

The relationship between observed classroom quality and social competence in Finnish preschool classrooms

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Finnish preschool education as a context for social interactions

- In Finland, preschoolers are 6-year-olds
- The emphasis is strongly child-centered and learning is incorporated through playlike activities
- Becoming socially competent and constructive individuals, who can interact responsibly in different social networks, is one of the central aims of Finnish preschool education for 6-year-olds (Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education, 2010).



Theoretical background

- Educational settings are influential social contexts for shaping development (Ladd, Buhs, & Troop, 2002; Spivak & Farran, 2012)
- Teacher's significance for children's social development (Howes et al., 1994; Lillvist et al., 2009)
- Especially, the quality of teacher-child interactions is known to have an effect for children's social and academic development (Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2003; Pianta et al., 2002; Siekkinen et al., 2013)
- Process quality
 - Teachers' emotional support, organization and management, instructional support



The CLASS assesses process quality

(Pre-K, Pianta, LaParo & Hamre, 2008)

3 DOMAINS	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION	INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT
	Positive Climate	Behavior Management	Concept Development
	Negative Climate	Productivity	Quality of Feedback
	Teacher Sensitivity	Instructional Learning Formats	Language Modeling
	Regard for Student Perspectives		
10 DIMENSIONS			

Multiple **indicators** define each dimension.

Multiple **behavioral markers** define each indicator.



Research Gap

- Previous studies in Finland have shown that teachers' instructional support and teachers' stress is connected to children's social competence (Siekkinen et al., 2013).
- However, other studies in and outside the US have suggested that dimension level of classroom process quality could be more meaningful (Curby et al., 2009; Salminen et al., 2012).

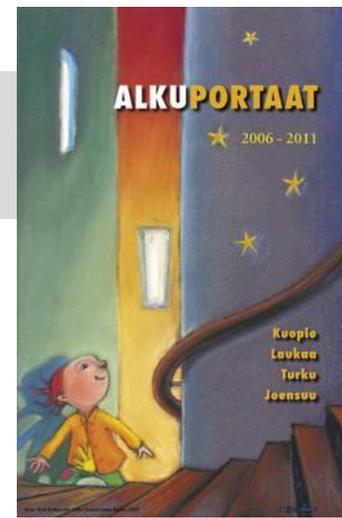


Research Questions

- Are there differences between preschool classrooms in children's social competence?
- What kind of combinations of quality (i.e., CLASS items) are associated with those differences, when controlling for children's gender, number sequences, and interest in kindergarten activities?



Participants



- Data were gathered as a part of the longitudinal First Steps -study (Alkuportaati) in the spring 2007
- 49 kindergarten teachers (47 women, 2 men) and 515 children (271 boys, 244 girls)



Measures 1/3

- **Classroom Observations:**
 - 49 preschool classrooms were observed by using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
 - 3 hrs at a time on two different days
 - 2 independent observers
 - Ratings from 1-7
 - Sum scores over two observation days and over two observers



Measures 2/3

- **Children's Social Competence:**
 - **Teacher ratings** of the children's social competence in their classroom
 - Multisource Assessment of Children's Social Competence (MASCS, 2006)
- The following four subscale sums were used in the analysis as measures of aspects of social competence: Cooperation Skills and Empathy for ***prosocial behavior***; Impulsivity and Disruptiveness for ***antisocial behavior***.

MASCS

- 15 dimensions, 4 scales
- On the basis of Kenneth Merrell's School Social Behavior Scale (SSBS).

