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TEACHER-STUDENT POWER RELATIONSHIP IN FINNISH BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

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The power relationship between teachers and students has been a researched area in the educational field. Few studies, however, explicitly illustrate how Finnish teachers experienced the power relationship. To fill in this gap, this study aims to provide insight into whether Finnish teachers have encountered power-related conflicts with students and how they manage the situation. By viewing the teacher-student power relationship as complex and dynamic, this study conducted interviews with five experienced teachers in Finnish primary schools.

Results show that Finnish teachers had free but strict relationship with students, and they did encounter conflicts in the power relationship with students throughout their teaching career. Some intense conflicts mostly happened in the first years of career, while some small conflicts still happened daily. To solve the conflicts, one of the main strategies is not viewing teachers and students in a hostile relationship. Teachers, as adults, are bound with students by the security needs of students, and that is how trust and respect can grow. In addition, teachers have strategies such as setting rules, using professional skills and turning to professional sectors at school for help.

The study provides educators with useful implications and suggestions on behavior management at school. Finnish experience showed how to provide sufficient autonomy for students, while in the meanwhile maintain the authority of teachers and keep learning in order.

Keywords: educational power, behavior management, classroom management, authority of teacher, autonomy of student, Finnish education

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a background introduction of modern society on the decline of respect to traditional authorities, followed by a discussion of the inevitable power-conflicts between teachers and students. Then ‘power relationship’ is briefly defined, and the significance of studying the power relationship between Finnish teachers and students in behavior management is drawn out. Finally, the research questions are addressed.

1.1 Background and Motivation

Modern changes in western societies have inevitably triggered a gradual decline in the function of tradition and moral values (Heelas et al., 1996). There is a tendency that young people are unwilling to show respect to the traditional authorities, such as religious figures, police and teachers, and so forth. They are requiring the authority to be justified and there should not be unconditional authorities anymore (Thomson & Holland, 2002). It is an age of emancipation with more diversity and democracy for the young generation. However, the social norms and values have been kept questioning and criticizing, risking the fact that there can hardly be any powerful authority to prevent the young from behavior disruptions.

In the school educational level, educational emancipation has been well-explored by theorists, including Dewey, Piaget, critical pedagogists and postmodernists, to highlight the role of students in the educational process. Students have begun to take a more and more active and empowered part in learning as well as decision-making in school life. A collaborative power dynamic at school certainly has more benefits comparing a coercive one (Cummins, 1994). Whereas, in terms of behavior management in the classroom, it is hard for educators to hold the behavioral standards on one hand and at the same time give room for flexibility to students on the other.

Therefore, it comes with conflicts in the power distribution between educators and students during the behavior management process.

Furthermore, power-related conflicts between teachers and students are in fact fundamental and inevitable, for the reason that students and teachers usually hold different goals in implementing school tasks (Raufelder et al., 2013).

In Finland, where the ‘world’s best education’ located (Sahlberg, 2011), however, the situation seemed to be different. Finland has centered students’ role in the education process ever since Dewey’s influence (Sahlberg, 2015). Whereas, the relationship between teachers and students seemed to be kept in harmony according to limited observational research (Heo et al., 2018). Therefore, it would be interesting to take a close look at the power relationship between teachers and students in Finland, to see if the harmony is true or if conflicts exist, and to see what experiences on power relationship from their teachers can be shared to the world.

1.2 Purpose and Significance of the Study

Power relationship in educational context has been recognized as one of the most important and prevailing topics in education research. Rich studies can be found in this topic since the 1970s: ranging from Freire’s ‘banking’ theory (1996) and critical pedagogists’ call for education emancipation, Cummins’s (1994) and Devine’s (2003) collaborative power relationships, to constructive power relationships from Dewey (1998) and Piaget (1977).

Significance to study the power relationship in Finnish education is twofold. On one hand, power is a fundamental as well as a crucial element in educational practices and reformations. It is so essential that every topic in education can be deduced to a problem of power, and it is true that before the conflicts in power have been probably overcome, reformations in education can hardly be implemented. In other words, examining the power relationship would provide an ultimate insight into any specific kinds of education practice. Based on the deduction above, to study the power relationship and its conflicts of the ‘world’s best education’ (Sahlberg, 2011), would benefit the practices and possible reformations in modern education. On the other hand, good academic performance always needs to be supported by proper behavior management in classroom so as to guarantee the order of daily teaching. Finland is

well known for its excellent performance in the OECD academic tests throughout the world (Sahlberg, 2011), thus, whether it also owns the excellent performance in behavior management and can share its experience in behavior management for the world is waiting for further examination.

Regarding the previous research on Finnish teacher-student relationship, it is suggested that it is an equal relationship and students have great autonomy in the educational process (Berner et al., 2015; Fraser & Walberg, 2005; Heo et al., 2018; Toom & Husu, 2012). In addition, a student-centered idea has been rooted and widely accepted by Finnish educators since the middle of the last century by examining the historical development of educational ideology in Finland (Sahlberg, 2015). Nevertheless, the conflicts between teachers and students are inevitable and naturally exist as illustrated above, thus, how Finnish educators maintain their authority in behavior management, and in the meanwhile respect student's autonomy can be a myth. Little attention, however, has been paid to a specific and close look at the teacher-student power relationship in Finnish education.

This study aims to investigate the teacher-student power relationship in Finland with a lens of teachers' perceptions, especially with a focus on how they experience power conflicts. By viewing the teacher-student power relationship as complex and dynamic, this study conducted interviews with five teachers in Finnish primary schools. Their experiences were analyzed by depicting the climate of the power relationship and the conflicts that they encountered, along with the values as well as the strategies they employed.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research questions guiding the current study are the following two:

1. Have teachers experienced any power-related conflicts with students in behavior management in Finnish primary schools?
2. How did teachers confront these power-related conflicts?

By answering these two questions, the study aims to shed light on what conflicts experienced teachers in Finland have. Their experiences and how they successfully handled the conflicts will hopefully provide teachers, novice teachers and teacher

educators some insights into coping with conflicts in teacher-student power relationship.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review starts with a brief introduction of behavior management in classroom. Then, there is an overview of the general teacher-student relationship and its complicated and dynamic nature is discussed. It then unfolds a more specific focus on the teacher-student power relationship, with a careful check on the definition of power, studies on power in education as well as the power relationship between teachers and students. Lastly, a general picture of the teacher-student power relationship in Finnish educational context is depicted based on the previous literature.

2.1 Behavior Management

Throughout the years, problems of discipline in classroom have become a primary matter for educators, and classroom management has been identified as the top concern of teachers (Shin & Koh, 2007). Classroom management consists of various aspects, including behavior management, time arrangement, teacher-parent communication, and so forth (Hertzog, 2002). Among these aspects, however, behavior management is examined to stress teachers the most (Meister & Melnick, 2003).

