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Author: Irena Pilch

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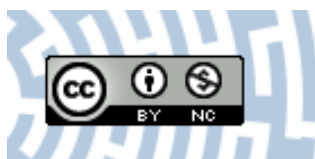
Irena Pilch
Poland

Machiavellians in a School Class

Abstract

Machiavellianism is a personality trait of which the essence is created by a specific view of the social world that is treated as a place of combat, by egocentric motivation, subjective treatment of other people and a tendency to achieve goals by means of interpersonal manipulation. This article presents the results of a few researches dedicated to the phenomenon of Machiavellianism in children and the youth, and to stressing problems and threats created by the Machiavellian pupils at school; it also suggests some ways to overcome those problems.

Key words: *Machiavellianism, manipulation, children, bullying.*

Introduction

Machiavellianism is a personality variable quite rarely analyzed in the context of the social behaviours of children and adolescents. More often, it is associated with the behaviours of people in organizations. However, for the last few decades a sufficient quantity of empirical data has been gathered in order to enable the analysis of Machiavellianism among children and to measure its influence over children's and adolescents' functioning in a group. This article is a review of researches into Machiavellianism among children and it is reflection upon the way of using the results of those researches in the work of teachers and those who are responsible for children's upbringing.

A Machiavellian is a person who strives for acquiring personal gains by means of interpersonal manipulation (Christie & Geis, 1970; Fehr, Samsom & Paulhus, 1992). The core of manipulation is exercising a conscious influence over the interaction partner such as for the partner not to be aware that he/she is a subject of manipulation. The subjectively treated partner becomes an obedient tool in the

hands of the manipulator. Such behaviour is usually not accepted as being not in line with the binding norms and thus being unethical. The acceptance of deceiving means to acquire goals does not mean that in every situation a Machiavellian would lie or cheat – his/her behaviour, to a great extent, will depend on the external conditions. Despite the fact that a great majority of studies of Machiavellianism had been conducted upon groups of adults; already in the 1960s, Christie created a version of the Mach IV scale that was dedicated to children, which has been used ever since.(Christie & Geis, 1970).

The knowledge of Machiavellianism in children may be useful for parents, teachers and social workers who foster children and the youth. Being aware of the threats associated with Machiavellianism should trigger off paying special attention to Machiavellian children whose talents for self-presentation (not revealing their own, unacceptable for adults intentions and goals, and hiding the forbidden methods for acquiring those goals, and at the same time exposing the desired behaviours) make them very often unrecognized by the teachers. Knowing the specifics of functioning of a Machiavellian child can be used in creating such conditions in a school class that would not support the spread, development and expression of Machiavellian attitudes among children.

Acquiring a Machiavellian attitude

Mechanisms leading to the development of Machiavellianism in children are not known. The inclination towards manipulation may be partly hereditary similarly to the inheritable empathy and altruism; however, such a statement needs to be yet verified (Wilson, Near & Miller, 1996). Acquiring a Machiavellian attitude in the social process may be explained by two competing hypotheses. The first one says that children learn a role that is complementary to the one of their parents. By manipulating their children Machiavellian parents make their children trustful and submissive. On the contrary, non-Machiavellian parents are more sensitive to their children's needs; therefore, they subconsciously drive their children towards manipulation by reinforcing their efforts leading to gaining satisfaction (Christie & Geis, 1970). Arguments supporting this hypothesis are provided by the research conducted by Braginsky (1970).

The second hypothesis precludes that the Machiavellian attitude is assimilated through modelling and identification with parents. Children take the picture of the world after their parents and at the same time they learn manipulation techniques. In older children, additionally, their interactions with their siblings, a group of peers or other important persons and the mass media, are of great importance.

