

# The Perception of Child-Rearing Goals among Surinamese Teachers and Parents

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This explorative study is a first step towards more extensive research into the child-rearing goals and parenting styles used in Suriname's multiethnic society. We tried to find out whether there are in fact differences in parenting and child-rearing ideals between Surinamese parents and teachers and among Surinamese parents and teachers of different ethnic origins. We have obtained our data by presenting 36 statements about child-rearing goals to 155 teachers and 142 parents and asking them to order them according to the q-sort method. This study has established that there are almost no significant differences between parents and teachers and among the various ethnicities within these two groups. This is contrary to the older literature on child-rearing goals and parenting styles in Suriname, which found greater differences among groups on the basis of anthropological methods like interviews and observations. The absence of differences could indicate that the ethnic groups are converging as far as values and standards are concerned. This finding should, however, be approached with due care since our sample is still small and has been limited to the urban and more highly educated part of the population.

*Keywords:* Child-rearing goals, parental styles, q-sort methodology, multiethnic society, Suriname.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Many West European countries have had a long history of immigration from Mediterranean countries, the so-called foreign workers and their children. They also have a tradition of people migrating from the colonies to settle in the mother country. One of the results of these traditions has been that relatively much empirical research has been conducted into the child-rearing traditions of these people. In addition to the academic angle, this has also been of practical use to society. After all, knowledge of child-rearing values and standards (goals and styles) may help to prevent conflicts in society and further the process of integration.

It is worth noting that so far so little research has been done on the child-rearing goals, values and standards in Suriname with its highly heterogeneous composition of the population with descendants of people from various parts of the

world: African-Surinamese, Indians, Javanese, Chinese, Lebanese etc. The process of integration is likely to run its own course, partly thanks to education, but there is hardly any factual knowledge about these processes. In fact, Suriname is an outstanding example of a country to carry out research into integration and emancipation processes, in which upbringing and education are important instruments.

The explorative study presented here is a first step towards more extensive research into the child-rearing goals and parenting styles used in Suriname's multiethnic society. The research aims to make a contribution to the development of academic theories and also to be an aid towards furthering, guiding and directing integration processes.

Child rearing has long since stopped taking place primarily in the family. Other institutes play an increasingly substantial role in child rearing. In addition to the influence of the media and the opportunities offered by ICT, it is difficult to underestimate the role of the school. The pedagogic policy of schools, as far as childrearing goals, values and standards are concerned, should fit in with and be geared as much as possible to the upbringing at home. The various socialising bodies can strengthen, weaken but

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also undo one another's effect. It is therefore imperative to think carefully and talk about the duties and responsibility of each of them. So far this has not been done in Suriname in a structured and controlled manner. Knowledge of the way in which parents and teachers think about the goals of child rearing may offer a sound background to the study of the actual parenting behaviour.

This chapter first deals with a number of general concepts in the field of child rearing. A number of parenting styles are distinguished. Next, attention is paid to what we know about the views of parents and teachers on the desired child-rearing goals. We then discuss Suriname as a multiethnic society with its differences in parenting in families. After this we consider the study which tries to find out whether there are in fact differences in parenting and child-rearing ideals between Surinamese parents and teachers and among Surinamese parents and teachers of different ethnic origins. We conclude this chapter with a discussion.

### **Child-rearing goals and parenting styles**

Children are not brought up in a vacuum. Child rearing has its own dynamics bound up with diverse cultural and ecological factors. Research on child-rearing should therefore consider the fact that child-rearing patterns are constructed/reconstructed in the interactions among educators, children and their surroundings.

Bronfenbrenner (1977; 1998) puts the child in concentric circles representing the family and the meso and macro systems around it. Each subsystem has its own interaction with the wider cultural and ecological context and may therefore be subject to change more or less independently of the other two. Nevertheless the three subsystems, according to the author, act as a coordinated whole. In case of dissonance there appear mechanisms that restore the balance and cultural consistency.

Child-rearing goals indicate what end the educator wishes to achieve, while parenting styles indicate the way in which the child-rearing goals can be attained. At first sight, there seems to be a certain relation between the child-rearing goals and the parenting method. It is unlikely, for example, that the child-rearing goal of *self-determination* is related to an authoritarian parenting style. The empirical connections between child-rearing goals and parenting styles have not been studied a great deal. Nor have we had the opportunity to link these two matters in an empirical manner. It is the intention to do this in a follow-up study.