Behavior management can be defined as the process of building students' behaviors so as to maintain learning in order and effective in classroom (Walker & Shea, 1998). Reports from teachers on frustration of managing behaviors in classroom were consistent (Meister & Melnick, 2003), and behavior management problem has been identified as a major reason for teachers quitting the teaching position (Liu & Meyer, 2005). Therefore, a lot is waiting for exploration in behavior management to facilitate teachers in approaching these difficulties.

2.2 *Teacher-Student Relationship*

Before starting a specific discussion on the power relationship between the two objectives-teachers and students, it is necessary to have a brief understanding of the general relationship between them.

Studies concerning the teacher-student relationship have a long tradition in educational psychology (Raufelder et al., 2013). According to Dewey, educative experiences ‘*never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment “they create”*’. (Dewey, 2004, p. 18). ‘*Education is essentially a social process*’, therefore, the quality of a teacher-student relationship is key to establishing this environment. (Dewey, 1998, p. 65). It is true that based on the previous studies, the teacher-student relationship plays an essential role in the whole education process by the means of ‘creating’ certain kinds of climate.

The complexity of teacher-student relationship is well-discussed in the previous research as well. In line with the developmental contextualism theory of Lerner, the dynamic of the interaction between teachers and students is composed of multiple cognitive and emotional patterns and processes that are constantly influenced by the socio-cultural context (Lerner, 1991, 1998). The components of the teacher-student relationship cannot be simply categorized and therefore, it is important to understand the nature that the teacher-student relationship is constantly complex, active and dynamic.

2.3 *Teacher-Student Power Relationship*

The definitions of power are well developed. Power was defined as ‘*generalized capacity*’ by Parsons (1963, 237) in his functionalism, while it was defined by Weber (1978, 53) as the possibility that an individual will ‘*carry out his own will despite resistance*’ with his conflict theory. The former emphasizes the legitimacy of implementing power; the latter views power in the context of conflict and resistance. Whereas, it was argued by Foucault that power ‘*only exists in action*’ (1980, 89) and ‘*there are no relations of power without resistances*’ (1980, 142) in terms of interpersonal relationships. It can be perceived that power is seen as a mutual and dynamic process in the context of conflict from Weber and Foucault, which is more

suitable for studies in micro-level human relationships. Considering the complex and active nature of the teacher-student relationship as discussed above, this study adopts the concept of power in a dynamic context of conflict.

In terms of the power relationships in education, it has been well-studied since the 1970s. Young (1971), Apple (1979) and Bernstein (1977a) considered power in school as a whole influencing the cultural and economic development of society. Later, Freire (1996, 53) criticized the ‘banking’ concept from teachers to students, in which the role of students is presumed as totally inferior while teachers are the certain authority in transmitting knowledge. Following Freire, other scholars in critical pedagogy continued to call for emancipation and democracy of power in education as well.

Many educational scholars (e.g. Buzzelli & Johnston 2001; Devine 2003; Pace 2003; Perumal 2008; Winograd 2002; Zhang 2005) have studied the conflictual and harmonious aspects of power in schools, classrooms and pedagogies. Classrooms can feature both power-sharing and confrontation between teachers and students, while the teacher-student power relationship is inherently conflictual. Teachers exercise power to control students, but also share power and cooperate with students in the meanwhile (Cummins 1994; Devine 2003; Verkuyten 2002). Cummins (1994) categorizes the teacher-student power relationship into two types: coercive and collaborative. In coercive relationships, teachers’ authority is dominant, while students are in a position of continuously being subordinated and inferior. In collaborative relationships, nevertheless, power is created in the relationships and is shared among every individual, which means that both teachers and students are empowered.

This idea is in line with the social constructivist perspectives, who assert that teacher authority can be constructive (e.g., Dewey, 1998; Olyer, 1996, Pace & Hemmings, 2006). Teacher authority is not only for instructing children’s learning on various occasions, but also for maintaining respect for every individual student. Students’ autonomy is highlighted in a constructive education context. Constructivists like Piaget (1977), typically, believed that students have the autonomy to construct their own experience, knowledge base and versions during the education process, which ought to be respected and assisted by teachers as facilitators.

2.4 *Finnish Teacher-Student Power Relationship*

Based on the previous research on Finnish teacher-student relationship, it is noted that there is usually an equal relationship and students enjoy great equity during the educational process (Berner et al., 2015; Fraser & Walberg, 2005; Heo et al., 2018; Toom & Husu, 2012). Fraser and his co-researchers described the teacher-student relationship in Finland was so close that they were just like parents and children. Heo and her co-researchers indicated by means of observations in Finnish school that students obtain a high level of autonomy in classrooms.

Examining the ideology development of pedagogy in Finnish history, Sahlberg (2015) pointed out that Dewey's theory has been widely accepted as the dominant pedagogical ideology in Finland, especially the pragmatic, student-centered educational ideas. Sahlberg (2015) stated Dewey's role in this way- '*Dewey's philosophy of education forms a foundation for academic, research-based teacher education in Finland and influenced also the work of the most influential Finnish scholar professor Matti Koskenniemi in the 1940s.*' Nearly all of the pre-service primary school teachers read and explore Dewey's and Koskenniemi's works as part of their courses during college according to Sahlberg. On the school level, there was a number of Finnish schools that have adopted Dewey's educational ideas, for creating a democratic atmosphere where students can have the autonomy to make decisions for their daily life in school. In addition, Sahlberg (2011) suggested that, even dated back to 1860s, Uno Cygnaeus, who was considered as the father of basic education in Finland, asserted that in an ideal classroom, students are able to speak more than the teachers. Therefore, the student-centered idea was rooted in the Finnish education context and has been well-developed and accepted since the middle of the last century.

In the literature of power relationships in Finnish education, much focuses on the behind values of power distribution, or provides a glance at the teacher-student power relationship while depicting the whole picture of Finnish education climate. Through observations and literature reviews, these studies reviewed previously could capture the general democratic look in Finnish schools.

There was, however, little attention on a specific and close examination of the teacher-student power relationship in Finland. Investigating this area might provide an

insightful perspective into power relationship in education. The current study aims to contribute more on this topic.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter begins with a review of the research purpose and the two main research questions, followed by the justification and rationale of using a qualitative and phenomenological approach. The procedure of choosing participants, interviews, and data analysis are presented below as well.

3.1 Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how Finnish primary school teachers describe their power relationships with students in behavior management, what possible conflicts and strategies they had during the process. With this purpose, two main research questions were planned to guide the present study:

1. Have Finnish primary school teachers experienced any power-related conflicts with students in behavior management?
2. How did teachers confront these power-related conflicts?

To answer these two questions, a qualitative method is considered appropriate, and the data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The next section is a rationale for the use of a qualitative research method in the study.

3.2 Methodological Background

A qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach was conducted in this study.

