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Teachers' Practices: Students' Views at the Beginning of the School Year

Audrey Murillo, Julie Blanc and Hélène Veyrac, Université de Toulouse

At the very start of the school year, how do students perceive the practices of their teachers, and how do they consider that these practices affect their own attitudes? Not long after the start of the school year, high school students reported on classroom situations that enabled them to better understand their teachers. We show that students perceive their teachers' practices in four areas: mastering pedagogy, setting limits, establishing a caring relationship, and making learning fun. These perceptions influence the students' experience and in general, remain throughout the year.

1. Introduction

The very beginning of the school year fuels the belief that some teachers pass on to each other, such as "If you miss your first lesson, you miss your year", or "Don't smile until after Christmas" (Andersen & Andersen, 1987; Serres et al., 2012). Pioneering work in the humanities and social sciences has shown that the beginning of a relationship is very important. Goffman (1973) pointed out the usefulness of the information that individuals initially have about their conversation partners, which enables them to define and adapt to the situation they find themselves in. Asch (1946) has also highlighted the 'primacy effect': the initial information about an object or individual is, on average, retained for longer in the memory and has a stronger impact than any subsequent information. However, little research has focused on the beginning of the school year, and more specifically on the beginning of the relationship between a teacher and their class (Murillo, 2021). Some of these research projects have focused on the information that students gather about their teachers at the very beginning of the school year. They are generally based on sociological interactionist currents, using an ethnographic method. They focus on two phases at the beginning of the year when pupils are broadly observing their teachers: a 'honeymoon' phase and a 'test' phase.

The honeymoon phase. Up until the 1990s, several researchers observed classroom situations in secondary education at the start of the new school year. These researchers agreed that pupils tend to be particularly quiet during the first few days: Hargreaves (1972) speaks of a "disciplinary illusion", Ball (1980) of a "honeymoon" Allen (1986) of a "wait-and-see" phase, and (Woods, 1990) mentions "ultra-conformist" students with the "forest of hands" syndrome (they all want to be the one to answer the teacher's question). Beynon (1985), and Lahelma and Gordon (1997), reach the same conclusions: pupils (especially those new to the school), classmates and teachers, tend to sit back calmly in observational mode because they are not yet familiar with the explicit and implicit rules that will structure classroom situations. During the very first lessons of the year, pupils seem relatively passive because they are not taking much initiative, but they are very active in gathering information. In secondary education, students need to distinguish between general rules (to be followed in all classes) and teacher-specific rules. This is the case for speaking, moving around the classroom, time management (especially being late), interactions between students, and interactions between students and teachers (Beynon, 1985). Pupils identify the teacher's tone of voice, facial expressions, classroom position, speech, the level of noise they will tolerate, how they like to be addressed and the amount of work they expect (Ball, 1980). According to Lahelma and Gordon (1997), students are "on the lookout" for information that will enable them to adapt to their school and to each teacher. It is interesting to note that teachers' practices very early in the year can have an impact on how students perceive teachers at the end of the year; for example, Legg and Wilson showed that an email sent by teachers to their students before the first lesson had a positive influence on students' assessment of teachers at the end of the year. According to Ball (1980), the honeymoon phase rarely lasts more than one session; according to Woods (1990), it could extend to about a week (this is not necessarily a contradiction, as students may only have one session with a teacher per week).

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The test phase. This comes after the honeymoon phase. Beynon points out that the honeymoon phase and the test phase may overlap, and that they may seem quicker or slower to different students in the same class. He notes that *"classroom order is clearly far from being the straightforward product of teacher demand and pupil response"* (Beynon, 1985, p. 19): classroom discipline management is more like the product of classroom-teacher negotiations. Students try to find out which aspects of classroom life are open to negotiation, for example, by determining to what extent messing around in a particular teacher's class is tolerated, possibly by challenging them. Beynon notes that not all students have to test the teacher since they are all spectators of the teacher's public response to the disruptive student. Rayou (1992, p. 33) also discusses 'messing around' (or collective disorder) as a way for students to evaluate teachers: *"Where the teacher may see only disorder, the young person, through messing around, tests the consistency of the rules and the adult's ability to enforce them."* As a result, some students *"adopt different identities in different classrooms and sussing provides them with the data that allow them to decide which identity they can 'bring off' with which teachers"* (Beynon, 1985, p. 121). According to Ball (1980, p. 150),

> taking no action at all, or getting angry and losing self-control, or showing signs of confusion on the teacher's part, all typical of the inexperienced student teacher, demonstrated the kind of lack of tactical skill that would be taken advantage of even by pupils in the most pro-school oriented classes.

The testing pupils' intentions are not necessarily malicious: they are attempting to define and clarify the classroom situation in which they find themselves, possibly by trying to influence it, so they can conform to it better (Ball, 1980). By testing the situation, it is important for pupils to learn the possible consequences of their behavior. Pupils cannot rely solely on the teacher's verbal announcements, which are not always followed by facts: teachers' reactions in the classroom provide the most reliable information. This is how the honeymoon gives way to a less calm phase, which varies between teachers.