The researches have shown that in pre-school children (under 6) the Machiavellianism of parents and their children is negatively correlated (Dien, 1974, Dien & Fujisawa, 1979); and in children who attend school (12–17 years old) such a correlation is positive (Ojha, 2007; Kraut & Price, 1976; Ria & Gupta, 1989). Younger children might take an attitude that is complementary to their parents' attitude, and later on, thanks to modelling and identification, they change their attitude to contrary. In the studies by East Indian researchers, the highest level of Machiavellianism was indicated by adolescents (16–19 years old) whose both parents were Machiavellian, and the lowest level was recorded by those whose both parents were non-Machiavellian (Ria & Gupta, 1989, Gupta 1990).

Other factors that may have an influence on the child's Machiavellianism are: the lack of good emotional tuning between a child and his/her parent in the early childhood, which results in the lesser ability to feel empathy (Draheim, 2004), the size of the family (Ricks & Fraedrich, 1999), order of births (Gupta, 1986, 1987; Tripathi & Sinha, 1981). The influence of the parents' Machiavellianism on the child's Machiavellianism can be modified through the parents' attitudes in fostering the child. In the group of 15–18-year old-boys, the negative correlation has been attested between the attitudes: loving, permissive and Machiavellianism in children (Ojha, 2007).

Does Machiavellianism as a feature tend to be stable throughout a child's growth? Can the development of the Machiavellian attitude at the mature age be determined upon the basis of the measured Machiavellianism in the early adolescence? There are not enough researches that could clearly solve that problem. Machiavellianism as a construct is, however, strongly correlated with psychopathy – some researchers even think that both constructs describe the same phenomenon and they call Machiavellianism a psychopathy in the population of "normal" people (McHoskey, Worzel & Szyarto, 1998). In the longitudinal studies, it has been attested that psychopathy in adolescence can help to foresee psychopathy at the mature age (Lynam, Caspi & Moffitt, 2007). The stability of that feature has been verified as moderate. The above-mentioned result allows for expecting a similar correlation with regards to Machiavellianism.

Personality traits and behaviour of a young Machiavellian

Machiavellianism is related to the child's age – it grows from the pre-school age until the late adolescence (Gupta, 1986, 1987; Mudrack, 1989; Murray & Okanes, 1980), and to the child's sex –girls tend to score higher results than those of boys (Andreou, 2004). The researches have proved that the correlation pattern

between Machiavellianism and personality traits in children is identical to that of adults. Machiavellianism correlates positively with psychoticism and neuroticism and negatively with the lying scale of Eysenck's questionnaire (Sutton & Keogh, 2001), and positively with anxiety (Poderico, 1987) and measures of psychopathy (Draheim, 2004).

Do the Machiavellians constitute a coherent group or it is rather a collective category that includes people of different personality profiles? A supporter of the latter opinion is Draheim (2004), who has distinguished two types of Machiavellianism in children: "cold" one – in accordance with the coldness syndrome as described by Christie (Christie & Geis, 1970) (lack of the feeling of guilt, lack of remorse, empathy deficit), and "hot" one – being impulsive, with weak control of behaviour and an increased level of anxiety. The researches conducted on adolescents have shown a great number of differences among the above-mentioned types. The "cold" Machiavellians are egoistic, cold materialists who treat people instrumentally, and in the situation of stress they show a cognitive orientation. The "hot" Machiavellians are mean, impatient and full of internal conflicts, they usually blame others; in situations of stress they show an emotional orientation. The "cold" type (irrespectively of the sex) and boys who belong to the "hot" type are characterised by low empathy. Greater anxiety and neuroticism characterises girls who belong to the "hot" type. In reality, quite often, we can see a "mixed" type – people who have the features of the "cold" and "hot" type of Machiavellianism at the same time.

Similarly to adults, in a group of children, the correlation of Machiavellianism with the tendency to manipulate has been confirmed in experiments. In Nachamie's (1969) experiment, 10–11-year-old children participated in a game with a partner where they could cheat or discover the partner's cheating. In accordance with the expectations, the Machiavellian children would win more often. In Braginsky's (1970) experiment, 10–year old children were supposed to convince a peer to eat the greatest number of sour crackers. The Machiavellian kids would manipulate their peers much more effectively.

