

The Effects of Parenting Practices in the Development of Children's
Emotional Intelligence

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Short Abstract:

The study investigates the parenting practices and styles of Spanish parents and the way they influence the development of the emotional intelligence of their children. 159 children, 154 mothers and 111 fathers participated in the study. Four dimensions of emotional intelligence were measured, intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management. Parents answered three different questionnaires about their parenting styles. Factorial analysis revealed the underlying parenting variables. Data was collected also on the time that parent spend with their children and the types of things they do together. Results show different correlations between the emotional intelligence dimensions and the parental variables.

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Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been defined as the “ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)”.

Emotional Intelligence has been found to positively influence important life outcomes as emotional well-being (Baron, 2000), academic achievement (Nicola S.

Schute et al., 1998), mental health (Bernet, 1996), competency in the work place and in society (Finnegan, 1998), success in life (Goleman 1995), and general positive outcomes (Mayer and Salovey, 1997),

In contrast with general intelligence, emotional intelligence is hypothesized to be very flexible. A person can become more intelligent with time provided he or she enjoys the appropriate experiences (Mayer and Salovey, 1990, Goleman, 1996).

Parenting and emotional intelligence

Parenting practices are considered to have a strong effect on children's emotional development. They have been found to influence children's self-control (Baumrind, 1966, 1967, 1995), sociability (van den Boom, 1994), social competence (Kuczyinski and Kochanska, 1995), conduct problems (Webster-Stratton, 1998), optimism (Seligman, 1995, Hasan & Power, 2002), peer competence (Gottman et al, 1997, Pearson & Rao, 2003), depression symptomatology (Lempers, Clark-Lempers & Simons, 1989), and coping strategies (Mesters, 2004).

Considering that parenting practices influence so many emotional characteristics of children, it makes sense to believe that they also influence the development of children's emotional intelligence.

There is, however, an extraordinary lack of research in this area. Martinez-Pons (1999) investigated adolescence perceptions of their parents parenting practices and their influence on their emotional intelligence. He found that children, who reported that their parents modeled, encouraged, facilitated, and rewarded emotional intelligent-related behavior enjoyed higher degrees of emotional intelligence. To the extent of our knowledge, however, no study has investigated the relationship between parenting practices as reported by the parents themselves and children's emotional intelligence.

Additionally, most studies on parenting and children's emotional development have been directed towards American families. A question remained open on whether other cultures would show different types of parenting that would also have different effects on children.

The present study therefore concentrates on parenting practices and styles and on whether they significantly influence children's emotional intelligence. Based on data collected directly from Spanish parents and from their children, it actually consists of two complementary studies. The first one examines the relationship between parents' self-reported parenting practices and their children's emotional intelligence scores. Special attention is given to the amount of time that parents and children spend together and the nature of the things they do when they are interacting. The second study uses a more detailed and extensive child-rearing questionnaire (Child Rearing Practices Report, Block, 1984) with a smaller sample to look for more specific parental dimensions and their correlations with emotional intelligence measures.

Method Study 1

Procedure

Through their children's school principal, parents of children seven to twelve years of age from four different private and public schools from a city in Spain were asked to participate. 159 children participated in the study along with 155 of their mothers and 111 of their fathers. Families reflected a range of socioeconomic status.

Measures

In the first study parents answered a time-log designed to estimate the amount of time they spent interacting with their children on an average day, and the amount of time they dedicated to particular types of activities when they were interacting with

them. Variables measured with the time-log are: (a) total time parents and children spent together and (b) time parents and children spent interacting. Variable b was divided on five subvariables depending on the types of things parents and children did when interacting (playing to children's games, engaging in educational activities, watching TV together, reading books, and helping with practical issues). Parents also answered the Parenting Practices and Styles Questionnaire developed for this research to classify parental child rearing dimensions. The questionnaire contained 46 questions about parenting practices. Factorial analysis of mothers' answers to the PSPQ revealed four underlying parenting variables, (Weak-inconsistent discipline, Controlling behavior, Democratic parenting, and Harsh discipline). The reliability of the four factors was .7561, .7247, .6777, and .5212, respectively. Factorial analysis of fathers' answers to the PSPQ revealed four slightly different parenting variables (Anxious about results, controlling, inconsistent, warm-democratic). The reliabilities of the four factors were .790, .721, .743, and .656.

