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## On growing closer versus becoming more distant in the teacher–pupil relationship

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### Abstract

Many studies on classroom aspects related to teaching suggest that the classroom climate, and especially the teacher–student relationship, can greatly determine the quality of teaching in many ways. This study is focused on the narrower perspective of the teacher–pupil relationship, namely the concept known as teacher immediacy. The text starts with an overview of current knowledge about immediacy and the issue of teacher misbehaviour at State schools of compulsory education, which are directly involved in shaping the classroom climate. Subsequently, the results of a study aimed at detecting behaviour that reduces perceived closeness are presented. Narrative interviews were conducted with several former pupils of compulsory school attendance. The data obtained from the interviews were analysed and various modes of teacher’s behaviour that violated the trust or sympathy in the teacher–pupil relationship were identified. They include verbal and non-verbal forms of suspicion, underestimation of pupils’ abilities, reduced interest in the pupil or teaching, hostility of the teacher and others. The context of trust and the perceived closeness of the pupil to the teacher are discussed as well as other forms of non-immediacy and teacher misbehaviour from a neutral perspective.

**Keywords:** Misbehaviour, pupil, relationship, school classroom, teacher immediacy.

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## 1. Introduction

The vision of quality and effective learning and teaching has been supported in the schools for many years. One of the key determinants that influence educational activity is the social environment in the classroom. The teacher's capability to create and develop a safe interpersonal zone with the pupil and the entire class contributes to this to a major degree. The increase in the bullying of teachers by the pupils, or the bullying of pupils by teachers, more frequent emotional social problems of both parties concerned lead to increasing interest in relational pedagogy (Crowover & Jones, 2018). There is a clear effort to define the teacher – expert and his competencies that can be exercised at the relational level. Riley and Lewis (2009) refer to the fact that the creation of the positive interpersonal aspect of learning required patience, resistance to stress, empathy, ability to process information from multiple subjects and also respond to it in real time. It is a complicated multi-factorial element that functions complexly as a single unit. In the end, this does not only affect the focus of the teacher's style and his strategic behaviour but also the interpersonal processes that are permeated by the teacher's full personality, his nature, characteristics, motivations, life values, attitudes and approach to the pupils or students as well as to the learning subjects. A very significant aspect of the pedagogue's personality, which is reflected in his/her behaviour, is social and emotional intelligence. It is necessary to state that the behaviour of the teacher in the interactions need not be stable, but may copy his momentary inner and outer environment. Simply stated, he may succumb to situational influences.

Clearly, the most wide-spread concepts of communicative behaviour, which may be responsible for the relationships of the teachers and the pupils, are known as teacher immediacy, non-immediacy and teacher misbehaviour. The highest attention has been focused on the first of the mentioned concept, particularly in the American States. Teacher immediacy is defined as verbal and non-verbal behaviours 'that reduce physics and psychological distance between teacher and students.' (Andersen, 1971, p. 544) Verbal expressions of teacher immediacy are praise of the pupil, self-determination in the sense of use of personal examples and sharing personal experiences, addressing the pupils by their first names or use of humour (Bourne & Moore, 2003; Gorham, 1988). By non-verbal expressions such as a smile, eye contact, walking through the classroom among the pupils or enthusiastic expressions, the teacher can get the sympathy and favour of his pupils. The non-verbal stimuli particularly have strong effects on the perception of closeness (Burgoon, Guerrero & Burgoon, 2016). Guerrero (2017) refers to the fact that immediacy behaviour influences how behaviour is interpreted and evaluated. The low level of immediacy in the behaviour of an individual indicates stagnation of the relationship while a higher level indicates a positive personal to intimate relationship. Teachers with a higher level of immediacy are evaluated by the students as more effective and their lessons are popular (Guerrero, 2017). Teacher immediacy is generally comprehended as behaviour, which means friendliness and approachability, availability for interaction and communication, warmth and closeness at interpersonal level (Gregersen, 2006).

Immediacy behaviour need not always be evaluated positively, Gilstrap (2004) writes that excess or forced immediacy may have a negative effect and result in avoiding of the subjects. This brings us to the basic principle of approaching/avoiding, which is manifest in the interaction. The connection of this theory with teacher immediacy was stated already by Mehrabian (1969, 1971), who defined the whole concept and laid down its major pillars thanks to his implicit communication researches. He explained immediacy in interactions on the basis of the tendency to desire being closer to someone assuming that this person has a higher level of immediacy, which evokes the feeling of pleasure and sympathy.

