

Power and control in the classroom
Understanding students' disruptive behaviours

Preciosa Silva
Isabel P. Neves
Centre for Educational Research
School of Science University of Lisbon

Revised personal version of the article published in:
Pedagogies – An International Journal, 2 (4), pp. 205-231 (2007).
Pedagogies homepage: <https://www.erlbaum.com/shop/tek9.asp?pg=products&specific=1554-480X>

**POWER AND CONTROL IN THE CLASSROOM
UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOURS**

Preciosa Silva
Isabel P. Neves

*Centre for Educational Research
School of Science University of Lisbon*

INTRODUCTION

Students' disruptive behaviours is a frequent theme of teachers' talk. This is a subject of concern to both teachers starting their career and experienced teachers. The former fear that they will be unable to manage possible disruptive incidents that may occur in their classrooms. The latter, having already faced undesirable situations, fear to have to face them again. Although this subject of much concern to teachers has been the object of wide research, they still have great difficulties in coping with this problem.

Disciplinary behaviours in the classroom are complex relational and interactive phenomena that present various degrees of intensity with underlying multiple factors of a social, family, personal and schooling character. It is, therefore, a problem with multiple approaches. The vast bibliography on this subject shows psychopedagogic studies (Romi & Mira, 1999; Munn, Johnstone & Sharp, 1998), sociopedagogic studies (Bastik, 2000; MacFadden, 1995; McNeil, 1986; Woods, 1980) and sociological studies (French & Raven, 1960; Denscombe, 1985; Friedberg, 1993; Marsh *et al*, 1980). Our study uses a sociological approach, where we sought to deepen the analysis of the relations between teachers and students in order to achieve a better understanding of disciplinary behaviours and help teachers to avoid behaviours that put at stake students' learning. This study is part of a broader study (Silva, 2002) where we analysed the relation between students' disciplinary behaviours and teachers' pedagogic practice in the context of the science classroom and where we looked for reasons underlying that relation. The research is particularly based on Bernstein's theory of pedagogic discourse (1990).

That broader study showed that students' disciplinary behaviours seemed to be mostly related to the specific coding orientation (SCO) for the regulative dimension of teachers' pedagogic practice and to the socio-affective dispositions (SAD) for that practice (Silva, 2002). The present study intends at deepening the understanding of these results, by analysing the extent to which: (a) students' disciplinary behaviours reflect the interaction between the SCO to the teacher-student *control relations* that characterize the regulative context of the pedagogic practice, and the SAD to that practice; (b) distinct levels of disruptive behaviours reflect the interaction between students' SCO to the teacher-student *power relations*, that also characterize the regulative context of the pedagogic practice, and the SAD to that practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When we talk about disruptive behaviours we are not always speaking about the same thing. For some teachers, when a student comes into the classroom with the cap on his head or chewing a gum, he is considered as having a disruptive behaviour. Other teachers will dismiss this as an unimportant issue. These distinct understandings may be a reason why a disruptive behaviour is defined in various forms in the literature (Amado, 2001; Denscombe, 1985; Durkheim, 2003; Estrela, 1992; Lawrence *et al*, 1985; Munn, Johnstone & Sharp, 1998; Woods, 1980).

In this study, a disruptive behaviour in the classroom is considered as a *manifestation of acts/conducts, from the part of students, which have underlying them attitudes not legitimised by the teacher in the regulative context of the pedagogic practice, consequently disrupting the normal teaching-learning process*. Thus, students' acts and conducts legitimised by the teacher, in the regulative context of his/her pedagogic practice, are considered *proper* behaviours, whereas acts and conducts not legitimised by the teacher are considered *disruptive* behaviours. According to the theoretical framework of this study, the pedagogic practice represents a given modality of pedagogic code, that is a given form of institutionalising the school's elaborated orientation. Sociologically, the practice can be characterized by power (classification) and control (framing) relations that define the instructional and regulative contexts of the classroom. The instructional context refers to the knowledges and cognitive competences that are part of a given discipline, whereas the regulative context refers to the values, attitudes and norms of social conduct that characterize the processes of social interaction in the classroom. Pedagogic practices globally characterized by strong classifications and framings correspond to didactic practices, centred on the transmitter, whereas pedagogic practices characterized by weak classifications and framings correspond to self regulative practices, centred on the acquirer. Between these two extremes there are mixed modalities of pedagogic practice that are characterized by strong classifications and/or framings in some relations and by weak classifications and/or framings in other relations.

According to Bernstein (1990), an appropriate performance in a specific context (instructional or regulative) of the pedagogic practice, requires the acquisition of recognition and realization rules to that context, that is the acquisition of the specific coding orientation to the context (Figure 1). The possession of recognition rules allows the distinction between contexts through the identification of the specific characteristics of a context, whereas the possession of realization rules creates the means for the selection of meanings appropriate to the context (passive realization) and the production of the legitimate text (active realization).

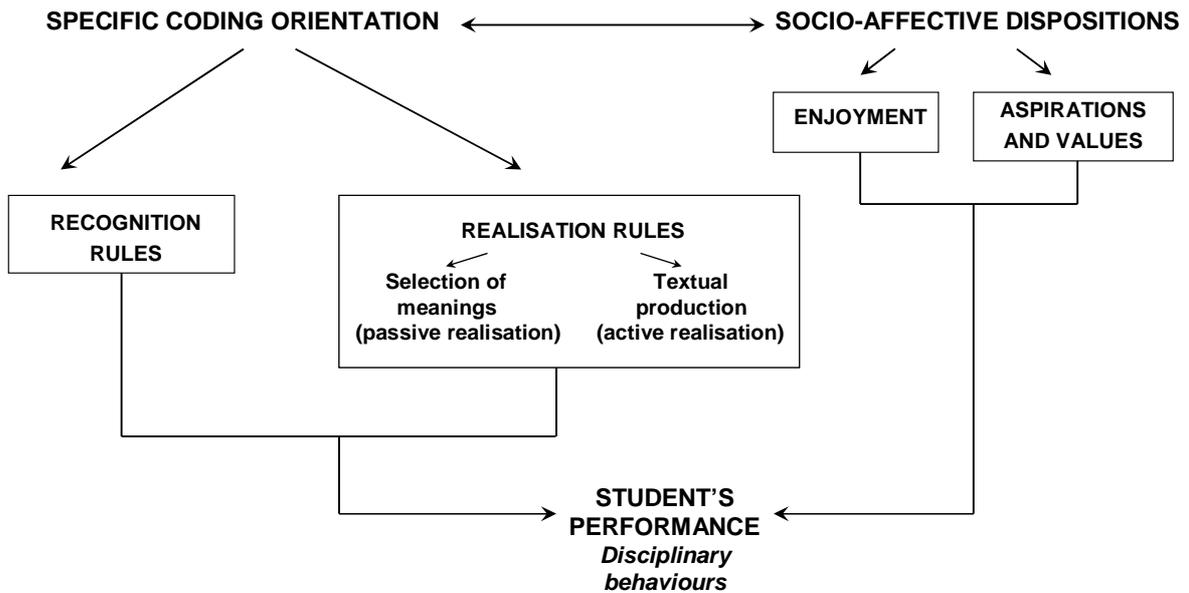


Figure 1 – *Specific coding orientation, socio-affective dispositions and performance in specific classroom contexts (Adapt from Morais & Antunes, 1994).*