Children completed the Emotional Quotient inventory, Youth Version (Baron, 2000), which measures four dimensions of emotional intelligence (intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability) The intrapersonal intelligence consist of five related abilities: emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization, independence. The interpersonal intelligence consists of three related abilities: empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationship. The adaptability dimension consists of three related abilities: reality testing, flexibility, problem solving. The stress management dimension consists of two related abilities: stress tolerance and impulse control. Baron reports different reliability coefficients for each dimension and group of age and sex. They range from .67 the lowest (intrapersonal for males between 7 and 9 years) to .85 the highest (stress management for females between 10 and 12 years of age). In the present study reliability coefficients for children over 8 were .752, .644, .751, .719 respectively. Reliability coefficients for children younger than 9 were .378, .719, .676, .570 respectively.

Results

Time-Log and Measures of Emotional Intelligence

The time mothers spent interacting with their children positively correlated with their adaptability (.169, $p = .038$). The time fathers spent interacting with their children did not show any correlation with their children's emotional intelligence. The time mothers spent in educational activities with their children showed a positive correlation with adaptability (.168, $p = .041$) and with interpersonal intelligence (.194, $p = .018$), and the time they spent watching TV together correlated negatively (-.173, $p = .040$).

Despite the fact that the time that fathers spent interacting with their children did not seem to influence children's development, some particular activities that father and child developed together seemed to influence children negatively (Playing, -.232, $p = .022$, reading books, -.204, $p = .044$). Results for mothers are reported in exhibit 2, and for fathers in exhibit 3.

Parenting Styles and Practices Questionnaires and Measures of Emotional Intelligence

A maternal democratic style of parenting correlated positively with the ability of children to adapt to new situations (.218, $p = .007$). Mothers' harsh discipline had negative effects on children's ability to manage stress (-.170, $p = .044$).

The democratic factor included statements as "I am aware that my child needs respect for his privacy", "A wide autonomy help children better than a strict supervision to make the right decisions in adulthood", "When my child does not obey, I listen to his/her motives and negotiate if I think he/she is partially right", "When my child keeps

misbehaving, I dialogue with him/her and together we find an strategy so he/she can behave properly". The harsh discipline factor included comments as: When my child misbehaves, I yell, threat and punish him/her", "When my child keeps misbehaving, I yell, punish, or tell him/her how ungrateful she/he is. If necessary, I spank him/her".

For fathers, a type of parenting characterized by anxiety about child's performance and results negatively correlated with children's ability to manage stress (-264, $p = .013$). Surprisingly, an inconsistent child rearing positively correlated with children's intrapersonal intelligence.

The anxiety-about-performance factor included statements like: "I get nervous if my child does not learn at the same rhythm than his/her peers, and I push him/her to study more", "When I don't know what else to do, I offer him/her some attractive prize", "I want my child to be outstanding compared to the other children". Statements characteristic of an inconsistent parenting were: "I often forget the rules that I myself have established", "Often, I have the feeling my child does not understand my commands, "Often, I don't have a clear idea of what to allow or forbid to my child".

Method Study 2

Procedure

Feeling that Spanish parents might have similar opinions about parenting practices than American parents, but they might give them different value in their personal parenting style we asked parents to answered a second more detailed questionnaire. 88 mothers and 55 fathers from the original sample in study 1, volunteered to answer this second questionnaire.

Measures

In this second study parents answered the Child Rearing Practices Report (Block, 1982). This measure was designed to not only understand what parents thought about different parenting practices, but also to establish which ones were more important in their particular parenting practice and belief system. Parents were asked to classify 91 statements about parenting practices, values, and beliefs in seven groups according to how much they reflected their real child rearing practices. Typical statements in the Child Rearing Practice Report would be "I respect my child's opinions and encourage him/her to express them" or "I find very hard to punish my child".

Factorial analysis revealed seven parental dimensions among Spanish mothers: Warmth, Detachment, Weakness, Accountability, Child centeredness, Overcontrol, Harsh discipline. Reliability coefficients were respectively .702, .702, .680, .612, .557, .567, and .533

Results

For mothers, Accountability correlated positively with children's interpersonal intelligence (.283, $p = .008$). Child centeredness on the other hand negatively affected children's ability to adapt to new situations (-.213, $p = .047$). Overcontrolling correlated negatively with intrapersonal intelligence (-.245, $p = .027$), and a harsh attitude towards child negatively influenced children's adaptability (-.250, $p = .021$). No correlations were found for fathers.

