A Comparative Study of the Seriousness Attributed to Disruptive Classroom Behaviors

Concepción Gotzens, Mar Badia, Cándido Genovard, Teresa Dezcallar

School of Psychology, *Autónoma* University of Barcelona

Spain

Correspondence: Concepción Gotzens Busquets. Dpto. de Psicología Básica, Evolutiva y de la Educación. Facultad de Psicología. Campus de Bellaterra. Edificio B. Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. Bellaterra (Barcelona). Spain. E-mail: concepcio.gotzens@uab.es

Abstract

Introduction. In this paper we present a comparative analysis of three samples of teachers from Coimbra, Barcelona and Murcia that provides insight into the importance teachers attach to disruptive behavior and how different perspectives and values affect their daily work.

Method. This research is framed within a quantitative empirical-analytic design. It is a descriptive study that compares the data obtained from applying a questionnaire to a sample of 146 school teachers from primary and secondary education in three European cities: Barcelona, Murcia and Coimbra. This unobtrusive questionnaire was developed by the authors to minimize language distortions.

Results. Results consistently confirm the trend proposed in the study's hypothesis. In general, inappropriate social behaviors receive stronger ratings than behaviors that hinder instruction, except in the case of disobedience, which receives the highest score. Male teachers tend to assign higher scores to instruction-related behaviors than do their female colleagues, and there is a trend toward stronger ratings for instruction-related behaviors with increasing years of teaching experience.

Discussion and Conclusion. The teachers sampled in this study show greater concern for the general social transgressions that occur in the class group, relegating disruptive behaviors to positions of lesser importance, despite their rigorously-demonstrated implications in teaching-learning processes. Moreover, the variable years of experience appears to exert a moderating effect on the concern for inappropriate social behaviors, nearly equating their seriousness with that of instruction-related behaviors. This leveling effect is observed more strongly with male teachers than with their female colleagues.

Keywords: Classroom discipline, comparative study, teachers' perceptions, teaching experience.

Resumen

Introducción. En este artículo presentamos un análisis comparativo de tres muestras de docentes de Coimbra, Barcelona y Murcia que proporciona una visión sobre la importancia que conceden los docentes a las conductas disruptivas y cómo las diversas perspectivas y valoraciones afectan el quehacer diario del profesorado.

Método. Esta investigación se enmarca en un diseño cuantitativo empírico-analítico. Se trata de un estudio descriptivo que compara los datos obtenidos a partir de la aplicación de un cuestionario a una muestra de 146 docentes de enseñanza infantil, primaria y secundaria, de tres ciudades europeas: Barcelona, Murcia, y Coimbra. El cuestionario, de tipo no obtrusivo, ha sido elaborado por las autoras a fin de minimizar las distorsiones asociadas al lenguaje.

Resultados. Los resultados obtenidos destacan sistemáticamente la tendencia propuesta en las hipótesis del estudio. En general, las conductas sociales tienden a obtener puntuaciones más elevadas que las conductas instruccionales, exceptuando el caso de *desobedecer* que obtiene la máxima puntuación. Los profesores tienden a atribuir mayor puntuación a las conductas instruccionales que sus colegas del sexo femenino y se observa una tendencia a atribuir mayor gravedad a los comportamientos instruccionales a medida que aumenta los años de experiencia docente.

Discusión y Conclusión. El profesorado de este estudio muestra mayor preocupación por las transgresiones de orden social general que se dan en el grupo de clase, relegando a posiciones de menor importancia las conductas disruptivas de tipo instruccionales cuya implicación en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje está rigurosamente comprobada. Por otra parte, los años de experiencia parecen ejercer un efecto moderador en la preocupación por las conductas sociales llegándolas a equiparar en gravedad con las instruccionales, observándose dicha equiparación de forma preferente entre los docentes del sexo masculino que entre sus compañeras del sexo femenino.

Palabras Clave: Disciplina en el aula, estudio comparativo, percepción docentes, experiencia docente.

Introduction

Discipline problems in the educational arena are common to all areas and subjects that make up the educational curriculum (Hardman & Smith, 2003; Ishee, 2004), with serious repercussions in the teaching-learning process, including the reduced time which is actually devoted to the pupil's learning (Fernández-Balboa, 1990). Approximately half of classroom time is *consumed* with activities that have nothing to do with the instructional content, but with discipline problems (Bibou, Kiosseoglou & Stogiannidou, 2000). Likewise, students' undisciplined behaviors often represent a source of professional stress, and the questioning of one's work performance as a teacher, generating anxiety, worry and even giving up the profession (Fernández-Balboa, 1991), especially in new teachers (Borko, Lalik & Tomchin, 1987).

It is not difficult to find information in the press which points to discipline as the most serious problem facing the educational system. Many teachers and students are concerned about disorder and the risk of bad elements in the classrooms and schools. Teachers and other school staff, students, and parents all remark about the high incidence of behavior problems at school—drug use, cheating, insubordination, truancy, bullying, etc.—with serious repercussions in the educational community.

In addition to these characteristically *social* behaviors that disturb classroom dynamics and order (Meunier, 2000; Ramírez & Justicia, 2006), it is important to take note of another type of disruptive behavior that also interrupts the flow of classroom activities, and renders it impossible for students to learn; these are the so-called *instruction-related* disruptive behaviors (Gotzens, 1997; Grebennikov, 2005). Such behaviors disturb order in the classroom as a consequence of infringement or ignorance of the specific rules that regulate how the class group functions, as distinct from rules that govern the functioning of other groups.

This can occur either because the teacher has not properly sorted out how to regulate classroom discipline, because he or she has not transmitted this understanding to the students, or because the students (or some of them) infringe on it (Corrie, 1997). In any case, these are disruptive behaviors that the teacher can manage and redirect; in other words, it is possible to anticipate them or at least to directly intervene in such behaviors (Gotzens, Badia, Castelló & Genovard, 2007).

Disruptive behaviors as understood over the 20th century

The concern with specifying and analyzing the issue of disruptive behaviors is evident in several studies that have examined how the issue is perceived by teachers, pupils and parents (Houhton, Merrett & Whendall, 1988). In a previous paper (Gotzens, 1985), we looked at the principal research that had been carried out until the 1980s, addressing the importance that adults attribute to school discipline problems. It would seem pertinent to review some aspects of the former, in the light of what has taken place in the last 25 years.

For this purpose we look back to a pioneering study performed by Wickman (1928), which consisted of presenting a list of 50 *indiscipline* behaviors to 511 teachers and 30 clinical psychologists, asking them to order the behaviors according to the importance they assigned to each one, from the perspective of school discipline. Results showed that teachers expressed more concern over transgressions against order or morality, and they considered that stealing, masturbation, obscene notes, lying, skipping class and impertinence were the most serious problems. In other words, defying authority, moral norms and classroom control were perceived as highly threatening behaviors.

For their part, the clinical psychologists pointed to suicidal behaviors as the main cause for concern in the school discipline arena. The next highest ratings were given to behaviors associated with *personality disorders.*

Grosso modo, the Wickman study revealed contrasting ideas about the concept of school discipline: while teachers highlighted the greater *disruptive* capacity of behaviors that undermine order in the classroom (stealing, sex, deceit, impertinence, etc.), clinical psychologists considered that students' individual disorders held the greatest potential for harm in terms of upsetting this order.