In the last decades a great deal of research has been carried out on parenting styles, child-rearing goals and parenting methods. Baumrind (1966, 1967) has studied the parenting styles of parents by means of extensive observations of parents and children in the home environment. She concluded that three fundamental dimensions may be distinguished, later added to by Maccoby & Martin (1983). These four dimensions still form the basis for further research into parenting styles. They are characterized as follows:

### **The authoritative parenting style**

This parenting style is referred to in the literature as the one that is most desirable. Within this parenting style reasonable limits are set, behaviour is explained and there is authority and love in the parenting relationship. This parenting style is also referred to as 'democratic'. We are not in favour of this term, because 'democratic' is first of all related to the type of administration of a state. Other characteristics of the authoritative parenting style are that parents pay a great deal of attention to the children's needs and wishes. Parents talk a lot with the children and there is reasonable room for the children's own contribution. The parents encourage their children's independent behaviour. This parenting style takes up a lot of time and energy and also presupposes a high degree of knowledge and linguistic skills to explain things to the children and discuss things with them.

### **The authoritarian parenting style**

Within the authoritarian parenting style, the relationship between the child and the parents is a highly hierarchical one. The parents dominate and are the boss. It is the parents who make the (firm) rules and enforce and preserve the (strict) rules. The child should obey the parents. Parenting is aimed at disciplining and obeying. Fear of the unknown and of the wicked outside world is often the major motive for the parents to practise authoritarian parenting. The disadvantages of an authoritarian parenting style are that the child becomes anxious and docile and will show little initiative and independence.

### **The permissive or indulgent parenting style**

This parenting style is characterised by the positive attention the parents give to the children. On the other hand few demands are made on them. The parents rear the children with love and authority and there is room for the children's own contribution. Independent and exploratory behaviour on the part of the children is also

encouraged. The disadvantage of this parenting style is that the children find it difficult to set limits later. They learn insufficiently to control themselves and cope with their emotions.

### **The uninvolved parenting style (added later)**

This parenting style is characterised by ignoring to a large degree the children's wishes and needs. No attention is paid to the child's development. Providing food is the most important aspect of the contact with the children. The more pedagogic aspects like teaching values and standards, stimulating and motivating are neglected. The parents make few demands on the child, the only demand may be to be quiet and not bother them.

### **Opinions about child-rearing goals**

Parents' opinions about child-rearing goals may be classified into five categories, according to Distelbrink (1998). Social achievements, formulated as getting a sound education and achieving economic independence form an important theme. Sociability is a second theme. It is about being ready to help, taking other people into consideration. A third factor often mentioned is conformism. It distinguishes a social component, viz. respect and compliance and a moral one dealing with honesty and keeping to the straight and narrow. Great store is also set by autonomy. This is about developing a strong personality. Finally, wellness is also mentioned as a child-rearing goal, being happy and enjoying life. Research by Dekovic, Groenendaal en Gerrits (1996) distinguishes child-rearing goals according to conformism, sociability, autonomy and social achievements.

Klaassen en Leeferink (1998) studied the ideas of parents and teachers about the desired child-rearing goals. By means of a questionnaire they asked both groups which goals they thought important in parenting. This study shows that parents and teachers classify child-rearing goals in two categories. The first category is related to the development of self-determination and a social sense. This category comprises goals like taking on responsibility, independence, thinking critically, having consideration for others and being tolerant. The second category may come under the concept of conformity. This refers to goals like having good manners, compliance, showing respect for older people and conforming to rules.

As is evident from the study, parents and teachers agree on the desired child-rearing goals. Both parents and teachers are of the opinion that there cannot be a strict division of tasks between

child rearing at home and at school. They think the child-rearing tasks overlap and should be coordinated with each other as much as possible. So the school and the parents should complement each other, if necessary. But both parents and teachers are of the opinion that the responsibility for child-rearing lies primarily with the parents. In general, child-rearing at the school is regarded as an extension of child-rearing at home. In spite of the similar ideas about the division of tasks, there is a lot of criticism on the part of teachers of the parenting behaviour of parents. Teachers generally think that what parents offer their children is inadequately structured and that they do not make enough demands on their children.

Parents are ill-informed about with the school's child-rearing policy; teachers hardly know anything about the parents' child-rearing ideas. It should be recognised that information about each other's child-rearing practices is essential to bearing the joint responsibility for the children's education. It is imperative to prevent parents and teachers from stereotyping each other and from talking about child-rearing only when problems occur. What is essential is to build a clear relationship between child-rearing at home and at school. This objective requires considerable openness concerning views on values and standards. This concludes the views of Klaassen and Leeferink.

Research has shown that teachers have repertoires of knowledge, feelings and values that are different from those of the rest of the population, so also from those of parents. It is assumed that there is a general teachers' culture (Sachs & Smith, 1988, Kaviadas, 2003).

Schools are expected to prepare pupils for their role in tomorrow's society. The transfer of instrumental knowledge is only one aspect of that preparation. 'Education' also includes the development of the entire personality, imparting a sense of public responsibility and wider social skills (Elcharduset *al.* 1999). From this perspective, schools play an integrating role: they should match the moral and mental constitution of the young members of a community and by doing so assist in building and preserving a society (Durkheim, 1925). This tradition also exists in Suriname and translates into an ever increasing package of expectations with regard to teachers.