According to Allen (1986, p. 446), the students' main strategy at the beginning of the school year is to *"determine and clarify the teacher's requirements and expectations"*, or in other words, *"figure out the teacher"*. Depending on the information gathered about the teacher, pupils may opt to develop two main strategies: having fun or doing what the teacher asks. These two strategies can be combined if the situations the teacher proposes are enjoyable for the pupils (Allen, 1986). Therefore, it is a matter of students quickly acquiring reliable information about their teachers. In Hoy and Weinstein's review (2006) of the literature on students' views on classroom management (collected during the school year and not at the beginning), they show that students perceive "good teachers" in three ways, which influence their decision to cooperate (or not) with teachers:

- "care": when the teacher establishes a relationship that considers the student's welfare, broken down into personal caring (the teacher's concern for the student's wellbeing) and academic caring (the teacher's concern that the student understands, learns and succeeds academically);
- "authority": when the teacher sets limits without being too rigid or coercive;
- "fun": when the teacher makes learning enjoyable, through their enthusiasm and humor and with the variety and originality of the activities they set up.

Therefore, depending on the information taken from their teachers, pupils have different experiences and exhibit different "misbehaviors". For example, we have already shown (Veyrac et al., 2018) that secondary school students, at different times of the year, are able to express (1) that their experiences and behaviors vary between lessons (being interested in the lesson, making an effort, having difficulties, being disciplined, being bored, chatting with classmates, etc.), and (2) that this is often associated with the teacher and their practices (explains well, only talks, is friendly with students, keeps the atmosphere relaxed, etc.). The point here is to consider students as constructing their own educational theory, deeming them capable of interpreting classroom situations and having an influence on these situations through their actions (Cothran et al., 2003; Nicholls, 1992). Pupils are able to distinguish specifically between teacher practices that help them in their learning, and behaviors that may adversely affect their academic and psychological, or even medical, welfare (Sava, 2002). Cothran et al. (2003) also show that students believe, in retrospect, that teachers have an interest in looking after the framework and relationships they build with their students from the beginning of the school year.

Here, we seek to more precisely investigate the categories of perception of teachers' practices by pupils at the very beginning of the school year, when the testing phase is coming to an end or has just been completed. Upon which categories of perception are students' judgements of their teachers constructed? From the students' perspective, how do a teacher's practices affect the experiences, attitudes or behavior of students? Are their first perceptions temporary, or do they last the whole year? Thus, we choose to investigate the construction of the

teacher-student relationship from the perspective of the students. In the context studied (French secondary education), pupils are taught by several teachers: pupils observe them and quickly construct an understanding of how each one functions. We seek to find out whether, very early in the year, the approaches of the different teachers as perceived by the students have different effects on students. These effects are not defined a priori, but arise from interviews with the pupils who mention many diverse effects, such as being unruly or demotivated, enjoying being in class or having difficulty learning. These are therefore effects that can be experienced and expressed in words.

2. Method

2.1 Data collection

We conducted interviews at the beginning of the school year with 21 students (14 girls and 7 boys) from an agricultural high school in France[1]. These students were about 16 years old and were divided into four tenth grade classes: it was their first year in their new school and therefore they did not know any teachers. On the fourth day of the school year, with the agreement of the school, we presented our research to the students. We explained to them that we were researchers and teacher trainers: it was important for us to better understand what the students were experiencing so as to better train other teachers. The participating students, to whom anonymity was guaranteed, agreed to give us at least two interviews at the beginning of the school year. Recorded via voice recorder, the interviews used in this article were made in venues near the high school in the second and third weeks of the new school year, outside of class time. The interviews were semi-directive to give us the opportunity to explore the participants' experiences in detail, as they described their activities, experiences and opinions in their own words (Kvale, 2007).

The semi-directive interviews were conducted according to the following framework:

- [reputations] Before the start of the school year, did you know anything about any of your teachers?
- [situation] Can you tell me about a time when you formed a first impression of one of your teachers? Take some time to remember this moment, let me know when you think you remember it well enough to talk about it in detail. Which teacher was it? Name the teacher by their alias[2].
- [teacher practices] What do you think about this teacher and about the way they do things? What have they done to give you that impression of them? What does it mean to you when they do this?
- [effects on the student] How is this information important or useful to you? What difference does it make to you that the teacher did/said this, in what you do, your attitude, in what you think you do, etc.?
- [validation of the summary] At this point in the interview, we asked the student to validate or amend a summary of what they had said, including the context of the situation, the information taken from the teacher, the meaning this information had for the student, and perceived effects on the student. If there was still time, we suggested that the pupil discuss a different situation.

Over the course of the interviews, we took care to keep each pupil focused on a specific situation of their choice, to avoid influencing their categories of perception, asking them to be as precise as possible in their comments. This ensured that the principles of the explanatory interview (Vermersch, 2009) were followed: the interviewee

[1] In France, agricultural high schools can encompass a number of different pathways, as do the majority of high schools in France (vocational, technological and general). In the class surveyed, in their first year of high school, the students were in the "general and technological" stream, therefore they would continue in the general or technological stream the following year (in agricultural high schools or otherwise). The curriculum is the same as in other high schools, but the options differ, including one specific to agricultural education, "Ecology, Agronomy, Territory and Sustainable Development". The high school in which the survey was conducted attracts students from different backgrounds, due to the agricultural specialisation and the preparatory classes it provides for engineering or veterinary schools. The students interviewed would like to become veterinarians, agricultural engineers, farmers, laboratory technicians, etc. Of the 21 students interviewed, 10 are boarders.