Despite the fact that—in the period when this study was performed—the topic of *school discipline* did not carry the weight or the connotations which it does today, the difference described in the above paragraph is particularly interesting in that it reveals disagreements and conceptual confusion, some of which still persists today:

First, perspectives from teaching and from psychology differ in their interpretation of the purposes and tasks of school itself: while teachers *appear* to need an orderly situation in which to perform their assigned teaching tasks, and so promote students' learning, the psychologists emphasize the need to achieve and maintain students' personal equilibrium.

Second, problem issues highlighted by teachers refer to individuals or groups of individuals who, for the most part, are disturbing the general classroom order, while the psychologists focus on individual cases within which the problem *begins* and *ends,* without giving much attention to its repercussions for the rest of the student group.

Third, while teachers show more concern for frequently-appearing classroom behaviors, even though the behaviors have moderate importance in themselves, the psychologists take the opposite perspective, focusing on the severity of the behavior as compared to its, fortunately, less frequent appearance.

Not until the second half of the 20th century will some of these differences be further explained, due to the ongoing development of the different disciplines involved. Basically, in the school setting, clinical problems *will be minimized*, giving greater weight to analysis and intervention in matters of educational psychology, rather than clinical psychology (Gotzens, 2006; Watkins and Wagner, 1991; White, Algozzine, Audette, Marr & Ellis, 2001). This does not mean that psychologists *abandon the school,* but that educational psychologists address the study of the teaching-learning processes which are characteristic of this arena, managing to better identify the problems that appear in the classroom and at school, and becoming more in tune with the concerns of the teachers.

Psychology's underlying interest in the individual will have long-lasting repercussions in research on teaching-learning processes, which take place at school and do not evolve in an individual fashion but rather in the context of groups (Kounin, 1977). Educational psychologists themselves, who tend to reproduce the therapist-patient scenario in their analysis of teacher-pupil relations, have often overlooked this aspect, as basic as it is to understanding the processes in question.

This has meant that, while personality disorders are not the center of the educational psychologist's concern in the matter of school discipline, this concern is often addressed from a perspective of individual cases, forcing the teacher, the psychologist and other school staff

to deal with *individual cases*, which most often cannot be resolved within the context of a class group.

Current approaches

The most current approaches to the topic are derived from two primary considerations. *For one,* classroom discipline is not an individual problem but a collective one: the class group is not a sum of individuals but a set of persons whose activities involve numerous, multiple interactions. For this reason school discipline cannot focus on the individual case, but must attend to the proper functioning of the class group (Gump, 1980).

So it is that the concept of *interaction* represents a breakthrough in our approach to this topic (Genovard & Gotzens, 1990; Richmond & McCroskey, 1992; Slavin, 1989). However, since interaction occurs in all human groups, we observe a certain tendency to extrapolate its characteristics from one context to another, ignoring the particular peculiarities of each. For example, ideas associated with norms of interaction in the family context have been applied equally to the school context, producing a diverse, confusing array of effects.

Thus, while certain types of wrongdoing in the family or neighborhood context produce serious disturbances, they may be less disruptive in the school context, and vice versa, to the extent that the infraction disturbs the order required for each of these contexts to function and to fulfill its intended purposes.

The *second consideration* has to do with realizing that instructional processes require *specific conditions* in order to be carried out (McLeod, Fisher & Hoover, 2003; Rudduck, Chaplain & Wallace, 1996; Seidman, 2005). This means there is a need to establish rules related to classroom functioning and to a kind of order that makes this functioning possible (for example: performing the tasks assigned, participating in learning activities, following the teacher's instructions, etc.), and not only to rules regarding the *general social order* (taking away others' belongings, destroying material, harassment, etc.). In terms of teaching-learning, the former rules constitute true conditions *sine qua non* for the teaching-learning process to be produced with any assurance of success.

However, previous studies on the type of knowledge that guides teacher performance (Calderhead, 1996; Castelló, 1999; Mumby, Russell & Martin, 2001; Pajares, 1992; Woolfolf,

Rarosoff & Hoy, 1998) have revealed that, in the absence of rigorous educational preparation, teacher beliefs become an inalienable part of their performance, replacing formal knowledge with a belief system, the latter being quite difficult to modify.

Even though a few experiences with topics of cooperation in the classroom are integrated in the teacher training curriculum (Benítez, García-Berbén & Fernández, 2009), the most frequent situation in our country is that training in school discipline is absent from the educational syllabus for future teachers. For this reason, our working hypothesis states that teachers tend to apply a belief system rather than scientific knowledge about the organization and management of school discipline. Thus, the majority take as their reference those behaviors that society considers disruptive and undesirable (social behaviors), and tend to extrapolate them to the school context, undervaluing the importance of that which is fundamental to the proper functioning of the class group (instructional behaviors) (Badia, 2001; Gotzens, Castelló, Genovard & Badia, 2003).

Objectives and hypothesis

The present study seeks to determine the main concerns of teachers with regard to classroom discipline. Specifically, we aim to identify the seriousness which teachers attribute to different behavior problems that occur in the classroom, some of which we refer to as "social problems" and others which are basically "instructional". As we mention above, although the school context can be considered an extension of the social world, it possesses specific rules and conditions that are different from those that govern other sectors of the "social world".

When these rules and conditions are not distinguished clearly, teachers become inconsistent, rejecting and even punishing behaviors that, in their own opinion, do not merit such a response from the teacher (Gotzens, Castelló, Genovard, Badia, 2003). In addition, we thought it would be interesting to confirm this idea in diverse samples of teachers, whether in terms of geography, years of experience, gender or the educational level being taught. With these purposes in mind, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1

Teachers' main concern is directed toward the appearance of serious social behaviors, such as stealing, lying, etc., even if these are not especially damaging to teaching-learning

processes, rather than giving preferential attention to behaviors that seriously hinder the latter, regardless of whether they involve significant social risk – for example, avoiding the completion of assigned tasks, systematically forgetting school materials at home, etc. (instructional behaviors).

Hypothesis 2

This hypothesis is broken down into four sub-hypotheses referring to the differences we expect to find in the analysis of four variables in the 146 teachers who make up the sample. Thus:

Sub-hypothesis 2.1

We expect to observe differences according to gender in teachers' ratings, where female teachers will assign greater weight to social behaviors than to instructional behaviors, more so than their male counterparts.

Sub-hypothesis 2.2

Differences are expected in teachers' ratings according to the educational level being taught. Teachers in the earlier stages (preschool and primary) are expected to assign greater weight to social behaviors, while those in secondary education will attribute greater seriousness to instructional behaviors.

Sub-hypothesis 2.3

Differences are expected in teachers' ratings according to their years of experience, where teachers with fewer years of experience will assign greater weight to social behaviors, while teachers with greater experience will assign greater weight to instructional behaviors.

Sub-hypothesis 2.4

Finally, regarding the population or geographic variable, our approach is more exploratory than for verification, such that no specific expectations are formulated.

