Teacher-Child Relationship

Implications of Emotion Knowledge and the Quality of Teacher-Child Relationships for Children's Adaptation to Preschool and Readiness for Kindergarten

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Although the accruing evidence demonstrates the importance of social functioning for young children's developing school competence, previous research has, for the most part, included peer relationship quality as the indicator of social emotional competence (e.g., Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Coleman, 1997). Here, this focus is expanded to consider how the other half of the socioemotional construct, namely emotional competence, might contribute to positive school-related outcomes for young children. Emotional competence refers to children's ability to apply knowledge of emotion and expression in their efforts to regulate their emotional experiences and negotiate social exchanges with others (Saarni, 1990). Given the critical role of emotions in the creation of a positive classroom climate, there is a pressing need to understand the extent to which specific dimensions of child emotional competence are associated with young children's school-related developmental outcomes. At the same time, the ability of teachers to emotionally connect with children may also have an enduring impact on the learning that occurs in the preschool classroom.

The present study further examined the relationship between emotional competence and school-related developmental outcomes by: (a) examining the associations of emotion knowledge and teacher-child relationship quality to preschoolers' school-related competence, (b) evaluating whether these associations hold after accounting for the effects of age, gender, and income, (c) evaluating whether the proposed associations vary as a function of these demographic variables, and (d) examining the extent to which emotion knowledge may mediate the linkage between teacher-child relationship quality and school competence. Seventy-four economically and ethnically diverse preschoolers (40 boys, 34 girls) were administered an emotion knowledge task and a standardized school competence measure. Classroom teachers and their assistants completed ratings of the children's school competence and reported on the quality of their relationships with each child.

Results revealed that girls had higher school competence scores than boys for both school competence measures. Girls also scored higher than boys on the emotion knowledge task and teachers reported having a closer relationship with girls. After accounting for the demographic variables, emotion knowledge was directly associated with children's performance on the standardized school competence measure. However, both positive and negative teacher-child relationship variables were the important predictors of teacher-reported school competence. Finally, the association between teacher-child closeness and teacher-reported school competence was mediated by emotion knowledge.

There are a number of limitations to the research. First, the teacher-child instruments used here are global measures and attention to specific teacher-child interactions can provide additional useful information about how teacher socialize young children's social, emotional, and academic competencies. Second, the research reported here is correlational and cause-effect explanations for the associations cannot be offered. Despite these limitations, the results demonstrated that emotion knowledge and teacher-child relationship quality were both directly related to children's school competence, and suggested that the linkage between some aspects of teacher-child relational quality and school competence may be mediated through emotion situation knowledge. The present work provides important information about the unique and joint contributions of emotion knowledge and teacher-child relational qualities in predicting school related competence.

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Student-Teacher Relationships in the Early Grades of School

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The importance of student-teacher relationships—apart from either curriculum or methods—for children's learning and achievement has long been discussed in educational research (Pederson, Faucher, & Eaton, 1978; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1969). Recent research has documented connections between early teacher-reported relationship quality and subsequent student academic performance and adjustment (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1997). Closeness and (low) conflict in the relationship, as reported by kindergarten teachers, predict academic competence in first through eighth grades after taking into account concurrent student functioning. This *suggests* that there is something about the relationship *per se*, and not simply the child's competence or adjustment, that gives unique information about that student's likelihood of success in later grades.

However, studies that control for student competence when using relationship scores to predict later functioning are limited in number and do not examine contributions that teacher and child characteristics make to relationship scores. One must ask, then, whether it is the relationship itself being assessed (and carrying the prediction), or simply unmeasured aspects of child behavior and adjustment (to which the teacher is reacting when rating their relationship). Unless we can identify variation in relationship scores that is attributable to teacher qualities—and to the fit between teacher and child characteristics—relationship scores inform us about neither teacher nor relationship effects, so why assess the relationship at all? Multiple measures of child functioning may be just as effective in forecasting subsequent adjustment.