In addition to teacher immediacy, the terms non-immediacy or teacher misbehaviour also appear frequently. Non-immediacy, unlike the preceding behaviour, concerns communication cues, which reduce the feeling of closeness. Mehrabian (1971) precisely described it as 'the degree of attention of directness and intensity of interaction between a communicator and the object his communication.' Richmond & McCroskey (2000) in such behaviour include reduced eye contact or its avoidance, poor

face expressions with a higher level of dissatisfied expressions, deviation of one's body from another person, expressions of coldness and disinterest. Nervous, abrupt movements, rigid body positions that indicate stress, or frequent and long pauses when talking are usually also considered as behaviour that is indicative of the non-immediacy concept. How this behaviour shall be evaluated to a greater degree is predicted by the type of emitter and receiver. The behaviour shall be explained differently between the employer and employee and also differently between the teacher and pupil. According to Dolin (1995), the students usually perceive non-immediacy in the class as negatively as teacher misbehaviour. This thesis is supported by the study by Thweatt & McCroskey (1996).

Kearney, Plax, Hays and Ivey (1991, p. 310) defined the teacher misbehaviour phenomenon as 'interfere with instruction and thus, learning' Riley and Lewis (2009) differentiate two categories, that is legal and illegal misbehaviour. Illegal behaviour on the part of the teacher is typically associated with sexual abuse or harassment. It clearly breaks the law and this is probably the reason for its frequent medialisation. On the other hand, the second category may appear more frequently in the class and maybe manifest, for instance, as neglect of the teacher's duties. If we would like to know the specific forms of unsuitable teacher behaviour, we can refer to Wrench, Richmond & Gorham (2009), according to whom it is possible within the framework of the student–teacher environment to identify three types of such behaviour. It concerns unwillingness, incompetency and offensive teacher behaviour.

Just as applies to other variables in the teacher–pupil relationship, this behaviour is affected by many aspects. The experts state that the unsuitable tasks on the part of the educator strongly act on the behaviour of the student, his working morale, motivation and approach to the subject (Wrench et al., 2009). In their study, Broekelman-Post et al. (2015) ascertained whether a relationship exists between teacher misbehaviour and two selected variables such as the interest and involvement of the students in the learning process. The results show that the interest of the students is substantially related to the unsuitable behaviour of the teachers, and a less stronger relationship appeared with involvement in the learning process. This is also related to the second principle of avoidance. If low teacher immediacy is perceived and more frequent teacher misbehaviour or non-immediacy is indicated to the student, a good relationship is not established, but the student mentally avoids the teacher. Interest in the curriculum and subject may also be lost.

Many types of research exist that investigate the teacher–pupil relationship in the contexts of the teacher immediacy and misbehaviour concepts, which mainly have a quantitative tradition. They examine relationships and contexts with various variables such as perceived learning, motivation or involvement of the students. All these researches were conducted in institutions of higher learning and universities. Nevertheless, a negligible number of researches are concerned with closeness in the relationship to State primary school, where compulsory schooling takes place although we can comprehend it as a specific educational environment, where the students get general education defined by the State. The pupils are in the adolescence period, which requires a different teacher approach to them. With regard to these circumstances, this study shall examine the following research question: What kind of teacher behaviour acts on the perceived closeness of the pupils? The research is not focused directly teacher misbehaviour but is interested in the teacher's behaviour that influences the relationship framework.

## **2. Methods**

The advantages of qualitative research were applied within the framework of this research. Because of interest in following the behaviour that acted on the perceived closeness and brought changes in the perception of the relationship of the pupils and their teachers, a narrative-oriented research was chosen. We can also look at it as a data collection and analysis method whose subject of interest is narration (Golsteijn & Wright, 2013). Although this type of research was in the past rather perceived in terms of sociological and psychological sciences, it is currently appearing more frequently in educational practice where the narrative is the carrier of the socio-cultural context, which links a

person with people (Moen, 2006). The substantial part is that understanding of human experience occurs through narration, a life story, in which loosely laid significance appears (Hendl, 2008). The narrator selects, construes and states them in context (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013).