Method

Participants

The sample comprises 146 teachers from three European cities: Barcelona, Murcia and Coimbra. Table 1 shows the distribution of subjects according to gender, educational level, years of experience and population (geography). As in studies mentioned earlier, and due to certain suspicions and fears that are associated with making statements and taking positions on this topic, the subjects' participation is anonymous and voluntary. Distribution of teachers according to gender, years of experience and level of education is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Distribution of samples

		POPULATION (N=146)		
		Barcelona (N=46)	Coimbra (N=66)	Murcia (N=34)
GENDER	Male (N=31)	6	16	9
	Female (N=115)	40	50	25
LEVEL OF EDUCATION	Preschool (N= 26)	19	3	4
	Primary (N= 82)	21	36	25
	Secondary (N=38)	6	27	5
YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	1-5 (N=32)	11	15	6
	6-10 (N=34)	13	16	5
	11-20 (N=45)	12	21	12
	> 20 (N=35)	10	14	11

Instrument and procedure

The information under analysis represents the opinions expressed by teachers concerning the seriousness associated which certain classroom behaviors, or in other words, the potentially disruptive value which teachers assign to different behavioral problems.

These assigned values have been compared in terms of the variables indicated above: the subjects' years of experience, level of education, gender and population group, making possible inter-group comparisons. Similarly, comparing the ratings teachers assign to social behaviors and to instructional behaviors allows us to make intra-group comparisons.

Since we detected language "interferences" in previous research, in the sense that it is very difficult for a teacher to affirm, for example, that "stealing from a classmate" is not a highly disruptive classroom behavior, we decided to design an unobtrusive instrument with a graphic format so as to avoid distortions in teachers' responses as much as possible.

As seen in Figure 1, the instrument consists of a target with four concentric circles, and a list of eight disruptive behaviors identified by the first eight letters of the alphabet, thus avoiding the mostly hierarchical nature that is usually associated with the use of numbers.
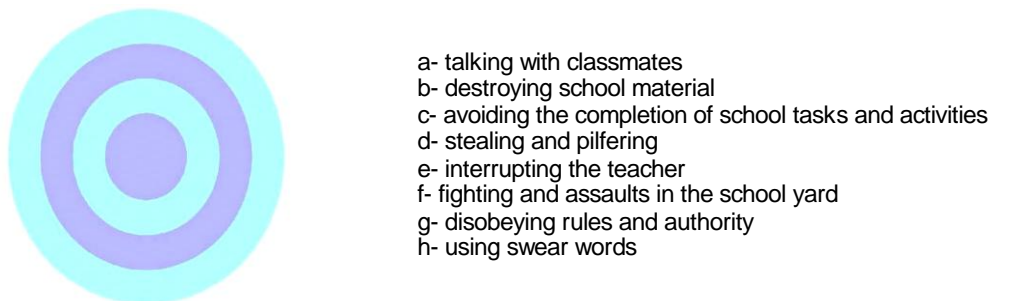

a- talking with classmates
b- destroying school material
c- avoiding the completion of school tasks and activities
d- stealing and pilfering
e- interrupting the teacher
f- fighting and assaults in the school yard
g- disobeying rules and authority
h- using swear words

Figure 1. The instrument that was created for and used in this study

Of the eight behaviors presented, four belong to the category of "disruptive behaviors of a social type", and four belong to "disruptive behaviors of an instructional type". Teachers in our study samples were asked to place the letter corresponding to each behavior somewhere on the target, keeping in mind that a placement nearer the center meant greater seriousness was attributed to the behavior, and placement further from the center meant it was assigned less seriousness.

The following instruction was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire: "Please place the eight behaviors listed in the right-hand column onto the target. The idea is to distribute them in such a way that those which you consider most disruptive to class functioning will occupy central areas of the target, while less disturbing behaviors occupy the outer areas. If any of these behaviors does not seem disruptive to you, place it outside the target".

A behavior was assigned 4 points if it was placed in the center of the target, 3 points if placed in the next ring, and so on down to 0 points if it were placed outside the outermost circle. Thus, in effect, scoring was assigned over a 4-point scale.

For reasons we have discussed in prior studies, where the pros and cons were analyzed in great depth (Añaños & Gotzens, 1990), we determined that participation would be both anonymous − meaning that the data collected would refer exclusively to the four variables cited above − as well as voluntary.

Thus, after contacting the principals of the different schools located in the cities mentioned, and explaining to them the characteristics of the study, we arranged for a day and time to administer the test on an anonymous, voluntary basis. Although we did not place any limit on the time allowed to complete the test, in no case did it require more than 10 minutes.

Research Design and Statistical Analysis

This research is framed within a quantitative, empirical-analytical design. It is a descriptive study that compares data obtained from applying the questionnaire to a sample of 146 teachers from preschool, primary and secondary education, from three European cities: Barcelona, Coimbra and Murcia.

Statistical treament of the data was performed using statistical analysis software SPSS v15.0. Analyses consisted of bivariate tests, using the adequate non-parametric model (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test).

Results

The following results from the statistical analyses are worthy of mention:

Regarding Hypothesis 1, concerning teachers' greater concern with social behaviors rather than instructional behaviors: it was observed that ratings assigned to *talking* and *avoiding tasks* were lower than those assigned to social behaviors, while the rating given to *disobeying* was higher. No significant differences were observed between the ratings given to

interrupting and ratings for social factors. This constitutes a partial verification of our first hypothesis.
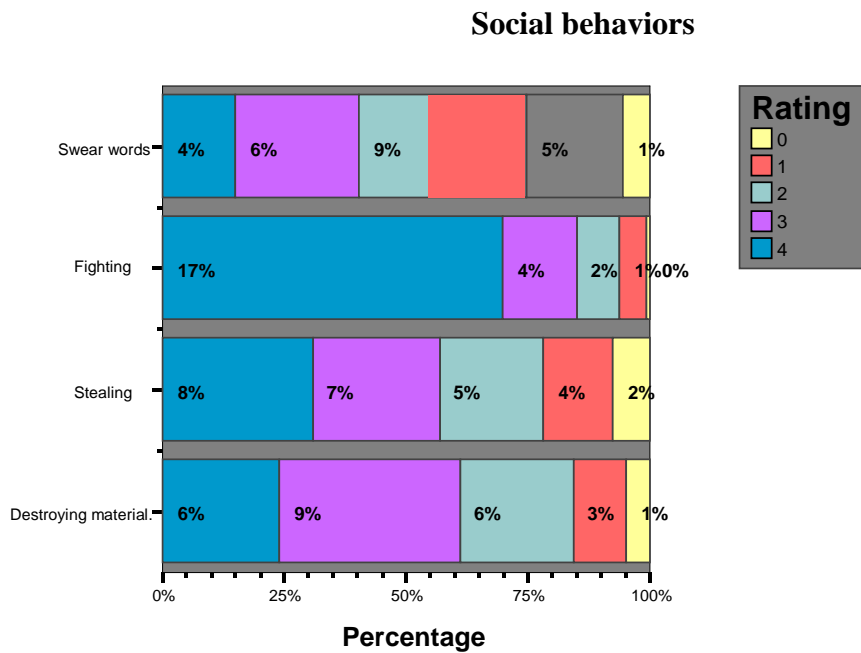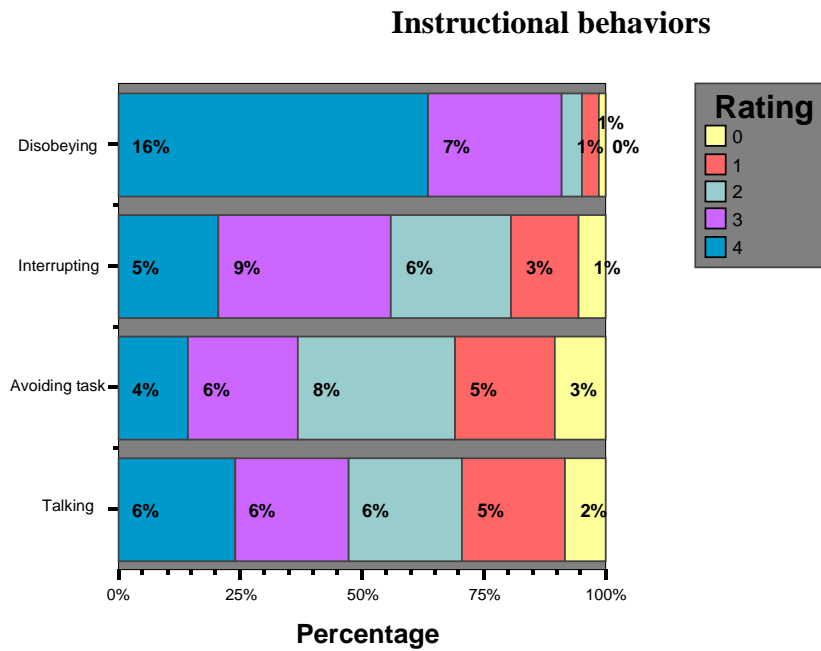
Instructional behaviors