The reason why this study lends itself to a qualitative design is because how teachers experience and handle school behaviors is dynamic in nature, and it is important to understand the process of teacher and student interaction as the process is happening. Firestone (1987) explains the difference between quantitative and

qualitative study in the following way: '*The quantitative study portrays a world of variables and static states; by contrast, the qualitative study describes people acting in events*' (p. 19). Thus, due to how unique and fluctuating teachers' perceptions of behavior management are, a qualitative paradigm is appropriate to capture the different characteristics of the research subjects.

In order to understand the experience that teachers have regards to their perceptions of behavior management at school, a phenomenological study was used. The phenomenological methodology is suitable when the researcher is trying to comprehensively describe the essence of the experience of the participants being studied (Patton, 2002). Therefore, phenomenology was deemed to be the most appropriate method for this study as it sought to understand and describe the phenomenon of behavior management in Finnish classrooms from teachers' perspectives.

3.3 *Participants*

Since qualitative research does not require a large sample size (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015), and for phenomenological research, Creswell (2013) suggested a sample size of five to twenty-five participants. The expected number of participants was set as from five to ten before sending interview invitations, considering the validity of the study as well as my availability for future data collection and data analysis.

As explained in the previous chapters, this study has its main focus on the primary school level in Finland. In addition, experienced teachers would be ideal participants since struggles as well as strategies from teachers' teaching experience would be asked in the interviews. Therefore, to be eligible for the study, participants needed to meet the following criteria: a current primary school teacher in Finland; a minimum of five years of Finnish primary school teaching experience. The information of participants found for this study is listed below, and the names of participants are using acronyms to respect confidentiality.

Table 3-1

Basic Information of Participants

Acronyms of Teachers	Current Position	Years of Experience
H	vice-principal & special-needs teacher	28
M	class teacher	13
K	English & German language teacher	31
AL	class teacher	17
U	class teacher	12

3.4 *Data Collection and Analysis*

3.4.1 Data collection

Creswell (2013) explains data collection for qualitative studies often included unstructured or semi-structured interviews, observations, review of documents, etc. For this study, semi-structured interviews were used. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure collection.

The process of data collection for the study began with finding interviewees to participate. Considering the convenience of taking the interviews, I sent interview invitations to primary school teachers in the city I live-Tampere, the third-largest city in Finland, and it turned out that I found enough participants for my study within this area within two months. First, I sent invitations to a primary school via emails, one teacher-H replied to me, and she was very much interested in doing the interview. Then I contacted M, a teacher in the same school, who I knew for the other study that I have conducted with him, and he was glad to participate in the study. The third teacher joint the study was K, who also worked in the primary school. I knew her when I did observations to the school before. Apart from the first school, I also sent

interview invitations to teachers in two other primary schools in Tampere but there was no reply. My other two participants AL and U were recommended by one of my friends, they also worked as primary school teachers in Tampere and were willing to take part in the study.

Out of all the teachers contacted, three of the teachers wanted to conduct the interviews in their office at school, two teachers wanted to meet in a coffee shop. Upon meeting the teachers at their requested location, they were presented with a consent form. After signing the consent form, the interviews started and were recorded. The interviews were conducted using a six-question interview protocol. Follow-up questions were used as a way to elicit responses to obtain thick and rich data of the shared experiences teachers have with behavior management. Each interview lasted between forty minutes and an hour, and I took observational notes during each interview.

General questions to ask (Table 3-2) in an interview protocol was used to make sure that there was uniformity when interviewing the participants. However, there were also random or follow-up questions asked to gain further clarification on the meanings of words or concepts the teachers were expounding. The reason why follow-up questions were necessary is because the intention of a phenomenological study is to capture the unique meaning of the experience the participants are having, as expressed through dialogue and reflection (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). After the interviews, I transcribed the interviews within the weeks the interviews took place. Every transcript was sent to the interviewees to check the accuracy and after that, transcripts were prepared for coding.

Table 3-2

General Questions Asked in the Interviews

Questions

- 1 Please tell me about your background as a teacher: length of experience, teaching subjects, the type of school you work at, and any other pertinent information that you would like to share about as a teacher.
- 2 How is your relationship with the students and how you maintain it?
- 3 If students misbehave at school, what will your reaction be?
- 4 Have you encountered any cases that students challenge you during behavior management? If so, please describe your experiences and explain how you cope with it.

- 5 Have you ever lost your temper towards students during behavior management?
What are your mindsets and strategies in such situations?
 - 6 Apart from working out problems on your own, who do you usually go for help?
-

3.4.2 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted once all the interviews were completed. Moustaka's (1994) method of data analysis provided structure for the process of analyzing data. Qualitative research software NVivo was used to assist with the coding process.

The coding process began as I engaged in multiple readings of each interview transcript. During the reading, significant terms, sentences and quotes were highlighted. The data were uploaded to NVivo and categorized into different sections using various themes and codes. Then, emerging patterns were cross-checked to ensure they aligned with the research questions. Once the data were coded, frequencies of themes were calculated to identify patterns and key findings.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The four main findings in this chapter will be presented in the order of the research questions that have been asked in the interviews. The interviews were open with a question on the teacher-student relationship, to see if there exist any underlying conflicts in everyday teaching. Then it went straightforward to ask whether students challenge teacher's authority in behavior management as referred. Finally, the conversations moved to the practice of managing these challenges and the key to close the gap between teachers and students was unexpectedly revealed. The chapter closes with an analysis and a discussion on the four main themes.

In order to keep the custom of qualitative research by addressing the vital role of the researcher in data collection and description, this chapter is displayed in the first person (Hatch, 2002).

4.1 Theme 1: Controversial Climate-Both Free and Strict

4.1.1 Get along with each other like friends

When I asked teachers about their relationships with the students, most of them were quick to answer in a similar way without any hesitate-it is close. They indicated that they often have fun with students like friends, such as playing ball games, reading books and even chatting like friends.

Teacher AL, who used to be a kindergarten teacher and has 17 years of experience in primary school, addressed that every morning she warmly greet her students. She tried her best to find the positive characters of each student and help them appreciate themselves as well as others. She believed that this contributed to the warm and home-like feeling for her and her students.

Teacher H, currently a vice-principle as well as a special-needs teacher, who has been as a class teacher for 28 years, said that to know the students well is always the first step. The other teacher, K, an English and German language teacher who has taught since 1989, also stressed the importance to get to know the students first.

I love the kids. It's somehow from my heart. I always want to get to know the kids first. What kind of characters are they? What do they like? What kind of families do they have? And so on. Then, of course, I will tell them about myself.

To know each other well is like any beginning of a lovely friendship. From the talks, it is easy to understand that teachers and students in Finland get along like friends.

In addition, teacher M, who has worked as a class teacher for 13 years, maintained that he kept an open relationship with his students. It was also open for them to discuss and share their feelings. Though it was possible that sometimes students might get negative feedbacks like humiliation from the other students, or their words might be too challenging for teachers, a free atmosphere to express and discuss is still created and maintained by him. He was there to ensure that every individual student was able to speak out if they wished.

