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## Teacher-Students Relationship. The Significance to Decreasing Dropout Rates and Motivation for Change

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### Abstract

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A case analysis of a "Second Chance" high school for high risk students focuses on the contribution of teacher-students relationships to reducing school dropout and motivation to change their attitude towards school and learning. The present research based on the following psychological-sociological theories: (1) Self Determination (Deci & Ryan); (2) Self-Efficacy (Bandura). This mixed methods research sought to examine teacher-students relationships' contribution in reducing students' dropout, and their influence on students' motivation to change. Preliminary findings emerging from interviews with teachers reveal teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students and the significance of this relationship. Inconsistency of teacher-student relationship also emerged. The school population consists of some 120 students and 25 teachers. The researched population is that of students and teachers. The latter are regular teachers with no training in special education, with BA and MA degrees. Most of them have years of experience at the school (8-28 years). The students are aged 14-18 and have been potential dropouts throughout their school years in different schools. Most students come from a low socio-economic level and have experienced many failures, attention problems and have difficult behavior problems

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**Keywords:** Teacher-students' relationship; motivation for change; dropout; perseverance; students at risk.

### 1. Introduction

Teacher-students' relationships are of great interest both because of their significance in the educational process and because of the human psychological aspects involved in this relationship,



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which is of particular importance when the students are at risk, and thus the system becomes more complicated and complex. This system includes exchange of information between adults and children, and constitutes a communication system that comprises teachers' attention and perceptions (Pianta, 1999).

The research is a case study conducted in a second change high school, where the focus is on the contribution of teacher-students' relationship to students' perseverance, motivation, change of attitudes and decreased dropout rates.

The school population consists of some 120 students and 25 teachers. The researched population is that of students and teachers. The latter are regular teachers with no training in special education, with BA and MA degrees. Most of them have years of experience at the school (8-28 years). The students are aged 14-18 and have been potential dropouts throughout their school years in different schools. Most students come from a low socio-economic level and have experienced many failures, attention problems and have difficult behavior problems. Some of them have difficulties in reading and writing. The parents are a weak link in the students' lives.

## **2. Research Design and Methodology**

The leading paradigm in this research is of Mixed Methods. (Shkedi, 2003; Bryman 2004)

Research Stages:

### Stage 1:

- Producing and conducting a structured partly open interview with 20 – 25 teachers
- Valid and reliable quantitative questionnaire (adapted to the research topic) to be administered to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, and statistical analysis

### Stage 2:

- Producing a structured partly open interview for students and conducting it with 10 graduates and 10 students who are still at school. Conducting interviews
- Producing instructions for observations in class (5) and conducting observations
- Conducting qualitative part of research (interviews and observations)

### Stage 3:

Integrative Analysis of findings and discussion

The article seeks to introduce the preliminary findings emerging from interviews with school teachers. 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers working full time.

As the researcher, I have worked in the studied school as a vice-principal, and my involvement in the researched phenomenon is quite significant. Possible biases will be discussed, as my acquaintance with the researched population covers numerous aspects, and I will have to deal with both explicit and implicit biases due to my acquaintance with the school and its population.

### *2.1. Importance of Research and Gap in Knowledge*

Numerous education studies engage in different aspects and forces that take part in understanding educational processes and their introduction. These studies examine students' psychological-developmental processes, the important interface between students and teachers/school system/environmental-social system, and in the last decades, research has been interdisciplinary (education-psychology-sociology) in the attempt to get a full description of students, their development and needs.

Teachers are part of the school system that surrounds students. They are involved in processes and interactions in students' lives, and not only pedagogically (teaching the different subjects), but also in significant intra-personal processes in the students' lives, as students and teachers meet in significant junctions that shape the adolescents' lives. As such, the same social-psychological approach to the youths and what teachers build with them interface with motivation and perseverance in school, which is cardinal in research.