Effective manipulation of a partner in a game is not a sufficient proof to claim that Machiavellians possess greater interpersonal skills than non-Machiavellians. Nevertheless, the experiments proving greater effectiveness of Machiavellians in situations of influencing others, have assured the researchers in their opinion that Machiavellians possess extraordinary social skills. Earlier studies suggested that Machiavellians could have problems with feeling empathy at the emotional level but they were able to compensate that shortage by their extraordinary skills in cognitive empathy. Barnett and Thompson (1985) tested the correlation between Machiavellianism and the cognitive and affective component of empathy in a group of

10–12-year-old children. The children with high skills of understanding a partner's perspective (cognitive component of empathy) and with low emotional empathy (affective component) would have higher results in Kiddie's Mach scale than all other remaining groups. At the same time, those kids would be less keen on helping others. Machiavellianism of the remaining groups – also the children with low cognitive empathy and low emotional empathy – did not differ substantially.

However, new researches bring different results. The study dedicated to the associations of Machiavellianism with the theory of mind skills has proved no associations in children at the preadolescent age (Repacholi, Slaughter, Pritchard & Gibbs, 2003). Despite the expectations, Machiavellians proved not to be more skilful in reading the state of mind of other people (cognitive empathy) than their non-Machiavellian counterparts. Perhaps new specific social situations should be sought where the interpersonal skills of Machiavellians – if they exist – could be revealed. Repacholi et al. suspect that Machiavellians may show extraordinary mindreading skills in the natural situations where a reward is expected in the form of attaining a personal goal. However, such reasoning does not seem to be right, because in the earlier experiments (Nachamie, 1969, Braginsky, 1970) the young Machiavellians had shown an advantage in the experimental conditions and a lack of a personally selected goal did not prove to be an obstacle. In the studies dedicated to adults, Machiavellianism again, proved not to be correlated with mindreading skills (Paal & Bereczkei, 2007). However, in Glenwick's (2001) research which was done on a group of adolescent psychiatric patients, Machiavellianism was associated with lower cognitive empathy.

In Draheim's (2004) study, a "cold" dimension of Machiavellianism and global Machiavellianism were negatively correlated with social intelligence. The lowest level of social intelligence was among the boys coming from the mixed group (with "cold" and "hot" traits being present at the same time). The children with the "cold" type of Machiavellianism had also problems with reading other people's emotions, especially those of fear and sadness, based on the nonverbal indicators. In the researches that were conducted with the use of the test for recognizing mimics microexpressions, the accuracy in recognition was negatively correlated with the "cold" Machiavellianism and positively with the "hot" one.

A Machiavellian child in the school class

A Machiavellian child in the class does create a challenge to the teacher responsible for his/her care and education. An egocentric motivation makes such a child not a fully capable member of the class who would be keen on cooperating with

others for the good of the entire group. The teacher may expect that a young Machiavellian would attempt to realize his/her own goals by all means available to him/her, also at the expense of other children. However, because a Machiavellian child knows the social norms and is aware that breaking them could cause his/her being punished, he/she would strive to hide the socially unacceptable behaviours.

In the early researches into Machiavellianism among children in the school environment, Touchey (1977) verified the hypothesis that teachers would tend to attribute to Machiavellian children (aged 10–11) rather external than internal reasons for their behaviour inappropriate with the norms. In fact, the teachers would assign lesser personal responsibility for the misbehaving pupils – the Machiavellians. Machiavellian girls were considered as those who made fewer trespasses than non-Machiavellian girls. The teachers evaluated the children's preferences regarding various school and after-school occupations. Non-Machiavellians' preferences were foreseen with greater accuracy but even so, the teachers were more assured in their opinions with regards to the Machiavellians. The results of that study show us the difficulty a teacher may experience in contact with a Machiavellian child that is motivated to cover up his/her intentions, opinions and behaviours.