4.1.2 'If I'm saying something, I am not going backward.'

Limits, however, are at the same time everywhere. Teacher U, a 12-year-experienced teacher told me: *'To show them where the limits are is everyday life.'* Teachers not only stated a 'close' relationship with students, but in the interviews, they also mentioned how strict they were towards their students. *'Sometimes I teach kids from the same family. The bigger one would tell the smaller one that he or she knew AL and said, "she is really strict".'* Teacher AL said to me in a smile. She explained that her lessons were motivating and joyful, but everyone also need to respect others' feelings and needs, especially the need for learning.

Teacher H saw herself as a teacher combined with the characters of a friend and a strict educator. While in the interview, she looked into my eyes and talked seriously, trying to convince me the two controversial characteristics really exist in her. *'If I'm saying something, I am not going backward,'* teacher H said to me.

This both free and strict ‘conflict’ point came out from the teachers’ answers, is in line with what it was referred through literature studying before the interviews were taken. Nevertheless, what exactly it is going on in the everyday Finnish school behavior teaching and what sorts of problems teachers every day deal with would be the most interesting and valuable things to explore in the talks with the teachers.

4.2 *Theme 2: High Autonomy-Be Responsible for Themselves*

4.2.1 ‘behaviors always have the price.’

Teacher H explained that she balanced the ‘free and strict’ roles in her by drawing a clear distinction between ‘group rules’ and ‘individual rules’. While she was alone with the students, she respected the diversity of every single student and thus, they were totally free to share their feelings and to express their ideas to her, with shoulder patting or hugging sometimes. However, when it comes to groups, rules were different and every student has to follow the common rule for the best of the whole group. Some students were confused about the distinction and she sometimes needs to explain to them time by time, but both teacher H and teacher U thought it is an important ability to read different situations that students should learn.

Teacher U described ‘group rules’ were just like road rules for drivers and over-speed driving should get fines, she said: *‘Behaviors always have the price, you’ll get to know that your behaviors get consequences.’* In addition, teacher M told me that sometimes he took away some of the freedom of the students if they misbehaved, he mentioned: *‘If nothing would happen even after they behave badly, they’ll learn that they could actually behave in such a bad way.’* Every teacher in the interviews agreed that certain rules should certainly be followed even though their relationship with students were friendly and free.

Teachers usually have discussions on some common and basic rules with students, for example, no hitting is allowed, everyone at the school has the right to learn without being interrupted by someone else, and so forth. Students knew these rules well and the consequences followed with, so they were able to choose by themselves. *‘I treat them more like an adult.’* Teacher K said to me, *‘They are*

learning to be responsible for themselves by making decisions and taking the responsibilities every day.'

Teacher AL explained to me her understanding of students' autonomy. She thought students do enjoy high autonomy at school, since they could figure out problems themselves, think and share without any limitations. It cannot, however, merely focus on the benefits of themselves and instead, should think more about their obligation and responsibility to the whole class and the school.

In addition, teachers' guidance and even supervision are necessary during the practice instead of a way like herding. Teacher M told me that when one or two students misbehaved, he usually made a use of the break time to talk to them instead of doing it when the other students were self-studying, because *'I am not quite sure what will happen when I am not with them,'* he said while pointing to his five-grade students playing outside the room we had the conversation. For teacher M, behavior teaching is a dynamic process, as students are always learning rules by going back or forward, and therefore, teachers' help places a significant role behind the *'autonomous and independent'* look of students.

'I am going to have a discussion with my students in the next lesson, as some of them broke the rule of not disturbing others in the class. It is of course not the first time for me to talk about this with them.'

Teacher M said and invited me to observe his discussion with the students after the interview.

4.2.2 'Students are not robots.'

Teacher M showed me his texts on WhatsApp with the students on the night before the interview about their misbehavior in the class. He was on a day leave and it was a substituted teacher to have lessons for the students and several of them did not behave well. M translated the dialogues between him and his students to me. M asked them to raise their hands (with emoji) to show if they broke the rules. *'As you can see, more than ten raised their hands. I really didn't expect that many as the substituted teacher only told me it was several of them.'* Teacher M giggled and said, *'I texted the parents of several kids and most of them have already had conversations at home last night,*

which will make our today in-class discussion more effective.' During the discussion that teacher M and his students had, part of the school disciplines was displayed on the screen one by one. M sat in the middle and his students were half-surrounded him. M asked and students raised their hands and spoke their thoughts out, following by some comments by M. I could tell that the speaking flow of teacher M was steady and firm.

Most teachers in the interviews said there was a process of rules explanation and rules discussion during the behavior management. Students first should understand the reason that they have certain rules as well as the meanings of the rules. Teacher K said to me in the middle of giving the example of how she explained the rule of 'no humiliation' to her students, '*Students are not robots. If you give rules without explaining, it's of course no use.*' Teacher U also mentioned that sometimes she played games or used drama for her students in order to help them understand the underlying values and meanings of the rules.

4.2.3 Teachers do have confusions

'I'm thinking that when we are taking the students to plan and let them say their own opinions. Then the question is, what's the idea for them to say something if I have already planned that we are doing that way. Why they are saying then it is better to not even ask? It's making them feel stupid. They would think "She is asking. I am telling. But then she continues doing what he wants".'

Teacher H said. She confessed that how important should students' roles take sometimes did confused the teachers, especially the young teachers, although in most cases that rules discussion help students in behavior developing. It was hard for some teachers to figure out the point of discussing in some situations. It actually comes to the power conflicts between teachers and students at this point.

Teacher U mentioned one of her early teaching confusions to me. She thought she considered the students' feeling too much once and she did not even have any authority in front of her students, though it was the student who misbehaved. She recalled this with laughs and stated that she would never go back there. She said:

‘I was wondering at that time, for example, can I said to the kid, “Hey, it's not ok to hit others”? Or should I just ask: “How were you feeling when you're hitting the other? Why did you do that? Are you feeling ok?” (acting particularly gently) Of course, it's not that way. I mean, the idea is that sometimes teachers are afraid to say, ‘Now you shut up and listen to what I am telling you...’”

4.3 *Theme 3: Teacher Authority-Always Challenged by Students*

4.3.1 ‘Teachers still know more than children.’

The authority of teachers still remains significant in such a mutual-understanding and free-discussing environment as teachers depicted. *‘Teachers still know more than children, though they do not necessarily need to know everything.’* Teacher AL said. She thought teachers are still the leaders in school life since they were adults and it was their duty to take good care of the students. In addition, to make everybody agree with rules was not practical, when it had to reach agreements and guide students to follow, teachers’ authority plays an important and irreplaceable role.

Teacher M believed that teachers were like helmsmen for the students, who were making sure they were in the right direction all the time. Students were always trying to find the limits. *‘Not everyone is able to handle the freedom, and that’s the truth. We’ll have to try to fight against that all the time.’* Teacher M told me. It was his job or say his authority to deprive the freedom of his students sometimes when they misbehave. Teacher U also agreed that some basic disciplines like ‘no hitting’ were strictly guarded by teachers. In her opinion, teachers were adults in school, and it was their responsibility to maintain a safe environment for every student.

