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Children's help seeking and impulsivity

Minna Puustinen*, Marja Kokkonen, Asko Tolvanen, Lea Pulkkinen

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to analyze the relationship between students' (100 children aged 8 to 12) help-seeking behavior and impulsivity. Help-seeking behavior was evaluated using a naturalistic experimental paradigm in which children were placed in a problem-solving situation and had the opportunity to seek help from the experimenter, if needed. Impulsivity was analyzed using the Hyperactivity–Impulsivity Scale from the Teacher Rating Form of the Multidimensional Peer Nomination Inventory (TR-MPNI), Circle Tracing Task (CTT), Matching Familiar Figures (MFF), and Impulsiveness and Venturesomeness scales from the Eysenck Junior I₆ questionnaire. Structural equation modeling (SEM) showed that impulsivity was not related to children's question asking. Different correlational patterns were found for question asking and other help-seeking variables (i.e., performance scores and mean reflection time preceding question asking). The two Eysenck Junior I₆ scales showed no significant correlations with other measures. The importance of considering the many sidedness of both help-seeking and impulsivity constructs is discussed.

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1. Introduction

Educational psychologists have now amply documented the beneficial effects of selective help seeking on learning and understanding. Instrumental (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985), adaptive (Newman, 1994), strategic (Karabenick, 1998), or self-regulating (Puustinen, 1998) help seekers do not rush headlong into questioning. Rather, they begin first by trying to solve the problems themselves, and if asking for help from someone more competent proves to be necessary, they restrict their questions to just those hints and

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: mcguo@club-internet.fr (M. Puustinen).

explanations needed to allow them to finish solving the problems by themselves. In short, this kind of help seeking can be considered a strategy for self-regulated learning (SRL).

Research on help seeking within educational psychology has mostly dealt with three out of four aspects of the help-seeking process, namely, (meta)cognitive, motivational and affective, and social and interactional aspects. The (meta) cognitive aspect refers to studies that focus mainly on the actual question-asking behavior (e.g., Graesser & Person, 1994; Karabenick & Knapp, 1988; Puustinen, 1998; van der Meij, 1990; van der Meij & Dillon, 1994). The motivational and affective side of the help-seeking process has been most often explored through goal orientations (e.g., Arbreton, 1998; Butler & Neuman, 1995; Karabenick, 2003; Newman, 1990; Newman & Schwager, 1995; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997), but also through perceptions of competence (Nelson-Le Gall, De Cooke, & Jones, 1989), self-efficacy (Puustinen & Winnykamen, 1998), and self-esteem (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; van der Meij, 1989). The social and interactional aspect emphasizes the inherently social nature of the help-seeking process and the role of contextual factors in it (e.g., Karabenick, 1994; Nelson-Le Gall & Glor-Scheib, 1986; Newman & Schwager, 1993; Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998; Winnykamen, 1993).

The fourth aspect, behavior, is present, at least implicitly, in all help seeking; asking for help necessarily involves the help-seeker's activity. This aspect has not been well developed by educational psychologists. Pintrich (2000), however, put forth this point recently by referring to help seeking as a behavioral strategy in his model of SRL. According to the model, SRL is composed of four phases, labeled forethought, monitoring, control, and reflection phases. For each phase, self-regulatory activities are detailed in cognitive, motivational and affective, behavioral, and contextual areas. Help-seeking behavior is classified as a behavioral control activity in SRL "because it involves the person's own behavior" (Pintrich, 2000, p. 468).

From the educational viewpoint, impulsivity as an aspect of behavioral self-regulation is of particular importance. Impulsivity has been demonstrated to be associated with disorganization, poor planning, lack of effective problem solving, failure to deploy mnemonic strategies, deficient self-monitoring (Levine & Jordan, 1987), high error scores (Brunas-Wagstaff, Bergquist, & Wagstaff, 1994; Victor, Halverson, & Montague, 1985), and poor academic performance (Kipnis, 1971). According to the review by Messer (1976), impulsive children use worse problem-solving strategies than reflective children do in tasks where the answer is not immediately obvious. More recently, children with high levels of aggressive-hyperactive-inattentive behavior have been shown to have lower levels of academic achievement skills (Shelton et al., 1998). In boys only, Hyperactivity-Impulsivity has been linked to reading disability (Willcutt & Pennington, 2000), and Hyperactivity-Impulsivity-attention problems appear to be associated with low grade point average and low self-evaluation of academic skills (Loeber, Brinthaup, & Green, 1990). Generally, Hyperactivity-Impulsivity is more typical of boys than of girls (Logue & Chavarro, 1992; Newcorn et al., 2001; Nolan, Volpe, Gadow, & Sprafkin, 1999; Sandberg, 1996).

One of the very rare empirical studies dealing with help seeking and behavioral self-regulation comes from Bembenutty and Karabenick (1998). However, neither impulsivity nor help seeking was specifically the focus of their study. They examined the role of academic delay of gratification (ADOG, i.e., postponement of immediate satisfaction of impulses in favor of more valuable and temporally remote academic goals) in college students' SRL strategies. Impulsivity, evaluated by the adaptation of the Buss and Plomin (1984; Buss, 1995) Impulsivity Scale, was added to the comparisons to test the discriminant validity of ADOG. Help seeking, on the other hand, was included in the Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1993). ADOG was

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