Data were collected by narrative interviews with former pupils of various primary schools. The research involved six girls and two boys. The participants were requested to share their school story and their teacher–pupil experiences with us. Thanks to these interviews, we acquired rich data that we subjected to thematic analysis with a focus on the content. The orientation on content was followed by the procedure of Earchy and Cronin (2008) recommending that the analysis should include the elements concerning these issues: ‘What happened?’, ‘Who was present?’, ‘How did the actors in the plot respond?’, ‘What is the significance of the narrated situation?’. The topics also appeared in ‘micro-stories’, but in spite of this, the context of the whole narrative was not overlooked. First, the plots of the teachers and narrators were sought. And since the interaction of these two subjects does not occur all by themselves, the situational background was considered from the initial point to the final message.

### 3. Results

The behaviour of teachers acting within the distance perceived by the pupils was reflected in six topics. The major guideline for identification of different topics was the real behaviour of the teacher – for example, what he or she did, in what context and with what effect on the pupil. The first reflected the teacher’s handling of trust, which is the topic with the highest strength of evidence contained in all narratives. The situation was similar in the case of all the other topics. The second topic covers all behaviour in which emotions played a significant role. No less important were the chances and opportunities offered by the teacher or his evaluation of the pupil. The last two topics were related to the leadership, expression of interest and performance of care for the pupils. We shall describe all the topics in greater detail in this study. For credibility and transparency of the data, the topics shall be accompanied by examples from the narratives.

#### 3.1. Handling of trust

The handling of trust topic appeared several times in all narratives. The primary aspect is expression of trust or distrust in the pupil. Here, we typically find narrations of false accusations or accusations, or expression of trust on the part of the teacher. Both teacher actions have a strong effect on the pupil.

##### *Example 1 (Narrative 3)*

My relationship to my Maths teacher (mistress) changed quite a lot. I was never good at Mathematics, the fact is I could never get to learn it. But I once outdid myself and learned for the written test. At the time, I got a straight A and I was very happy. In the end, this was bad because the teacher suspected that I copied from someone else. She simply did not believe me, and she disappointed me quite a lot. After this, I never bothered to learn Mathematics, and when I met her in the corridor, I pretended that I did not see her.

In this micro-narration, we can see the act of the teacher on one hand and the response of the pupil on the other. It seems that the unexpected good result raised the teacher’s doubts and the core of the whole situation was that the pupil was suspected of cheating. The labelling of the pupil who was permanently not good at Mathematics could have played a role in this and the pupil was trapped in the stereotype idea of the teacher. The priority is the way in which the teacher verifies the correctness and removes the doubt. The teacher confronts the pupil and asks the pupil to tell the truth. At the opposite end, the pupil ends up in the position of the suspect. This evokes the negative response of the pupil both in the affective and motivation planes. The expression of the teacher’s distrust resulted in the pupil’s demotivation, resignation on learning and ignoring the teacher. In the story, we see that the expression of distrust is a sensitive issue for the pupil and in principle does not only concern

betrayal of trust but may also affect the relationship to the teacher, its subject and to learning in its full scope.

Table 1 shows the specific behaviour of the teacher, which either reduces the perceived closeness and leads to an increase of the distance between the pupil and the teacher or increases it and subsequently results in friendly and approachable behaviour. As we can see, the topics did not only contain negative behaviour but significantly often also the intimate expressions of the teacher, which motivated the pupils to learn and were reflected in their attitude to the subject, curriculum and the teacher.

**Table 1. Handling of trust in two opposite poles**

| Negative connotations of the handling of trust  | Positive connotations of the handling of trust  |
|---|---|
| The teacher suspects the pupil or accuses him of violating the school rules, of lying, of cheating by verbal or non-verbal expressions. | The teacher expressed trust, supports the pupil or class or moderates accusations from a third party.   |
| The teacher does not believe in the teacher’s abilities, underrates the pupil.  | He/She solves the doubts in a sensitive manner.<br><br>The teacher expressed trust in the pupil in spite of negative experience in relation to his/her conduct, personal nature and performances. |