[2] Pupils had a list of their teachers in front of them. Each teacher's name was associated with the subject taught and a neutral alias. These aliases were assigned to the teachers randomly by someone outside the study. This ensured that we did not know the real names of the teachers mentioned by the students, but we could determine whether two students from two different classes were talking about the same teacher. In addition, we could emphasise to the students that it was not their teachers as individuals who were of interest to us and facilitate honest expression from the students. Assigning aliases also emphasized our wish to protect the anonymity and reputation of the teachers whom we, as researchers and trainers, were likely to cross paths with. In fact, these aliases were rarely used by the students, who preferred other forms that preserved anonymity ("he/she", "the teacher", etc.) and allowed them instead to focus on talking about their experiences.

describes their experience of a past activity, guided by a tried-and-tested structure giving the student time to remember their experiences and translate them into a detailed account. In this way, we encouraged each student to give a clear description of the practices, postures, and specific words of their teachers in the classroom, and how the student perceived and interpreted them.

In each interview, each pupil mentioned between 1 and 7 situations: the 21 pupils referred to a total of 58 situations experienced with 20 different teachers. Depending on the day of the interview and the teacher mentioned, the pupils had previously spent between 1.5 and 8 hours in class with that teacher.

In the middle of the school year, we conducted further interviews with 13 volunteer students from those interviewed at the beginning of the year. We asked them to compare their current view with what they had said at the beginning of the year (perceptions of teachers' practices and effects on the student) and say whether they thought these statements were still valid, and if not, how they differed.

2.2 Data processing and analysis

After transcribing the interviews, for each situation we identified:

- the student interviewed (e.g. Emma)
- the alias of the teacher concerned (e.g. Mrs. Poppy)
- the pupil's perception of the teacher: information taking, opinions, etc. (e.g. lets us talk a lot, doesn't command respect)
- the effect(s) perceived by the pupil (e.g. I am having fun in class, I won't be able to learn much)

These units were then coded. In order to achieve comprehensive coding with exclusive categories, we made the choices below.

For the student's perception of the teacher, we used the results of the literature review by Hoy and Weinstein (2006) which highlights three aspects characterizing 'good teachers' according to the students, as seen above: limits, care and fun. Two of the authors carried out the coding independently and then collaborated to reach a consensus on the coding. We added a fourth aspect, mastery of pedagogy, to account for all student comments. The categories and sub-categories obtained are in the table below:

Table 1

Dimensions of students' perceptions of teachers

Dimension		Meaning
Limits		Limits considered acceptable by students have been set and maintained by the teacher (remarks, warnings, threats of punishment, etc.)
Care	Academic	Student perceives the teacher as caring whether the student understands, learns, succeeds
	Personal	Student describes the teacher as friendly, welcoming in class, smiling, not hostile, talking to the students
Fun	Activities	According to students, activities make lesson interesting, students do more than just listen and take notes
	Humor	According to students, the teacher jokes, laughs with the students, does not prevent them from laughing among themselves
	Enthusiasm	According to students, the teacher is motivated and dynamic, especially in gestures and speech
Pedagogy	Appropriate requirement	Appropriate requirement level from the students' point of view (workload, level of difficulty, pace)
	Clarity	Clarity of explanations, course structure, targets, students' point of view

The 'care', 'fun' and 'pedagogy' dimensions were coded in two modalities: presence or absence in the interview.

The 'limits' dimension was coded in three modalities: acceptable limits, absence of limits (teacher allows the students not to work) or unreasonable limits (teacher is too strict, unfair or inconsistent).

For example, we coded the view that «the teacher lets us chat, doesn't get respect» with the category 'absence of limits'.

With regard to the effects on the students (as perceived by the students themselves), we categorized the data - attempting to stay as close as possible to what was said - grouping them by degree of proximity. The 13

categories obtained were grouped into 6 themes: enjoyment, concentration, motivation, discipline, relationship with the teacher, and learning/results. Each theme has a positive value (associated with enjoyment, work and success) and a negative value. These positive and negative values are based on the authors' constructions, which reflect the values of the students' comments when they are identifiable[3].

Table 2

Categories of effects on students, according to their positive or negative value

		Positive value	Negative value
Student's experience	**Enjoyment**	**Enjoyment** (e.g. I really like it)	**Dissatisfaction** (e.g. I don't like it, it annoys me, etc.)
Student's activity	**Concentration**	**Concentrated** (I am focused, interested, etc.)	**Bored**
	Motivation	**Motivated** (I want to go to class, to listen, to study, etc.)	**Unmotivated** (I don't feel like going to class, listening, I'm discouraged, etc.)
	Discipline	**Disciplined** (e.g. I follow the rules)	**Undisciplined** (I fool around, chat, etc.)
Relationship with the teacher		**Cooperative** (I participate, I don't annoy the teacher, I ask students to be quiet, etc.)	**Opposed or defiant** (I don't respect the teacher, I don't understand them, I resent them)
Learning/outcomes		**Ease of learning/succeeding** (I can understand, I'm not ashamed to make mistakes, etc.)	**- Difficulty learning/succeeding** (I can't do it, I drop out...)
			- Possibly: compensation (I try to learn other ways, e.g. from friends, family, internet, etc.)

For example, we coded the attitude "I am having fun in class, I won't be able to learn much» with the categories «undisciplined» and «difficulty learning/succeeding."

We (the three authors of this article) carried out independent coding and then made comparisons to review and refine the categories of analysis.

