

The Influence of Friendship Quality and Perceived Emotional Risk of Participation on
Behavioral Engagement versus Cognitive Engagement

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Abstract

Friendship quality during middle childhood has been shown to impact school adjustment and academic outcomes in children (Hosan & Hoglund, 2017; Zucchetti, Candela, Sacconi, & Rabaglietti, 2015). Previous research has shown that friendship quality is associated with higher cognitive and behavioral school engagement in elementary school children in grades K-3 (Hosan & Hoglund, 2017) and longitudinally predicts academic achievement (e.g., grades) (Zucchetti, Candela, Sacconi, & Rabaglietti, 2015). Furthermore, perceived emotional risk of participation is a variable which has been theorized to be negatively related to both friendship quality and classroom engagement (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005) and has been included as a variable of interest in research focusing on the impact of the socio-affective environment on positive school adjustment in students (Hamm, Farmer, Dadisman, Gravelle, & Murray, 2011).

Despite the interest for the role of friendship quality and perceived risk of participation in the academic lives of children, there is insufficient research exploring their independent contributions to cognitive and behavioral domains of academic life (e.g., engagement). The present study aimed to further examine the influence of friendship quality (specifically validation and caring) on student cognitive and behavioral engagement. The validation and caring subscale was chosen because an initial Pearson Correlation analysis revealed a significant correlation between validation and caring and scores and cognitive engagement ($r=.410, p<.01$), as well as validation and caring scores and behavioral engagement ($r=.240, p<.05$). The data analyzed in this study was compiled by Thomas and Serpell (2019). A total of 101 ethnically diverse 5th graders ($M_{\text{age}}=10.9$ years) completed surveys reporting on their friendship quality, school engagement, and perceived risk of participation. The Emotional Risk of Participation Scale (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005), the validation and caring subscale of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Parker & Asher, 1993),

and the cognitive and behavioral engagement subscales of the School Engagement Scale (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, & Paris, 2005) were used in the survey. Participants were 60.4% male and lived in a middle class, suburban area (Thomas & Serpell, 2019).

To investigate how well emotional risk of participation and friendship quality scores predicted cognitive and behavioral engagement, after controlling for gender, two hierarchical linear regressions were computed; first for cognitive engagement, then for behavioral engagement. In the first hierarchical regression, when added to the model controlling for gender, emotional risk of participation did not make a large change in the prediction of cognitive engagement, $\Delta R^2 = .031$, $p < .05$. The inclusion of friendship quality significantly improved the prediction of cognitive engagement, $\Delta R^2 = .125$, $p < .05$. All variables together accounted for 19.5% of variance in predicting cognitive engagement ($F(3, 93) = 8.77$, $p < .05$, adj. $R^2 = .195$). 5.5% of the variance in cognitive engagement could be predicted by knowing gender alone. Next, in the second regression, after controlling for gender, emotional risk of participation was a statistically significant predictor of behavioral engagement, $\Delta R^2 = .071$, $p < .05$. The inclusion of friendship quality did not result in a significant change, $\Delta R^2 = .03$. Only the model controlling for gender and emotional risk of participation significantly predicted behavioral engagement ($F(2, 94) = 7.26$, $p < .05$, adj. $R^2 = .115$). 5.3% of the variance in behavioral engagement could be predicted by knowing gender alone. Gender was a significant predictor of both cognitive and behavioral engagement.

These results suggest that validation and caring aspects of friendship quality have an association in predicting students' cognitive engagement, but not behavioral engagement. Conversely, emotional risk of participation was a significant predictor of behavioral but not cognitive engagement. These results constitute an important contribution to the understanding of the independent contributions of validation and caring aspects of friendship quality and emotional

risk of participation to distinct domains of academic engagement. School engagement has been established as a critical factor for academic success, and a better understanding of the distinct factors that favor its specific components might constitute a useful tool in the design and implementation of intervention programs targeting ethnically diverse populations.

References

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