Cooperating skills	Empathy	Impulsivity	Disruptiveness
Offers help to other students	Knows how to be a good friend	Has "a short fuse"	Teases and makes fun of other students
Effectively participates in group activities	Is sensitive to the feelings of others	Has temper outbursts or tantrums	Argues and quarrels with peers
Invites other students to participate in activities	Shows acceptance of other students	Is easily irritated	Bothers and annoys other students
Is skillfull in starting conversations with mates			Acts without thinking
Cooperates with other students			

1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = frequently, 4 = very frequently



Measures 3/3

- Children's math skills (i.e., number sequences)
 - "How far can you name the numbers? Begin 1,2,3... I will tell you when you can stop" or "Can you name the numbers backward? Like 4,3,2,1... Begin from 12." (4 items)
- Motivation (Interest towards contents in preschool)
 - Picture cards
 - Question: "How much do you enjoy playing/ music/preschool activities etc. (8 items)? "
 - Scale: 😞 😐 😊 😄



Intraclass correlations

	ICC
Empathy	.24***
Cooperation Skills	.18***
Impulsivity	.17**
Disruptiveness	.15*

*Note . * $p < .05$, * $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.*

→ how many % of the total variation in social competence was due to classroom-level (i.e., between-classroom variation, within classroom homogeneity in social competence)

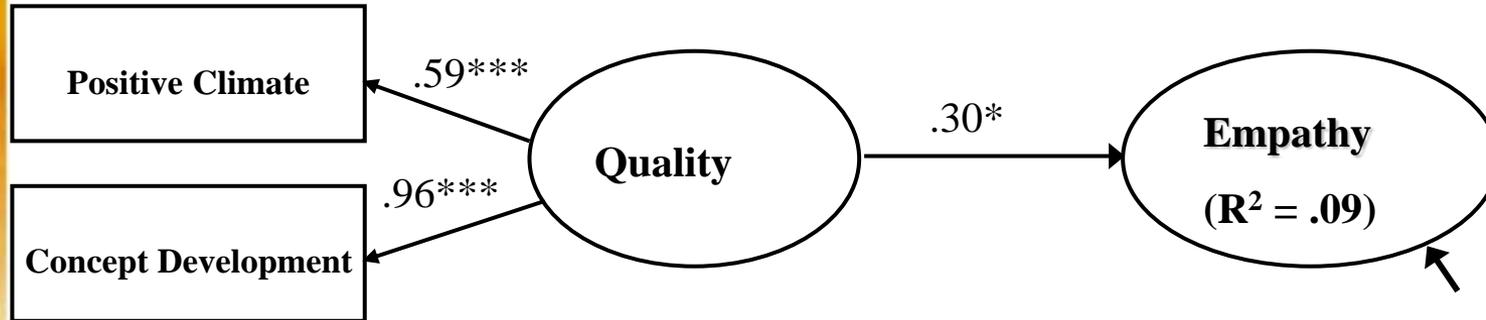
Correlations

	Cooperation Skills	Empathy	Impulsivity	Disruptiveness
Positive Climate	.17**	.30**	.07	-.13**
Teacher Sensitivity	.10*	.23**	.13**	-.03
Regard for Student Perspectives	.14**	.25**	.23**	.07
Behavior Management	.07	.25**	.07	-.05
Productivity	-.03	.12**	.11*	.05
Instructional Learning Formats	.14**	.30**	.04	-.17**
Concept Development	.17**	.37**	.03	-.17**
Quality of Feedback	.09*	.33**	.09*	-.11*
Language Modeling	.17**	.32**	.12**	-.08+