### 3.2. Expression of emotions

Education, as we know, is associated with many different aspects and factors. One of them is the personality of the pedagogue, his pedagogic abilities and skills, but also his affective motivation attitude or social intelligence. It is possible in each narrative to find a plot in which the trigger of the pupil’s growing closer or becoming more distant to/from the pedagogue is emotions or their absence. The emotions of the teacher are often not the subject of researches so we do not know about them, perhaps it is only possible to enunciate that the pedagogue as the role model should express emotions appropriately and adequately to the given situation. The narratives showed that if the circumstances require the pedagogue’s emotions, then they should be expressed. If they are not, the pedagogue may be perceived as hard-hearted. In the opposite case where the pedagogue expresses positive and negative emotions adequately according to the situation, the teacher is usually perceived positively. His empathy and human approach are appreciated. Nevertheless, the excerpt below shows a slightly different situation.

#### *Example 2 (Narrative 6)*

Our class mistress was the classic mistress type, but I did not like talking to or solving anything with her. I avoided her, but I was not always successful. She was quite mentally unstable and was angry most of the time. When I did something wrong, she got annoyed and screamed. In spite of the fact that I already realised the mistake, she even became angrier and made everything sultry.

As theory has already suggested, the work of the teacher, particularly on the interpersonal level is not easy at all as far as its handling is concerned. The teachers do not have satisfactory financial reward although the demands on their work are increasing. Moreover, this helping pedagogical profession lacks permanent supervision. In the end, teachers may show the first signs of burnout, nervousness and disquiet. Regardless of whether this is in the context related to the burnout syndrome, or in connection with higher irritation and inadequate work with own emotions, the excess anger, disquiet, melancholic emotions become a source of the principle of becoming more distant. This behaviour may be regular, but also sudden, unexpected. In all cases, the pupils turn away from the teacher.

Table 2 offers a view of the bipolarity of emotional expression. A special case is the venting of the teacher’s accumulated emotions. From the beginning of the school year, the teacher can get into a

situation that triggers his emotional response. In a case where the teacher makes an effort at hiding such responses because he is after all a professional, the emotions begin to build-up. If he has inadequate experience with working with emotions and space for their discharge, only a little suffices and the emotions inconspicuously take over control of his behaviour, which is quite a natural process in these conditions that affect every individual. The solution is certainly not to suppress the emotions, not express them, but learn to work with them. Unfortunately, only a few these exist at present that would emphasise the supervision of teachers and their personal self-development.

**Table 2. Expression of emotions in two opposite poles**

| <b>Negative connotations of the expression of emotions</b>   | <b>Positive connotations of the expression of emotions</b>   |
|--|--|
| The teacher emits verbal and non-verbal signals of nervousness, he/she is irritated, under stress.                       | The teacher mostly has a positively affectionate mood. He/She emits peace of mind and emotional balance. |
| He/She erratically expresses the emotions.   | He/She expresses positive and negative emotions adequate to the given situation. They can be assumed.    |
| The teacher excessively expresses negative emotions such as sadness or anger. He/She often ‘vents’ accumulated emotions. | The teacher is sensitive to the pupils and expresses adequate empathy.                                   |
| The teacher does not show any emotions, he/she makes an impression that is cold to cynical or even robotic.              |  |

### **3.3. Chances and opportunities**

This topic is based on the fact that the teacher expresses an accommodating attitude and is willing to give chances and opportunities in many areas. It could be said that in a case where the teacher gives chances and opportunities, he himself is expressing friendly and approachable behaviour, which leads to the accessible behaviour of the pupil. In the interaction, the teacher is the mirror and the pupil copies his behaviour on the principle of ‘birds of the same feather fly together’. If the pupil is not given an opportunity, a negative response occurs. The non-accommodating attitude of the teacher leads to the pupil’s retreat into the background regardless of whether this is accompanied by a feeling of injustice, anger or anxiety. The narratives also showed that alternatives in education are welcome and appreciated. This wins the favour of the pupil but in the case of such teachers, this is also characterised by a higher perceived degree of closeness. This is particularly intensive in cases where it concerns subjectively more personal level of the pupil. If the pupil gets the feeling that the teacher has precisely accommodated him and it is necessary to emphasise ‘precisely’, the doors to the interpersonal teacher–pupil relationship open.