According to the diagram, when we consider students' performance in terms of disciplinary behaviours, that performance is analysed in terms of the specific coding orientation to the *regulative context* of the pedagogic practice in the classroom. Considering that the specific regulative contexts of the pedagogic practice may differ in power and control relations that characterize the teacher-student interactions, we can appreciate students' specific coding orientation to the regulative context of the pedagogic practice in terms of each one of the two types of relations (power and control). Within this perspective of analysis, if students are to show a legitimate performance in a given regulative context (i.e. do not have disruptive behaviours) they must possess the specific coding orientation to the control relations that characterize that context. This means that the students should have *recognition rules* that allow them to recognize control relations that are present in the teacher's regulative practice. They should also have *realization rules* that allow them not only to select the meanings adequate to the teacher's specific regulative practice and the attitudes and conducts legitimised in that practice (*passive realization*), but also to act in accordance to those attitudes and conducts (*active realization*). If students do not possess these rules in a minimal degree, this means that they do not have the specific coding orientation to the control relations that characterize the specific regulative context and that that absence may lead them to show disruptive behaviours. However, students may have the specific coding orientation and still show disruptive behaviours because, as evidenced by the model of figure 1, performance in a given context is mediated by socio-affective dispositions. Given the influence that the two main socializing agencies – family and school – may have on the way the student behaves in school contexts, we can say that socio-affective dispositions depend on both the valuing that the family accords to school discourses and the kind of practices that the school uses to legitimize its discourses. Thus, to have socio-affective dispositions favourable to a given school context means to have enjoyment and/or aspirations and values to the social relations legitimised in that context. When we consider the student's performance in terms of socio-affective dispositions, we may say that, even when possessing the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations, if the students dislike the teacher pedagogic

practice (instructional and/or regulative) and do not possess the aspirations and values for the text (instructional and/or regulative) required by the school/teacher, they may still have disruptive behaviours.

Summarizing, students' disruptive behaviours in the classroom, according to our model of analysis (Figure 1), may be a result of the absence of specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations, in the regulative context of the teacher pedagogic practice, and/or of the socio-affective dispositions favourable to that practice. However, as referred by Amado (2001), different levels of disruptive behaviours may exist. According to this author, three levels can be defined. The first, called "deviance from the classroom rules", refers to incidents that lead to 'disruption' of the good functioning of the class. The second level, "the conflict between pairs" includes the incidents that show essentially difficulties in the relation between students, sometimes leading to 'violence' and 'bullying' phenomena. The third level, "conflicts in the teacher-student relation", refer to behaviours that, in varied ways, defy the power and status of the teacher, also including violence and vandalism against the school property.

According to Crozier and Friedberg (1977), the exercise of power is not a solitary exercise, as the relational character of power implies always the possibility of negotiation and adaptation of the actors involved in that relation. In this way, even in a strongly asymmetrical and unequal relation, as is the relation between the teacher and the students, none of the actors is totally deprived of power. This means that the students also have a small part of power, although this is mostly of an informal character, as it is a power that is not legitimised either by the school-institution or by society.

Various studies have focused on the issue of students informal power and the various forms of putting it into practice (Delamont, 1983; Woods, 1987). This informal power is a *group power* which is directly related to the number of students that are mobilised against the teacher. According to Delamont (1983), to have power, students need the help of their friends. In this way, the larger is the number of students involved in a given situation, the more reduced are the asymmetries created by the teacher-student power relations.

According to our model, the different levels of disruptive behaviours, we referred above, may be seen in terms of the interaction between the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student *power relations*, that characterize the regulative context of the pedagogic practice, and the socio-affective dispositions to that practice.¹ A student with disruptive behaviours who does not possess the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student power relations may be only involved in incidents corresponding to the two first levels of disruptive behaviours. The fact that s/he does not recognise that there is a power asymmetry between teacher and students and/or the fact that s/he does not know how to blur that power asymmetry, limits him/her of voluntarily defy the teacher, that is it limits him/her of showing behaviours that, to some extent, can defy the teacher's power and status. His/her disruptive behaviour may simply reflect the absence of the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student *control relations* and/or favourable socio-affective dispositions to the teacher pedagogic practice. However, if a student, with unfavourable socio-affective dispositions to the teacher pedagogic practice, possesses the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student *power relations*, s/he may be involved in incidents that defy the teacher's power and status (third level of disruptive behaviours).

METHODOLOGY

The study followed a comprehensive-interpretative methodological approach. We used an external language of description derived from Bernstein's internal language of description (2000), that is we used a methodology based on the dialectical relation between the theoretical and the empirical so that the theoretical propositions, the external language of description and the empirical analysis interact with each other.

Subjects of the study

We selected four students of two science classes of the 6th year of schooling (ages 11⁻ – 12⁺) and respective teachers (both females). These school classes were the object of the broader study of which this study is part (Silva, 2002). Three students were part of school class X and one student of school class Y. The pedagogic practices of the two teachers differed dramatically. Teacher X (Sara) used a practice that approximated to a didactic model, that is a practice centred on the teacher, whereas teacher Y (Ana) used a mixed modality of pedagogic practice, more students' centred.² The two school classes differed in their students' behaviour. Students of class X showed in general disruptive behaviours whereas students of class Y behaved in general well. Both school classes were taught by teacher X in their 5th year of schooling and both were considered by this teacher as behaving badly.

The selection of these four students was made to illustrate representative cases of well behaved students of both school classes and representative cases of badly behaved students who were involved in incidents corresponding to different levels of disruptive behaviours. From the three students of school class X, two were considered by the teacher as very disruptive and the third was considered as behaving well. Student of school class Y behaved well, although he had been involved in many disruptive incidents during his previous year.

