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AUTHOR Deslandes, Rollande; Leclerc, Danielle; Dore-Cote, Annie
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ABSTRACT

Research suggests links between authoritative parenting style, parental involvement, autonomy, and school performance during adolescence. This study examined the nature of change over a 2-year period of parenting style, parenting involvement, and autonomy among special education students; compared these variables among regular and special education students; and attempted to assess the direction of influence of parenting style and involvement in schooling practices on regular and special education students' level of autonomy. Participants were from the first two waves of two 3-year longitudinal studies. The sample of Study 1 included 866 regular education students with an average of 14.4 years at Time 1. The Study 2 sample included 350 special education students with a mean age of 15.4 years at Time 1. Participants completed the Student Report of Autonomy, the Student Report of Parenting Style, and the Student Report of Parent Involvement twice over 2 years. Findings indicated no difference over time of parenting and autonomy measures among special education students. Special education students scored lower on autonomy than their regular education same-age peers. Special education students also reported lower parental supervision, lower parental psychological autonomy granting, and lower parental affective support. The direction of influence of parenting style on autonomy differed between regular and special education students. No significant relationship was observed between parental involvement in schooling and special education students' autonomy. On the other hand, reciprocal relationships were observed with regular education students. This study provides evidence for the importance of developing autonomy of special education students. Longitudinal data should be maintained and analyzed to clarify mutually interactive processes in parent-adolescent interactions of both regular and special education students. (Contains 34 references and 6 tables.) (Author/KB)

Longitudinal studies of special education and regular students: autonomy, parental involvement practices and degree of reciprocity in parent-adolescent interactions

Rollande DESLANDES, Ph.D.[1]
Danielle LECLERC, Ph.D.,
Annie DORÉ-Côté, Doctoral candidate
CRIRES Research Center
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières
Québec, Canada, G9A 5H7

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests links between authoritative parenting style, parental involvement, autonomy and school performance during adolescence. This study examined the nature of change over a two-year period of parenting style, parenting involvement and autonomy among special education students; compared these variables among regular and special education students and attempted to assess the direction of influence of parenting style and involvement in schooling practices on regular and special education students' level of autonomy. Exactly 866 regular and 350 special education students have completed the questionnaires. Results indicated no difference over time of parenting and autonomy measures among special education students. Special education students scored lower on autonomy than their regular education same age peers. Special education students also reported lower parental supervision, lower parental psychological autonomy granting and lower parental affective support. The direction of influence of parenting style on autonomy differed between regular and special education students. No significant relationship was observed between parental involvement in schooling and special education students autonomy. On the other hand, reciprocal relationships were observed with regular education students. This study provides evidence for the importance of developing autonomy of special education students. Longitudinal data should be maintained and analyzed to clarify mutually interactive process in parent-adolescent interactions of both regular and special education students.

[1] Correspondence concerning this presentation should be addressed to Dr. Rollande Deslandes, *e-mail*: Rollande_Deslandes@uqtr.uquebec.ca. This research was supported by grants to the first author from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

INTRODUCTION

The results from nearly thirty years of research suggest that students of all ages and economic backgrounds are likely to benefit from authoritative parenting style (i.e., warmth, supervision and psychological autonomy granting) and parental involvement in their schooling (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Deslandes, 1996; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Herman, Dornbusch, Herron, & Herting, 1997; Lee, 1994; Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Studies also show that adolescents who have achieved high levels of autonomy perform better in school than their peers do (e.g., Deslandes, Potvin, & Leclerc, 2000; Greenberger, 1982, 1984; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Results indicate that regular education students at the secondary level who feel that their parents are warm, highly autonomy supportive (i.e., who encourage their individuality within the family), and involved in their schooling through affective support (encouragement, praise, help with homework when asked, discussions on courses to choose and attendance at school as audience) perceive themselves as being more autonomous. However, parents seem to react to their low level of autonomy by interacting on daily matters (e.g., questions about school, grades, and homework) (Deslandes & Potvin, 1999; Deslandes, Potvin, & Leclerc, 2000). Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Greenberger, 1984; Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Paulson & Sputa, 1996; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), Deslandes (2000) found that, within a two-year span, regular education students showed increases in autonomy, and reported higher parental psychological autonomy granting and lower parental warmth and parent-school communication. Even though some authors claim that both parents and child seek to modulate the behavior of the other in a mutually interactive process (Bell, 1968; Belsky, 1984; Sanson & Rothbart, 1995), so far, our analyses with regular education students have not given clear cut results (Deslandes, 2000). To our knowledge, no attempt has yet been made to assess the nature and the direction of influences of specific parenting and parental involvement in schooling practices on special education students' level of autonomy.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of these portions of two larger studies was to examine the following key questions : (a) Do special education students increase their autonomy over a two-year period and do parental practices evolve over a two-year period? (b) How do special education students levels of autonomy and parental practices compare to those of same age regular education students? (c)

What is the direction of influence between parental practices and special education students autonomy, and between parental practices and regular education students autonomy?