Indeed this research focuses on one small school, and is one case study, but it holds significant information with regard to adolescents at risk and especially with regard to teachers' work with this students' population. The focus in this research will be an examination of teacher-student relationship in a second chance high school – do they constitute a key factor in arousing motivation and decreasing dropout rates?

Furthermore, the research may find a positive correlation between teacher-student relationship and dropout. Teachers develop relationships with students at all ages. Is the influence of this relationship incidental or systematic? How (if at all) do such relationships contribute to students' sense of self-efficacy? Does this relationship influence students' decision to remain in school or to drop out? What happens in a second chance school, a place where students are meant to find the exact solutions for the problems that got them to this school: lack of motivation and dropout from various schools?

## **3. Teacher-Student Relationship – Human Touch**

### *3.1. Nurturing Self-efficacy and Self-Determination – Recipe for motivation and Change*

Ryan & Deci have dedicated a good part of their research to the issue of self-determination, motivation (intrinsic/extrinsic) with regard to education, students' behavior and their approach to learning. This is like a triangle, where each side supports the other and they are all interdependent.

Ryan & Deci's basic assumption was that people are naturally curious, vital, motivated and wish to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2000), unless something happened in the social context of life. In other words, the human soul may often reject this basic state of wishing to learn owing to social attitudes to which it has

been accidentally or intentionally exposed. They emphasized that this entails a wide range of social responses, which require educators' consideration, so as to be able to influence the troubled youths.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes a person's intrinsic needs which lead to personal development (Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997), competence (Harter, 1978; White, 1959), relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Reis, 1994) and autonomy (de Charms, 1968; Deci, 1975). The three together create the self-determination side of the triangle; meaning, education has to be directed at these needs, otherwise, according to Ryan and Deci, how can educators help promote students' proper development? It must be noted that teacher-student relationship leads the entire educational process.

This theory examines the components of the environment and the extent to which they influence and contribute to one's mental wellbeing and motivation. Apparently environmental factors are cardinal and influence both.

Another side of the triangle, according to Ryan & Deci (2000) pertains to one's energy and perseverance, which motivate action. They noted that intrinsic motivation is one's positive innate bias. Healthy children are curious and active (e.g. Harter, 1978). This intrinsic motivation expresses a person's positive potential, which will not develop without a support system in the social context (Deci, 1975). Intrinsic motivation does not develop from scratch. This leads to the insight that intrinsic motivation is one of the most important values in education. If we make sure there is intrinsic motivation, we get a student who is intrinsically motivated and aware, who knows how to manage his/her motivation independently (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and be aware of his/her abilities (Fisher, 1978; Ryan, 1982).

As such, Ryan & Deci listed the following concepts for the plausibility of intrinsic motivation: supporting the child in social context, developing internal awareness, autonomy and awareness of one's abilities. It appears that these are the tasks of each teacher. What we refer to as "social context" is a whole system that envelopes the student at school. This system is led by teachers, though the peer group and the parents also plays an important role in the social context. This review emphasizes the teacher's role in developing relationships with their students, which connects to the findings emerging from the interviews, which will be presented hereafter. Teachers who enable and nurture autonomy catalyze students' intrinsic motivation and their wish to be challenged (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

### *3.2. Students Integrating Environmental Values*

Once a student is enveloped in the appropriate social context, meaning teachers, parents and their environment, he/she has to absorb all the values received from this context. How is this integration achieved? Is it an innate ability? Who accompanies them in the process? Students integrate by accidental self-evaluation (Ryan & Deci, 1995) or integrative regulation.

Awareness of integration processes enhances one's sense of autonomy. A person makes this integration his or her own. Research has shown that the more external (not integrated) one's regulation, the less one tends to achieve, and the more one tends to blame failure on others. The more internal this regulation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the more interested and cooperative the students who show efforts at school and in their studies (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Other studies showed that the more autonomy, the higher the sense of belonging (Connel & Wellborn, 1991), better performance

(Miserandino, 1996) and lower dropout rates among students (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992). So how does one get to own extrinsic motivation? Ryan & Deci emphasized the social aspect which is an active factor in this motivation play. The human environment's attitude and the need to belong are significant factors in the process of regulation, integration and assimilation.