General methodological aspects

To meet the objectives of the study we wanted to know if the students recognised the control relations between teacher and students and if they possessed the realization rules to those relations in the regulative context of the classroom, and also to know if they had favourable socio-affective dispositions to their teachers' regulative and instructional practices. We had to define the sociological characteristics of the instructional and regulative contexts of the teachers' practices. Also we had to define if students were able to recognise the teacher-student power relations, that characterize the regulative context of the classroom, and if they know how to act to weaken those relations.

The observation of the science lessons gave us data to both characterize the teachers' pedagogic practices and students' behaviours in terms of active realization. The characterization of the pedagogic practice was made by using instruments that referred to both the regulative and the instructional contexts.³ To obtain information about recognition and passive realization rules, when the teacher-student control relations in the regulative context were considered, and also about students socio-affective dispositions to the teacher's pedagogic practice, all students answered a questionnaire.

In a second stage, a semi-structured interview was made to the four students of this specific study.⁴ Regarding the questionnaire, some questions were directed to the recognition rules. Students were faced with critical disciplinary incidents and with diverse modalities of pedagogic practice, represented in comics,⁵ and were asked to identify the kind of control mostly used by their teacher and the modality of regulative practice closer to that of their teacher. Other questions were intended to obtain data about the passive realization rules. Before disruptive incidents observed in the classroom, and represented in comics, the students were asked to identify the attitudes legitimised by the teacher in the regulative context of her pedagogic practice. Finally, as a form of getting information about students' socio-affective dispositions, we asked them to indicate, justifying, among several modalities of both instructional and regulative pedagogic practices, also represented in comics, those they preferred most. This was followed by a comparison with the type of the teacher's practice we had previously observed and characterized.

The data of the interview, allowed to consolidate the data referred above and also provided data about the students' specific coding orientation to the teacher-student *power relations*.

THE CASE OF FOUR STUDENTS

The four students showed a very distinct way of behaving in the classroom. Two of them showed frequently disruptive behaviours whereas the other two showed to have a proper behaviour. Among those who disrupted the class, the behaviours were substantially distinct. One of them was only involved in anecdotal incidents related to the disrespect of the functioning rules of the classroom, whereas the other not only was involved in these incidents but above all showed behaviours that purposely intended to defy the teacher's power and status.

The main objective of the analysis of the four cases was to suggest explanatory hypotheses for the occurrence of proper and disruptive behaviours and for different degrees of disruptive behaviours.

The case of Marco

Marco was a student of class X and was 14 years old. His performance in the regulative context, was frequently illegitimate, that is he showed a frequent disruptive behaviour. He was the leader of the class, having a notorious influence over other students. He would not follow teacher's directions as, for example, to do the tasks required and even coming to the point of insulting and menacing the teacher. He would constantly stand up to talk to other students in order they would act according to what he had planned. However, he sometimes assumed the role of a "well behaved student", showing interest and listening. Every time this happened, he immediately would start denouncing other students by saying that they were doing 'this' or 'that' and that for that reason he was unable to listen. All this scenario was part of a strategy that he had agreed upon with other students. Let us see the following situation that took place in one of the lessons we observed:

The teacher was questioning the students about the blood circulation and, within this subject, he asks Marco, who seemed to be paying attention, a question. He starts to answer but, immediately after, he says "I cannot think! Look at the pornographic magazine over there! Can't you see the magazines they have over there?" In face of the student's denouncing, the teacher told one of the students who she suspected was having the magazine "I'm going to call the clerk."⁶ You have no respect, I must send you [...]." The chaos was established. Nobody assumed to be the owner of the magazine, which was passing from student to student, without the teacher being able to get it, ending up thrown out of the window by one of the students.

According to our observation, this incident did not occur unintentionally, Marco acted deliberately, predicting what was going to happen.

According to Amado's classification (2001) of disruptive behaviours, we think that Marco's behaviour during the classes we observed covered the three levels he proposes, with a predominance of behaviours which correspond to the highest level, as he behaved to directly defying the teacher.

The analysis of the questionnaire showed that this student identified clearly the type of control more frequently used by the teacher and selected, from the various modalities of regulative practice, represented in the comics, the practice more similar to that of his teacher. Thus, we considered that the student recognised, for the regulative context of his teacher's pedagogic practice, the teacher-student control relations (he possessed the recognition rules). Through the interview, we could see that Marco was able to clearly identify the attitudes and conducts which were legitimised by the teacher in the regulative context of her practice. For example, to the question "*How should you behave in the classroom so that your science teacher consider her students well behaved?*", the student answered "[...] *to be quiet, speak in our turn, only leave our seat when Miss Sara gives permission, do not interrupt the class, do not disturb the class... do not talk to others about things not related to the lesson.*" Considering that the teacher used only an expositive method, where the student had a passive role and where obedience to teacher and to rules were the attitudes most valued, we think that the student possessed, for the regulative context of the pedagogic practice, the passive realization rules to the teacher-student control relations. However, his behaviour in the classroom was quite distinct from the one he referred, leading us to assume that that behaviour was the consequence of an absence of active realization rules to the teacher-student control relations and/or the absence of socio-affective dispositions favourable to the teacher's pedagogic practice.

If we now consider that, in the first lesson we observed, Marco showed a performance that corresponded to the behaviour he told us should be appropriate in that classroom and considering also that in further lessons he sometimes had that behaviour, we believe that this student possessed active realization to the teacher-student control relations. Thus, if the student possessed the recognition and realization rules to the control relations that characterized the regulative context of his teacher's pedagogic practice, this means that he possessed the specific coding orientation to those relations. With regard to the socio-affective dispositions, the data from the questionnaire indicate that the student did not like his teacher's practice (regulative and instructional), when he answered that he would prefer a practice with characteristics opposite to those observed in his teacher's pedagogic practice (globally characterized by strong framings). These data are confirmed, in the interview, by his answer to the question "*Do you like the way the teacher deals with you all?*":

“I don’t like. Whatever I do she immediately shouts at me, menacing that she will send me out of the classroom, that she will send me to the disciplinary council, that she is going to make a participation of me [...] The discipline I prefer is science. What spoils everything is Miss Sara. I had this teacher twice but before that I had very good teachers [...]”

Through our talk with Marco and with the director of his school class, we learned that his family did not value the school discourse. For example, the fact that Marco did not behave well in some disciplines did not constitute a problem to his stepfather. According to Neves and Morais (2005), the social relations inside the family, particularly between father and mother and also between parents and children, represent an implicit and tacit regulative practice, through which the children perceive the multiple social relations that are valued in the family/community. The family’s devaluation of the school must be perceived by Marco and this might have led to his absence of aspirations/values to the text required by the teacher-school. This would influence his socio-affective dispositions. In fact, if the student did not like his teacher’s pedagogic practice (regulative and instructional) and, simultaneously, did not have aspirations and values related to the text legitimised by the teacher-school, his socio-affective dispositions to the teacher’s pedagogic practice would be strongly unfavourable.

