Children’s drawings: A language-friendly tool to investigate the quality of student–teacher relationships

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There is no shortage of evidence supporting the view that dyadic relationships between teachers and individual students are the keystone of students’ successful school adjustment. When there is a sense of trust and secure relatedness with their teachers, students tend to feel more self-efficacious and motivated in their school tasks, show higher levels of well-being, and perform better academically than classmates with conflictual student–teacher relationships. Moreover, high-quality student–teacher relationships may, in large part, be responsible for the developmental success of at-risk students, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds, low socioeconomic milieus, or those speaking a different language at home. But what do we actually know about how students feel about and behave toward their teachers? Usually, students’ representations of student–teacher relationships are captured through survey measures that are filled out by students themselves. Yet, these measures tend to be relatively global and are not always reliable, especially when students do not yet have sufficient capabilities for abstract linguistic expression, or enter school speaking a first language other than the teacher’s. This talk considers student–teacher relationship drawings as a language-friendly tool to evaluate the quality of student–teacher relationships. Issues regarding the psychometric qualities of this new tool will be discussed and initial (cross-cultural) evidence supporting the link between students’ mental relationship representations and a variety of school-related outcomes will be presented.

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