

Aggression and Learning Behavior during the Transition from Preschool to School. Relations among Parent, Preschool Teacher and School Teacher Ratings

Eve Kikas, University of Tartu, Faculty of Education
Kristiina Tropp, University of Tartu, Faculty of Education

Transition from preschool to school is a difficult period for several but not for the majority of children; besides cognitive abilities, aggressive and academic behaviors influence the process of adjustment. The short-term longitudinal study investigates children's aggressive and learning behavior, academic skills and cognitive development before school and in school, and children's adjustment in school using parent, preschool teacher and school teacher reports.

Data are collected twice – first, in spring in preschool and, second, in fall in school. The participants are 151 6–7-year-old children (77 boys and 74 girls), their parents, preschool and school teachers. At the first time, parents and preschool teachers rate children's aggression and learning behavior; teachers additionally evaluate children's competence in language and mathematics. Children complete the conceptual development test in small groups. At the second time, schoolteachers rate children's aggression, learning behavior, competence in language and mathematics as well as how often they are victimized.

The findings indicate that:

- the concordance between preschool teachers' and parents' evaluations of aggression and learning behaviour is not high;
- according to both parents' and teachers' ratings, aggressive behavior is negatively correlated with learning behavior, this correlation is higher according to parents' ratings;
- preschool aggression and learning behaviors are related to school aggression and learning behaviors, academic skills and victimization;
- low conceptual knowledge is also a significant predictor of aggression;
- in addition to preschool teachers' reports, parents' reports have an additional predictive value for aggression in school.

In school, children meet new challenges and have to adjust to new situations, peers, and adults, and this is quite difficult for many children. To make the transition from preschool to school smoother and less problematic to all the children, cooperation among parents, preschool teachers and class teachers is of importance. Just the habitual way of aggressive behaviour seems to inhibit smoother adjustment. Namely children who before school tend to be aggressive in different situations (i.e., are assessed as more aggressive by different reporters), are found to be more aggressive and more frequently victimized in the first months in school. These behaviours do not account for all maladjustment problems; however, these behaviours are malleable, and appropriate intervention can help later academic failure and social problems. To help children cope better, it is important to know their behaviour patterns in different situations. The study indicates the importance of parents' reports beside teachers' evaluations, specifically in assessing aggression.