METHOD

Participants

Participants were from the first two waves of two three-year longitudinal studies. The sample of Study 1 was composed of 866 regular education students (girls = 465; boys=401; mean age= 14.4 years, at time1), and the sample of Study 2 included 350 special education students (girls = 130; boys=220; mean age= 15.4 years at time 1). In the present study, Time 1 special education students (mean age=15.4 years) were compared to Time 2 regular students (mean age= 15.4 years). Special education students all had learning difficulties or behavior problems, and had repeated more than one class. Regular education students at time 1 were secondary II adolescents (i.e., 8th grade). The participants were attending five public high schools in urban, suburban and rural areas of the Mauricie Bois-Francs, Monteregie and Montreal regions in Quebec. About 70% of regular education students lived with their two biological parents as opposed to 60% of special education students. Nearly 37% of the mothers and fathers of special education students, as compared to 40% of regular education students, had completed a high school or a vocational school diploma. About 20% of the special education mothers and fathers had attended either college or university against 35% of regular education students.

Measures

Student Report of Autonomy (Greenberger, Josselson, Knerr, & Knerr, 1975). Autonomy or the capacity to function effectively (individual adequacy) is part of the concept of psychosocial maturity, along with interpersonal adequacy and social adequacy. A translated and adapted version of the three 10-item subscales (i.e., self-reliance, work orientation and identity) of the autonomy scale of the Psychosocial Maturity Inventory (Form D) was used. The scoring was based on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (very often). A global autonomy score was composed of scores on the three subscales. The latter ones were shown to have good reliability and validity (Deslandes et al., 1999). The work-orientation subscale measures the adolescent's work skills, aspirations for competent work performance, and capacity to experience pleasure in work. The internal reliability of this subscale in the present study was quite good (Cronbach's alpha was .85). A sample item from this subscale, reverse scored, is " I tend to go from one thing

to another before finishing any one of them ". The self-reliance subscale assesses the absence of dependence on others, a sense of control, and self-initiative. A sample item, reverse code, is " The main reason I'm not more successful is that I have bad luck from this ". The internal reliability of this subscale was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha was .71). The identity subscale measures the adolescent's sense of self-esteem, concern with life goals, internalization of values, and clarity of self-concept. A sample item, reverse scored, is "I can't really say what my interests are ".

Student Report of Parenting Style (Steinberg et al., 1992). Parenting style refers to a general child-rearing pattern that characterizes parents' behaviors toward their child. This measure is a translated and adapted version of the three subscales developed by Steinberg et al. (1992): warmth, supervision and psychological autonomy granting. As shown in previous studies in the Quebec context, the alphas ranged from .73 to .86 (Deslandes et al., 1995; Deslandes, 1996; Deslandes et al., 1997). The first subscale, entitled warmth, measures the extent to which the adolescent perceives his or her parents as loving, responsive, and involved (sample item: "I can count on my parents to help me out, if I have some kind of problem," 10 items; alpha= 86). The second subscale, called supervision, assesses parental monitoring of the adolescent (sample item: "Your parents really know what you do with your free time," 6 items; alpha=..80). The third subscale, labeled psychological autonomy granting, measures the extent to which parents employ democratic discipline and encourage the adolescent to express individuality with the family (sample item, reverse score: "My parents answer my arguments by saying something like 'You'll know better when you grow up,' " 8 items; alpha=.80).