Social behaviors

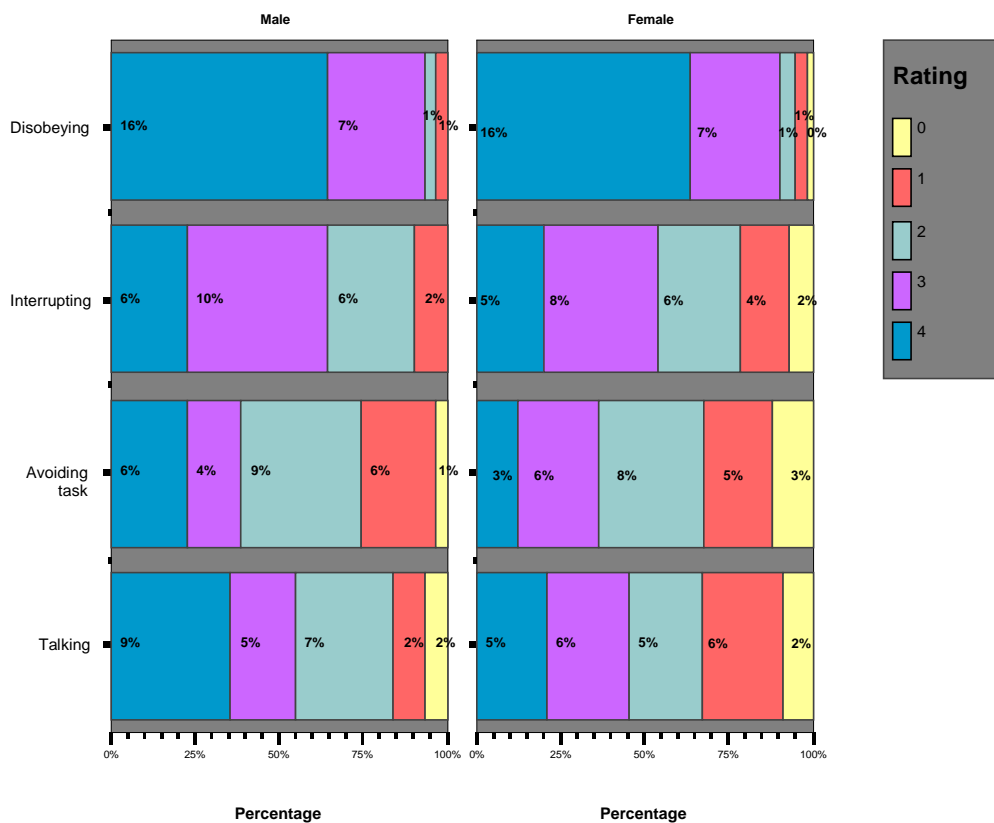**Chart 1. Global comparison of ratings for instructional vs. social behaviors**

Regarding Hypothesis 2. *In the first place,* data comparison according to the variable "teacher's gender" yielded the following results:

No significant differences were seen in male teachers' ratings for the behaviors *talking, avoiding the task* or *interrupting* and the ratings they gave to social behaviors. However, the value given to *disobeying* is higher than the ratings for social factors.

Among the female teachers, ratings for *talking* and *avoiding the task* are lower than their ratings for social behaviors, while their ratings for *disobeying* are higher than the latter. No significant differences were observed between the ratings given to *interrupting*[1] and those assigned to social behaviors.

Consequently, the results point to a marked tendency toward fulfilling our expectation in Hypothesis 2.1.

Instructional Behaviors

	Male	Female
Disobeying	16% · 7% · 1% · 1%	16% · 7% · 1% · 1% · 0%
Interrupting	6% · 10% · 6% · 2%	5% · 8% · 6% · 4% · 2%
Avoiding task	6% · 4% · 9% · 6% · 1%	3% · 6% · 8% · 5% · 3%
Talking	9% · 5% · 7% · 2% · 2%	5% · 6% · 5% · 6% · 2%

Rating: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4

Percentage

---

[1] *Translator's note: Interrupting is generally a socially accepted behavior in informal contexts in Spain, hence its classification as a behavior that specifically hinders instruction, and not the extension of a broader social misbehavior.*
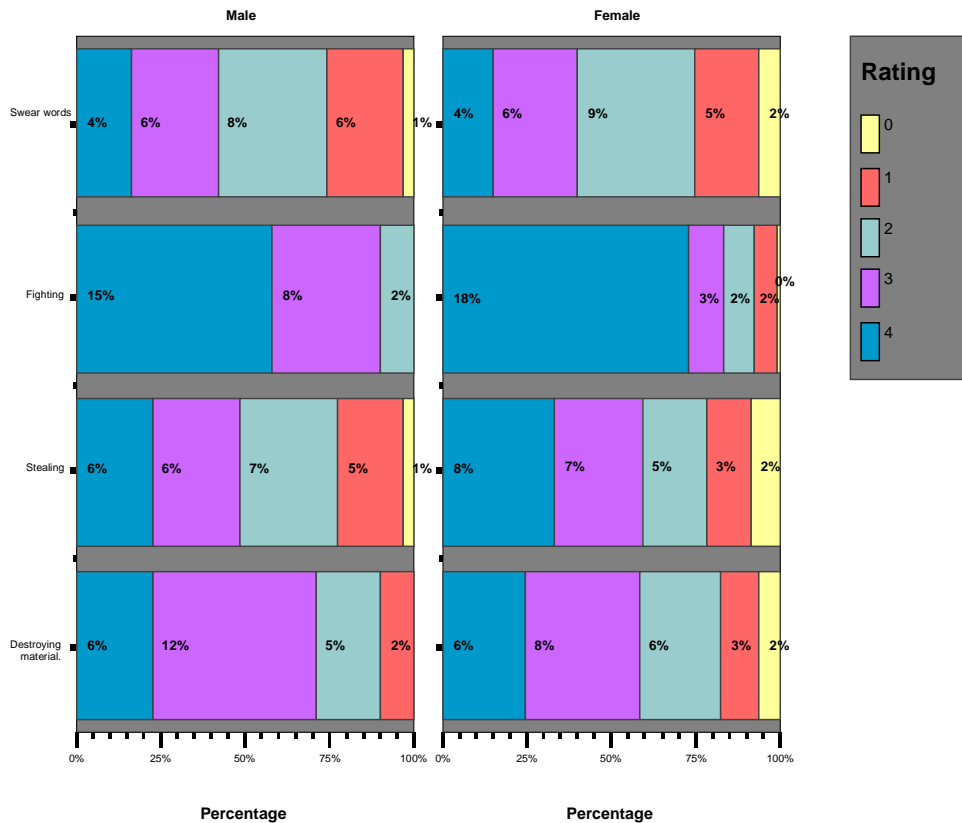
Social behaviors

***Chart 2.* Comparison by gender**

In the second place, when comparing the ratings assigned as a function of the variable "level of education" being taught, we can indicate the following:

In the stage of Preschool Education, ratings given to the behaviors *talking, avoiding the task* and *interrupting* are lower than those given to social behaviors, while ratings assigned to *disobeying* receive higher scores than all other behaviors listed.

