

Student-teacher socioemotional interactions, student's focus of attention and emotional arousal in environmentally sensitive students

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Literature has shown how student-teacher interaction influence children's wellbeing and learning. Such interactions may also capture bystanders' attention causing emotional arousal and taking away the focus of attention from the assigned task.

The present study assessed the relation between student-teacher socioemotional interactions, student's focus of attention and emotional arousal also accounting for environmental sensitivity. Through an eye tracker apparatus, we registered 95 primary school children's pupil diameters while watching a student-teacher interaction scene. Sympathetic response and focus of attention were registered while different interaction scenes took place. Children self-reported on environmental sensitivity and perceived classroom climate. A mixed effects regression model for second pass pupil dilatation showed that attention was captured by different scenes based on their previous classroom experiences. The sympathetic response-attention link was moderated by environmental sensitivity. More sensitive children were more emotionally aroused when looking at the teacher scolding a sad child or a kind teacher having a child respond to her aggressively. Incongruent socio-emotional exchanges caused greater arousal in highly sensitive children compared to low sensitive ones. Based on the finding we planned an intervention to promote emotionally positive and in-tune teacher-student interactions to avoid students' distraction and sympathetic arousal, especially in more environmentally sensitive students.