4.3.2 ‘Why is your word more important than mine?’

Talking about challenged by students, teacher K felt that challenges can be good, because it showed that students are thinking but are not just listening and obeying like robots. As a language teacher, K exchange ideas with her students at a high frequency. It was always an open and free atmosphere for her students to express and thus, her students sometimes gave very good insights that inspired her too. *‘One of the*

main things in our new Finish Curriculum is to teach students the ways of thinking and how to be critical.' Teacher K told me with proud.

Teacher H illustrated how she experienced challenges from students by using an example of a cap. Some students like wearing a cap when they were eating, teacher H told me, and she tried to tell them it was neither a good habit nor a polite way to do when eating, but some students did not agree with her and still keep their caps on.

'I can't see any sense why I have to take it out every time I eat, and I don't understand your idea when you're just saying that. I think wearing a cap is nice. Why is your word more important than mine?'

Teacher H said it by imitating the words from her students, which she thought was a typical challenge case in her teaching life. *'But when we have discussed it, at least they understood my way of thinking. Though maybe they still say that it's stupid, they know how and why I think in that way then.'* H added in a calm voice.

4.3.3 Lose temper? It happens.

When talking about the disagreements, I sensed that there might be actual arguments between my interviewees and their students and conflicts could go extreme in some circumstances, so I asked the dare question on whether teachers had any students who had ever made them want to lose their temper or ever drawn them crazy. Then, most of the teachers I asked reply me with either a laugh or a big smile, and said *'Yeah...'*

They told me that there were always a couple of students who challenged teachers a lot. *'Ten percent of students take about ninety percent of your time,'* teacher AL said, *'There have been classes that when they finished the sixth grade and go to the seventh, I've been quite happy.'* It was true that they had lost their temper on the students. It was not often at present but usually happened during the first years of their teaching. *'Once my colleague told me that she shouted at one of her students, and she just wanted to quit her job after that. Well, as for me, I nearly didn't lose my temper these years.'* Teacher U told me. Teacher K was also quite straight-out on this matter, *'You have to do it in a professional anyway. You can't yell at them. It's not professional, but it still happens.'*

4.4 *Theme 4: The Key-Students Should Feel Safe*

4.4.1 'I don't take it personally, but professionally.'

Nevertheless, teachers seemed to be confident enough to confront the conflicts in behavior teaching. *'I've never had the situation that I felt I can't cope with it. There have been situations that I felt I need help, but I always found some sort of solutions to work them out.'* Teacher M said. Speaking of ways to do in solving the problems with students, teachers gave me similar answers.

For instance, both teacher AL and teacher U thought to talk, to put into words were quite important in those circumstances. Teacher AL thought the ability to communicate well is the most important capability of teachers. She used her humor now and then to rebuild the relationship with her students.

Teacher U shared with me her steps when trying to talk with students. First, she might try to find the right time to have a conversation with the students, while sometimes both of them might need some space to cool down. Then, she would describe her feelings to the student in an objective way, rather than letting the emotions off. Later, she tried to figure out the reasons, analyze and find the solutions for the matter, and thus, tried to make him or her feeling better. The keys to dealing with those troubles U mentioned in the interview as well, which respectively were teachers' authority, respect and trust and empathy. She thought the efficiency of discussion highly relied on whether the teachers had authority and have respect from students, and those elements came from a good relationship between teachers and students.

Apart from working on their own, teachers turn to others for cooperation and help as well, such as parents, colleagues, principal and professional sectors in school. Teacher M had mentioned that he texted parents when their kids misbehaved, and he also told me that he drove between home and school every day and he shared his difficulties with his colleagues on car, who always understood and gave insights to him. Teacher K also said that her colleagues in her early years of teaching meant a great deal to her. In addition, professional sectors in school play a vital role in behavior management as well. *'Luckily, we had our own psychologist, school nurse and special-needs teachers in school here. Students can always get help.'* Teacher K

told me. There were also personal files for every student that teachers would get before they start schooling, so that teachers and the school could be well-prepared for all the possible problems they would confront in the future education.

‘So, come here and sit quietly, just cope with your own problems and we are not interested-that’s not our way. The best thing in our Finnish school system is that everybody knows that they can get help, they are never left alone with their problems.’

Teacher AL said to me with certainty.

4.4.2 Authority and autonomy are not against each other

‘Between the teacher’s authority and the students’ autonomy, there is not a gap as you said. I see it differently. Children need to feel safe. They would think that who is with them is an adult (stressed ‘adult’). Even that one can be young, but they know that one is going to take care of them if something happens.’

Teacher H said. When talking about young teachers might not be strong as well as certain enough to grow their authority as a leader among the students, teacher H gave me an interesting point indeed. It was the security needs that make students to trust and respect their teachers and in fact link them together, in a natural way of connection.

Coincidentally, teacher K also talked about security needs for students in our conversation. *‘The main thing in primary school is trust and to feel safe.’* She said. It was not only physically, but also mentally. She gave me an easy example that if some arguments happened on students and they had not been solved yet before the lesson began, they would not be able to behave well at all during the class as those tiny things were big to the little ones. She told me:

‘If the students don’t feel safe, they can’t concentrate. They are thinking about what is going to happen next. If something disturbs the kids, they can’t get motivated, and then the lesson would be none. My main job to assure that everybody is feeling well, and they can go on with their learning.’

Therefore, having a sense of security for students was fundamental to all the behaviors of students in school according to the teachers in the interview. Even when

something terrible happens, like someone got angry, students had no need to worry about since teachers would handle it well and handle it in a professional way in order to protect the students.

4.4.3 ‘Not me myself goes first but the students.’

During the interview, teachers told me that whenever they noticed a problem, they reacted quickly, and tried to find ways to help as soon as possible rather than ignore it, because it was simply teachers’ responsibility to handle various problems every day. The word ‘adult’ was used a lot of times in the interviews when talking about the duty of teachers. *‘I’m an adult here and I ought to behave like an adult, be able to take the responsibility of noticing things and finding the ways of helping.’* Teacher AL said.

‘Being a professional teacher means always work for the best of students and their families.’ Teacher K told me. From her perspective, it should not be thinking merely about the own schedules of teachers themselves, nor whether they were having a group of easy-to-teach students. *‘Not me myself goes first but the students.’* Teacher K said, *‘We are always working for the best and for the best of their families. That is something that always in my heart as well.’* She believed that only by having this mindset, can teachers work professionally in their everyday school life.