If we consider youths at risk in a high school that absorbs these youths, we may find that they are at high risk of dropout, perhaps only because they have not experienced the environment's appreciation during their school years, there was no support of their abilities (perhaps only owing to the claim that their abilities are low), had no sense of belonging (due to changing schools and feeling unwanted in any), nor a sense of autonomy.

Educational studies (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989. Strahan, 1995. William and Deci, 1996) have examined the issue of supporting autonomy and competence between teachers and students and between parents and their children, and revealed that this type of support creates internalization of motivation, and as such, students feel that they are able and can independently realize cultural values in their actions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This means that the feeling is powerful and students are able to step outside their selves and see their personal actions in social-cultural aspects. One's basic needs according to SDT (competence, autonomy and relatedness) have to be met throughout life so that a person can experience satisfaction and wellbeing (Ryan & Frederick 1997. Waterman, 1993).

Ryan and Deci's research has revealed that the social context is of great significance to one's motivation. A society that attends to aspects of competence, autonomy and relatedness witnesses better internalization and integration processes than a society that does not. Applying these principles to youths at risk will reveal a wide field of research with regard to social behavior, teacher-student relationship and their contribution to motivation.

Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy theory consists a number of information sources: performance accomplishment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological state. Many components influence the developing sense of self-efficacy, which is identified as a cognitive process. the more experience, the more one's sense of self-efficacy changes.

A perception of self-efficacy, behavioral change and motivation interact and are interdependent. It is important to clarify this interaction to understand the best way to approach students, or in other words, to find out what encourages self-efficacy so that it will arouse a learner's motivation? It can be said that without the one, the other cannot exist, and vice versa. They feed each other. A person with a high sense of self-efficacy will have high motivation, and in turn, success in performing a task enhances one's sense of self-efficacy, so that one's belief in self and competence is important and efforts must be made to nurture it.

It is important to note that Bandura noted the efforts people make depend on competence, support from the environment, intra-personality factors and one's self-expectations. All these create a sense of self-efficacy, which influences one's choices and decisions. The higher one's sense of self-efficacy, the more efforts one will make in performing a task.

A person's beliefs and thoughts are a source of strength in developing self-efficacy. They are stronger and more influential than any other reinforcement or encouragement (Baron, Kaufman, & Stauber, 1969; Kaufman, Baron, & Kopp, 1966). As such, it appears that when we seek to understand

self-efficacy as developed by students, we have to be prepared to influence them, and see how we can influence cognitive and intrapersonal processes, because there lies the person's motivating and formative strength. Moreover, with youths at risk, there has already been a "breakdown" in these beliefs and thoughts about self. To empower such a student's self-efficacy, there is a need for many "modifications". One of the ways to do that is modeling, observing others, which motivates action and leads to feedback and "modification" (Bandura, 1971). This is a complex process that takes place within the relationship between individuals and their environment, where the social environment is most important. At the same time, this process takes place within the individual, in the building of his/her intrapersonal texture.

### 3.3. *Nurturing Self-Efficacy and the Social Aspect*

Numerous studies have addressed self-efficacy and what has to be done to develop it in an optimal manner. The first, most available possibility is external reward, except research has shown that rewards do not always influence interest, and interest is an important component. Furthermore, reward does not always affect performance (Condry, 1977; Lepper & Greene, 1978). A person needs external and social incentives, and although they are not enough as motivators, they can help in the construction of the perception of self-efficacy. A positive incentive promotes interest during task performance and enhances self-efficacy (Boggiano & Ruble, 1979; Ross, 1976). The more a reward refers to competence, the more interest is generated (Enzle & Ross, 1978), and if there is interest, there is motivation, meaning the external incentive arouses an internal one.

