

Resources by Skill: Connect

The Connect skills are Relationships, Teamwork, and Communication. These three skills are very closely related, so we have chosen some studies that deal with all three.

The Importance of Connect Skills

Positive relationships with teachers and peers can help students academically and behaviorally. **Hamre and Pianta (2001)**, for example, studied the extent to which kindergarten teachers' relationships with students are associated with academic and behavioral outcomes, and found that reports of negative relationships predicted student grades, test scores, work habits through lower elementary school (4th grade). Additionally, early teacher-child relationships were unique predictors of academic and behavioral outcomes in early elementary school, with mediated effects through eighth grade.

Similarly, **Birch and Ladd (1997)** analyzed the effect of kindergarten students' relationships with their teachers (including closeness, dependency, and conflict) on their achievement and attitudes towards school. For example, they found that student-teacher closeness uniquely accounted for 17% of the variance in school liking, and 14% of the variance in self-directedness. Dependency on the teacher uniquely accounted for 24% of the variance in student self-directedness. Components of the student-teacher relationship also accounted for smaller portions of the variance in academic readiness (visual and language skills), loneliness, school avoidance, and cooperation.

Furrer and Skinner (2003) examined children's sense of relatedness to teachers, parents, and peers as a factor contributing to their school engagement and academic outcomes. They found that engagement mediated the relationship between children's sense of relatedness and academic outcomes, meaning that relatedness affected academic outcomes by means of improving engagement in the classroom. Relatedness uniquely accounted for 15% of the variance in engagement.

Youth-adult relationships have also been linked to improved grades and improved social skills (**Pierce et al., 2010**).

A comparison of different groups of children based on their perceptions of teacher relationships and bonds with school (**Murray and Greenberg, 2000**) also found that students with greater scores on student-teacher relationship and school bond scales had higher scores on scales measuring positive aspects of social and emotional adjustment. Furthermore, students with strong relationship and school bond scores also had lower scores on negative adjustment factors. Effects were also found for social competence, delinquency, and symptoms of disorder.

Lastly, a longitudinal study (third through eighth grade) found that early prosocial behavior, including cooperativeness, helpfulness, sharing, and empathy, predicted later academic success (**Caprara et al., 2000**). The following figure describes the paths of influence that the researchers proposed between prosocial behavior, aggression, and academic achievement in third grade, and academic achievement and social preference in eighth grade, controlling for early academic achievement.

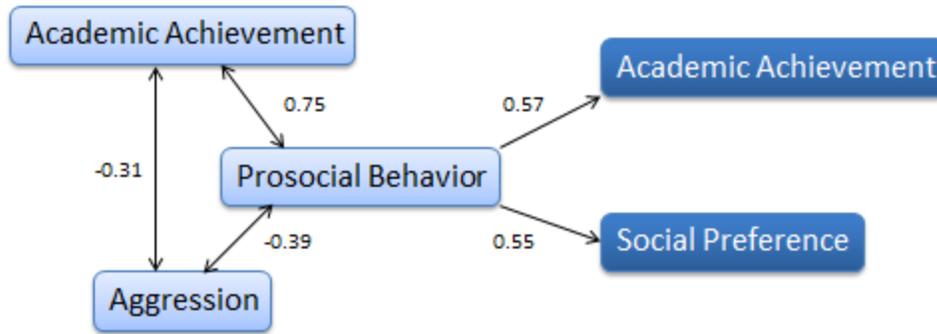


Figure 1: Caprara et al. (2001)'s proposed paths of influence, represented by arrows, and correlation coefficients ($p < 0.05$). The three items on the left are measured in third grade; the two on the right in eighth grade.

Cultivating Connect Skills

One study of youth-adult relationships in an after school program (Paisley and Ferrari, 2005), concluded that attendance is important to relationship-building and that relationships with program staff are some of the students' most positive relationships with adults. Interactions at the program between youth and adults were primarily one on one (84%) compared to group (9%) or small group (7%). A significant correlation was found between attendance and the adult relationship score ($r = 0.481$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, relationships with program staff were significantly more positive than those with teachers or neighborhood adults. The researchers note some implications of these results for practice, suggesting that programs should:

- Encourage long-term participation of youth,
- Recruit program staff with desirable characteristics conducive to relationship-building,
- Provide training for staff on youth development and building relationships,
- Conduct observations to provide feedback,
- Take steps to increase the frequency of desirable interactions, and
- Provide positive feedback to staff who build positive relationships with youth.

Petrides et al. (2006) studied the extent to which individual differences in trait emotional intelligence (EI) influence children's relationships with their peers. High trait EI pupils received more nominations for cooperation and leadership and fewer nominations for aggression and dependence. There was also a significant correlation between trait EI and fewer classroom disruptions.

One specific program, the Boys and Girls Clubs, focuses on forming positive relationships. Arbretton et al. (2009) studied ten Boys and Girls Clubs from around the country, tracking middle school youth over a 30 month period. Researchers found that longer attendance to such a program mattered. A minimum attendance of 52 days was associated with increased levels of school effort, increased levels of academic confidence, increased levels of integrity, higher levels of community service involvement, increased levels of future connectedness, and a lower likelihood of starting to smoke marijuana. A minimum attendance of 122 days caused decreased levels of aggression, decreased levels of shyness, a lower

likelihood of starting to carry a weapon, a decreased number of times stopped by the police, a lower likelihood of starting to drink alcohol, and a lower likelihood of starting to smoke cigarettes. A minimum of 244 days attending resulted in a decrease in the number of times skipping school and a lower likelihood of starting to have sexual intercourse. Finally, attendance of 366 days or more caused a decreased number of negative peers as friends.

Works Cited

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