Given the fact that Marco possessed the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations in the regulative dimension of the practice, Marco’s illegitimate performance seems clearly to be a result of the unfavourable socio-affective dispositions to that practice.

This might justify Marco’s disruptive behaviour. However, why was it that his behaviour reflected a higher level of disruptive behaviour when compared to his classmates? Although Marco recognised the teacher’s legitimate power, he always tried to subvert it, as illustrated by the following answer he gave in the interview to the question “*Why do you think students behaved badly in the science classroom?*”:

“They enjoy to see Miss Sara crossed with them. We do not like most of her [the teacher] attitudes and we can’t do anything, Miss Sara is always right, so we act this way. It is Miss Sara who orders [...] as we can’t do anything else, we do this [...] we behave properly in some other classrooms, we have no respect for that teacher. [...]”

Marco clearly recognised the teacher-student power relations in the regulative context of the pedagogic practice. In fact only the possession of that recognition made possible his assertion that “*it is Miss Sara who orders [...] as we can’t do anything else, we do this*”. Moreover, to the question “*If you all want, do you think you are able to prevent your science teacher from doing what she had planned to that lesson?*”, he answers:

“Yes, if we agree, it’s enough 4 or 5, that’s it, they can ruin the lesson, or even three only. If it’s only one she’ll do nothing, but if they are three Miss Sara is not sure who s/he is and she can’t send him/her out of the classroom coz she does not know who s/he is [preventing the teacher from doing what she had planned], we shout, we send messages to each other, we put small pieces of paper inside the pen and blow them out. We throw our rubbers at the blinds. Ricardo knocks at the door, Miss Sara goes there but sees nobody and comes back [...]. The more we do the better”

This shows that he also knows what to do to weaken the teacher-student power relations. He is aware that, through group acting, he increases his informal power and consequently decreases teacher’s power. This shows that he possesses the realization rules to weaken teacher-student power relations in the regulative context of the

pedagogic practice.

To summarize, given the fact that Marco showed to possess the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations, his illegitimate performance seems to be a result of his absence of favourable socio-affective dispositions. On the other hand, the level (third level) of disruptive behaviour he showed seems to be the result of his recognition of the teacher-student power relations and of being able to weaken those relations, that is it seems to be the result of the interaction between his possession of the specific coding orientation to those relations and his lack of favourable socio-affective dispositions to his teacher's pedagogic practice.

The case of Ricardo

Ricardo was a student of class X and was 14 years old. He was very unstable, showing frequently opposite behaviours. He loved talking and quite often he was not paying attention because he would let himself be involved in the many foolishnesses planned by his classmates. Usually, it was the leader of the class (Marco) who would lead him to participate in the various illegitimate situations they had planned. However, contrary to some other classmates, his conduct was not one of aggressiveness towards the teacher. He often performed the role of a 'clown'. He would stand up without the teacher's permission and he would walk across the classroom to talk to others and make 'clownishness'. When he was sitting, he was always talking to the classmate sitting beside him and whenever this student was not in the classroom he would talk to the classmates sitting in front of him. Usually he was not paying attention to the teacher and usually he would not take notes of what was written on the blackboard or respond to what he was asked for. He would argue with others, this ending up occasionally in verbal and physical aggression. However, in spite of Ricardo's performance being frequently illegitimate, it presented distinct characteristics of that of Marco. Marco's acting was directed to defy the teacher, whereas Ricardo's conduct was associated to behaviours that disrupted the normal functioning of the lesson and the relations among his classmates. According to Amado's classification (2001), we think that Ricardo's behaviour was included in the first and second levels of disruptive behaviours.

The data from the questionnaire, showed that Ricardo could in general identify the characteristics of the regulative context of his teacher's pedagogic practice and also the type of control more frequently used by her, this indicating that he could recognise, to this context, the teacher-student control relations. However, the data showed that Ricardo possessed the passive realization rules to the teacher-student control relations, in a low degree, as he was not able to select all relevant meanings to that context. When, during the interview, we asked him the question "*How should you all behave in the classroom to be considered well behaved by the teacher?*", he answered:

"To be quiet, do whatever Miss Sara orders, not talking all at the same time when she asks a question, put our hands up or ask permission to ask a question, [...] when we wanted to talk to a classmate ask for Miss Sara's permission [...]"

This answer shows that Ricardo selected some of the meanings associated to the regulative context of his teacher's practice. However, when he says "*I seldom play these jokes, what I do is when the science lesson is a bore I make a drawing [...] or I talk to one of the others*", he shows that he was not able to select all the meanings

legitimised by the teacher in the regulative context of her pedagogic practice, as it was quite clear through our observation of the lessons that the talk between students was not allowed. Moreover, Ricardo showed frequently an illegitimate performance, and this, together with his low degree of passive realization, indicates a very low degree of active realization. As a consequence, and although Ricardo possessed the recognition rules, his low levels of realization (passive and active) led to a non-possession of the specific coding orientation to the regulative practice, when we consider the teacher-student control relations.

With regard to the socio-affective dispositions, Ricardo did not like his teacher's pedagogic practice. The questionnaire's data show that he would prefer a practice characterized by weak framings at the level of both the instructional and regulative contexts, therefore the opposite of his teacher's practice (generally characterized by strong framings). Faced with distinct modalities of pedagogic practice represented in comics and asked to indicate which of them he liked most, he answered: "*I would love that she was like André's [regulative practice of weak framing] coz, she won't shout and we won't be excited [...] and I'd love Jacinta's classroom [instructional practice of weak framing] coz I'd learn more and other things [...] and at the same time I'd be relaxed and I'd learn more things of science*". However, he says in the interview "*[...] even if we don't like the teacher, it's what my mother tells me, you don't have to like the teacher, all you have to do is to study to have a good mark and pass the year*". This means that there was a valuing of the school by Ricardo's family (something not surprising given the fact that his brother studied in the university), this leading him to have some aspirations and values in the direction of what is legitimised by the teacher/school. Thus, the fact that Ricardo disliked his teacher's pedagogic practice but might have some aspirations related to the text required by the school/practice, leads us to think that his socio-affective dispositions would be globally favourable.

On the basis of the analyses, we believe that Ricardo's illegitimate performance could be a consequence of, among other reasons, the absence of the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations, in the regulative context of the pedagogic practice.