Social theories note the significance of setting goals and self-appreciation as a cognitive strength that builds self-motivation. Setting goals requires an internal, cognitive dynamic and developing system - a pattern of personal standards.

Students who cope with the environment's evaluation of their performance can do it only if they build intrinsic motivation which begins with a perception of self-efficacy, continues in satisfaction which constitutes a personal incentive and ends with optimal performance. The question is how such complex cognitive actions are created in children. What is the part of a group, an organization or even a nation in the creation of self-efficacy?

Bandura (1982) coined the term "collective efficacy", stating that a person does not live alone. Therefore, a perception of self-efficacy depends on and interacts with a perception of collective efficacy. The power of the environment in the construction of self-efficacy was mentioned earlier, but a twofold emphasis is added: (1) Collective efficacy emerging from diverse personalities leads to the development of a new powerful and influential entity – the group. This entity navigates people's choices and determines which efforts will be made and how strong they will be in times of crisis; (2) the level of reciprocity between the two efficacies (Bandura, 1978b; Cairns, 1979; Endler & Magnusson, 1976; Pervin & Lewis, 1978), the personal and the collective may change and it depends on people, action and interest.

When a person can say, "I am able and have the strength to do the task", this internal statement enables that person to collaborate with people around him/her from a position of strength. People with a sense of collective efficacy will invest in collaboration with others because it will serve them in their

wish to make a change. This does not mean that a person who lacks collective efficacy cannot achieve. Change is possible with appropriate efforts. However, it is important to remember that the strength of a group is not always positive. Collective efficacy can take a person to places he/she has never thought of reaching, and it is important to examine collective efficacy and identify what in it is right and worthy to use.

Bandura (1982) related to collective efficacy as the strength to change our future life. He emphasized that collective efficacy is bound to a collective effort to make a change and is stronger than individuals' self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is a source of strength that has to be nurtured in cognitive intra-personal activity, and at the same time, activity between an individual and the environment. Both processes are cognitive and are intertwined throughout a person's life. It appears that the encounter between an individual and his/her social environment rewards is both rewarding and useful if self-efficacy is strong enough.

It is interesting to find out how teachers work to develop this important tool called "collective and self-efficacy", as it is a tool, which if not sufficiently developed, no intrinsic motivational aspects expressing one's positive potential can develop, and as such no change will take place with students in particular and people in general.

#### **4. Teachers as part of the Environmental Aspect and Their Influence on Students**

Intrinsic motivation is an outcome of an intra-personal process that occurs as the individual is interacting with the environment. The intrapersonal aspect refers to every person's basic psychological needs: the need for autonomy, for competence (experiencing ability), for relatedness and safety, and the need to belong. Numerous researchers have referred to these needs (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci, Ryan & Williams, 1996; Ryan, 1995; Asor, 2001). A student whose needs are met will develop intrinsic motivation. Teachers play an important role in nurturing these needs. Teachers have to be involved and pay attention to the each student's emotional state and uniqueness, show empathy and construct non-competitive learning while considering others. Teachers also need to support students' autonomy (to encourage and enable freedom of choice while learning, allow expression of doubts and challenge the things, stimulate students' interest, etc.). Teachers need to challenge students, help them deal with failure and build a support-based work program suited to each student's ability (Asor, 2001).

In order to reach a state of genuine autonomy, the student should be exposed to all possibilities, otherwise, this autonomy could become, paradoxically, limiting and even oppressive. The entire process whereby a student considers various existing options and choices is a tool, which encourages the development of intrinsic motivation.