4.5 Discussion

4.5.1 Relationship-both free and strict

As shown in Figure 4-1 below, teachers in the interviews indicated their relationship with students was twofold-both free and strict. The former was in line with the previous studies that the teacher-student relationship in Finland was equal. To be more specific, teachers in the interviews described it as close, friendly, open free and warm like a home, as warm-greeting and friendly-talking with students were often cases at school. This kind of positive climate is essential because it is indeed the foundation for students’ growth and learning at school (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Lomax, 2000).

Students are granted a high level of autonomy in the power relationship. To put it into practice, it means that students are responsible for themselves to a great extent, whenever it is in rule-establishing, decision-making, or consequence-taking. Students are treated more like adults than children in the practice of behavior management. Ackerman (1980) noted that autonomy can only be realistic if three elements are fulfilled: be informed by a range of possibilities; a decision must be well thought out; this right has to exist in a context of freedom, respect and equality. From the interviews, practices in Finnish behavior management corresponding to each of these three elements are explicit. First, students are informed by the choices and possible consequences followed by. Then, based on the understanding of the rules, they know what it will take if they make different decisions. During the practice, teachers give intervention and guidance time by time. Thus, students' ability to make the right decisions is enhanced by making right or wrong ones and the process of learning is back and forth as the teachers stated in the interviews. Finally, an open, free and equal teacher-student relationship provides a positive environment for students' autonomy to grow.

The benefits of supporting student's autonomy and minimizing the power differential between teachers and students have been proven by studies. Studies indicate that interpersonal respect between educators and students has a positive relationship with the level of autonomy that students have (O'Grady, 2015). In addition, according to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), it is the autonomy that helps students to transfer the external regulated behaviors to an internal mindset of discipline. (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Nevertheless, apart from the autonomy of students, the authority of teachers was given much attention as well during the interviews and it mainly represents the strict part of the power relationship. Teachers believed that teacher authority is necessary because it is their role to set limits for students whenever it is needed. They have the power to deprive some freedom of students if they misbehave, such as cutting their time of playing. Further, teachers take the responsibility to hold the rules, mostly the rules designed for the whole class or the school, to make sure that they are going towards the same goal instead of diverging or falling behind. When it is necessary like during a fire drill, teachers also give quick and direct demand without much discussion or flexibility. The importance of building authority in teachers and exerting their control is explicitly addressed from the model of the social system for classroom

management, since merely rules and training routines are not sufficient to keep learning and teaching in order (Benware et al.,2017; Vaaland, 2017).

To further analyze the authority of teachers in Finland, a comprehensive and influential theory of power bases from French and Raven (1959) can be utilized. There are six bases of power in the theory: (1) coercion; (2) reward; (3) legitimacy; (4) expertise; (5) reference; (6) information. These six power bases are not totally independent from each other and several bases can be employed at the same time. Based on the interviews, teachers in Finland usually exert two kinds of power-(3) legitimacy and (5) reference, with the others especially (1) coercion was hardly relevant. The term ‘reference’ will be discussed in the next session. In terms of ‘legitimacy’, it means a request based on the mutual agreement of individuals in the relationship. In the Finnish school context, teachers and students reach a mutual agreement towards the disciplines in a form of rules. Teachers act the role of navigating students’ behaviors and students consent to follow the rules; students have the freedom to express, to decide and influence the rule-making process which teachers should also respect.

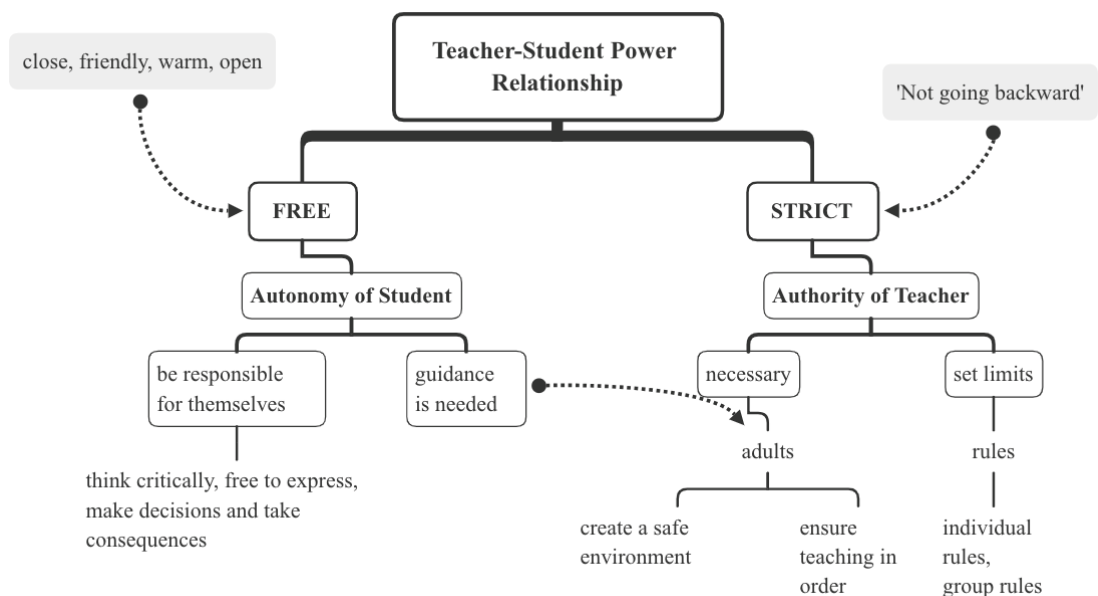


Figure 4-1 *Teacher-student power relationship-Both Free and Strict*

4.5.2 Conflicts and strategies

According to the interviews, teachers did encounter power-related conflicts with students during the process of behavior management. Conflicts were derived from

classroom disruptions, eating manners, personal humiliations and attacks, and so forth. Dividing the conflictual situations between teachers and students by the extent of intense, respectively there were disagreements, challenges, arguments, disruptions and emotional loss of control. Teachers confessed that the extreme cases of losing temper or shouting to students did happen during the early years of teaching. They were struggling with a balance between their authority and students' autonomy at that time. However, the recent years they had reached a relatively balanced relationship with students, and what happened more often in daily teaching were disagreements and small arguments.

The strategies dealing with conflicts in behavior management teachers mentioned in the interviews can be divided into inner strategies and outer strategies (Figure 4-2). Inner strategies refer to the strategies that are mainly designed and conducted by teachers themselves, and outer strategies means the ones that teachers go for external supports. The discussion of strategies below will be presented one by one.

The initial inner strategy is to fulfill the security needs of students. According to the words of three teachers in the interview- teacher U, teacher H and teacher K, they believed that it was the security needs of their students that bound their relationship. What makes students put trust in teachers is that teachers are adults and they will surely stay with the students no matter what happens. This mindset is especially important in primary education as students need protection physically and mentally. This can be explained by the power bases from French and Raven (1959). This kind of mental connection between teachers and students can refer to the 'reference' power base. In terms of 'reference', it refers to an emphasis on belongingness and commonality in the power relationship. Finnish teachers exert 'reference' power by building such a safe, trust and caring relationship with students. They shoulder the responsibility and promise the students that they are reliable anytime. It is then like both teachers and students are having the same belief so that they are ready to confront all the conflicts in the near future, instead of a broken relationship that each subjective fight against with each other. In other words, in this mindset, the autonomy of students is no longer against the authority of teachers.