In the stage of Primary Education, no significant differences are observed between ratings given to the behaviors *talking* and *interrupting* and the rating of social factors, but significant differences are seen between ratings for *avoiding the task* and ratings given to social behaviors, where the former is scored lower than the latter. The opposite occurs with ratings assigned to the behavior *disobeying,* which receives higher scores than those assigned to social behaviors.

In the stage of Compulsory Secondary Education, no significant differences are observed between ratings for the behaviors *talking* and *interrupting* and the rating of social behaviors. In contrast, ratings for *avoiding the task* are lower than the scores assigned to social behaviors, and ratings for *disobeying* are higher.

These results are consistent with the trend we expected, even though they do not provide a total verification of sub-hypothesis 2.2.

*Third,* a comparison of data according to the variable "years of experience" reveals the following:

Teachers with five years of experience or less give lower scores to the behaviors *talking, avoiding the task* and *interrupting* than they do to social behaviors. The opposite occurs with the behavior *disobeying*.

This same scoring pattern is reproduced with differing degrees of intensity in responses from teachers with 6 to 20 years of experience; the ratings assigned to the behaviors *talking*, *interrupting* and *avoiding the task* are significantly lower than the ratings given to social behaviors. Nonetheless, the behavior *disobeying* is perceived as more serious than the social behaviors.

Teachers with more than 20 years of experience do not show significant differences in the weight they assign to the behaviors *talking*, *interrupting* and *avoiding the task* and the weight assigned to social behaviors. This group also gives a higher rating to *disobeying* than to the social behaviors.

In short, results indicate a trend toward attributing greater seriousness to instructional behaviors as teachers acquire more years of experience; this result is consistent with the expectations expressed in hypothesis 2.3.
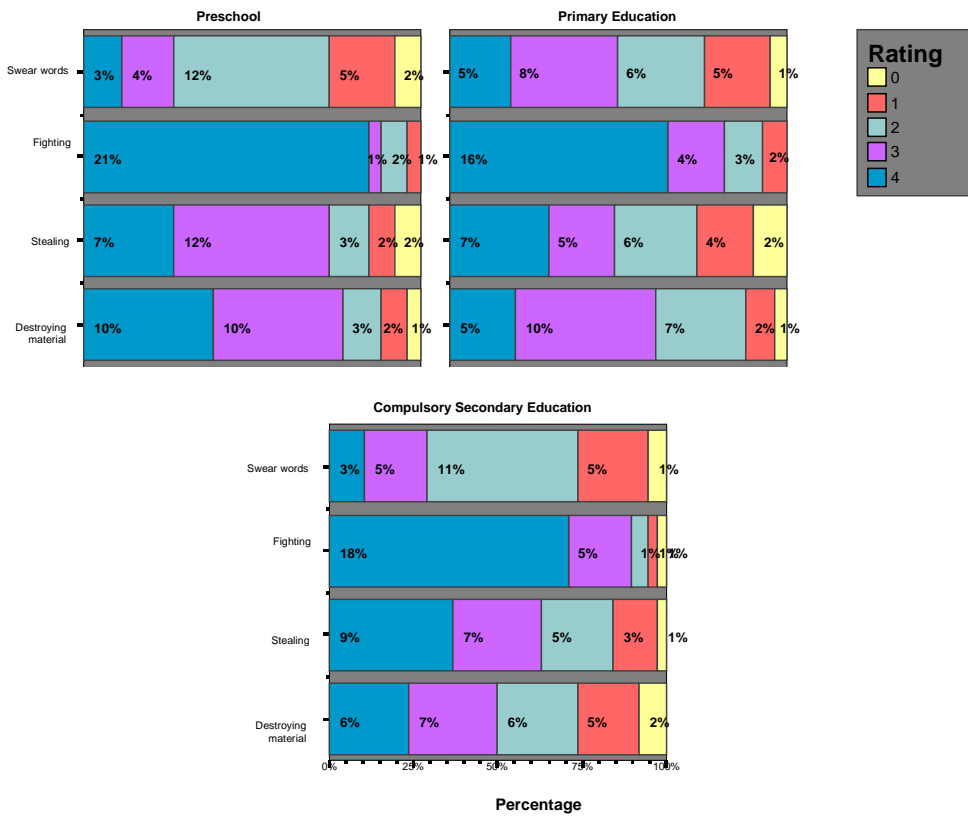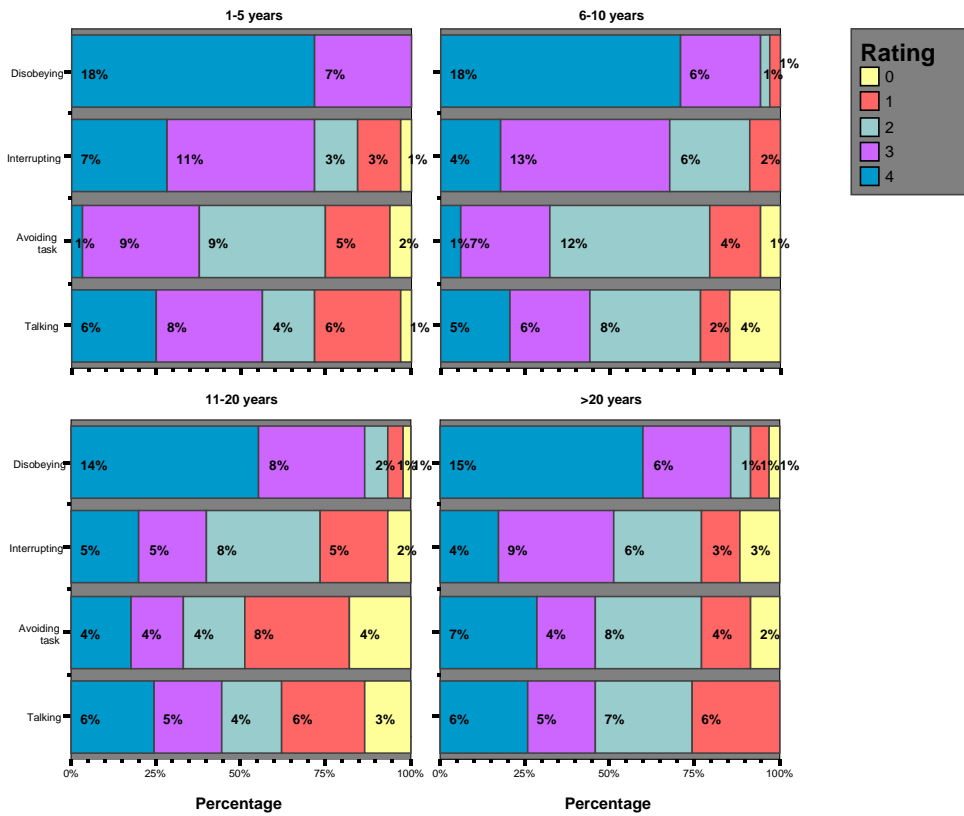
Instructional behaviors
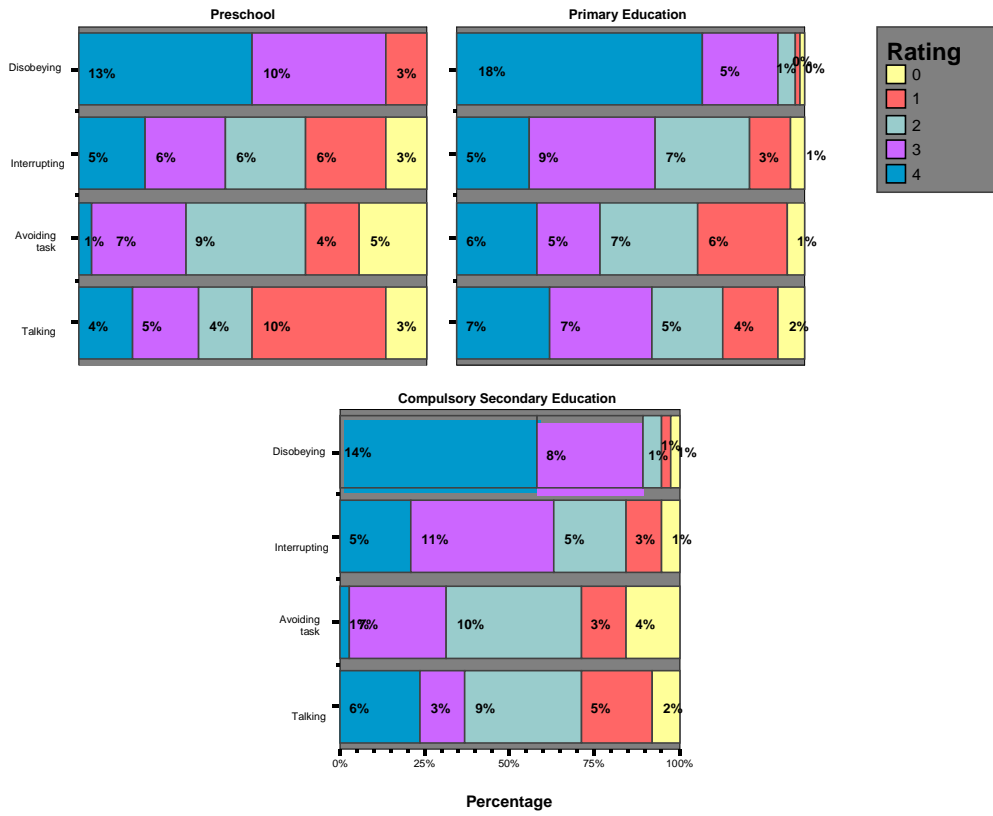
Social behaviors