Student Report of Parent Involvement (Epstein, Connors & Salinas, 1993, Q-3): Parental involvement in schooling refers to the parents' role in their child's education at home and at school (Christenson, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). A five-dimension scale was adapted from questionnaires designed by Epstein et al. (1993). The resulting subscales, which include twenty parental involvement activities, at home and at school, are labeled as follows: (a) affective support (sample item: "My mother gives me encouragement about school," 6 items, α= 0.82); (b) communication with the teachers (sample item: "My mother talks with my teachers on the phone," 4 items, α= 0.73); (c) parent-adolescent interactions based on daily school matters (sample item: "My mother asks if I did my

homework," 4 items, α= 0.80); (d) parent-school communication (sample item: "A parent goes to a meeting for parents at the school," 3 items, α= 0.59); and (e) parent-adolescent communication (sample item: "My mother discusses with me about my future (work, studies)," 3 items, α = 0.65). Adolescents' perceptions of mothers' and fathers' involvement were measured, and then, averaged in order to obtain global parental scores. affective support, communication with the teachers, parent-adolescent day-to-day interactions on school matters, parent-school and parent-adolescent communication (Deslandes et al., 1995; Deslandes, 1996; Deslandes et al., 1997; Deslandes, 2000).

Procedures

Authorization was obtained from the Quebec Commission d'accès à l'information to conduct our studies without having to go through official parental consent. Students participated on a voluntary basis. The questionnaires were administered during the spring of 1998 and 1999 for Study 1, and during the fall of 1998 and 1999 for Study 2. Data were based on the youth self-reports.

RESULTS

Evolution of autonomy, parenting and parental involvement practices among special education students

Paired *t* tests were conducted to verify the statistical significance of score differences between special education autonomy, parenting and parental involvement practices in 1998 and in 1999. As Table 1 shows, no significant differences were identified suggesting that the scores were similar.

Table 1, about here

Comparison of autonomy, parenting and parental involvement practices among same age special education and regular education students

Group differences in levels of autonomy, parenting and parental involvement practices were tested through the use of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of the three factor-based

variables that emerged in the descriptive portion of the investigation: education stream, family structure and parental education. They were followed by univariate analyses.

With regard to levels of autonomy, significant overall main effects were found only for education stream (see Table 2). Regular students reported higher levels of autonomy, and more specifically, of work orientation, self-reliance and identity (p =.000) when compared to special education students.

Table 2, about here

Concerning parenting style dimensions, significant overall main effects were found for education stream (regular/special education students, p =.000), family structure (traditional/non-traditional families, p =.000) and parental education (elementary/secondary/post-secondary studies, p =.006) (see Table 3) . The interaction of education stream and family structure was also significant (p =.002). Results for the univariate test for the independent variable education stream revealed higher parental supervision and higher psychological autonomy granting (p =.000) reported by regular education students than by special education students. Regular education students from traditional families revealed higher levels of parental supervision than regular education students from non-traditional families and special education students from traditional and non-traditional families (p =.000).

Table 3, about here

With respect to parental involvement in schooling, significant main effects were found for education stream (p =.000), family structure (p =.000) and parental education (p =.000). The interaction between education stream and family structure (p =.000) was also significant. Regular education students as compared to special education students, scored higher on affective support (p =.04), lower on communication with the teachers (p =.000), on parent-school communication (i.e., meetings at school) (p =.000), and parent-adolescent communication (p =.000). Parent-school communication was found higher among regular education students from traditional

families and special education students from traditional and non-traditional families than among regular education students from non-traditional families (p =.000).

Table 4, about here

Direction of influence between parental practices and students autonomy

To answer the question as to whether parental practices are stronger causes of adolescents' autonomy than the latter one is of parental practices, multiple cross-lagged correlations were computed separately for special education and regular education students across the two waves of measurement (Cook, Dintzer & Melvin, 1980). After controlling for parental education, family structure and sex, the parenting practices results indicated an unidirectionality between special education students autonomy (time 1) and parental warmth (time 2), autonomy leading to more parental warmth, and a reciprocity between autonomy and parental psychological autonomy granting, the latter one being more a contributor than an antecedent to autonomy. As for regular education students, consistent patterns of reciprocity emerged suggesting equal weights of influence between adolescents autonomy and parental warmth and a causal priority of adolescents autonomy (time 1) in predicting psychological autonomy granting (time 2).

Table 5, about here

No significant relationships were observed over time between parental involvement practices and special education students autonomy. On the opposite, parent-adolescent relationships with regard to parental involvement activities and regular education students autonomy showed very good reciprocity. The most important reciprocal relationships were found between parental affective support, parent-adolescent communication and students autonomy, meaning that affective support and parent-adolescent communication lead to students autonomy and that students autonomy precedes affective support and parent-adolescent communication.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was threefold: (a) to explore special education students levels of autonomy and parental practices over a two-year period; (b) to compare the data with that of regular education students, and (c) to identify the direction of influence between parental practices and regular and special education students autonomy.

