between (a) the pre scores of the parents and the post scores of the teachers and (b) the pre scores of the teachers and the post scores of the parents. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4 shows that with the exception of hostility, there was no significant correlation between the parent pretest and teacher posttest, suggesting that the teachers were generally not reordering their perceptions to those of the parents. However, there were significant correlations between parent posttest and teacher pretest for five of the six areas, indicating that the parents were moving closer to the perceptions of the teachers in extraversion, task orientation, introversion and distractibility.

Table 4 –Correlations Between Parent Pretest Ratings and Teacher Posttest Ratings and Between Parent Posttest Ratings and Teacher Pretest Ratings

Behavior	Parent Pre Teacher Post	Parent Teacher Pre
Considerateness	.024	.135
Hostility	.417**	.437**
Introversion	.150	.329*
Extraversion	.197	.426**
Distractibility	.164	.358**
Task Orientation	.045	.306*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ **Table 5 –Partial Correlation Between Parent Pre and Teacher Post with Teacher Pre Partialled Out and Between Parent Post and Teacher Pre with Parent Pre Partialled Out**

Behavior	Parent Pre Teacher Post	Parent Post Teacher Pre
Considerateness	.072	.154
Hostility	.265	.636**
Introversion	.140	.308*
Extraversion	.004	.352*
Distractibility	.122	.343*
Task Orientation	-.002	.313*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

The direction of the change becomes clearer and more dramatic when two series of partial correlations are compared. Teacher pre scores were correlated with parent post scores, partialling out parent pre scores, teacher post scores were correlated with parent pre scores, partialling out teacher pre scores. The results are shown in Table 5. None of the parent pre and teacher post score correlations (which are now independent of the teacher pre scores) was significant, while all of the parent post and teacher pre partial correlations were significant, with the exception of considerateness.

The results indicate that there was no significant correlation between parents and teachers in four areas at the time of the pretest. As a result of interaction between parents and teachers, perceptions of the parents changed and significant partial correlations were obtained for five areas. The sixth area shows a similar but insignificant pattern.

Canonical correlations using all six behavior areas simultaneously were performed between parent and teacher pre, parent and teacher post, parent pre and teacher post, parent post and teacher pre. The results of the first canonical variates are shown in Table 6. All the second or higher correlations are insignificant.

The results show the same pattern of relationships as those of the simple correlations. Canonical correlations of

Table 6. –First Order Canonical Correlations of the Six Behavior Areas For Three Sets of Parent and Teacher Variables

Variable Set	Canonical Correlation	Wilk's Lambda	Df	Chi Square
Parent Pre-Teacher Pre	.6048	.3528	36	47.402
Parent Post-Teacher Post	.7649	.1788	36	78.337**
Parent Pre-Teacher Post	.6038	.2815	36	57.671*
Parent Post-Teacher Pre	.554	.4515	36	37.766

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

the pretest ratings of parent and teacher were insignificant, while the posttest ratings were significant. The evidence also suggests that the parents were changing their perceptions to be more consistent with the teachers, as indicated by the significant canonical correlations between parent post and teacher pre and insignificant canonical correlation between parent pre and teacher post.

Discussion

Results of the study show that there were no significant differences in the elevation between parents and teachers on the pre scores. Neither did a change in elevation occur after a six month period of interaction between the groups.

Previous studies have indicated that perceptions of parents and teachers differ in elevation. Although the direction of the difference is not clear, the indications are that the parents tend to view the child more favorably (5-14). The other studies were conducted on children in normal settings, while children in the present study were identified as learning disabled. The parents of the children had been advised of the children's disabilities, usually by several agencies, and concurred in this evaluation by either seeking or agreeing to special placement. It is possible that no differences were found because the parents have accepted the children's disabilities.

In terms of similarity between the profiles of parent and teacher perceptions, similarity was found at the time of the pretest in only two areas. However, after a period of interaction, significant correlations were obtained in five areas. The strength of the correlations ranged from .30 to .48, which is similar to Becker's (1) findings.

Interpretation of the present findings in the light of previous studies suggests that there is a difference between parents and teachers of normal children and of maladjusted children in normal settings in the subjective positioning of the scale as a whole. Parents in effect do not have the same exposure that teachers do to what the average child is like. They see the average child as having fewer of the desirable traits than their own child. The average parental rating as a result of such a process would come out higher than the average teacher rating.

The present study applies to children with known learning disabilities. Their parents, who have been exposed through the referral process and subsequent placement to the poor school adjustment of their children, may have become more realistic in their subjective placement of their children on the various scales or at least agree more with the teacher's subjective placement of children on the scale. However, given the absence of level differences, the parent can still be influenced to adjust his perception of where his particular child stands on any given scale. Further study is suggested to verify this interpretation.

FOOTNOTE

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