#### *Example 3 (Narrative 1)*

He (the teacher) was wonderful in that when I, for instance, did the written test badly, he did not label me, but gave me an opportunity to redo the written test. At all times, we as a class really respected him for this because he gave us the opportunity, chance to be better and overcome the failure. In once really had a big problem, the year was bad for me and I needed to get good mid-year marks to qualify to secondary school. And he simply said, well but you must convince me that you really deserve the best mark. And I learned like mad.

Example 3 describes a pupil who finds himself/herself in an unpleasant situation. The pupil needs better marks to improve the overall average so that the doors to secondary school education remain open to him or her. This problem directly links the pupil with the teacher who helped him/her in such a manner that he or she allowed him/her to better marks and get a better overall assessment. Table 3 shows the bipolarity of this behaviour.

**Table 3. Chances and opportunities in two opposite poles**

| <b>Negative connotations of the theme of chance and opportunity</b>  | <b>Positive connotations of the theme of chance and opportunity</b>                                |
|--|--|
| The teacher has a negative attitude to any alternatives, which concern the formal and informal school level. | The teacher gives the pupils a chance to better their marks, to overcome the obstacles or failure. |
|  | He/She often offers opportunities and leaves the choice to the pupils.                             |

### **3.4. Assessment**

The assessment of the pupil is a major topic for teachers and experts. Issues concerning the suitability of the assessment method and modern trends that make an effort to respond to the changes in the approach to the educational process are coming into the forefront. It seems at first sight that it is a matter of formal character. From another perspective, it is an important pillar that shapes the teacher–pupil relationship. It is known from practice that the pupil either agrees with the assessment, he accepts or does not accept it, and does so actively or otherwise. A crisis moment occurs in the case of the pupil’s disagreement where the pupil assumes a better mark than given by the teacher. The responses of the pupils are variegated, but according to the analysis of the narrations, there is a rapid decline in the perceived closeness and the increase of the pupil’s distance from the teacher. In example 4, the narrator (female pupil) in the end stated that: ‘To date, I cannot forget what she did to me.’ by which she expresses the fact that the behaviour of the teacher deeply hurt her and the unsolved situation concerning her assessment has never been resolved even after such a long time.

#### *Example 4 (Narrative 5)*

I have a live memory concerning my teacher from Grade Six. Transfer to the upper level was quite difficult, but even in this case, I was sure that I would defend my initial marks. I had problems mainly with Mathematics, but I had excellent written tests except for one where I got a fail. At the end of the year, I expected that I would get a distinction, but this was not the case. My Maths teacher gave me a Pass. But that was the end for me. I went to see her and we discussed the issue and she gave me the mark just because of than single Fail, only because of that. I liked her before that but I developed a complete distaste for her from that moment. To date, I cannot forget what she did to me.

The example also illustrates that the problem is hidden in the assessment method and inadequate communication between the pupil and the teacher. It is clear from the narration that the assessment remained in the teacher’s head and the pupil did not become part of that assessment. She did not get feedback but a resolution in the form of a mark, a Pass. The pupil did not expect such a mark at all because the pupil assumes that she had fulfilled the criterion for positive marks in spite of one trip. The subsequent debate with the teacher concerning the reason for the assessment had the chance to remedy the situation. But this was unsuccessful and the pupil is carrying the feeling of betrayal with her into further life. The entire assessment act subsequently reflects in the pupil’s affective mood to the teacher and in the final consequence impacts their interpersonal zone. Table 4 subsequently shows two types of teacher behaviour in connection with the assessments, which appeared in the narration of the participants in connection with perception of nearness.

**Table 4. Assessment in two opposite poles**

| Negative connotations of assessment  | Positive connotations of assessment   |
|--|---|
| The teacher does not acquaint the pupil with the assessment.                                     | The teacher comprehends the pupil as an integral component of the assessment. He/She involves the pupil in the assessment. The teacher chooses various methods of assessment with regard to the needs of the pupil. |
| The teacher only gives a mark and does not provide real feedback.                                |   |
| Clear assessment criteria do not exist.  |   |
| The teacher negatively evaluates the pupil’s personality, judges and compares her/his to others. | The teacher appreciates the pupil’s virtues. He or she does not assess the pupil’s deficiencies – he/she accepts them.  |
| The teacher reproves the teacher’s performance.  |   |

### 3.5. Leadership

In the school environment, we most often encounter the terms authority – natural authority. The seeking, dynamics and expressions of authority in the school classroom are to a greater extent related to the management of education and school life. However, in this study, we have encountered the fact that the narrators talked about the phenomenon of leadership rather than management and authority. We explain leadership here in a similar manner as applies to the area of HR management, as a mode of behaviour by which the teacher compels the other pupils to follow him. In order for them to voluntarily share the pursuit of a common goal and perform tasks targeted at it.