Chart 3. Comparison by level of education

Instructional behaviors
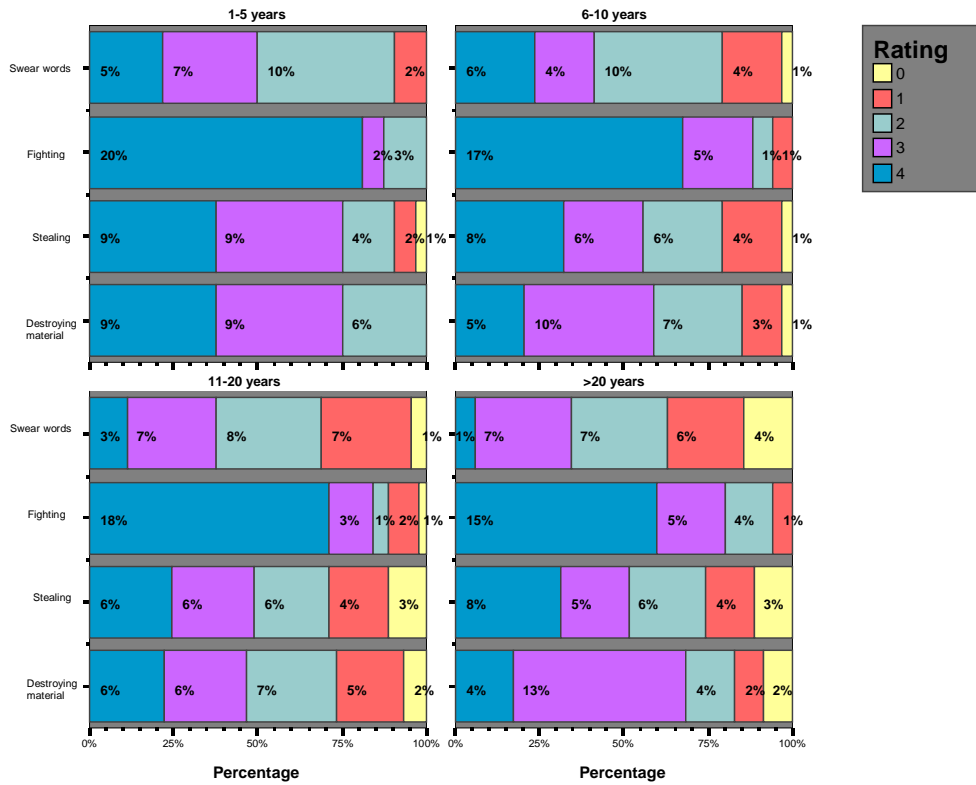

Social behaviors

Chart 4. Comparison by years of experience.

Finally, if we take into account the population variable of our sample when comparing ratings given to instructional behaviors with ratings given to social factors, we observe the following:

In the sample from Barcelona, we find that ratings for the behaviors *talking* and *avoiding the task* are lower than the ratings given to social behaviors, while the rating given to the behavior *disobeying* is higher. However, no significant differences are observed between the ratings assigned to *interrupting* and those assigned to social behaviors.

Regarding the sample from the city of Coimbra, ratings for the behaviors *talking*, *avoiding the task* and *interrupting* are lower than the ratings given to social behaviors. However, ratings given to the behavior *disobeying* are higher than the ratings assigned to social behaviors.

In the sample from the city of Murcia, ratings for the behaviors *talking, avoiding the task* and *disobeying* are higher than ratings assigned to social behaviors.

In the latter case, it is worth mentioning that the sample from Murcia, unlike the other two groups of teachers (Barcelona and Coimbra) assigned higher scores to most of the instructional behaviors than they assigned to the social behaviors.