The major findings were as follows:

- Special education students autonomy and corresponding parenting practices did not evolve over a two-year span.
- As compared to same age peers in the regular stream, special education students scored lower on autonomy and more specifically on work orientation, self-reliance and identity.
- With regard to parenting practices, special education students reported lower levels of parental supervision and psychological autonomy granting.
- Concerning parental involvement in schooling, data on special education students revealed lower parental affective support, but more frequent parent-adolescent communications, more frequent parent and school communications (e.g., meetings for parents at school) and more frequent communications with teachers.
- As for the direction of influence with parenting practices, special education students autonomy contributes to evoke parental warmth whereas with regular education students, reciprocity exists between parental warmth and students autonomy. Reciprocity is also found between parental psychological autonomy granting and special education and regular students autonomy.
- With respect to the direction of influence between parental involvement in schooling practices and autonomy, no reciprocal relationship was observed among special education students. On the other hand, reciprocity was observed with regular education students, the two most important reciprocal relationships being parental affective support and students autonomy, and parent-adolescent communication and autonomy.

The following section discuss very briefly each of these findings.

Contrary to prior work with regular education students which indicated higher levels of autonomy and more specifically of work orientation and self-reliance over a two-year span (Deslandes, 2000), the present study reveals no difference over time with special education students. Compared to same age regular students, special education students perceive themselves as less autonomous, that is, less work-oriented and less self-reliant. They also report lower scores on their general self-concept and their self-esteem. Put in other words, special education students do not describe themselves as hard-workers, as being persistent and as having initiative, a sense of control and pleasure in work. Interestingly, past research has shown that autonomy and mainly work-orientation is positively associated with school grades (Deslandes, Potvin, & Leclerc, 2000; Greenberger, 1982, 1984; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Such results are not surprising given that special education students are considered at-risk students.

These data reflect special education characteristics often reported in the literature. One way to help special education students develop their psychosocial maturity or their autonomy would be to provide opportunities to develop goal-setting strategies, planning strategies and skills required to succeed in school and in life (Eisenberger, Contin-D'Antonio & Bertrando, 2000; Rich, 1988).

Our data also suggest that special education parents do not change their involvement behaviors over a two-year period. These results differ from that obtained with regular education students (Deslandes, 2000). Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Lee, 1994; Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Paulson & Sputa, 1996), older regular education students had reported less parental warmth, more psychological autonomy granting, lower parent-school communication (i.e., less parental attendance at a school meeting and less talking to other parents about school). There was also a tendency for higher parent-adolescent communication. Thus, parents of regular education students appeared to use their adolescents' autonomy as a regulator of their own actions, tailoring their parenting efforts to them (Grolnick, Weiss, McKenzie, & Wrightman, 1996; Maccoby, Snow, & Jacklin, 1984). In fact, one of the major challenges that parents of adolescents must face is to maintain the fit between adolescents needs and the expression of their affective relationship (Jacobs & Eccles, 2000).

When compared to parents of the regular stream, parents of special education were perceived as exerting less supervision, offering less psychological autonomy granting and manifesting less affective support. In corollary, they were involved in more frequent communications with

teachers, more parent and school communications and more parent and adolescent communications. In a previous study, Deslandes et al. (2000) have found that parental warmth, supervision, psychological autonomy granting, affective support and parent-adolescent communication contribute to the prediction of students autonomy. Thus, special education students seem to be lacking the effective parental manifestations of behaviors recognized as key factors which lead to autonomy. Moreover, special education parents appear to react to low levels of autonomy by getting in touch more often with the teachers and by going more often to parents meetings at school. One positive behavioral manifestation of special education parents is that they increase, over a two-year period, the communication with their adolescent about current events, future plans and about time management. According to Nurmi and Pulliainen (1991, cited in Henricson & Roker, 2000), such behaviors are beneficial to adolescents rendering them more optimistic than others.