#### *Example 5 (Narrative 2)*

We had a teacher who was totally gorgeous. As a class, we did everything that he wanted from us, even extra things. I do not know if it was because of what he was like. He was so focused on the ladies, not the female pupils, but the mistresses, he always flirted with them. He sometimes even broke the school rules, but this never bothered us at all in his case – perhaps we liked him even more for this. It was not as if he were like bread and butter. He was also strict when it was necessary, but he was not the directive, categorical type. His lessons were interesting and he kept us active. Moreover, when we needed help, he never said no. He was, in fact, our leader in everything and he was not even our class teacher. We called him the captain. We once attended a competition with him. He disappeared with a mistress he met there and he left us there without supervision. We messed up the competition and did not win anything. He then talked our ears off and told us how we had disappointed him. We could simply have said that he had betrayed us, but nobody took the liberty even to think of such a thing, we rather felt guilty.

The example of the leadership topic captures the popular teacher as described by the narrator. The typical characteristic of his behaviour is leadership. It is possible to judge from the narration that he was not a perfect person who did not err. The female participant stated in the negative connotation that he had an excessive liking for women. By this, she casts a doubt on the potential interpretation that he was a flawless person. An interesting thing is also violation of rules by the teacher. In professional literature, we rather encounter the thesis that it concerns the unsuitable behaviour of the teacher. However, in this narration, we see that the pupils liked him more than the others. Nevertheless, it is emphasised here that this behaviour was respected only in his case. That this concerns leadership can clearly be confirmed from the contention that the pupils perceived him as a leader and designated him as the captain. The pupils were interested in accommodating the teacher’s interest and felt guilty when the teacher expressed disappointment in spite of the fact that the teacher left them without support. This can be designated as friendly and approachable behaviour. The behaviour of the leader in this case is also related to the management of the lessons, which was interesting and compelled the pupils to get involved actively.

Table 5 contains additional modes of teacher behaviour, which were identified within the framework of thematic analysis. A big difference can be perceived particularly in the expression of



power where the teacher on the negative connotation side uses own authority as a weapon against the pupils. In the opposite case, the power, position of the leader is used for the good of the class or individual pupils. This already concerns very complex expressions of behaviour in which the pupils judge that their teacher in consequence only means well.

**Table 5. Leadership in two opposite poles**

| <b>Negative connotations of the expression of leadership</b>   | <b>Positive connotations of leadership</b>  |
|--|---|
| The teacher directly manages the class.  | The teacher expresses respect to the pupils.  |
| He/She intensively uses coercive measures to uphold discipline – threats, shouts, punishment, commands and prohibitions. | He/She is capable of creating a boundary and rules for the functioning of the class. He or she is an organisationally active and flexible type of person. |
| The teacher’s own needs are the focus of his/her interest. He/She uses his powers against the pupils.                    | He/She uses his power and authority for the good of the class and the pupil.  |
| He/She creates differences between the pupils divides the team.  | According to requirements, he does not only focus on the pupil individual but on the whole class.   |

### **3.6. Interest and care**

The last analysis topic of this research concerns two related components of education, particularly the relationship. It concerns the expression of interest and provision of care. The situation from the school environment is depicted by the narration under example 6. The female participant here describes a mistress, as she puts it, of motherly type. Similar comparisons have appeared more frequently in the narrations. ‘She was such a pleasant grandmother’ or ‘She was maternally focused.’ This comparison was generally associated with the care activities of their teachers.

