

PERCEPTIONS, LEARNING ATTITUDE

Spencer, M. B., D. Dupree, et al. (1997). "A Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST): A self-organization perspective in context." Development and Psychopathology 9(4): 817-833.

OVERVIEW

Experiences in different relationships and contexts affect how one views oneself, and the perception of such experiences affects how one perceives oneself. Bronfenbrenner has an ecological systems theory that describes how individuals are members of many systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem), and an individual's experience within those systems determines how a person gives meaning and significance to him or herself. A person self-organizes based on these experiences and perceptions, and this self-organization guides behaviors, thoughts, and actions. The person then develops coping strategies, positive (adaptive) and negative (maladaptive), to respond to situations or stresses. This study highlights perception within the microsystem of family, peers, school, and peer group. The study below how students' location in school and peer groups affect negative learning attitude.

DESIGN

Two hundred sixty-six students were questioned in an effort to answer two hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that there would be an opposite relationship between having a general positive attitude and a stable coping response, negative learning attitude. The second hypothesis is that perceived positive teacher expectations and perceived unpopularity with peers are important in predicting negative a learning attitude.

Students took a series of surveys. The Life Event Record measured type and number of stressful events in the previous year. The Perceived Positive Teacher Perception (PPTP) and Perceived Negative Teacher Perception (PTNP) Scales measured what students think the teacher thinks of them. The "Self" Sociometric Pupil Evaluation Inventory (SSPEI) measures what others perceive of a person. The Hale/Funder/Block Ego-Esteem/Resilience Scale (HFBEERS) measures self-esteem and resiliency. Researchers used statistical analysis to find relationships, and genders were separated.

FINDINGS

- Girls believe teachers have higher expectations of boys than the boys believe they do.
- Stress is positively linked with a general positive attitude in boys, and negatively linked with a negative learning attitude.
- Perceived unpopularity with peers is linked to a less positive general attitude for both boys and girls.
- Perceived unpopularity with peers is positively correlated with negative learning attitude, so it contributes to a negative learning attitude.
- A general positive attitude leads to a less negative learning attitude for both genders.
- Stress is negatively linked with a negative learning attitude for boys.

- Social supports (teachers, peers) and their perceptions contribute to negative learning attitude.
- Girls' report of positive expectations for Black males was unrelated to the negative learning attitudes of the girls.
- Perceived unpopularity with peers is the only contributor to a negative learning attitude for girls, but stress has very little impact.

CONCLUSIONS

The social supports perceived by boys and girls are important factors in negative learning attitudes. The power of peers is undeniable, and the difference of impact on gender is remarkable. As we begin to understand what students are thinking, we can reevaluate our connotations of their coping strategies. They are doing what is natural developmentally and influenced by their teachers, peers, and community.

CRITIQUE AND EVALUATION

The study gives us information of what students perceive teachers and peers think of them, but it does not give the specifics of the roots of those perceptions. It also does not confirm or disprove that the students' perceptions are accurate.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What can be done to educate teachers about what their words and behavior imply for their students?
2. How do we take student perceptions and use them to build bridges and change relationships between their educators and peers?
3. How do we create environments where academic achievement has successful and positive social connotations?
4. How should interventions be done differently as they relate to the gender differences in perceptions and response?

IMPLICATIONS

In this generation, what students feel that teachers feel about them heavily impacts their attitude toward learning. Because academic success is related to future life-course success for poor students, a student's attitude toward learning will probably affect their life course as well. This period of adolescence and decision-making has long-term effects in the way that young people will eventually interact with society. Now that we know where interventions can be done, we must modify perceptions through challenge and relationship building. As adults who understand these ramifications, we have to work to infuse cultures of achievement in the classroom and school communities so that peer groups will be ambitious academically.

Tamecia R. Jones ccys