**Teachers who build a relationship based on integrity with the student, focusing on well-directed dialogue and feedback relating to content sets milestones for building and fostering students' intrinsic motivation.**

In contrast, it is important to mention the issue of student's safety and belongingness, without which their motivation may be harmed (Ainsworth, 1978). The education system plays an important role in arousing motivation (Asor, 2001). Regarding the education system, the question is who is responsible for motivation in the system? Can the education system, and teachers representing it, being responsible for teaching more than for students psychological and emotional state, be significant in students' motivation? And if so, how? Should the education system or its teachers deal with the issue of motivation, which is essentially a state of mind or a mental process?

Moreover, when we refer to students at risk, who in the education system will deal with their motivation? These students, who start the motivation process at a relatively late age (16-18) have to go through a long process and they need someone to accompany them in the process. Discussions of student motivation and its significance in the lives of individuals as well as to society and culture, leads to searching whether and what we have missed. It is clear that motivation is what drives people, and globally, the world and its progress. Hence this issue and its implications are quite important.

With regard to this research dealing with teacher-student relationship and the motivation to change among youth at risk of dropout, motivation and all its aspects and the question who is responsible for building it becomes cardinal and dramatic.

## **5. Teacher- Student Relationship as a force in students changing processes**

Pianta, Hamre & Stuhlman (2003) wrote that the focus on teacher-student relationship has to change, and emphasis has to be placed on how this relationship advance students in the modern view of complex human development, which comprises interactions with others, all in broad context that has to be considered. Until recently, most studies examined teacher-student relationships vis-a- vis teaching-learning, class management discipline and so forth. Pianta, Hamre & Stuhlman (2003) sought to emphasize the relationship and its significance within the holistic complex picture, meaning current research in this respect is interdisciplinary between psychology and education, and examines the interaction between people and context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Lerner, 1998; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998; Sameroff, 1995). This is particularly true when youths at risk are concerned. In this case teacher-student (as well as parents-children) relationship is part of the interaction between a child and the external world (Csikszentmihalyi and Rathde , 1998) and is the key to the development of motivation, and as such to processes of change (Pianta, 1999).

### *5.1. Teacher-Student Relationship in dropout processes*

Students' dropout is a years-long process that is the belief held by the Ministry of Education. Students at risk experience difficulties in their relationship with school, where school clarifies that they do not meet the requirements for achievements, discipline or general functioning. Dropout according to the literature is disengagement from school where students' performance is inadequate (Atkinson et al, 2000; Stoll, 1990). Studies point to various reasons for dropout: family related, cultural reasons, crises and serious life events as well as school related factors.

There are studies that connect dropout to school responsibility (Karp, 1988; Brad, 1993, Darling-Hamond, 1997; Fine, 1987; Wolman, C.; Bruininks Thurlow, 1989), emphasizing school as catalyzing or inhibiting students' dropout, for instance, teachers who convey low expectations from students, insufficient resources, poor quality of teaching and teaching methods. We cannot ignore the fact that the actors in this process are students, teachers and school, who are there to keep the children in school by providing proper conditions for nurturing their abilities and realizing them.

### *5.2. Teacher-Student Relationship as a Key Factor in Decreasing Dropout and Increasing Motivation for Change – Preliminary Findings*

Preliminary findings emerging from this research, from interviews conducted with teachers who have worked for many years in a second chance high school, reveal that the main problem that causes the students end up in this school remains unresolved. These students, defined at risk, had failed in other schools before enrolling in this one. That is to say these students are enrolled in the second chance school because of motivation problems and risk of dropout. The school does not provide any solutions for these problems. Nevertheless, the school holds broad, directed and focused activities which teachers believe have significant influence on the level of student maintenance, but not necessarily on students' motivation and perseverance at school.

Teachers were asked about the following issues: did they choose to work with youths at risk? Did they receive special training to work with this type of youths? What are the characteristics of the youths? What do they do to increase the students' motivation, enhance their self-efficacy, self-determination, relatedness, autonomy and support? Are there conflicts between teachers and students, how often and how are they resolved? What is the rate of students' dropout from school and what are the reasons? What is done to decrease dropout rates? Do teacher-student relationships influence dropout rates? Are teachers at all responsible for students' dropout?