One of the indicators of Machiavellianism is readiness to lie and to cheat in a situation where such a deed is profitable for the subject. However, this reasonable expectation has been difficult to prove in research. The association of the level of Machiavellianism with lying in everyday life of adults was confirmed by the study of Kashy and DePaulo (1996). The Machiavellians would declare that they lie more often and their lies would be profitable to the lying person, also they would consider themselves as more effective liars in comparison to the non-Machiavellians.

Similar dependencies may be expected in a group of adolescent Machiavellians. The inclination to lying and at the same time proficiency in using lies was tested by Braginsky (1970) in a group of 10-year old children. The experiment participants were supposed to convince their peers to eat the greatest number of sour crackers. The Machiavellian children not only lied more but they were more effective – their partners had eaten the greatest number of crackers. After the experiment, the adult observers had assessed the Machiavellian children as being more honest, calm, innocent, relaxed and using better arguments. Thus, it can be expected that those children could obtain their goals by methods not necessarily approved of by adults, doing it in such a way as not to raise the teacher's suspicions (Hawley, 2003). The strategies that were used by the lying children in Braginsky's (1970) research depended on the child's the sex: the girls would conceal the truth more often while the boys would use false statements.

The deceit done by pupils in schools are a serious problem to teachers. The American researches proved that the number of pupils attending secondary

schools who had admitted to a lie/deceit was increasing and is now at the level of around 80% (Nathanson Paulhus & Williams, 2006). Machiavellianism of pupils is associated with cheating, however, such a correlation is weak (Cizek, 1999, Whitley, 1998). Nathanson et al. (2006) conducted a natural experiment among the university students who were passing exams. The level of Machiavellianism of those students was correlated with a deceit and was its key predictor. Only a subclinical psychopathy could better predict deceiving/cheating in situations of exams. The psychopaths, contrary to the Machiavellians, in cheating during an exam did not care too much for the possible consequences of such a deed. Thus, it can be suspected that the only way for eliminating cheating by pupils – psychopaths – during exams is to create such conditions where looking for help of the others would not be possible. Nevertheless, Machiavellians would cheat during exams only when they have decided that it is profitable – a severe and unavoidable penalty in this case should be sufficient security.

Violence and abuse in schools create a serious problem that endangers healthy upbringing of children at the school age (Veenstra, Lindenberg, Oldehinkel et al., 2005). Bullying is a multiple act of aggression in a situation where one person deliberately hurts other person on purpose physically (beating, pushing), verbally (threats, calling names) or psychologically (gossiping, isolating). The aggressors – bullies-are in the groups of high risk of alcoholism and crime because they do not create socially acceptable patterns to achieve their goals. Such children can be characterised as aggressive, hostile, anti-social, impulsive, dominating and unable to cooperate. Controlling others gives them a sense of security. The victims are prone to depression and low self – esteem in their adult life. They are more fearful, withheld, quiet, cautious and insecure, less prosocial, they feel lonely and less happy than other children, they have fewer friends. Bullies and victims do not belong to separate groups – about 50% of the bulling children also say that they are victims themselves. Bullies/victims are aggressive and depressive at the same time, they have minor achievements in school, low self-esteem, low self-control and are not accepted by the group. Those children function worse than bullies or victims and they create a group of the highest risk, also for the potential, future psychiatric disorders.

Machiavellianism is associated with violence in groups of children. Andreou (2004) tested 9–12-year-old children with a questionnaire concerning the violence at school. Machiavellianism correlated with a tendency to abuse their school mates and a tendency to be a victim, but only in the group of boys. The analysis of the results on the Kiddie Mach scale showed a positive correlation between the disbelief in human nature and abuse and experiencing violence in the group of boys, between mistrust and experiencing violence in boys and girls, and between

approval for manipulation and abuse in the group of girls. The children were subsequently divided into 4 sub-groups: bullies, victims, bullies/victims and other children. The largest group was the last group – those children had scored the lowest on the Mach scale. The highest Machiavellianism was shown by children who were bullies and victims at the same time. A similar result was recorded by Sutton and Keogh (2000) in a group of 9–12-year old children. The pupils who were abusing their peers were more Machiavellian, while the victims were characterised by lower Machiavellianism. A similar outcome was achieved by Giampietro and Caravita (2006) in a group of Italian children aged 9–14.