It should be noted that, although this was a disruptive student, his behaviours, as was pointed out before, corresponded to the first and second levels. A possible explanation to this may be related to the fact that Ricardo did not possess, to the regulative context of the pedagogic practice, the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student power relations. When, in the interview, he says "*Teacher's power is when a teacher is strong and does not fear anything, she has power over the class and the class respects her, I think that Miss Sara has no power at all [...]*", Ricardo shows that he cannot recognise the teacher-student power relations. On the other hand, he shows that he does not possess realization rules to weaken power relations, when he says "*They [the classmates] told me to throw this away, to make noise, to run [...], we play these tricks in group, I don't know..., but sometimes it is because the lesson is really boring, boring, it has no interest at all and it is more fun this way*".

The case of Tiago

Tiago, was a very well behaved student of class X and was 11 years old. Only very seldom had the teacher to call his attention for his behaviour. Even when other classmates tried to involve him in disruptive behaviours, he would stay away, not taking part in the tricks. This fact was also evident in the interview when, for example, he says:

“They [the classmates] are sitting behind me. I know who makes that, they send pieces of paper away and hide things, they throw away pen boxes, they often throw pens across the classroom... I do not pay attention, but, for example, when I look at the lad by my side he is not taking notes and he is there listening to jokes and playing tricks with them”.

The questionnaire and interview’s data showed that Tiago possessed the recognition and the passive realization rules to the regulative context of the teacher’s pedagogic practice, with regard to the teacher-student control relations. When he was asked “*How should they behave in order that the teacher was happy with their behaviour*”, Tiago said:

“Don’t talk during lessons, don’t stand up, be quiet, take notes from what’s written on the blackboard, coz we won’t learn what Miss Sara is teaching otherwise, answer in our turn, that’s also quite important coz if one is answering and other is talking at the same time, Miss Sara doesn’t like it..., do the tasks asked by Miss Sara, obey to Miss Sara.

Given the fact that Tiago showed to possess the recognition and passive realization rules to the teacher-student control relations and also to have a consistent legitimate performance, therefore having active realization, we considered that he possessed the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations. With regard to the socio-affective dispositions, Tiago showed to dislike his teacher’s practice. When answering the question “*Which is the practice [regulative and instructional] from these represented in the comics you like most?*”, Tiago answered “*I’d like that my teacher was like André’s [regulative practice of weak framing] coz I like cool teachers, that talk to us like this teacher does, she explains calmly what’s wrong [...]*” and “*I would like that she was like Jacinta’s [instructional practice of weak framing] coz I’d be relaxed, we could clarify doubts about different things and talk with our classmates about doubts we have, in team work*”. However, Tiago possessed aspirations and values related to the text required by the school, perhaps as a consequence of his primary socialisation. To the question “*Why don’t you do things of the kind [disruptive behaviours] some of your classmates do?*”, he answered:

“Coz I like to get good marks in all disciplines. I don’t live with my father and most of the time I am the one who looks after the home, coz my mummy comes late home after work, therefore I want to be somebody in my life and I want to have good marks so that my mummy is proud of me.”

All his speech shows well how Tiago possessed aspirations and values in the direction of obtaining good marks and, thus, even if he did not like his teacher’s practice, he thought that was worth the effort of behaving well in the classroom context, as this was essential to attain the school results he wanted. Thus, Tiago not only possessed the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations but also possessed globally favourable socio-affective dispositions to his teacher’s practice.

It is also interesting to note that Tiago, much like Marco, recognised the teacher-student power relations to the regulative context of the pedagogic practice, and he also knows

how to weaken those relations, knowing even how to behave to achieve that end. That is, Tiago also possessed, to the context under analysis, the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student power relations, as evidenced by the following excerpts of the transcripts:

“For me, the teacher’s power it’s when she’s able to be in control and make herself be respected, she [Miss Sara] has power... but coz she hasn’t enough strength... as I said, she sends Hugo out of the classroom and then all start protesting and... she end’s up by saying he doesn’t need to go out. They always end up by attaining what they want [...] [the tricks in the classroom] were intended to pull Miss Sara’s leg and avoid that the lesson progresses. They even are already arranging that some of our classmates, they talk to them and I think they’re managing to increase the team. I think they know what they are doing. [...]”

When Tiago says “*The teacher’s power is when she is able to be in control and make herself be respected, she [Miss Sara] has power [...]*”, he indicates that he recognises the teacher-student power relations. Moreover, he shows that he is able to select the meanings necessary to weaken teacher’s power, when he says “*They always end up by attaining what they want [...] [the tricks in the classroom] were intended to pull Miss Sara’s leg and avoid that the lesson progresses, they are even already arranging that some of our classmates, they talk to them and I think they’re managing to increase the team*”. That is, it shows that he has realization rules to weaken the teacher-student power relations. However, although possessing the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student power relations, Tiago was well behaved. He possessed the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations and he also had socio-affective dispositions globally favourable to his teachers’ pedagogic practice. This may explain why it would not make sense to him to behave in order to weaken the teacher-student power relations.

The case of Paulo

Paulo was part of class Y and was 14 years old. According to the number of disciplinary participations to the Directive Council⁷, in the previous year, and according also to information provided by his science teacher in the 5th year and by the present class director⁸, Paulo misbehaved in the science class. He was considered one of the most disruptive students of the class. Frequently his conduct was a conduct not legitimised by the teacher, disturbing the class functioning. The student himself describes his science classes in the 5th year in the following way:

“[...] Miss Sara didn’t have... she would let us talk, she would let us do everything. We would sit down on the floor at the back of the classroom, with our notepad open and Miss Sara would do nothing, that’s why we didn’t learn anything. She wouldn’t virtually teach, because she couldn’t, and she was also quite unable to do that. She couldn’t because we made a lot of noise and now with Miss Ana [the new teacher] this doesn’t happen [...] Miss Sara often insulted us and things like this. She got cross [...] the objective was to annoy her so that the lesson didn’t take place [...]”

Although teachers and students were unanimous about Paulo’s disruptive behaviours in his 5th year, the observation of his 6th year class showed a quite distinct reality. Although, he sometimes showed some resistance in doing given tasks, the teacher always ended up by convincing him to participate. Apart from this type of reaction, Paulo did not show any behaviour that could affect the teacher-student relationship. The

only incidents observed respected to the student-student relationship and occurred only during the first term. Paulo and one of his classmates had not a good relationship and he sometimes would talk to him in an incorrect way. However, according to the teacher, they were good friends by the end of the year.