The other inner strategy related to 'reference' power of teachers is to build a positive relationship with students. Teachers in the interviews indicated that when they came to disagreements with students, they took a series of professional interventions, but the effectiveness of these interventions primarily depended on their

relationships. If the relationship is caring, trust and respect, it would be much easier for teachers to talk through the problems and avoid the misbehavior to take place next time. In addition, some researchers have identified that disruptive behaviors would decrease if teachers tend to build a caring and equal relationship in the classroom and have a bond with the students. (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008; Rusk, 2016). Thus, a good relationship acts at the same time both the destination and the vehicle towards the journey of behavior management.

The third inner strategy, as discussed above, teachers set rules to regulate students' behaviors, and rules become a deal between teachers and students. It requires thorough explanation for the rules beforehand, and students feel free to express their critical views and discuss in an open atmosphere. This process goes back and forth. Whenever an explanation and discussion are needed, it would take place. There is evidence that rules, if used effectively, can contribute to a caring, respect and trust environment in classroom settings (Sternberg & Williams, 2010).

To keep professional when confronting power-related conflicts with students is the fourth inner strategy from the experiences of teachers. Teachers emphasized the significance of communication when talking about their professional strategies. Before starting the conversations, teachers usually helped students let off their feelings. It is a strategy that has been examined to improve the quality of conversation, while conversely, trying to suppress emotions is proven to have even more negative interaction in the relationship (Sutton et al., 2009). The conversations are led by a specific and pragmatic result that both of the teacher and student are willing to achieve. Conversations are so vital that if they are taken effectively and cooperatively, the most beneficial results can arise according to the theory of Lewis and Burman (2008).

As for outer strategies, teachers turn to their colleagues, principal, professional sectors at school and parents to work with the conflicts. Teachers mentioned in the interviews that sometimes they need a third person to help shifting the mindsets, a third person who might have more professional educational skills or have a bigger authority, and maybe someone who had experience in the situation. It is worth noting that schools in Finland are well-supported by professional sectors, including psychologists, special-needs teachers and social workers throughout the whole basic education. Professional supporters are there to help some students on a regular basis

so that students and teachers have the confidence that they can always get help not only on academic matters, but also on behavioral problems (Sahlberg, 2015).

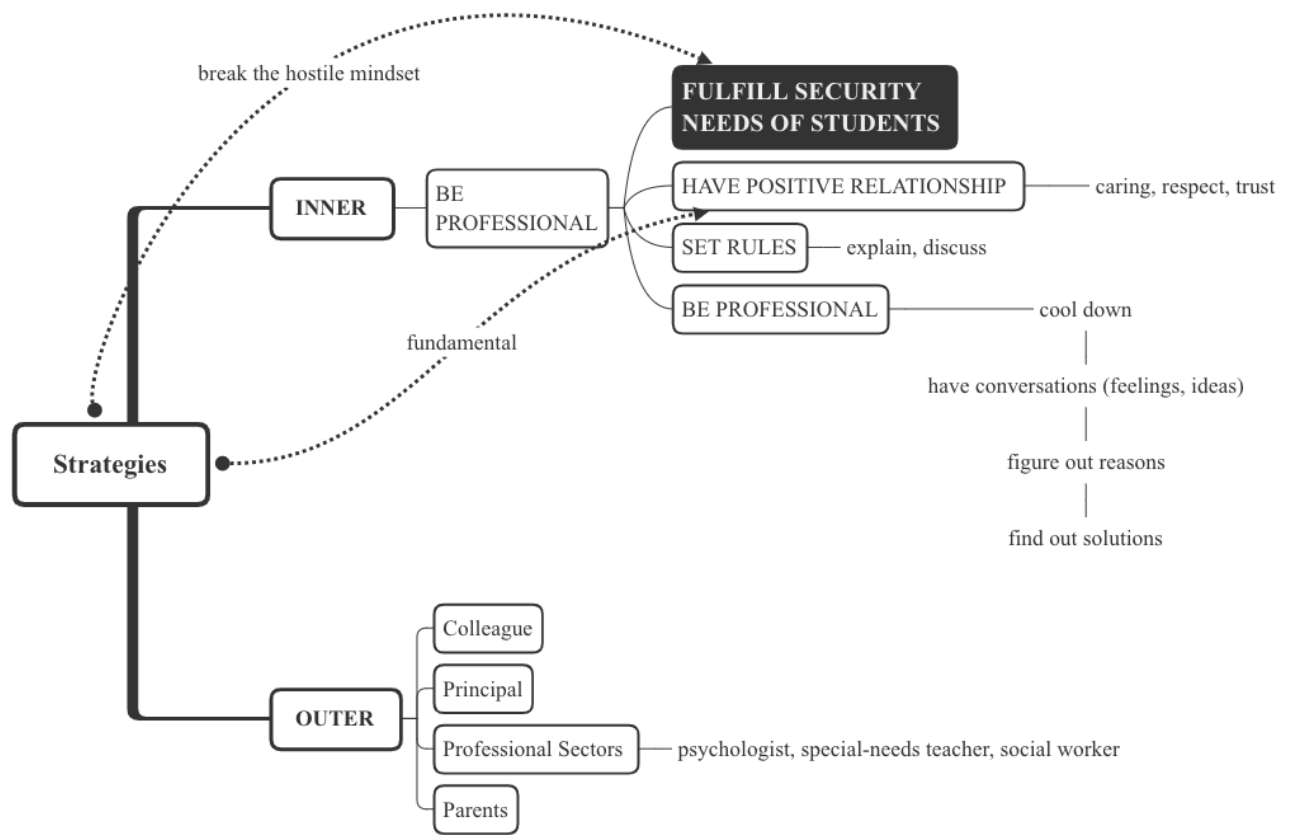


Figure 4-2 *Strategies for Power-related Conflicts*

5 IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 *Summary of the Study*

The objective of this study is to investigate the teacher-student power relationship in Finnish behavior management. Considering the difficulties of behavior management in school (Meister & Melnick, 2003) and the decline of authority of teachers in modern western society (Heelas et al., 1996), how to confront the power-related conflicts in managing students' behavior has become one of the top concerns of teachers. Examining the experience of Finnish education-the 'world's best education' (Sahlberg, 2011), therefore, might give insight to responding this concern. Few studies, however, discuss how Finnish teachers experience and manage power-related conflicts with students.

To fill in this research gap, interviews with five teachers in Finnish primary schools and data analysis were conducted. As shown in Figure 5-1, teacher-student power relationship in Finland is both free and strict. Results showing the great extent of freedom and autonomy students in Finnish classroom have is in line with the previous studies (Berner et al., 2015; Fraser & Walberg, 2005; Heo et al., 2018; Toom & Husu, 2012). However, the authority of Finnish teachers is explicitly unfolded in this study. Teachers believed that authority is necessary, and they should be strict enough to set limits for students in daily teaching.