2.3 Ethical approval

Before collecting the data, the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Toulouse gave a positive opinion of this study. We also had the approval of the school management and the parents of interviewees. Informed active consent was obtained from all students, who could withdraw from the study at any point without needing to provide a reason.

3. Results

In this section, we will present students' perceptions of their teachers' practices at the very beginning of the school year in a quantitative way, as well as the effects of these practices on students, as perceived by them; we then express this data in a summary diagram. We will then develop four themes qualitatively. The conclusion of this section includes our investigation of whether students' perceptions of teachers' practices at the beginning of the school year are still valid, from the students' point of view, in the middle of the school year.

[3] Of the 58 situations mentioned, 26 were clearly associated with a positive value, 22 with a negative value, and 10 with no clear value. Here is an example of a pupil's statement without a clearly marked value, which we have classified as "negative value" because of the lack of discipline: "The teacher is not the big bad wolf, she tells us to stop chatting but if we carry on, she doesn't punish us. So I chat a bit with the others, it's a bit of a mess." It is interesting to note that 'having fun in class' rarely has a positive value for students, who often regret not being more interested in the class in which they are having fun, as Rayou (1992, p.33) notes about students of the same age: "Curiously, many students complain afterwards about the messing around in which they nevertheless indulge. The pleasure of momentary regression is followed by the bitterness of having a teacher who is unable to control the behaviour."

3.1 Students' perceptions of teachers' practices

Pupils in the chosen school rarely met their classmates from the previous year: during the interviews, students told us that they were getting to know teachers whose reputation they knew very little about. The first week of the school year was therefore when pupils very largely formed first impressions of their teachers.

Students called up 117 descriptors to describe 58 situations in which they felt they had gained a better understanding of their teachers. The occurrences of these descriptors are separated, as shown in the table below[4].

Table 3

Number of occurrences of teacher descriptors by students

		Presence in the teacher, according to the student	**Absence in the teacher, according to the student**	
Limits 28		14 (acceptable limits)	6 (no/few limits)	8 (unreasonable limits)
Care 31	academic (17)	13	4	
	personal (14)	9	5	
Fun 33	activities (11)	8	3	
	humor (9)	9	0	
	enthusiasm (13)	11	2	
Pedagogy 25	appropriate requirements (14)	3	11	
	clarity (11)	4	7	
	Total: 117	**71**	**46**	

Reading example: 13 out of 21 students noted the presence of 'academic care' in their teacher.

We can see that the students often mentioned the presence of fun in relation to their teachers, but rarely its absence. On the other hand, they mentioned the absence of pedagogical qualities in the lessons, but seldom the presence of these qualities (because they were deemed to be 'normal').

Finally, 11 of the 20 teachers mentioned were referred to by several students. The perceptions of these teachers were largely uniform; only 2 teachers were perceived in a non-uniform manner by the students[5].

3.2 The effects of teaching practices on students, from the students' point of view

The 58 situations described by the students highlight 100 effects perceived by the students on themselves, shown in the following table.

[4] - This table was developed from the students' point of view. As researchers, we do not judge whether a teacher's approach is acceptable, or whether their explanations are clear. Our categories reflect the subjectivity of the students.
- The occurrences in the table are taken from the students' own words: if a student mentions that a teacher has a sense of humor, we add an occurrence in the box 'humor - presence', but if a student mentions a teacher without mentioning whether they have a sense of humor or not, we do not add an occurrence in the table. This explains, for example, why the 'humor - no' box is set to 'zero': this does not mean that no teachers are seen not to show humor, but that the absence of humor is not one of the characterizing aspects mentioned by students.
- Subtotals are shown in brackets in the line headings.

[5] One student found the limits set by one teacher to be reasonable, while others thought they were almost non-existent. For another teacher, one student (low academic level) found the level of difficulty of the lessons appropriate, while another student (higher level) did not.

Table 4

Number of occurrences of effects on students

		Positive value	Negative value
	Enjoyment (10)	Enjoyment 5	Dissatisfaction 5
Student activity (54)	**Concentration (14)**	Concentrated 12	Bored 2
	Motivation (22)	Motivated 14	Unmotivated 8
	Discipline (18)	Disciplined 13	Undisciplined 5
	Relationship with the teacher (13)	Cooperative 9	Opposed or defiant 4
	Learning/results (23)	Ease of learning/succeeding 8	Difficulty learning/succeeding 8
	Learning/results (23)		Compensation 7
	Total: 100	**61**	**39**

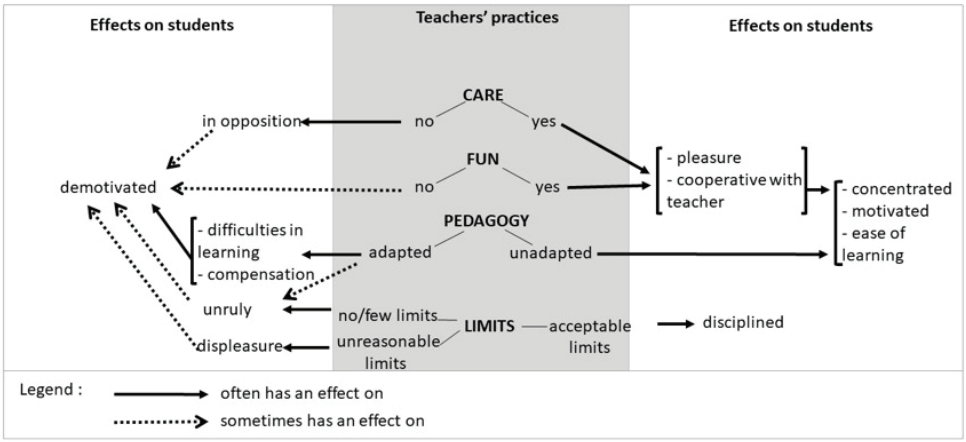
The effects perceived by the pupils refer to the particular situation («I allowed myself to discuss», «I concentrated in the lesson», etc.) but also to more general statements («it discourages me», «I like going to this lesson»), and the rest of the school year («I won't get good grades», «I could bring myself to challenge the teacher...»). In the students' perception, a classroom situation at the beginning of the year can therefore influence the rest of the year.