As a matter of fact, the teachers try to live up to those expectations and have a specific profile. This profile has been described as a striking combination of attitudes: on the one hand, teachers place great store by sticking to rules, punctuality, neatness, order and the importance of conventions, but on the other hand, also by solidarity, openness, creativity, self-development

and tolerance (Elcharduset *al.*, 1998). They combine as if it were a mild form of authoritarianism with a relatively progressive social commitment. In fact, this combination is understandable from the perspective of those involved: the substance of their task is aimed at progressive values like the development of the individual (self-development) and solidarity, whereas the form requires authoritarianism. After all, teachers need a minimum of order and explicit rules to carry out their job properly.

### Suriname

Suriname is situated on the north coast of South America. It is sandwiched between French Guiana and Guyana and Brazil to the south. With a surface area of just under 165,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Suriname is the smallest sovereign state in South America. It has a tropical climate; about 90% is covered with tropical forest.

In the 17th century Suriname was first colonised by the English and later by the Dutch, who established a large-scale plantation economy. The plantations were worked by slaves imported from Africa and, after the abolition of slavery in 1863, by indentured workers from India (from 1873) and from the island of Java in the then Dutch East Indies (from 1890). The descendants of these slaves, Indians and Javanese, together with the Maroons, descendants of slaves that escaped from the plantations and settled in the interior, make up the greater part of the present population. In addition, there is a large group of people of mixed descent, and there are small numbers of Jews, Chinese, Lebanese, and Europeans. The original inhabitants, the indigenous people, only make up a very small part of the population. Suriname has a population of 534,189 (August 2012).<sup>2</sup>

Suriname gained full independence from the Netherlands in 1975. Since then it has been trying to define its position and role in the Caribbean and on the South-American continent. Dutch is still the official language. It has also been the language of instruction in schools since compulsory education was introduced for 7-12-year-olds in 1876. The introduction of secondary education soon followed. Tertiary education started in 1968 with the establishment of the Medical School.

In the Surinamese context, too little research has been conducted into the parenting styles of parents and teachers, even though the complex cultural situation offers plenty of opportunities to do so. Anthropological research has been carried out on the matrifocal family, especially within the African-Surinamese group. In 1973 Buschkens published a study of the living and childrearing conditions of the African-Surinamese population in the lower socioeconomic classes. The child-rearing duties often fall to the mother in this group. She primarily bears the responsibility for the upbringing of the children. The importance of the mother as the child's educator and protector is expressed in various ways: hurting someone by, for example, saying something negative about the mother and the heated response of the receiver, or the prominent position given to the mother in songs and sayings. As a rule, the parenting style is authoritarian. As long as the children come under the responsibility of the parents, it is taken for granted that they cannot and may not take decisions on their own. The parents demand obedience and respect. Children are not expected to talk back: opposition is regarded as impudence, or forwardness, and lack of respect.

The traditional Indian family system, the joint family, with several families living together is found less and less. This is the result of urbanisation and raising the development level by education and training. The system has been toned down, but some characteristics are still visible. The father is the dominant person in Indian families. The structure is patriarchal. Religious values and traditions are regarded as important parenting goals. The kinship relations are of great importance within the family system. Children learn early who their relatives are and how they should address them. The father is the most important role model for boys in the socialisation process. He is the one who sees to discipline and teaches values, standards and rules of behaviour. Boys identify with the dominant father. The men together guard the family honor.

In the upbringing of girls, values like diligence, frugality, modesty, fidelity, obedience and helpfulness are of great importance. These days we see that girls are also encouraged to be active socially and get a good education. This sometimes leads to tensions in traditional families and in marriages. Disciplining is often done by means of reprimands, threats and, if they do not help, corporal punishment or violence.

An important idea in the Javanese group is that young children up to about the age of five can do little themselves. As a result, few demands are made on the young child. Harmony, *rukun*, is a central value in the child's upbringing. Children are raised very much with the idea of solidarity

<sup>2</sup>Population: Indians 27.4%; African Surinamese 17.7%; Maroons 14.7%; Javanese 14.6%; people of mixed descent 12.5%; other groups (including indigenous people) 6.5%; no data 6.6% (source: 2004 census)

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and communality. Central values in Javanese parenting are: conforming to the standards of the group and respect for the positions within the family. Javanese only very rarely punish their children physically; it is considered to be at variance with the value of harmony.

to examine how people think about a topic (Popovich & Popovich; 2000) .

The respondents were asked to sort the 36 child-rearing goals from 'not at all important' to 'very important'.