Our results suggest a reciprocal nature of parenting practices and regular education students autonomy. Parental behaviors promote adolescents autonomy that, in turn, promotes school achievement (Deslandes & Potvin, 1999; Deslandes, Potvin & Leclerc, 2000). At the same time, adolescents autonomy contributes to the quality of parenting. The main reciprocal links were observed between students autonomy on one part, and parental warmth, psychological autonomy granting, affective support and parent-adolescent communication, on the other part.

As far as special education is concerned, the only identified reciprocal relationship was between parental psychological autonomy granting and students autonomy. Findings indicate an unidirectional relationship between students autonomy and parental warmth. Put in concrete words, it suggests that autonomy provokes parental warmth but not the reverse. In that particular case, parents seem to use their perceptions of their adolescents' autonomy to regulate their own behavior.

Part of the mentioned results may have a few explanations. For example, special education students' repeated failures and behavior problems may have led parents to withdraw from involvement (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Deslandes, Royer, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 2001). Furthermore, special education students may be more or less open to parenting practices (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

A number of important observations emerge from our analyses. First, the results indicate that, contrary to regular education, special education students autonomy does not increase across a two-year period. Second, parents of special education students do not seem to modify their parenting and parental involvement practices over the two-year period. Third, when autonomy, parenting and parental involvement practices of special and regular education students of the same age are compared, important differences are observed. Thus, special education students score lower on autonomy, parental supervision, psychological autonomy granting and affective support. However, special education students report higher levels of parent-teacher communication, parent-school communication and parent-adolescent communication. One plausible explanation could be that because special education experience more academic and behavior problems, parents contact teachers, attend school meetings, and discuss with their adolescents about future plans more often. Obviously, special education students seem to lack the parental support to autonomy in terms of parental supervision, psychological autonomy granting and affective support, three parental practices previously identified as effective with regular education students (Deslandes & Potvin, 1999; Deslandes, 2000; Deslandes et al., 2000). Except for the relationship between students autonomy and psychological autonomy granting, there seems to be a lack of reciprocity and in many cases, of significant relationships between special education students autonomy and parental practices.

Despite some limitations (e.g., small special education sample), this study provides evidence for the importance of developing autonomy of special education students (i.e., work orientation, self-reliance and identity). Parents should be aware of the role they play in enhancing students autonomy. Workshops or parenting conferences or classes should be designed to provide parents with knowledge and strategies to increase their parenting skills. Specific topics of these activities should include ways to help parents become involved in their adolescents schooling in age and development-appropriate ways. In a like manner, special education students should be sensitized to the benefits of reciprocal parent-adolescent relationships. Likewise, preservice teachers should be equipped with knowledge of the literature linking parenting and parental involvement activities and students autonomy. Finally, longitudinal data should be maintained and analyzed to

clarify the absence of mutually interactive process in parent-adolescent interactions of special education students.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations and Paired Sample *t*-Tests among Special Education Students

	M (SD) (time 1)	**M (SD)** (time 2)	*t*
Autonomy	2.68 (0.55)	2.75 (0.59)	n.s.
Work orientation	2.41 (0.64)	2.45 (0.59)	n.s.
Self-reliance	2.68 (0.66)	2.73 (0.66)	n.s.
Identity	2.97 (0.70)	3.03 (0.66)	n.s.
Parenting style			
Warmth	3.06 90.59)	3.06 (0.56)	n.s.
Supervision	1.93 (0.50)	1.99 (0.47)	n.s.
Autonomy granting	2.42 (0.61)	2.48 (0.58)	n.s.
Parental involvement			
Affective support	2.35 (0.59)	2.32 (0.62)	n.s.
Comm. with teachers	1.89 (0.63)	1.88 (0.65)	n.s.
Interactions on daily school matters	2.75 (0.65)	2.80 (0.72)	n.s.
Comm. parent-school	1.81 (0.55)	1.82 (0.61)	n.s.
Comm. parent-adolescent	2.12 (0.66)	2.13 (0.64)	n.s.