#### *Example 6 (Narrative 5)*

Our class teacher was so maternal and at the same time short, she measured only about 150 cm. But this was not so important as compared with the fact that she was interested and took care of us. She did not solve only what was happening in school but also helped us with what was happening outside school. She was always willing to talk to us. I highly appreciated her for the fact that she asked me to tell her what was going on. She noticed that something was wrong with me and feared for me. At the time, I did not want to talk about it, so I said that nothing was happening and everything was okay. And she started talking about life and thus indirectly actually calmed me. The fact that she came to me meant a lot to me. I and the girls sometimes visit her to take a cup of tea and we always chat.

As we can see, the main source of the pupil’s friendly and approachable behaviour was the teacher’s expressed concern. It is possible to follow several substantial points in the story. In first place, it concerns the fact that the mistress noticed that something was not okay with the pupil. It is thus clear that she likes the pupil and cares about her. This is proven by the second point in which the mistress approaches the pupil and asks a question giving the pupil space to confide in her. In spite of the fact she rhetorically says that everything is okay, the mistress makes an effort to intervene in the situation with words about life. The participant further states that ‘just the fact’ that the mistress came to her was valuable to her. The relationship between the mistress and pupil continues with visits outside school and compulsory schooling. This reveals that it is possible by the mentioned interactions between the major actors in education to deepen the relationship and also transform it to the friendly level.

Table 5 shows interest and care in their connotation opposition. Negative connotation indicates a lack of interest and a deficiency in the teacher’s care or his interest with intent to harm the pupil. This is not an entirely eradicated phenomenon in the schools. On the part of the teacher, this may, however, be innocent teasing of the pupil. But it may be an unpleasant situation in the pupil’s perspective. In the end, the narrations exclusively stated the process of becoming more distant. That

is not how the example described the situation in which the teacher takes care of the pupil and if it is necessary to offer a helping hand to the pupil. In this case, the perceived closeness is highly intensified.

**Table 6. Interest and care in a bipolar image**

| <b>Negative connotations of interest and care</b>   | <b>Positive connotations of interest and care</b>                                    |
|---|--|
| Higher interest in the pupil or class accompanied by the teacher’s aggressive behaviour. (for instance, sarcastic comments against the pupil) | The teacher talks to the pupils, shows interest in their life in and outside school. |
| Disinterest in the pupils, their personalities, needs, personal issues. Dismissive negatively oriented communication.                         | If necessary, he/she offers help and support to the pupils.                          |

#### **4. Conclusion and discussion**

The study presented the results of the partial research investigation concerning the behaviour of the teachers in the context of the perceived degree of closeness and the principle of growing closer and becoming more distant in the interactions between the participants. Thematic analysis revealed six topics including handling of trust, assessment, leadership, chances and opportunities, expression of emotions and interest as well as the teacher’s care for the pupils. It seems that friendly and approachable behaviour on the part of the teacher leads to friendly and approachable behaviour on the part of the pupil. It is quite a logical sequence. Nevertheless, this study proved that even traditionally negatively assessed teacher behaviour that can be even be designated as inappropriate behaviour can be comprehended differently in certain circumstances and results in the friendly and approachable behaviour of the pupil.

It is possible that the particularly sensitive areas of the teacher–pupil relationship are trust, assessment, interest and care. It is possible to make such a judgement according to the more intensive and affective responses of the narrators. Within the framework of research in educational communication, closeness – the teacher immediacy concept – is comprehended as a component of the teacher’s credibility. Nevertheless, the relationship between these two phenomena seems to be more complicated at present. It is not clear whether the perceived closeness and trust in the teacher are not two co-related components, which are mutually conditional in different circumstances. The same care is comprehended as a partial aspect of the teacher’s credibility. It is possible in this context to recommend further verification of relationships between these variables. It is necessary to add that the researches in educational communication are realised in the university environment where trust in the teacher may carry a completely different connotation than applies to a younger pupil of compulsory school age. It is also in place to closely examine immediacy behaviour in the context of the theories stated by Reeves & Le Mare (2017). The first of the concepts is the theory of attachment, which emphasises that the sensitive behaviour of the pedagogue may contribute to the pupil’s feeling of safety and also change the pupil’s social behaviour. The second theory is based on care, which requires the teacher to bridge the attention from himself to the pupils. According to Noddings (2007), care for children is subsequently manifest in social and ethical virtues. Within the framework of the immediacy theory, it is in place to consider what care and trust support the feeling of closeness.

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