3.3 How do students' perceptions of their teachers affect students?

Do students' perceptions of teachers early in the school year have an effect on them? What are the links between the descriptors of teacher practice (limits, care, fun, pedagogy) and their effects on students? The diagram below shows the perceptions of teachers' practices by students and their effects on students. This diagram, to be read from the central column, shows effects with a negative value in the left-hand column, and effects with a positive value in the right-hand column[6].

Figure 1

From the students' perspective, the effects of their teachers' practices



Reading example 1: When pupils perceive the pedagogical aspects are being adapted, they are often of the view that this affects their concentration, motivation and ease of learning.
Reading example 2: When pupils do not perceive care in their teacher, they often express their opposition, which can lead to a lack of motivation.

6 Each outcome is linked by a solid arrow to the perceptions with which it is associated in at least 60% of cases. The dotted arrows refer to associations of less than 60%, but with more than two occurrences. As the effect of 'boredom' was only mentioned twice, it is not included in this diagram.

Below, we look further into the different effects on pupils' attitudes highlighted in this diagram.

To be disciplined, to be focused: two distinct attitudes generated by different teaching practices [in Figure 1, 'disciplined', 'unruly', 'concentrated', 'motivated', 'ease of learning']

When students mentioned being disciplined in a lesson, in the vast majority of cases (12 times out of 13), it was linked to setting limits that the student perceived as reasonable and acceptable. But from the students' point of view, concentration and motivation were only once associated with acceptable limits and, surprisingly enough, learning perceived as easy was never explicitly associated with acceptable limits. Motivation, concentration and learning are often associated with care, fun and the pedagogical dimension, as Claire explains:

> With [one teacher], we did several activities in the same class, we didn't always stay on the same thing, time passed quickly, he got the whole class involved. At the same time, he knows how to keep the atmosphere relaxed, whenever there's a joke to be made about a word, he makes his joke and then continues with the lesson... With a teacher like this, you feel more like raising your hand and asking questions than chatting with your neighbor. He has imposed his respect, and now we have to do the same with him, to be respectful. It's going to be an hour when we say to ourselves: I'm in this class to listen and to have a good time. I tell myself that the year will go well with him, that we won't be looking at the clock all the time and waiting for the next lesson.

Thus, teachers who foster the areas of pedagogy, care and fun manage to get the students to work, without needing to impose discipline as such (through remarks, warnings or even threats of punishment, associated with limits deemed acceptable by the students). This disciplinary framing does not appear to be at the forefront of students' experiences; these teachers seem to have a mindset of "enrolment" and not of "containment" (Claude & Rayou, 2019). Furthermore, the fact that the teachers intend to make their lessons fun (including original activities, humor, enthusiasm) does not lead to unruly behavior; on the contrary, pupils express their pleasure at being in class and are more inclined to cooperate.

According to pupils, disruptive behavior is sometimes caused by a lack of mastery of pedagogy in the teachers (lack of clarity, inappropriate level of demands, etc.) and in most cases by a lack of authority and limit-setting. Elise illustrates this point by talking about her first lesson with a teacher:

> Her course is not very interesting, I don't feel like listening, we let ourselves get distracted by our friends. I don't really understand how she delivers her lessons, or what the point of the lesson is or the structure of the course. The first lesson was a mess. She wasn't very strict at the start, then she tried to be strict, but nobody listened anymore.

Credible threats of punishment in the eyes of the pupils do not guarantee that they will concentrate on learning, but do encourage discipline. Mathias says:

> I am suspicious of this teacher, he told us from the start that he could give us three afternoons in detention if we kept forgetting our things or talked too much. That stopped the chatter straight away, nobody talks in this class.

Very early on in the year, the student exhibit different attitudes in the different classes they attend, e.g. having fun in one class, concentrating in another subject, being disciplined elsewhere, etc.

When students identify teaching practices that promote or inhibit learning [In Figure 1: 'pedagogy']

From the beginning of the school year, pupils are confronted with situations in which they have differing levels of success in getting down to work and learning; they like to understand how the lesson is structured and what they have to do to achieve good grades. They sometimes express regret that certain teachers' explanations lack clarity. Pupils distinguish between teachers who have not made themselves understood despite their efforts, and those who, in a hurry to finish the program, have not explained a point that was not understood. In the latter case, it is the feeling of struggling to learn and resignation that prevails among students. Marie says:

> I asked the teacher to explain the answer to an exercise and she just repeated the answer... I said to myself that there was no point in asking her questions... I just try to make sense of it in the evening.