An interesting attempt to look differently at Machiavellianism and at its occurrences in school, are the studies done by Hawley (2003). They were conducted upon a group of 1700 children in their early adolescent years (M=14). The resources control strategies used by the children were reviewed from the point of view of evolutionary psychology. The research objective was to determine correlations between aggressive behaviour and the effectiveness of controlling resources. The children were divided into 5 groups based on self-reported use of coercive strategies and prosocial strategies of resource control. They were categorized as bistrategic controllers, coercive controllers, prosocial controllers, noncontrollers and typicals. Bistrategic controllers – Machiavellians used both strategies of resource control. Hawley accepted the assumption that the bistrategic controllers should be equipped with such features as: amicability, social skills, conscientiousness, popularity, and at the same time with hostility, aggression (understood as dominance, want of one's own good, extorsions) and inclination to cheating. Instrumental aggression should help to achieve the goals and even to raise other children's admiration. It was assumed that even though the children would not belong to the most popular kids, however, they would be perceived as the most popular by the entire group. It was also expected that the social skills of bistrategic controllers would make acts of aggression in order not to be noticed by the teachers. It was also presumed that the coercive controllers and prosocial controllers would be evaluated by their peers differently, while the noncontrollers – ineffective children who had not worked out the strategy of controlling the resources would be dominated and ignored by others. The results of the study had confirmed the above-mentioned assumptions.

The essence of Hawley's (2003) approach is the conviction that coercive behaviour that is balanced by prosociability may be effective (may allow for effective control of resources) and at the same time the child who uses this behavioural strategy may possess a positive self-evaluation, a sense of wellbeing and may be positively evaluated by his/her colleagues. Machiavellian children may thus be well-adapted and effective. Those children know that they are aggressive and that their peers perceive them as such. Nevertheless, Machiavellian children are scrupulous,

they can read social indicators – they do not have deficits in this field, they hold a high rank in the group of peers and they are accepted by their mates and teachers, and this means that loneliness is no threat for them. The self-presentation skills of assessed Machiavellians made teachers fail to perceive their aggressiveness. Such a result confirms the suspicion that teachers may not be able to distinguish the prosocial and bistrategic controllers in the evaluated group of peers.

Hawley (2003) described socially skilled Machiavellians. However, we do not know whether the group of such distinguished Machiavellians is homogeneous with regard to their attitude towards people, whether they treat all of their partners instrumentally? The core of Machiavellianism is a combination of a specific vision of the world and related to it egocentric motivation with the Machiavellian behavioural tactics that allow for realizing those goals. The Machiavellians who were tested by Hawley might have used Machiavellian tactics (they say that they can effectively influence others) but only part of them might have used such a tactic instrumentally, without the associated Machiavellian vision of the world, and this is much less destructive.

Hawley (2003) thinks that the results of her study refute a conviction that aggression and deceit must be maladaptive. It is confirmed by the results of other studies that claim that at least some bullying children may have good social skills that allow them to become successful – also socially. However, on the other hand, talented Machiavellian constitutes a greater threat to the group than a poor/ unskilled Machiavellian. Such a "well adjusted" Machiavellian would use other children effectively and without any scruples, and at the same time he/she would deceive a teacher and thus avoid a penalty. Removal of the ethical aspect from the description of Machiavellianism leads to a false conclusion that the Machiavellian strategy – which is more flexible since it allows for both cooperation and a betrayal – is to some extent "better", more effective, although it may not be optimal in all situations. The teacher and the tutor cannot accept such a point of view since he/ she must care for the good of all his/her pupils, and the pedagogical goals that he/ she accepts and norms and values that he/she tries to convey to the children.