Instructional behaviors

Barcelona

Coimbra

Murcia

Percentage

Social behaviors

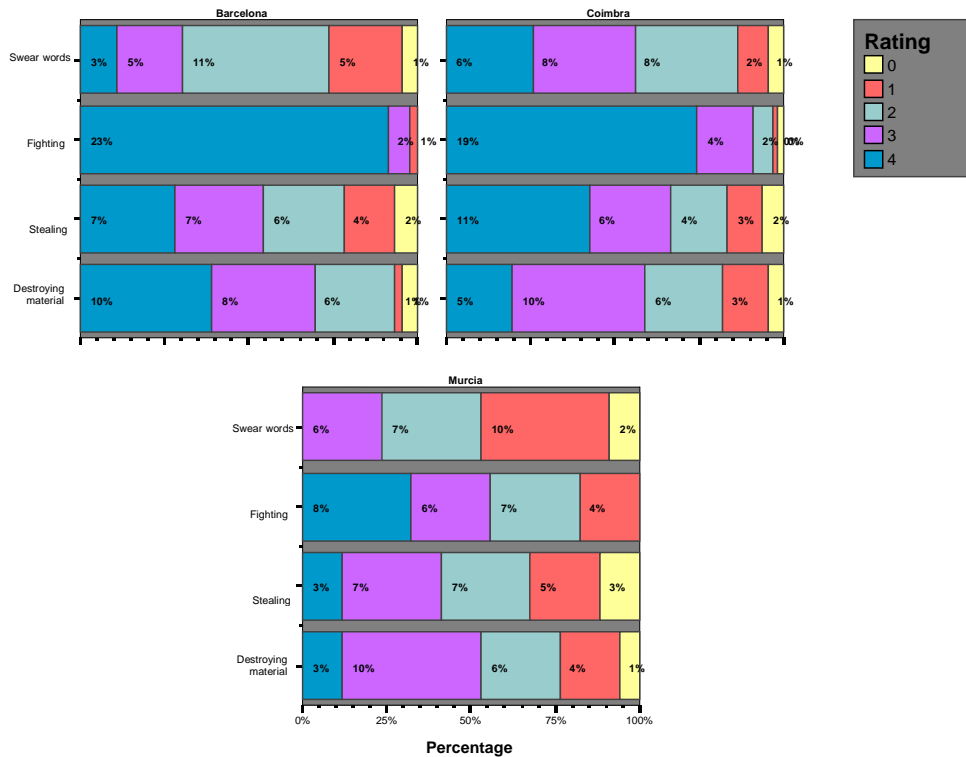**Barcelona**

Coimbra

Murcia

Percentage
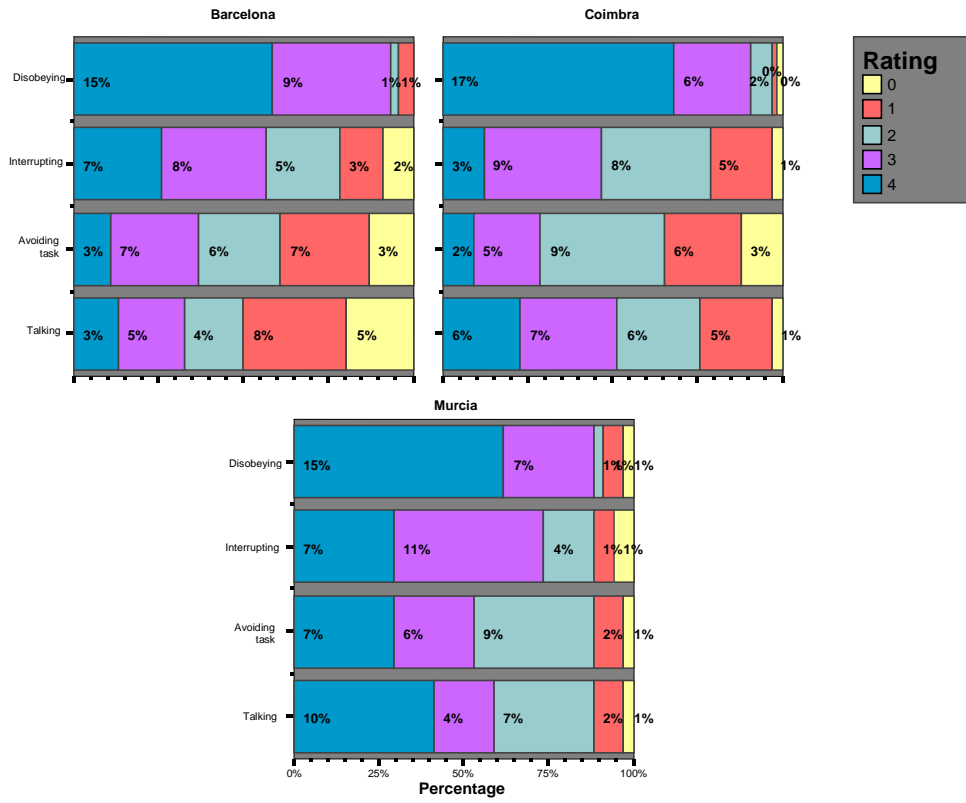
Chart 5. Comparison between populations

Discussion and Conclusions

The first conclusion drawn is the verification of our first hypothesis: although teachers show concern about all the behaviors presented in the questionnaire, generally speaking they assign greater disruptive value to "social behaviors" than to "instructional behaviors".

On one hand, it must be stressed that *all* behaviors presented in this study are perceived as sources of disruption in the classroom, and therefore, as threats to the teaching-learning process. As such they justify the intense concern that the school discipline issue evokes. On the other hand, verification of Hypothesis 1 is consistent with the teachers' having a certain *decontextualized* concern in their perception of which behaviors have greater disruptive potential in the classroom: they give special attention to those behaviors that are not particularly the most detrimental to classroom management.

This assessment can be interpreted to mean that teachers not only consider social behaviors to be more detrimental to classroom order than the so-called instructional behaviors, but also that, by leaving actions like *talking* in the lowest positions in their ranking, they overlook the fundamental role that attention processes play in their students' learning.

Something similar may be said for *avoiding the task*: despite this behavior being incompatible with learning – a pupil who is off task in the classroom is unlikely to be learning – the teachers have assigned this behavior the lowest ratings for seriousness. Only the *disobeying* behavior takes a higher place in this ranking, while *interrupting* falls into the same "spaces" as social behaviors.

In like manner to results from other studies mentioned earlier, the teachers show greater concern for transgressions of the social order (stealing) and for behaviors that are most disturbing to the class group. This relegates to positions of lesser importance those behaviors whose involvement in teaching-learning processes has been rigorously demonstrated, but that are not associated with chaos in the classroom.

These results are unsettling, revealing once again that, in the absence of theoretical and applied training in school discipline, teachers opt to use belief-based knowledge to man-

age order in the classroom, such that their decisions are not based on teaching-learning principles as much as on principals for general social coexistence.

As for testing Hypothesis 2 and its corresponding sub-hypotheses, it is noteworthy that in every case we confirmed trends in the same direction as our expectations, although no sub-hypothesis was entirely verified. Thus, for example, we can state that years of teaching experience seems to have a moderating effect on concern for social behaviors, bringing them into equivalency with the seriousness attributed to instructional behaviors, and that this equivalency is observed more notably among male teachers than among their female colleagues. As for level of education, teachers from preschool tend to prioritize social behaviors over instructional behaviors, while their colleagues in secondary education assign similar ratings of seriousness to both types.

Nonetheless, three issues deserve special comment: one, *disobeying* has been verified as the highest-ranked behavior in all cases; two, *talking* and *avoiding the task* were consistently given lower ratings, and three, the sub-sample of teachers from Murcia is the one group that prioritizes instructional behaviors above social behaviors as a source of disruption in the classroom.

