

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION RIGHT, PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM QUALITY, AND SELF-COMPETENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Children's participation, defined as the right to participate in all matters affecting them, freely expressing their opinion, and have it respected and taken into account is increasingly considered a criteria of early childhood education quality (Sheridan, 2007). Although several authors discuss, at a conceptual level, relationships between children's participation and self-esteem, self-efficacy, communication or negotiation skills (e.g., Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Sinclair, 2004), there is little empirical evidence on the effects of participation on preschool children's development. This study aims to investigate the associations between preschool teachers' perceptions about participation practices, observed teacher-child interactions quality, and children's perceived competence, controlling for children's sex, age, and mothers' education. Because social skills are important for children's successful socioemotional development (LaFreniere & Dumas, 1996), **self-control will be tested as a moderator of the relationship between both teacher-child interactions quality and participation practices, and children's perceived competence.**

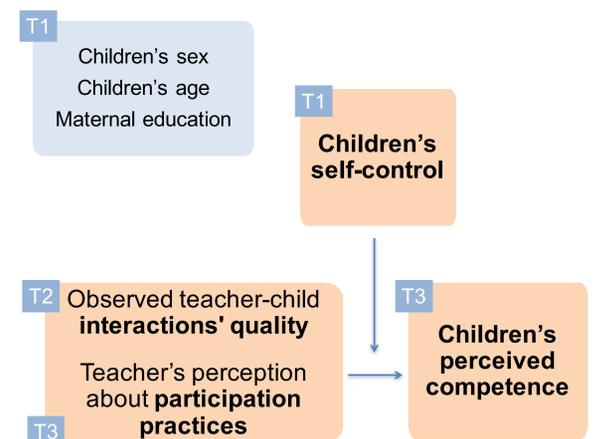


Figure 1. Hypothetic model of relations between variables

METHOD

Participants

- 180 typically developing children (90 ♂) ($M_{age} = 63.33$, $SD = 7.05$) from 44 preschool classrooms of the Lisbon area.
- 44 preschool teachers (1♂) ($M_{age} = 48.04$, $SD = 7.58$), with professional teaching experience ranging from 7 to 35 years ($M = 22.68$, $SD = 6.37$).

Measures and procedures

- "Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Pre-K version" (Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008) ($\alpha = .92$).
 - "Teacher's perceptions about the implementation of children's participation right in preschool settings": Likert-type scale (1 = *Not at all typical*, 5 = *Extremely typical*) (Factor 'Children's Expression and Responsibility', $\alpha = .85$; Factor 'Decision Making by the Adult', $\alpha = .78$).
 - Portuguese adaptation of the "Social Skills Rating System" (Gresham & Elliott, 1990), preschool version for teachers (Self-control, $\alpha = .88$).
 - Portuguese adaptation of "The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children" - Harter (Mata, Monteiro, & Peixoto, 2008) (Perceived competence, $\alpha = .71$).
- Measures were collected in three different moments (T1 to T3), with 5 months between T1 and T3.

DISCUSSION

- We did not find main effects of perceived teacher participation practices and teacher-child interactions quality on children's perceived competence.
- However, results suggest the moderating role of children's self-control in the association between participation practices and children's perceived competence. For children with lower levels of self-control (as perceived by their teachers), both participation factors were positively, albeit moderately, associated with children's perceived competence.
- Findings suggest children with lower levels of self-control in the beginning of the school year developed a more positive view of themselves in classrooms in which the teacher limits their opportunities for decision-making (regarding classroom features, schedule, and activities), but simultaneously allows them to express themselves, share their ideas, and take responsibility for different tasks.

RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptives and correlations among variables

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|--------|-------|-------|------|------|--------|--------|------|
| 1. Sex (1 = male) | --- | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age (months) | -.04 | --- | | | | | | |
| 3. Maternal education (years) | .04 | -.15 | --- | | | | | |
| 4. Perceived competence | .08 | -.10 | .02 | --- | | | | |
| 5. Self-control | -.28** | .16* | .05 | -.10 | --- | | | |
| 6. Teacher-child interactions quality | .00 | .06 | .27** | .07 | .05 | --- | | |
| 7. Children's expression and responsibility | .00 | -.06 | .07 | .06 | .12 | .29** | --- | |
| 8. Decision making by the adult | .00 | .01 | -.08 | -.07 | .11 | -.51** | -.45** | --- |
| <i>M</i> | | 63.33 | 11.80 | 3.36 | 1.48 | 4.07 | 4.37 | 3.20 |
| <i>SD</i> | | 7.05 | 3.81 | 0.43 | 0.37 | 0.57 | 0.42 | 0.54 |
| <i>N</i> | 180 | 180 | 167 | 131 | 180 | 176 | 160 | 160 |

Note. Variables were mean centered.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Summary of multilevel analysis (SPSS Linear Mixed Models) predicting children's perceived competence and effect sizes

| | <i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>) | <i>Effect size</i> |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Intercept | 3.44 (.05)* | |
| Sex (1 = male) | .04 (.09) | .08 |
| Age (months) | -.01 (.01) | -.16 |
| Maternal education (years) | -.01 (.01) | -.04 |
| Self-control | -.08 (.13) | -.07 |
| Teacher-child interactions quality | .00 (.09) | -.00 |
| Children's expression and responsibility | .07 (.12) | .07 |
| Decision making by the adult | .07 (.11) | .09 |
| Self-control * Teacher-child interactions quality | .20 (.21) | .10 (+1 SD) -.10 (-1 SD) |
| Self-control * Children's expression and responsibility | -.99 (0.34)* | -.29 (+1 SD) .42 (-1 SD) |
| Self-control * Decision making by the adult | -.63 (0.29)* | -.20 (+1 SD) .39 (-1 SD) |

Note. Variables were mean centered.
* $p < .05$.

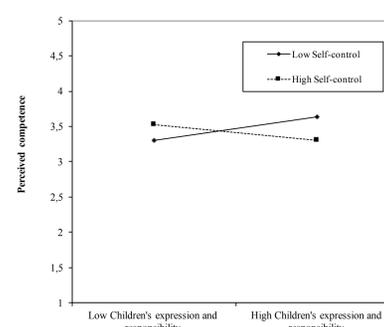


Figure 2. Self-control moderating effects between practices promoting children's expression and responsibility and children's perceived competence.

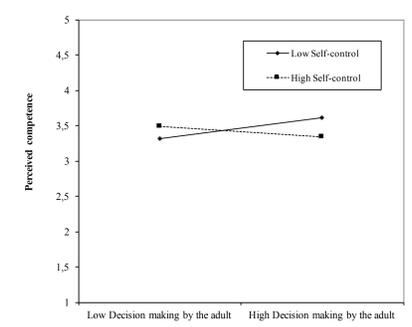


Figure 3. Self-control moderating effects between decision making by the adult and children's perceived competence.