How to deal with Machiavellian pupil(s)

A threat of Machiavellianism has been growing because treating individual profit, career and material values as superior life goals, gains widespread social approval. Provoking competition if it is not associated with shaping children's prosocial attitude or with care for ethical standards, can easily lead to the child's adoption of the Machiavellian rule that "the end justifies the means". At the same time,

greater social mobility causes man to make a greater number of shorter and more superficial social contacts thus the risk of a Machiavellian strategy to be exposed and condemned gets lower. If, however, the motives and methods of actions of a Machiavellian are discovered he/she can easily change the social environment –work, the place of living, friends and even the life partner. In understanding those conditions, greater attention should be paid to the diagnosis and prevention of Machiavellianism in children – as soon as possible.

Irrespectively of which of the described mechanisms of acquiring a Machiavellian disposition in children prove to be the most important, it is known for sure that some children develop such an attitude already in their early school years. A Machiavellian child can be characterised by a specific view of the social world that is understood as a place for constant combat where the strongest individuals win, and with a tendency to apply any techniques for manipulation that increase his/her chances of wining. Such children not only do harm to other children but because of the manifested attitude they contribute to the development of undesirable patterns of behaviour and group norms. However, one should not mistake Machiavellianism for the competitive attitude. The problem is not only in a Machiavellian's way of competing where he/she always prefers his/her personal goals over the common good or the good of the partner. It is also about his/her not restraining from any means to achieve his/her goal.

Working with a Machiavellian child should entail attempts to modify his/her general, negative attitude towards people, breaking his/her mistrust, developing a prosocial disposition, encouraging empathy, teaching the norm of reciprocity and implementing socially desired values and moral norms. At the same time, one needs to strive to create such conditions where the negative impact of Machiavellian children on other children, could be minimal. It would not be beneficial if a teacher – by giving up to a specific charm of a Machiavellian child – did not notice or made nothing of such a child's reprehensible or detrimental behavioural norms, thus giving the other children a signal that such a behaviour pays.

The best way to avoid school deceit is to create such conditions (during the class tests, examinations or during various individual and group works) where deceiving would be made impossible or where the chance to discover such a deceit would be high and the penalty severe. A Machiavellian very efficiently assesses the risk related to his/her breaking a norm or a rule, therefore, one should make cheating not worth trying. Of course, clearly and directly, expressed requirements, supported with a consequently used system of penalties and rewards may prevent acts of aggression and bullying. In such a situation a pragmatic Machiavellian would respect the norms for his/her own good.

The managerial science scholars think that keeping high moral standards in organizations (also those with regard to the prosocial behaviours) very much diminishes the losses caused by Machiavellian employees (Singhapakdi, 1993). A similar relation could be found in schools, where high demands should be addressed not only to the pupils/students but also to the teachers. At the school age, the teacher becomes one of the meaningful characters for the children, his/her opinions and evaluations are important and he himself, becomes a model for children to follow. A Machiavellian teacher would not be able to shape the right attitude of his/her pupil.

Starting from the late childhood, a group of peers becomes very important, and its meaning even increases in adolescence. Group work as initiated by the teacher supports the growth of social competences and enables breaking of the childhood egocentrism that is typical of the early phases of growing up; it teaches cooperation and solving problems.

The school and the school class specific properties that cannot be directly modified by the teacher such as the size of the school, the number of children in the class create an environment more or less favourable for the Machiavellian strategy. Large schools and classes create a sense of anonymity and make the inner relations weaken; the teacher's contacts with a single pupil are rare and it supports the expression of a Machiavellian attitude and the Machiavellian's impunity. A less structural environment is more favourable for Machiavellians (Christie, Geis, 1970).

In the period of early adolescence, a child reaches the level of the moral reasoning that is named pre-conventional by Kohlberg, it can be characterised as "one's own interest morality" (Bardziejewska, 2005). The motivation for the child's actions is to gain rewards, pleasure, satisfying his/her own needs. A Machiavellian child has problems in reaching maturity in the moral sphere as if he/she had stopped at a certain level. The responsibility of a teacher or a tutor is to help the child to overcome the said limitation.

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