Regarding the experience of conflicts, teachers confessed that they had encountered various kinds of conflicts with students, ranging from daily disagreements, classroom disruptions to arguments and emotion outburst. More intense the conflicts were, earlier they took place in their teaching careers. Most of the extreme cases were in the first years of teaching, and with more than ten or twenty years of teaching, they have managed to deal with most of the conflicts.

Strategies of Finnish teachers confronting the conflicts can be divided into inner strategies and outer strategies. The most important and inspiring one of the inner strategies is to break the mindset of putting teachers and students against each other. Though autonomy of students and authority of teachers seemed to be inevitably in conflict, teachers and students are in fact bound by the natural needs of security to fulfil from students, as teachers stated in the interviews. It is teachers' responsibility, as adults, to always protect and help students no matter what happens, therefore, having the same goal together dismisses the conflicts and creates a sense of 'belongingness' between them (French & Raven, 1959). Apart from this mindset, both of the power of teachers and students are regulated by rules, which is called 'legitimacy' power from French and Raven (1959). In addition, when facing conflicts, teachers usually cope it with professional skills and turn to other professionals in school for help as well.

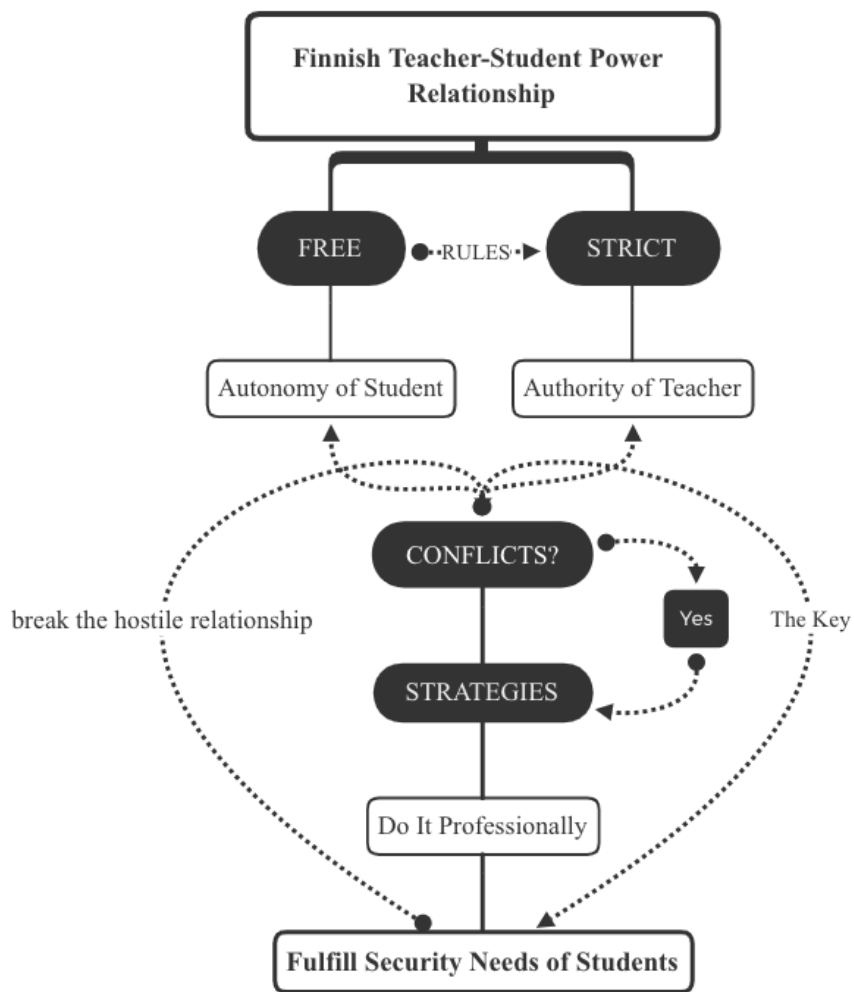


Figure 5-1 *Finnish Teacher-Student Power Relationship in a Nutshell*

5.2 *Implications*

The study aims at presenting whether power-related conflicts exist between teachers and students in Finnish behavior management, along with the intention to show how teachers confronted the conflicts and maintained a relatively balanced power relationship with students. One of the most important implications is that there should be a critical view towards the power relationship between teachers and students. On one hand, power-related conflicts are inevitable, even in the place the 'world's best education' located (Sahlberg, 2011). Especially during the beginning of teaching career, it is normal for teachers to have frustrations and stress on behavior management and power relationship with students. It is a fact that every novice teacher should notice and be prepared before choosing their teaching career. On the other hand, however, it is possible, as proven by the Finnish experience, to cope with these relationship conflicts and balance the authority of teachers and autonomy of students as teachers putting efforts in behavior management in classroom. The growth might take years but the belief of building a peaceful power relationship with students should not be abandoned.

Another implication is not to hold a hostile view towards the power relationship between teachers and students. The authority of teachers and autonomy of students are not against each other, but target a same goal to fulfil the security needs of students. Teachers can learn to detect students' instinctive needs of feeling safe and try to act as someone who is reliable enough for students. Thus, a trust and respect relationship between teachers and students, instead of a controlling or repelling one can grow. Furthermore, for educational researchers, they can put effort into studying the correlation between students' security fulfillment and teacher-student relationship to provide insights into further implications.

5.3 *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

There are three limitations in this research and suggestions for future research can be drawn from these limitations. First is the ethical concern. In the data collection process, though transcriptions of interviews were sent to interviewees for review, there still might have misleading or false data to appease the interviewer. Further, as a

novice researcher, the reliability of the study could be higher if I have carried out a pilot interview before the data collection.

In addition, this research examines the teacher-student power relationship in Finland merely from the perception of teachers. Teachers can provide their own experience in power relationship management with students, however, it is limited since students' or parents' perception, or observations are not included to provide an overall picture of the power relationship between teacher and student in Finland.

The other limitation is the sample size. This study was conducted with five teachers in Tampere, Finland, while three of them are from a same primary school. It has the limitation of not presenting a general and various view of the teacher-student power relationship in Finland, which also lies in the nature of qualitative study to focus more on sample subject's characteristics than a large quantity.

For future research, as stated in the discussion section, correlation between security needs of students and teacher-student relationship can be further examined. Regarding the limitations of the study, future research can work on observations of Finnish behavior management in classroom, perceptions from students and parents, as well as expanding the participant number and variety in a qualitative study to increase the scope and depth of the research. It would also be beneficial if local studies in Finnish can be examined and compared to this preliminary research, so that a more comprehensive picture and richer experience of power relationship between teachers and students in Finland can be provided.

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