Especially emphasized was the absence of teachers' reference to the issue of motivation and its components. Indeed teachers noted that with regard to students' characteristics. *"Our students have a whole array of problems. We have students that come from a population that is far from simple, they have problems at home, and many things project onto their emotional state. There are students whose emotional state does not allow them to learn."* That was said to justify the students' motivational state, and later, *"No motivation. That is why I mostly talk to them, making it all on a personal level. It does not work."*

Helplessness with regard to increasing motivation was expressed by teachers, *"that is how they come. Without motivation."*, or another teacher who said, *"I don't think about it at all", referring to motivation. "It is impossible to arouse motivation. It is hard. My personal formative approach increases motivation."*

There were teachers who referred to the issue of developing self-efficacy by saying, *"Build their self-confidence, impart tools."* The teachers found it hard to explain how he does it. *"I assign a task and make sure the students do it, and give them feedback on it."*

With regard to autonomy for the purpose of creating motivation, answers were few, *"Each student can advance at his or her pace."* *"There is constant play between autonomy and boundaries in learning."* *"I would like there to be more autonomy outside the subject matter."* *"I prepare materials*

for two hours, and in the end give them choice with regard to any subject they wish to know about. That is how I get their attention, small bites, small stages." "There is autonomy on the technical level: they submit work at their pace. Constant negotiation." (meaning the autonomy is the teacher's not the students', and if students have autonomy, it is rather technical).

With regard to relatedness and competence,, teachers' references were many, *"I speak a lot. Lots of homeroom lessons, lots of conversations about...come, this is the place...I keep telling them, I also wrote to them: School is an island of sanity in the great mess. Please understand things are good for you here." "I tell them, there is nothing you cannot do. You need will power."*

Teacher-student relations as discussed by teachers, *"I fell in love with the students, really. When I talk to them, I explain. I punish less and talk to them at eye level, and they see it comes from a place of respect, that I respect them." "They tell me personal things, the consult with me, and we just have small talk. When a student tells me about his girlfriend, when a student tells me about a ball game, and invited me to watch football with him on Saturday...I did not go, but he invited me."*

It appears that teachers have many conversations that are based on their reason. In the conversations they provide reasons why it is a good idea to remain in school, the values of education and what must be done in order to benefit. Except teachers do not go home after a workday feeling successful. Most of them report frustration, *"I am not tired in class. I am not burnt out. On the contrary, I am constantly challenged. Make no mistake, there are lots of frustrating moments."* Moreover, *"I am frustrated. There are many cases that I feel we are not pedagogic. There is no time to sit with the students. A feeling of lots of aides, and nothing happening. There is a need for pedagogic organization vis a vis objectives."* *"Frustration and challenge at the same time".*

As for dropout rates, teachers did not really know what these rates were (although there was a periodical announcement by management with regard to students about to drop out, and at the end of the year, with regard to students who dropped out), and so answers were diverse, *"This is one of the problems at school, but dropout rates are low. I may be wrong, and there are many dropouts, but I think there are only a few." "Medium dropout" "Low dropout. "Only very difficult cases are dropped out." "There is a lot of dropout from school."*

With regard to the question whether teachers take responsibility for dropout, references were, *"I am not responsible for this. Sorry. I cannot control the students' lessons." "The feeling is that I am significant with regard to the student's dropout. I talked to him. I stayed after school with him." "I am responsible and have to make efforts so that he does not leave. This is expressed in the feeling that I convey that he is able. My responsibility with regard to dropout is medium." "I have no responsibility for dropout. I am only teach one subject." "Most dropout reasons have nothing to do with school." "There are children who are within the norm and others who are not. The former we can be responsible for, and even there we sometimes fail, and I don't have time to deal with it." "I have a part in the student's dropout. There are things I could have done but did not do." "Clearly I have responsibility for dropout. I should have devoted more time to my class at the beginning of the year, even if they did not enable me."*

## **6. Discussion and Conclusions**

A preliminary note has to be made with regard to the interviews. The researcher used to work at the researched school as a vice principal, and since interviews pertained to teachers' attitudes and actions at school, there may be a bias in their answers. Nevertheless, the interviewees felt comfortable and answered all questions, although they knew the interviewer was well aware of and familiar with the nature of their work, and that she possessed previous knowledge from the time she worked at school.