When, in the interview, Paulo was asked about his change, from the 5th to the 6th year, he pointed out the following reasons:

[...] This year's teacher [Miss Ana] is nice, she brings in videos for us to watch, we go out for field trips, we do team work and we like it and we don't make much noise. This year we are allowed to ask questions. Last year, first we're not allowed to ask questions and anyway there were no questions to be asked because we wouldn't listen to anything the teacher was saying. [...] last year's teacher [Miss Sara] was ill tempered, always shouting at us. This year [...] we like more the way Miss Ana teaches, she doesn't allow us to make noise and teaches better. She stays talking to us after the class ends and before it starts."

The questionnaire's data showed that Paulo possessed, for the regulative context of the pedagogic practice, the recognition of the teacher-student control relations and an average degree of passive realization for those relations. This was confirmed by the interview's data, when he was asked how he should behave so that his science teacher considered him well behaved and he answered: "*We cannot be chewing gum, sitting properly, not making noise, not talking with the classmate by our side and without troubling the teacher, respecting her*". While emphasising the respect for rules and for the teacher, this description shows that Paulo was able to identify some of the meanings inherent to the teacher-student control relations. However, he did not refer to the respect by his classmates, one of the attitudes most valued by his teacher in the regulative context of the pedagogic practice. Although Paulo possessed only an average degree of passive realization to the teacher-student control relations, he showed a conduct in the classroom that was close to the conduct legitimised by his teacher in the regulative context of his practice. This means that he possessed the active realization rules to the teacher-student control relations and for that reason the meanings he was able to identify in that context and the relation he established between them were sufficient to lead him to act according to the attitudes and conducts that were legitimised by the teacher. Thus, we can consider that Paulo possessed, for the regulative context of his teacher's pedagogic practice, the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations.

With regard to the socio-affective dispositions, the questionnaire's data showed that he liked a pedagogic practice of weak framing in both the regulative and instructional dimensions, characteristics that in general were present in his teacher's pedagogic practice. However, aspirations concerning the text legitimised by his teacher's practice, namely the instructional text, were low. According to what we could observe and to what his teacher told us, Paulo did not enjoy working, making his best to work very little. However, through a personal kind of control, the teacher would manage to bring him to do the work. This reinforces the importance of students enjoying teacher's practice for their good performance, in both the regulative and the instructional context. The change in Paulo's behaviour from the 5th to the 6th year of schooling seems, therefore, to be related to the possession of the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations and the socio-affective dispositions globally favourable to the teacher's pedagogic practice.

To get a better understanding of the change in performance of Paulo from the 5th to the 6th year of schooling, we also analysed if Paulo possessed the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student power relations. From the interview's data we could infer that he effectively recognised the teacher-student power relations and that he knew how to weaken that power, that is he possessed realization rules to these relations. This is evident when he tells what happened in the science class in the 5th year:

“[...] we would form a group, because when we're many, in group, she [the teacher] would not send the five out of the classroom or something like that. If it was only one he'd be sent out straight away [...] nobody liked to have classes with Miss Sara. They didn't want to be in her class [...]. We would agree upon we'd make a mess, that we'd throw pieces of paper, in all directions... and that's it. [...]. If we want we'd make the teacher to be unable to teach the class, we're always disruptive and then the teacher is unable to teach the class”.

Although Paulo possessed the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student power relations, his proper behaviour in the 6th year of schooling may be the result of the possession of socio-affective dispositions globally favourable to the teacher's practice (namely enjoying the teacher's practice) and the simultaneous possession of the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations. The following sentence reinforces this interpretation: *“This teacher [Miss Ana], this year, makes herself to be respected, but if we wanted we'd also disrupt the class this year, but we don't feel like that”*.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the analysis of the four cases, summarised in figure 2, it seems clear that the disciplinary behaviours in the classroom may result, among other factors, from the interaction between the specific coding orientation to the regulative context of the pedagogic practice, when this context is considered in terms of the *teacher-student control relations*, and the socio-affective dispositions to the teacher's pedagogic practice.

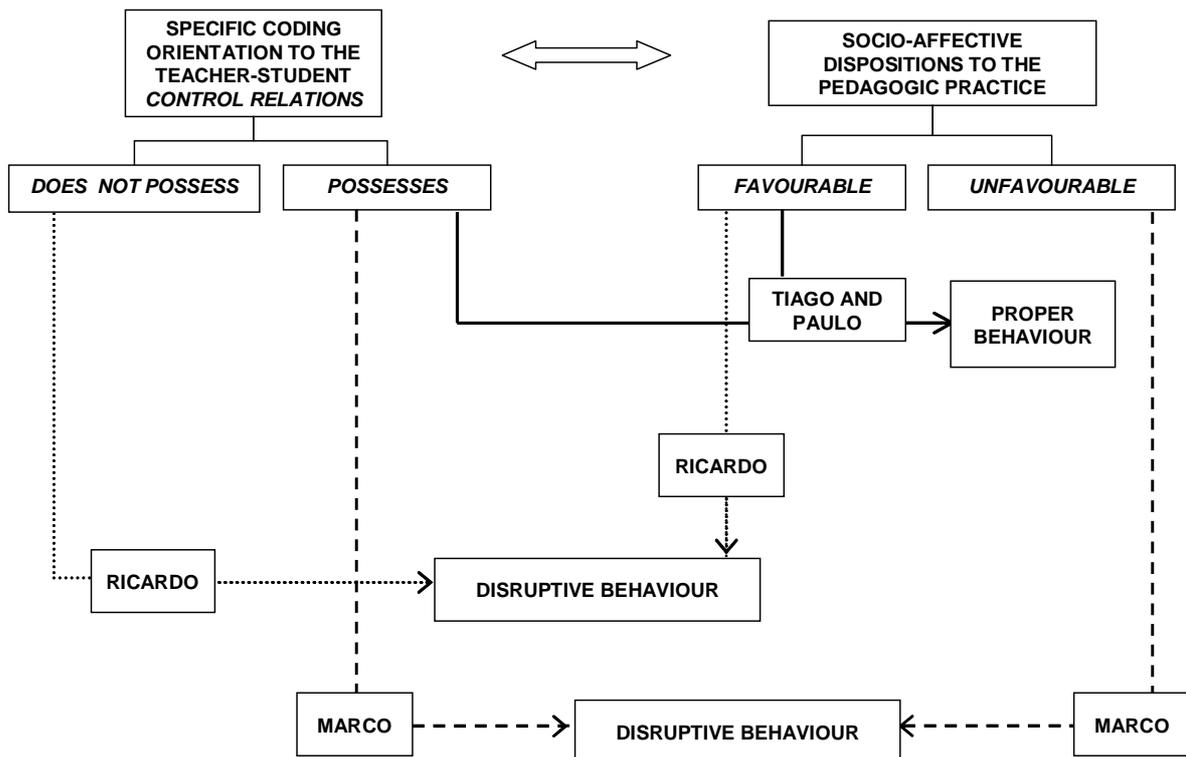


Figure 2 – *Disruptive behaviours and interaction between socio-affective dispositions and specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations.*