This investigation scrutinized more closely ratings that teachers in the earliest grades give their relationships with students. The goal was threefold: (1) to document stability and change in teacher-reported relationship quality within one early elementary school year, (2) to examine whether teacher qualities and specific combinations of teacher and child characteristics explain variation in relationship scores above and beyond child adjustment, and (3) to test potential moderating variables (e.g., change in child behavior, life events in the child's family) that might explain change in relationship scores over the school year

In some respects, consistency within one teacher's report of relationship quality over the school year sets the upper bounds—at least conceptually—for consistency from one teacher or school year to the next. Therefore, examining relationship stability and change, and their correlates, *within* a school year in some sense logically precedes prediction from one year to the next. In fact, Hamre and Pianta (2001) acknowledged that one of the weaknesses in this field of research is "the lack of repeated measures of the teacher-child relationship" (p. 636). The year-long study described here provides some of the conceptual and empirical foundations for the work already being published on longitudinal prediction from teacher-child relationship scores.

Teacher ratings of teacher-student relationship quality (*Student-Teacher Relationship Scale*, Pianta, 2001) were gathered twice during either kindergarten or first grade on 28 young children

(fall and spring). Sixty-one percent of the sample was male and the same percentage was African American. Children attended a public elementary school serving low-income families. Four kindergarten teachers and one first-grade teacher rated the relationships. Teachers were themselves rated by observers on a number of social and academic indices, and parents rated child behavioral adjustment and family life events midway through the school year.

Teacher-reported relationship scores were moderately stable over the school year, with the greatest stability for "closeness" ($r = .64$, $p < .01$) and "conflict" ($r = .58$, $p < .01$). In contrast, the amount of dependency rated in the child by the teacher was not stable from fall to spring ($r = .23$, ns). Overall, only about 25% of the variance in total scores was stable over the school year.

Average teacher-reported "closeness" increased for girls but decreased for boys from fall to spring (resulting in no overall sample change). Teachers reported slightly higher "dependency" later in the year for all children, but no significant change in "conflict." The four Caucasian teachers rated their relationships with African-American and biracial children significantly lower than their relationships with Caucasian children in "closeness." However, this was not the case for the single African-American teacher.

Teachers who were rated more positively by observers (e.g., positive in class, personally connected to students, socially competent with adults) reported more "dependency" in their students in the first half of the year ($r = .60$, $p < .01$) and greater "closeness" to their students by the end of the year ($r = .50$, $p < .01$). The opposite was true for teachers rated more negatively (i.e., negative and controlling in class; $r = -.57$, $p < .01$ for "dependency" in the fall, and $r = -.51$, $p < .01$ for "closeness" in the spring).

We used hierarchical regression to model change in teacher-student relationship quality from fall to spring.   The positive/negative valence of the ratings is fairly stable over the school year, and it is "conflict," in particular, that is generally the source of predictive value for later child adjustment. A downward trend in relationship quality—declining closeness and increasing conflict in student-teacher relationships over the school year—is linked to teacher negativity in the classroom, an increasing number of anxious child behaviors at home, and combinations of child problems and teacher classroom behavior (e.g., controlling teacher and acting-out student, racial mismatch between teacher and student). Teacher report of increasing dependency was also associated with increasingly anxious child behaviors at home. Parent reported life events had no association with changes in student-teacher relationship quality.

Our data suggested that teacher ratings of their relationships with individual students in the early grades of school were, in fact, based on both teacher and child characteristics, but also on specific combinations of the two. Teacher qualities apparent to a classroom observer or project staff member helped account for their ratings of relationship quality with children both early and later in the school year, but also for change in how they reported relationship quality over time. In contrast, children's anxious behaviors at home—as reported by parents—were linked only to declining relationship quality over time. And negative life events at home had no bearing on relationship quality at all.

These preliminary data suggest that teachers have a key role to play in how they rate their relationship quality with students in the early grades. Indeed, the pattern of results suggests that how teachers in the earliest grades respond to children may have some weight in how children adjust to and function in the school setting down the road. The predictive value of relationship ratings for later child school adjustment surely reflects initial child competence and motivation, but also perhaps a trajectory that is established from good or poor "fits" and experiences with teachers in the very first grades of school. Early child educators may indeed hold a special role in children's educational success.