**The study**

Q Methodology is a research method used in psychology and other social sciences to study people's "subjectivity"—that is, their viewpoint. It has been used both in clinical settings for assessing patients, as well as in research settings



Schema 1: 36 child-rearing goals

Be concerned with other people's joys and sorrows	Stick up for one's own interests
Listen to adults	Have good manners
Be religious	Achieve something/be something in society
Do well in school	Be able to solve conflicts
Be prudent in society	Control oneself
Not trust people lightly	Be kind
Put parents and family first	Take initiatives
Know one's own cultural background	Be creative
Acquire an income (job and house) of one's own	Be independent
Be happy	Be honest
Express one's own feelings and emotions	Form an opinion of one's own
Be self-disciplined	Accept responsibility
Be helpful	Be confident
Be able to deal with criticism	Not practise discrimination against others
Have respect for those holding different views	Be just
Be open to other opinions	Make a judgement of one's own
Be tolerant	Show perseverance
Think critically	Have consideration for others

Table 1: Composition of the research-sample

	African-Surinamese	Indians	Javanese	Mixed	Total
teacher	48	49	30	28	155
parent	29	58	27	28	142
total	77	107	57	56	297

### Results

Factor analysis applied to the 36 goals did not result in easily interpretable dimensions. If we take all components with Eigenvalues larger than 1, we get 14 factors with an explained percentage of variance of 66%. The factors, however, cannot be interpreted well and there are many double loadings. Furthermore, there are quite a few negative loadings. The interpretation of these loadings is complex and arbitrary. A 3-component solution (on the basis of the scree-plot analysis) found a 25% explained variance, which is very little. It was therefore decided not to continue data reduction by means of factor analysis in this study and to use the items with very high loadings as the cores for new scale development. This will have to be done in another round of data collection.

When comparing parents with teachers on the 36 child-rearing goals (independent samples t-test), it is found that parents score higher on items like 'being religious' (parents 5.46-teachers 4.84;  $p=.046$ ), 'doing well in school' (parents 7.57-teachers 6.93;  $p=.024$ ) and 'sticking up for one's own interests' (parents 6.51-teachers 5.99;  $p=.043$ ). Parents seem to have slightly more traditional attitudes than teachers, even though that is only true for three of the 36 goals. The similarities between the two groups are much larger than the differences.

Teachers, on the other hand, score higher on the authoritative style, on items like 'be able to deal with criticism' (parents 5.78-teachers 6.41;  $p=.004$ ), 'have respect for those holding different views' (parents 5.35-teachers 5.95;  $p=.011$ ) and 'be open to other opinions' (parents 5.16-teachers 5.93;  $p=.043$ ). But again, the differences between teachers and parents are extremely small.

If we take parents and teachers together in a one-way analysis of variance, there appear to be hardly any differences among the four different ethnic groups. The Indians score higher on only two items ('be prudent in society' and 'know one's own cultural background'). No differences have been found among the other ethnic groups.

### Discussion

This explorative study has established that there are almost no significant differences between parents and teachers and among the various ethnicities within these two groups. This is contrary to the older literature on child-rearing

goals and parenting styles in Suriname, which found greater differences among groups on the basis of anthropological methods like interviews and observations. The absence of differences could indicate that the ethnic groups are converging as far as values and standards are concerned. This finding should, however, be approached with due care since our sample is still small and has been limited to the urban and more highly educated part of the population. It could be found that the convergence of child-rearing goals, values and standards has advanced far less in rural areas and among poorly educated sections of the population.

This study has yielded interesting data for the researchers and for the respondents, parents and teachers. The respondents were surprised at the outcome and wish to continue to talk and think about their own childrearing goals. Never before had they been confronted so explicitly with what they did in child rearing. It emerges that it is also important to ask children questions about their parents' child-rearing goals. Children may experience the child-rearing pattern (goals and styles) differently from their parents. Children will be involved in the follow-up study in the sense that they will be asked to give their opinion about their parents' child-rearing goals. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the age of the child also plays a part in the parenting styles and the parent goals. Goals and means may be used in different ways in different stages of life. These variables will be incorporated into follow-up research.

Conducting this empirical study of child-rearing goals and parenting styles in the various ethnic groups at home and at school marks the beginning of a long series of sub-studies which will be carried out at the *Anton de Kom Universiteit van Suriname*. The study is of both academic and practical interest in connection with integration and nation building. We have obtained our data by presenting 36 statements about child-rearing goals to the respondents and asking them to order them according to the q-sort method. It is advisable that these data should be complemented with interviews and observations. Follow-up studies will focus attention on them. The results of this study are sufficient reason to continue the planned studies and in this way make a contribution in both an academic and a practical sense. Students of the bachelor's programme in educational sciences of the *Anton de Kom Universiteit van Suriname* have already embraced this opportunity.

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