If the student does not have the specific coding orientation, because he does not recognise the teacher-student control relations and/or because he does not know how to act in accordance to what is required in that context, his performance tends to be illegitimate, in terms of disciplinary behaviours (the case of Ricardo). However, even when the student possesses this specific coding orientation, if he has unfavourable socio-affective dispositions to the teacher’s pedagogic practice, his performance will also tend to be equally illegitimate (the case of Marco). Thus, the student’s performance will only be legitimate and consistent when the two conditions are simultaneously present, that is if the student has, to the regulative context of his teacher’s pedagogic practice, the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations and favourable socio-affective dispositions to the practice (the cases of Tiago and Paulo).

Although the specific coding orientation is an essential condition to a legitimate performance (according to the four cases presented) it did not show up by itself to be a reason that can strongly justify students’ behaviour. Socio-affective dispositions seem to have had quite an influence on student’s performance. It should be noted that this only became clear when we considered all the indicators that can be associated to the socio-affective dispositions (enjoyment, aspirations and values). In fact, only a more detailed analysis of the socio-affective dispositions allowed us to understand that, if the students have the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student control relations, their performance, in terms of disciplinary behaviours, may be legitimate either when the student likes the teacher’s practice but does not have aspirations and values to the text legitimised by the school (the case of Paulo) or if the inverse situation occurs (the case of Tiago).

When we introduce, in the analysis of the cases of students with disruptive behaviours, the specific coding orientation to the *teacher-student power relations* (see figure 3), the study suggests that if a disruptive student does not possess the specific coding orientation to those relations (the case of Ricardo), his behaviours tend to be of a small scale (1st and 2nd levels). This is the result of the fact that the disruptive behaviour will be the sole result of the student not being able to act according to what is legitimised by the regulative practice, at the level of the teacher-student control relations. Moreover, if the student cannot recognise the teacher-student power relations and/or not even knows how to act to weaken them, he will not seek to defy the teacher, that is s/he will not try to defy his/her power and status. However, if the student possesses the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student power relations and simultaneously has unfavourable socio-affective dispositions to the teacher’s pedagogic practice (the case of Marco), his disruptive behaviours tend to be of the highest level (3rd level). In this situation, the student knows how to act to weaken teacher-student power relations and, because s/he does not like the teacher’s practice, and does not have aspirations and values to the text legitimised by the school/teacher, s/he will tend to act in the direction of weakening these power relations. It should be noted that, in this situation, the socio-affective dispositions seem to be a determinant factor of student’s performance. In fact, even when possessing the specific coding orientation to the teacher-student power relations, the student will not be involved in classroom disruptive incidents if socio-affective dispositions are favourable (the cases of Tiago and Paulo).

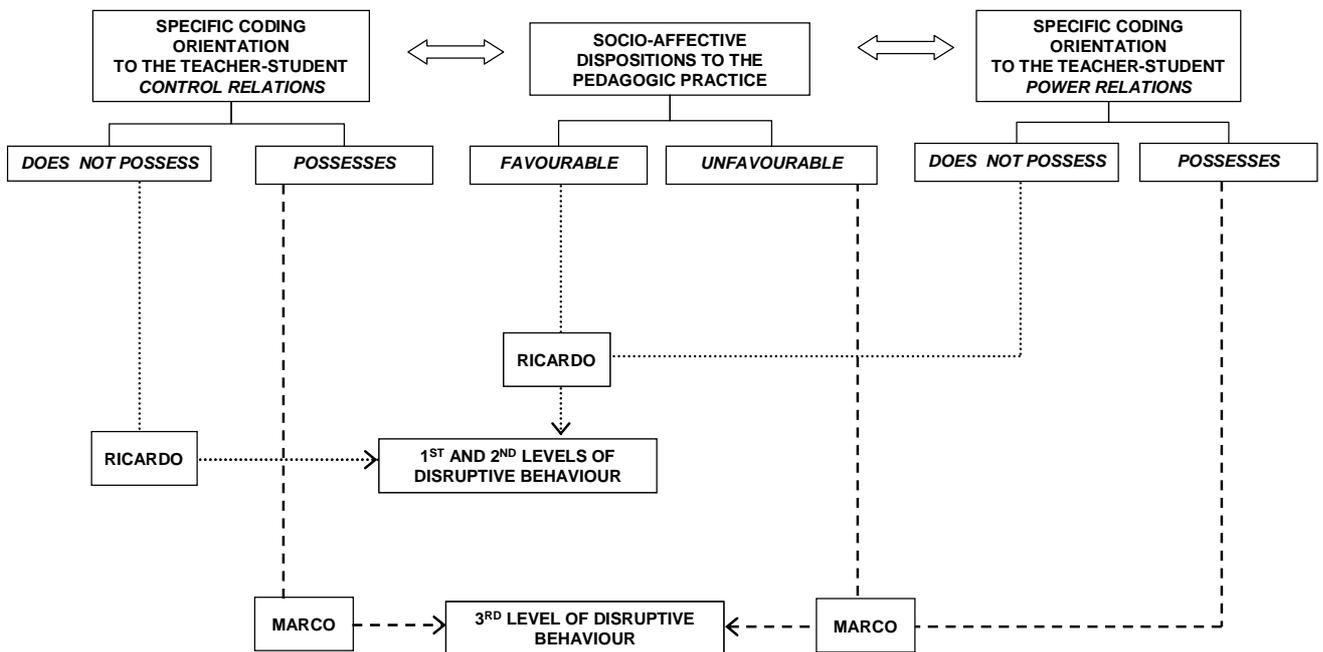


Figure 3 – Distinct levels of disruptive behaviours: Interaction between socio-affective dispositions to the teacher’s pedagogic practice and the specific coding orientation to the control and to the power relations that characterize the regulative context of that practice

To summarize, we can say that, according to our model of analysis, disruptive behaviours in the classroom may be explained by the absence of specific coding orientation to the *teacher-student control relations*, that characterizes the regulative context of the teacher’s pedagogic practice, or by the possession of unfavourable socio-affective dispositions to that practice. According to the same analysis, the distinct

degrees of disruptive behaviours that students may show in the classroom may be interpreted in terms of their specific coding orientation to the *teacher-student power relations* that characterize the regulative context of teacher's pedagogic practice

We would not want to make generalisations on the basis of the analysis of data that refer to four cases only. However, we should note that these cases are illustrative of distinct disciplinary behaviours, frequently occurring in the classroom, and in this way they can provide important information for reflection. Moreover, since the study is based on a model that allows the explanation of various situations of disruptive behaviours, it may give a contribution to point out to new perspectives of analysis that may be important in terms of educational research and pedagogic intervention. If instead of looking for recipes, teachers invest more on a reflection based on analyses of this character they may find more efficient ways of resolving their students' disciplinary problems. Furthermore, since disruptive behaviours are a complex phenomena, the greater the number of interactions analysed, the greater will also be the understanding of the sociological meaning of disruptive behaviours and of the various levels they can reach.