In addition, note-taking is something new and challenging for students of this age, who have been used to their previous teachers' practice of dictating text. Marie describes her difficulties with one teacher:

> She speaks, then we take notes on something, she repeats the same thing but with new things added, and she does this three or four times: we don't have time to write it all down. We get lost, we ask her to repeat, she repeats something else and adds things... so it's complicated to note everything down.

Some pupils with difficulty learning in certain lessons mentioned the pace, which is too slow or too fast, or a level of difficulty, which is too low or too high. Agnes recalls the first foreign language lessons: "

> I really wanted to progress and the level is very low, I don't think I'll progress, I'm disappointed. In the class, we went over the [conjugation of the] present tense, some people were learning this for the first time, I've known it since the first year of middle school... It's so boring." Celia (on the same course) finds the level of difficulty suits her needs: "I like it, [the teacher] has covered the basics, she will teach us everything. I think we will improve this year.

Finally, students may be embarrassed when a teacher insists they copy out the entire correction of an exercise, rather than just focusing on the misunderstood passages; another student mentions another teacher who *"instead of helping them, does the exercise for them."* In contrast, Coline, and other students, finds their learning facilitated by the approach of one teacher,

> who pays attention to everything he says. He explains all the details so that we get used to his lesson; for example, when he says something less loudly, he tells us "I say it less loudly because it's less important", he helps us understand his method, we become more interested. He speaks about his lesson, explaining that there are some good things. He's interested and he takes pleasure in teaching. I understood the lesson well, whereas in previous years I wasn't so good at this subject.

As this interview excerpt suggests, when pupils feel that they find the learning easier, they associate it with pedagogical factors (transmission of knowledge) as well as care and fun (5 times out of 8): students feel that their learning is facilitated when their teacher makes the lesson enjoyable and cares about them.

How teachers' practices affect student motivation [in Figure 1: 'motivated', 'demotivated']

The methodology of our research projects reveals which teacher practices affect pupil motivation.

When pupils say they are unmotivated, they generally attribute it (7 times out of 8) to the teacher not adapting the class content, i.e. too much work, too fast, too slow, too difficult, too easy, etc. To a lesser extent (3 times for each of the following dimensions), students also attribute poor motivation to a lack of structure, care or fun: a class where *"you can't do anything but listen and write"* (Jules), where it's *"a mess"* (Elise), and a teacher who, according to the student, *"doesn't feel like teaching, doesn't feel like having new students"* (Rémi). In some cases, students perceive teachers as impeding their learning, which is a source of discouragement: "

> [The teacher] yelled at me during the lesson because I whispered something. I couldn't read what was written on the board and I asked my neighbor. When you don't understand and you're really lost, you don't even try to understand (Charlene).

When students said they felt motivated (14 cases), they mainly credited the teacher's (academic and/or personal) care (11 cases out of 14) and fun (9 cases out of 14), as well as the pedagogical aspects (5 cases out of 14). Mathias talks about the practices of a teacher that he believes motivate him*:*

> The course is exciting, pleasant, [the teacher] takes the time to answer our questions, takes a certain interest in us, laughs with us outside of lessons... It makes you want to come to class, you want to enjoy moments with him at the end [of the class], and not get on his nerves so that you can laugh together.

In another case, Emma had never studied a foreign language already known to her classmates, and was reassured and motivated by the attention of the teacher:

> At the end of the lesson, she told me that in general it was going well [in cases where students are new to the language], and that she could help me if need be. She told me that it was normal not to retain all the information, and that this would come with doing exercises. She was reassuring, it made me want to concentrate properly. I know I have to work a little harder than the others, but it's motivating.

Coline indicated a cause-and-effect relationship between teacher motivation and student motivation: *"It's motivating to see a teacher motivated by their lesson."*

Cooperative or hostile pupils, depending on the teacher [in Figure 1: 'in opposition', 'cooperative with the teacher']

Depending on the perceived practices of their teachers, students adopt different stances: cooperative when the pupil helps the teacher (participating, trying to behave well, or even asking other pupils to do so), or in opposition by preventing a calm class atmosphere (when pupils feel incomprehension, develop resentment or disrespect towards their teachers). On four occasions, pupils mentioned defiant or hostile attitudes from some of their teachers at the start of the school year. In 3 times out of 4 these were associated with a lack of care from the teacher, as was the case with Charlene (mentioned above) who was reprimanded by the teacher when she asked her neighbor for help. Other examples were Adrien, who did not dare to ask one of his teachers a question for fear of saying something stupid and being lectured, and Jeanne whose classmate was sent out of the classroom because he said the name of the lesson too loudly to a classmate. Jeanne said:

> I don't know how to say it but... it's taken me away from the teacher, because I think that at the end of the day, he's only there to give us the lesson, and that if at some point we lose our focus, he's not going to put us back in line or call us to order, but he's going to make us leave... In the end it doesn't give us much of a chance to regain our focus."

Finally, faced with a teacher who *"doesn't say hello, doesn't smile"*, Rémi is on the lookout for the slightest slip-up on the part of the teacher, such as an unfair punishment, which would give him the opportunity to challenge the teacher, as he himself wants to be irreproachable so as not to be criticized in return. Thus, from the beginning of the school year, certain relations between teachers and pupils take a negative turn, and do not seem to foster a positive working atmosphere.

