

Parenting and social competence in school: the role of preadolescents' personality

This study of 230 preadolescent students (mean age 11.3 years) from the wider area of Athens, Greece, examined the role of personality in the relation between parenting dimensions and social competence in school. Social competence was defined in terms of assertive, communicative and cooperative skills. Parenting dimensions were examined separately for mothers and fathers.

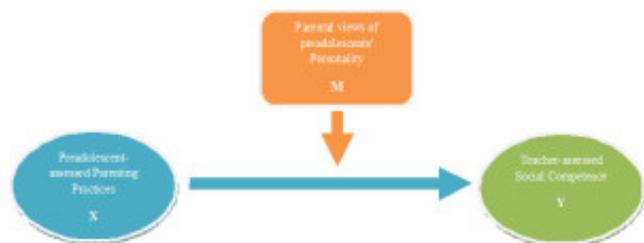


Fig. 1. Model of the moderation by preadolescents' personality.

Parental views of preadolescents' personality and parenting as reported by the children were associated, whereas no association between parenting and social competence was found. Extraverted preadolescents reported that they received more emotional warmth by both their parents. Also students, who are more prone to express their feelings and thoughts openly and be friendly towards others, are seen as more capable of maintaining social relationships efficiently. However, there were no findings to support the hypothesis that negative personality traits associate with demanding parenting practices. It would seem that in the delicate, transitive years of preadolescence, children with more positive personality traits value highly the responsive behavior of their parents. On the other hand, parents tend to be more affective and supportive of their preadolescent offspring, when they behave in a manner that is socially accepted, paying less attention to their negative characteristics and behaviors. Organized, attentive and intellectual students are considered by their teachers to be more socially efficient in class, exhibiting such behavior as tolerance, co-operation, positive negotiation skills and avoidance of conflicts within the peer

In this study parenting dimensions did not associate directly with social competence. This finding, although rare, suggests that parenting behavior associates with social competence indirectly and that several variables, such as children's personality, should be examined as intermediate (Fig. 1).

Results seem to suggest that either low or high levels of neuroticism matter more for the social competence of preadolescents who report high parental rejection (both maternal and paternal). Children, who have been consistently rejected by their parents, struggle to find their place among schoolmates instead. Thus, they may exhibit a more assertive behavior, may communicate and

cooperate with others and could be perceived by their teacher as more competent in social perspective. In order to behave in such manner, they need to be self-centered, audacious and emotionally reactive, among other things.

Moreover, preadolescents that reported low paternal overprotection and are exhibiting low levels of agreeableness were perceived as more socially competent, whereas those who reported high paternal overprotection were considered less competent in their social adjustment by their teachers. Likewise, extraverted preadolescents, who experienced their fathers as overprotective, were perceived with high levels of social competence. Results suggest that the emotional pressure that the controlling behavior of a father exerts upon a preadolescent contributes negatively to social adjustment among peers, mainly for those students lacking in a warm, friendly and concerned for others personality profile.

Differences in the gender and educational grade of the preadolescents were, also, identified. Mothers tended to be more tender and warm towards their daughters than their sons, a finding that can be related to the onset of puberty in many 11-year-old girls, when maternal support is considered very important. This result may, also, be related to the finding that sixth graders report their parents less controlling and more distant. Children often request and expect this kind of behavior by their parents and some parents feel safer to give their children more “space” for this purpose. Contrary to fifth graders, students of sixth grade are considered by their parents as more agreeable, cooperative and docile. Teachers seem to have the same notion of sixth grade, as a school year preparatory for high-school, when students are allowed to experience more freedom and autonomy granting.

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