Future studies must seek to offer a sound interpretation for these results, especially as they pertain to the behaviors *disobeying, talking* and *avoiding the task,* since we have already stated the exploratory nature of the comparison between geographic sub-samples. For the moment, and in the light of results from some of our team's other research work, we can affirm that student disobedience means refusing to comply with, or at best ignoring, the teachers' directives, making the complex process of teaching-learning unviable. The refusal of one of the parties to join in the teaching-learning process necessarily condemns this process to failure.

It is possible that teachers' anticipation of such consequences justifies their concern for this behavior and hence the high score it receives on our questionnaire.

With regard to the behavior *avoiding the task,* the most plausible justification is the limited interference in the class group that is produced by one member's lack of involvement. Pupils' tendency to constantly be talking to each other is another case altogether, since there

is high potential for disruption of the entire teaching-learning process. Perhaps the widespread nature of this behavior makes it seem less serious, not to mention that many have risen in defense of students' free, spontaneous behavior, which would be compatible with permissiveness toward this form of verbal expression.

In any case, what is evident is that teachers do not have a clear or complete conceptualization of behaviors that have the greatest disruptive potential in the classroom, meaning those behaviors that most disturb the individual and collective learning processes in which the students are involved.

References

Añaños, E. & Gotzens, C. (1990). Análisis de algunos elementos que intervienen en la conducta del profesor: un estudio a partir de la resolución de problemas de disciplina. [Analysis of some elements that intervene in the teacher's behavior; a study based on solutions to discipline problems.] *Boletín de Psicología, 2*, 77-93.

Badia, M (2001). *Las percepciones de profesores y alumnos de E.S.O sobre la intervención en el comportamiento disruptivo: un estudio comparativo*. [Perceptions of teachers and pupils in compulsory secondary education regarding disruptive behavior: a comparative study.] Doctoral thesis. Bellaterra (Barcelona). *Autónoma* University of Barcelona.

Benítez, J.L., García-Berbén, A. & Fernández, M. (2009). The impact of a course on bullying within the pre-service teacher training curriculum. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology, 17, 7*(1), 191-208.

Bibou N.I., Kiosseoglou, G. & Stogiannidou, A. (2000). Elementary teachers' perceptions regarding school behavior problems: Implications for school psychological services. *Psychology in the Schools, 37*(2), 123-134.

Borko, H., Lalik, R. & Tomchin, E. (1987): Student Teachers' Understandings of Successful and Unsuccessful Teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 3,* 77-90.

Calderhead, J. (1996). Teachers: beliefs and knowledge. In D.C. Berliner & R. Calfee (Eds). *Handbook of Educational Psychology*, (709-725). New York. Macmillan.

Castelló, A. (1999). Procesos cognitivos en el professor. [Cognitive processes in the teacher.] In A. Sipán (Coord.). *Educar para la diversidad en el S.XXI*, 81-107. Zaragoza. Mira Editores.

Corrie, L. (1997). The interaction between teachers' knowledge and skills when managing a troublesome classroom behaviour. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *27*(1), 93-105.

Fernández-Balboa, J. M. (1990). Helping Novice Teachers Handle Discipline Problems. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, 62*, 50-54.

Fernández-Balboa, J. M (1991). Beliefs, Interactive Thoughts, and Actions of Physical Education Student Teachers Regarding Pupil Misbehaviors. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 11,* 59-78.

Genovard, C. & Gotzens, C. (1990). *Psicología de la Instrucción*. [The psychology of instruction.] Madrid. Santillana.

Gotzens, C. (1985) La perspectiva dels adults sobre els comportaments d'indisciplina en el context escolar. [The perspective of adults regarding indiscipline behaviors in the school context.] VVAA *Psicopedagogia de l'excepcionalitat:* Barcelona: Fundació Caixa de Pensions.

Gotzens, C. (1997). *La disciplina escolar*. [School discipline.] Horsori. Barcelona.

Gotzens, C. (2006). El psicólogo escolar: nuevos retos y viejos desencuentros. [The school psychologist: new challenges and old conflicts.] *Papeles del Psicólogo, 27,* 180-184.

Gotzens, C., Badia, M., Castelló, A. & Genovard, C. (2007). La gravedad de los problemas de comportamiento en el aula vista por los profesores. [The seriousness of classroom behavior problems as seen by teachers.] *Revista Portuguesa de Pedagogía, 41*(1)*,* 103-120.

Gotzens, C., Castelló, A., Genovard, C. & Badia, M. (2003). Percepciones de profesores y alumnos de E.S.O. sobre la disciplina en el aula. . [Perceptions of teachers and pupils in compulsory secondary education regarding disruptive classroom behavior.] *Psicothema, 15*(3), 362-368.

Grebennikov, L. (2005). The Normalised Child: A Non-Traditional Psychological Framework. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, *30*(2), 8-14.

Gump, P.V. (1980). The school as a social situation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *31*, 553-582.

Hardman, E.L. & Smith, S. (2003). Analysis of Classroom Discipline-Related Content in Elementary Education Journals. *Behavioral Disorders*. *28*(2), 173-186.

Houhton, S., Merrett, F. & Whendall, K. (1988). Classroom behaviours which secondary schools teachers say they find most troublesome. *British Educational Research Journal, 14*, 295-310.

Ishee, J. H. (2004). Perceptions of Misbehavior in Middle School Physical Education. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 75,* 9.

Kounin J.S (1977). *Discipline and group management in classrooms.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

McLeod, J., Fisher, J. & Hoover, G. (2003). *The Key Elements of Classroom Management: Managing Time and Space, Student Behavior, and Instructional Strategies.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Meunier, J.M. (2000). Sondage dans une ecole primaire: Des conduites pacifiques et des comportements violents. [A survey in primary school: on peaceful and violent behaviors.] *Apprentissage et Socialisation*, *20*(1), 35-49.

Mumby, H., Russell, T. & Martin, A.K. (2001). Teachers' knowledge and how it develops. In V. Richardson (Ed.). *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (4th edition), pp. 119-160. Washington: American Educational Research Association.

Pajares, M.F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Clearing up a construct. *Review of educational Research*, *62*, 307-332.

Ramírez, S. & Justicia, F. (2006). Bullying among schoolchildren and other problem behaviors for coexistence. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology 9, 4*(2), 265-290.

Richmond, V.P. & McCroskey, J.C. (Eds.) (1992). *Power in the Classroom: Communication, Control and Concern*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Rudduck, J., Chaplain, R. & Wallace, G. (1996). Reviewing the conditions of learning in school. In J. Rudduck, R. Chaplain & G. Wallace (Eds). *School Improvement: What can pupils tell us?* 29-40. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Seidman, A. (2005). The Learning Killer: Disruptive student behaviour in the classroom. *Reading improvement, 42*(1), 40-49.

Slavin, R.E (1989). *School and Classroom Organization*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Watkins, CH. & Wagner, P. (1991) *La disciplina escolar. Propuesta de trabajo en el marco global del centro.* [School discipline: a working proposal within the overall framework of the school.] Barcelona: Paidós.

White, R., Algozzine, B., Audette, R., Marr, M. B., & Ellis, E. D. (2001). Unified Discipline: A School-Wide Approach for Managing Problem Behavior. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 37*(1), 3-11.

Wickman, E.K. (1928). *Children´s behavior and teachers' attitudes.* New York: The Commonwealth Foundation.

Woolfolf, A., Rarosoff, R. & Hoy, W. (1998). Teacher's sense of efficacy and their beliefs about managing students. *Teaching and Teacher Education.* *6*(2), 46-54.