

Agreeableness Trait as one Predictor to Learning Outcome for Children Aged from 2-11 years old

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Abstract. This essay is aimed at illustrating the personality traits “Agreeableness” can be one significant predictor to children’s academic performance, who are from 2 to 11 years old, respectively in Preoperational Stage and Concrete operational stage grounded on the Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development Theory (Laura E. Berk, 2013). The Five-Factor Model is utilized to define agreeableness in this essay to make the scope of agreeableness much more explicit.

Keywords: Personality Traits; Agreeableness; Learning outcome; Predictors.

1. Introduction

The Five-Factor Model is proven a systematic scale for people to define their personality traits especially for adults (McCrae, Costa & Busch, 1986), which is also testified to be applicable for young children according to their observational behaviors (Halverson, Kohnstamm, & Martin, 1994; Sneed, 2002). People’s personalities are classified consistently into 5 aspects as Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, abbreviated as OCEAN. People’s stable behaviors style, thinking models and emotional expressive types can be traced back to the above mentioned 5 personality categories (McCrae & Costa, 1997).

Recent years the Big Five personality traits or Five-Factor Model (FFM) has been studied from the perspective of correlation between participants’ academic performance and the five personality traits (Costa & McCrae 1992) from adults in university to children from preschools, primary and secondary schools (Furnham, Monsen, & Ahmetoglu, 2009).

Agreeableness as one of the Big Five personality traits is defined by Costa and McCrae “the quality of one’s interpersonal orientation along a continuum from compassion to antagonism in thoughts, feelings and actions” (1985). According to the delimitation in the “Big Five”, the agreeableness is defined as one index scaling and demonstrating people’s social tendency and ability. Therefore people who are highly in agreeableness tend to behave more sociable, friendly “soft-hearted, good-natured, trusting, helpful, forgiving, gullible” and lower in this scale would be to the opposite as aggressive, antisocial “cynical, rude, suspicious, uncooperative, vengeful, ruthless, irritable” (Costa & McCrae, 1985).

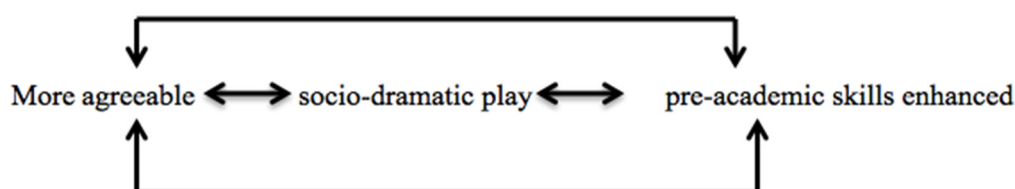
2. Children’s Characteristic Relating to Agreeableness in Learning from Perspective of Piaget’s Cognitive Development Theory

2.1 The Characteristic in Cognitive Development at this Stage

According to Piagetian theory, there are 4 stages of children’s cognitive development as Sensorimotor Stage (birth to 2 years), Preoperational Stage (2-7 years old), Concrete Operational Stage (7-11 years old) and Formal Operational Stage (11 to adult) are universal (Berk, 2013; Piaget, 1926). During the Preoperational and Concrete Operational Stage, children have become the active self-learners in environment with their main caregivers. They could combine objects and the words together through their accumulated experience in daily life and explore the world by “hand-on” experience via multi sensory (Minetola, 2014). They also gradually build the relation between symbol (like words, images, photos etc.) and concrete objects in real life, which is named as Mental Representation (Laura E. Berk, 2013).

2.2 Cooperative Children Engage More in Socio-Dramatic Play

As children further develop in the Mental Representation, socio-dramatic play has played an important role for children to learn and enhance their social skills simultaneously, which are highly appraised by in both Piagetian and Vygotskian theory (Berk, 2013). As Vygotskian defines that the socio-dramatic play regarding to preschool children with such features: “imagined situation by children” themselves, role-play and role’s “rules” during play. Socio-dramatic play is one kind of make-believe play involving other peers since children are 3-year old or so and the complexity and degree with peers’ interaction is increasing as time goes on (Berk, 2013). Children who are more agreeable tend to be more engaged in socio-dramatic play with peers and they would learn social norm and comprehensively understand peer’s meaning through play. As children frequently interact with peers during play, children would learn more necessary “prerequisites pre-academic skills” for future learning as longer attention span, reasoning and problem-solving abilities etc., which predict children reading (Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2003), arithmetic ability etc. in academics. Thus it seems to be a virtuous cycle:



In a study conducted by NICHD (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development), the researchers aim to prove that the whether “quality and quantity of Early Care relates to children’s functioning in primary grade” (Allhusen et al., 2002). Participants are 772 children from 1364 families at 10 locations totally. Among the aspects of Child Outcomes, children are tested in reading, mathematics, memory and vocabulary by Revised Woodcock- Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery at half past four, first grade and third grade in primary school respectively. Social Skills Rating System is utilized to testify children’s social ability in 4 areas as cooperation, assertion, responsibility and self-control from perspectives of mothers and teachers at the above 3 time dots respectively. The result shows that either from the perspective of mothers or teachers, the children’s academic outcome is positively correlated with their social ability index. Therefore, as a personality trait of individual, children of high agreeableness would have more chances to initiate play, through which they enhance their social skills and fortunately these skills and social norms help to facilitate and promote their academic learning from peers, caregivers, teachers etc.

3. Children’s Characteristic Relating to Agreeableness in Learning from Perspective of Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory

Another crucial aspect relating to children’s agreeableness personality trait and learning process is grounded from Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development theory. This is a scope that when children encounter some challenges that they can’t tackle it all by themselves alone, however they can solve the problem with the help of other experienced adults or expert peers. Teachers and caregivers should pay more attention to it for ZPD is the initial beginning of learning process. Teachers and caregivers or other skilled peers can behave as assistants to scaffold children’s learning in order to promote children reach to higher level or another area in learning content. Just take teachers’ behaviors as scaffolding for example: at this specific time, teachers could provide direct instructions, divide the whole task into small elements or make an example by themselves with clear explanations as well (Laura E Berk & Winsler, 1995; Hogan & Pressley, 1997). So when children are more cooperative and with more social skills, they would clearly express the difficulties in learning and depict why they feel confused about the challenges they are facing. Simultaneously when listening to other more experienced person’s explanations, they tend to understand the meaning more

comprehensively. Thus children of high agreeableness would grasp the main idea more accurately during learning.

4. Summary

In sum, this essay aims to illustrate the agreeableness trait in predicting children's school success referring the age group of 2-11 years old from kindergarten to early years in primary school. Firstly, Children's learning in Preoperational stage and Operational stage has characteristics according to Piagetian theory. During this stage, children's language and cognitive, social and emotional development is significant, especially the mental representation ability is a unique characteristic for children. Thus Socio-dramatic play is vital for children's learning during this stage. Cooperative children would have more possibilities to practice social skills and enhance the social competence during play. Secondly, from Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, learning is natured in social culture. Children of high agreeable personality trait would be more engaged in social cooperation and learn more cultural and social norms, which would facilitate and promote children's involvement in interaction with peers, caregivers or teachers in family, kindergarten or elementary school. Thirdly, there are various instruments to evaluate children's academic performance (especially in one specific area as verbal, number sense etc.) before enrolling to elementary school. School readiness is always used to define and evaluate children's developmental outcome in ECE and it is also strongly predicts the future academic learning outcome. If children are more capable in social skills, they would be much more ready for the future learning and build positive relationship with peers and teachers, which are all important factors influencing academic outcome.

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