Table 2

Comparaison of Regular Education and Special Education Students Autonomy

	Wilks	*F*	*P*
A. Education stream	.835	80.58	.000
B. Family structure	.995	1.99	.114
C.Parental education	.987	1.33	.192
A X B	.997	1.33	.192
B X C	,986	1.40	.157
A X C	.987	1.33	.191
A X B X C	.985	1.54	.100

Table 3

Comparaison of Regular Education and Special Education Students Parenting Style

	Wilks	*F*	*p*
A.Education stream	.921	35.21	.000
B.Family structure	.967	14.02	.000
C.Parental education	.978	2.33	.006
A X B	.988	5.11	.002
B X C	,995	0.55	.885
A X C	.992	0.35	.598
A X B X C	.985	1.55	.100

Table 4

Comparaison of Regular Education and Special Education Students Parental Involvement

	Wilks	*F*	*p*
A.Education stream	.921	23.72	.000
B.Family structure	.957	10.97	.000
C.Parental education	.941	3.72	.000
A X B	.928	4.46	.000
B X C	.992	0.47	.997
A X C	.987	0.80	.710
A X B X C	.988	0.76	.769

Table 5

Direction of influence between Parenting Style Dimensions and Special Education and Regular Students Autonomy

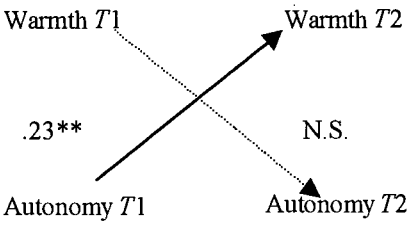
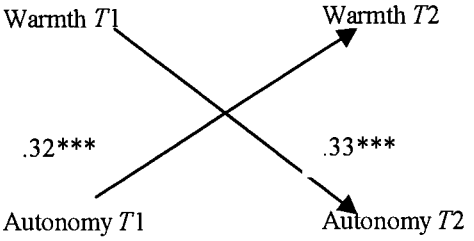
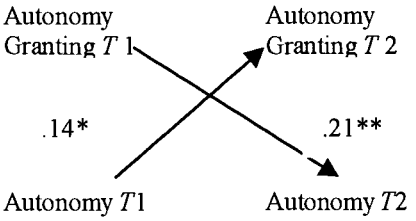
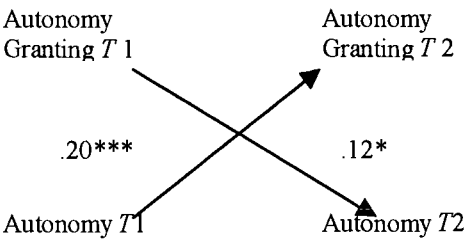
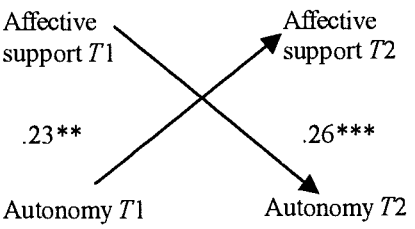
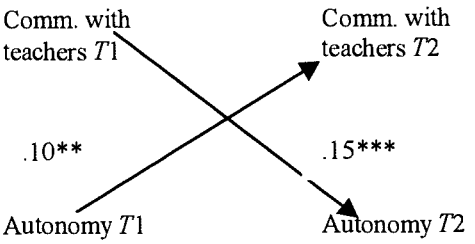
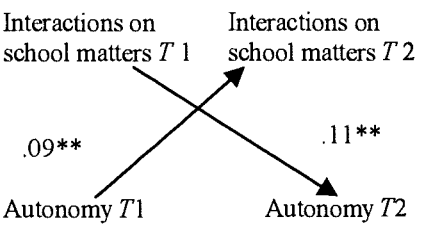
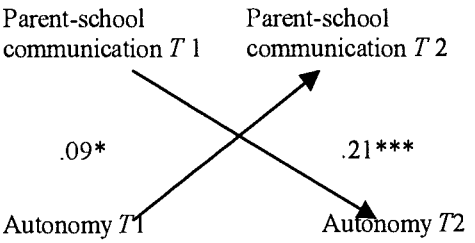
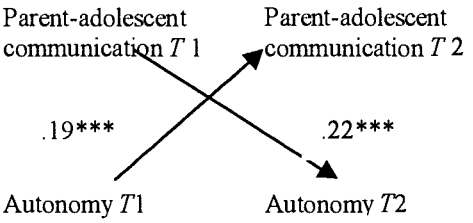
	Special Education Students	**Regular Education Students**
Warmth		
Psychological Autonomy Granting		

Table 6

Direction of influence between Parental Involvement Dimensions and Regular Students Autonomy

	Affective Support	**Communication with teachers**
Regular education students		
	Parent-adolescent interactions based on daily school matters	**Parent-school communication**
		
	Parent-adolescent communication	
		

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