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Home-School Relationships in Head Start: Cultural Values of Parents and Teachers

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Cultural interpretations of children's early care and development has been a long-standing interest among human development researchers and anthropologists. Robert LeVine's (1974) classic paper on cultural values and parental goals made clear that the diversity in parenting strategies and priorities has a rational basis and corresponds not only to historical traditions but contemporary changes in environmental exigencies, possibilities, and dangers. This study builds upon this rich tradition of cultural studies on parental beliefs by examining immigrant Chinese parents' and teachers' hopes for and roles in young children's early learning.

Specifically, this study examined the relationship between personal/professional roles as they influence conceptions of parent-teacher relationships and are associated with different beliefs about children's early learning and school readiness as supported in the home and in Head Start classrooms.

This study took place in a Head Start Center serving a predominantly Chinese population in an urban northeastern city. Interviews were conducted with 20 Chinese immigrant parents and the entire teaching staff (n=11), who were also Chinese immigrants. In addition to the 45-minute semi-structured interview, ethnographic observations of classroom routines were conducted.

Results from qualitative analysis of the interviews reveal parents' hopes that children learn English and pre-academic skills at Head Start to prepare for their entrance to public schools. In contrast, teachers stressed traditional Chinese values of respect, listening, and following direction in combination with more Western values of self-expression, creativity, and independence.

Both parents and teachers valued children's socialization to group membership. However, there were differences between parents' and teachers' interpretations of autonomy, respect, and cultural diversity. For example, teachers typically emphasized children's respect for other individuals, including peers and parents, whereas parents typically emphasized children's respect for authority figures and elders, particularly regarding cooperation to teachers' instructions.

Teachers and parents also varied in their interpretations of the home-school, or teacher-parent relationship. Both groups noted the critical importance of cooperation and communication between teachers and parents on behalf of their children. However, parents conveyed an unwillingness to raise issues of concern or challenge the authority of teachers. Teachers emphasized the need for parents to comply with Head Start interpretations of how best to support children's readiness for school.

These results correspond to recent studies on differences in immigrant status, parenting (Chao & Tseng, 2002), parental involvement in children's lives (Coll et al., 2002), and early childhood education (Fuller et al., 1996; New, Mallory, & Mantovani, 2000). They also provide new

insights into the consequences of professional development on immigrant teachers. These results also suggest the need for future research on immigrant children and the importance of pre-service and in-service professional development on the role of culture in program improvement.

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Observations of Teacher-Child Interactionsin the Context of 1:1 Story Reading

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Experiences with adult-child story reading provide an important context for emergent literacy; however, many children make the transition to kindergarten without these experiences, and are described as not "ready for school" (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001;Whitehurst, et al., 1994). Story reading processes in preschools consist primarily of large-group experiences, which may be insufficient for children whose previous experience with interactive story reading is limited (Morrow & Smith, 1990). Utilizing 1:1 story reading in preschool may enhance children's emergent literacy skills, by affording children access to higher quality interactive relationship processes (Frosch, Cox, & Goldman, 2001) with the teacher. The present study examined interactions of children and their teachers in 1:1 story reading activities in relation to teachers' reports of their relationship, child temperament, and child development.

Six Head Start pre-kindergarten teachers collaborated, implementing 1:1 story reading in their classrooms. Twenty-four participants and 24 control children were randomly selected. Teachers read with participants individually, twice a week. Teachers completed the following questionnaires at the beginning and end of the semester: relationship closeness and conflict (Student-Teacher Relationship Scale – Short Form; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992), temperamental effortful control, negative emotionality, and surgency (adaptation of the Children's Behavior Questionnaire (Very Short); Rothbart, et al., 2001), and literacy and social-emotional development (Developmental Continuum; Dodge & Colker, 1992). Teachers were videotaped reading to individual children 5-7 times. Observers coded frequencies of teacher and child interactive behaviors: teacher verbalizations, teacher looks at child, child looks at teacher (bids), child looks away, shared positive affect, and eye contact. Dyadic enjoyment was also rated. Inter-rater reliability of 2 independent coders ranged from .70 – 1.00 (ICC).