Typical statements of the accountability factor were: "I never tease or pull my child's leg", "I never forget the things I promise to my child", "I teach my child that he/she is responsible for what happens to him/her". The child-centeredness factor included statements as the following: "Sometimes I think I am too involved with my child", "I don't want my child to impress other people favorably", "I encourage my child to ask questions and think about life". The overcontrolling factor included the following comments: "I control closely what and when my child eats", "I don't want my child to

play rough games or do things that can hurt him/her”, “I don’t allow my child to make his/her decisions by him/herself”. Examples of the harsh discipline statements were: “I don’t find hard to punish my child”, “I don’t give up some of my interest because of my child”, “I believe that my child improves when I scold or criticize him/her”.

Conclusions

According with hypothesis and with findings among American families, Spanish mothers’ parenting practices had an impact on children’s emotional intelligence. As signaled by Greenspan (1996) and Kindlon (2001), the time mothers spend with their children is a significant influence in their emotional development. Spanish mothers who spent more time interacting with their children, and developed more educational activities had more emotionally intelligent children. The time they spent watching TV on the other hand correlated negatively.

Unexpectedly the time fathers spent playing with their children and reading books seemed to have a negative influence in their children. Spanish fathers tend to spend less time with their children, and may have a more stereotypical way of approaching them than American fathers. Whether this is a sex-related issue, a culture-related issue, has to do with the amount of time that fathers actually spent with their children or with patterns of interaction, needs further research.

Consonant with previous research on parenting styles, a controlling type of parenting and a harsh disciplinarian type of parenting negatively influenced the development of emotional intelligence on children, while a democratic style positively predicted higher levels of adaptability. Mothers’ tendency to be responsible and demand responsibility from their children also positively influenced children’s ability to understand other’s emotions, be responsible in social situations and establish good interpersonal relationships.

Most efforts in the education of emotional competence have been directed towards training children’s abilities. This study shows that emotional intelligence can be nurtured and improved by positive parenting styles. Those parenting styles would be characterized by: involvement with the child, a democratic way of decision making, a emphasis on accountability, a moderate level of autonomy for the child, a sensible way of using discipline, and a tendency to emphasize independence over child centerdness.

Exhibit 1: Time-Log; Parents interacting with their Children

Time interacting with child	Intrapersonal Intelligence	Interpersonal Intelligence	Stress Management	Adaptability
Mother	-.129	.121	-.097	.169*
Fathers	-.125	-.012	.126	.049

Asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.05$. Double asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.01$

Exhibit 2: Time-Log; Mothers interacting with Children

Time Variables	Intrapersonal Intelligence	Interpersonal Intelligence	Stress Management	Adaptability
Children's games	-.069	.006	-.028	.016
Educational activities	.034	.194*	.014	.168*
Reading Books	-.135	.040	.078	-.033
Watching TV	.018	.019	-.173*	.098
Helping	-.066	-.071	.011	-.029

Asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.05$. Double asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.01$

Exhibit 3: Time-Log; Fathers interacting with Children

Time Variables	Intrapersonal Intelligence	Interpersonal Intelligence	Stress Management	Adaptability
Children's games	-.127	-.141	.002	-.232
Educational activities	-.149	.018	-.101	-.004
Reading Books	-.015	-.204	-.049	-.114
Watching TV	.137	.034	-.130	-.007
Helping	.043	-.045	.045	-.109

Asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.05$. Double asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.01$

Exhibit 4: Parenting Styles and Practices Questionnaire; Mothers and Children

Time Variables	Intrapersonal Intelligence	Interpersonal Intelligence	Stress Management	Adaptability
Weak/inconsistent	.096	-.097	-.122	-.018
Controlling	.038	.083	.023	-.047
Democratic	-.074	.023	.037	.218**
Harsh Discipline	-.088	-.047	-.170*	-.016

Asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.05$. Double asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.01$

Exhibit 5: Parenting Styles and Practices Questionnaire; Fathers and Children

Time	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal	Stress	Adaptability
Variables	Intelligence	Intelligence	Management	
Inconsistent	.227*	-.004	-.060	.059
Controlling	.010	-.040	-.031	-.070
Democratic	-.051	-.025	-.059	.034
Anxious	.064	-.072	-.264*	.017

Asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.05$. Double asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.01$

Exhibit 6: Child Rearing Practices Report; Mothers and Children

Parenting	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal	Stress	Adaptability
Variables	Intelligence	Intelligence	Management	
Accountability	-.158	.283**	-.019	-.103
Child centeredness	.032	-.070	.002	-.213*
Overcontrolling	-.245*	-.048	.065	.048
Harsh discipline	.025	.001	-.050	-.278**

Asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.05$. Double asterisked correlations are significant, $p < 0.01$

Note. Warmth, detachment, and weakness were unrelated to emotional intelligence scales.

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