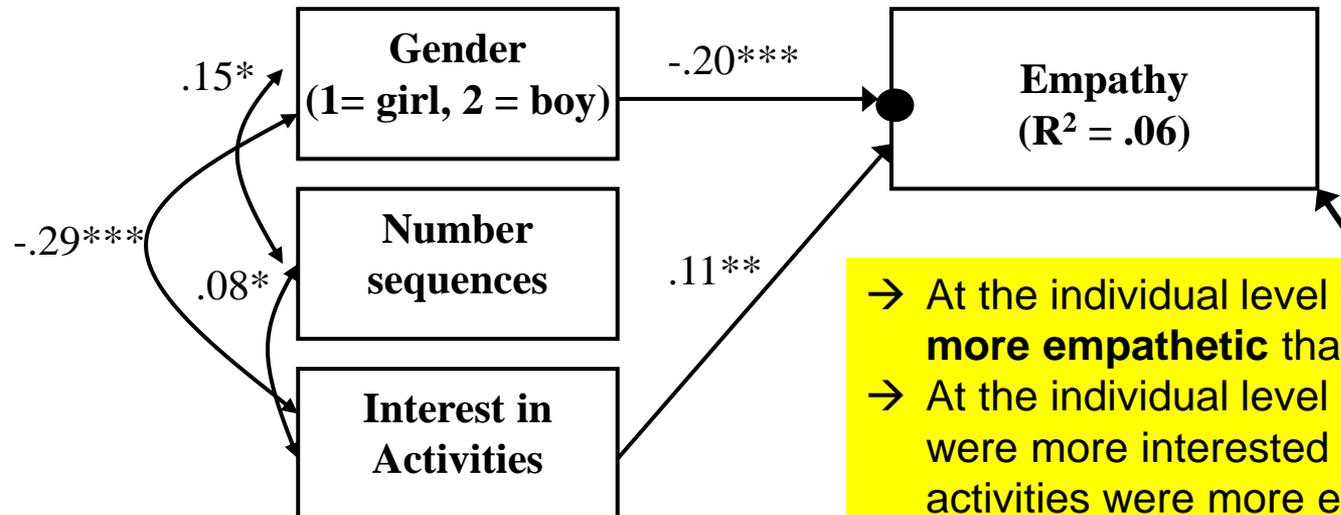
→ The higher the classroom quality with respect to dimensions of **Positive Climate and Concept Development**, the more **empathetic** children were in that classroom.

$\chi^2(1) = 1.81, p = .18$; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .04; SRMR_{within} = .00; SRMR_{between} = .02; one-tailed testing of significance