In contrast, some students say that they are in a cooperative relationship with some of their teachers. Out of 9 times when students mention that they develop a cooperative attitude, 8 are associated with fun and 5 with care: a teacher who is perceived as making work situations pleasant for students and who cares about them, generates a positive attitude. This is consistent with Valenzuela's findings (1999, quoted by Hoy & Weinstein, 2006), that the care relationship is often reciprocal: students often need the school and teachers to care about them before they care about the school and their teachers. This reciprocity is illustrated by students:

> He's nice to us, we'll be nice to him, it's only natural" (Mathias), "If he says to us 'please stay calm', I will fully comply because he knows how to please us... the fact that he gave us just a little time to laugh allowed us to concentrate completely on what he was saying next, and that's what I liked" (Lily).

Pupils say they feel more engaged with a teacher "*with whom we can have a bit of a laugh*", who "*really wants to teach us something*" (Agnes), who *"takes the time to answer our questions"* (Mathias). Reassuring students that they will not be criticized if they get it wrong also encourages participation; Agathe appreciates this about one of her teachers: *"She gives you confidence, you're not ashamed when you make a mistake"*. Cooperating with the teacher can also mean helping them discipline other students, as Jules tries to do with one teacher:

> The other teachers, I don't especially need to help them, they need students who participate, but that's fine. This teacher just says 'I'm fed up' but she doesn't follow through her warnings. I try not to chat, to help her, to participate a little. I ask the other students to be quiet, to show respect for the teacher. I put myself in their shoes, it's never nice to speak without being listened to... but it doesn't work too well when I tell them to shut up, and then I don't want to be seen as the teacher's pet [a student seen as being too friendly with their teacher].

3.4 Lingering perceptions

So far, this article has presented students' perceptions at the very beginning of the school year. To what extent do these perceptions form an opinion that students will have throughout the year? Are they likely to change as the classroom situation evolves? In order to answer these questions, we asked 13 student volunteers in the middle of the school year to make a comparison with the statements they had made in September (covering 45 classroom situations). Of these 45 statements:

- 30 are still valid according to the students. Of course, perceptions may have evolved and changed. Perceptions are also refined as students adjust to the situation, for example Celia, who judged her teacher as "strict" at the start of the year, realized later that this teacher was also very demanding on graded assessments. In another case, Elise had judged a teacher's practices at the start of the year on her experience of them (in smaller groups), but she later distinguished between this teacher's practices in groups and with the whole class (where Elise found the situation more *"tiring"* and had a greater tendency to *"scatter"*). As a result, certain perceptions were refined over time, without invalidating the judgements made at the beginning of the year.
- In 9 cases, the students' perceptions of the teachers changed because the teachers modified some of their behaviors. This was mostly the case for teachers who adapted to students' requests (no longer making them copy out the correction if the student had done the exercise correctly, being more tolerant of weaker students, giving students more time to take notes and understand the lesson, allowing breaks, etc.); these changes were perceived positively by the students.
- In 3 cases, the pupil's behavior had changed irrespective of the teacher; this may be due to pupils who start to make a positive effort because they realize that a subject is important for their future.
- Only 3 statements involved situations in which the pupil felt that they had made an error in judgement, or at least that their judgement had changed. This was the case for Charlene, for example, who said that she had changed the way she viewed a teacher since they had spoken at the parent-teacher meeting: she realized then that the teacher accepted that students speak, but only if it was related to the lesson.

In the majority of cases, students' perceptions of their teachers remained unchanged throughout the year. When perceptions change, it is most often because the teachers change their practices to suit their class.

4. Discussion

In this article, we aimed to understand to what extent teachers' practices and more precisely how they are perceived by students affect students' experiences, attitudes and behaviors, from the very beginning of the school year. We have shown that the categories of pupils' perception of teachers' practices can be described according to four main dimensions: care, fun, pedagogy and limits, and that students report different behaviors between teachers based on these dimensions. We have shown that very early in the year, pupils develop different feelings and activities depending on the teacher, in terms of pleasure, concentration, motivation and discipline, but also in the type of relationship they build with the teacher and in their commitment to learning.

Some of the results are likely to provide food for thought in teacher training. For example, from the pupils' point of view, an absence or excess of limit-setting generates more negative effects in terms of pupils' attitudes or activities (lack of discipline, dissatisfaction, lack of motivation) than a structure generating positive effects (discipline). Furthermore, the structure provided by the teacher is not sufficient to generate concentration, and the pupil's motivation appears to be closely linked to the concepts of care and fun. This suggests that teacher training should consider the different factors that can affect students' experiences one by one.

Our results also offer a case for encouraging both new and experienced teachers to seek information about how students perceive their practices and the effects these practices have on them. Providing opportunities for teacher-student exchanges, with anonymous and non-anonymous student feedback, is a valuable source of professional development for teachers; it can help them adapt to their students, as well as contribute to the perception of student activity as partly influenced by the teacher's style, and not assigned to a "fixed academic position" between 'good' and 'bad' ways of being a student" (Netter & Mamede, 2021).

