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The role of parenting styles and teacher interactional styles in children's reading and spelling development

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the associations between parenting styles, teacher interactional styles, and children's reading and spelling skills. The sample consisted of 864 Finnish-speaking children and their parents (864 mothers, 864 fathers) and teachers ($N = 123$). Children's risk for reading disabilities and reader status were assessed in kindergarten. Children were also tested on reading and spelling skills in Grades 1 and 2. Parenting styles and teacher interactional styles were measured using parents' and teachers' self-reports in Grade 1. First, the results indicated that both an authoritative parenting style and authoritative teacher interactional style positively predicted children's spelling skill development. Second, authoritative parenting was particularly beneficial for the spelling skill development of children who were at risk for reading disabilities. Third, authoritative teaching promoted spelling skill development particularly among children who were nonreaders in

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kindergarten but had no risk for reading disabilities. Finally, some evidence was found that authoritative teaching could compensate for the negative impact of nonauthoritative parenting on reading development among kindergarten nonreaders.

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1. Introduction

Interaction with parents and teachers constitute important interpersonal contexts for children's learning and school achievement (Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997). For example, previous research has shown that authoritative parenting characterized by high responsiveness and high demandingness is linked to children's high academic achievement (e.g., Baumrind, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Similarly, authoritative teaching has been connected to children's good academic skills (Walker, 2008). Previous research on parenting styles and teacher interactional styles, however, has three major limitations. First, only a few attempts have been made to investigate both of these in the same study (see Paulson, Marchant, & Rothlisberg, 1998 for adolescent perceptions of parenting and teaching styles), and thus little is known about their eventual cumulative and compensative effects. Second, most of the earlier research has concentrated on general academic achievement (e.g., Baumrind, 1989; Boon, 2007; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996) rather than specific academic skills, such as reading and spelling. Third, little is known about the extent to which the impacts of parenting and teaching on children's reading and spelling skills differ according to children's individual characteristics. The present longitudinal study in a Finnish sample investigated the unique and interactive contributions of parenting styles and teachers' interactional styles on the development of children's reading and spelling skills from Grade 1 to Grade 2 and whether children's early reading ability, risk for reading difficulties, and sex moderate these associations.

1.1. Children's learning to read and spell

Learning to read and spell is crucial for all academic learning. One of the goals of research on reading and spelling has been early identification of children at high risk for developing reading and spelling difficulties at school. The strongest predictors of reading difficulties have repeatedly been shown to be low levels of letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and naming speed both in languages with consistent (e.g., Finnish; Lerkkanen, Ahonen, & Poikkeus, 2011; Puolakanaho et al., 2007) and in those with inconsistent orthographies (e.g., English; Gallagher, Frith, & Snowling, 2000; Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000; Scarborough, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Wimmer, Mayringer, & Landerl, 1998, 2000). Sex differences favoring girls have also been reported in literacy tasks in the early school years (e.g., Chatterji, 2006; Gambell & Hunter, 1999; Logan & Johnson, 2009). For example, when analyzing the K-8 national longitudinal data of United States children, Robinson and Lubienski (2011) showed that girls scored significantly higher than boys at the beginning of kindergarten, although the sex gap diminished from kindergarten through Grade 5. Moreover, reading and spelling difficulties have been found to be more prevalent among males than females (Hawke, Olson, Willcut, Wadsworth, & DeFries, 2009; Rutter et al., 2004).

The present study was carried out with Finnish children. One important feature of the Finnish language and its writing system is that it consists of only 29 grapheme–phoneme combinations, all of which are wholly consistent in both spelling and reading. Due to the consistent nature of the Finnish orthography, about 25% of children learn to decode words during the kindergarten year (e.g., Lerkkanen, Rasku-Puttonen, Aunola & Nurmi, 2004) and the majority of children learn to read during the first semester of Grade 1 (Leppänen, Niemi, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2004; Lerkkanen, Rasku-Puttonen, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2004). However, even a highly consistent orthography does not guarantee efficient literacy acquisition for all children. In Finnish, reading difficulties are typically identified in fluency rather than accuracy (e.g., Holopainen, Ahonen, & Lyytinen, 2001), as has also been reported in other orthographically consistent languages (e.g., van Daal & van der Leij, 1999; Wimmer, 1993). Spelling problems also characterize many children with reading deficit in Finnish (e.g., Torppa, Lyytinen, Erskine, Eklund, & Lyytinen, 2010).

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