Perceived Autonomy Levels among Elementary School Students and Their Teachers

Abstract

Many authors have spoken against controlling environments and in favour of autonomous ones. In order to estimate perceived autonomy levels in the classroom, we decided to compare teachers’ perceptions with students’ ones, gaining a more accurate idea of the autonomy levels present in the classroom. The study participants (231 students, 18 teachers) provided data which showed how the teachers’ perceptions differ from the students’ ones in all cases, generally the teachers rating autonomy levels higher than the students. We also found indicators of differences present among teachers of the same subject areas as well as in terms of the students’ gender, school and age.

Keywords: self-determination, autonomy, elementary school, teacher, student

Introduction

Ryan and Deci (2000) have recognized the importance of extrinsic motivation, which classical authors, such as deCharms, often regarded as an impoverished and weak form of motivation. Self-determination theory, however, introduces a variety of motivation types within extrinsic motivation, ranging from weak to proactive. Extrinsically motivated individuals can, therefore, perform activities with resentment and disinterest or willingly, by accepting the value of an activity. This aspect of self-determination theory comes in very handy when working in environments where extrinsic motivation is the predominant type of motivation, e.g., knowing how to successfully motivate students is a helpful tool for any teacher.