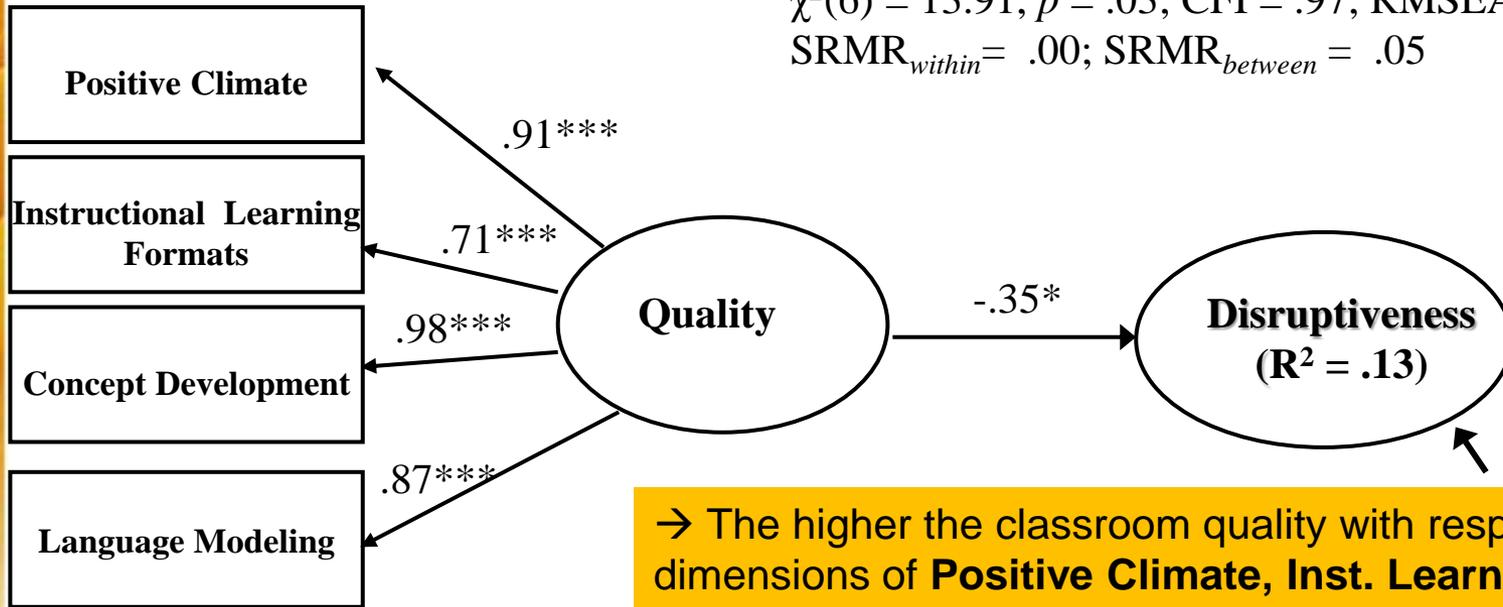
Between

Within



→ At the individual level **girls were more empathetic** than boys.
 → At the individual level children who were more interested in preschool activities were more empathetic.

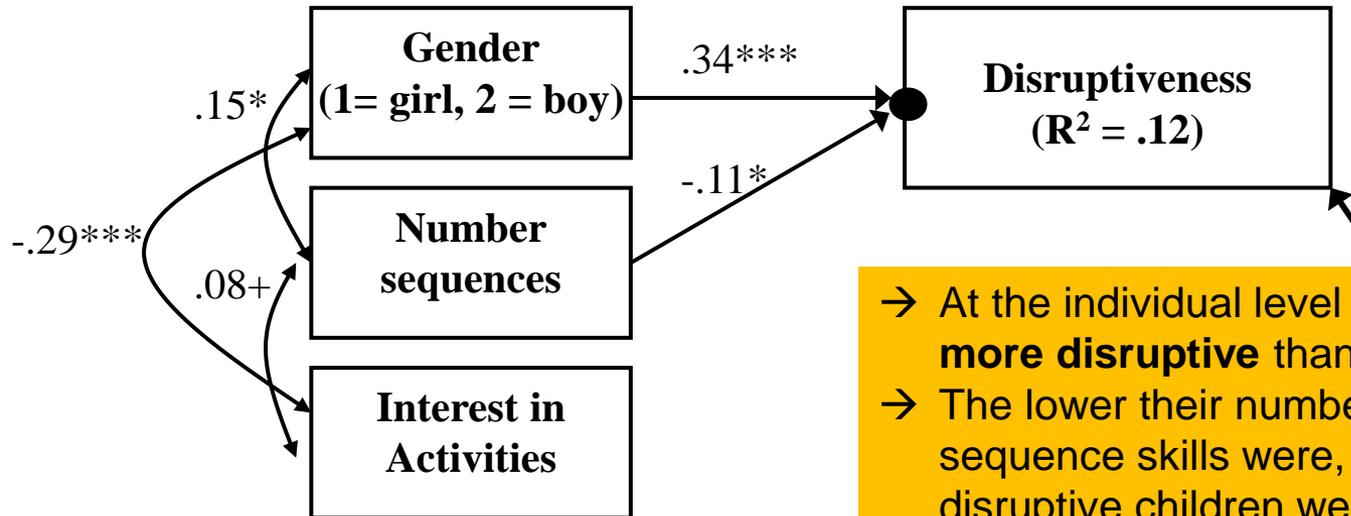
$\chi^2(6) = 13.91, p = .03; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .05;$
 $SRMR_{within} = .00; SRMR_{between} = .05$



→ The higher the classroom quality with respect to dimensions of **Positive Climate, Inst. Learning Formats, Concept Development, and Language Modeling** the less disruptive children were in that classroom

Between

Within



→ At the individual level **boys were more disruptive** than girls.
 → The lower their number sequence skills were, the more disruptive children were.