In light of the teachers' statements presented above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Teacher-student relationships are nurtured but are not structured as tools for decreasing students' dropout from school.
2. The issue of motivation in teachers' day to day work is neither organized nor systematic. If a teacher manages to arouse motivation – that will suffice.
3. According to teachers, students' dropout is mostly caused by external reasons (family, socio-economic reasons) while teachers hardly have responsibility in the matter.
4. Teachers are not significantly interested in the dropout issue, and therefore are not shaken by its rates.
5. There is no assimilation of the extent of students' dropout, in light of teacher's approach to their responsibility in the matter.

It appears that the main problems that lead to lack of motivation and dropout are not resolved by the work of teachers and by their relationships with students. The description of teachers' work as emerging from the interview may be suitable for normative students, but not to youths at risk. Furthermore, it is important to note that Ryan & Deci's SDT and Bandura's Self-Efficacy theory pertain to the human aspect, relationships between adults and children, between teachers and students, as a central tool in the creation of human motivation.

Teacher-student relationship include a number of constantly interacting aspects (Hinde, 1987; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). From their perspective, teachers can regard their relationship with students through three aspects: conflict, closeness and dependence (Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995; Safi & Pianta, 2001). Moreover, Pianta (2003) noted these aspects are present throughout all ages from kindergarten to high school (Howes, 2000; Pianta et al., 1995). Teacher-student relationships are shaped and influenced mostly by students' behavior, and less by other aspects (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002).

In a school where teachers report 4-5 conflicts per lesson (12 students in class), the relationships between teachers and students are built and tested in constant conflict situations. The question is what is the nature of the relationship that develops under such circumstances? Do teachers who claim they love their students and are close to them really feel that way?, and if they do, how do they turn this relationship into a working tool with regard to students' perseverance and motivation at school?

Interviews with teachers reveal that the teacher-student relationship is not built systematically, consistently and with intentionality. Researchers have pointed to a lack of correlation between the increasing need of students to create significant relationships with teachers and school and system as a whole (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). This finding is of significance in the context of teachers' work, as it appears that teachers who encourage processes of change beyond the students' abilities motivate them, thus leading to students' more positive attitude (Ames, 1992). Teachers who believe they can

influence students can encourage progress and achievements (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989). However, the interviews show that teachers do not believe that they can influence students' decisions as to whether they will persevere or drop out.

Research in the field and the teachers' interviews reveal that teachers and students seem to speak two different languages. Students who wish (as is their developmental need vis a vis adults that accompany them) that teacher would develop interpersonal relationships with them with an attitude of "You can do it" regardless of their behavior or abilities; teachers, on the other hand, construct their perception of relationships with students based on exactly that behavior or abilities. And when teachers speak of "love" and support they mean parent love, while in fact, it is totally different, as it ought to focus on students improvement, on adhering to trust and respect of students despite their behavior. This is a type of relationship that produces motivation.

In a holistic perspective, we ought to remember components of school climate, rules and organizational structure. Except in this case the emphasis is on what teachers at a second chance high school said about teacher-student relationship. It is important to remember that these insights, when attributed to youths at risk, are sharper, intensive and mores significant.

Further in this research, interviews will be conducted with graduates, and quantitative questionnaires will be administered to students who are still at school, in order to get a complete picture of teacher-student relationship and its significance to motivation, change and decreased dropout in a second chance high school.

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