NOTES

1. Although from a different analytical perspective, the study carried out by Morais and Antunes (1994) had already used the concepts of specific coding orientation and socio-affective dispositions to investigate the acquisition of the regulative text in contexts of scientific learning.
2. In general terms, the practice of the teacher of class Y, was a mixed practice, with sociological characteristics that former studies (e.g. Morais & Rocha, 2000; Morais, Neves & Pires, 2004) have showed to be favourable to the cognitive and socio-affective learning of all students.
3. The instruments to characterize the pedagogic practice were adapted from instruments used in previous studies (see, for example, Morais & Neves, 2001) and may be found in Silva (2002).
4. The questionnaire and the interview guide are available in Silva (2002).
5. The annexes 1 and 2 give some examples of parts of the questionnaire.
6. Clerks are school employees who give assistance to classrooms, teachers and students.
7. The Directive Council is constituted by a small team of teachers, one of whom is the president of the Council. They together are responsible for the direction of the school.
8. The class director is the teacher who is responsible for a given school class.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to thank Ana M. Morais for her enlightening comments.

REFERENCES

- Amado, J. (2001). *Interação pedagógica e indisciplina na aula*. Porto: Edições ASA.
- Bastick, T. (2000, February). *Differences between anti-social adolescent behaviour in single sex schools*

and co-educational schools in Jamaica. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research, New Orleans, LA.

- Bernstein, B. (1990). *Class, codes and control: Vol. IV, The structuring of pedagogic discourse.* London: Routledge.
- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research critique.* (Revised edition). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Crozier, M., & Friedberg, E. (1977). *L'acteur et le système.* Paris: Seuil.
- Delamont, S. (1983). *Interaction in the classroom.* London: Methuen.
- Denscombe, M. (1985). *Classroom control. A sociological perspective.* London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Durkheim, E. (2003). *Éducation et sociologie: L'éducation morale* (8th edition). Paris: Puf.
- Estrela, M. T. (1992). *Relação pedagógica, disciplina e indisciplina na aula.* Porto: Porto Editora.
- French, J., & Raven, B. (1960). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright, & A. Zander (Eds.), *Group dynamics* (pp. 607-623). New York: Harper and Row
- Friedberg, E. (1993). *Le pouvoir et la règle. Dynamiques de l'action organisée.* Paris: Seuil.
- Lawrence, J. et al (1985). *Disruptive children, disruptive schools?* London: Croom Helm.
- Marsh, P. et al (1980). *The rules of disorder.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mc Fadden, M. (1995). Resistance to schooling and education outcomes: Questions of structure and agency. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16 (4), 293-309.
- McNeill, L. (1986). *Contradictions of control-schools structure and school knowledge.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Morais, A. M., & Antunes, H. (1994). Students' differential text production in the regulative context of the classroom. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15 (2), 243-263.
- Morais, A. M., & Rocha, C. (2000). Development of social competences in the primary school: Study of specific pedagogic practices. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26 (1), 93-120.
- Morais, A., & Neves, I. (2001). Pedagogic social contexts: Studies for a sociology of learning. In A. Morais, I. Neves, B. Davies & H. Daniels (Eds.), *Towards a sociology of pedagogy: The contribution of Basil Bernstein to research* (Chap. 8). New York: Peter Lang.
- Morais, A. M., Neves, I. P., & Pires, D. (2004). The *what* and the *how* of teaching and learning: Going deeper into sociological analysis and intervention. In J. Muller, B. Davies, & A. Morais (Eds.) *Reading Bernstein, researching Bernstein* (Chap. 6). London: Routledge & Falmer.
- Munn, P., Johnstone, M., & Sharp, S. (1998). Is indiscipline getting worse? Scottish teachers' perceptions of indiscipline in 1990 and 1996. *Scottish Educational Review*, 30 (2), 57-72.
- Neves, I. P., & Morais, A. M. (2005). Pedagogic practices in the family socialising context and children's school achievement. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26 (1), 121-137.
- Romi, S., & Mira, F. (1999). Teachers', students' and parents' attitudes towards disruptive behaviour problems in high school: A case study. *Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology*, 19 (1), 53-70.
- Silva, P. (2002). *(In)disciplina e prática pedagógica. Um estudo sociológico no contexto da aula de*

ciências. Master thesis in education, School of Science University of Lisbon.

Woods, P. (1980). *Pupil strategies: Explorations in the sociology of the school*. London: Croom Helm.

Woods, P. (1987). Social interaction in the classroom: the pupils perspective. In E. Decorte, H. Lodewijks, R. Parmentier & P. Span (Eds.), *Learning and Instruction. European Research in an International Context: Vol. I*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

**POWER AND CONTROL IN THE CLASSROOM
UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOURS**

Preciosa Silva
Isabel P. Neves

*Centre for Educational Research
School of Science University of Lisbon*

Abstract

The study is part of a broader research aimed at understanding the relation between students' disruptive behaviours and teachers' pedagogic practices and finding out reasons underlying that relation. Theoretically it is based on Bernstein's theory of pedagogic discourse.

The study is centred on four students, who were part of two science classes of the 6th year of schooling' (ages 11-12) and who had showed distinct behaviours. It addresses the following objectives: (1) analyse students' behaviours in terms of the interaction between their socio-affective dispositions and their specific coding orientation for power and control relations that characterise the regulative context of teachers' pedagogic practices; (2) analyse the extent to which specificities of the interaction may explain different levels of disruptive behaviours.

The study suggests that disruptive behaviours in the classroom are the result of the interaction between students' socio-affective dispositions to teachers' pedagogic practices and their specific coding orientation to *control relations* that characterise the regulative context of those practices. It also suggests that distinct specific coding orientations to *power relations* between teacher and students may explain distinct levels of disruptive behaviours.

Key-words: Disruptive behaviours; Specific coding orientation; Socio-affective dispositions; Power relations; Control relations; Pedagogic practice.