Discussion

- Dimensions of Concept Development and Positive Climate seem to be meaningful for children's social competence in Finnish preschool classrooms:
 - **Increased** prosocial behavior (**Empathy**)
 - In practice, such teachers might be able to create pleasant and inviting atmosphere but also verbally assist and activate children's own thinking.
 - Teacher and other children as models of socially appropriate behavior
- Higher quality of Positive Climate, Instructional Learning Formats, Concept Development and Language Modeling
 - **Decreased** antisocial behavior (**Disruptiveness**)
 - In practice, such teachers, perhaps, are better able to respond to children's emotional needs in the challenging situations and use children's own ideas as tools to engage them to activities and by using multifaceted practices and methods.

Discussion...

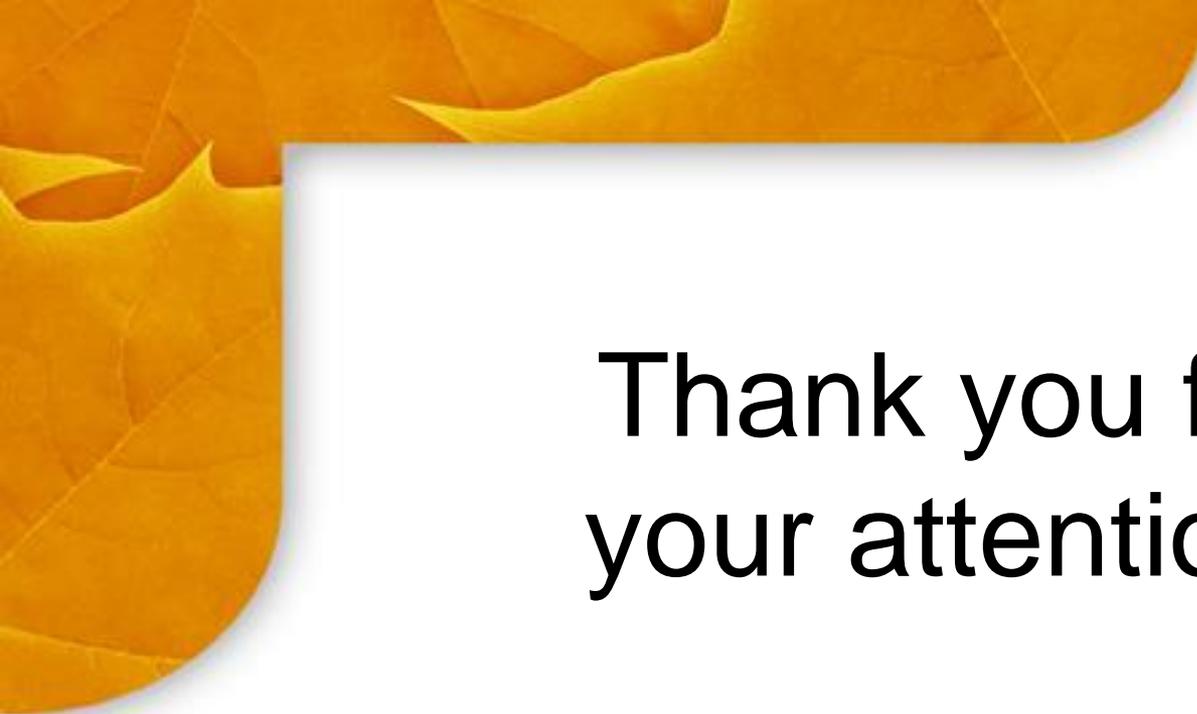
- Previous Finnish study (Salminen et al., 2012) indicates a large variation between teachers' emotional support (inc. Positive Climate) and relatively low CLASS scores on the Instructional Support (inc. Concept Development) → Challenges for the teacher education in the future.



Limitations and future directions

- Only small amount of observed teachers (selectivity?)
- No cross-lagged design (only one time point)
- Teacher-ratings of social skills
- Only small amount of explained variance
- The role of other factors (family)
- More nuanced analyses are needed (what teachers actually do, what kind of practices are behind the quality scores).





Thank you for
your attention!

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