Teachers reported more closeness in their relationships with students who demonstrated more effortful control, surgency, and higher literacy and social emotional skills. Children looked away from story reading less when teachers reported a closer relationship. Teachers reported more conflict in their relationships with students who demonstrated more negative affect, surgency, and lower social-emotional skills. Children looked away from story reading more when teachers reported a more conflictual relationship. Children's looking away more was also associated with poorer effortful control and lower literacy and social-emotional skills. Teachers verbalized more and looked more often at children whom they reported having higher negative affect and lower social-emotional skills. Teachers shared more positive affect and demonstrated more enjoyment with children rated higher in surgency.

Observing teachers and children interacting over story reading provided increased understanding of children's engagement in emergent literacy and teacher-child relationship processes. "Looking away" from story reading emerged as an indicator of child temperament, emergent literacy and

social-emotional skills, and the quality of the teacher child relationship. Investigations with this small sample suggest that observing teacher-child story reading yields important information about the quality of the teacher-child relationship processes in the context of emergent literacy. Because the early teacher-child relationship is associated with academic and social outcomes through the elementary school years (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004) further research in this area may prove fruitful.

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Low-Income Children's Teacher-Child Relationships in Preschool and Social Skills at Kindergarten Entry as Predictors of Kindergarten Performance.

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Children's social and emotional skills are intimately linked with learning throughout childhood (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). Reductions in children's maladaptive classroom behaviors within early childhood programs have been associated with later academic success for low-income children (Gottfredson, 2001). There is need to investigate the extent to which children's social-emotional abilities may have direct and indirect influences on early academic performance, especially among low-income children who often begin school at a disadvantage compared to peers from more affluent families (Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The current study investigated direct and mediated relationships between low-income preschool children's closeness with adults in preschool, social skills in early kindergarten, and their end of the year kindergarten grades. It was predicted that social skills in preschool and early kindergarten social skills would be directly associated with kindergarten grades and that social skills in kindergarten would partially mediate the relationship between children's closeness with adults in preschool and kindergarten grades.

1,481 four-year-old children (51% female; 62% Hispanic/Latino, 35% African-American, 3% Caucasian) attending subsidized childcare in a large city in the southern US participated. During the Spring of their 4-yr-old preschool year (Age M = 62.72 mos, SD = 3.55), teachers completed the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1999), which includes an attachment or closeness with adults scale. About 6 months later, children were assessed upon entering kindergarten using the Work Sampling System Behavioral Screening Instrument (Dichtelmiller, Jablon, Marsden, & Meisels, 2002), which includes a personal and social development scale. At the end of their kindergarten year, an overall kindergarten performance score was calculated for each child by averaging their progress report marks in 11 subjects/areas; each reported on the scale of 3 = excellent, 2 = satisfactory, and 1 = not satisfactory.

Children's closeness with teachers in preschool accounted for 6% of the variance in children's social skills upon entering kindergarten, β = .25, $F(1,1479)$ = 96.56, p < .05. Social competence in kindergarten, in turn, accounted for 17% of the variance in children's end of the year kindergarten grades, β = .42, $F(1,1479)$ = 309.10, p < .05. Concerning the mediated regression, children's closeness with teachers in preschool accounted for 5% of the variance in kindergarten grades, $F(2,1478)$ = 171.32, p < .05, but only 2% of unique variance in kindergarten grades when social skills in kindergarten was included in the model. Similarly, the positive relationship between children's teacher-child closeness in preschool and kindergarten grades was reduced (β = .22 to β = .13) when early kindergarten social skills at was included.

In sum, children's interactions with teachers in preschool were predictive of children's later school success via its link with children's social skills exhibited in kindergarten. Social skills in kindergarten were in turn highly predictive of children's academic success in kindergarten. Therefore, school readiness research should expand beyond direct relationships between

preschool factors and school outcomes and include conducting and educating audiences on the important of indirect relationships between early social development in early childcare programs and later school success.

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Relations Among Teacher-Child Relationships, Children's Emotion Regulation, and School Adjustment in a Head Start Sample

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(Summary not available)