It is interesting to note that our results converge with those of process-product research, linking teacher behaviors observed by researchers at the very beginning of the year (clear rules, smiles, consideration of pupils' emotions, etc.) with performance indicators (frequency of inappropriate pupil behavior, pupil engagement in tasks, pupil progress, and even teacher evaluation by their pupils at the end of the year). These research projects (Bohn et al., 2004; Evertson & Emmer, 1982; Moskowitz & Hayman, 1976) make it possible to identify so-called effective practices, or at least practices correlated with performance indicators. Their results lead us to hypothesize that, in our research projects, teachers who provide a reasonable structure, a caring relationship, pleasant situations and appropriate pedagogical requirements for the pupils are also the teachers who will enable the pupils to make the most progress in their learning. Combining student interviews, classroom observations, and student testing in the same investigation would support this hypothesis. As it stands, our research complements research that attempts to define the "good teacher" or "effective teacher": we do not ask students about the value or effectiveness of their teachers but give students the opportunity to express in detail the link between certain practices of their teachers, and the consequences that these practices have on students (in terms of feelings, attitudes, practices, etc.). Interpreted in terms of teacher practices having positive or negative consequences, our results allow us to characterize in detail the teacher practices that are meaningful to and have an effect on students. In this sense, our research can contribute to the "good teacher" research stream, but precautions must be taken: there is no way of verifying that the way students perceive certain practices is faithful to the way these practices actually took place in the classroom.

Furthermore, we found few inconsistencies in how students perceived the same teachers. This is consistent with the work of Cothran et al. (2003) and Netter and Boulin (2021) who, despite having surveyed a variety of schools, found few differences in students' perceptions of classroom management practices. However, the few differences that were found would benefit from further study: which aspects do students disagree on? Can the differences in students' views be explained by their personal profiles? In this context, collecting details of student profiles (particularly academic performance, e.g. questioning their self-perception, or by collecting more factual data such as their academic results) would make it possible to enhance the data and, in the wake of these results, explore the variations in students' experiences of class and academic commitment according to their characteristics or profiles.

Finally, we know from Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) that a teacher's first impressions of a student can influence the teacher's expectations and, in turn the student's behavior and learning (Pygmalion effect): believing that a student will make progress can become a self-fulfilling prophecy that actually helps the student make progress. It is possible to wonder whether the opposite is true: are the first impressions given by a teacher to their students likely to create expectations in the students that will help make the teacher a 'good' teacher? For example, if students are convinced that the teacher is going to be exciting, they will certainly want to listen carefully, and the students' attitude may make the teacher more exciting than if the students were not interested

in the lesson. From the start of the school year, students make judgements and develop a course of action that seems to persist throughout the school year.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors have no conflict of interest or competing interests to declare.

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Keywords: Teacher-student relationship; student attitudes; effective teaching; beginning of the school year; pedagogy

Praktiken der Lehrkräfte: Die Ansichten der Schüler*innen zu Beginn des Schuljahres

Zusammenfassung
Wie nehmen die Schüler*innen zu Beginn des Schuljahres die Praktiken ihrer Lehrkräfte wahr und wie wirken sich diese Praktiken ihrer Meinung nach auf ihre eigenen Einstellungen aus? Kurz nach Beginn des Schuljahres berichteten Schülerinnen und Schüler über Unterrichtssituationen, die es ihnen ermöglichten, ihre Lehrpersonen besser zu verstehen. Wir zeigen, dass die Schüler*innen die Praktiken ihrer Lehrpersonen in vier Bereichen wahrnehmen: Beherrschung der Didaktik, Setzen von Grenzen, Aufbau einer fürsorglichen Beziehung und Spaß am Lernen. Diese Wahrnehmungen beeinflussen die Erfahrungen der Schüler*innen und bleiben im Allgemeinen das ganze Jahr über bestehen.

Schlagworte: Lehrpersonen-Schüler*innen-Beziehung; Einstellung der Schüler*innen; effektiver Unterricht; Beginn des Schuljahres; Pädagogik

Perspectives des élèves sur les pratiques de leurs enseignant·e·s en tout début d'année scolaire

Résumé
En tout début d'année scolaire, comment les élèves perçoivent-ils ou elles les pratiques de leurs différent·e·s enseignant·e·s, et en quoi pensent-ils ou elles que ces pratiques ont un effet sur leur propre attitude ? Peu de temps après la rentrée, des lycéennes et lycéens ont évoqué des situations de classe qui leur ont permis de mieux cerner leurs enseignant·e·s. Nous montrons que les élèves perçoivent les pratiques de leurs enseignant·e·s selon quatre dimensions : maîtriser les aspects didactiques, poser un cadre, mettre en place une relation de « care » et des situations de classe agréables. Ces perceptions ont des effets sur le vécu des élèves, et sont largement persistantes.

Mots-clés : Relation enseignant·e-élève ; vécu des élèves ; enseignement efficace ; début d'année scolaire ; pédagogie

Pratiche degli insegnanti: Opinioni degli studenti all'inizio dell'anno scolastico

Riassunto
All'inizio dell'anno scolastico, come percepiscono gli studenti e le studentesse le pratiche dei/delle loro insegnanti e come ritengono che queste pratiche influenzino i loro atteggiamenti? Non molto tempo dopo l'inizio dell'anno scolastico, è stato chiesto a studenti e studentesse delle scuole superiori di descrivere le situazioni in classe che hanno permesso loro di comprendere meglio i/le loro insegnanti. In questo studio mostriamo come studenti e studentesse percepiscano le pratiche dei loro/delle loro insegnanti in quattro aree: padronanza della didattica, definizione dei limiti, instaurazione di un rapporto di cura e divertimento nell'apprendimento. Queste percezioni influenzano l'esperienza degli studenti e delle studentesse e, in generale, permangono per tutto l'anno.

Parole chiave: Relazione insegnante-studente; esperienza degli studenti; insegnamento efficace; inizio dell'anno scolastico; pedagogia

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