Emotional Expressivity in School Context, Social Relationships, and Academic Adjustment in Kindergarten

Guest Lecture by Maciel M. Hernández
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Abstract: This study evaluated direct relations of kindergarteners’ (N = 301) naturally observed emotion in two different school contexts and early kindergarten verbal competence to academic adjustment (i.e., standardized measures of academic achievement, teacher-reported academic skills, teacher-reported and observed school engagement) and if these relations were mediated by teacher-reported conflict with students and by peer acceptance. When controlling for verbal competence, positive emotions expressed in the classroom context positively directly predicted academic skills, whereas positive emotions expressed outside class (lunch/recess) negatively predicted academic skills. Negative emotions observed in the classroom context and during lunch/recess negatively predicted academic achievement. Positive emotions observed in both contexts indirectly predicted higher school engagement through its positive relation to peer acceptance; positive emotions expressed in lunch and recess indirectly predicted higher school engagement via lower teacher–student conflict. Negative emotions observed in both contexts also indirectly predicted lower school engagement via higher teacher–student conflict. Furthermore, verbal competence indirectly predicted higher academic adjustment via lower teacher–student conflict. Moreover, verbal competence moderated the association between peer acceptance (but not teacher–student conflict) and academic adjustment. Positive emotions in both contexts indirectly predicted higher academic adjustment via higher peer acceptance primarily for children with low, but not high, initial verbal competence. The study’s research findings will be summarized within the context of Dr. Hernández’s research program examining how emotional expressivity and regulatory behaviors in school relate to children’s academic experiences. Future research directions will be described.

Maciel Hernández is a postdoctoral research associate in the Department of Psychology at Arizona State University. Her research interests include child development and human development. She earned her Ph.D. in Human Development at Claremont McKenna College.